

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES AT CRANBROOK SCHOOL ON SATURDAY, 10TH
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I call this a "softening up" process. I stand up here shaking hands for a long time, handing out prizes, with all the gusto of a politician giving things away (Laughter) and when they have just about reduced me to a state of weakness, then a man who used to be my friend, Sir Kenneth Street, gets up quite blithely and says, "Now, make a speech". (Laughter)

As a matter of fact before I begin to make a very short speech I think I ought to tell you that I formed the highest admiration for the Headmaster. He took a risk today that I wouldn't have dreamed of taking after 30 odd years in politics. He said, "If anybody can't hear me, will he hold up his hand". (Laughter) The last politician who was green enough to do that had a man hold up his hand whereupon a fellow in the front seat, you remember? turned around and said, "I'll change places with you willingly". (Laughter, applause)

I was also, of course, delighted to find that in a progressive school of this kind, which, judging by the books that I've been handing out, embraces judo among its accomplishments, I was delighted to find that there was to be a course in "Elementary Russian".

Now, as a matter of fact, if you want any assistance, on a voluntary basis, on that matter, I'm prepared to offer it. I am a master of elementary Russian (Laughter, applause) You see, not for the first time the audience is ahead of me, because what I was going to say was, I am a master of elementary Russian punctuation - it is done with the sole of your shoe. (Laughter, applause) I hand on that secret to you.

Now, for anybody who has himself been talked into making a speech at a school Speech Day, there is always a rather grim choice to be resolved. Should I talk to the parents? In which case the boys, if they have any sense, will be bored stiff.

Or, should I talk to the boys whose minds are more receptive than those of most audiences I speak to, (Laughter) and leave the parents alone?

Well I'm going to say just a few words to the boys on the principle, the well-established principle, that except for a few shining exceptions, who will identify themselves without difficulty, the parents here today are practically beyond redemption. Their minds are made up about all sorts of things; but the boys, well they might, as I say, be willing to entertain an idea or two.

I have always sympathised with boys at a School Speech Day. Just toward the end I gave some learned fellow, whose name I now regret to say I don't recall, the prize for Latin and French, and I would have you know - I'll say this to the parents, some of whom may have a disregard for my intellectual capacities - that was the last prize I got at School too. (Laughter)

Latin and French - I still retain a few broken shards of each of these languages - one dead, and now deader; the other alive, but strangely pronounced in its own country!

But my deepest sympathy has always been for the poor chaps who have to sit there, as we all did - I'm talking about the men today - in our time, when some ponderous old platitudinous politician came along and made a speech and said,

"Boys, these are the happiest days of your life. You must make the most of your school days because when they are over, and you come out into the hard cold world you will have to forget all this stuff you have been learning at school, and learn the hard facts of life". (Laughter)

Well I used to listen to these chaps for a few minutes and then yawn, and then go to sleep. And it shows, Sir, how the habits of youth can persist when I tell you that that is exactly what I do in Parliament at the end of the Session. (Laughter, applause)

But could I just offer an observation to my friends over here on two or three, or perhaps four matters - not one of which will take me long, because I see the stumps are up and light is shining brightly.

What are the great things, the great virtues that we ought to achieve when we are at school? Because if we don't achieve them then, our prospect of achieving them thereafter are not as good as they might be.

I think one of the virtues is what I will call "pride". I know, Headmaster, pride is supposed to be one of the deadly sins. But pride in the sense of a proper self-respect, a determination to do your own work, and to play your own play, and to stand on your own feet - this is one of the great qualities in mankind. Nobody knows it better than a man who has been engaged, fairly responsibly most of the time, in public affairs.

So many people in the world don't start with their self-respect, or their self-help, but make their first port of call the Government, which is only another way of saying that they want other people, through the Government, to do their work for them.

This is a great point with me. It is a great quality to be independent, for a man to have a proper pride, and to say "If I can do this myself I'm going to do it myself. And it is only if I can't do it myself that I must call on other people, if I have a chance, to help me to do it".

Pride is not to be confused with vanity. There is nothing sillier than vanity; and vanity brings about its own downfall every day of the week, or, as we say, every tick of the clock. But pride, in the true sense is a great virtue. I say get it; and stick to it.

Then of course you, most of you - I would have hoped all of you - have read J.M. Barrie's famous rectorial address at St. Andrew's University - a remarkable speech which ought to be read by every thoughtful person at least once a year.

The theme of Barrie's address was courage. I had the great privilege, years afterwards, of walking up and down in a garden in the west of England for an hour with J.M. Barrie, discussing this speech, and how he had gone about making it.

His theme was courage, the lovely virtue, as he called it, the virtue without which other virtues can be broken into the dust.

