

NEW ENGLAND GIRLS' SCHOOL, ARMIDALE, N.S.W.

SPEECH DAY, 11TH DECEMBER, 1963

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

Well, my Lord Bishop, I want to begin with a personal explanation, as we say. I have been misrepresented. I have been in Armidale before. I even suspect that I made a speech, but I know it was a long time ago. Long forgotten and, I hope, long forgiven. (Laughter)

The second sort of personal explanation I want to make is that when the Headmistress was reading her report, I misheard one word. Let me see..... I must look it up. I thought she said "the second" when referring to Miss Young. "The second is our Treasurer", I thought she said. (Laughter) And when everybody applauded, applauded and applauded, I knew there must be a mistake, because no Treasurer ever gets applause. (Laughter) And then I saw it was "our treasure".

The next thing I want to say of a minor kind is that I am greatly indebted to whoever it was who drew the thistle, and had it put (gesturing) (Laughter) (Applause). Fortunately, it is only a drawing. (Laughter) I suppose if it hadn't been a drawing, one of you well-behaved girls would have arranged to have put it on the seat itself. (Laughter)

I am grateful to the headmistress for having mentioned me in conjunction with Sir Alec Home, the Prime Minister of Great Britain because as it happens, he is the second-last Knight of the Thistle to be created and I am the last, and we walked one behind the other to the Chapel of the Thistle and I am sure that my Scots friend on the platform will be delighted to know that when The Queen said to me, "How do you pronounce your name?" because she has to say, "I demand," or "I require that So-and-so (mentioning my name" be installed, I said, "Mingies, Your Majesty, Mingies. It is only in Australia that I am called 'Menzies'". That's not quite true. (Laughter) That's a political approximation. Anyhow, Mingies I was in the Chapel of the Thistle, and, for better or for worse, I regard that as rather an authentic thing.

The third preliminary remark I want to make is that I was very interested to hear the school sing, "Let us now praise famous men," which I had not heard before put to music. Then later on when I heard all these splendid and warm remarks about the staff, it occurred to me to suggest that your musical composer whoever she may be ought to cast up a tune for Kipling's version :

"Let us now praise famous men --
Men of little showing --
For their work continueth,
And their work continueth,
Broad and deep continueth,
Greater than their knowing!"

You remember? His "Schoolteachers". His "Let us now praise famous men" was all about schoolteachers and there it was about men teachers, of course, because they "laid on us with whips, laid on us with many whips" and, of course, you don't do that here - I imagine. (Laughter)

Now, the Lord Bishop of Armidale who, until a few minutes ago, was masquerading as a friend of mine, has stolen half my speech, or rather, yesterday I made a speech to a girls' school and one of my chief themes was the impact of beauty and the function of beauty in education. Well, he must have read that in the paper (Laughter). It's perfectly true. Even bishops are capable of reading a sermon. (Laughter) Therefore, I won't say much about it, but I do crave the privilege of repeating it because I believe tremendously in the function of beauty in life.

The world has gone through a terrible century so far, full of hatred, full of scandalous attacks by man on man, full of ugliness, and yet, you know, there is so much beauty in the world and if people could learn to breathe it in, to take it in particularly when they are at school and carry it with them through life, distilling a little of it for other people, letting it colour their views of other people, making them more tolerant, more anxious to look for the good than to seek out the evil, I am sure the world would do much better than it has because ugliness has disfigured it.

But there is another thing that has gone on in this century. All of us who are grown up are very familiar with it, and that is that we seem to have got cast adrift from our moorings, from our intellectual moorings, from our spiritual moorings, from our sense of values. It has been a very strange century so far and you will all have some part to play in making it better before it finishes. It is really, of course, completely true that in this century, the developments of science and the developments of technology, the developments of technical skill have all gone on apace. This, I suppose, is the golden century of science.

Why, I can tell you girls - looking at me with this feigned respect with which you are now looking at me (Laughter) - that I can remember the first motor vehicle that ever came into my part of Victoria. It was a gruesome thing called a motor buggy (Laughter). It had good old-fashioned buggy wheels and so on and the driver sat up perched aloft. I can remember seeing the first movie - isn't this incredible that a man so young should remember so far back (Laughter). It seems only yesterday that I was sitting in some open-air place because nobody could afford to build picture theatres for a start. Now they can't afford to keep them open. I saw a film called "The Great American Train Robbery". Everybody jerked like that. Fortunately there were no voices and therefore even at that time of my life I found it relatively easy to have a nap while the picture was on. (Laughter)

Aircraft - this is all in our time. Wireless, television, all these things that we now take for granted, of course, have come in this century or, for all practical purposes, in this century. So that the other day, I could pick up a telephone in Sydney and have a talk to Alec Home in London over a telephone circuit through a submarine cable, just as if he were in the next room.

