

Mrs Elliott

V-C's TOAST TO HONORARY GRADUATES : LUNCHEON : 17 APRIL 1982

MR CHANCELLOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

THERE IS PROBABLY NOTHING SO GENERALLY TAKEN FOR GRANTED AS ONE'S ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND AND TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS. BUT COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING RESTS NOT ONLY ON A KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE, BUT ALSO ON FAMILIARITY WITH THE HABITS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE SPEAKER. TO ILLUSTRATE THIS, I NEED MERELY REMIND YOU OF THE FRENCHMAN, WITH A GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH, WHO WAS FURIOUS WHEN HE WON A GAME OF POKER AND WAS CALLED "A LUCKY DOG" IT WAS QUICKLY EXPLAINED TO HIM THAT THE EXPRESSION IS QUITE ACCEPTABLE IN ENGLISH SOCIETY, AND WHEN A WOMAN WON THE NEXT GAME, HE SHOWED OFF HIS NEW KNOWLEDGE BY SAYING TO HER "YOU LUCKY DOG!". BUT THEN HIS KNOWLEDGE OF GRAMMAR SURGED TO THE FORE AND HE HASTILY ADDED: "I'M SORRY, I MEAN 'YOU LUCKY BITCH'".

WITH SUCH PITFALLS AROUND US, WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE GRATEFUL FOR ALL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO PAVE THE WAY TO BETTER UNDERSTANDING IN ANY FIELD, AND THREE SUCH MEN ARE THE HONORARY GRADUATES WHOM WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO HAVE WITH US TO-DAY.

IN HIS ROLE OF TRILINGUAL LEXICOGRAPHER, DR PAHL IS OPENING THE WAY TO BETTER UNDERSTANDING AMONG THREE MAJOR LANGUAGE GROUPS IN SOUTH AFRICA, FOR IT IS SELF-EVIDENT THAT WHEN THE LANGUAGE OF ANY GROUP BECOMES INTELLIGIBLE TO ANOTHER, THE BIGGEST BARRIER TO COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING HAS TUMBLED. BUT HE HAS ALSO SHOWN HIMSELF TO POSSESS THAT GREATER UNDERSTANDING THAT GOES BEYOND LANGUAGE - AN APPRECIATION OF THE NEEDS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF PEOPLE, WHICH ENABLED HIM TO DEVISE AND APPLY THE OPTIMUM TEACHING METHODS FOR THE SPECIFIC LANGUAGE-GROUP INVOLVED. THE DRAMATIC SUCCESS THAT HE ACHIEVED, IS NOW COMMON KNOWLEDGE. THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY, NO LESS, MAY BE INFLUENCED FOR THE BETTER BY THE PAINSTAKING EFFORTS, OVER SO MANY YEARS, OF THIS DISTINGUISHED OLD RHODIAN, DR PAHL.

A MAN WHO EMBARKS ON A CAREER IN DAIRY FARMING, AS DID DR SKEAD, MAY WELL BE EXPECTED TO FEEL THAT ORNITHOLOGY IS "FOR THE BIRDS", BUT THIS AVID EXPLORER IN MANY BRANCHES OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES WAS ULTIMATELY LED TO MAKE IT A FIELD OF OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT. IN THIS SUBJECT ALSO, THERE ARE OBSTACLES TO COMMUNICATION UNLESS BOTH THE LANGUAGE AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE SPEAKER ARE UNDERSTOOD - FOR INSTANCE, WHEN THE TERM "BIRD WATCHING" IS USED. BUT HOW WONDERFUL FOR SCIENCE, AND FOR THE MAN-IN-THE-STREET, THAT A SCHOLAR SHOULD HAVE THE PATIENCE AND THE APPLICATION TO DEVOTE HIS EFFORTS TO THE ACQUISITION OF A SOUND UNDERSTANDING OF THE HABITS AND WAYS OF THESE BEAUTIFUL CREATURES THAT WERE CREATED LONG BEFORE MAN. AS DR SKEAD'S PUBLICATIONS HAVE ENRICHED THE WORLD OF SCIENCE, SO ALSO HAS HIS ACCEPTANCE OF OUR DOCTORATE ENRICHED OUR UNIVERSITY.

AS AN EXECUTIVE, DIRECTOR AND CHAIRMAN OF A LARGE PUBLIC COMPANY, DR SUTHERLAND FOUND HIMSELF IN A FIELD IN WHICH A CONSTANT NEED EXISTED TO UNDERSTAND PERFECTLY THE NEEDS AND TECHNIQUES OF DOCTORS, NURSES, PATIENTS, AND ALSO OF WELDERS AND OTHER CRAFTSMEN. IT IS EVEN RUMOURED THAT THE PRODUCTION OF LIGHT-WEIGHT CYLINDERS FOR BLOW-TORCHES WAS BASED ON AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NEEDS OF BURGLARS. BUT DR SUTHERLAND AND HIS COMPANY NOT ONLY SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE - THEY ALSO FOUND WAYS OF OVERCOMING THEIR DIFFICULTIES. AND THIS HABIT HAS REMAINED WITH DR SUTHERLAND. IN HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THIS UNIVERSITY, HIS ALMA MATER, HE HAS ACHIEVED A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING OF OUR NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS, AND IS EVER SEEKING TO HELP IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY. WE ARE GREATLY PLEASED TO-DAY TO SEE HIS OUTSTANDING CAREER ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE AWARD OF A DOCTORATE.

I ASK YOU NOW TO RISE TO THE TOAST OF OUR HONORARY GRADUATES.