

OLD WESLEY COLLEGIANS' ASSOCIATION CENTENARY
FOUNDERS' DAY DINNER
TOWN HALL, MELBOURNE

66/084

2nd May, 1966

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt :

Mr. President, Many Distinguished Guests and Fellow Collegians -

It would be a wonderful thing, as so many of you are finding, to be at the Wesley Centenary Dinner. A very remarkable thing to be not only at the Wesley Centenary Dinner, but to be there as guest of honour, and to be there both as guest of honour and as Prime Minister of the country. Well, I think even Ken Hadley and Maurice Sloman, with whom I have had an occasional game of poker in my more leisurely moments of past years, would agree that is a hand which takes some beating. And so, Trevor, I feel a great sense of pride in being here in those various capacities this evening. The sum of their totality makes my own enjoyment and relish of what is for me a notable and historic night quite a moving experience.

I listened with very great interest to your rather detailed judgment. It has confirmed a suspicion I've had for many years that the congestion of the courts is due to the fact that the judges do not apply themselves to the business of law but allow their minds to wander. Anyhow, I am certainly indebted to you for your researches because I've been reminded of so many of the happy occasions which slip into the limbo and only reappear on very rare occasions if they appear at all. You mentioned some of these unanswered letters and I apologise to several hundred people in this company who were good enough to send me congratulations and good wishes a few months ago when the high office of Prime Minister came my way. I can only say by way of exculpation that the list of unanswered letters runs into the thousands mark and I do hope some time to be given sufficient opportunity by my Cabinet and by Parliament and the people to say a personal "thank-you" to you, but at least this medium can be taken tonight to pass on an interim and very warm-hearted acknowledgment to you all.

But one of the dividends that I secured out of this appointment was not merely the host of letters of good wishes but so many of those who wrote to me were school friends of many years back that I hadn't heard of perhaps for a generation or more. Included amongst them, although I had, of course, been aware of his presence in the intervening period, was a letter from Eddie Wells and Eddie had been at the Prep. when I was there - I think he was Headmaster of the Prep. School but certainly he looked after all of us who were boarding at Stella in those days. Eddie wrote to me to remind me that in 1922 I secured 100 marks for algebra in each of the three terms. Now I think you will agree, gentlemen, that for a Treasurer that is a pretty remarkable achievement. Had it come before the change in office, I would have taken even more encouragement from it. As it was, I was very glad to slip into the somewhat easier calculations of decimal currency. But Eddie I encountered tonight, he addressed me as "Sir".

It was the first time in the history of our relationship over many years that I haven't been doing it that way from my end, and so Prime Ministers do enjoy some privileges.

Gentlemen, it is for all of us tonight a wonderful occasion. There isn't one of us in this room who isn't proud of what he still regards as the best school of all - and I exclude some of the philistines who have crept in by virtue of that traditional Wesley courtesy which obtrudes itself from time to time. But for those of us who have passed through, or in the case of some of the senior boys who are still going through the final stages of their studentship there, we shall treasure always in a corner of our hearts - and you made a reference, Trevor, to that song I had to sing. Dickie Adamson of whom I'll say a few more words in a moment or two, was a very remarkable man, of course, in very many respects, but he knew how to contrive a song so that the emotion desired from the comparatively unemotional students with whom he had to deal, came forward at the right moment. I defy anybody to sing the leaving song, which is usually reserved on speech night for the senior boys leaving the school - I defy anybody at whatever stage their voice has gone - contralto, breaking or baritone or whatever the case may be - without an involuntary sob coming into the voice, the music is so arranged. And so you sing on the final day - at the speech night actually - this leaving song, and in it we talk about the school still having a corner in our hearts, and I am sure that is true of all of us. And it is a warm corner, something to which we can turn when we are amongst our contemporaries, when we read with pride and satisfaction of what a fellow collegian has accomplished, or find that some well known Wesley family - and I have run across so many of them here tonight - has sent on another son to carry on the famous tradition of the father.

