

OPENING OF THE R.G. MENZIES SCHOOL OF
HUMANITIES - MONASH UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE
ON 24TH AUGUST, 1963

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

Mr. Chancellor, Most Potent, Grave and Reverend Seniors
sitting here behind me, and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I propose, with your concurrence, to institute a new rule and that is that I don't speak with my hat on. I can't (Laughter) I'm very grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts for having varied the usual form. I always have to remember when I open anything that apart from uttering a number of words and if possible saying something, I have to open whatever it is and he has given me an alternative today. I may either open this School or I may pronounce the benediction over it. (Laughter) I now do both.

Mr. Chancellor, your account of how this new movement in the university world occurred was still interesting to me though I had played a part in it. I don't mind telling you that your broad hints about the future and the slight side touches on the same theme by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts (Laughter) may appear to you to have passed unnoticed by me because I observed a straight face, but the reason for that was that looking back in the audience I saw that my colleague, the Treasurer, was present and so he knows now as much as I do and if he doesn't know it, I think the Chairman of the Universities Commission who is also lurking in this audience will no doubt have made a note of it. And so in due course, something dreadful will happen, financially, which will be something very good for the universities of Australia.

You have to do a great deal of good by stealth. I offer that piece of gratuitous advice to those who are now training for some occupation in life. Do it by stealth. I remember when I had this idea of establishing a committee with the possibility of getting Keith Murray to come and preside over it. I didn't care to mention this to the Treasurer at the time - who wasn't Mr. Holt at that time - until it was practically completed. I was in England and I spoke to Sir Keith Murray and he said, "Well, I would be very happy. This is the kind of thing that I have had some experience of, that I would like to do something about, but I work with the Chancellor of the Exchequer - a very happy arrangement - and I will need to have his approval." The Chancellor of the day was Mr. Harold Macmillan, so I went and got his approval. Thus the Committee began.

When I had assembled the Committee, I then broke the news to the Treasurer and he said, "Well, old man, I know you are very interested in this kind of thing." I said, "I certainly am". I said, of course, "I warn you, this will cost money," and he said, "Yes, I had an idea that it would," and I said, "Any committee of competence that goes into the position of the universities - tremendously pressed as they were at that time by a vast flood of increase in those requiring university training - well, the cost will be high."

Up to that time, the Commonwealth Government had got along very quietly with a few special grants of a limited kind - I think we ran to about £12M in the course of a year - but this

one was bound to be in far greater figures than that. And I must say for my then colleague that he took this very well and the Committee then got to work and produced its first report, its first triennial recommendation and it was very large, as it seemed at that time and once more I adopted what you might be pleased to describe as rather devious methods.

I knew that if this report were distributed to the Ministers too far ahead of a Cabinet Meeting, too many of them might get to know too much about it, and so I had to circulate it one day and deal with it the next. And we came out at the end of the day in Cabinet completely approving of all the recommendations that had been made and since then, of course, you know the story. I know some of it.

I know that for the first triennium under the auspices of the Universities Commission what had seemed large figures in the Murray Report turned out to be quite insignificant and Sir Leslie Martin has developed nowadays almost a habit of avoiding my eye because he knows and I know that the next triennium will be such as to leave the second one looking a poor relation. Well, this is all good. It may be difficult - it is difficult, but it is incredibly good and I am happy to think that what has happened in the universities of Australia has been, in a sense, revolutionary, never sufficient - the day will never come when university authorities will say they are content with what they have. It can't come. This is not a static community, it is not a static world that we live in. Problems are increasing and the demand for people with cultivated intelligence is a growing demand, not only here but all over the world and, consequently, I am not here to say, "Well, gentlemen, call it a day, will you? It is becoming a little uncomfortable." I am quite prepared to say to you that I will wonder what has happened to the universities if they ever reach that comfortable position. This is a great task and a task which any man claiming any elements of statesmanship at all ought to be delighted to participate in.

Of course, Sir, it is always worth remembering, and I am sure that you all remember it, that while there are great financial problems, great problems of building, great problems of securing equipment and of keeping abreast of the developing equipment, particularly in the scientific faculties, although all those present problems, one of the great problems will be to maintain in a growing university field the high quality of university staffs. This is a problem which occasions me - although I am not responsible for dealing with it very much - but this occasions me more thought than all these other physical problems to which I have referred, because we must maintain the high standards. If there is one thing we can't afford in this country, it is to lower the standards of university training and to have first-class people, first-class men, first-class women in the various faculties is not going to be easy. Nor indeed, Sir, can we contemplate that we are going to secure much help on that front from outside Australia because all countries feel the same pressure, the same urge, the same urgent demand to maintain standards and to keep up and expand their first-class teaching population. This is something that I think must inspire everybody to greater and greater efforts.

And, Sir, particularly here, what a marvellous thing it is, as I said to the Chancellor after lunch, what a marvellous thing it is to have the honour of presiding over and contributing to the growth of a new university, something straight from the grass roots, not just inheriting somebody else's work but

creating something on the spot. This is tremendous. You know, quite recently in America I delivered the Jefferson Oration, as they are pleased to call it, at Monticello.

