

THE REPLY OF MAKERERE

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THE green hill of Makerere just outside Kampala, Uganda's largest town, has been a scene of higher education ever since in the early nineteen twenties the Uganda government started courses in post-school training for Africans. There were trade courses, long since removed to a separate institution; there were also medical and veterinary courses, a course for intending teachers, and courses in general education which were the beginnings from which the Makerere of to-day was to grow.

Even in those early days there were men who foresaw that one day Makerere would become a university institution for all the East African countries. In 1931 Dr. Julian Huxley boldly prophesied in his "Africa View" that this might be accomplished in fifty years. In fact it took two university commissions from England only eighteen years to accomplish this goal, and in 1949 Makerere College attained university status through admission into Special Relation with the University of London and full membership of the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth. Already in the nineteen thirties students were coming from Kenya, Tanganyika and Zanzibar as well as from Uganda, and the College had acquired its own autonomous governing Council and Academic Board. Above all, academic standards had been substantially raised and the stage was set.

Since admission to the university world as the University College of East Africa, the College has made strides. The East African governments at once quadrupled their previous contributions towards recurrent expenditure (this year running at some £650,000). Through the Colonial Development and Welfare Act the British Government immediately awarded us one million pounds towards a large-scale building programme, to which they have recently added a further million pounds, and Dr. J. T. Williamson of Tanganyika presented us with our new Physics building. New halls of residence for men and women, new laboratories, new buildings for Arts and Science, for Medicine, Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Education and the School of Fine Arts have been occupied, and a spacious university Library has just been opened by Her Majesty the Queen Mother.

Instead of the two hundred students and thirty members of staff in 1949, we are about to open our new session with 900 undergraduates and a full-time teaching and research staff of 140. By 1960 we may have some 1000 students.

Our aim is to provide qualified students with university conditions and standards in East Africa that compare worthily with those in Britain. Academically, students in our Faculties of Arts and Science work for the B.A. (both Honours and General), the B.Sc. Econ., the B.Sc., and the B.Sc. Agric. of the University of London. In Medicine our own College Licentiatehip has now attained the recognition of the General Medical Council and is therefore a registrable qualification in the United Kingdom. At the same time, under the scheme of Special Relation with the University of London, we are able to take part as recognized examiners in introducing elements in our syllabuses which are of particular relevance to the interests of East Africa—a stimulus to the research work in which our staff is actively engaged. Needless to say an immense amount lies ahead of us in widening the scope of our courses and in research. If we succeed in laying a true foundation in standards in this generation, we may confidently look forward to the university of 2,000 students which we ultimately visualize on Makerere hill, and to the responsibilities of awarding our own degrees.

Makerere was founded and grew up to serve the needs of Africans, and it was the performance and promise of its African students that helped to give the College its place among the university institutions of the Commonwealth. As befits any university in the Western tradition, our doors are now open to all races without restriction or quota. In America "white" colleges have welcomed in Negroes; at Makerere, on the other hand, Africans have welcomed Europeans and Asians. Of the 900 students in residence this coming session, we shall have 8 Europeans and some 60 Asians and Goans as well as Arabs from Zanzibar and representatives of some 60 different African peoples sharing a common university life in common halls of residence. How far or how fast this widening of our society will go it is impossible at this stage to foresee; we can only claim that a start has been made and our society is the richer for it. From the beginning our African students warmly welcomed this policy. I believe that they rightly saw that their College could not be regarded as a university in the full sense if it excluded people on account of race, and they welcomed

the stimulus of a society drawn from more varied backgrounds and containing more varied viewpoints and experience. So much for the younger generation. A few of their elders, both African and European, were a little worried by the proposal, wondering whether it might lead to the swamping out of Africans by Asians and Europeans, who could equally pay for themselves overseas. These initial fears—now quite forgotten—were to some extent allayed by the confidence of the students themselves, especially when attention was drawn to the Cambridge School Certificate results, which showed that the African Secondary Schools were more than holding their own with the Asian and European schools. We have never set out on a big campaign to urge the other races to come. Those that have joined us have done so both at under-graduate and post-graduate levels for the sound reason that we provided what they needed—a good enough reason to believe that others will follow.

The residential pattern of life here is already established—a pattern broadly modelled on that of a British residential university. There can and should be no question of separate Halls of Residence for separate races here, whether or not this would tend to increase the number of our non-African students. Nor indeed has the issue ever been publicly raised or become an issue of controversy in East Africa. The newly established Royal Technical College in Nairobi, for instance, built its hostels on the “open” principle from the start.

Our experience of the common life is still, of course, limited and short, but I believe it has been a satisfactory one both for the majority and the minorities. On the side of human relationships—the main factor—the evidence is altogether happy. In almost every case we have been fortunate in our first European and Asian students; they have neither pushed themselves forward nor held themselves back. Nor have African students treated them as special cases.

In introducing Asians and Europeans to our already varied African student body, the only real problem we have met with has been the question of diet. There are two sides to the problem. Firstly, though you may have (as we have found) one or two Europeans prepared to experiment with a more African-based diet for the sake of the adventure and the common cause, you cannot disturb your digestion for your ideals. Secondly, African students have a sensitiveness to community, and, in the same way as they want Europeans and Asians to share

in the common life of the Halls, they want to avoid separate diets with the danger of separate tables in the dining halls. The solution of a cafeteria system did not commend itself to any of us, since at any rate dinner was already established as a formal meal taken in academic dress, beginning with a grace and presided over by the Warden and members of the High Table—one of those English collegiate practices that our students appreciate. The solution to which we have therefore moved in stages and which is now in full operation is a common diet for all (with alternatives for vegetarians only) based on a simple English diet and style of cooking. To many Africans this has meant a sacrifice, especially in bulk, of what they were used to (though even then it was impossible to cater for the immense variety of sixty tribal diets), but they willingly agreed and are finding a taste for the more balanced food, cooked in a greater variety of ways. I would not yet claim universal satisfaction—what College in Africa or England ever can?—but I am sure that this is the only possible and right solution.

I do not believe any other real problem exists. We have showers, not baths, except in our one women's Hall. One day we may add some hot baths—perhaps to the disgust of our African students who, like Americans, believe that the European bath habit is unhygienic. They will not convert me, nor my fellow Europeans, though after all they may be right.

What of the rest of our life outside the lecture room, the library and the laboratories? It is very much like that of an English college. There are voluntary societies and clubs in plenty, athletic, social, cultural and political; there are dances; there are chapels, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, and a Mosque; there is talk in students' rooms until the early hours and there is talk and meals with tutors in their homes. I should say we still lack enough hilarity, and I am awaiting anxiously for the College's leg to be pulled. I hope and believe, however, that we are growing in something of the maturity that comes from university standards and a university way of life, and the fact that we passed through recent political tensions in Kenya and Uganda quite unruffled and undisturbed can give us good hope for the future.