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### UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

The University of Ceylon was established on the 1st July, 1942, by the fusion of the Ceylon Medical College (founded 1870) and the Ceylon University College (founded 1921). It has at present Faculties of Oriental Studies, Arts, Science and Medicine. Its seat is temporarily in Colombo, but it will be moved to Peradeniya, near Kandy, as soon as its new buildings are ready for occupation. The University has taken over from the Government of Ceylon the publication of the Ceylon Journal of Science, which will be developed as its chief means of contact with Scientists elsewhere. The University of Ceylon Review has been founded in order to make similar contact with scholars in literary subjects, to provide a medium of publication for the research in those subjects conducted in the University, and to provide a learned review for Ceylon. The Review is now published four times a year, in January, April, July and October. The Annual Subscription is Rs. 5, and a single copy Rs. 2.50.

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# University of Ceylon Review

Vol. VI No. 1

January, 1948

## *The Qualities Required of Public Servants*<sup>1</sup>

I think I should begin this Address to you with a confession. I have hitherto had the belief that a Convocation Address at a University must be delivered by one who has achieved a high reputation for scholarship. I confess that, when the Vice-Chancellor pressed his invitation on me to address you today, I was much perturbed. As you know, it has taken me a much longer time to reach this platform than those of you who have just graduated. Yet I felt I ought not to refuse the Vice-Chancellor's invitation to speak to you at this, your fifth General Convocation, for I believe that I may speak with some experience but much sincerity on a theme that seems to need expression on public occasions like this.

I wish, however, in the first place to congratulate the University on its progress. Its popularity is witnessed by its numbers. In 1942 it had 900 students; today it has 1,550, and I am told that 1,500 students are trying to secure admission through this year's Entrance Examination. That your academic standards are being maintained I have no doubt whatever. It is obvious that, if standards are equal, an education which is adapted to local conditions is better than one which is not. It is said that it is a common failing with us Ceylonese that we do not appreciate local products. We tend to think that the imported article must necessarily be better. And it says much for the quality of our University that its graduates can more than hold their own with others in almost every sphere of our public life.

This brings me to my subject, the qualities required of graduates who wish to enter the public service. I have not been a Minister for sixteen years without forming views about the qualities of public servants, and perhaps you will allow me to express some of them. I do not think it is out of place to state here that I consider that we have been very fortunate in having a body of public servants whose standards of efficiency and integrity and devotion to the general public interest are no whit inferior to similar standards elsewhere in the world. But this does not mean that there is no room for improvement, or that we need not dispassionately appraise their qualities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Convocation Address, delivered on 17th October, 1947, at King George's Hall, University of Ceylon, Colombo.

As you know, there are certain cases in which high technical qualifications are required. This applies especially to lawyers, doctors, dental surgeons, engineers, scientists, and veterinary surgeons. There are, however, a good many things that cannot be learned from books. Nobody in this Hall would allow himself to be operated on by a surgeon whose only qualification was that he had obtained a First Class in the Final Examination. To academic knowledge must be added experience and certain personal qualities which I will mention presently. In other cases, notably the Civil Service, we ask for no technical knowledge at all but expect a high academic standard which is evidence of ability and power of concentration. But once the graduate enters the service we forget what sort of degree he has and judge him by what he does. Finally, there are many cases where we require only the minimum academic qualification and are more concerned with other qualifications. Candidates for such posts often think that they should be selected according to their degrees, a First Class being preferred to a Second Class and a Second Class to a Pass. This ignores the fact that academic qualifications are for this purpose far less important than other qualifications.

One qualification which an officer must possess is interest in his job. He is of no great use to the community if he merely carries through the routine and escapes as soon as possible to his bridge or tennis. We have officials of that type, the sort of official who regards the public service as a means for getting a salary, a dowry and a pension of sufficient amount to enable him to keep a wife and a car, educate his children in the best schools, maintain a large house, join a club, and generally spend his leisure in comfort. The leisure of such a man provides his real life. His job merely provides the means for enjoying his leisure. There are, on the other hand, officials whose life is in the job and whose leisure is a means for keeping them fit for the job. They do this work with enthusiasm even when it consists largely of routine. They do everything possible to get to know their job better, either by reading about it or by going into the field and learning about it. They develop ideas which they put into practice. They try experiments. And very soon, you will find, they are noted for early promotion.

