

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G. MENZIES,
AT THE OPENING OF THE MAWSON INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF
ADELAIDE, SATURDAY, 15TH APRIL, 1961.

Sir, ladies and gentlemen,

This is a very, very notable occasion. I would have hoped that the reason for it were known to everybody in Australia, and in particular the younger people of Australia, because this is one of these occasions when we say "Let us now praise famous men".

Indeed we are met here to think about and to talk about one of the very greatest Australians that this country has had. I think it is one of the ironies of life, at least of contemporary life, that if you were to say to the average citizen, "Who are the best known people?" he would at once think in terms of headlines. The footballers would come first; and the cricketers would come second; and the politicians a most honourable third; and the rest nowhere. This has always seemed to me to be something of a monstrosity. Never more do I think that than when we are here to think about Douglas Mawson and his character and his achievements and his enormous stature, not only in our own country, but in the world - one of the very greatest of Australians.

That greatness, Sir, was a versatile one. He was, of course, a great explorer; but he was a great scientist. I have marvelled as I have, as a non-scientist, struggled to understand something about his work. I have marvelled at the enormous amount of scientific work that he did, the investigations that he conducted, the things that he worked out, the things that he published. He was first and foremost, I think, a great and versatile scientist.

I don't want to say anything that might subtract from his repute, but in the highest sense of the word he was something of a politician; or shall I put it, 'he was something of a statesman'? Because with all his science and with all his exploration, it was he more than anybody else who added to the territory and responsibilities of this country, millions of square miles of Antarctic territory.

That, of course, from a scientific point of view may be regarded as something of an eccentricity. But from the point of view of Australia it was an uncommon thing for a man in the very middle of exploration, and of investigation, to feel that he had a duty to his own country to extend the responsibilities and interests of his own country. If today we look at a map of the world and see certain areas marked out as Australian Antarctica, there may be some in the world who don't agree with it, and some who are perhaps agnostic on the point. But never let us forget that when we ourselves see these areas marked out, there is one man above all men who can be thanked for it, and that man is Douglas Mawson.

Of course he was an immense explorer; but why was he a great explorer? I myself in physical matters rather like the beaten track. I like to go home, for example, at night by the well known route; I like to proceed from point A to point B by a well-known track. My wife is not like that at all - I'm sorry she's not here - but she is not like that at all: she likes going down the highways and byways and getting lost. But to be an explorer of this world, and of its resources, you must first of all have enormous imagination. This is not a task for dull people, for routine people, for people who merely see today's job and the result of today's job. This is a task for men of imagination. And I start with that with Douglas Mawson.

I used to think myself in my earlier and perhaps, for all I know, better informed days, that a geologist was a man who went around knapping bits of rock and putting them in a little sack, and then telling you without any danger of contradiction what age they belonged to and all about them. It fascinated me. For many years I wished that if I could be reincarnated I should be a geologist! I dare say I would have found the subject matter to deal with not much more unresponsive than that which I deal with today. (Laughter) It all seemed rather matter of fact: you had a body of knowledge and you applied it to a particular formation.

But of course for the work that Mawson did imagination was of the essence. Not the kind of imagination which knows what the answer will be around the corner; but the imagination which knows that there is an answer around the corner and is determined to discover it. So here was a great man of great imaginative qualities. And in the field in which he worked he needed to add to imagination, courage. Because imagination, the exploring instinct, in whatever field it may be, is worthless without the courage to pursue it, without the courage to meet the unknown, and its dangers. In that field he is a household name, not only here but all around the world.

Then with imagination and with courage he needed, and had, endurance. Not short-lived courage, not an imagination easily baffled, but the capacity for hanging on to it, for enduring, for seeing it right through. So with these three enormous qualities which were essential for his work he succeeded as nobody else has succeeded. He set an example that I don't think anybody else has been able to equal. He achieved results which I believe are outstanding in the whole history of Antarctic investigation.

It is almost baffling, Sir, to those of us who are made of more ordinary stuff, to think that one man should have done so much, should have thought so much, should have recorded so much, as I hope this Institute will make clear to future investigators, should have published so much, and above all, should have influenced so many. That is one of the great things that year after year, generation after generation, people will be influenced by what Mawson did and thought.

It may be, I suppose inevitably, that in 10 or 20 or 30 or 50 years' time the boundaries of knowledge will have been so extended that some of the things that he found and recorded may be regarded as commonplace; just as the great basic principles of physics are today regarded as commonplace; just as the great basic principles of nuclear fission are today regarded as commonplace. But they wouldn't be commonplace - they never will be commonplace - so long as people remember that the foundations have been laid, the great principles established by remarkably great men.

And so, Sir, this Institute will, I believe, take its proper place in the life of this University, and in the life of Australia. In it will be found not only information and rich material for research, but a profound inspiration to the people who come later on.

