

LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES
THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

23RD MARCH, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies.

.....proposing the toast of our distinguished guests who are no newcomers in this place, but had in fact to cope in their own time with Ministers of the Crown and, occasionally I have no doubt, put them right.

Sir, I remember the first time you came here because I was at that time something of a new boy in Canberra. I came here in October of 1934, and you arrived - am I right in thinking? - in November, 1934 on a Royal Visit, and this is quite memorable because the rain fell. (We've had no rain here this year) It rained and it rained and it rained most indiscriminately, and the Molongolo, that noble stream, flooded. I have always been indebted to you, Sir, for having arranged that because it was the first time I had a vivid picture of what a lake would look like in Canberra. (Laughter) And from that time on, I began work hoping that it might arise.

Then, Sir, of course, you were out here as Governor-General, and you, Ma'am, as the Governor-General's wife, and I know perhaps better than most people what an affection you conceived for this country. This is indeed most important because in all these more recent years, whenever I have gone to England, you have overwhelmed me and my wife and other people with great kindness and I have never been left in any doubt that Australia has a place in your hearts which you would not always want to make vocal but which is perfectly obvious and has been perfectly obvious to those who have seen you.

Therefore it gave me immense pleasure to be able to take a hand in arranging this journey of yours this time. This is not a pompous journey; this is not a journey to be richly adorned by illuminated addresses. This is a journey in which you are coming to a country which you love and in which you are going to see old friends whom you have known. Indeed, I think, Sir, this is perhaps the only unhappy occasion, from your point of view, on which you may have to make a speech.

I want to tell you that His Royal Highness, as a former Governor-General, has a sturdy disregard for speeches. (Laughter) He probably had to listen to a number of them when he was here. He will have to listen to what I have just been saying, and when he has made his, I am going to ask Arthur Calwell to speak to associate the Opposition with this welcome.

But Sir, and Ma'am, the main thing I want to establish in the few words that I utter is that you are old friends and that you are back here among old friends. This, I think, is something that matters to you and matters to us. We hope you have a marvellous time. We have had the great pleasure in Australia of seeing your two sons here - William and Richard, in their time, and we have been greatly taken by both of them. Rather nice to think that in many, many years to come the former Governor-General and his wife will be recalled by their sons who I have not the slightest doubt will continue to maintain a lively interest in Australia.

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Now, Sir, I know you don't like listening to speeches but I must tell one story - would you mind, Sir? His Royal Highness was President of the Australian Club in London one year when I stepped out of the Australian summer into the English winter and got the next best thing to pneumonia - whatever the next best thing may be - and I was booked to make a speech at the Australian Club downstairs in the Savoy, and I had a high temperature. I think about 103. I was advised by a medical man - and medical men are always disagreeable, that I must cancel it. I said, "But I can't. I can't, I am booked to do this. This is for me." So I struggled into that garment of the subservient - a stiff shirt and a white tie - and I went down below and stood in the line with His Royal Highness for a while and then we went in and finally I got up to make a speech - the first time I ever made a speech to a collection of clouds, because that's all I could see. I didn't know whether I began a sentence or ended a sentence, and when I sat down, I turned round almost despairingly to the Royal Chairman and said, "Sir, could you understand a word I said? You know, I have a very high temperature." And he looked at me with a mixture of affection and contempt and said, "On the contrary, I have never heard you better." (Laughter) So there we are.

Well, Sir, we have never seen you better. Ma'am, we've never seen you better. We grieved for you for the troubles that you have been through. You really have had a rough time, but I have no doubt whatever that with the weather, the friendships, the comfort, the quietness - as I would hope - that you will experience in Australia, you will go back feeling completely fit.

Ladies and gentlemen : Their Royal Highnesses!
