

University of Ceylon Review

Vol. IX, No. 3

July, 1951

The Foundation of the University of Ceylon

THE 'Battle of the Sites' is part of the history of Ceylon as well as of the history of the University. The present writer was an undergraduate in another country when the Battle began, and a professor in yet another country when it ended. In the course of ten years, however, he read most of the documents in a dozen files, and it seemed a pity to put them away in the archives without trying to give a connected account of what took place. It cannot be entirely a complete account, for it has been derived from one source only. One result of publication may be to produce more material, in the form of pamphlets or personal recollections. There are, however, two very obvious gaps due to ignorance of the proceedings of the Board of Ministers and the Executive Committee of Education.

Some comment on the actions of persons still living has been necessary. It may amuse them to see how their actions appear to a more or less impartial historian who has had to rely on documents. If the comments are unjust we shall no doubt be informed so that the future historians may have better documentation.

I. The Foundation of the Ceylon University College

Just as Manchester is alleged to think today what the rest of England thinks tomorrow, so it is alleged that Jaffna thinks today what the rest of Ceylon thinks tomorrow. It has therefore been said, though the evidence is a little flimsy, that Jaffna suggested the creation of a University of Ceylon in the early years of the nineteenth century. There is, however, some evidence that in the latter part of the eighties, when the tea plantations were beginning to overcome the depression which had spread over the Island with the coffee blight, Colombo was beginning to talk of the need for a University. Early in the present century, too, the Ceylon University Association was established to propagate the idea of a University for Ceylon.

This agitation reached the official level when the question of higher education was referred to the Macleod Committee in 1911. The Colombo Academy (Royal College) had been affiliated to the University of Calcutta before 1870: but, on the recommendation of the Morgan Committee, this affiliation was

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

broken. Some of the Jaffna schools were affiliated to the University of Madras until 1907 or 1908, when the London External examinations were introduced. Meanwhile the Law College and the Medical College had been established. The Law College was placed under the statutory control of the Council of Legal Education, a demi-official body representing the judges and the legal profession. The Medical College was established in 1870 to train medical assistants, but in 1888 it was recognised by the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom as a colonial medical school authorised to confer diplomas whose holders were entitled to registration on the Colonial Register maintained by the Council in accordance with the Medical Act of 1886. Consequently, legal and medical education of full professional standard was available in Ceylon. University education, as such, was available only to those who went to universities in India or the United Kingdom. Most of the Ceylonese graduates teaching in the schools in 1911 had Indian degrees, but a few Ceylonese had been able to afford university education in the United Kingdom and a few had been sent to the United Kingdom on Government University Scholarships. Up to 1880 there had been only one scholarship, open to the pupils of the Colombo Academy (Royal College). In 1880 it was thrown into open competition on the result of the Cambridge Senior Local Examination, and by 1911 there were two such scholarships.

The London Intermediate Examinations were started in Ceylon in 1907, and between 1907 and 1911, 32 passed the Intermediate in Arts, while 10 passed the Intermediate in Science. Most of these came from Royal College, St. Joseph's College and St. John's College, Panadura. These students were said to take an unconscionable proportion of the time of the teachers. Whether any had passed a Final Examination and taken London degrees is not recorded but Mr. A. G. Fraser said that the numbers could be counted on the thumbs.¹ This was the position when the Macleod Committee was asked to report²:

‘Whether it is desirable to continue the present system, under which the older pupils of the Royal College and the more prominent grant-in-aid schools continue their studies by preparation for the external examinations of the University of London, or to replace it by a system under which higher education is provided by means of courses of instruction at a single institution, either a university or a university college. If the first of these alternatives is recommended, the Committee should advise as to whether the staff of the Royal College should be strengthened, so as to enable students to be prepared for degrees in Arts and Science. If the second alternative is preferred, the Committee should advise as to the constitution and staff of the institution, as to the continuance of the present

1. *S.P. XX* of 1912, p. 4.

2. *S.P. XIX* of 1912, p. 3.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

system of university scholarships, and as to the question whether the institution may be utilized to provide any part of the special education required by medical students, law students, and students in training for the profession of teachers'.

