

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT.
HON. R.G. MENZIES, TO THE AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF
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THE CHALLENGE TO EDUCATION

It would perhaps be prudent to say, at the very outset, that I am not here as the head of a government making a policy speech, outlining new policies or forecasting future financial benefits and burdens. I have been honoured by your invitation to make the Inaugural address at the second annual meeting of the Australian College of Education. That very great teacher, Dr. Darling, wrote to me "We would like you to speak on the theme of Australia in the next twenty years and what you, as the leader of the country, expect or desire from us the teachers."

This opportunity I have accepted, if I may say so, not as one who seeks to express a Government or a party point of view but as one who has been privileged to have something to do, small enough in all conscience, with recent educational advancement in Australia, something which had the support of all parties; and as one with a profound belief in the tremendous significance of the teacher's calling. What I have to say will therefore be more philosophical, in the non-technical sense, than political, in the narrow and partisan sense.

For indeed, your voluntary responsibilities are very great. You have established this College to help you to discharge them better and better. You have made it clear that you look on teaching not merely as a means of earning a living but as a vocation which will enable you to contribute to the fullness of life.

To do anything to help or to stimulate is therefore a singular privilege.

Education and educators are beyond doubt confronting a great challenge both material, intellectual and spiritual.

At a later stage I will endeavour to bring these elements into association. For the present, however, I will speak of the material challenge, a challenge which is to be heard all round the world.

It is calculated by the statisticians that in 1950 the population of the world was 2,500 million; that in 1975 it will be 3,800 million; and that in 2000 it will be over 6,000 million! These forecasts are, of course, based on present trends and the absence of massive catastrophe. To produce food, shelter, clothing, and a decently ordered life for such growing myriads is a vast problem.

There is a strange irony in this reflection; that as what is called the "space age" begins - to what end and for what human purpose most of us cannot understand - the "Earth Age" approaches the most acute problems it will have ever confronted. The solving of those problems should be our first priority. Clearly the population problem will be insoluble, and will therefore produce the most frightful struggles for survival, with wars and pestilences their regular accompaniment, unless the earth's productivity is enormously increased, and/or the rate of population growth is slowed down.

If productivity is to be increased in economically backward countries, advanced countries will need a growing sense of international social and economic responsibility, and will, both directly and indirectly, need to increase efficiency and skill all round in production, transport, and distribution.

There must also be immense improvements in organization, in political and civil administration, in scientific research and in the application of that research to the provision of human needs. Not one of these results can reasonably be achieved by the ignorant, the unskilful, or by the socially irresponsible i.e. the lazy.

In general, this rapidly approaching crisis presents a dramatic challenge to all nations and peoples who enjoy peace, order, good government, and high material standards. It is a rebuke to those who, asked to bear burdens for international assistance, remind us of that ecclasiast proverb, that "charity begins at home."

But in particular it is a challenge to us, as a nation, to play our part in increasing the world's resources. And, in essence, that is a challenge to us to improve our education; for it is only by constantly improving education and skills that we can discharge our world duty.

Improvements in agriculture, in pastures, in stock breeding, do not come about by accident. They are the products of research, of scientific application, and of concentrated skill. The storing and distribution of water calls for engineers, surveyors, and a host of technical people. Moreover, much available skill will be wasted without intelligent and trained managers and organisers. Without increasingly educated people and political administrators, material potentialities may be either unrealised or partly frustrated by confusion or by a lack of imagination. These are obvious and elementary truths.

It should be equally obvious that without growing numbers of trained and dedicated teachers, we cannot meet the demand in Australia and elsewhere, for the scientific, technological, and managerial and administrative skills demanded by the task and the time.

Yet this does not mean that if, in the homely phrase we could "write our own ticket", we would concentrate upon producing technicians and specialists destined from their earlier days to the particular technique or specialty. We would, I hope, want to do better than that. For, as I shall remind you later on, a specialist without some reasonable degree of basic education of a humane kind can do more harm than good.

We must do our best to avoid early specialisation. In an educated man or woman, specialisation will come soon enough. It will come more effectively, more valuably, if it is the product of a judgment enlightened by broad and basic studies.

In 1959 Admiral Rickover, famous for his driving work in nuclear propulsion, gave evidence before the United States House of Representatives' Committee on Appropriations. He had some good things to say, which I will take leave to quote for my present purpose.

