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THE GREAT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENT

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ON Sunday the 5th of March this year I was taken to see the new cathedral at Coventry; the day before, at my own request, I had visited the old cathedral at Ely. Parts of Coventry Cathedral horrified me, as I had anticipated; the so-called Chapel of Unity is the least ecumenical and, indeed, the least aesthetically pleasing building it has ever been my misfortune to set eyes on. But other parts impressed me. The five stained glass windows down either side are very striking: the first one green for spring and youth; the second red for summer and maturity; the third yellow for autumn and old age; the fourth black for death; and the fifth white for hope and resurrection. But what impressed me most of all was how cleverly the new cathedral had been made to rise from the carefully-preserved ruins of the old.

This visit to Coventry Cathedral is symptomatic of my whole six-week tour to the Universities of Keele, York and Leicester: and this is why I have described it in some detail. First, I had to be *taken* to see the new, whereas my own natural preference was for the old and well-established. Many of the items on the programmes arranged for me were not things I would have gone to of my own volition – a concert by the Amadeus String Quartet or a lecture by an American Historian on Unitarianism in Early Victorian England. And, though I cannot honestly say I enjoyed every item, it is my considered opinion that it did me a lot of good to have my gaze directed to new horizons; and I should like to take this opportunity of thanking the British Council, who made the visit possible under their Commonwealth Universities Interchange Scheme, and of course, the three universities that entertained me.

The second analogy I wish to draw is that, just as in Coventry Cathedral the old has given place to something very new and very different, so the idea of a University in the Britain of the 1960's is very different from our concept of a university in the years astride the War, although it has undoubtedly derived from it. And, while much of what I saw in the new universities horrified me just as much as I had expected it would, some of the experiments I saw in action interested me deeply and impressed me favourably.

I think I was singularly fortunate in the three universities I visited: the more so because you go where you are invited rather than to the places which are likely to be most useful to you. There could hardly be three universities more different from one another than Keele, York and Leicester. Leicester is the largest and oldest. It was a university college prewar, but has grown with tremendous rapidity since 1950, and now numbers 2300 students: the English Department has a staff of twelve. Since the site is in the city, very little further physical expansion is likely and it is impossible for the students to live *in* the university: most of them live in adapted halls and manor-houses three or four miles out of Leicester, with unmarried staff doing wardens' and supervisors' duties in the halls in exchange for free board and lodging. Gowns and high tables persist, and the life of Leicester – and, indeed, the degree-structure and the teaching-methods – are by far the most traditional of the three. There is no town-and-gown relationship. Leicester is reputedly the second richest city in Europe; there has never been any large-scale unemployment, even during the Great Depression, and I found the civic atmosphere to be one of complacent and uninvolved materialism.

Keele has no town-and-gown relationship either, but for a very different reason: there is no town. The university campus occupies a country estate in North Staffordshire, centred upon Keele Hall, a fine old building which, as you might imagine, has been taken over by the university administration. Not only the students but even the married staff live on the campus, and this self-contained life has, naturally, had a very marked effect on the outlook of all concerned. There is always a tremendous amount going on within easy reach; on one evening, for example, I had a choice between Father Borelli, of *scugnizzi* fame, Christopher Mayhew, ex-Minister of the Crown, and a debate proclaiming that 'this House prefers Snobs to Yobs.'

Keele regards itself, and strangely enough is regarded by the other new universities, as occupying a special and privileged position. It was founded just after the war by the Socialist Government to be a sort of Academic Garden of Eden, – with the serpent excluded by Act of Parliament. An optimum complement of 800 students was to do a four-year instead of a three-year degree course, and it was put under the care of Lord Lindsay, the Master of Balliol. A great deal of money, a great deal of thought and a great deal of care was put into Keele to make it the show-place of postwar academic society. An example is the library, which compares favourably with any in the older universities: the Nuffield Foundation equipped one complete library from top to bottom; the Librarian keeps an eye on the obituary notices in the *Times* and rushes off with *carte blanche* to purchase whole private collections. So cheaply did he buy up four houses

full of books belonging to a lately deceased Professor of French in Edinburgh, that one of the older professors at Keele, after hearing his report to the Senate, is reputed to have gone home and said to his wife, 'When I die, keep that chap off the doorstep or you'll end up penniless!' The basement of the library contains some magnificent photographic and duplicating equipment, and, by a series of steel shutters controlled by a timing device, the Library can be used for research right through the night and all day Sunday as well.

