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120TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF OTAGO

Address delivered by DR. NEIL C. BEGG on March 23rd, 1968.

Isaac Watts wrote his famous hymn "O God our help in ages past" about the beginning of the 18th century. In it he describes the passage of time—"Time, like an ever-rolling stream
Bears all its sons away,...."

His simile "Time, like an ever-rolling stream" gives a simple uncomplicated picture. We are tiny objects immersed in a vast flowing river of time. We see the future appearing from nowhere and bearing inexorably down upon us. For a moment of the present it flows over us and engulfs us only to slide on again behind us until it is lost in the forgotten past. The clarity of the simile is its main virtue as I think it has little validity.

This concept where the past disappears and is gone forever was first challenged, for me, when I was a boy. Someone told me that it takes 8 minutes for the sun's rays to reach the earth. In effect this means that as I watch the first rays of the sun cutting the horizon the sun, at that moment, has already marched 8 minutes on its journey to its zenith. Light from the stars, of course, may take months, years or centuries to reach us on earth. So an observer out in space watching us with a powerful telescope would see, at this moment, the Roman legions conquering the Gauls, or, if his observation point was a little closer to us, he would see, at this moment, the *John Wickliffe* and the *Philip Laing* disembarking their passengers to build their new homes in Otago. History in fact doesn't just disappear to be lost forever. It remains with us to guide our way-of life, our thinking,, our actions.

In a much more practical way we can see the past today in the rolling pasture lands—the main wealth of Otago—which were laboriously cut out of the bush by our forefathers. We see it in the blue stone buildings, still a feature of our city, which were hand built by the old masons. We see it in our roads and railways surveyed by the pioneers and shaped and formed with pick and shovel by the workmen of old. Less tangible, but perhaps more important, we still benefit from the dreams of the early settlers, dreams of education for everyone, freedom in religious belief, justice and the right to govern themselves and carve out their own destinies. They moulded our present way of thinking and our present way of life.

Just as the present is inextricably tangled up with the past, so is the future merely a projection of the present. The genes we nurture in our bodies today are handed on to our children. Even more significant the pattern of life they learn from their families provides a blue print for their future living. Each child learns his standards from his home--standards which form an invisible framework for all his activities for the whole of his life span. The actions of the individuals of the future are determined largely, not only by heredity, but by family and community traditions. There is no doubt that our beliefs, our behaviour and our dreams today cast their long shadows ahead into the future.

We have benefited very greatly from the dreams and the vision of our forefathers and on this 120th anniversary of the founding of Otago we should remember them with gratitude. The Apocrypha in its book of Ecclesiasticus says-

"Let us now praise famous men ; and our fathers that begat us". It goes on to enumerate the famous men—"Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, were renowned for their power ; giving counsel by their understanding, and delivering prophecies : Leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the peoples. Wise and eloquent in their instruction : Such as found out musical tunes ; and recited verses in writing. Rich men' furnished with ability : Living peaceably in their habitations : All these were honoured in their generations, and were the glories of their times...."

We all know the great contributions made by our famous men. We remember William Cargill, Thomas Burns, James Macandrew, John McGlashan, Robert Stout, James Watkin, Julius Vogel and many others. They were honoured in their generations and were the glories of their times. But equally our

thanks should go to the humbler citizens whose names are not so familiar, but who worked hard for their families and their community and who helped to translate the dream into reality. Most of them died unsung but they left us, their children, with their thoughts, beliefs and philosophies.

For instance, Dr. Edward Shortland describes one, Stephen Smith—a worthy man Shortland met during his travels here in 1843. Stephen Smith was a whaler who had his own dream for the future. Shortland described him thus—"This man, by his care and industry, was an example of what may be done by the exercise of these inestimable virtues under very disadvantageous circumstances. By the edge of a wood about a mile distant he had a garden of two or three acres, entirely fenced; where he cultivated potatoes, corn, and garden stuff, more than sufficient for his own use. He had seven head of cattle, among which were milch cows, and a young bull, which he had broken-in to harness, and one which he might frequently be seen mounted, riding to his farm. His cottage and dairy were pictures of neatness, and his soidisant wife, a native of Taranaki, with whom he had lived six or seven years, not less so. Mrs. Smith dressed like a European country girl, wore a white apron, and made excellent butter." Many of the shore whalers of Otago lived on farms in this way, and bore little resemblance to the roystering liberty men of the foreign whaleships which visited the Bay of Islands and northern ports.

We should remember Tommy Chaseland who killed eleven whales in seventeen days—the greatest feat of its kind ever recorded in this country. In addition to being a master whaleman he was a superb sailor and knew our coasts better than anyone else. He was illiterate and knew nothing of maps or charts. Shortland asked him to draw an outline of the west coast harbours but this he was quite unable to do. "He carried his map," he said, "in his head ; but it was useless to anyone save himself." He was a good natured giant and ruled his men with patience and justice. Shortland described him thus—"This man, so inveterate a drunkard, was considered the best whaler in New Zealand, and was a universal favourite owing to his excellent temper ; never being quarrelsome under any circumstances, although he was of great size and strength. He was a specimen of the Australian half-cast, being the son of one of the early 'English settlers in New South Wales, and an aboriginal native of that country ; from whom, probably, he inherited his extraordinary power of vision."