Now we can think about courage in many ways. The rarest form of courage, I think, in the world, is moral courage. The courage that a man has when he is prepared to form his view of the truth and to pursue it, when he is not running around the corner every five minutes to say, "Is this going to be

popular?" Not like the traditional old politician of fiction who said, "Find out what the people want, and that is my policy".

Courage is very important, all important. But of course it is no use becoming addicted to sticking to your own view unless you have taken all the preliminary steps to do your best to see that it is the right view. Courage without work, courage without thought, courage without judgment will not be worth so much. It might ultimately amount to mere obstinacy. But properly considered and properly set, it is one of the great virtues.

There are two things - I could talk about a dozen - which perhaps are not very much respected now-a-days. They are at the other end of the scale, I grant you.

One is to have good manners, courtesy. One becomes dejected occasionally at the decline in good manners. Why is it thought by so many people that to be strong, you must be rude? That to demonstrate that you have a mind of your own you must engage in the most brutal discourtesy to other people? 'Manners maketh man' is one of the oldest of the old school mottoes. And although, of course, it goes deep into the character of the boy, and of the man, it also has its superficial aspect, the courtesy which human beings owe, one to the other.

Life becomes a rough, tough thing; public life is a rough, tough life. There are many aspects in the world which appear superficially to be rough and tough, in which victory goes to the strongest, and the most enduring. No man was ever less strong, no man was ever less tough by treating with courtesy what other people think or say, or do.

Since everybody has been here now for some time I just want to mention my fourth which you will think quite absurd, I'm sure. Because this is not one of the great virtues at all. This is something that I think is gravely misunderstood. I'm all in favour of boys when they are at school learning to speak their own language with respect and with justice.

I'm staggered, ladies and gentlemen, at the number of times I can listen to a man talking, not getting up and making a speech, but just talking, conversationally, turns out to have two or three degrees - but no degree at all in the English language! Speaking in a shoddy, snuffling fashion, murdering the King's English - or the Queen's English as I suppose it is now. This is no good. This is not a sign of intelligence. It is a sign of quite the opposite.

I don't know enough about Cranbrook to know to what extent you are an exception to a deplorable rule, but I'm bound to tell you quite frankly that in my experience the average Girls' School is more concerned at speech than the average Boys' school.

It is very easy, you know, when you are a boy at school to disregard that, because if a boy at school finds himself the exception in a little group, and has been in the habit of speaking his language with precision and correctness, and pleasantly, somebody may say that he's a bit "sissy"; somebody imitates him, you know.

I say don't worry about that. This English language of ours - I speak with the valor of partial ignorance - is one of the greatest and most flexible tongues that God ever put into the mind and mouth of man to speak. It's a marvellous language. (Applause)

It has produced more poetry, I venture to say, of the highest order than any other language in the history of man. It is a beautiful adjustable, flexible language with, contained inside itself, all the subtleties in the world. And, like all other great languages, those who know it best, will speak it most simply.

Don't fall into the error of thinking that it is a proof of education to use long words with Latin endings. (Laughter) The people I have known who loved long words most, who were polysyllabic narvels, were those who understood the language least.

The great object of knowing your own language is to speak it with justice and weight and simplicity. You read a speech by Winston Churchill, you go back and read a speech by the younger Pitt 100 years before, and you will find the lovely simplicity of language.

Because after all, it is only a man who is a master of his language who can eliminate these rather foolish long words and settle for that simple, direct speech which is the ultimate proof of scholarship and of knowledge of the language.

Now I say that to the boys because I think this is tremendously important, that we should have in our own country - don't worry about people's arguments over whether so-and-so has an accent of the home counties or whether he's got an English or Somerset accent, or Victorian accent - which of course is very good (Laughter) - or a Sydney accent, which has its moments. (Laughter) Don't worry about that.

What we ought to worry about is the quality, the justice, the conciseness, the effect of the words you use.

Now, Sir, I've given you a mixed grill really: two very great virtues at the beginning; a third, a considerable virtue; and the fourth you may not think a virtue at all. But since speech is the universal means of communication, and since in these days no man can lead in anything unless he can communicate his ideas to other people, never neglect speech. In the long run it is one of the great instruments that you will have to use all your life.

Now that is all I want to say. There have been people standing up around the back, including I say with regret, as a Presbyterian, the Dean of Sydney. Normally I don't mind a Church of England fellow standing up and listening to me. But I do feel that I've made it a little bit hot this afternoon, both literally and otherwise.

I'm delighted to be here. On the last two occasions I couldn't be here for reasons that were beyond my control. On this occasion I made up my mind that I must be here whatever came or went. It only just happened because Parliament sat a week longer than anybody supposed, and it sat up till 4 o'clock on Friday morning. But this being Saturday, I've arrived, I have spoken, I apologise - but I'm delighted. (Applause)