"A liberal education tends to liberate the mind from the narrow confines of personal observation through one's senses."

"A liberal education also lays the foundation of knowledge upon which professional education is built."

"Too many people here think of a liberal education as a luxury, something of no immediate usefulness. It is true that ... a liberal education does not in itself prepare one to earn a living. For this one needs in addition some specialist skill".

We know that there are difficulties, not all of them financial, in the way of achieving this ideal. One of those difficulties is the parent who says: "I want my son to earn his living in a specialised and highly-paid skill or craft. I want no time wasted on frills. What is not clearly and immediately relevant to the main end is unimportant, and a waste of time".

The good teacher, who wants to help to produce not just a good scientist or engineer, but also a good and wise citizen, will resist these basically uncivilised ideas to the very limits of his capacity. This does not mean, of course, that all must be educated in the same way; that there will be merit in uniformity. If, as I hope and believe, the grand objective is an educated personality, and personality is of all elements the most individual, we must not bow down and worship a false equality.

For education, though it has a mass aspect, since we must aim at certain basic training which all should have, is not, properly considered, a mass matter. It is not the business of today's educators to turn out the 1961 model, with automatic mental transmission gears. Once we get above the rudiments, education is the business, I repeat, of producing an educated personality. The work of organising a community educational service is therefore a complex one, requiring great skill, devotion, and understanding. What is to be aimed at is a general system, producing individuals of great variety.

In Australia, I believe that we tend to carry uniformity too far. Even in the drafting of the Commonwealth Constitution the fears of the self-governing colonies, fears that one prospective State might secure some advantage over another, produced a series of requirements of "uniformity" which have not always been of advantage. For example, Section 99 of the Constitution provides, reflecting the fears of the Nineties, that

"The Commonwealth shall not, by any law or regulation of trade, commerce, or revenue, give preference to one State or any part thereof over another State or any part thereof".

Though this provision has perhaps been splendidly ignored in the special tax provisions relating to remote areas, it is clear to many of us that special fiscal or trade treatment of particular parts of the Commonwealth may prove to be vital to a true and balanced national development. The passion for uniformity can be carried much too far.

I return to my subject, education, where this same passion can do great harm. Except in broad physical characteristics, men are not uniform. They all want education, but they do not all need the same kind of education. I oppose early specialisation at school, for it serves to narrow the mind and restrict the full development of personality. But in the later stages before matriculation there must be some room for a consideration of the life which the boy is expected to live. What is good for the prospective University student is not necessarily identical with what is good for a prospective wheat farmer. Each should know something of language and literature and history, to take some examples, for these are part of the essential furniture of his mind. But when it comes to special subjects, each should be given his chance.

When I first met them, years ago, I was much impressed (as I still am) by the Tasmanian Area Schools, with their special studies for boys who were going to live and work on the land. I saw great common sense in this, so long as it did not impair those general studies which seem to me to be essential for education of any kind.

It is just because I think that too much uniformity in education is bad, and philosophically considered, self-defeating, that I do not believe that the constitutional power over education should be transferred to the Commonwealth Parliament. In a continent like ours, with immense varieties of physical and human characteristics, variety should be developed. Men are different. It is just because they are different that our parliamentary democracy survives. For the greatest of all liberties is that which exists in a man's own mind. It is a liberty of which he alone is master, and it makes him to that extent a master, not a servant. Produce in a nation a generation of men and women with liberty in their own individual minds, and dictatorship becomes impossible.

Montesquieu, who has had such an influence upon organic political science, had no respect for uniformity. He looked for a system of government (which the United States and Australia to a degree adopted) where there is a division of power, where power checks power. He firmly believed that the idea of uniformity appealed to little minds, who found in it a species of perfection.

Whatever brand of politics the student may some day profess, or reject, or ignore, the educator must look at him, not as an economic unit some day to be recorded by a statistician, but as an individual, to be sent out into the world some day as a better individual. For the better the individual, the more conscious will he be of his responsibilities to his neighbour and to society.

But learning and skill are not all. One of the aims of this College is "to uphold within the profession and to proclaim in the community the higher values of education". This is supremely important, if bad money is not to drive out good, and lead to a general debasement of the moral and intellectual currency.

I take leave to adopt, with acknowledgement, the wise words of Father J.P. Gleeson at the Founders Convention, when this aim was under discussion -

"All knowledge is grist to the mill of the educator; but unless he concerns himself with his pupil's character he remains an informer, a source of facts piled upon one another and imparted to a mind both immature and untrained in their proper use."

