

The Outlook for English in Central Africa

An Inaugural Lecture

GIVEN IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF
RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

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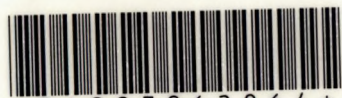
THE OUTLOOK FOR ENGLISH IN CENTRAL AFRICA

*An Inaugural Lecture
given in the University College of
Rhodesia and Nyasaland
on 7 August 1959*

by

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THE OUTLOOK FOR ENGLISH IN CENTRAL AFRICA

AN academic 'chair' has been innocently defined as 'the seat from which a Professor delivers his lectures'. It sounds relaxing and secluded. In Central Africa, however, no Chair can bear any resemblance to those dignified structures in which princes and pontiffs used to sit enthroned while granting audience to the privileged few. The Chair of English in this country certainly provides stimulus and diversions enough. The Professor of English finds himself called upon to settle grammatical disputes among heated members of local clubs, to interpret the almost baffling language of our statute books, assist with the delicate wording of documents, and figure as a court of appeal on how one ought to pronounce the name 'Rhodesia'. (He is regarded as of infirm character for replying that there are at least half-a-dozen respectable variants!) It is, of course, his duty to keep a benevolent eye on the work of local poets and novelists, and to take an interest in that lively branch of literature, the drama, which flourishes in our own territories with such enthusiastic abandon.

More seriously, outside his own responsibilities within the Department, it is his privilege to co-operate with all those in the College and in the general system of education in the country who are concerned about the future of English and who believe that it could be of great importance in the achievement of racial harmony in our land. His work impinges at so many points on matters affecting the whole educational system, that I have decided not to limit my Inaugural Lecture to our aims within the Department of English itself, or to the particular portion of seventeenth-century literature which absorbs my research

activities overseas. Tonight, therefore, I want to outline a few of the larger tasks which call for our vigorous participation, thinking of one special aspect of English—the contribution which it can make to true communication. If in the accomplishment of your share in these tasks you find yourselves looking for encouragement or guidance to our University College, let me assure you that we here are very anxious to respond. The outlook for English depends upon numerous factors and many people: within the College and in the teaching profession, not merely on its own specialists, but on all who handle words; and, to an extent which some of us may not yet fully realize, upon the large African population to whom English has been in the past only a foreign language, but who may very soon decide that it is worth adopting as their own. In speaking of the future of English in Central Africa, I do not wish to make a prophecy but a prognosis—and one cannot prognosticate without having first diagnosed.

‘Perhaps of all the creations of man’, wrote Lytton Strachey thirty years ago, ‘language is the most astonishing.’ Yet even when people speak of communications, language is the thing which they take most for granted. They are much more inclined to think of means of communication in terms of jet-aircraft, or of super-elevated roads which give high-speed access to recognized beauty spots, and which in the process of leading us there scarify the hillsides, and bury fern valleys under sprawling embankments. This special feature of our own times seems to me well symbolized by one particular scene in contemporary Greece. As the modern visitor to the Peloponnesus travels from Athens to the site of the ancient city of Corinth, he suddenly encounters without any prelude what must surely be one of the most incongruous sights in that country today. Crossing

a steel bridge, he finds far beneath him, like some gigantic railway cutting, the Corinth Canal—straight as a sunken autobahn, running for four miles without a swerve from the Gulf of Corinth to the famous bay of Salamis. It is one of the Machine Age's contributions to Greece. If it had existed in the time of Homer, we might never had had the most famous books of the *Odyssey*, the story of Scylla and Charybdis and the hero's perilous voyage round the treacherous Peloponnesian coast. It is true that the Greeks made a few attempts to break a channel through the isthmus of Corinth, but their main energies and talents were given to the transmission of thought rather than the moving of bodies. They have left us not seaways and canals but models of clear thinking, so that after nearly three thousand years we still turn back to them gratefully for guidance.

Even when we recognize in the word 'communication' its older English meaning—the sharing of information, the interchange of points of view—we are too apt to identify it with our triumphs in the invention of multi-core telephone cables, or the miraculous volley-balling of messages off the pitted face of the Moon. But these achievements concern only the middle part of the much more complex process of communication. They correspond to the actual flight in a so-called journey by air. We can conduct our aircraft from runway to runway with a marvellous display of speed, but the crawling interminabilities of our city streets turn the start of the expedition into frustration and its finish into anticlimax. So too we can, whenever we choose, flash the full text of a debate in Westminster or Salisbury around the earth without losing a single word, but the radio beam cannot improve the stages at the beginning or the end. The speakers in the debate have first to assimilate many written and verbal reports before converting their conclusions into

words. The listeners on the other side of the House or of the globe, catching those words as they flow, interpret them in the light of their own experience. We cannot yet pretend to be able to explain how either process goes on in the billion channels of the brain, but we do know that both the coding into words and the decoding into ideas must often remain approximate, and that without the exercise of great care they are liable to distortions of the grossest kind. Like particles veering in a highly electrical field, thoughts may be deflected by prejudice and emotion.