Now, all these things have happened and they are all marvellous aren't they? One thing wrong with them is that they don't have much to do with people's character or tolerance or understanding of human beings. In short, they don't have much to do with civilisation. They can be used as an aid to civilisation. They can, of course, be used as the enemies of civilisation. Aircraft - yes, for a great and good purpose like bringing me here (Laughter); or for the purposes of destruction of people. This is the great feature about this period of our

history. All this tremendous development in science, in applied science, in understanding of these things as things, but how much understanding of them as things to be used and used for some purpose?

Now this has a great bearing on the school. This has a great bearing on the attitude that parents have towards their children at school. There is a bit of a disposition, I think I am right in saying, to want some early kind of specialisation, to say, "Well, Ruth - or whatever her name might be - she wants to do a particular thing in life that is going to be a very profitable thing to do. Let her concentrate on that." I hope not too soon. I am one of those people who believe that unless the basis of education is right, unless up to a certain stage people are really studying what I will call the human things in education, they can become narrow specialists. They can become detached from the values of civilisation, they can become indeed a positive menace, because an irresponsible scientific expert may be a great scientific expert but whether his contribution to life is a good one or a bad one will, if he be a narrow-minded man, be something that will have to be determined by other people less narrow minded and more wise, and that means that the whole process of education is a process of developing individual people, developing them in a balanced way.

How on earth could we possibly have any sense of judgment about contemporary events if we knew nothing about what had happened in the past. I just don't understand how anybody can profess to be educated, though he or she may have all the degrees in the world, unless they know something of the history of the past, unless they have some basis of judgment, some understanding that men and women are remembered for their impact on life and that you will find this impact specifically or generally described in history. You can see in history the errors that have been made and the results that have come from them.

And now the study of English. I had something to say about this in another place yesterday but I must say that I am constantly astonished at the number of people who, when they open their mouths to have a conversation or make a speech or whatever it may be, think that anything will do. I have met a number of boys out of good schools - I say nothing about girls; I'm not game to - but I have met lots and lots of young men out of good schools whose vocabulary was hopelessly inadequate and who spoke a species of Hottentot (Laughter) as far as I was concerned, on the great principle that, "Anyhow, you know what I mean" and anything will do or even the famous Australian slogan - "It's good enough".

Now, it's not good enough. There is nothing good enough for the language that we speak. Nobody could ever be perfect at it, but we can all try, we can all be conscious of the fact that it's a wonderful language and a flexible language and that it is not all long words but that the best words in it are short words, clear-cut words. I don't know whether this is a classical school. I know that Greek has disappeared from the face of the earth, I think much to the misfortune of the earth, but Latin staggers on. It used to be compulsory for a number of courses at the university; now I think it isn't. I don't know. But if people could even learn a little Latin and remember it, they would understand their own language a lot better and would misuse it less villainously.

Now, all this is quite consistent with doing physics and chemistry, all these scientific matters. They are of

tremendous importance. The second half of this century will need more and more of the results of scientific work than did the first half and I hope we will get far greater civil, ordinary, peaceful benefit from it. But a scientist who doesn't know these other things, who hasn't really taken time to get into a line of communication with other human beings, learning from them, sub-consciously, getting to understand them, that scientist will always be less than a great man, whereas the humanist, as we say, who has studied all these other things, who has thrived on history and philosophy and all these great exercises of the mind, will be something less than academic if he fails to know something about the problem of the scientist and fails to learn something about the nature of the world about which he is speculating.

Now, that is all I want to say to you. It sounds singularly like a bit of a sermon, but you know, I must say that when I was going to speech days or speech nights, and sometimes getting a prize (Laughter), we used to sit down there and they always had some old politician on the platform (Laughter); he was always a very distinguished old boy and he always bored us stiff (Laughter) and I took a vow later on that I would never put myself into that position. I must say it for myself - I do it as seldom as I can. But I am a bit lucky today because all I can tell you is, whether it is the superior nature of girls over the nature of boys - I don't know.... if you had been boys..... I'll try it out this afternoon (Laughter) but if you had been boys, half of you would have been yawning in my face by now. All I can say is that you are the best - I don't know about those others further back who pay the fees (Laughter). They are, in a sense, beyond redemption (Laughter). What I have had to say to you is really wasted on them. I am getting in early with you, on your minds, and I am delighted to have had the opportunity of standing here and looking at you, and if I may repeat, before I sit down, one improper remark I made when I walked into the chapel this morning, my Lord Bishop - not realising for a moment that I was in the chapel and so I spoke to a couple of the girls in the front row as I went by. Do you know what I said to them - and looking around I repeat it with emphasis - I have never seen such admirable hair-dos in a girls' school before. (Laughter)
