

THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF
SOUTH AUSTRALIA - SIR MARK OLIPHANT K.B.E.

St. Mark's College - 50th Anniversary
Sunday, 16th February 1975

Many reasons are advanced for educating the young. A literate population is obviously desirable, but literacy, to judge by the ability to use the English language, both spoken and written, is not a necessary result of primary and secondary education. Training for a trade, a white collar job or a profession, at secondary and tertiary levels, has been a recognised objective. Courses in the humanities, languages the sciences, taken for no reason other than intense interest in a branch of knowledge or of art, can be most satisfying, even when the student has little or no idea how or whether they can provide a living later. A further reason for continued education, which may be especially valid at present, is to keep as many as possible of the young off the labour market!

It is probable that Professor Karmel is right in the sense that young people should not be forced, or encouraged, to continue their education beyond their capacity to profit, economically or intellectually, from further study. The primary motivation for higher education may be love of scholarship or of the natural world, but there is always the assumption that the end result will be a white-collar job. I hope that this will change. Thus, knowledge of why metals behave in the way they do, could be invaluable to the silversmith or the designer, while understanding of biological structure and form and the optical basis of colour, could be as invaluable to the painter today as they were to Leonardo da Vinci, even for the artist who regards draughtsmanship or colour as unwarranted intrusions upon creativity!

It seems that we are as mixed up today in our ideas of education as we are in music or the arts. We take the uncommitted minds of the young, educate them for from 10 to 20 years, and leave them at the end rudderless, without purpose or discipline, unable to speak or write their own language. The guidance and self-control given in the past by religion are dead or dying, and not without reason, as readers of the Christmas Special number of 'Punch' must appreciate.

There is no doubt that we live in the midst of a social revolution, where all the old canons of decency are fast becoming ineffective. This would be less worrying if it were not accompanied by increasing violence and disregard for the rights and privileges of others by both individuals and nations. Even in sport and

entertainment, win at any price, and climb to the top at any sacrifice by others, have replaced older ideals. Max Harris's description of winning the 'Ashes' as a rather sordid victory, is echoed in the hearts of many Australians. The diabolical misuse of man's growing knowledge of nature, in such areas as nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, knows no bounds. With the proliferation of such methods of warfare the whole human race faces almost certain disaster.

But, you might ask, what has all this to do with the jubilee of St. Mark's College. My reply is 'everything'.

I remember well the arrival of your foundation Master at the University of Adelaide. I had taken geography as a subject in my public examinations. It consisted of memorizing, for instance, the railways and rivers of Britain, and the names and products of the principal towns thereon. The idea that geography had anything to do with people was never mentioned, nor do I remember learning anything substantial about Australia. The inaugural lecture given by Dr. Grenfell Price changed my concept of geography. It became the study of man in relation to his surroundings. This outlook was his as first Master of St. Mark's. A gentle, human man, as tough as nails and as shrewd as the Vice Chancellor or the Bishop! These qualities made him not only a master of compromise, on his own terms, as when St. Mark's became 'damp' rather than 'wet': They made him a real leader, an historian of note, and a creator of many things, from St. Mark's to the National Library in Canberra. Above all, he laid the foundations here of something which could well save our sick society. Here he lived with young men who captured his enthusiasm, who enjoyed the freedoms and privileges of College life, with the self respect, and the gentle but demanding discipline necessary to appreciate both.

It is wonderful that on the 50th birthday of the College we can honour Sir Archibald Grenfell Price in person. It has been a singular pleasure and privilege to know him and Lady Price.

Although I am by no means a religious conformist, I believe that St. Mark's has gained much from its association with the Anglican Church. While the College imposes no religious allegiance or observance upon its members, its background, like that of the major colleges in Cambridge and Oxford, has been with the Church of England, a remarkable organization, in which anyone, from the lowest of low church, to the highest of high church, can feel comfortable. It is strange that a Church so closely associated with Royalty since the time of Henry VIII, and whose clergy were recruited from the aristocracy and upper middle class, should have become so much more tolerant than most, if not all, other denominations.

On the other hand, this truly Christian attitude of the Church of England may be a result of its continual recruitment of the most highly educated people in the realm, with a consequent deep respect for learning and appreciation of those pitfalls of bigotry which are destroying Christianity. Consequently, this attitude towards life, and particularly towards fellow members of society and of the human race generally, has been fostered by St. Mark's in "love and charity towards all men", in free and open discussions of all issues, and with the restraints and dignities proper to being part of society. It is this part of the process of education, prominent in the great Public Schools of Britain and Australia, which is missing in the highly centralized, politically controlled State School system.

You will gather from this that I am a traditionalist, at least so far as the basic principles of education are concerned. Traditionally, learning was both imparted and cemented in place in the mind, through discourse. The culture of the Australian aborigine was complex, yet was preserved over tens of thousands of years through word of mouth. Education through apprenticeship, through example and uninhibited discussion, as practised by Sir Archie, by R.B. Lewis, and by the present Master in St. Mark's is the most natural, the most effective, and the most pleasant of all approaches. In St. Mark's it has produced some great men. There are signs that the gospel according to St. Mark's is spreading.