It is with these vital initial and final steps in the transmission of thought, the sharing of experience, that we as teachers of English are deeply concerned. All the prejudices of the world have become near neighbours—and as we know only too well, living together may not beget understanding but build up to the sudden crisis of divorce. We can sweep down upon countries thousands of miles away for a high-pressure visit, and return home with a vision as broad as the Amazon, and as shallow as a marsh. True communication only occurs when there is deep mutual understanding: its achievement often demands an ability to enter into modes of thought which differ considerably from our own. I believe that our work as teachers of English language and literature, both in the schools and the University, ought to contribute materially towards the achievement of this ideal. Though in the younger stages, no doubt, we should aim above all else at making reading a pleasure and recreation, unless we gradually cultivate a capacity on the part of our students to overcome initial dislikes and to find value and enjoyment among authors for whom they have had little inclination, their taste will remain undisciplined and immature. To this important topic we must presently return. Let us first ask ourselves what standards of

communication are like in our country at present, and what our own College is planning as its share in their improvement. In so doing we may attain some measure of the outlook for English in Central Africa.

No good purpose whatsoever would be served by blanketing the naked fact that direct communication between the average African and the average European in this country is so incomplete as scarcely to deserve that title. There are, happily, numbers of Europeans, such as missionaries and district officers, welfare workers and anthropologists, who have a sufficient knowledge of one or more African languages and have made some study of the customs of particular tribes. Between them and certain sections of the African people there can certainly be true inter-communication. Corresponding to them among Africans are those who have acquired not merely a thorough working knowledge of the English language, but (often through having had a period of residence in Britain), an insight into our ways of life and customs of thought.

Next to these in the descending scale we might rank those Africans who have received a full or partial secondary education through the medium of English, and who are in many cases trying to hand on to primary school children such control of the language as they have managed to win for themselves. Others will be more competent to assess the matter than I am, but I confess to some misgivings concerning the success of our educational system, judged by the general level of their English attainment. Even among Africans who have received the best schooling possible, namely candidates in the Sixth Forms, we have found that ability to follow reasoning in English is erratic. Faced, for example, with the printed text of a Home Service broadcast from the B.B.C. on a subject of general interest, the

response of a large proportion of students appears to oscillate between wild surmise and momentary visions of the true meaning. One can, in fact, never be sure how much of a logically coherent passage will reach them undistorted. Given essay subjects for which they can fall back upon textbook sentences or memorized notes, their showing is much better; but we can scarcely classify as 'communication' the polite handing back to an examiner of borrowed information.

The art of teaching English as a foreign language is one which has until recently been given less attention than it deserves, yet few subjects seem of greater importance to thousands of native teachers in India and Africa. A succession of experiments with methods direct and indirect, with basic English and graded vocabularies, has led to improvements far short of what we have desired. It would be comforting if we could transfer the blame entirely to the learners, but Africans and Indians are in general very industrious pupils, and if their progress is unsatisfactory, we must continue to challenge the efficacy of our texts and procedures.

Much has been said in recent months about the necessity of spending more money on information services which will tell Africans about matters which are of benefit or concern to them. If this is done we must endeavour to avoid the pitfalls which have lamed similar attempts in other countries, where the capacity of the general public to read intelligent material even in their own language has been trustingly overestimated.

In Britain there was, to quote but one example, the case of an official pamphlet issued in 1947, *The Battle for Output*. The Prime Minister, emphasizing its importance in the cause of national survival, declared in the House of

Commons: 'It is written in simple language, and I am sure that the bulk of the people can read and understand it.' But investigators who carried out a wide-scale sample survey of its effectiveness discovered that few of those for whom it had been written had felt equal to doing more than glance at its diagrams, and among those who had tackled the text, almost none of the women and very few of the men had gathered even the outline of its argument.¹