No employer is satisfied with the sort of employee who merely does with bare efficiency what he is told to do but no more. The Government, especially a democratic Government elected from and by the people, is entitled to ask for energy and enthusiasm. It is often said that the Government ought to be the model employer and the statement can perhaps be justified. But in that case the Government servant must be the model employee. Patriotic sentiment alone should require a high sense of duty. To live for the sake of one's leisure is a poor sort of life. It is even poorer when the leisure is used for purely selfish ends. A democratic Government is entitled at all times

to ask for the willing service of its citizens. The Government servant ought to set the standard in patriotic zeal. You will in fact find that our best officials have very little leisure. When their offices are closed they are reading papers at home, or learning more of the technical aspects of the service in which they are engaged, or serving on committees, or going out among the people, or otherwise helping the advancement of the country.

It has often come to my notice that graduates simultaneously apply for posts in several departments of Government. They apparently had no very strong preference because, after all, these were all Government jobs. Other things being equal they seemed to prefer the one which kept them in Colombo. They had not thought which job was the more interesting, or the more useful to the community. In fact very often they knew nothing about the job except the title. They had not even taken the trouble to find out what they would have to do if they were appointed. You will no doubt appreciate that from the point of view of Government this was the wrong sort of approach. It is a justifiable presumption that a graduate who sought a post because of its salary and prospects alone and who was not sufficiently interested to find out what sort of post it was would probably display the same lackadaisical attitude if he were appointed.

This presumption can of course be rebutted. And a person who has read the appropriate Ordinance is not necessarily the sort of officer we want. He must have character and personality. I do not know whether the educationists consider that character is innate or inherited. I should myself conclude from observation that in large measure it is acquired by education. Certainly what we seek to ascertain is whether the candidates have displayed character in their schools and at the University. High academic qualifications are in themselves some evidence, for we know that such qualifications are not obtained without concentration and consistent application. But the student who shuts himself up with his books is unlikely to be of much use to us, except perhaps in the Archives. Practically every job in the Government service requires energy and initiative, leadership, ability to work with superiors and control subordinates, and other qualities that no examination can test. It is useful to know which candidates play games. What is important is not that a candidate has run the hundred yards in ten seconds or hit a century in the Royal-Thomian match, but the self-discipline which must arise from playing games, especially team-games. Success in organising societies is another useful quality. I do too much talking myself to have much faith in talkers. But administration is a very difficult art and those who have acquired some experience of it in University committees are likely to be useful afterwards.



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There is one aspect of games which I would like to mention specially. An official who goes down with influenza every time the wind blows is not of much use to the Government. Nor must he have been so coddled by his family that he dare not go into the jungle in case he meets a mosquito. The townbred student suffers in any event under a serious handicap; it is made more serious if he has never been at the bottom of a disorganised scrum or torn out the last effort in the three miles or shown by some other means that he is physically fit. In fact, I have been distressed by the poor physique of many of our graduates. Few of them seem to realise that physical fitness is one of the necessities. The Vice-Chancellor tells me that a system of medical examination is being organized, but I think you need more than that. Muscle and brawn are no substitute for intelligence, but there is no need to ignore the claims of physical education. I hope that when you go to Peradeniya, if not before, something more will be done to encourage physical fitness.

I wish also to say a few words to the women graduates. There are many avenues of employment in the public services of this Island where the special qualities that we associate with the sex, gentleness and tenderness, can be made use of to the best advantage of the community. The benefit of the high general education that you receive at this University can never be altogether lost, whether you decide on home-making or on a vocational career. In both cases that education can be applied to purpose. For instance, I suggest that the manner in which you react to the transfer to a remote outstation of your husband or other close male relation may be regarded as a test of the education you have received. The best men are often required to serve in the most backward areas, for it is these areas that most need to be developed. It is surely your patriotic duty to encourage and sustain the officers engaged in this important task rather than embarrass them and the authorities by sighing aloud for a return to the amenities of civilization.