There was not complete agreement among the witnesses about the need for an institution of university rank, nor was there complete agreement about its nature. There was wide agreement that it should be at first a university college and not a university. Mr. A. G. Fraser, Principal of Trinity College, Kandy, was however anxious that it should frame its own curricula and not be 'tied to the wheels of London's chariot'. Mr. A. F. Joseph, Professor of Chemistry and Acting Registrar at the Ceylon Medical College, thought that provision might be made for holding the London examinations 'if it did not interfere with the more important business of the college'; but his evidence did not suggest that he knew exactly what he meant. Mr. M. U. Moore, Principal of Ananda College, wanted an affiliating university of Indian type and was utterly opposed to having a single institution for higher education 'A Government college being to some extent removed from, and independent of, competition, the principal and professors are generally satisfied with the perfunctory performance of their duties, and so long as they are able to keep up fairly well with other colleges, as far as success in examination goes, they do not greatly care'.³ The public were not likely to give support to a Government college. Mr. J. G. C. Mendis, Principal of Prince of Wales College, Moratuwa, thought that the present arrangement should continue so long as the London examinations were held. Dr. J. Pearson, Director of the Colombo Museum, objected to the conversion of Royal College into a hybrid institution, half secondary school and half university college and wanted a separate university college, incorporating the Medical College. It should award diplomas and not teach for London degrees. The Rev. G. G. Brown, Principal of Jaffna College, while agreeing with the proposal for a university college, wanted liberty for other bodies to take part in higher education. Mr. G. Shiva Rau, Principal of Jaffna Hindu College, wanted an affiliating university and, until this was possible, affiliation to the University of Madras. The Rev. W. M. P. Wilkes, Principal of the Jaffna Central College, wanted the Royal College to become the university. Mr. C. A. Jansz, Principal of St. John's College, Panadura, wanted the London examinations continued for at least twenty years. Mr. L. E. Blazé, Principal of Kingswood College, was entirely opposed to the creation of a university, which would confer valueless 'degrees': but Royal College should be strengthened and made the centre of higher education, teaching for London degrees. The Rev. P. T. Cash, Acting Principal of Wesley College, wanted a separate university college with a normal school attached to it. Warden

3. *S.P. XX* of 1912, p. 91.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

Stone of St. Thomas' College wanted Royal College strengthened to teach for London degrees, but considered that the Roman Catholics should conduct their own higher education. The Very Rev. Father Lytton, O.M.I., Rector of St. Joseph's College, was utterly opposed to any university institution under Government control, described the proposal as 'tyranny', and suggested that the real purpose of all the proposals for reform was 'to deprive us of the right of giving our children an English education'.

The committee had no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that a university college was desirable, on the following grounds :—

- (a) An inordinate amount of the time of the best teachers was devoted to preparing a few pupils for London examinations.
- (b) Those who could not send their children to Europe needed provision for continued education and 'part of such provision should take the form of a residential institution, with proper playing fields and scope for a healthy corporate life'.⁴
- (c) Medical students would benefit by having their pre-medical training in the university college. Overlapping could be prevented by spending the money voted for new laboratories at the Medical College on the enlargement of the new Science laboratories at Royal College.
- (d) Higher teaching could be provided for teachers in training at the Government Training College. 'Secondary teachers in Ceylon are too often only a few chapters ahead of their pupils'.⁵

The Committee suggested that the higher work at the Royal College should be done by the University College, while the remainder of the Royal College work should be done by the Government Training College School. The Government should provide facilities for hostels to be established.

In the light of later discussions and the tradition in England, it is remarkable that there was no discussion whatever of the propriety of putting the University College under Government control. It was simply assumed that it must be so, because of the absence of endowments.⁶ The general direction of affairs should be in the hands of a Council of sixteen persons (including the Principal). From the point of view of a modern university administrator, it was an astonishingly sketchy proposal, which discussed none of the fundamental issues and very few of the subordinate proposals. The fact is that none of the members of the Committee, nor the witnesses before the Committee, knew much of university education. Some of the defects of the Univer-

4. *S.P. XIX* of 1912, p. 5.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

sity College which came into existence in 1921 were due to this extraordinarily haphazard manner in which these proposals were developed.

