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Convocation Address^{*}

CHANCELLOR, Vice-Chancellor, and as I may now say, fellow-graduates of the University, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am deeply sensible of the great honour you have conferred upon me in making me a Doctor of the University of Ceylon and so a member of your Academic Society. It is however an honour which I cannot take for myself alone, for I conceive that it is at least in equal measure, or as I myself would say in far greater measure, a recognition of the association which has existed for so long between the University of Ceylon and the University of London, and in particular between the School of Oriental Studies, on the staff of which I served for 36 years, and of which I was Director for 20, and the Oriental and History Faculties of this University. Long may that association continue, widening and deepening with every year that passes. For I can conceive of nothing more conducive to the cementing of old friendships and the forging of new friendships between our two peoples than a mutual sharing, side by side, in the labours and the joys of scholarship and research. All through my long association with Indological studies, which extends now over a period of nearly 60 years, I have become increasingly aware of the beneficent power which such an association of scholars, whether young or old, can exercise in promoting the growth of friendship between peoples, translating—no, I would rather say making of no import whatsoever—all differences of race or history or cultural tradition. Never have I been more certain of the truth of this than during the last years of my Directorship of the School of Oriental Studies, when we were enabled to arrange Conferences in London in the field of history, to which scholars were invited to come from Asian countries, including Ceylon, some of them for the Conference itself, but some also to stay beforehand for several months, preparing with their London colleagues the papers to be laid before

^{*}By Sir Ralph L. Turner, F.B.A., Litt.D. (Cantab.) on 15 November 1958 at Peradeniya.

the full Conference when it assembled. The close association and co-operation of such scholars, working side by side to solve common problems and with a common aim, produced in them that community of interest and understanding from which true and lasting friendships arise cannot fail to be of permanent benefit to our fellow-countrymen. The holding of these Conferences in London has been made possible largely through the generosity of American Foundations. I would express here the earnest hope that in the future our Governments also, both yours and mine, may be made aware of the importance of such work, and so by the provision of what would be really quite modest sums, enable senior scholars of both countries to work for a time side by side with their colleagues from other Universities, whether in the fogs of London or in the lovely surroundings of your own University here in Peradeniya.

If I feel confidence that this community of interest and close co-operation in our common studies—and here I must ask the forgiveness of the members of other Faculties if I speak mainly of those fields in which I personally have been concerned : the study of the history and languages and great literatures of Asia—if I feel confidence that this co-operation will continue, it is because I have seen during my life-time a considerable change in the attitude of my own countrymen, and particularly of my own Government, to these things.

I have just come from the Deccan College and the University of Poona where the kindness of my friends in presenting me with a volume of Studies has only too forcibly brought home to me the fact that I have already passed the limit of 3 score and 10 years set by the Prophet as the span of man's life. I would ask you to bear with me for a few minutes while I exercise the privilege of old age to indulge in reminiscences, not in any way as *laudator temporis acti*, a praiser of the past, but as one who looks forward with hope and confidence to a future in which there will be a continued growth of that association between scholars of East and West, and particularly between those of your country and his, which he has been privileged to see grow and flourish during the years of his life. For as my mind wanders back through the long years and the concatenation of events which have brought me here, those events sometimes seem to me to have been something more than the result of pure chance.

Nearly 60 years ago when I was about 12 years old, chance did indeed bring into my hands one of those admirable little primers, which in those far-off days cost 6d. new, and a penny or two second-hand. It was 'Philology' by John Peile, and in it I read of the existence of Sanskrit as a sister-

language to English and to the Greek and Latin I had just begun to learn at school. A little later chance again brought my father back to Cambridge and there at the Perse School I came under one of the greatest of headmasters, W. H. D. Rouse. Rouse was not only a fine classic and a superlative teacher, but born and nurtured in Bengal, he was also an accomplished scholar of Sanskrit and Pali. You perhaps here will remember his name as the translator into English of Fausboll's edition of the Dhammapada, while in the last years of his life he was engaged upon a translation of a Sanskrit Buddhist text, the Divyāvadāna. Learning of my interest in Philology he started several of us in the Sixth Form on the elements of Sanskrit. In that little group there were the present Masters of two Cambridge Colleges, Dr Tillyard who became a great authority on the poet Milton, and Sir George Thompson, who, as son of the famous J. J. Thompson, was among those that helped to split the atom, with all its potentialities for good and evil. So you see what an early training in Sanskrit can do even if it is not pursued very far. For I was the only one that stuck to it, and when I myself was admitted as a scholar of Christ's College, I knelt and placed my hands between those of the Master, that same John Peile, who had written the little primer of Philology and who more than any other had been instrumental in founding the Chair of Sanskrit in the University of Cambridge. There a close friendship I formed with a fellow-undergraduate from Bengal, the late Sir Satyendranath Roy, and later with a student from Ceylon awakened in me that interest in the relationship of the modern Indo-Aryan languages that has remained the major intellectual interest of my life.