A great school makes a great contribution to the national life. It gives, as the Headmaster has said to us, qualities of character, and it brings an individuality which I think every community finds of advantage to possess. We don't want all to be cast in the same mould, and even when you are a school inside a particular system of schools, as the Great Public Schools are in this State of Victoria, each school somehow develops its own atmosphere, its own character, and Wesley undoubtedly can claim that individuality and Wesley undoubtedly can claim that thanks to the men who have gone before in the headmastership and who today stand in that office, there are qualities of character which any Wesley boy worth the salt will acquire and will carry with him through his days wherever his tasks or his inclinations may take him. And this for an Australia of less than twelve million people is a tremendously important thing if we are to face the great responsibilities and challenges of developing a continent the size of the United States, if you leave Alaska out of the picture, and we are trying to do it with our 11,500,000; against something over 200 million in that country, then the people must be people of quality and people of character if we are to make our mark and have some influence on what is happening amongst the 1,500 million people to the north of this country who are finding themselves in a dynamic period of rapid and revolutionary change. It is not sufficient for us to produce

people, we have to produce leaders, we have to produce people of character and quality. And I believe Australia is doing just that. One of the lessons I've learned as I have gone around in this last ten days, although it was a lesson well perceived from many earlier voyagings, is that the best export that Australia makes is the export of its own people - I am not recommending that we export them wholesale, because we are busily trying to import people to build a nation around us, but the Australian where he goes in the main is a person I use that terms "he" generically because, as a matter of fact some of the Australian "shes" abroad are pretty good, too, and I met the daughter of one of our most distinguished old boys, Keith Reid's daughter, at the surgical unit in Saigon in the last few days where she was doing a great job for Australia also.

But here Australia is making its presence felt by the good Australians that have gone to serve in one capacity or another, particularly around the South East Asian arc to our north. There are a couple of Australians in Cambodia, a country of whose politics we don't entirely approve, but there has developed a curious friendship between the government of that country, and one of the reasons for this is that there are two fellows there who have taught them how to mend the buses when the buses kreak down. Now, other countries make handsome gifts of hundreds of buses. They compete for the favours of Cambodia. Some will come from the United States, some will come from Russia, some will come from China or from somewhere else, and that's fine. The buses are received but when the buses break down, nobody knew how to fix them. Well, a couple of Australians are running a training workshop in Cambodia and are amongst the two best known men in Cambodia and they have built up a great store of goodwill for this country. And that rather illustrates the sort of thing I have in mind.

You spoke, Headmaster, about this generation of students I heard - and what a wonderful thing it was, what a moving thing it was to hear the voice of Dickie Adamson tonight giving us something of the philosophy which we had absorbed from him in which he talked of the criticism of that particular generation of young Australians by their elders and expressing his own view that it was a better generation than the one before. I, having come in contact with a good many of the generation which succeeded me, endorse his judgment as far as today's generation of young Atstralians go. They are better educated, I believe, than we were, they have got more assurance and I believe they have got as much earnestness and determination to do what they believe is the right thing to do, provided their own intell'gence can be satisfied that this is the right thing. They have a more challenging judgment, perhaps, than an earlier generation. The slogans are under questioning because they find themselves in a restless turbulent world in which the standards of the past have come under increasing challenge. But the stuff is there, and again I have seen this confirmed over the last ten days by the quality of manhood and womanhood that I have encountered in the various countries that I have visited.

We talked of Dickie Adamson and what he meant to us, and I mention him because he happened to be my own headmaster. Any generation of Wesley collegians who had

another headmaster to guide them will think, I have no doubt, in very similar terms about the man who guided the earlier years of their own lives. But a headmaster, a good headmaster, has his own special brand of immortality. It is an immortality of influence which goes into the hearts and minds of those to whom he is giving leadership, and it extends from them - perhaps through their families, perhaps in the leadership which they in turn bring to others, but it is a species of immortality which is very genuine and goes very deep. I shall never forget - I am sure nobody who was at Wesley in my time could forget - the impact which the character and personality of Lawrence Arthur Adamson made upon us, the precepts which he gave to us, which have become embedded in our own make-up and which have illuminated so clearly for us so many of the paths along which we have had to proceed as we have made our own way through life.

I have no doubt that in my own public life the job of assessing what was the right thing to do in a situation has been greatly assisted by the clear perception which Dickie Adamson brought to the great precepts of human conduct.

Perhaps I could illustrate by an example the way he used to go about it with us. He was, of course, a man of legal training and he sometimes thought in legal terms, but on one occasion, I remember, we had some discussion with him - I was one of his prefects at this time, so was Spot Turnbull, my old room-mate in the eyrie just the two of us, in one of those towers in the older Wesley, and somehow or other I couldn't have persuaded him adequately at the time as to the political course he was to follow later but, still, you can't achieve everything. We are still very good friends and I did have the pleasure of introducing him to the young lady who became his wife. I would have you know, Mr. Justice Rapke, that this rather flippant reference of yours to the dancing prize calls for some amplification because I was in that state of bondage at the time which afflicts the boarder - I don't know whether there has been improvement since - but the only way I could escape from the prison was to go to dancing class on a Friday night at St. Catherine's School. Naturally, being there one developed a certain proficiency in order to secure the more agreeable partners that one saw around the room. The incentive was there and finally came the accolade. I can't claim ever to have mastered the Charleston to which you have referred. There are some people who would be unkind enough to say in politics that I had learned the Twist fairly early in my career.

