

OPENING OF ARTS BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA, PERTH, W.A.

29TH APRIL, 1964

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

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. Dean, Mr. Court and Ladies and Gentlemen :

I see considerable changes since I was here last. On the last occasion, as you have been reminded, I opened a building belonging to what I suppose might be called the Students Union. I received a very merry reception (Laughter) which I enjoyed, having led a few of them in my own time.

Today I am astonished to find the docility of the students (Laughter). They looked at us as we marched in here with absolute respect (Laughter). Well, it appeared to be so. One or two almost had an appearance of veneration. (Laughter) At least it appeared to be so, and so these changes come, but such is the fallibility of human memory that I ought to begin at once by saying that I declare this building open. (Laughter) (Applause) You never know, I might do it again. It depends entirely on whether, having made a few brief remarks, I look around and my wife waggles an eyebrow at me to remind me that I really ought to do it twice. (Laughter)

Sir, it is a great pleasure to do this task because it is a great pleasure to visit this University. I have always had more than a sneaking idea that a university ought to be a place that has some beauty, some charm, something to remember, something more than a towering skyscraper as you see in some cities, something that has atmosphere, something that in due course will evoke memories, and I am bound to say that this university is enviable in those respects. I know that some of the new buildings are not, perhaps from one point of view, as beautiful as others but then I am an old-fashioned Tory on architectural matters. You see, I like this building; I think it is wonderful, and one of the fascinating things to me is my old friend, Professor Alexander, who has always masqueraded to me over many years as a species of bolshevik (Laughter) (Applause) has been giving me from time to time broad hints in a very friendly way that it is time I saw the error of my ways. I'm delighted to find that at long last, the wheel has turned full circle in his case (Laughter) and that we both agree that this is a lovely building. So here we are. This is a new act. (Laughter) I can say that about him because he is an old friend of mine and I value his friendship and the fact that he is a friend of mine was one of the reasons that helped to persuade me to come over to perform this very pleasant task.

Now, Sir, it will hardly be said about me, though I am the least scientific of mortals, that I am not interested in science, the teaching of science, the development of science, because when I look back on all the new science labs. that I have opened at schools and upon various things that my own government has been able to do, I realise that we have, and I have, shown some practical understanding of the importance of science. If I ever had a temptation to forget it, then all I would need to do would be to look around and see the Universities Commission and see your representative on it, Professor Bayliss, helped by a bias in favour of this university (Laughter). I wouldn't run any risk of not being aware of the importance of science, but I always come back to the tremendous importance in this world of the humanities. Now, I may have to say something

about this tonight; therefore, I won't waste any powder and shot on it because you will all be there tonight (Laughter) and you will have to listen to me a second time.

But, Sir, an arts building, designed to further the study and understanding of the humanities, covering in its range languages, ancient and modern, literature, history, philosophy, all of these matters which are so easily forgotten in the modern world where a lot of very successful people profess a distaste for history. Indeed, wasn't it Henry Ford I who made that superb remark which reverberated around the world - "History is bunk". Well, that is one point of view. It's a very poor point of view, because I happen to be one of those who believe that one of the first things, if you are to create a civilised man or woman, is to induce in him or her some knowledge of men, past as well as present, some knowledge of events, past as well as current, because if there is anything calculated to bring proportion to an otherwise educated mind, it is a knowledge of history, an understanding of it; not an understanding simply of those things that we used to have pushed into us when we were very small boys - a long list of dates, of kings and battles - but an understanding of the great social development that has occurred right through history in one country and another.

This is a necessary thing if we are to have a sense of proportion, if we are not to be in all our controversies purely ad captandum as we too frequently are in the modern world. It is so important to learn, not just from machinery, from plant, from test tubes - important as all these things are - you must do more than that. It is necessary to learn from men - I will use "men" as including women for the sake of brevity - to learn from men. (Laughter) Yes, I know, I see the point you have made. I have known women who were more long-winded than men; I have known men who were more long-winded than women. It's a toss-up in the long run, but I will use "men" as including women in the best statutory fashion. We must learn from men, we must learn from history, we must learn from literature.

Do you know that I am frequently shocked to discover that there are men in the world of considerable scientific attainments who are, when it comes to expressing themselves in word or in writing, almost illiterate, and this is ridiculous, on the face of it. Who can be a great scientific discoverer unless he can convey to other people the nature of his discovery? Who can conduct scientific research work of real value to the people of the world unless he is able to explain it to other people? Who, indeed, in any avenue of life can reach the top mark unless he has the power of communication?

I have known a number of men in my life - which is now going on - a number of men of enormous distinction in some particular field, whether it was in the field of military activity or engineering or whatever it might be and when I found them to be in the very top flight, I suddenly discovered by contact with them that they had all these things - the power to express themselves with clarity and lucidity and justice so that other people heard and understood and were prepared to follow. Now this is so true, isn't it? And it is a very great pity to find too many people, otherwise tremendously good at their particular specialty who make some stumbling explanation of it and who, when you put an enquiry say, "Well, anyhow, you know what I mean."

Now, the great function of a department of arts is to produce balanced, educated, civilised people, not necessarily specialists in some field but people who, having achieved a broad

cultivation of the mind, are capable of quick learning, of human understanding, of exposition and of objective judgment. This is what I believe the humanities to be concerned about, whether they achieve it through the teaching and study of literature, of history, of languages, of philosophy or whatever may be, in the broad curriculum.

