

OPENING OF KINGSWOOD COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, ON SUNDAY, 17TH
NOVEMBER, 1963

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

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chancellor, Your Grace and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I think I ought to begin by giving you a short but powerful talk on the warming qualities of wool. (Laughter) I went around earlier among my gaily caparisoned colleagues on the bench here and fingered their robes. I am the only one who is all wool and a yard wide. (Laughter) Anyhow, that will have one great advantage and that is, it will shorten my speech, because it is a warm day.

Now, Sir, I am over here, of course as everybody knows, on certain illicit occasions. This is a day off. This is my one unquestionably respectable day in the period of three or four weeks, and I was delighted to find that I could still accept the invitation to open this College, this new extension, this building, because, as I don't need to tell you, I have a very profound belief in places like this and it has been my very great privilege to make some contribution to the development of university education and of residential colleges over the last ten years.

Coming across yesterday in the plane and bereft of all books of reference, I was trying to remember something that had provoked a thought in my mind. I hope I remember it accurately. Many of you will recall it. Wordsworth in "The Prelude" has a marvellous description of the statue of Newton -

"Newton with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone."

Those lines have always stuck in my mind - "voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone." Well, perhaps some of us may occasionally be tempted to feel that we are explorers of the same fashion, but most of us are not. It may very well be that some man of soaring genius - to use the word in its proper sense - like Newton, like Einstein, may indeed go through strange seas, all alone, perhaps without the need of company or companionship, or fellow workers. I don't know. But, no doubt, every now and then in the history of the world there is somebody who achieves something tremendous, adds something tremendous to the sum of human knowledge and who does it as an individual, exploring a problem, lonely, complete in himself, just as there may well be in the history of the world great thinkers who were, in effect, hermits who shut themselves away from the world. But for most of us, for the overwhelming majority of people in this world, work cannot be done just alone. Education cannot be regarded as a purely individual matter. That's why we have universities. That's why we have residential colleges, because what we are seeking to do is to extend the boundaries of knowledge in a mass of people, working together, getting to know each other, learning from each other, the whole matter being part of the process of producing civilised people. And, of course, by definition, originally, I suppose, a "civilised person" was a person who lived in a city. He was

by definition, a man who lived among others, who learned from others, the result being that in the total, there was a degree of knowledge, a degree of genuine instruction, a degree of genuine understanding which amounted to what we call civilised education.

Now, Sir, we occasionally forget it. The world occasionally forgets it, but what we all are looking for is a civilised life, civilised relations between the nations of the world, civilised relations between the people who live in our own country, and a civilised life is a life lived in a human society. That's the first thing that we must remember. Not lived in the abstract but lived in a human society. And therefore if education is devoted to the task, as I believe it is, of equipping us for civilised life, then I venture to say that education is at all times best considered when achieved in a social setting, and when I say social setting, I am not referring to that word "social" with a capital "S" that you read in the gossip columns. A social setting, a setting among human beings.

I was just saying to myself, "Suppose a man couldn't go to a university, suppose he couldn't go and live in a residential college, suppose he lived out somewhere in the middle of a desert but was able in some mysterious fashion to have a correspondence course of instruction - this would be a good thing, of course - but it wouldn't be that kind of education which you and I in this place, and many others, understand and benefit from. It would be a lonely kind of instruction; it would be an instruction from books, from documents, not an instruction gathered in the general rough and tumble and shoulder-rubbing of a student community.

I remember when I first set up a committee - not the famous Murray Committee - but an earlier one, to give me a little advice on what grants might be made for the time being to the universities, one member of the Committee, when I spoke to him about residential colleges, said, "Oh, no, no. Residential colleges?" - I remember his words - I made a note of it yesterday - he said, "Residential colleges are luxuries for those who can afford them", and I have never had the same opinion of that man since. I thought what an utterly uncivilised conception that was that colleges are luxuries for those who can afford them, and I remember with some satisfaction the reply I made to him. I said, "This Committee will make a recommendation for residential colleges or the Committee will be a luxury that I can't afford." (Laughter) And so it came about and from there on it has grown in strength as time has gone on.

But just to come back to the rubbing of shoulders, to the community significance of education. I don't know how people can fail to understand it. One man goes to the university and he is determined - as I was in my time - to be a lawyer, using that term in its broadest sense, but determined at any rate to become a lawyer. There is another man who is in the same college or in the same group who is determined to become a doctor. Very good thing that they should get to know each other quite early. (Laughter) If contact at the university between medical students and law students had been made compulsory, I don't think I could have cross-examined so many medical men so successfully in my later life. There is something to learn each way.

You know, I regret to tell you this but in my time at the university if somebody were pointed out who had a rather melancholy cast of countenance, you would be told that he was

a "theolog" (Laughter). Yes. All I can say is that I think nothing better could be imagined than for theological students and arrant sinners to be thrown together at a university; (Laughter) (Applause) the sinners being helped by contact with something a little better at the right time and the "theolog" being immeasurably improved by making the first of all great discoveries, that he is a sinner as well as the others. (Laughter) This is the kind of contact that goes on. It was magnificently described, if you will allow me to say so in his presence by the President-General in a sermon he preached this morning, one fragment only of which I venture to steal with acknowledgment. That was when he said that really in this business of acquiring knowledge what we all need to do is every now and then to look over the other man's shoulder and see the problem with the other man's eyes. Now you see how profoundly true this is. It is so easy to become narrow-minded; it is so easy to become dogmatic; it's so easy to say, "Well, I am so objective in my approach to this matter that I forget that I am being completely subjective. It is only my mind, my view, my general atmosphere, my general background that concern me in studying that particular problem."

What we must learn to do - and the world needs it desperately badly - is to understand something about the other man's mind and the other man's approach and how things look to him from his angle, viewed from which the problem, the subject, may look an entirely different shape. This is, I think, tremendously important and this is why residential colleges are tremendously important because they get away from the idea that a man having attended his lecture, having gone to the library and checked up his references, having done some reading of his own, then disappears, so to speak, into outer darkness until the next appearance in a lecture. For men to be living in a community, a community of good minds - some better than others of course - but of good minds, a community in which brains can be anticipated from any particular quarter, in which they can discuss things with each other, in which the man who is doing humanities of one kind or another gets to know something about the science student and what goes on in his mind and what is even more important, the science student gets to know something about the humanities. This is tremendously important.

It is this subdivision of learning into separate compartments which produces so much danger for the world - the nuclear scientist so bemused by the brilliance of his own discoveries that he will shrug his shoulders and say, "Well, what happens to all this is, of course, not my business". In a sense, I suppose, it isn't, but I imagine that he would be no worse as a scientist and so much better as a citizen if all the time he had the contemplation of the impact of these things on humanity and how people thought about them. In other words: If scientists and the humanists really got together and rubbed off a little of their gold on to each other, this would be, I am sure, a very good thing for the world, and it is best achieved where people live together and play together and argue together. They have a very good chance of coming out not only admirable graduated students, in a variety of disciplines, but vastly improved human beings designed to live in a civilised society because they will broaden their minds, they will know enough about what other people do and what other people think to preserve them from the excesses of the utterly narrow intellectual specialist.

And so, Sir, believing those things, as you know I do, I have great pleasure in being here and, woollen robes or no woollen robes, I go through with my task and I declare this place open.