However, we discussed with the Headmaster at that time what seemed to us to be a curious application of the law because two sets of offences had been committed within quite recent time of each other. A group of schoolboys returning from Geelong, having no doubt conquered either Geelong College or Geelong Grammar as the case might have been, felt that the occasion called for some celebration and were found by some intrus ive master drinking a bottle of wine in the railway carriage and were duly reported to the headmaster. The other episode concerned a group of boys who, no doubt, for good cause

decided to ink the navel of one of their colleagues. Now the headmaster administered a much lighter penalty on the boys caught drinking the wine which seemed to us at school by far the more heinous crime, than he inflicted on those who had inked the navel of their fellow student, and seeking enlightenment we discussed this with him, and he explained it quite logically and simply. He said the wine-drinkers were engaged in a social misdemeanour, perhaps of some harm ultimately to themselves but not damaging the interests of others or interfering with the liberty of others. But those who inked the navel of the schoolboy, that was an assault upon the person and a grave interference with his own personal liberty and course of action. Now, gentlemen, here was a typical example of the logic, of the sense of principle which Dickie Adamson had. We remember him with great affection. I remember him with a very deep gratitude.

The generation which you now have to look to, Headmaster, face challenges of even greater complexity than we did in our time. We are in this restless rapidly-changing world, but Australia is so peculiarly placed as in effect a Western country in an Asian world, finding it of increasing importance to trade, to collaborate, to join for purposes of mutual security, to confer on matters of mutual interest and concern. And here is a test of the Australian qualities which we believe are well enshrined at Wesley, of tolerance, of character, of courage and of mateship, and when you think of it that by the time this generation that I speak of - the new generation - reaches its own maturity, the population of the world, certainly of Asia will probably have doubled, and Australia which today has this handful of people in the sea of humanity of which I speak, will have to exercise a role, a significant role in helping to shape the outcome of these opportunities and challenges and problems as they open up to us.

Well here, I repeat, are claims upon the kind of quality that a great school can produce. Wesley has a proud record of achievement over its first one hundred years. The purple and the gold - those royal colours which we bear so proudly and see carried so proudly by those who represent the college - will have to be again in the forefront of leadership in the affairs of the years ahead. But the tradition is secure. We here tonight, from those who were here in 1906 onwards, are all inheritors and participators in this great heritage built for us by men of the quality and the character and leadership as headmasters to whom I have referred. And you, Sir, now have that trust and we know that in you the Wesley tradition will be safely carried and that knight new chapters will be added to the Wesley story.

Last night, I was turning over - because I thought there might be something there of interest to you - the publication, the very limited publication put out in 1921, March of 1921, of the first 55 years of the school's history, and it was clear that those who compiled the history then were very much influenced by the proximity of the publication to the school's contribution to the First World War, and we as students honoured appropriately as the occasions seemed

proper, those who had served Australia in those years. And each generation seems to have to face up to its own challenge to freedom and the standards that it wishes to see preserved in its own country and in other countries to whom we can bring our own succour. And this falls again to the responsibility of another generation of young Australians, and I can assure you from what I have seen of the Australians of this new generation abroad, we have produced a breed of men of whom we shall be eternally proud.

Gentlemen, tonight you have done me the great honour of proposing my toast. Trevor has gone through his researches to a degree that has not merely delighted me but has stimulated many happy recollections which I will mull over for a very considerable time to come. I hope that in the next 100 years you don't merely produce a couple more Prime Ministers, but the judges, the doctors, the lawyers, the teachers and all those who go to make a civilised community, able to live the good life themselves but more importantly in the kind of world in which we find ourselves, able to contribute themselves to a better life for others. This will be the product of the Wesley of the next 100 years.

And so to the best school of all, my thanks for the great joy and the great reward of having served my seven years there, for the host of happy memories whenever thoughts turn back to a wonderful school. And the best wishes of all of us, Headmaster, to you and the boys for an even greater Wesley in the hundred years ahead.