When in 1913 at the age of 25 I came to India to teach English and Sanskrit in the Queen's College—that I had the audacity to attempt such a thing in Benares of all places in the world only the rashness of youth can excuse—there, in the ancient sacred city of Kāśī, I found myself in a world with which I felt already some degree of familiarity. A few days after my arrival I had an experience the memory of which remains with me to this day. I went out one evening to Sarnath, where the great Stupa, Dhamek, and the column set up by Asoka with the famous lion-capital which has been taken as the symbol of the Republic of India and the then but partially excavated remains of the ancient monastery mark the spot where the Buddha, after his enlightenment, preached his first sermon. As I sat among the ruins in the lovely twilight of an Indian winter evening the past began to re-create itself and from the ruined halls I seemed to hear re-echoing down the corridors of time the words : *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.*

“ I heard,

Through the long centuries, the faintly whispered word :
Thus says the Lord : ‘ For all who fear death’s dreadful maw
Waits refuge in the Church, the Buddha and the Law.’ ”

As the fancied sound died away, I saw coming over the swell of ruin-strewed ground two Buddhist monks, with shaven heads and saffron robes. They were pilgrims from Burma and I rose to speak to them. They knew no English, I no Burmese, and the only tongue in which we could exchange a few words, halting on my part, was the ancient language of the Buddhist scriptures, Pali, which you, bringing originally from India, have guarded and enriched in the Isle of Lankā.

It was about that time and partly as a result of that almost mystical experience that there grew in me a conviction of the need for a much greater extension in my own country of knowledge of the East, of its long history, of its great languages and literatures and philosophies, including I would say, above all, the philosophy and teaching of Buddhism which stem from the words of the Buddha himself, which have exercised so profound an influence, and at no time more than the present-day, upon the thought of mankind, perhaps even upon its destinies. I knew, of course, of the Reay Committee and its report recommending the establishment of a School of Oriental Studies in London. But at that time, in 1913, it seemed unlikely that anything would be done about it.

Nearly 40 years later I once again visited Sarnath, this time in the august company of Vice-Chancellors of Universities from all over the Commonwealth. In the full glare of the midday sun, and the somewhat, I regret to say, commercialised surroundings of today, I could not recapture all the feeling of that earlier visit ; but disappointed as I was, perhaps a little disillusioned, I was comforted by the knowledge that back there in London the somewhat vague aspirations of that youth at the beginning of the century had taken concrete form and that there was now in London a great institution with more than 150 Professors, Readers and Lecturers, forming an integral part of the University, in which almost every aspect of Asian life and thought and history was being studied, to which students were coming in increasing numbers from every part of the world, and where especially ever-strengthening bonds of work and interest and friendship were being forged between the scholars of my country and my own beloved lands of India and Ceylon.

But the intervening years, which had seen the creation of this great School in London and the extension of Orientalist studies in other parts

of the United Kingdom, to which, of course, many others had contributed far more than I myself,—these intervening years had also brought me a more personal and deeper satisfaction. From Benares I had returned to London in 1922, and for 15 years, before I succeeded Sir Denison Ross as Director of the School, there came to me in London both from India and Ceylon a succession of post-graduate students to carry on research into the history of the languages of India and Ceylon, both Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. I can say without hesitation that those who came were nearly all far better Sanskrit or Pali scholars than I was or now ever shall be and, of course, they all had a far more intimate knowledge of their own languages of some of which I was abysmally ignorant. I often marvelled at their self-restraint in not telling me so. But perhaps I was able to contribute something in method and way of approach to our problems. At least I know one thing : Those years were the happiest of my life, and the memory of our discussions, whether in my room at the School or at week-ends in our house of Haverbrack, is an abiding joy to me.

And now that I return once more to Ceylon, what could a teacher want more ? For here in the Oriental Faculty and in the Dictionary Department of the University I find myself surrounded by my pupils and my pupils’ pupils, my *śiṣyas* and *prasiṣyas*, to use a Sanskrit term, instructing and inspiring younger generations.

It was after that second visit to Sarnath that I had an opportunity in 1951 in the course of my first visit to Ceylon of seeing the new home of your University. At that time only a few of these beautiful buildings had been erected and a beginning only had been made with the task of transferring the faculties from Colombo to Peradeniya. It was then I think only the Faculty of Law which had made the move. The Law is sometimes considered to be one of the most conservative of human institutions : it would, therefore, perhaps have been surprising that it was that Faculty which made the first move, were it not that your predecessor in office, Vice-Chancellor, was a great lawyer and a famous maker of new constitutions. Now I have the good fortune to return after the lapse of 8 years and to see the University fully established in surroundings incomparably more beautiful than those of any other that I know. Through your favour, Chancellor, and that of the Council and of the Senate I also am a member of this University. Although I am a very young graduate in one sense, may I be permitted as one older at least in years to say one thing to my fellow-graduates and to the students of the University. You are members of a University of which you have good reason to be proud. See to it that the University in its turn shall be proud of you.