Numbers have caught up with Keele, and the total is now 1100, to reach 2000 in three years' time. There are thirteen on the staff of the English Department. But it is in York that the numbers are really startling. Founded as recently as 1963, with its first degree examination last June, York already accommodates 1300 students, a number that is to rise to 3000 by 1972. The English Department has twenty-three members of staff – twice as many as in Keele or Leicester – and the aim is to give three staff-members a sabbatical years' leave every year. I have some application-figures for York that are rather staggering: over 2000 pupils have applied for the seventy places available in English for October 1967: all these applications must be read and over 500 candidates interviewed; for technical reasons a member of the English staff must obviously be present, and in the interests of standardisation it should be the same people throughout. So acute is the pressure of numbers among applicants for university places, that I was told that sixth-formers with two A grades and one B in their three A level subjects are being turned down in Oxford this year. Dealing with mass applications on this scale is an unproductive expenditure of time that we in Malta have hitherto happily been spared.

The University is three or four miles outside York itself; like Keele, it is centred on an old manor-house, Heslington Hall, which differs from most other old houses in England in that Queen Elizabeth did *not* sleep there, but is said to have refused to do so after it had been specially built to accommodate her. The university is to be completely residential, and two colleges are already in full action, with another two to start working by October this year; in all, eight were planned but only seven of these will now be built, owing to the cuts in university spending. The buildings are cleverly sited on a concentric plan, and are interconnected by covered walks, – an obvious advantage in wet weather when students have not time to go and fetch mackintoshes between lectures. Everything is built of what looks like filtered asbestos; the design can be changed within twenty-four hours and the architects claim with pride that their buildings will last ten years longer than the average contemporary structure – twenty-five years as opposed to fifteen! The Vice-Chancellor, Lord James of Rusholme, erstwhile High Master of Manchester Grammar School,

has tried to encourage collegiate life and *esprit de corps* by forbidding a students' union; this move has obvious disadvantages, and has caused considerable dissatisfaction among the students, who feel themselves 'deprived' (magic word of the 1960's) of facilities available at other universities. Everyone, Vice-Chancellor, staff and students, queue with trays for their meals and sit at bare wooden tables in an atmosphere of, generally, strained silence. I am not saying for a moment that I am right in thinking that this system of communal feeding is wrong; it is certainly very democratic and far advanced along the road of staff-student relationships. But what I must say is that I personally found it alien, uncomfortable and ungracious.

Strangely enough, for all its newness and advanced thinking, York is the university with the most traditional relationship between town and and gown. The city of York has always wanted a university and has felt – rightly I think, – that, steeped in history as it is, it deserves a university. And so the citizens of little, mediaeval York are, in contrast to the citizens of big commercial Leicester, interested in, helpful to and proud of their university.

The idea behind the Commonwealth Universities Interchange Scheme is not to provide a supplementary temporary lecturer for the relevant department in the entertaining universities, but to provide the visitor with opportunities for discussing problems of mutual interest at all levels. Nor need the visitor feel confined to purely university matters: I visited two comprehensive schools, a teacher-training college and a college for the training of youth leaders: I actually taught a sixth form in a public school for a morning before having lunch with the staff. There are obviously a hundred-and-one things that I saw or heard or did that I could tell you about, but time forces me to be selective, and I have chosen three points of general interest which answer the question which somebody actually asked me – 'What on your tour excited you most?'