This idea, that character, a proper conception of life, is the element most necessary to be achieved, runs right through every aspect of life. As Charles Morgan said, in his "Liberties of the Mind" (p.42), a book which should stand alongside Sir Richard Livingstone's "Education for a World Adrift" near every educated man's fireside :

"Everything, including democracy, is destroyed by its own extremes: personal rule by absolutism; oligarchy, or bureaucracy, by closeness, rigidity, and centralisation; plutocracy by avarice; democracy by a watering of its only valid currency of self-discipline and self-respect."

I seek your indulgence when I quote another passage from the same book which I have for years found quite haunting :

"Immortality is not to be voted at a political meeting. Posterity will not stay in any man's school. We are wilful and enchanted children, by the grace of God ... He whom we love and remember is not he who thrusts upon us his own

dusty chart of the Supreme Reality, scored over with his arguments, prejudices, and opinions; nor he who will draw a map of heaven on the blackboard and chastise us with scorpions if we will not fall down and worship it; but he who will pull the curtain away from the classroom window and let us see our own heaven with our own eyes. And this enablement of mankind I take to be the function of true education, for the very word means a leading out, and to lead out the spirit of man, through the wise, liberating self-discipline of learning and wonder, has been the glory of great teachers and of great universities since civilisation began to flower".

In other words, behind, inspiring and making a good use of skills, there must be an increasing awareness of the ethical aspects of life. For without such awareness, and the individual attitude which it will produce, all of our educational efforts can bring us to ultimate disaster.

I use the word ethics in a general way; not as denoting "Christian ethics", though to many of us these are the highest; not in any discriminating sense. Christianity remains, as a Scottish preacher once said, dramatically, in my hearing "the greatest minority movement in the history of the world". But there are other religions with their own ethical rules and moral compulsions. The main thing is that education must not be so resolutely utilitarian as to be pagan and degrading. Secular education must not come to mean selfish education.

I am convinced that if our approach to education is (in the popular "practical" way) "how much can I get for myself out of it or how much can my family get out of it in terms of financial advantage or social position?" then we shall see the material advancement of the nation matched by moral decay, and ultimately destroyed by it.

I have stressed the point of ethics because I believe that the most important thing to consider and learn in this world is the nature of man, his duties and rights, his place in society, his relationship to his Creator. This is why, as Sir Richard Livingstone says in "The Rainbow Bridge" (p.5) "history and literature must enter into any education; for they are our chief records of man and his ways."

This is, of course, not to subtract one thing from the immense importance of the teaching of science and technology to which, quite clearly, we must devote more and more effort and attention. For the world reasons to which I have referred, we have a moral obligation to promote all of those practical studies which will help to solve the population and production problem.

But this is not to obscure the truth that, whether our education is to produce scientists or engineers or doctors, or lawyers or teachers or preachers, there are basic studies which are essential for educated people, and the absence of which can make a man of technical skill a social menace.

It is perhaps unfortunate that a notion has obtained some currency, that there is an educational conflict between the study of science and the study of the humanities; that students should be put to their choice of one or the other. This is quite wrong. We live in a material world, the forces in which it is the business of science to understand, and the business of technology to harness and direct. But this world, of matter and physical dynamism, is a world in which men live; in which the fate and welfare of men must be the prime consideration.

It is in this sense that "the proper study of mankind is man". I believe that the greatest scientists are well aware of this; are conscious of the duality of their task. We must not achieve a lop-sidedness in our education. A scientist who was unaware of literature and history or of the principles of social responsibility would be dangerous. A humanist who turned his back upon the discoveries in natural science, who did not know something of their impact upon life and living would be condemning himself to a socially fruitless life in a non-radio-active ivory tower.

I come back, therefore, to those basic studies which are essential for educated people. In Australia, Latin and Greek appear to be on the way out, to the impoverishment of our understanding of our own language, and of our historic sense. We must seek to repair this position, not by a vain attempt to restore the old classical learning, but by insisting, in all our educational plans upon some reasonable knowledge of our language, of history, and of the processes of thought. This last is important, not as some separate subject for the class-room, but as something which pervades others. After all, the business of the educator is to teach students to think, and to think for themselves.

