

LOED PROVOST'S LUNCHEON, EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

1st July, 1963

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

Lord Provost, Lady Provost :

When you were telling us of this highly erudite note that you wrote to your then girl-friend, if that isn't a debased expression, I was delighted because it reminded me of the most famous maiden speech ever made in the House of Commons and that was made, of course I need hardly say, by F.E. Smith who was the only Conservative, I think, at the great election of 1906 to win a seat. That meant something. And he found himself as a new Member but, like myself, heavily endowed with impertinence (Laughter), and there he saw on the other side among other people, David Lloyd George, and Lloyd George had been attacking the Tories in the election and explaining that if they were voted for, Chinese slavery would break out in the Welsh hills because, strangely enough, most elections are conducted on what are subsequently rather amusing issues really.

Anyhow, the Liberals won and the Tories were in opposition and I hope you have all read - you should - Birkenhead.... well, Smith's maiden speech, because the Speaker in due course by arrangement called on Mr. Smith, and four gentlemen stood up. This is, of course, one of the disadvantages of having a name like Smith. If it had been Menzies or Mingies, it would have been different. But, anyhow, I am not going to repeat to you the entire speech, but he did end up by quoting a little Latin, as you did, Sir. He said all this, having attacked Lloyd George, having attacked the idea of Chinese slavery in the Welsh mountains. He ended up by saying : "Proxime ualelegem ardebat." And then he added, as you didn't Sir, "For the benefit of those educated at Eton, I will do this into English," (Laughter) and he did it into English. And he said - "Proxime : 'in the adjoining county,' of course. Ualelegem - 'the right honourable gentleman from Carnarvon Burroughs'. Ardebat : 'was letting off Chinese crackers'" (Laughter) And I have always liked this because with my rather scanty knowledge of Latin, I have always been delighted to know that there was once a politician who produced the right tense for the word "ardebat". And so I listened to you, Sir, today with great pleasure and I thought, "Well, classical learning is not dead in Edinburgh."

Now the next thing I want to say is that this chronic argument goes on about how to pronounce my name. I can remember when I was a small boy, hearing my father say in a rather exostulating fashion to people, "Look, please, my name is Mingies," but they wouldn't have it. It's M-e-n-z-i-e-s, therefore it is Menzies. And last Friday, I lunched here with the College of Physicians and I was assured by four physicians out of five that Menzies was the right pronunciation and that Mingies was an Edinburgh affectation. (Laughter)

But years ago, I had this matter conveniently settled for me in London. You know, in London, when they have a big patriotic dinner - these things at which poor, wandering Colonial types like myself have to make a speech - they have an imposing gentleman in a red coat and he announces everybody, ending up where possible with the pregnant phrase - "Justice of the Peace" (Laughter) - which I am not. This old boy had got rather tired. He had produced all these things, time after time,

in what I might describe as a fine Home Counties English. (Laughter) Just before he was to announce me, he came across and with a fine Doric quality on his tongue - no Home County this stuff - he said, "Excuse me, Sir, but am I to announce ye as Menries or by y'r proper name?" (Laughter) (Applause) And I said, "Of course, by my proper name."

Now, you know, Sir, there is something rather attractive, even to the Sassenach, about Edinburgh. You realise that, don't you, I'll say something about Edinburgh in a moment. (Laughter) I remember that you mentioned that you had a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation coming here, including a quasi-supporter and a definite opponent. (Laughter) Well, I remember that one year we had a delegation and by some species of lottery, it was decided that X would reply in such-and-such a place, Y in another place and Z in another place, and when it came to Edinburgh, the Lord Provost gave a Reception and the man on whom the lot had fallen to reply had me mere to do with Scotland, I thought, than the man in the moon. Still, he got up and he said, "You know, Lord Provost, I have Scotch blood in my veins" - and we were all flabbergasted - and he said, "Yes, my wife's aunt was a Scotswoman" (Laughter) And with my usual irreverence, I turned to my neighbour and said, "Must have been a gypay wedding." (Laughter)

Now, Sir, you were very tactful. You gave a broad hint in the course of your most engaging speech about the story connected with me becoming a Freeman of Edinburgh. Some of you have heard it but others of you may not have heard it. You gave me the opportunity, so I will tell it because many of you might say, "Well, for this fellow to become a Freeman of Edinburgh is a matter which requires some explanation." (Laughter) Well, it came about in this way.

In 1948, I was on what was allegedly called a health journey. I was then Leader of the Opposition in Australia, an honourable position, which I had occupied at that time for seven years and which I occupied, I am happy to say, for only one year more. My wife was with me and various people and we were travelling in Scotland. John Wakehurst had been Governor of New South Wales and we had been in touch with him and he met us at the Assembly Room in George Street. When we arrived, well, there we are: my wife and my daughter who was with me - they wanted to see ballet, you know, and ballet is a little beyond my grasp (Laughter), and wanted to see the Lindsay play and this kind of thing. And we arrived and I said to Lord Wakehurst, "You know, we have booked nowhere and the Festival is in full cry; what can we do?" And he said, "Come across here and meet Lord Provost" who was then Lord Provost Murray, I think I am right in saying. We were presented in due form to the Lord Provost and I said with all the bashfulness that characterises an Australian (Laughter): "Well, Lord Provost, I hate to impose this on you but could you help us to book a few seats here and there, you know." And he looked at me and said, "My dear Sir, as a Freeman of Edinburgh, all doors are open to you." I said, "I'm sorry, but would you mind repeating that?" And he repeated it in a loud, clear voice, and I said, "Well, I don't understand this at all."

