

PRIZE GIVING 1954

Speech/Report of Head Master Dr.R L Hayman

Mr. Hulugalle, Ladies and Gentlemen

We are happy to welcome you here this afternoon and it is a particular pleasure to have as our chief guest a distinguished old boy of S. Thomas' College, and one who is connected with this branch in a special way for it was here that one of his sons received much of his education.

Mr. Hulugalle is, and has always been a very busy public figure, but he has ever found time to interest himself in the progress of the College. When our Bandarawela Preparatory School was started eleven or more years ago, there was great difficulty in finding sufficient suitable accommodation for the boarders. Mr. Hulugalle made his Bandarawela bungalow available to the school, and thereby overcome that very serious difficulty.

I know that many past and present Gurutalawa boys have spent their Prep. School years happily in that bungalow, and would join me in their gratitude to Mr. Hulugalle.

In that and in many other ways Mr. Hulugalle has been a staunch friend and supporter of the school.

It would be presumptuous for me to say anything of Mr. Hulugalle's work as Editor, or of his present task in the Information Office. It is to be noted however that in a country like Ceylon, where a successful man becomes all too often the target of envious criticism his character and integrity have earned him the respect and affection of all whose work bring them in contact with him.

It is particularly good of him to come today, when he has even more than usual on his hands.

To the rest of our guests I also extend a hearty welcome. Many untoward events have conspired to interrupt our preparation for the prize-giving. If perhaps our arrangements are not up to our usual standard, we ask to be forgiven.

After the prize-giving there will be the usual tea party in the Master's Common Room, (and for those who prefer it outside in the garden, if conditions permit). During tea we hope to entertain you to show of gymnastics on the lawn below. Immediately after tea there will be exhibitions of Modelling, Art, Photography, etc., in the quadrangle and library. These exhibitions are meant for the visitors and will open again for the boys on Monday.

In the woodwork shed there are a number of exhibits of considerable interest, and I hope that many of you will find your way there.

As usual there is a science exhibition in the Laboratory, which will, we hope, amuse you even if it does not instruct nor mystify. We are indebted to Messrs. Photo Cinex for the loan of one exhibit in this section.

The Farm is also exhibiting some of its produce in the Tuck Shop.

Speech of Chief Guest Mr. H. A. Hulugalle

Doctor Hayman, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all I must thank Doctor Hayman for the very kind words he has said about me-you, Ladies and Gentlemen, should discount some of those words-but I must acknowledge and appreciate the spirit which prompted them.

As Doctor Hayman said, there are some reasons why I should, when invited, make this long trip to Gurutalawa to be present at the Prize-Giving. It is about 45 years since I first entered S. Thomas' College, and through a great deal of my career I was a contemporary of your warden. Doctor Hayman also said that one of my sons was at this school. I may say that when he came here he was quite a backward boy, but he emerged with a serious interest in work, a serious interest in life, and one of the things that he has been the first to do at the University, has been to found a social service league. Then again I have been interested in the estate even before the school was thought of, because I had a common interest with your benefactor Mr. Leslie de Saram in growing oranges. He used this place as a citrus farm, and I came up here to see how his trees were faring. Some of the trees were good, but more trees were ailing and each tree seemed to have its special bottle of mixture and its special injection. Both Mr. Leslie de Saram and I had to give up planting oranges.

Reading the report, I can see what excellent work the school is doing. There is not a great deal I can suggest, criticize or do, to help the school, but if at any time Doctor Hayman is in want of 16 mm films for your cinema we might be able to provide some, because one of my jobs as Information Officer is to run a film unit. We make films in English, Sinhalese and Tamil - 35mm for the Cinemas and we have had many of these films reduced to 16mm for if somebody from the school asks for the films, when in Colombo, and promises to take care of them, I think we can lend them.

When I accepted this invitation, I wrote to Doctor Hayman and said I should be prepared to speak for about five or ten minutes. He said "Well, a short speech is much more effective, but a large number of boys would expect a rather longer speech", and I shall therefore only give you a short speech.....

I should like to say a few words on the serious subject of education, not as an educationalist, nor as anyone who has been engaged in public work, but just as a parent who has had children, strangely, enough, at three schools- S. Thomas', Royal and Trinity. One boy was at Trinity because he wanted to play Rugged, and the other was at Royal because I could not at the time afford to have three boys in the boarding schools, and so I availed myself of one advantage of Free Education. This and other circumstances led me to realize that most boys in Ceylon delay a little too long in making up their minds as to what they want to do in life. That is

one of the things I wish to say a few words about, and the other is to ask myself and you whether we are fully alive to the changing conditions in Ceylon and in the world at large.