It will be noted, too, that there was no real discussion about the suitability of the site. It was assumed that the university college ought to grow out of the Intermediate classes at Royal College. It was thought to be convenient to have it near the Government Training College. It was apparently never asked whether even the whole of the 'Education Triangle' would be large enough for a university. There was no suggestion that the university might not be located in Colombo at all. It is not surprising that fifteen years later the 'Battle of the Sites' developed.

In sending the views of the Executive Council to the Secretary of State, Sir Henry McCallum said⁷ that doubts had been expressed (1) whether the majority of parents who sent their sons to England for a university education would not continue to do so, and (2) whether, in that case, it was justifiable to spend a necessarily considerable sum of public money on providing a university college for the sons of those parents who, though fairly well to do, were not sufficiently wealthy to send their boys to an English university. It had been urged that there were no suitable careers for such boys. The Executive Council nevertheless agreed with the Macleod Committee. Some such institution was urgently desirable to obviate the dissipation of higher educational forces and to provide the necessary mental equipment of future generations of teachers.

The Executive Council had therefore agreed that a university college, to be called the Ceylon University College should be established; that in the first place it be organized to provide for higher education generally, courses in arts and science for teachers in training, and pre-medical training in pure science; that in the first instance no provision be made for law students; and that hostels be provided by the Government and leased to religious bodies. It was suggested that teaching be provided for London degrees, and detailed proposals for staff and expenditure were made. It was thought capital expenditure would be about Rs. 233,250 and annual expenditure about Rs. 186,840, of which Rs. 57,600 was already provided for existing institutions. The Governor regretted the practical disappearance of Royal College, which had had a long and honourable history.

The reply of the Secretary of State has not been published, and is not in the University files, but the following summary of the matters raised by the Board of Education has been given⁸:

'They were, briefly stated, the questions of its locality, its status, the scope of its studies, and its administrative head. The first question

7. *System of Education in Ceylon, S.P. XXVI* of 1913, p. 3.

8. *S.P. XIV* of 1916, p. 2.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

was as to its locality,⁹ that is to say, whether it should be situated in Colombo or at Kandy. The second was as to its status, that is to say, whether it should be a University College or a University, and in this connection there was a new material fact, viz., that the Royal Commission on University Education in London had recommended the abandonment of the colonial examinations for the London University Degree, a possibility already foreshadowed in Sir Henry McCallum's previous despatch. It became important to consider, therefore, whether an effort should be made to secure affiliation with some English University with a view to maintaining the standards of the examinations of the new institution, and whether, assuming that its status was to be that of a University College, arrangements ought not to be made for the recognition of its diploma for local purposes and for the purposes of further studies at the affiliating University.¹⁰ The third question was whether special provision ought not to be made for oriental studies. And the fourth, whether the Principal of the College should hold a Professorship, or whether he should confine himself to purely administrative duties'.

Sir Robert Chalmers, who had become Governor, replied to the Secretary of State in a despatch dated January 20, 1914.¹¹ The diplomas awarded by the university college could be converted into degrees when the university was created. On the question of site, the Governor said that he was driven to the conclusion that, despite advantages which might be gained by combining it with the proposed College of Tropical Agriculture at Peradeniya, the college should be located in Colombo. 'To place it at Kandy would have the effect of cutting off from it not only the medical students, but also those in training for the teaching profession, and of confining it almost entirely to the richer classes. Further, no suitable buildings exist in the neighbourhood of Kandy, whereas in Colombo the new buildings erected for the Royal College can be utilized, and the University College can thus be brought into existence with little delay and relatively small expense'. Sir Robert agreed that there should be adequate facilities for oriental studies, and he recommended the immediate appointment of a Professor of Sanskrit and Pali.

As regards affiliation, he preferred Oxford and asked that the necessary steps be taken. The staff would consist in the first instance of a Principal and eight professors, together with what are now called visiting lecturers paid by fee. He was in complete agreement with Sir Henry McCallum that the university college should, as far as possible, be a residential institution,

9. See the quotation in *S.P. V* of 1927, p. 4.

10. This was, of course, not affiliation in the Indian sense.

11. Despatches relating to the Establishment of a University College in Ceylon, *S.P. XVI* of 1915.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

and that, under proper safeguards, hostels should be built by the Government and leased to educational (? denominational) organizations. He was anxious to establish something corresponding to the Oxford tutorial system. Admission should be allowed to women, though as a non-residential basis at the outset. There was no reason to suppose that their presence would cause any difficulty of management.