The neglect of the English language, both in writing and in speech, seems to me to be quite serious. I have known Doctors of Philosophy in Economics, for example, whose disregard of clear and grammatical English and whose subservience to jargon add to the natural difficulties of the reader, and make one regret that J.M. Keynes is no longer with us. There are some men of great mental ability and equipment who struggle to find utterance through obscurity - "you know what I mean!"

Perhaps we have not fully realised that the more complex life becomes, and the more the business of discovery goes on, the more important is clarity and persuasiveness of speech and writing.

Knowledge, to be of use to others, should be communicated to others. I remember, many years ago, saying to the late Sir John Monash, after hearing him put a case to the Victorian Government in relation to the State Electricity Commission, of which he was the founding Chairman - "you know, Sir John, everybody knows you as a very great soldier and a notable engineer. But I think of you also as one of the greatest advocates I have ever listened to." He smiled and said "These things are, after all, not unrelated. I doubt whether I could have done what I did in France, or got my ideas put into operation, if I had not acquired and practised the great art of expression!"

Clearly we neglect the treasures of our language at our peril and, on occasion, to the loss of others.

As for the treasures of our literature, perhaps the richest in the world, we owe it to ourselves and to others constantly to refresh our minds and our memories by enthusiastic reading. May I illustrate this by a reference to an art of which I must by now have learned something; the art of politics. Nothing has so widespread a significance for the daily life of a nation as the decisions taken by governments. Small errors can do harm; great errors can inflict grievous injury. The statesman therefore has the initial responsibility of close study and concentrated thought leading to a decision in his own mind.

But the problem does not end there. He must communicate his ideas, to a Cabinet, to Parliament, to the people. He must do this as well as he possibly can. His language must be such as to arrest and sustain interest. He must not condescend. He must seek to instruct, to explain, and to inspire. The vocabulary he employs must be rich and flexible. He must not under-estimate the public by thinking that the common-place is good enough. I am no great example in these matters, but having prepared my ideas and my arguments for an important speech, I find it a good thing, the night before, to read poetry. To some, this sounds silly; but it can make a great difference in the choice of words and in the weight and balance of sentences when the time to speak comes.

I turn now to what I will call some specific challenges in the field of education.

There is, of course, a great challenge to our university structure, brought about by the fantastic rate of increase in the demand for higher education. This is the most remarkable feature of the post-war years.

I remember, just after the war, brooding gloomily upon the future of the great public schools, many of them Church foundations. Could they survive what was likely to be a prolonged period of high taxation? Could parents face increased fees under such circumstances? My brooding was wasted; these schools have doubled and trebled in size, and have long waiting lists.

The same is true of the universities. The end of the war saw a great rush of new students. Accommodation became hopelessly overcrowded; classes became too big for effective work. The Murray Committee, writing in 1957, when actual university enrolments were 36,500, forecast an enrolment by 1960 of 48,000. In fact, the figures turned out to be 53,300! Murray thought he was entering the realms of phantasy when he gave 71,000 as the prospective figure for 1965. But the present Universities Commission estimates that the figure will be just on 90,000.

In the face of these figures, at once so stimulating and so menacing, are we to go along the old paths of the 19th century university conception, or must we devise new and varied instruments of tertiary education, some more advanced and costly than others, some simpler and cheaper? Can we make more effective and economic use of the facilities we now have? My Government is about to set up a special and powerful committee to advise the University Commission on these questions. It will "consider the pattern of higher education in relation to the needs and resources of the nation and make recommendation on the future development of higher education in Australia".

A similar investigation is being conducted in Great Britain.

The demands of education at all stages are tremendous. Socially, this is good. But we shall do badly if we ignore (as I fear many do), the inexorable practical considerations which must be taken into account.

Money is not unlimited, even in the Commonwealth Treasury. I find it constantly necessary to point out that governments have no money of their own. Governments are trustees not independent capitalists. Every effective pound of their expenditure must be worked for and earned by the people, and transferred to government by means of taxation and loans.

Yet, within the limits of their capacity thus created, governments in Australia have been both aware and responsive.

In university education, the student aspects of which I have just mentioned, the financial involvements are huge. In my own time as Prime Minister the Commonwealth, without direct constitutional responsibility save in its own territories, has found, for State university grants, rapidly increasing sums. From 1950, when our first special grant was made, until and including 1957, the total was £11.6m. In the Murray triennium 1958-59-60, it was £21.843m. In the current period 1961-2-3 it rises to £40.809m! Great and growing though these figures are, they are very greatly exceeded by the amounts found by the States themselves.