A distinguished Thomian, who recently visited the school told me the other day, that the old place seemed to live very much in the past. I rejoined that, nevertheless, the country appeared to display a weakness for finding its Prime Ministers and Permanent Secretaries from among Old Thomians. He then said, strangely I thought at the time, that S. Thomas' College could still produce a race of educated thugs. I think I know what he meant when he used the word "thugs". He meant that a hard core of character, a certain toughness, which a boarding school helps to develop, was an asset to anyone who undertakes a difficult job. The distinguished soldier, the late Field-Marshal Lord Wavell, once said that the first essential of a good General was robustness, the ability to stand the shocks of war.

But not all boys are born to be leaders, though without leaders of the right kind no progress is possible. The majority of us are called to be plain company commanders, N. C. O.'s and even Privates. It is seldom possible to predict that anyone will become a leader. There are, of course, obvious essentials for leadership, such as an unflinching interest in what you are doing, a relish in doing it, the capacity to take responsibility without thirsting for power, and above all an unshakeable faith in the future of your country. The Careers Master of a famous English Public School has said that "most public schools will have about 10% academic scholars, and 5% "Real shockers"; the rest are just the material of which the work-a-day world is made up and are the salt of the earth".

What then does the future hold for boys of schools like S. Thomas'? Forty years ago, when my generation was thinking about our own future careers, openings in the higher positions in the Government service and industry were few. In some years, a single Ceylonese was appointed to the Civil Services. In other years there was none. The majority of Police Magistrates, Police Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents, Engineers, Accountants, Assistant Government Agents and nearly all Heads of departments came from abroad. The Medical and Legal professions except for the highest official positions, were manned by Ceylonese, but competition in those professions was keen, as they were the main outlets for local talent. The teaching profession attracted some of the ablest young men, because the tradition of academic education was strong, and the bright student without private means had few opportunities for lucrative employment. In the majority of cases, however, this was only a stepping-stone. The glamour and rewards of the public service and the professions lured them away from the teaching profession, as it will always do.

But the general outlook has changed fundamentally. The university has brought higher education within the reach of hundreds, nay thousands, of those who are able to pass the entrance test. The public service and professions in the Island are manned almost entirely by Ceylonese. And the glittering prizes in them go not only to the products of the older and better known school but-and this is a good thing for the country - to the products of schools, large and small, all over the Island. There are nearly a million and a half children in school in Ceylon today. Although the supply of jobs has increased greatly during the past forty years, the demand for them has increased very much more.

What then should a young man do to secure employment of the kind for which he is best suited and to succeed in that employment? What can a parent or the Headmaster of the School do to help him? Nearly 250 years ago, the poet John Gay wrote:-

One day (the tale's by Martial penn'd)
A father thus address'd his friend.
To train my boy and call forth sense,
You know I've stuck at no expence;
I've try'd him in sev'ral arts,
(The lad, no doubt, hath latent parts,)
Yet trying all he nothing knows;
But crab-like rather backward goes.

Teach me what yet remains undone;
'Tis your advice shall fix my son.
Sir, says the friend, I've weighed the matter;
Excuse me, for I scorn to flatter;
Make him (nor think his genius check,)
A herald or an architect.
Perhaps (as commonly 'tis known)
He heard th' advice and took his own.

Parents in this country notoriously play for safety. They try to see their sons into a secure job or good marriage or both. And it is not surprising that many boys should be content with what Disraeli said of Eton boys of his day. "To do nothing and get something", he said "was a boy's ideal of manly character". But it is only a very few who could afford such luxury or repose. As for the rest, a frank discussion between father and son should help in arriving at a right decision as to what career a boy should follow. But this rarely happens. A generation separates father and son. The wishes of the parent, born of his own experience, frequently conflict with the aptitudes or aspirations of the son. The issue is usually avoided and the decision postponed by the simple expedient of sending the son to the University if he can pass the entrance examination. Few

Ceylonese at this stage seem to have clear cut ambitions or make the effort to discover what opportunities are available.

No doubt there are many who wish to follow the careers of their fathers, especially if the fathers have been successful in their careers. This is most marked among the sons of doctors. As for the others, their minds are not made up. In that state they do not bother about their aptitudes but are more likely to think about the salaries they may be able to earn. Thereby they may abandon life-long pleasure of doing work which grips them and is after their own heart.

I do not know what percentage of Thomians go to the University. It is not perhaps very profitable to compare the figures with those of a typical English public school like Rugby because, while we have in Ceylon only one University, with a limited number of courses, in Great Britain there are perhaps a dozen universities, with courses suited for every type of career. Furthermore, our University has hardly reached the stage when it becomes primarily a seat of learning rather than a training ground for examinations.