Finally, Sir Robert said that 'if any section of the community seeks further provision beyond that afforded by the University College and decides to have an institution of its own, such an institution should, of course, be allowed on equal opportunity of affiliation to the university to which the Ceylon University College will be affiliated, and will have equally to satisfy the university that its staff, equipment and courses of study came up to the appointed standard'. In this connection he forwarded a letter, dated September 2, 1913, from the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church to the Officer administering the Government.¹² They could not consent to send Catholic boys to the proposed university college. 'It is a fundamental principle of the Catholic Church that the claim of a right, on the part of any persons or Government, to educate Catholic youth under systems of non-Catholic education, whether elementary, secondary, or higher, is incompatible with her own inherent right and duty, which she possesses by her Divine commission, of watching and guarding the education of Catholic youth of all classes. She cannot therefore give her assent to any form of monopoly in education which excludes her from the free exercise of this right'. Further, since the proposed university college would exclude religion from its education, it would not only 'present very grave dangers intrinsic to such an education, to the faith and morals of our Catholic youth, but also expose them to the evil of absolute indifferentism in religious matters'. They could not be satisfied with the offer of a special hostel for Catholics. The Catholics were entitled to support from Government in proportion to the share they contributed to public funds. They therefore claimed to have a Catholic College affiliated to the university college, together with such financial support, conditions and guarantees as would be required on the part of the Government to put the students of the affiliated Catholic College in a position in no way inferior to that of the students of the university college.

It will be seen that Sir Robert Chalmers was not very clear what it was he wanted. There was to be a university college in the Royal College buildings, in Colombo; but it was to be 'as far as possible a residential institution' and accordingly hostels should be built by the Government. He was thus proposing the remarkable innovation of a residential university college not far from the centre of a capital city, on a site which was quite inadequate even

12. *S.P. XVI* of 1915, p. 3.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

for academic buildings. This residential university college, erected on the most expensive site in the Island, was somehow to be cheaper to students than a residential university college erected in, say, Peradeniya because the latter, for some reason which he did not explain, would be accessible only to the 'richer classes'. It seems impossible to understand why the poor boy from Jaffna (for instance) should be excluded from a residential university college in Peradeniya because of expense, but not excluded from a residential university college in Cinnamon Gardens.

Sir Robert wanted the university college to be affiliated to his own University of Oxford, but it is not clear whether he knew what he meant. Indeed, there seems to have been much local confusion about 'affiliation'. In the Indian sense an affiliated college may present students for the degree examinations of the affiliating university. In the English sense, if the phrase is used at all, it means that students qualifying in the college may go into residence in the university as affiliated or senior students and graduate in two years from matriculation. Possibly Sir Robert Chalmers, who was a distinguished member of Oriel College, knew that Ceylon diplomates would have to keep six terms before they could graduate: but the Ceylonese, who understood the Indian system, thought that they could sit for Oxford examinations in Ceylon and obtain Oxford degrees.

Sir Robert went on to say, however, that any body of persons who wanted to establish a university college of their own, at their own expense, could do so and be affiliated to the same University. Presumably he intended that the University of Ceylon, when established, would be an affiliating university in the Indian sense, but he did not say so; and if he did so assume it is surprising that he should decide so important an issue on a subordinate proposal. The only point on which he was quite definite was that a Roman Catholic College, if established, would not receive financial support from the Government.

