

THE C.B. ALEXANDER PRESBYTERIAN AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

OFFICIAL OPENING

TOCAL, N.S.W.

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Speech by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies

Well, Sir and Ladies and Gentlemen :

This is a rather terrifying sort of an occasion because it says in the book of the words....."the Prime Minister shall deliver an address" and I must say that sounds rather formidable. But before I proceed to deliver an address, I would like to add a supplementary note about the presence of the Moderator-General.

You have been quite rightly informed that we are the only country in the world that runs to the luxury of a Moderator-General. The Head of the Church of Scotland is the Moderator and thereby, Sir, hangs a tale. I tell it because I notice you are down to preach a sermon later on, and this little story may improve you. (Laughter)

One of the Moderators of the Church of Scotland, Wyatt Anderson, whom a number of you will remember, told me that he was preaching at Craithie church as part of his annual duty to the late King George VI in this little church near Balmoral, and on the way across afterwards to have lunch, the King was very complimentary. He said, "Moderator, that is the best sermon I have heard for years and years" and the Moderator, somewhat pleased with this Royal approval said, "Well, thank you, Sir, thank you very much." "Yes," said King George VI, "I had the watch on you and it took twelve minutes only." (Laughter) Now, Sir, I don't know whether there is any moral in that, but I leave it to you for what it is worth.

Although I am bound to say that I am no great believer in the brevity of sermons, I think it depends on the sermon, myself. I remember one of the shortest sermons I listened to in my life was delivered by the late celebrated and highly contentious Larry Rentoul in Melbourne, and it took forty-five minutes - forty-five minutes - and even at my young age, I enjoyed it.

Now this, I think, is a wonderful occasion. What has been done here already just staggers me. The vision of the great benefactor who brought this about has been matched by the vision and imagination of those who designed this college, who have furnished it with buildings, who have laid down the lines for its future. Now this is a wonderful hall that we are in. The buildings themselves, (I have just had a quick glance at them), are charming in design, and this is good because I am one of those who believes that when generation after generation of boys goes to a place of learning whether it is an agricultural college or a university or whatever it may be, it is a good thing for them to have memories of beauty to take with them during their lives. This is one of the civilising things in life, to see beauty and to recollect beauty in years to come, and that is why, Sir, I am so delighted with the way in which this great task has been attacked and so far accomplished.

Now this is an agricultural college. In one of the notes that was sent to me, a rather useful phrase, I thought, occurred, and that was that the idea was to bridge the gap between

knowledge and application and this is something I want to talk about for a little while, just in a conversational fashion, not by way of an address.

We have lived - or many of us have lived - through a remarkable period of development in Australian rural industries, starting from a time when you just took what nature appeared to provide and made the most of it, and if it was poor country, well it was poor country. I was born in a place called the Mallee at a time when the Melbourne headlines regularly said, "Is the Mallee worth saving?" and it was understandable. It was a light sandy loam, had a very sketchy rainfall, sometimes a complete black-out in a drought, sometimes 12, 14 inches of rain, and I can remember as a boy the first agricultural scientist coming up into the district and going out on to a property and having a ring of farmers around him and explaining to them about a strange thing called superphosphate.

They had never heard of superphosphates, and I'm there like a small boy....you know, ears pricked up, listening to all this. And he explained that on that soil in that sort of climate, in that kind of rainfall, he thought they would all do better by going in for rotation of crops which was itself rather a novelty in those days, and also using a dressing of superphosphate which he put down at one hundredweight to the acre. Well, even from the rear view that I had of the farmers present, you could tell that they weren't very much impressed by this. "We've never used this stuff before"....."What does it cost?" "So-and-so"....."Oh..." (These were the days before the superphosphates bounty.) (Laughter) "What does it cost?"..... And, finally, all of them ignored the advice except three, three of the best farmers in the area, and even they were cautious enough to say, "Well, we'll try half a hundred weight", and when after the next harvest it turned out that they had got three bushels to the acre more than any of their neighbours, the first round of the battle for superphosphates had been won. You see, it takes time, doesn't it? Because we are tremendously conservative by instinct about these things.

