

HOSKINS FAMILY MEMORIAL SERVICE AT HOSKINS  
MEMORIAL CHURCH, LITHGOW, NSW.

17TH OCTOBER, 1965

Speech by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

It's a very great honour to be here and to be asked to speak on such a notable family occasion. I'm a very old friend, I'm happy to say, of several of the distinguished members of the family. I was warned by one of them that on this occasion I should not embarrass the family by talking about it. Having met scores of members of the family, having been across the road compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses all of whom appeared to be Hoskins, I dare not omit to speak about them. Indeed, that is what I am here for.

And being a Presbyterian, Sir, I like a text, and my text, though it hasn't found entrance to the Authorised Version and still remains in the Apocrypha, it is a great one, a suitable one - "Let us now praise famous men and our fathers which begat us." There can be no more splendid invocation than that, because we are praising today, with our memories and with our prayers, notable people, people who were creators in this country, people who have not merely lived and passed on but who have left this country in their debt. We are celebrating an uncommon family and therefore uncommon individuals.

Now Sir, the history of the Hoskins family in Australia, running back now over 112 years - if I mistake not - is a very remarkable one. I was fascinated to discover when I was informed of some of the details that at one stage the founder of this - shall I call it a dynasty - in Australia worked in Ballarat. This at least gives me some faint contact, in terms of place, if not in terms of quality, because I was at school in Ballarat and my parents were born in Ballarat, and so the family lines have merged to that extent.

But the story of this family, Sir, is a matter for pride for the family, and it is a matter of gratitude for the country. Having said that, I would like to add that it gives all of us something to ponder.

We all know, don't we, that this has been described as the age of the common man. I want to say something to you about that.

I remember during this last war making a speech in London in which I used the phrase - the common man. I used it I thought in a very appropriate way on that occasion because I was referring to the behaviour of the people in Great Britain under the bombs, under attack, and I said it was an age in which the common man had become a king. But I had letters from people, quite a few, protesting against the use of the word "common" as if it involved some condescension. Perhaps I had better explain to you at once, it doesn't. The word "common" is one of those words in our language which has an almost infinite variety of meanings. You may say, "That's a very common fellow." You don't mean something pleasant. You may say that the Elder Pitt was the great commoner. Not offensive - on the contrary. You may say that a Royal personage has married a commoner. There are enormous varieties of meanings to be found. But it has been said and said in some senses with

profound truth that this is the age of the common man. It's a great truth so long as we understand what it means. I want to give you two reasons for saying it's true, before I make a certain gloss upon it.

The first is that true democracy, that which we all in our own ways try to practice in Australia, true democracy seeks to achieve not justice to a few or something for the talented but justice for all men, for all women, and regards the good life of the individual as the ultimate aim of government. This is worth remembering.

Politics is not a matter of loaves and fishes entirely. Loaves and fishes may come into our economic life, but the essence of it is that in our ways, whatever our party beliefs may be, we must all the time be struggling for the good life for the individual because that will be the ultimate test of the value of whatever contribution we make to our country. And in the second place, in all times of crisis (we can say this with pride), in all times of crisis for the nation, it is the spirit of the ordinary man and the ordinary woman that has provided the foundation of survival and success.

I had the great honour, as you know, of enjoying the close personal friendship of Winston Churchill, and like you, I shall never forget how his words rang out and gave encouragement and hope and confidence to his people and to people all round the world, and yet he was the first to know and to concede that he wasn't creating something in the individual; he was evoking from the individual something that was there. This courage and determination came from ordinary men and women and he made their deepest feelings vocal. It was he who led out something which is part of the genius of the common man, the common individual, the ordinary person in a community like ours.

Now, Sir, having said that, let me look at the other side of the picture. I rather think it would be a calamity if our applause of the age of the common man for the reasons that I have just been stating induced us to yield to the temptation to resent or reject the uncommon man. This is a great danger. One sees occasionally a symptom of it - the little flashes of jealousy, of hatred, of malice. This is too easy, a strong temptation; it's easy enough to yield to it, and therefore, to look at the uncommon man as if he ran counter to the pattern of life that I have just been saying something about. My reason for saying that we must not yield to that temptation is that in all history it has been well established that it is, after all, the uncommon man who initiates ideas, who provides leadership, who has honourable and powerful ambitions, who supplies the driving force, who has a capacity for industry beyond the minimum of obligation, who has sufficient courage to defy disaster and not to be misled by temporary success. This is some definition, I think, of the uncommon man and it is appropriate to refer to him because the founder of this notable family was an uncommon man. He answered to all of these things that I have been talking about.