Indeed to all graduates, men and women alike, I should like to emphasize the importance of a knowledge of the people of the Island. One of the most important features of the University is that it knows no barriers of race, religion or caste. In this respect it has given a lead to the rest of the country which, I hope, the rest will follow. Even so, you must remember that most graduates come from the English-educated classes in a few Provinces—the Western, the Southern, the Central and the Northern. Our educational system has not yet progressed so far that the University can skim the cream of intellect from every part of the country. In fact most graduates come from the schools in Colombo, Kandy, Galle and Jafna. Those are important towns, but they contain only a small section of the people. Most of the problems of

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Government relate to the people of the villages and the estates. They have needs and aspirations which are remote from those of the town-dwellers and which town-bred students will not understand unless they make an effort to understand. The first steps towards understanding is interest. If you go into the villages as a condescending public servant you will never learn anything. You must be able to talk to the villagers in their own language, and this means not merely that you must learn colloquial Sinhalese or Tamil—or better still both of them—but the set of ideas which the villager possesses. You may have obtained a First Class Honours Degree in Sinhalese, and yet know nothing whatever of village lore about paddy; and until you do you will be of little use in the Departments of Agriculture, Irrigation, Land Settlement, Co-operatives, Agricultural Marketing, and so on—in fact all the Departments in the Ministries of Agriculture and Food.

There is in fact a gulf between the English-educated classes and the mass of the people that the Government servant must attempt to bridge before his work can have any success. Moreover, the close relationship between Ministers and officials implied in the Cabinet system cannot be attained if the official does not understand why the Ministers and other Members of Parliament are so insistent on the needs of the people of the countryside. I do not for one moment deny the importance of the major economic problems of the country; but it has to be remembered that our objective is not to raise the standard of living in Cinnamon Gardens but to secure as high a standard of life as we can for the great mass of the people who are barely at subsistence level. The great majority of our problems in relation to production, health, education, social services, and so on, are village problems and the segregation of the intelligentsia in the towns is a great misfortune. It will be a little better, but only a little better, to be segregated in Peradeniya. I know that most of the time of University students must be devoted to the acquisition of knowledge from books; but there is also a knowledge to be acquired in the country, a knowledge not only of people and ways of life but also of cultivation, plants, insects, birds and animals. I wish it were possible to compel every student to spend a year in a village as a villager. Since it is not, I suggest that you should spend some part of your vacations in tramping through the jungles or cycling through the villages. Some of you go on picnics to Anuradhapura, Sigiriya and some of the historic shrines. I do not want to discourage you from obtaining inspiration from our ancient glories; but you will learn little of the North Central Province by going to and from Anuradhapura in a bus. If you join the public service you may have to spend days in jungle villages camping out and never talking to people who can speak English. In making appointments, therefore, we have to ascertain which are the candidates suited to this kind of life. The town-dweller whose greatest

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adventure is to drive to Nuwara Eliya is fitted for few of the posts in the public service.

What is wanted is an education in the broadest sense, an education which has given not only intellectual qualities of a high order but also integrity, physical fitness, personality, and a knowledge of the country, its people and its problems. Local knowledge cannot be acquired by residence at an English University, or by working for an external degree of an English University. It may, however, be obtained through the University of Ceylon. I am glad to find that the University is branching out into new fields where practical experience is required—Agriculture, Veterinary Science and Engineering. As Minister for Agriculture and Lands under the Donoughmore Constitution I did my best to help. I shall be no less ready to help, now that the broader responsibilities of Prime Minister have fallen to my lot.

The future of the country lies not with the birds of passage who have been elected to Parliament but with the young men and women of the country of whom you are a highly selected example. For the greater part of two years you have had free university education at the public expense and even before then your education was heavily subsidised. Whether you enter the public service or not it is your duty to devote your talents to the public benefit. In whatever career you choose I wish you success, and trust you will not be found wanting.

D. S. SENANAYAKE