

OPENING OF THE NEW SCIENCE BUILDING AT
SYDNEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL, SYDNEY, N.S.W.
ON 9TH APRIL, 1963.

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Sir :

I don't mind telling you I am speaking this afternoon with one advantage and with a couple of disadvantages. The one advantage is that at dinner-time last night, I polled my full majority (Applause) and therefore I haven't had to endure the mortification of being referred to here either as "the ex-Prime Minister", "the former Prime Minister" or, as people sometimes say with a touch of graveyard humour, "the late Prime Minister." (Laughter)

So here I am, as you might say, all present and correct. From my point of view, a singular advantage, but whether it is from yours, I wouldn't like to say. But the disadvantages are two at least. One is that I have a splendid daylight view of the boys, most of whom are looking a bit grim, and I would be too in their place; and the other is that except for the front row, I can't see you at all. (Laughter) You are shrouded in darkness. Men, of course, loving the darkness because their deeds are evil. (Laughter) And so that is a disadvantage. I always like to be able to see the audience. You satisfy yourself that you have one if you can see it. (Laughter)

Another disadvantage is that Mr. Robson, this most famous person, connected so eloquently with this marvellous industrial fund, has developed a habit of haunting me. (Laughter) I have been to two or three of these things and each time I look around uneasily, I see Mr. Robson, Mr. Charles Beeth (who used to be an old friend of mine) and Mr. Trigg, and they sit there - Robson does the talking, the others do the applauding (Laughter) and although I don't mind hearing what he has to say four times (Laughter), he must be completely fed up now with listening to me. Fortunately for me, I can't remember what I said on the former occasions and therefore I will do my best to overcome this handicap.

But, really, this is a marvellous event. I must confess, as your Highmaster has told you, that on more than one occasion, as a result of being driven rapidly along the street outside, I have said to him, "How do you get them all in?" This is very true. I have. I have said it. And I still don't know, but they are here and that, I think, is a very good thing for Sydney and a very good thing for Australia.

Now, I want to confess to you that my claims to speak about science are extremely sketchy. When I was a schoolboy, I had an inordinately good memory. I was the kind of fellow who gets through examinations rather easily, you see - except in science or mathematics. And when it came to these branches of learning, which I never succeeded in understanding, I used to learn the book by heart, and as I once said in the presence of Mr. Robson, I always got fifty as a result. half and half - theory, practice. Fifty percent. That was

my scientific qualification. Since then, my instinctive but not cultivated scientific ideas have been recognised. I am a Doctor of Science - believe it or not - (Laughter) of the University of New South Wales, and seeing a couple of powerful medical men, who are friends of mine, in the front row, I want to tell them that I am also a Fellow of the Royal College of Gynaecologists and Obstetricians (Laughter) (Applause). So you see, in a sense, I am not entirely unqualified (Laughter) for the task this afternoon, even though the only thing I deliver is a speech. (Laughter, applause)

But putting all that on one side, the truth of the matter is that we have become, particularly in the last ten, twenty years, increasingly conscious of the demanding place of science in education and in the whole conduct of the affairs of the world. This is tremendously true. It may be, Sir, that perhaps we are a little carried away by the fascination of nuclear physics, by the spectacular achievements which are taking place no doubt at this moment somewhere up above us. But this is not to blind us to the fact that humanity, though it lives in some fear of some of these developments, has benefited enormously by the scientific work done in this century - the work of the microbiologists, the antibiotics, the whole modern development of surgery, the whole modern developments in agriculture, in genetics, in the pastoral industry - all these things have not only added enormously to human wealth and human happiness but they have, in various aspects, contributed to a remarkable extension of human life. This is something that we are not to forget in the excitement at the moment of more fashionable and fascinating ideas.

I once took the opportunity of saying, in one of the universities, at the time when the first Sputnik went up and was to be seen by earnest observers in the sky, that it was worth the while of a lot of the people in the world who were looking at it and marvelling at it to remember that but for the work particularly of the medical scientists in this century millions of them would not have been there to see it. So, as always, we must praise famous men and understand what we are talking about when we are talking of science, not narrowly, but in all its aspects.

