

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. SIR  
ROBERT MENZIES, ON THE OCCASION OF A GRADUATION  
CEREMONIAL CONFERRING ON HIM THE HONORARY DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF LAWS, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND ON 1st JULY, 1963

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Your Royal Highness, Mr. Chancellor, My Lords and Ladies  
and Gentlemen :

This is every bit, as His Royal Highness said, a tremendous day in my life. You know, in Australia we address our political people with a certain amount of offensive good humour. Nobody who leads a party or leads the Government in Australia is ever allowed to suffer from the illusion that he is important, because he really isn't, and every time I've gone abroad I have found here or there, a degree of importance that I have never been able to sustain in my own country.

Of course I have been particularly honoured and delighted today. I went through the Ceremony of the Thistle this morning at St. Giles and came out as proud as Lucifer. I hadn't tripped on my robe. I hadn't stood in the wrong place. Everybody seemed to be quite content, even the Lord Lyon! But when I knew all that time that this was to be followed by receiving a Degree at Edinburgh, I would like you to understand how full my cup of happiness was. This is for me, and for my wife, and for my elder son who has been here today, the greatest day in our lives.

And, of course, this Ceremony is added to by the fact that His Royal Highness is your Chancellor. I've never been a Royal Highness myself. I've never had to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which come to His Royal Highness. And we in Australia, of course, know him. We think, on the whole, we know him pretty well. He has been out sometimes in great ceremony on a full Royal visit. Twice he's been out - once to the Olympic Games, once to the Empire Games - in a fairly informal sort of fashion, and he has won a place in the Australian heart which is second only to that occupied by our Sovereign Lady, The Queen. But perhaps if he had just been His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, these are very considerable attributes, but he has, in his own proper person, added to them titles all around the world, which are appropriate to be mentioned in this famous University on this occasion because if there is one man in my own time who has raised the banner of education, who has encouraged the young, who has encouraged scholarship, who has encouraged widening the frontiers of scientific and technological knowledge in the world, it is your Chancellor, so that I venture to say that, at the end of his life, which is bound to occur in another sixty years, not earlier I trust, but at the end of his life as he sits, as we are all supposed to sit as we get older, by the fireside, meditating on our sins of the past, extracting a little pride from the few good things that we might have done - that applies to me - he will be able to look back and know that nobody has done more than he has in these great causes to which I have referred and, therefore, while it is a singular honour for me to be given a Degree at the University of Edinburgh, it is a profound honour, an unforgettable honour, to receive it at the hands of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.

Now, I must say that my sponsor today I thought did me rather well, rather better than well, perhaps, and I will, in future, forever love him for two reasons. One, he delivered his address in English. I mention that, Sir, because a few years ago, some error having occurred at Oxford, they made me a Doctor of Laws, a Doctor of Civil Law of Oxford, and they had a variety of people, some distinguished scientists and even Margot Fonteyn, who was to receive a Degree as a Doctor of Music, of lovely gown, one of these things you see but rather lacy, and lovely, and we paused at the School of Divinity where we were given our tickets, you know, our instructions. I didn't have any today, so I wouldn't know. But it turned out that every one of the Honorary Graduands had the public orator's speech in Latin and in English - but I was first - I didn't get my copy until afterwards and so I stood in front of Lord Halifax, who was the Chancellor and I heard the public orator, in an impeccable modern pronunciation of Latin, make a speech about me, and I had to follow it. He made two jokes, as all public orators do, particularly when they are speaking in Latin, and I say with boastful Menzies pride that I laughed at the right time, and when I came in here today, I was rather apprehensive because I thought, well now, I can cope with the public orator speaking in Latin in the modern pronunciation, but how can I cope with the public orator speaking in Latin with a Scots accent? And so I want to say thank you very much for having delivered me from this embarrassment.

The other reason that I was delighted with him was that he did say something about what might almost be regarded as an adventitious association that I have with the University development in Australia. It is one of the remarkable things in our generation, not perhaps mine but the current generation, that when the Second World War ended, the first result in my own country and, I think, Sir, here, was that there was a tremendous upsurge of demand for University training. In my own University I think there were 1,500 undergraduates, in my own town, and within a year or two after the war there were 6,000, 7,000, 8,000, and the result has been that the pressure of demand on universities for university training has been phenomenal. The last estimate that I saw was that, by the turn of the century, in Australia, with a population of something under 11 millions at the present time, there would be 100,000 undergraduates and this, of course, has put the most tremendous pressure on universities. It is beginning to produce new universities. It is beginning to present problems of the most tremendous kind.