First I want to tell you a little about the Keele Foundation Year. The fourth year which all the other universities envy Keele, but which deters some career-hungry applicants, comes at the beginning, not the end of the degree course. In their first year, all students pursue a common course of lectures, tutorials, seminars, essay topics and examinations. The aim is to introduce all students of all disciplines to the development, achievements and problems of modern man. Every department contributes to a selective and carefully integrated lecture course: let me give you one brief excerpt from the Foundation Year Programme:

Week 5

Early Britain and the Middle Ages

Mon. 7. Nov.	9 a.m.	41.Roman Britain	Dept. Classics
	11 a.m.	42.Anglo Saxon Civilisation	The Vice-Chancellor
Tues. 8.	9 a.m.	43.Feudalism	History
	11 a.m.	44.12th C. Renaissance	History

Because its Foundation Year is unique, Keele was able to persuade the Nuffield Foundation to donate a whole library containing an average of forty copies of every basic book used in the Foundation Year.

The advantages of such a course are obvious. We in education are always preaching the dangers of over-specialisation; in this very hall one of the recent Leverhulme Lecturers asserted that scientists spoke a language that only scientists could understand. Here is the answer: a preliminary year of humanism in the broadest sense of the word, where every student undergoes a course that is scientific, humanistic, economic, – and every other '-ic' you can think of – rolled into one. One practical advantage not immediately obvious is that the Foundation Year gives a student chance to change his mind. Meeting new subjects that he never did at school – psychology, say, – he can take this up as a degree subject at the beginning of this second year without any loss of time in his principal-course studies. Naturally the course is not perfect: anyone could find topics missing that should be there; my own first reaction to the syllabus was there that was very little about Art and nothing at all on the cultural influence of Renaissance Italy. Again, not all the people from all the departments deliver interesting lectures; the applause which has become the tradition at the end of every Foundation Year lecture is carefully graded to show just the right amount of appreciation – or lack of it! But the idea of the Foundation Year undoubtedly works, and is popular with staff and students alike; at a free debate held while I was in Keele on the merits of the Foundation Year, the student vote was overwhelmingly in its favour.

The second exciting experiment, also at Keele, is the so-called Communication Department – 'Communication' without an 's'. This has nothing to do with telephones – or English Literature for that matter; nor even university teaching. It is a research department – the only one of its kind in Britain – financed largely by funds from the General Medical Council. The basic theory is easily explained by a personal anecdote: when I was learning to fly an Oxford trainer aircraft in 1941, I said to my instructor 'Isn't that speck a chap coming round the circuit the wrong way?' He seized the control column and pressed it forward so hard that all the dust

from the cockpit floor hit our faces; we just managed to avoid hitting the other aircraft as it whizzed over us. At a relative speed of 600 m.p.h. two aircraft approach each other at ten miles a second. Nowadays, with this speed increased to thirty-five miles per second, some physiological means must be found to make people think faster – the 'Communication' referred to is in and out of the human brain. The heads of the staff are covered with small sores where they have been sticking electrodes into their scalps and recording thought-impulses on complicated home-made equipment.

When I visited them they were working on a sonar device to help blind people to 'see' with the help of sound. A small instrument worn round the neck sends out a signal which strikes an object and is reflected back: the time-lapse gives the distance of the object from the person; the percentage of the sound register recorded indicates the size of the object; and a practised ear can even tell whether the object is rough or smooth. What they could not solve was that sharp corners did not register on the instrument; and this was very trying – nothing is more likely to destroy a blind man's confidence more quickly than running into sharp corners with his head; but I've no doubt that they will solve even this in time.

The Foundation Year and the Communication Department excited my admiration: the York Examination Experiment interested me, but I have some doubts of its overall advantages as compared to the present system.