Rugby School has 670 boys, 60 of whom are day boys. Of these 670 boys, 325 are doing "sixth form" specialized work, which to some extent commits them to their career qualifications. Of 128 scientists or mathematicians 40 are more or less committed to medicine and the remainder to some form of technical career - chemical, electrical, aeronautical, or other form of engineering; Chemical research; and the occasional statistician or actuary. Of the 197 arts students, not a large proportion know, at the time of leaving for the University, what their career is actually going to be. About 62 per cent of the arts students go to a University. Mainly Oxford or Cambridge. It is interesting to note, that so far as the intentions of the boys leaving the school in 1946-52 were known at their leaving, the percentages were: Industry and Commerce, 37; Law and Accountancy, 17; Medicine, 11; Armed Forces, 8; other State services, 8; Education, 2.5; Agriculture, 7.5; Banking, Insurance and Stock exchange, 1; other categories, 11.

Now those are figures for a typical English public school whose status in England is not unlike that of S. Thomas' College in Ceylon. There is this great difference, however. The proportion of our secondary school boys who go into industry and commerce, the largest field of employment in England, is insignificant. The percentage of those who go into State employment is, on the other hand much greater than it is in England. The security of Government service is a very desirable thing but it also has the effect of killing initiative. It has been said that, all that is necessary to earn the increment in Government service is that one should continue to live. In England the majority go into the productive employments of industry and commerce and every effort is made to train young men for positions of leadership as well as in the many technical skills involved.

It seems to be the policy of the Government to encourage the employment of graduates. For many appointments there is what is called a graduate scale, something better than what a non-graduate would receive if appointed to the same post. A degree is prescribed as a necessary qualification for many quite junior posts. This is not an entirely satisfactory system. It tends to admit the mediocre graduate and exclude able non-graduate. Many graduates in their late twenties or early thirties apply for a post, having tried many things including teaching and temporary employment in Government service and commerce. Some of them have families to support. It is a sad sight to see them coming up before one Selection Board after another to go away disappointed and embittered. Where the rudiments of technical knowledge or experience are required, these beachcombing graduates are frequently passed over in favour of a younger man with only a school-leaving certificate, but who has learnt something about the work involved in the job. The assets of keenness, teachability and the contentment which makes for efficiency are usually with the young men, without a degree but with a flair for the particular sort of work for which they apply.

Should then young men be discouraged from drifting aimlessly into the University either because they have no specific aptitudes or ambitions, or are unready to decide what they want to do as their life's work? I can understand their difficulty and sympathise with them. It can happen to any of us. But if the last years in school enable them to make up their minds, after discussions with parents and schoolmasters, there will be a great gain for all concerned.

The years between 19 and 25 are precious in the life of a young man and they should not be spent without purpose or plan. For the first class student the University affords brilliant opportunities but even he will be happier for a clear objective not prematurely blunted by sordid yearnings. The truth is that too many students go into the University in a mood of frustration and defeatism. They are hampered by an inferiority complex from enjoying the benefits of a corporate life at the most interesting stage of their development.

I have seen students in Palestine joyfully planting a forest. I saw students in Germany in 1946, when all their cities were in ruins, go out into the country in parties, with banjos and accordions, singing as they went. In many an American city I have chatted with University students serving behind the counter at a cafeteria during their vacation. How many of our students would be willing to give voluntary service to lay out a tennis court or volley ball ground even for their own use? What is their grudge against society, against themselves? The answer to the question cannot be simple. It has something to do with the social system and economic stresses. There is uncertainty about the future, lack of knowledge of the opportunities, lack of guidance, a complete absence of training facilities for industry and a general belief that influence counts more than merit in landing a job. But these are not valid excuses.

It is not necessary to adopt such a defeatist attitude. Ceylon is still a land of opportunity provided you are not looking for a soft job. There is still a great field for ingenuity and enterprise which neither school nor University should kill. There are thousands of houses to be built, there are millions of acres to be cultivated, there are dozens of new industries to be started to bring prosperity and happiness to this land. Who will tell the young people of Ceylon to face the risk and reap the reward of enterprise? Look around and see what British enterprise and Indian labour have done to create the tea estates; watch the humble and hard-working peasant at his task of terracing paddy fields hewn out of the hill-sides; and think about the joy of achievement.

We must be alive to the changing conditions in Ceylon and the world at large. If we learn to manage our lives correctly, which comes of discipline; to cultivate an inner peace of mind which comes of the spirit, and have faith in the future of this country, which is our inheritance, we need never fear the future.

“Heart, Heart, still vexed with troubles past enduring,
Up and be doing, steel thyself and stay
Mid thronging foemen to the last enduring,
Steadfast amid the forefront of the fray.”