Now, we in Australia have, I think, two tremendous interests in this matter. In the first place there is, in the modern world, as a process of development goes on, a constant pressure on the cost level, a constant inflationary upward force on all the things that enter into the cost structure; and these, of course, are of tremendous interest, for example, to the man on the land, to the farmer, to the grazier and, of course, of tremendous interest to many other people. More and more, we are coming to realise that the right answer to this is not a blind attempt to push back the tide, but the right answer is to increase our efficiency of production in all its aspects and that the right way to do that is primarily by devoting more and more scientific study and technological application to the problem in hand.

We've all seen - I've seen it in my own lifetime - how the production of wheat has improved, how many areas have come under profitable cultivation that were thought to be arid. What an enormous development there has been in the wool industry, in the sheep industry broadly. What tremendous improvements are occurring every day in the great industrial enterprises. And if you go back far enough, it is very seldom just a happy accident. It is usually the result of the careful work of some scientist in the laboratory and of some applied scientist in the technological field.

Therefore, though I myself am no scientist, though I myself am bred in the tradition of the humanities and hope that that tradition will always survive, I am utterly convinced that we must pay an increasing attention to scientific training, to scientific discovery, to scientific application if we are to be well in the march of time, if our country is to have more and more people and to be more and more prosperous. From that point of view, a boy who uses the facilities of this new building will not simply be doing something that may someday qualify him to hold a particular job or to earn a particular income. He will, in fact, be one of thousands making a contribution to the ultimate advancement of the country. And the advancement of the country and the advancement of the people and their happiness is more important than any individual advancement at all. Now, Sir, that's my first reason.

The second reason is perhaps not unassociated with it. We have a rapidly-growing population, we have now - call it 11 million - people in Australia, many, many more than when I first knew what the population of Australia was. But there are other countries in the world just emerging into self-conscious nationhood, just emerging into independence, just practising, sometimes in a faltering way, the great art of self-government. The population of China itself will probably be a thousand million at the turn of the century. The population of India 400-odd million. The population of Indonesia gets very near to 100 million. We have hundreds, becoming rapidly thousands of millions of people in the world not living in old settled communities, not enjoying the amenities of life that we enjoy, not familiar as we are with all the latest products of human ingenuity, but wanting them, needing them, struggling towards them, and our country - small as it may be - will find increasingly that it must produce scientists not only for itself but for other countries in the world because we have a tremendous contribution to make if this new world is to develop and maintain its pride, secure its independence and to be able to hold up its head in the full process of what we call modern civilisation.

And so, for the individual, for this nation, for other great nations in the world, the study of science, the attaining of the highest possible standards, have become of vital importance.

One of the reasons why I so vastly admire the imaginative work of the industrial fund and of these public-spirited gentlemen who conduct its affairs is that when I was a schoolboy, scientific equipment was of a highly rudimentary kind. Today it becomes more and more complex - not as complex as in a research university or in a university of the normal type, but still complex and expensive as compared to the rudimentary apparatus of the past. It is much more costly to establish a science faculty in a university than it is to establish an arts faculty. You can teach people Latin, with some difficulty, I take it, but you can teach people Latin with the minimum of equipment. My experience was some books and a teacher with a gimlet eye (Laughter) That was the equipment that could set you going on the road.

But in science it is big money that is now needed. This involves tremendous expenditure and in the government field, dealing as I do with the universities of Australia, I am increasingly conscious of this fact because the outlay, even

since the great Murray Report was adopted by us, doubles itself every three years. And this is not inconsiderably related to the cost of equipment. The industrial fund, realising this as men of practical experience, has come along and its own contributions, massive as they are, are very largely directed to seeing that you just don't have an agreeable building, with good light coming through the windows, but that you have the means of producing, with the co-operation of the student, first-class people up to the standard at which they go to the university, well-equipped people coming out of well-equipped laboratories.

Now, Sir, that is all I want to say. I have spoken too long. It is a curious thing about the effect - I will have to get Sir Norman Gregg to explain it to me sometime - a curious thing about the effect on the optic nerve, but if you look at an audience, even in the dark, as long as I have been looking at you, you get to pick out a few faces and that's what has been happening to me. That is perhaps why I have spoken too long.

Sir, and I won't forget on this occasion, I have a very great deal of satisfaction in declaring this building open.
