

OPENING OF NEW SCIENCE BLOCK AT ST. STANISLAUS
COLLEGE, BATHURST, N.S.W.

27TH MARCH, 1965

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

Reverend Father Principal, My Lord Bishops and Ladies and
Gentlemen and fellow workers :

I have been very pleased here today to hear these kind things spoken about the policies that we have been trying to pursue. Personally, as one of the authors of this scheme, I have never understood why anybody should object to it. (Applause) And I am perfectly certain that 90 per cent. of the people of Australia warmly approve of it. (Applause)

My Lord Bishop and the Principal have both mentioned a sum of money. Well, the last word that was given to me on this matter yesterday was that the total completed cost of the science block and equipment had not yet been ascertained and that when they were, no doubt there would be a further sum to be handed over. (Applause)

Now I don't need to discuss with you the reasons, ladies and gentlemen, for these measures to encourage scientific study; I'd rather prefer today to say something to the boys. You grown-up people and parents, you can listen in, but most of you are really beyond being helped on these matters. (Laughter) I'd like to talk to the boys, if they don't mind. I want to tell them that when I was a schoolboy I used to regard all well-known politicians who came to the speech nights as the most intolerable bores (Laughter) and therefore they are at complete liberty to count me out. I assure them that I am an expert at receiving such compliments. (Laughter)

I just want to say two things to you. The first is that this story, this piece of history about Father Slattery and the work he did here, deserves to be known by everybody in this country. It is part of a marvellous tradition in your school and a great school is not merely created by bricks and mortar or by having a lot of money or even by getting a lot of boys to attend.

The greatness of a school depends on its quality and its quality depends, to a very large degree, on the men who have fashioned it. Some of them today are boys, but tomorrow they will be adults and taking their place in the world and helping to fashion the world and perhaps helping once more to fashion the school.

It is a wonderful thing to have a tradition. But we must never be bound by tradition. We must never become so traditional that we are unavailable to fresh ideas. Not at all. But a tradition that serves to inspire you for the future by reminding you of the efforts and achievements of the past, this is of the very essence of a great school, and you have it here, and particularly on the science side in this new building with its new equipment there will be every reason to remember that one of the great scientists, scientific workers or his time was here in this school and did this memorable work. Therefore be proud of it and make up your minds that you, yourselves, will contribute to it in due course.

The second thing I want to say to you is this. Several times already today, I have had occasion to mention the fact that the explorers came over the lip of the mountains and discovered these plains and that from this very place, there went out at least five of the greatest explorers we have known in Australia. These are very stimulating memories. Much to be learned from them. Much to be retained by thinking of them. But they were concerned at that time, and properly concerned, with extending the bounds of settlement. They were extending physical boundaries in a sense, they were opening up country that was a mere dream before and enabling people to live in it and to grow in it and to have families in it and to enjoy the fruits of the earth and to add to them. This was a great piece of pioneering in that sense, extending the frontiers of the eye, extending the frontiers of settlement.

But in this new wing those of you who are students of science will be put on your way to extend the frontiers of knowledge, the frontiers of scientific knowledge, and therefore I don't want you to become pompous like an old politician, but please remember that in that sense, every one of you who tackles it seriously and does his best will be just as much a pioneer in his own fashion as these old men with beards who came over here so long ago and began to extend the frontiers of civilised settlement.

To extend the frontiers of knowledge is not only our privilege, but it is our duty. None of us must ever be content merely by learning what somebody else has discovered. We must do our best to think about it, to discover something ourselves. You won't all be able to think of some new and brilliant conception in the scientific world but you may very well be able to think of some way of applying a piece of scientific knowledge in a new way for the service of mankind, and in that way you will have extended the frontiers of knowledge.

Now ladies and gentlemen, turning to you, I must say that I hope we will all encourage these ideas. We have, in Australia, with all our privileges - because we are a privileged people, a prosperous people - a great obligation not just to ourselves but to other people not so privileged, not so prosperous around the world, and if we are to honour that obligation, we can't just be satisfied to think we will do it by providing some money. We will do it to the best extent by providing them with the results of our work and our knowledge of our achievement. There is hardly a problem you can think of today, looking around the world, problems of population, problems of hungry millions, problems of all kinds, that does not involve the more and more scientific use of resources to bring to them such skill, such scientific knowledge as we have in the fields of agriculture and in dealing with cattle, in dealing with the whole problem of food, in dealing with production for their own needs. It is in these fields that we, the happy and the privileged, have a great opportunity of making a powerful contribution, and the contribution will start here. It will be encouraged, it will grow more and more rapidly if all of us who are older and who profess to have scientific knowledge constantly encourage these ideas and determine to make some sacrifices ourselves to bring them into fruition.

Now I hope, boys, that hasn't been too heavy. After all, if you can stand a man lecturing to you on logarithms, you can put up with me with the greatest ease in the world. (Laughter) At least I think so, looking back over my own life.

Now, Sir, I don't want to say any more than that. It is a very great privilege to be here. I regret deeply that my wife couldn't be with me but I am happy to report she is doing very well, making a good recovery, (Applause)

I therefore give myself the pleasure, and the honour, of declaring this block open. Now I think I remember that I have to unveil a plaque. Is that right? Well I will do it.