Now, Sir, it is a very interesting thing, I am sure, because my friend, Professor Bayliss, as a member of the Universities Commission, would bear this out, that although many of us thought that with all the concentration of the public mind and headlines on physical sciences, on scientific discoveries, on technological developments, from the more simple forms up to sputniks and satellites, I had thought that all this, by romanticising these matters, would produce a tremendous growing demand for space in the universities. Yet the fact is, so far as I know - there may be one or two exceptions - the restrictions on numbers going into the universities have needed to be on the humanities side not on the science side. There is a greater and growing demand on the humanities side so far than there is on the science side, at least that was so the last time I obtained some statistics about it.

I wonder why that is. In other words, I permit myself, just for five minutes, to put the question to myself and to you: Why does this come about? Why is there such a demand on the arts courses? I think it is a very interesting question and I sat down the other day to ask myself whether I could think of the answers to it. Well, of course, there was one, a cynical answer, quite easy, and that would be that arts subjects seem easier than scientific ones. That's a rather cynical proposal.

I have known some people who I think might have, in a candid moment, said, "Yes, that will do me". You know, the mathematicians..... although, of course, you have a school of mathematics in this department..... but the mathematicians are a horror to ordinary unmathematical people. There is one thing I always thought about my colleagues who were great mathematicians and that is that they had a slight advantage. I might write a superb - so I thought - paper in English and get 85 marks out of 100 because it was all a matter of opinion. Same in history; same, with moderate concessions, in Latin (Laughter) but my mathematical colleagues, they got 100 or they got none. Well, I was almost among the none (Laughter) and therefore a lot of people, I think, may imagine that it is easier. I don't think there are too many who have that point of view.

I suppose there are some people who take up the study of the humanities or some of them - this certainly doesn't apply to the classics - because they think they call for somewhat less precision of thought. And of course everybody here knows that any man who engages in precision of thought, even in my humble avocation, is always liable to be told that he is quibbling, that he is pedantic or that there is some other incurable disease which attaches to him. (Laughter) And so there are quite a few people who say, "Well, I like a little bit of looseness of thought. I like a little bit of the broad sweep of humanity, old boy, you understand me? (Laughter) and therefore I think I might be attracted to become a Bachelor of Arts." Well, they are in a hopeless minority too, and in today's world I would have thought a disappearing minority.

I have come to believe that there are very many people in the world - parents as well as students, who instinctively react against what they feel to be a narrow specialisation, who instinctively react against the idea that a man should be educated for one specialty and for no other, whereas in fact, he ought to be educated to have a broad view of mankind, fitting him for a variety of occupations, because he has developed his mind before specialising in some technical matter.

Now, there is a lot to be said for this, a great deal to be said for this view. I always like to remember if there is one country in the world which, quite early in its history, established a tradition of scholarship, it was Scotland, where the ploughman's son was brought up, giving that he had intelligence, to believe that he was not just to be a ploughman, he was to learn something, he was to advance on the position of his father, and how many ploughmen's sons in Scotland went to Edinburgh or Glasgow and took degrees in arts, raising their educational horizon, raising their general mental capacity - a tremendous number, a great tradition. And I suppose even in Scotland, there were people by whom we are all plagued from time to time who said, "But this is useless learning. Why learn Latin?" (I'm sorry I didn't learn it better myself) And if you replied, "Well, you will never really understand your own language unless you understand at least something about Latin," the answer is, "Oh, well, it's all right. It will do. People will know what I mean, they will know what I am getting at." This is really one of the important things in the world: to have a breadth of study.

Now you look back in this century and some of us, at least, have lived right through this century. There hasn't been much deficiency, has there, in scientific exploration, not much deficiency in scientific growth, some glorious triumphs in the field of biochemistry and all these things that have to do with the preservation of life, some dramatic, amazing and sometimes horrible development in the great arts of destruction, but could anybody say that the twentieth century has been marked by a growing understanding of human beings, by a better understanding by one nation of another, by a greater realisation that we are all human beings wherever we may be and that really all human things ought not to be alien to us? Has there been any adequate realisation of that? I venture to say not.

I believe that in the second half of this century the proper study of mankind must be man in the true and vigorous sense if we are to avoid marrying the advance of science to constant or recurring human disasters. And that, Sir, is why I believe in the humanities, because they serve humanity, because they are vital to the survival of the human race, because in their very name, they serve two purposes - the humanist, the purpose of the humanist, the purpose of the human being, living as a social being, wherever he may be in the world.

Now, Sir, this sounds awfully like a lecture on my part but I am provoked to do it on an occasion of this kind and before I open the building for the second time (Laughter), I want to explain to you that I have had to be on my best behaviour for today. I have had to give some rather shoddy imitation of being intelligent (Laughter) because I am speaking to you today in the presence of two men who have cost me and my Government more than any other men I know. (Laughter)

One of them has over a long period of years disgorged Commonwealth grants on a scale sometimes terrifying, but still I am bound to admit he has never made a recommendation yet that we have rejected. And the other one, of course, I have already referred to - the member of the Universities Commission. Dear me, I remember when Keith Murray came out. I got him, and I was in London and I borrowed him from Harold Macmillan and got him out and set him up with a first-class commission of enquiry and it was only when I had done all this that I was game to tell the then Treasurer what I was up to. (Laughter)

A bit of experience is not a bad guide on these matters and so I kept dark until I had the Committee established and then it went around and of course then it brought in its recommendations. Dear me, oh I read them and I gave instructions that they were to be circulated to Ministers on the morning of the Cabinet meeting. (Laughter) I got them all to sit all day and at about midnight, I had a general approval for the recommendations. And that is how it all began. When I look back on those modest beginnings - there were only about £30M in recommendations in those days - and I look at what these boys do to me now..... well, every time I see Keith Murray which is occasionally, fortunately, I say to him, "What a mild man you were". (Laughter)

However, Sir, this building is one of the results and therefore, for the second time - and I am like the character in "Alice" you know, and what I say twice is right (Laughter) - and so I say for the second time "I declare this building open".