He said, "We elected you to be a Freeman in 1941". In 1941 I had been in Great Britain during the war and I happened at that time, for some reason or another, to be

Prime Minister of Australia, and it turned out that the resolution had been carried and that the letter had been posted. Of course in 1941 a lot of mail went astray because ships were torpedoed and all that sort of thing. I had never heard of it. And so it was that three weeks later we came up into this very room, with the red gowns and the bailies and I received the Freedom of Edinburgh seven years after it had been voted (Laughter) but only three weeks after I had learnt about it. (Applause) And all I need tell you that in a room at my house there are various things - there is the Freedom of Edinburgh, and there's some competition, isn't there, Pat, among the family as to who is to get it. (Laughter)

Now there is another occasion today that gives me immense pleasure because, sitting on the right-hand side of the Lady Provost is Lady Dunrossil and sitting on the left-hand side of Sir Eric Harrison, that deplorable character who represents me in Great Britain, is Lady Slim. (Applause) I take this as a tremendously friendly gesture. As you all know, Lord Slim is one of the great men of our time, (Applause) and he was Governor-General of Australia. I lived in a state of constant terror of him (Laughter) because he is a formidable man. Those of you who know him, know that to go into his presence is to quake a little, and I was quaking all the way in this morning. (Laughter) And she is here, God bless her! (Hear, hear)

And then, of course, Lord Dunrossil who was better known as "Shakes" Morrison, an old Edinburgh man himself (Applause) began by being a great friend of mine and ended by being a great friend of everybody in Australia (Applause) - who died in Australia. I am so proud and delighted to think that Alison Dunrossil should be here today. (Applause)

Now, Sir, the only other thing that I want to say to you and to your great company is this. It's a curious thing, isn't it, about people of the Scots blood that they have a pride which sustains any journey and survives any transportation - I don't use the word in its technical sense - into the rest of the world. I can speak freely about that because I am happy to say that my grandparents went to Australia after transportation had ceased (Laughter). But the great thing about the Scots, wherever they may be in the world - and there are now far more of them outside Scotland than inside Scotland - a great thing about the Scots is that they retain their pride. They don't apologise, they don't talk about old grievances. The only grievance that they know anything about is that in the new country in which they live, the other people have the grievance. (Laughter).

In other words, the great quality of the Scot is pride, not silly self-conceit, which is always self-defeating, but pride. I am as proud as Lucifer to have Scots blood in my veins. (Laughter) My wife who was a Leekie and therefore belonged to a sept of the MacGregors, is as proud as Lucifer and years ago, down in the Mingies country, she had a painful experience because the clansmen were there and every time they pointed to a blasted oak - I use the word in its literal sense (Laughter) - on a hillside, they'd say, "And that's where we hanged the MacGregors" (Laughter). She took a rather poor view of this, a rather poor view, until once more, at the weekend we walked around the old churchyard at Wemyss and in the kirk at Wemyss, there they were. There were MacGregors, MacGregors - and I would hate to put words into my wife's mouth - I am sure she was saying to herself, "I wasn't the first to get back on the Mingies." (Laughter)

Sir, I said something about pride. Most English words lend themselves to misinterpretation and if you say that Jones or Brown or Robertson was a proud man, it is easy to say, "Well, he must have a good opinion of himself." That's fair enough. He must have some form of conceit. The Scots pride is nothing like that at all. Pride, of course, to a Scot or to a derivative Scot like myself follows a certain sense of personal dignity, of personal authority, and that's right. There's nothing wrong with that in this world and, God knows, that a Prime Minister who has been a Prime Minister for sixteen years as I have, needs it from time to time, but on top of all that, of course, the other connotation of pride is a sense of responsibility - your clan did this, your ancestors did this, you must never let them down. You see, this is the obverse of the medal; pride - hold your head high, pride - know that you have a sense of responsibility, that you can never let your clan, your name, whatever it may be, down.

These are the two facets of pride. When I found that this time I was to come to Edinburgh to receive this, to me, entirely unexpected honour of the Thistle, this thing so peculiar to Her Majesty, to her own prerogative, I was very proud to think that this would happen in Edinburgh because though it gave me and all my family, including my eldest son who is here for it, an immense feeling of joy, it also served as a reminder to all of us that we have immense responsibilities and that whatever comes or goes, we must never let down either Edinburgh in particular or Scotland in general. It's a proud thing to be of the Scots blood; it's a proud thing to have been here today; it's a proud thing for all of us to have been received by you, to hear you speak with such justice, except about that "yesterdie" (laughter) and to be able to go home and in the case of the elder of us to say, "Well, once more we have been in Ould Reekie. We have been in the land of our forefathers and we shall remember it for the rest of our lives."