The English Department in York employs five different examination methods: not alternatively, but consecutively, so that a student begins his degree examination in the fifth term of his nine-term course. Doubt No. 1: is it a good idea to begin a final examination so early, and to spread the strain over eighteen months instead of two or three weeks? Some of the students said they soon got used to it, some didn't like it. The first method is the conventional three-hour paper, but with the innovation that plain texts are permitted in the examination hall: of this I wholeheartedly approve – mere memory is not a virtue, and research workers must learn for their second degree to refer always to the original and not rely on memory; so that the present system is bad in that it encourages a method of learning which must be discarded immediately the hurdle of the first degree is safely past. Method 2 is the Long Essay, whereby an essay of about 7000 words on a topic agreed between the candidate and his tutor is written during a long vacation. Again I approve: it is a great advantage in a literary subject to have some idea of a candidate's style and method of presentation when he is not perpetually pressed by the clock in an examination atmosphere and when he himself is in a highly nervous state. Method 3, *viva voce*: this is a useful supplement in border-line cases from the written examination, but it is unfair, for temperamental reasons, to

examine degree candidates orally instead of by means of written papers; I believe that this is the method favoured by some continental universities, and I should be glad to hear from its supporters during question-time. The fourth method is by tutorial essay: a pupil writes four essays on a given period of literature during one academic term, and repeats the process later in the course. Having discussed these with his tutor, he submits fair copies of three of them to count as his final examination in this paper. But I have saved the most revolutionary method to the last. When the candidates turned up for the first-ever Shakespeare paper last June, the rubric read, 'Time allowed: fourteen days.' They had to write five answers, each of not more than 1500 words, and submit them a fortnight later; since there were 48 candidates, this meant that each examiner had to read 48 x 7500 words for one paper, that is, 360,000 words, or only slightly fewer than the 400,000 of *Gone with the Wind.* First objection: too hard on the staff. Second objection: too much of a strain on the candidates; one of them said to me that every time he stopped for a meal or go to bed he felt that he was cheating himself out of valuable writing-time. Third objection: open to the obvious abuse of a candidate's obtaining outside help.

I should like to say a word here in parenthesis, since I have a little time, on teaching as well as examination methods. In the Faculty of Arts in this University, we use three main methods of teaching: the language-class; the instructional lecture; and the tutorial. Both the language-class and the instructional lecture lay stress on the transmission of essential information to students not yet in possession of it – usually because they have not read widely enough before entering the University. The tutorial – in which two or three students bring essays to read aloud to a member of a staff and to one another – enables the tutor to hear and explain and correct any errors of fact, opinion and presentation in the work of individual students. A fair analysis of our methods would therefore be that two-thirds of our teaching-time must be given to providing material knowledge, and only one-third of the time can we afford to concentrate on developing the individuality and encouraging the originality of the student. And this limitation is the chief object of adverse criticism in the reports of our External Examiners.

In all the English universities I visited, individuality and originality are encouraged by the methods of teaching adopted, prodigal though these methods may be in time, money and staff. Lectures are generally interest-lectures, not instruction-lectures, and experts are brought from considerable distances at great expense to talk to small groups of students; a retired professor of History came from Nottingham to Leicester on a train arriving at 8 p.m., gave a fascinating lecture on his personal recollections of D.H. Lawrence, and went back on the 9.23; Dr. Derek Brewer, the Chaucer scholar, has been travelling from Cambridge to York and back every Friday this winter to give a one-hour lecture to English Honours students on the highly specialised subject of Realism in *Troilus and Criseyde*; and on the Friday I went, there were five students and four members of Staff present. Interest-lectures are, of course, being provided in Malta extra-murally, thanks once more to the generosity of the British Council in bringing out guest lecturers and to the untiring efforts of public-spirited men like Professor Andrew Vella, organiser of the university public-lectures of which this paper was originally one.

Apart from the interest-lecture, the main method of teaching used in the new universities is the seminar. Ten to a dozen students and two or three members of staff meet for a two-hour period, with tea and biscuits at half-time – for the one thing that certainly has not changed in England is the love of a cup of tea. Each of the pupils had been asked to prepare his or her reactions to a different poem by the same poet, and these criticisms they read in turn. They were then asked to find the common factors, and in this way a rough outline of the salient characteristics of this particular poet was built up. I could have told the students these salient characteristics, and illustrated them, in less than a quarter of the time; but because they did it *for themselves* it will be much more beneficial to them.