On March 30, 1915, the Secretary of State forwarded correspondence with the Board of Education. The University of Oxford had been approached, and Convocation had on October 27, 1914, passed a decree requiring the Hebdomadal Council to appoint a committee of not more than seven persons, being members of Convocation, for the purpose of co-operating with the Government of Ceylon in the establishment and maintenance of a college of university rank in Colombo in accordance with the following regulations:—

- (1) The majority of the Committee shall be members of the Hebdomadal Council.
- (2) The Committee may advise the Government of Ceylon on any matters connected with the curriculum and examinations of the said college which may be submitted to them by the Government.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

- (3) No expenses incurred by the Committee in the conduct or supervision of any examination on behalf of the Government shall be defrayed out of the funds of the University.
- (4) The Committee shall make a report of its proceedings every year to Convocation.
- (5) Unless their decree shall have been previously rescinded, the power of the Committee shall cease on October 1, 1920.¹³

In communicating this decision the Board ' understood that the University was willing to appoint the Committee but was not prepared until they have had some experience of the examinations conducted under the present scheme, to take into consideration the questions of the affiliation of the University College at Colombo to the University of Oxford '.

At the same time the Board sent an outline of a curriculum for the University College. This had been prepared by the Board of Education in consultation with Mr. Harward, Director of Public Instruction. It seems to the writer to be a very odd curriculum, such as one might expect to be made by people who had never taught undergraduates. However, it was to be discussed between the University College and the Oxford Committee and never was discussed.

Before Sir Robert Chalmers left the Island he summoned a conference at Queen's House. He emphasised that its status as a college was to be regarded as a preliminary status only, and the ultimate aim was to develop it into a degree-granting university. It was to comprise, as an integral part of itself, hostels under wardens who would guide and mould their students' characters out of college hours. Any responsible religious body would be qualified to manage a hostel, and such a hostel should contain a chapel. These hostels would be Government buildings, leased out at a low rental to the organizations responsible. The proposal to take over the Royal College buildings had been abandoned and he asked the conference to consider, as the only practicable scheme, the land to the north of Royal College. Two sub-committees were appointed. One on hostels agreed that four hostels, each holding fifty students, should be built facing Thurstan Road. The sub-committee on buildings worked out details for buildings, including laboratories.

The war intervening, nothing much was done, and in any case the correspondence is not in the University files. It seems, though, that Sir Robert Chalmers' decision was reversed. New buildings were erected for Royal College in Racecourse Avenue and it was decided to transfer the old buildings to the University College. ' Regina Walauwa ' in Thurstan Road, now called College House, was purchased, though later when Mr. Marrs asked how much

13. Ibid., p. 5.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

it cost he could not find out. The initiative, seems to have come from Mr. E. B. Denham, Director of Education, who on March 17, 1920, summoned a conference of principals of schools. It was then agreed that a minimum age of eighteen be fixed, that the intermediate classes in the schools be dropped, and that the course for the College diploma should be one of three years. A committee on courses was appointed. Its recommendations were based on the assumption that many of the students would want to take London examinations in addition to or in substitution for the diploma examinations.

The Oxford Committee had been re-established and had had two meetings in 1919, when Mr. Denham was present. The Committee would help in selecting professors, of whom five were to come from England—(a) English Language and Literature, (b) Classics and Philosophy, (c) Modern History and Economics, (d) Physics and (e) Chemistry. One, in Mathematics, was to be obtained locally or from India. Men between twenty-five and thirty, with Oxford or Cambridge Honours degrees, should be appointed. Lecturers in the various subjects should be appointed locally. A Principal was not recommended at the opening of the College, but one of the lecturers should act as Registrar and there should be a College Council presided over by the Director of Education.

Mr. Denham did not at present propose to recommend the building of hostels, though he considered that if the youth of Ceylon was to derive the full benefit from a university training, the University College should be residential and full encouragement should be given to the different religious bodies to provide hostels for their students. He thought that 'Regina Walauwa' would make an admirable hostel when it was no longer needed for teaching purposes.

The University College was opened in College House in January, 1921. Classes in Arts were held in that building, while the Science work was conducted in the Government Technical Schools, pending the completion of the Science Block. That Block was in fact opened by the Governor on October 1, 1921.

