

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
R.G. MENZIES

AT THE OPENING OF WESTMINSTER SCHOOL, ADELAIDE, ON
MONDAY, 13th FEBRUARY, 1961

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen:

It is no mere form of words for me to say that I am delighted to be here, because this is a very exciting occasion. It is a very exciting act of faith and of imagination.

We are accustomed, in Australia, to think of ourselves as having an almost painfully new country. I daresay that some of us here today have thought what a contrast there would be between this School, so far as it has gone, and Westminster School in London. But if we have enough imagination to turn our eyes back into history we will realise that, after all, that School had a beginning, and Westminster itself had a beginning. It is one of the things that I like thinking about when I'm in London, that at the very time when Westminster Hall was being built, the Great Hall of William Rufus, there were fields and farms around it. And when the Abbey sprang into existence, the white shining Abbey, as it was at that time, there were fields and farms around it.

We need every now and then to have an act of faith in order to lift ourselves above the ordinary common round. I don't know whether any of you, or many of you, have had the opportunity of seeing the great Ely Cathedral in the eastern provinces of England - a magnificent cathedral, rising out of a village, built at a time when there were a few villages and a few farms scattered around. What a tremendous act of imagination and faith.

Therefore I am delighted, not only to be here on such an occasion, but I am particularly interested in the name that has been chosen. Because I am a great believer in the continuity of good traditions: a sense of continuity, a sense that we are not here today and gone tomorrow, a sense that we are part of an immortal procession of human beings. This is the great thing, I believe, in the national character.

And there at Westminster, whose name you have taken, what does one see, even today? The great hall of William Rufus built in the twelfth century, still standing, grimed with smoke on two occasions in its history, still there; the Hall in which Charles I was tried; the Hall outside which today, looking into Parliament Place, stands the statue of Oliver Cromwell; the Hall out of which opened the doors into little rooms in which the whole of the English Common Law was developed, the great mediaeval Courts of the King's Bench and of the Common Pleas and of the Exchequer.

This is, of all places in our community of nations, the most fascinating and the most historic. And just over the road, so to speak, the great Abbey with all that it contains of British history.

Now this, I think is something that I hope every boy who comes here will get to understand. I would like to think that the full significance of what has happened and is happening, in Westminster became known. We are so accustomed today to having Parliaments. Some people think that we have too many. I occasionally share that feeling, but only in a momentary way. The first Parliament that ever sat, sat in Westminster Hall. The model Parliament sat in Westminster Hall. And today, if you wish to go in, or members wish to go in to the House of Commons, one of their main avenues of approach is through Westminster Hall. It still remains the great source of all our parliamentary institutions, and of all the great institutions of the Common Law. There is no

place to compare with it. And therefore, say I say to the boys, there is no name to compare with it. This is a magnificent and imaginative decision.

Sir, one other thing that I would like to say is this. It is no easy matter to create a School; it is no easy matter to say, "Well, we must start; we will get our first building. Someday we will get our second and our third and our fourth. And in due course the grounds of the school will be developed and we will have all those things that go with a great school." It must rather try the patience for people who are no longer young, to be able to postpone to their children the satisfaction that they would have loved to have had themselves in seeing the thing completed.

And yet, what I want to remind them of is this: that this is not just creating some grounds, or creating some buildings. This is creating a school which, so that it is properly understood and properly supported, will be here for hundreds of years, and will itself become the spiritual father of other schools in other places.

There have been very great changes in the world of education. If we go back to the middle ages when higher education was scholastic, was conducted against a basis - almost entirely - of religion, when it was considered the perquisite of those who were destined for the Church, when it involved almost monastic exclusion from the world, when it dealt entirely with classical knowledge, we find one kind of education, and one for which I have myself a profound respect. But now the wheel has turned. Today higher education is taking place not in the age of mediæval scholasticism, but in the age of science and technology, in which man is actually beginning to burst from the surface of the earth in his exploration and search for knowledge.

So the whole matter has changed. It seems to us to have something of urgency rather than something of reflection. It is a search for something new, rather than the study of something old.

But the choice is not quite so grim as that, because it still remains true that there is no higher education worth the name unless it embraces not only the knowledge of physical science, but the knowledge of mankind, the knowledge of the humanities, a broad sweep of education, a broad and balanced training. And that is something that we always have to keep in mind so that we won't be tempted, as so many people are, to adopt as our goal for education a purely pagan conception of physical knowledge.

Now this is a Church School. This is one of those schools standing vividly and enduringly for that most important conception of education over the whole field - a belief not only that we should have humane letters as well as science, but that we should have character as well as knowledge. And the function of this school is to produce character, not a lot of clever men with destructive minds, with no conception of their obligations to their fellow men, and no conception of their duty to God, but people of character, of a high morality, trained with a background of religion, able to understand right through their lives, that it is a good thing to be intelligent, it is a good thing to be successful, it is a good thing to be able to do this, or this, or this, but that it is a better thing to be a fine man, a better thing to be a fine citizen, a better thing to have learned at the right time those eternal truths which make all the difference between a great man and a little one.

And so, Sir, I am delighted to be here. I am sorry that I am not as young as I used to be, because if I were as young as I sometimes feel when I am under attack, I would feel confident of coming back here in 40 years' time to have a look over it. But I don't think that I can look forward to that. These boys will look forward to it. And I would like them to feel themselves the pioneers of this school, the first boys who will ever become the "old boys" of Westminster. I would like them to feel that they are helping to start a tradition in one sense, but in another sense to carry on the great tradition which is exemplified in the Church schools of this country, and in particular, to feel proud of the fact that their school has a name which associates it in the mind, and in the heart, with the great centre of all those things from Parliament to the Law which have marked our race, and which have been among our great contributions to mankind.

Now, Sir, having said that I express my pleasure and the pleasure of my wife at being here and I shall now, I think, if I have understood my instructions accurately, step smartly - the President told me "step smartly three cricket pitch lengths to the left" - and I hope that in the course of doing so I won't pull a muscle. (Applause)