On the forecasts of student population, it is clear that even with a "new look" at the structure and instruments of tertiary education, the Budget burdens will continue to grow greater and greater.

In education, including primary and secondary, State Governments have, I believe, done remarkably well, assisted by the Commonwealth-States financial arrangements for tax-reimbursement and loan works programmes. In 1950-51 total expenditure on education by the States was £46m. Expenditure for 1959-60 was over £160m.

It becomes clear that governments of all kinds are aware of the challenge of education and are striving manfully to meet it.

But even more onerous than the financial burden, which the nation will cheerfully carry as it sees the national benefits accrue, is the problem of maintaining the supply and the standards of professors, lecturers, and teachers. We must in large measure produce these ourselves, for the demands of education elsewhere are no less insistent than our own. Standards and quality are vital. If the pressure upon our trained human resources grows too great, higher education will suffer a grievous and perhaps a fatal blow.

And there is another challenge, to teachers of all grades, primary, secondary, tertiary. You may exercise yourselves, not unnaturally, about your rights. I understand this. For a good teacher is a good man, and he ought to be paid as such. Every man of intellect and responsibility who chooses the noble vocation of teaching should not have to devote too great a share of his time to the problems of physical living. Right through the whole structure of teaching, salaries should be adequate. There have been, in modern times, great improvements in this field. No doubt, there is still room for improvement.

But a sense of vocation has its own compulsions. And the greatest of these compulsions is to seek out and expound the truth. There can be no room for the slipshod or the tendentious. The old rules hold good; that "references should be verified", that facts should be ascertained with care, and presented with precision. An educated man is one who, in addition to a reasonable stock-in-trade of factual information, technical or otherwise, has learned to think for himself and to form objective judgments. "Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider".

There is still a good deal of mental dishonesty in the world; it is perhaps more prevalent than larceny from the person. "Arrive in advance at your conclusion, guided by emotion or prejudice; then force the facts into the pre-determined mould!"

No man can be a great, or even a good teacher, who yields to this temptation. Yet there are those, in schools and universities, who do. To teach history, for example, so as to justify some current and personally held political theory, is to deface history and obscure the lessons it can teach to the uninhibited and unbiassed mind. The good teacher has a great power and a great glory. As we all know, looking back, he achieves, though he may not know it at the time, a species of honourable immortality with his students. But this is because he is a true teacher, not one who worships false gods.

I fear that in this address which, you will have no difficulty in understanding, I have had to prepare in stolen hours in a period of great political pressures, my remarks have been unduly discursive. But it may be at least not harmful if I sum up my own thesis.

Education in Australia has two great tasks. One, which it would be aloofly academic to ignore or to disparage, is to train as many students as possible in bodies of knowledge which will make them more competent to deal with the practical affairs of life. We must train and equip more competent workers in every branch of every industry; more and better scientists and technologists; more and better administrators, engineers, doctors, and lawyers; more trained and dedicated educators; more and more equipped and responsible electors and those they choose for the duties of government. This is a great and costly task.

To the extent that we fail in it, we will imperil our own material advancement. But the other great task is even more important. It is a common, but attractive error, to think of modern advances in applied science, from the telephone to television, from the motor-car to aircraft to rockets and space vehicles, as in themselves the proof of advancing civilisation. These are among the mere mechanical aids to civilisation. They may be wisely or wickedly used. Civilisation is in the hearts and minds of men. It will advance or fall back according to the use we make of knowledge and of skill. In spite of all we have had to our hands, the twentieth century has seen more of greed and inhumanity, more of war and barbarism, more of hatred and envy and malice, than any of us could have foreseen when we were young and hopeful.

We have seen great skill employed with hatred; science with envy; diplomacy with threat and blackmail; the distraction as I personally believe, of too many skilled people from improving the lot of mankind upon earth to a tremendous competition in space, in which prestige threatens to out-match usefulness. We must recapture our desire to know more, and feel more, about our fellowmen; to have a philosophy of living; to elevate the dignity of man, a dignity which, in our Christian concept, arises from our belief that he is made in the image of his Maker.

The tasks of the educator in this century have not ended. Properly and thoughtfully considered, they are only beginning.
