

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES AT NEWINGTON COLLEGE, SYDNEY, ON 29TH
APRIL, 1961

Sir, President-General, and ladies and gentlemen:

I want to confess to you that I came up here with some doubt as to how I should begin what I hope will pass for a speech. As I am an old boy of Wesley College in Melbourne, your opposite number, I thought that courtesy might require that I should address you as "Fellow Methodists" (Applause) And then I remembered that I am not; I'm a Presbyterian. Then I thought, "Well perhaps", having a look at the Chairman, "I might begin" - because it's a good note - "Fellow Presbyterians" until I found that a man who had lived for years in Scotland couldn't pronounce Mackay. Then to my intense interest I found that this is really a very diverse audience because just as I was trying to settle in my own mind the fine points of doctrine I discovered that we are practically occupied by the Dalys, the Ryans and the Fitzgeralds! (Laughter) So I think I had better avoid any of these doctrinal differences and just address you as "Ladies and gentlemen".

The first thing that I want to do is to apologise to you. I am, for the only time for a long time, wearing a rather dashing looking blue shirt - some of you may have noticed it. I think I ought to explain to you how that comes about. This morning I had to make a television - what do you call it - performance, appearance, show? Anyhow it had something to do with television. And when you go on television - I say this for the benefit of those of you who have been fortunate enough to escape it - they do their best to improve you - and of course for all of us that is very necessary. But one way of improving you is to get you to wear a blue shirt; apparently it does something to you. I don't know; I've never got to the inner mystery of it. The other thing is that you sit back in a deep chair, pretend you're your own wife, and have your face made up! (Laughter) Very lightly, mind you, very lightly. A touch here; and a touch there. The effect of it, I want to tell you at once, is appalling.

I once did a famous political broadcast - I hope my colleague, Mr. Daly, won't object to this - a powerful political broadcast in the last election. And as my hair, as you can observe is white, they thought it was necessary to preserve the distinction where the forehead ended and the hair began - it's not so obvious in his case. So the young woman put a certain amount of a pale blue substance in my hair and it did the trick: everybody could tell I did have hair, instead of being bald. When we left she said to me, "Now" and I thought she said "wash it out". What she said, as my wife told me afterwards, was "Brush it out". But I washed it out; which meant I washed it in! That night I had to speak in a very, very strong industrial suburb and to see me standing up there with a blue rinse (Laughter) must have cost my candidate quite a number of votes.

Now I referred to my wife then. I want to refer to her again. She didn't come back with me to Australia, not because she has deserted me, but because she has remained with my daughter and her children for various reasons, and she's going to be back on Friday; and she will be very disappointed indeed that she couldn't be here.

I am delighted to be present on an occasion like this. It does great honour to the School that the School should have had this tremendous addition to its buildings; and it does great honour to the School that it should have named the additions after Mr. Nesbitt who has worked so valiantly in the

vineyard of this School for so long. (Applause) Therefore I regard it as a great privilege.

Furthermore, I always regard it as a particular privilege to be invited to do something, however small, of some notable event in the history of a great Church School. Because there are two kinds of things that matter in a School - one is that it should have a continuity of education and tradition and growth; and the other is that it should have a continuity of the spirit. These are the two things that matter in a great Church School. Newington, of course, has stood for them for many, many years.

When I refer to continuity I refer to something that is very close to my heart. It may be said by some that this represents my essential and deplorable conservatism of mind. I don't know. But I am an immense believer in continuity. I am not a believer in looking at the past because it is dead; but looking at the past because it is living; looking at the past because it reminds us that we are in the great procession of life. Any man who walked in the procession of life and who aims at doing anything in life, who is unaware of what went before him, unaware of the great truths that have come down to him, is a foolish man. He is essentially, a short-sighted man.

When we were listening to the words of a Psalm my mind went back to a time, many years ago now, when I first visited Chequers in Buckinghamshire, the new country home, the old country home, because it is both, of the British Prime Ministers, a home presented to the nation in the time of Lloyd George and now occupied as a place of rest and recreation - but in my experience even more of hard work - by Prime Ministers and those who come to see them.