I suppose most of you remember that when Jefferson drafted his own epitaph for his own memorial stone, he wrote out - "Thomas Jefferson" and his dates, "Draftsman of the Declaration of Independence, Creator of the Virginia Statute for Religious Toleration, Founder of the University of Virginia." Not a word about having been an ambassador, not a word about having been Secretary of State in George Washington's administration, not a word about having been Vice President, not a word about having been President, for two terms, of the United States of America - just these three simple things. And when he was asked by one of his relatives, "Why didn't you include these great matters?", he said, "Well, I wanted to have put on my memorial what I had done for the people, not what the people had done for me." Now this is superb. It's so simple and yet it's full of that imaginative quality which is required in the creation of anything, and here with this new University, what a task, what an opportunity for many among you to be able to look back and say, "Well, I was one of the creators in the true sense of the Monash University."

Now, Sir, I just want to say a word, if I may, about that very great man after whom this University is named. He was never involved in politics and therefore, perhaps, he escaped the barbed tongues of undergraduates. I am perfectly certain that nobody would ever have dreamed of referring to a building with which Sir John Monash was associated as "Jack's Shack" (Laughter) but I am told that already the ungodly in this University are referring to this as "Ming's Wing" (Laughter) But, Sir, the naming of this university, this was a positive inspiration. One of the greatest of Australians of all time - wonderful engineer, a famous and tremendous soldier, a scholar in his own right, a great expert in many fields of life and an advocate, not only an advocate of good causes, but stopping at the word "advocate", one of the greatest advocates I ever listened to in my life; a man who understood the art of persuasive speech, the art of clear speech, who used no jargon but who went clear to the point, persuasively to the point, with effects that I had the opportunity of witnessing in my own political life more than once. And, Sir, because the University is named after this great and famous man, I feel that a very great honour, even indifferently earned, has been conferred upon me to have my name associated with one school of study in the University named after him. It will always be a source of immense pleasure and pride to me and to my family and to my descendants.

Now, Sir, before I conclude, I would like to make one small contribution on the subject of the humanities. In this century, and particularly perhaps in the last twenty years of it, there has been a very great, inevitable and proper concentration of mind on what I will call, in the natural sense, scientific studies, not only for prestige purposes and doing some violence to the moon or something of that kind. No, but because this world with its explosion of population, with the urgent demand that exists all over the world to increase the use of resources, the discovery of resources, the scientific application of resources in order to meet a growing population, has become a task of tremendous urgency and of very great international significance. And therefore it's right that there should be this attention, but it is wrong to think as some people do, that studies which are not related to practical results of that kind are idle and useless.

This century hasn't failed either in science or in technology. It has produced almost the golden age of science and technology, but in terms of civilisation, it has had failure after failure written up against it and that's because we have become too fond of the idea that we are clever people, that we are very, very smart to be able to understand all the forces of Nature and to harness them, to deal with them, whereas the truth, of course, is that civilisation - I repeat something that I have said before many times - civilisation is in the heart and mind of people and the task of the humanist, the task of the people who teach and learn in a school of humanities is not to forget that history, for example, is no useless study, since a man who is ignorant of it will have no sense of proportion, no benefit of experience in dealing with new problems as they arise.

Languages..... and I throw in with a dying inflexion a word of classics - because a precise understanding of words and a dislike of jargon will save this world from many confusions, and as many hostilities have arisen in the world and in society through misunderstanding as through gross differences of points of view. Philosophy.... how important that we should have physics and go beyond it to metaphysics, that we should understand something about the source and nature of ideas so that the man who passes through and who is even lightly touched by these things is forever thereafter a wiser man, a better-informed man, a better-balanced man. And, of course, so far as literature is concerned, I don't understand people who regard the reading of great masters of prose or of poetry as an irrelevant occupation, exhibiting a slight but perceptible eccentricity. If I could compel every man sitting in all the parliaments of Australia to read something of this kind every night on going back from Parliament House, the standard of debate would rise in the most magnificent fashion. (Laughter) (Applause)

Sir, I say no more about that. I merely reiterate that what we want in the world is undoubtedly great physicists and great chemists and great engineers and what-have-you because the world is crying aloud for their work for the sake of its own problems and its own human beings all over the world, but it needs even more that wisdom, human understanding, which produces what I would call an educated tolerance of ideas. It needs these things far more because wars, disasters of that kind, bestial repressions here and there, the kind of thing we become accustomed to reading about almost every day in the newspapers don't arise from mechanical causes, they don't arise because of some jealousy between one scientist and another. On the contrary, science tends more and more to be international in its quality, in its thought. These things arise from the fact that men have inadequately learned to understand men or to have men understand them, because there is not this quiet, passionless humanity sufficiently distributed around the world to make the very thought of some of these events that I have mentioned impossible.

Sir, I repeat, you've done me a very great honour. I shall remember this occasion but I shall remember even more the fact that in this new university being pursued as it is with such vigour, such imagination, having as it most certainly has, a great future, you should have thought fit to associate my name with a great section of that University; this is, I think, the greatest honour that any university could pay to any man. So I give it my blessing and I once more declare it open.