II. The Colombo Plan

It will be seen that the Royal College site in Thurstan Road, Colombo, was selected for the site of the University College without any real consideration of its suitability. It was a proposal which did not involve much expense. The Royal College building—now the Arts Block—could be used for lecture rooms. The funds intended for a Biology Block at the Ceylon Medical College could be diverted to the erection of a Science Block. The whole area, including playing fields, was 18½ acres, but this figure was not mentioned until the Battle of Sites began. In the early documents the only suggestion of a possible

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

alternative site was contained in the views of the Board of Education (London), obtained in 1913 as a result of a despatch from Sir Henry McCallum¹⁴ recommending the adoption of the proposals of the Macleod Committee :

' If the Ceylon Government were to decide on a further consideration of the whole matter that it was desirable to give a larger place in the new institution to the study of oriental languages, literature, and history, the decision to locate the College in the buildings of the Royal College, Colombo, would very possibly need revision. It seems likely that a University College intended to appeal to those interested in Eastern learning would be more suitably located in such a place as Kandy than Colombo, and if this were done there would be strong arguments for giving the higher teaching in other art subjects and in science in a place which is probably more healthy and more suited to the student's life and less expensive than residence in Colombo can be. No doubt such a solution would entail a division of the work of the University College between Kandy on the one hand and Colombo on the other hand, for it would not be possible for the clinical instruction of medical students or for the professional part of the lawyers' education to be given elsewhere than in Colombo. But after all the disadvantages entailed by such an arrangement would not exceed those which at present exist in the case of Oxford and Cambridge men who are intending to become doctors or lawyers, for the clinical part of the medical course in both these English Universities is taken in London, and the work in chambers or in a solicitor's office for those studying law is also as a rule done in London. It would no doubt be preferable for the work of the new College to be concentrated if possible at all its stages in one place, but the question is one of balance of advantages and disadvantages, which can only be made if a decision upon the fundamental question of the scope of the College has been determined '.

It was said in the course of the Battle of the Sites that this question was raised ' at the instance of some gentlemen in Ceylon ',¹⁵ but no other evidence of this assertion is known to the present writer. In any case the new Governor, Sir Robert Chalmers, expressed decided views.¹⁶ ' Despite advantages which might be gained by combining the institutions of the proposed College of Tropical Agriculture at Peradeniya, the College should be located in Colombo. To place it at Kandy would have the effect of cutting off from it not only the medical students but also those in training for the teaching profession and of confining it almost entirely to the richer classes. Further, no suitable buildings exist in the neighbourhood of Kandy, whereas in Colombo the new build-

14. Quoted *S.P. V* of 1927, p. 4.

15. *The University Controversy*, by E. V., undated, but apparently written in 1926.

16. *S.P. XVI* of 1915, p. 1.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

ings erected for the Royal College can be utilized and a University College can be brought into existence with little delay and relatively little expense'.

He did not meet the argument that removal to Kandy would assist in the development of oriental learning. Nor is it easy to see how the argument could be sustained. The temples in and near Kandy might perhaps provide some inspiration, and even a little manuscript literature, but the libraries of the Royal Asiatic Society and the Colombo Museum would have been even more useful, not only for oriental learning but for occidental learning, too. The case for Peradeniya might have been put on much stronger grounds. The real case for Colombo was that the Faculty of Medicine could not easily be moved, though later experience has shown that it must in any case be in large measure distinct unless a new University Hospital is built—and such a hospital would be more useful in Peradeniya than in Cinnamon Gardens. It will be noted, too, that while the Board of Education thought that Kandy would be less expensive for students, the Governor thought that a College there would be 'confined almost entirely to the richer classes'. The Governor's assertion can be justified only if it be assumed that in Colombo the College would not be wholly residential and that full fees would have to be paid. In that case Colombo would be cheaper for Colombo students and more expensive for out-station students. The Governor nevertheless said that the College 'should, as far as possible, be a residential institution'.¹⁷

The truth is, probably, that Sir Robert Chalmers did not welcome the idea of finding the money for an entirely new set of buildings. He thought that the Royal College buildings could be used and so save a great deal of expense. At a later stage he appears to have given up the idea of using those buildings. At the conference at Queen's House in November, 1915¹⁸ he said that the proposal to take over and adapt the Royal College buildings had been abandoned and asked the conference to consider 'as the only practicable scheme' the utilization of the land to the north of Royal College, bounded by Serpentine Road (now Reid Avenue), Racecourse Avenue and Thurstan Road.