You know, Sir, today - I say this with particular reference to the graceful remarks made by the representative of the Academy of Science of the Soviet Union - today we are, as I am constantly being reminded, entering the "Space Age". And that, of course, is an exciting imaginative thing. We all admire the achievements, particularly the achievements of the last few days, in that field. I hope that we haven't become so

miserably isolated, one from another, that we can't admire and applaud immense work in the scientific and technological field wherever it happens. This is all part of the ultimate inheritance of mankind; though as a rather earthbound character myself I sometimes take time off to say "There are so many things on the earth, and in the earth itself, that we don't know about. I hope we shan't neglect them". I hope that Antarctic research from our point of view in Australia will continue to be something that we regard as of immense importance.

Indeed if I may, Lady Mawson, with your permission interlard these somewhat pontifical remarks of mine with a rather whimsical recollection, I would like to do it. Because I am afraid when I was a boy - and for all I know some of you Professors were once boys; (Laughter) there may be no immediate current evidence of it, but I am sure you were - but when I was a boy, we thought of Antarctic explorers and of Arctic explorers as gentlemen with furred parkas, with dogs, with sleds. They were remarkable men. And the whole of their history was a history of tremendous courage under tremendous difficulties. But what it was all about we were not too sure, were we? In fact at one stage I remember we had an idea that the one thing that mattered was that somebody should be the first to get to the Pole. No doubt that is very good. We were not conscious - I wasn't anyhow as a boy - of the tremendous significance of all these things which went far beyond the stirring, remarkable, heroic, romantic story of courage and endurance.

Perhaps those who, like Mr. Rymill, like Mr. Law, have been down in those strange parts will bear with me if I tell them a simple story about that very remarkable man who served under Sir Douglas, Frank Hurley, that phenomenal photographer.

In 1941, in about February, I was in the Middle East and went with Sir Thomas Blaney to Benghazi, the day after the battle of Benghazi - it wasn't a Polar region we were in, I can assure you - and with loving care for a Prime Minister, something I have seldom experienced, we flew in a tolerably fast plane and we were escorted, believe it or not, by a couple of fighter aircraft.

But the following day we flew back from a place called Barce in a biplane called a Valencia. Nobody could remember when it was built, but it was regarded as almost the equivalent of a T-model Ford. It had two flapping wings, and it had those windows made of what laymen like myself call "mica" but might be anything, and they were warped and twisted by the weather and by old age. As soon as we made a little height alongside the mountain range that runs there, it got colder and colder, and the blast came in on us. We were all sitting in rangers - that's all I can describe them as - on the side of this plane. The wintry blast came in; we had been provided with reading matter of a good solid kind like London Punch, and other journals of that kind. So far as I was concerned I grabbed as many as I could and tucked them inside my trousers. And then when a very respectful young Air Force lad came along and said, "Would you like a rug?" I said, "Certainly, bring me two". (Laughter) And he brought me two blankets and I ensconced myself in them and so did other people.

Finally we got out at a windswept aerodrome called El Aden, which some of you know, so stiff with the cold that it was hard to walk. It was 400 yards across to the airport building and to a really nourishing drink - 400 yards. Out got Frank Hurley. He had been travelling a little farther back in the plane than me. He was in uniform, and when he got out he could hardly walk. So I said, "My dear Hurley, it's all right

for a soft civilian like me to be frozen, but a polar man like you ..." He said, "That's the trouble, that's the trouble. When this boy came along to me and seeing my grey hair, and being innocent of my lack of rank said to me, 'Sir, would you like a blanket or two?' I started to say 'Yes' and then my eye caught my polar ribbons and I thought, 'I can't let the side down'. I said, 'No, no thank you very much, no thank you very much. On the whole I think it's rather stuffy'". (Laughter) And so, even more than I did, he limped away in the direction of that distant, but tantalising, whisky, as we hoped, in the Officers' building.

Well there it is; that is the kind of thing perhaps illustrated by that story that we used to have in mind.

Of course that is not the story. Who knows what will come out of the Antarctic? Who knows today, even the most scientifically gifted amongst you, who knows what yet may be learned from this vast tract, what stores of scientific knowledge, of material resources for all we know, of meteorological information from which we may derive matters of immense importance, particularly to this Continent? Who knows whether the Antarctic region itself will not in due course be part of one of the main highways of transportation around the world? These places get closer and closer. We have just touched the fringes of knowledge.

I believe myself that what may come for mankind out of this previously desolate area may turn out to be not only exciting but superb in its significance.

But I hope that those who are here when all these mysteries are disclosed will remember, will honour the name, will respect the memory of Douglas Mawson who, more than any other mortal man, will have provided the key with which to unlock the door. (Applause)
