OFFICIAL OPENING OF GOODWIN HOMES

CANBERRA, 22ND JULY, 1961

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies

Mr. Freeth, Your Excellencies and ladies and gentlemen:

This is, I think, a very remarkable community effort. There is a lot of self-help in this matter; and there is some help by the Government. Now that is as it should be. We must marry these two elements together. I ought to tell you, as I have told other people on similar occasions, how this practice arose of the Government subsidising such enterprises - first f for f, and later on f2. for fl.

We were approaching a Budget Session of the Cabinet, quite a few years ago, and my wife had a very cold look in the eye at the dinner table - which is not unusual for wives - but this time it had a particular sort of frigidity about it. She was looking at me as much as to say, "Well I can't ask you what you are doing about the Budget, but I would like to say something". Understanding this I said, "Now what have you got on your mind?" She said, "Do you know the greatest problem, socially, that you have?" She paused for an answer. I wasn't game to make one. Then she said, "The greatest problem is the problem of housing people who are now old, who ought to be looked after in circumstances that make them feel that they are living in a home of their own". This was, I thought, a magnificent suggestion. It was translated into cold, financial terms; and so the Act was introduced and the scheme has gone on. As you know the contribution by the Government has been doubled.

What I like about it is this: when I was a schoolboy in Ballarat I lived with an old and rather dour Scots grandmother, in a house in which the only two books available for my consumption, apart from such as I might smuggle in at the ripe age of about 13 or 14, were the Bible and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Not a bad library, if I may say so, not at all bad. On the other side of the road, enclosed in a corrugated iron fence, and housed in the most gloomy horrible looking building was what was then called "the Benevolent Asylum". Even as a boy it gave me the horrors. It was so "institutional" as we now say; it had a rusty look, and a rusty flavour about it. There were old men, elderly men, and old women or elderly women who sort of sat around. Such a condescension on the part of the community!

Those days, I am delighted to know, have gone. All of a sudden we have discovered that after all it isn't a crime to reach the age of 65 - I'm 66 myself and Iregard that as the smallest of my But it is not given to everybody to be able to live in the crimes. old family home, to live with the family in normal circumstances. To be able to go, not into a sort of conglomerate This is not easy. mass in which everybody feels organised, but to go into a place which is one's own home - there it is, the bedroom, the little sitting room, the kitchenette, the garden outside - this is of the essence of human dignity. And I believe that one of the great things that our generation has done - and it has done dome pretty silly things in one way or another - has been to realise that you have to produce circumstances in which people feel that they are living in their own home, under their "own vine and fig-tree", in the old phrase, able to live to themselves when they want to, able to move around and entertain, or be entertained by their friends when they want to be. This, I I have no doubt that in another 50 years time think, is magnificent. what is being done in places like this will have been far excelled in a thousand places all around Australia.

It is a very, very happy occasion for my wife who, as I say, gave the initial - the word is "nudge" - the initial nudge on this matter some time ago. It is a great pleasure for us to go around and see places that strike one as not being the least that can be done, but as the best that can be done. There is such a difference, isn't there, of atmosphere in all this? Not something done grudgingly, but something done with a full understanding of human beings, and of human values. Now the last thing I want to say to you is this. References have been made to the Department of the Interior which has done magnificent work, and the Department of Works, to my expensive friend Mr. Overall, the Chairman of the Commission.... Oh, by the way I will interrupt myself. I must tell you something about Mr. Overall, do you mind? Occasionally if you say to a Minister, or to a Department, "Yes, we'll approve of that", nothing much happens for a month or two. But when Mr. Overall has some proposal up, and it is usually a very expensive one, before the Government and he knows it has been considered in Cabinet that day, he will ring up the secretary to the Cabinet before midnight and say, "How did my proposal get on?" If the answer is "It was approved", he has the bulldozers on the site at 8 o'clock next morning. (Applause) This dynamic drive has meant a great deal to Canberra, and I am sure has meant a great deal to you.

But you may talk about the Department of the Interior, you may talk about Government policy, you may talk about the Capital Commission, but there is no Government Department that administers humanity. There is no Department of Humanity. There can't be. You can't deal with kindness and goodwill and human understanding by regulations or rules, or by a Department. What you need to convert to a place like this from being a collection of bricks and mortar, into being a collection of individual homes is human understanding. And it is on that side that those for whom Mr. Sautelle speaks matter so much: people who have maintained their interest. I see a dozen of them here this afternoon who, as I know, have devoted a lot of their time and a lot of their attention to this matter. This is where humanity comes in, and escapes through the red tape, escapes through the specifications escapes through the Statutes or regulations, and converts the whole place into your home, somebody' else's home, the home of your friend, in which you are not ordered about, but are assisted to live your own lives in the happiest possible fashion.

Sir, it is because of all these things that I have the greatest pleasure in the world in declaring the building Open.