Many years ago I stood on the utmost fringe of the Chiltern Hills looking down over the Oxford Plains. The man I was with had a great feeling for the geography and history of the country. We could just see the spire of the Church at Great Kimble where John Hampden went down and made his speech to the gentlemen of Buckinghamshire against ship money and so began the whole history of the parliamentary control of finances. We could see the long road that stretches across the plains, the Roman road from Andover; we could see on the sides of the hills the little ancient, almost obliterated, marks of the old British trenches put down at the time of the Roman invasion. This is the very microcosm of English history, the most fascinating place in the world.

And my friend said to me, "You know, over there Hampden was mortally wounded at the Battle of Chalgrove Field and he rode off the field slowly, with his head dipping, into the village of Thane just around the corner of the hill. And he died there. His men brought him up to Hampden House, just over here on the hill, and up the drive" - to which he later took me - "and there at nightfall these men, these Roundheads, with their lanterns in their hands marched the body of John Hampden up singing the Psalm that ends" - I've forgotten these words, but the reference is to justifying the work of our hands. I had it in my mind and it slipped away. That's the Presbyterian coming out, you see.

Now this seemed to me to be the most marvellous thing. Here was one of the great historic events in England and the very men who took their magnificent leader dead off the field were thinking and speaking and singing in terms of the Bible. That hasn't disappeared; that hasn't gone. This is still one of the great elements in continuity.

Does anybody suppose that every time a great crisis arrives in the world and some man is raised up to deal with it that he is a sudden accident. Was Churchill a sudden accident? Unexpected? Unreinforced by history? Unconscious of a sense of continuity? How absurd! If any boy at this School wants to understand the continuity of great things in the world, just as I want him to understand the continuity of what this School stands for, he might take an hour off and read the speeches of the Younger Pitt at the very turn of the 19th century. Then read the speeches of Churchill in 1940, and '41, and '42. He will find that although the mode of expression has changed, as it always does, here are the same ideas; here is the splendid eloquent expression of defiance, of strength, of a sense of continuity, all of which meant we, we the people of Britain, are not to be overthrown by tyrants.

There it is. This is a marvellous thing, the sense of continuity. And the people who live as if we were here today and gone tomorrow, I don't envy them - I'm sorry for them. Unless we have a sense of continuity, unless we know what our fathers and our grandfathers bestowed on us, what ideas are in the currents of our minds, almost at the moment of our birth, we know nothing. We must feel that in our time - just as the boys of Newington today, I hope, will feel that in their time - we and they are not only the inheritors but in our own fashion the creators, the people who continue the tradition, who build on it, who improve on it, who are not just reactionary in their minds, who look forward, who are free in their minds and enterprising in their thoughts, but who always know the foundations on which they build. This is, I think - well it is to me at any rate - a stimulating thought on an occasion of this kind.

It is easy enough for the old boys of a School to come back and become a little sentimental about when they were at school, to glorify the wit with which they replied one day to the Master, a wit almost entirely retrospective, to be saying something sentimental about the "good old days" when probably half of them hated a good deal of it as it occurred. That is all very well, very agreeable, I do it myself, I'm not being superior. I can equal anybody in these amiable hypocrisies on a suitable occasion. In reality however, down in their hearts they look at the school not in a backward-looking sense, not remembering what a superb footballer Tom was, or what a wonderful cricketer Jack was, but as something that they themselves have helped to make in their own time. They won't say so because they would think that rather pompous. And therefore I will say it for them: it is something that they have helped to make.

That is true too, about all the boys who are here, old and young; truest of the old who are about to leave. But for all of them true because this is a school that is established, that was established in the beginning, that continues to work, realising that you may have all the cleverness in the world, you may have all the scientific skill in the world; but the one thing that will save the world will be civilised minds. And civilised minds are minds conscious of the past, aware of responsibilities of the future, and above all with standards in their minds, standards of faith, standards of the spirit that will enable them to avoid the bitter wretched paganism that has beset the world in the last 50 years.

Sir, I want to say no more - I've spoken too long. But I did want to tell you, so far as I could, what I had in my mind in accepting this invitation and in telling you how delighted I am to open, as I now do open, this wing. (Applause)