We should remember the honesty of Edward Peters "Black Peter", born in Bombay, who made public his discovery of gold at Tuapeka in 1859; and two years later the unselfishness of Gabriel Read who wrote in the Otago Witness "Although the being able to work secretly for a time would greatly benefit me, I feel it my duty to impart these facts". The facts which led to the great Otago gold rush.

We should remember the unsung adventurers who explored and mapped our province. Charles Cameron who travelled up the Makarora and crossed to the west coast over the pass which was subsequently used by von Haast ; and the miners A. J. Barrington, James Farrell and Antoine Simonin who made the most daring and hazardous journey to the west coast and back to Queenstown. They were living skeletons on their return having traversed many of the great mountain ranges already in the grip of winter. These living skeletons described thus 'their cheek-bones and noses, besides their elbows, hips and other parts of the body were protruding through the skin in places' went to hospital, while their generous friends subscribed to pay their expenses... Surely these men have left with us a heritage of courage and determination, of ingenuity and self-sufficiency which has stood us in good stead through two world wars.

Then there was Ned Devine, "Cabbage-tree Ned", and the other coach drivers who held together the slender thread of communications of the province. In rain, in storm and flood these men, sparing neither themselves nor their horses, brought help and provisions and cheer to the isolated settlers who were building the farms which now grace our countryside. The Shennans who founded the celebrated run at Galloway, W. G. Rees and Nicholas von Tunzelman who opened up the lake country and many others who searched out and farmed the hills and valleys of central Otago. These and many more unnamed should be remembered today. For on their courage, their vision, their relentless labours has been built the province as we know it. But they left us not only tremendous material benefits but bequeathed also something of their character, their beliefs and their traditions. Time has seen their dreams turn to reality. The past has built the present.

But the future also depends on the present. What are our dreams? Do we still have the will to work, as they did, for their families and their community? Has a well-meaning state sapped us of our self-sufficiency, our dignity and our determination to give to the nation, rather than just to receive handouts from it. Our early settlers put aside the Town Belt as a public reserve to enhance the beauty of our city, Captain Cargill warning sternly that no one must damage it or cut wood from it. They knew of the beauty and the potential of the land. Can we, today, tolerate the folly of drowning thousands of acres of our best farm lands in order to make electricity by methods which will be outdated in a decade or two? A precursor to any plans for Otago is a careful appraisal of what is meant by progress. Having just returned from some of the great industrial centres of the world, I, for one, would not regard the urban ghettos, the rapacity and the selfishness of life in the great cities as part of my dream for Otago's future. In a hungry world I see our future as a food producer with our grasslands as our greatest asset.

I have attempted to show that the conception of time as an ever-rolling stream flowing over passive humanity is both cheerless and invalid. Instead we should see our history as the mould which has fashioned the present. Edward Shortland, standing somewhere near Lookout Point five years before the arrival of the *John Wickliffe* saw the bushclad hills of the future city, heard the song of the birds and the splash of the stream. He expressed his dream in his book "The Southern Districts of New Zealand", published in 1851.

"This is now the site of a township, called Dunedin, founded by a Scotch company. We have every reason to augur well for the peacefulness and prosperity of those who may select it for their home ; as it possesses many essential elements of a happy and successful colony. It has a healthful climate, and scenery not easily to be surpassed for beauty—good land for tillage, and plains for sheep pastures—plenty of large and valuable timber—and an excellent harbour for vessels of moderate size....It is also believed that more than ordinary care and precautions were taken in making the first purchase of the district, in order to secure to the colonists, as far as possible, undisputed title to their lands, and friendly relations with the former native proprietors of the soil...."

There is a certain timeless quality in these meditations. His thoughts revolve around peace and prosperity, success and happiness, health and beauty and, perhaps most important, he sees it built on justice. I wonder how our visions measure up to this.

I wonder what are our dreams for the future. Are they obscured by self-interest and materialism? Has the sense of personal responsibility been weakened by a paternalistic state, and too much centralisation of power? Do we remember that the significance and value of life lies not in things but in human beings and the relationship of human beings one to one another and to God. John Gardner, a famous American, says "One thing we are going to have to do is to restore a sense of community and participation at the local level."

I believe our early settlers saw many of these truths more clearly than we do today. They have provided us with circumstances where every young person has the opportunity to grow to his full stature. Their dream concerned itself with education for the youthful, freedom to worship and to work, mutual helpfulness and as Shortland pointed out the opportunity to use the natural productivity of this lovely land. It is hard to believe that we can improve on this vision.

But one thing is certain. Just as the untiring work of the early settlers turned their dreams into history, so will our visions, whatever they are, shape the future for our children.