One last question I must ask and try to answer: What value was all this time and money, this travelling and talking? I think the people I spoke to about Malta and the Royal University gained a little from my seven years' experience here; and the interest *in* and goodwill *towards* Malta were very strong during the period of my tour – particularly just after Candlemas! I am sure that I personally gained enormously; new planets swam into my ken, new interests were awakened, and new contacts were made which will surely prove of value in the future. One thing I did learn that I offer to my brother lecturers as a free gift from Leicester is a new way to deal with awkward questions after a public lecture. A visiting professor from Warwick, having read a particularly controversial paper to the Leicester Literary Society, was asked some pretty tricky questions to which he would have been hard put to find an answer. Quite calmly, he said, 'I am giving a Royal Academy Lecture in a few weeks, and I hope to deal with this interesting problem in detail then. I'm sure you wouldn't wish me to prejudice my argument by talking about it now.' I hope that the University too, will gain, particularly in the light of the move to the new site and the planning of new courses. I came back with dozens of book-titles gleaned from other libraries and dozens of questions lifted from other people's examination papers. There is a strong hope that one of the members of our staff here will be invited to spend some time in Keele, and

will return to apply the lessons of the Foundation Year to our own proposed new School of Mediterranean Studies. The long essay written at leisure over a protracted period is already a feature of at least two Arts departments in this university, Maltese and English, and this June we are to try the experiment of allowing plain texts into the examination in one of the English Honours papers. Seminars run by at least two members of staff are to be introduced in the English Department next year. We too in Malta are feeling the first effects of an explosion in the academic population: the figures in English Honours students are, 1965: 1, 1966: 5, 1967: 10, 1968: 14; with 23 applications to join the 1967/69 group. So that we should do well as a university to look closely at how others have dealt with this – the most consuming problem of the post-war academic world. I must admit that it is in this area that I have had most cause to alter my opinion. I went to England believing that whereas in my day universities had turned out a limited number of first class people, their aim now was to train a large number of second class graduates. I now believe that the output of first class graduates is the same *in number* as it always was, though the *proportion* to the whole student population is obviously smaller. As for the universities, I believe that they are struggling to cope with vast new problems by means of new methods; they are doing it sincerely and not without success.

MALTA'S SECOND DEVELOPMENT PLAN: 1964-69

SOME COMMENTS

By JOHN V. SIMPSON

AN assessment of the success of a Development Plan can be made in a number of ways. As a first step a clear statement of the aims of the plan can be compared with the results that were attained provided that account is also taken of the unexpected characteristics of the particular economy during the period under review. Assessments can also be attempted using international comparisons of similar countries.

It is difficult to find appropriate countries with which to compare Malta. In terms of population it is very small: the nearest comparable West European country is possibly Luxemburg with a similar population (just over 300,000) but this yardstick becomes unacceptable when it is recognised that Luxemburg is less independent, in terms of economic structure, than Malta. For example Luxemburg forms part of the Belgian-Luxemburg balance of payments area and has, even prior to the advent of the E.E.C., had a trading agreement with both the Netherlands and Belgium. Equally, none of the other Mediterranean islands provides a suitable yardstick, either because of population and size, because of integration with other larger countries (e.g. Sicily and Italy) or because of very different current standards of living. Cyprus comes closest, possibly, but is inadequate because of the lower current average standards of living and the greater proportionate importance of the agricultural sector in the build up of the Gross national product.

The following table illustrates some of these differences statistically.

Malta has certain unique characteristics which make international comparisons difficult (although not without value) and which alter the emphasis which is to be found in the development plan. Of prime importance amongst these characteristics are (i) the unusual development problem of replacing a predominant industry (the defence services) which is contracting as a result of political decisions taken in the United Kingdom and which, in contrast to the usual development problem of offsetting reductions in agricultural employment, is associated with relatively high average income levels and (ii) the existence, in Mediterranean Sea terms of a relatively high standard of living which, when considered with the absence of raw materials for industry and the problems of access, of a non-