Now it is tremendously important, indeed it is vital, that all those old conservative ideas should disappear in the case of the rural industries and for a very good reason. The international solvency of Australia, our balance of trade, our balance of payments, depends primarily on the volume of our exports, and the volume and value of our exports depends primarily, as to a vast percentage, on the products of the land whether in cattle or sheep or cereals or whatever the product may be. We have done rather well in the last few years, remarkably well, all things considered, but we can't hope to avoid balance of payments troubles, and I don't want to become too technical about those, unless we can maintain and steadily increase the value of our exports from this country. The solvency of masses of people who know nothing about the land will depend on it.

And in the second place, as time goes on, as we have long since reached a period of full employment, you have pressures on the economy, you have pressures on resources, labour is not easy to get, labour may have to be paid more because it is scarce -- all this is highly intelligible. It comes back to the man on the land who, for the most part, takes the price that the world will give him but pays the cost that internal affairs in Australia require him to meet, and his one hope of meeting these things and of growing and prospering is to increase his own skill, technically, in terms of management, steadily year

by year. Australia needs above all people today, highly trained farmers, people who are not of that happy group of people who think that anybody can be a farmer as if it were a sort of fool's business, people who know the skills that are required in animal husbandry, in cultivation, in whatever it may be, because these will be the guarantee in the future of the steady improvement of the skills of the techniques needed to meet these great problems, these two great problems to which I have referred.

The matter perhaps could be put in another way. We have in Australia some of the most remarkable research institutes in the world. The CSIRO is deservedly world famous for the work that it does, and there is other work being done in various places, including the universities - pure science, applied science. Now all of this, of course, is tremendously important, but for years now, quite a number of us have been troubled about the fact that there is too big an interval between the result of the research work and its application on the farm. There has been a gap - what is called in another sense, a deficiency of extension services, and this is important because time counts. It's all very well for somebody in CSIRO to make a great discovery which in the field of animal husbandry, for example, could have great results and then find that it's a year or two years before that filters through to the man who is actually conducting the operations on the spot, and when I enquire why, why do we have this delay, all too frequently the answer is that you can't have an unskilled man interpreting the results of research to a farmer. The interpreter himself must possess skill, he must know what he is talking about, and the wonderful thing to me is that in this place, when you get fully going, you will have 120 young men coming through here, acquiring skills which will make them the most effective interpreters in the world of the results of scientific research and applied scientific research to the problems on the spot of the man on the farm, so that you are helping in a very material way to supply a great national need.

Now all that, you see, is on the text that you provided me with - the gap between knowledge and application, and it is because of the reasons that I have given by way of elaborating that, that I regard it as a very great honour to come here, a great privilege to be here in the early days of a place which will inevitably become not only great in itself but famous over the country, and if I hadn't felt that it was an honour, I still would have had to come because my colleague, Alan Fairhall told me to, and if I may betray a political secret to you, if you want your Ministers to work for you, you occasionally have to work for them. So here I am, and of course in particular if I may say so, delighted to see my old friend, the Moderator, Fred McKay. I always remember with great interest that when my daughter was about to be married, we said to her: "Now, is there anybody you would like to bring in addition to the local Minister? Is there anybody you would like to have at your wedding?" She said, "Yes, I'd like Fred McKay" and down he came and has a very honoured place in our house and in our minds.

Now, Sir, I don't think that I want to say any more than that. I've run well over the twelve minutes that I mentioned in that exhilarating story of mine. I've told you

why I'm glad to be here and I've tried to tell you in a very few words why I think this is one of the most important things that I would have looked at this year - of great present interest, of great future importance to the nation, and in particular, I hope and know, of great importance to the individuals of whom at the moment we see the first fifteen who will come through here, who will be made good citizens as well as good farmers - good farmers as well as good students and good practical people of a scientific bent. This is to the good of Australia and it will do me a world of good to be able to remember it.

I declare - is this right? - I'm never too sure about this bit - I declare this College open.