Ten years ago, realising these, as a university man myself, I performed one of the greatest acts of trickery ever known in Australian politics. I say nothing about your political scene - I don't understand it. But I was in England and I saw Sir Keith Murray, Chairman of the University Grants Commission, and I said to him in a rather beguiling fashion, "What about coming out and being the Chairman of a Committee to investigate the university position in Australia?" And he said, as a few other people have said in the last week or two, "Well, I can't come unless Harold approves," because Harold Macmillan was then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, you see, and so I spoke to Harold Macmillan, and he was in an amiable and relaxed mood, and he said, "Certainly, old boy, yes, why not?" He hadn't experienced then any of these recent vicissitudes - this is ten years ago - and so I stole Keith Murray.

And then we set up a powerful Committee and it was only after I had set it up that I confessed to my Treasurer, or, as they would say in London, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what I was doing, and he said, "Oh yes, old man, well if you think that's all right, that's all right." "Well, I said, "I want to warn you that these Committees are not economical. This might cost a few million pounds," you see, and he, being in an amiable mood, said, "Well, old boy, if you feel that way, that's all right," and the result has been, you know, one step leading to another as it always does, but we are now spending almost as many millions as a Commonwealth on universities as we were spending tens of thousands when this thing began and, in the result, it has meant that the universities, confronted by utter bankruptcy with this pressure of demand on their resources, have been able to expand, to build.

I see among my audience this afternoon the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. If he could be persuaded to break all the rules of a Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne and become vocal, he would tell you that this has revolutionized the position of the universities. Or course, the work is not over. The work is beginning. We have great problems. I wonder whether we can cope with 100,000, 200,000, whatever it may be, of prospective undergraduates by following along the old paths, by having the university of the old pattern. I think the time is coming when we must vary our activities. Graduate, postgraduate, the higher levels of learning, the Ordinary pass degree, the Technological Institute, the Technical Institute, these present the most tremendous problems to us and in all the work that I have to do about this, and all the thoughts that I have to engage in, I confess, once more, I have been remarkably assisted by the modern, forward-looking, active view of your own Chancellor. This is of tremendous importance for the future of the world.

For all that is a generalisation, yes, but not so generalised, perhaps, as you might think, because it is a problem that comes to all of us. But to come here into this place in Scotland is to be reminded that there are certain foundations of learning which continue to be of supreme importance for mankind. Scotland, of course, and I speak without any bias on this matter, Scotland has a unique place in the history of learning in the world. The farm worker of one hundred years ago saying, "No, no, Jock must go to school. He must do something better", and Jock, himself, with his son saying, "He must go to Edinburgh - he must have a Degree". Learning, the ambition for learning, the instinctive sense that the cultivated mind - not the snobbish mind - the cultivated mind, is essential for mankind, has found its expression in Scotland more, I believe, than in any other country of the world. And, of course, Edinburgh itself with its ancient history embodies the whole of this idea. And the idea is not just to be able to take a Degree, to get a licence to practise the Law, or a licence to practise Medicine or whatever it may be. The whole idea has been to reach out to something which is, at the moment, beyond you, but which you may attain with effort and with character and with skill.

As Robert Browning said - and it deserves to be the motto of all great universities - "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a Heaven for." This is it - a man's reach should exceed his grasp - and so you don't want to have coming out of universities people who will say, even inadvertently, at some time in the future, "Well, I finished my education in 1963." The

people who finished their education when they took a Degree are not worth much. They may earn adequate incomes, but they're not worth much. "A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a Heaven for," and so the graduate continues to be the student. The graduate continues to feel that there are, in the intellectual sense, fresh worlds to conquer. And if you, of Edinburgh, realise as I do, and perhaps you do, how much this great tradition in this mother country of so many of us, has done to stimulate the minds and spirits of people, to make them feel the future is more important than the past, you would share my profound pride on this occasion.

This is a great day for me; it's a great day for us, as I said. I am grateful to you, I am proud of the honour which you have done me, and I hope that, in time to come, when they write those rather cynical obituaries that they write about all public men, and I am something of that kind in my own country, they will be prepared to say that, at any rate, the fact that Edinburgh honoured him in this fashion is a mark in his favour.

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