In the end this, 'the only practicable scheme', was itself abandoned. When the end of the war enabled action to be taken the new Director of Education, Mr. E. B. Denham, persuaded the Government to purchase 'Regina Walauwa', which was renamed 'College House', in Thurstan Road and to agree to the transfer of the Royal College buildings. A new Royal College was built on the Racecourse Avenue site, where it flourishes to this day.

It will be seen that all this discussion proceeded without any real consideration of the extent of land required for a university. Sir Edward

17. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

18. *S.P. XIV* of 1916, p. 2.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

Denham's scheme resulted in the University College being established on 18½ acres of land, including playing fields, and one bungalow. This was the position when Mr. Robert Marrs, who had had seven years university experience in India, assumed duties as Principal in October, 1921. It appears clearly from the subsequent discussions that he read more into the published documents than could be found in them after the controversy developed. He believed that the Government had decided to establish a unitary university in Thurstan Road. It is, however, plain that Sir Henry McCallum had contemplated the possibility of an affiliating university and that Sir Robert Chalmers had completely neglected to ask himself where the University was to be placed and how much land it required. In fact, when Mr. Marrs began to look into the problem in 1923 he found that the 18½ acres in Thurstan Road were insufficient. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary in February, 1923¹⁹ he said that from the decision of the Government to build what is now the Science Block and to hand over what is now the Arts Block, he assumed that 'Government had definitely resolved that the university should be situated in Colombo on and around the site of the present University College . . . Though sections of public opinion still regard it as an open question, the site of the University appears by these signs to be a *chose jugée*'. He added that he was personally of opinion that the University should be situated in Colombo, but he thought it necessary to make sure that the site chosen was large enough to contain all that was required. It seemed to him that all the available land in the 'educational triangle' would have to be appropriated, and also the vacant land between Racecourse Avenue and Guildford Crescent. This arrangement would be unsatisfactory for Royal College and the question whether the new Royal College (i.e. the present Royal College) ought not to be appropriated for University purposes ought to be discussed.

After a conference with the Principals of the two Colleges, Sir Cecil Clementi, Colonial Secretary, minuted that though probably no progress could be made unless a private benefactor appeared, the best solution would probably be to remove the Royal College to the site of the Lunatic Asylum in Buller's Road (which was to be moved to Angoda) and to hand over the new Royal College buildings (in Racecourse Avenue) to the University. After some difference of opinion, the University College Council agreed in August, 1923. At a conference in the following month, attended by the Colonial Secretary, the Director of Education, the Principal of the University College, the Principal of Royal College, and the Director of Public Works, it was however agreed that the Lunatic Asylum site should be allocated to the university, and Mr. Marrs undertook to work out the minimum needs for university buildings

19. See *Report of the University Site Committee, S.P. V of 1927*, which has been checked against *S.P. IX of 1927* and the files.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

on that site. Then in October, 1923 Mr. W. J. Thornhill, of the Public Works Department, in a conference with Mr. Marrs, suggested a third possibility, the taking over of the land south of Buller's Road, for which flood protection works were in progress and from which the Infectious Diseases Hospital was being removed.

Mr. Marrs brought the site question before the University College Council on November 12, 1923. Three possibilities were under consideration :—

- (a) The expansion of the College in the educational triangle, taking in Royal College ;
- (b) The taking over of the Lunatic Asylum, a site of 13 acres, with additional land, making in all 52 acres ;
- (c) The site of the Infectious Diseases Hospital south of Buller's Road, the whole area being 95 acres.

The Council appointed a sub-committee consisting of Mr. Marrs, Sir Marcus Fernando, Mr. James Peiris, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam and Dr. Rutherford, and when the sub-committee reported on November 28 the Council agreed emphatically that the Buller's Road site of 95 acres should be selected. In informing the Colonial Secretary Mr. Marrs pointed out that the change of opinion since August was due to the fact that the intention of the Government to move the Infectious Diseases Hospital, which occupied part of the site, was not known to the Council at the earlier meeting. In February, 1924 Mr. Marrs informed the Council that there was a possibility of getting some of the surplus balances of the Island for erecting buildings. The Council promptly reaffirmed its decision in favour of Buller's Road. Sir Cecil Clementi moved in the Legislative Council accordingly on March 20, 1924, and Rs. 3,000,000 were voted to what came to be known as the University Building and Equipment Fund.