And that adds up, Sir, to this, that the ordinary man must have a proper pride, should never be over-anxious to submerge himself or to be misled, but at the same time, he must always have a belief, a true belief, a true appreciation in and of the quality of the uncommon man. Now of course, the uncommon man, Sir, the uncommon man may turn out to be a tyrant, a dictator, and therefore a destroyer if he forgets that the

spirit and happiness of the common man is his chief concern and that his ambition must be for the people and not for himself.

Let me apply those ideas by one or two examples that will readily come to your own mind. Hitler, of course, was the latest - in this century - he was an uncommon man, who turned out to be a destroyer, so that he had to be destroyed. Napoleon, who overshadowed Europe, who overshadowed the then known world in the height of his military successes, his military genius, he was an uncommon man. Nobody would doubt if for a moment. But what did he achieve? Measure what he did against its defect for the common man, its value for the common man, the ordinary man. I remember standing once in Paris, looking through the Arc de Caroussel, right up the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe at the other end, and this beautiful arch is covered with the boastful record of Napoleon's victories, his conquests of this piece of land or that piece of land. Nothing remains except the marble - the victories forgotten, the victories fruitless, the conquered lands once more free. Here is a boasting piece of marble - the uncommon man, who in all those respects failed in his duty to the common man.

On the other hand, we may think of people - I don't need to name very many of them - Shaftesbury, in England, the founder of factories legislation, the true beginner of all the humane industrial legislation that has come to us since - this so-called remote aristocrat, the uncommon man, a tremendous benefactor of ordinary people. Lincoln, in America; the great industrial creators in our own country, because don't forget that there are two kinds of people who come to great wealth and position in the country. There are those who make money because they are good at making money. There are those who make money or power or influence because they have created something and maintained something for the benefit of other people. And the fact that they have some benefit from it is no more to say than to say that the labourer is worthy of his hire. The great names - I won't make invidious distinctions, but I could at the slightest thought mention five or six great names in industrial, manufacturing, mining history in Australia who are the names, who would be the names of people who were uncommon men and who have laid common men under heavy tribute.

I was looking the other day, once more Sir, in the Gospel according to Matthew at the parable of the talents. There is one word in it which deserves emphasis, because you remember that when those who had five talents, two talents, went away and put them to work, did something with them, and came back having doubled them, the word that was spoken was, "Well done thou good and faithful servant". True, true, they were the servants of the master who had given them the talents, but they were also servants because nobody could have done what they did without serving some good public or private end. The uncommon man. Whenever we are fortunate to encounter him, he is the servant of the country and the servant of his people, and there is every reminder of that as we stand or sit in this place on this most notable occasion.

I wonder, Sir, if I might conclude my remarks by saying that many years ago, I read for the first time - and that was a great event - Robert Louis Stevenson's "Child's Garden of Verses". There may be people here who have become so grown-up that they think they have outgrown them. I hope not. I hope not because Robert Louis Stevenson will himself never grow old in the minds of people, and his "Child's Garden of Verses" remains a joy forever. Remember the poem about the river and

the children putting their little boats into the river and floating them away, and exciting childish pleasure? And then it goes on -

"Away down the river  
A hundred miles or more  
Other little children  
Shall bring our boats ashore"

This verse has stuck in my mind. It has, in my own case, continued to have a profound effect on my own mind....  
"Other little children will bring our boats to shore".....  
Other little children will benefit or suffer, according to our virtue or our vice; every time we do something that is at all significant, we are launching a little boat on the river of life, and other little children will bring it to shore. Let us never forget about that.

No man could be a great pioneer and constructor as the founder of this family was if he had thought only of today. He must, from time to time, have looked forward and have said, "Yes, if I can do this, then we can do so-and-so, then we'll do something else," looking to the future, conscious of the fact, as we all must be, that we are not here today and gone tomorrow, but that we have our little mark to make for good or evil, and the mark doesn't rub out too quickly. That's why I think that that is a great poem, a wonderful poem, deserves to live with us, as I indeed I hope I may say it has lived with me.

And so here today in the presence of so many members of this family, this famous family, recalling the achievements of this family, I would like to think that we, like themselves, will look forward with thankfulness for what has been done and with a profound hope that when our boats come to shore, they will be found by happy children in a happy world all the better because we launched our boat.

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