Meanwhile Mr. Marrs had indicated, in a letter dated 1st March, 1924, what the requirements of the University would be. The reader will find them grossly inadequate, but that is because he has some knowledge of the present size of the University. A Principal who had suggested in 1924 that by 1950 the University would have over 2,000 students, would have been regarded as a visionary if not a fool. The main requirements were :

Convocation Hall for 800 persons.

Library for 60,000 volumes.

Arts Block for 300 to 500 students (including a lecture theatre for 150 students and two smaller theatres for 100 students each).

Science Blocks (apparently for about 250 or 300 students—the size was specified but not the numbers, quite correctly).

THE FOUNDATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON

Hostels—three men's hostels for 60 students each.

Cricket ground with cinders track for Athletics, two football grounds and eight tennis-courts.

Quarters for 30 servants.

Space was to be left for a women's hostel for 20 students and a space of two acres for additional laboratories.

It was also suggested that several of the Government bungalows in the neighbourhood might be allocated to members of the staff, but it was not suggested that housing be provided for the whole staff.

After discussion with the architect on October 24, 1924, in which evidently something was said about the heavy cost of these proposals, Mr. Marrs suggested certain modifications which involved reducing the Convocation Hall so as to seat only 600, the omission of the lecture theatre for 150 students, and the deletion of the women's hostel.

Meanwhile the Managing Committee of the Colombo Museum had suggested the transfer of the Museum to the administration of the University, and the Colonial Secretary summoned a meeting of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, the University College Council, and the Managing Committee of the Museum. When it met on January 28, 1925, the conference had a full report on the proposed plans (evidently based on the letter of 1st March, 1924 not that of October 24) showing a cost of Rs. 4,500,000. It was assumed that the number of students would be between 500 and 600 (including Law and Medicine) and that if residential accommodation was provided for two years for all persons not residing with parents or guardians hostels for 200 would have to be provided. The Conference agreed that—

- (1) The Building and Equipment Fund need not be limited to Rs. 3,000,000 but, if necessary, Rs. 4,500,000 or even more, should be spent.
- (2) Competitive designs should be called for.
- (3) The Public Works Department should construct.
- (4) At the outset there should be hostel accommodation for 180 students under the direct control of the University.
- (5) The Government should give facilities to denominational bodies to erect hostels in the neighbourhood, with assistance from public funds.
- (6) Colombo Observatory should be transferred to the University.
- (7) Colombo Museum should be transferred to the University.

The Government accepted these proposals and instructed Mr. Marrs to refer the plan to the College Council in order that the exact sum of money

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

required might be worked out. Mr. Marrs reported to the Colonial Secretary in a letter which was published as *Sessional Paper X* of 1925. The proposals made by Mr. Marrs in October, 1924 were approved by the Council and certain alterations made. Excluding the cost of bungalows and stone-facing, which had been included in the estimate of Rs. 4,500,000, the estimate had been reduced to Rs. 3,714,650. But meanwhile building costs had risen by at least 10 per cent., and accordingly the new estimate was Rs. 4,086,115. Additional funds, would be needed for Medicine, Agriculture and Engineering. The Council requested the allocation of an additional Rs. 1,500,000. When this proposal was referred to the Legislative Council, that Council agreed to vote Rs. 1,500,000 as and when required.

It should be added that while these discussions about the site were proceeding from 1923 to 1925, other aspects of the University project had been carefully worked out by Mr. Marrs and the College Council. A scheme of studies had been prepared by a large and representative Academic Committee and Boards of Studies had been set up. Since the Boards had not reported, the scheme had not been approved by the College Council when Mr. Marrs went on leave in 1926. The Council had also appointed a Constitution Committee to settle the University Constitution. This had met twice and had authorised Mr. Marrs to prepare a draft. He had in fact done so, basing his scheme on the recommendations of the Sadler Commission for Dacca and Lucknow, and he had the draft ready for discussion with the Oxford Committee when he went on leave.

(To be continued).