The possibilities of failure in communication are obviously much greater with those who are reading a foreign language: I can remember some of my own luckless delusions in such circumstances. I have had among my students at various other universities in Asia, Australia, and this continent highly intelligent Chinese, Indians, and Africans. Every now and then there comes a frightening glimpse of the ways in which they have misread passages which we have not thought it necessary to explain—errors due to some gap in cultural background or unawareness of the special valency of particular words. Even with 'advanced' students, both European and African, we must therefore repeatedly check back, to see whether the sentences which are plain to us are equally plain to those we are teaching. Students, whether African or European, have to be taught the art of interpreting the more difficult books: we tend to take this far too much for granted. In this Department we constantly come back to a close study of selected passages, a practice reflected in many of our examination papers. Following the words of a great author is not a passive activity, like drowsing over a long-playing record: it is much closer to the strenuous skill of the organist who translates black marks on a music sheet into a living sonata.

¹ Cf. *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, vol. iii, Princeton University Press, 1949.

If we deviate by a semitone in our interpretation, we may transform the intended mood from major to minor, or dissolve inspiration into commonplace. But whereas any organist can at least hear when he has strayed on to a wrong note, untrained readers of books can blunder happily through poems, novels, and ordinary articles, simplifying and distorting instead of achieving a reasonable rendering. Many readers have a bad habit equivalent to 'playing by ear'. They may follow the outline of the melody more or less as it was written, while substituting their own banal and jaded undertones for the unique statements of the composer.

Our Departments of African Education have since the war expanded their work at a speed deserving great admiration, although further improvement remains an urgent necessity. The rising generation is being increasingly catered for, and Southern Rhodesia claims to stand highest among all the countries on this continent in the proportion of African children of school-going age who are actually receiving instruction. It is of the utmost importance that the new generation, from whom the African leaders and teachers of the future will come, should be given a thorough grounding in English: whatever the political future of Central Africa may be, we want them to be fit to read the best that is being written in the books and journals of our own language.

It is therefore essential that we should continue our search for better ways of teaching English, applicable to the special needs and limitations of the average African school. Our College has been striving to make its own contribution through the Institute of Education, which has for some years supported a full-time research fellow investigating problems and methods in this field. In the Department of

English we have been scrutinizing the findings of British and American linguists, hoping that among much material which seems remote from practical language teaching, we may discover valuable leads. The forthcoming appointment to this College of a linguist trained in African languages will enable us to compare the structures of local Bantu languages with that of English, and we hope to furnish school-teachers with analyses of the grammatical forms in which confusion is most likely to beset African pupils, knowing that the teachers themselves may in many cases be unaware of their own mistakes. As African education spreads, so the proportion of schools without any English-speaking teachers on their staff is bound to increase. Even as matters stand today, a large percentage of Africans who enter the secondary school have received all their instruction in our language from those whose grasp of it is entirely inadequate. We would therefore like to see intensive concentration upon English at the bottom of the secondary school. This would mean the temporary slowing down of progress in other subjects, but through their improved control of language the pupils would soon more than regain any ground they had lost in Geography and History. It is highly desirable that language teaching in the lowest forms of the secondary school should be in the particular care of an English specialist—instead of being given, through shortage of expert staff, to any teacher (English or African) with a few blank hours on his time-table. Teaching English to Form I Africans gathered from a hundred different rural schools surely demands considerable skill and proficiency. As it is, an English specialist tends to find himself paid the dubious compliment of being given the older, 'examination' forms, whose occupants have suffered so many years of mishandling in the primary and middle

school that their errors and attitudes are disheartening to deal with.

An equally vexed problem is the provision of adequate training for primary pupils in the speaking of English. No one could expect, or indeed wish, that the English heard on the banks of the Zambezi should be indistinguishable in accent or idiom from that which is spoken beside the Isis or the Cam. The phonetician wandering around Britain and the Commonwealth can collect a whole orchestra of English accents. Nevertheless it is a fact that people judge strangers by comparatively superficial measures, and have more respect for a 'foreigner' who can handle their verbal forms almost as though they were in his mother tongue. We would like to see a number of African leaders emerging from our College with closer approximations to typical English patterns of intonation and with clearer vowels. The immediate openings for African graduates who can speak English well will be far greater than for those who are hard to follow. Hence the voluntary classes in Spoken English open to everyone in our College, which we encourage non-English students whether from Arts or Science to attend.

Language habits, however, need to be acquired young. African vowels are under-differentiated compared with our intricate English equivalents. We often find that communication between the races fades out, both during adult conferences and student seminars, because Africans have immense difficulty in mastering the distinctions between neighbouring English phonemes (just as Europeans have trouble with the implosive consonants of Bantu languages, and with sounds which vary subtly from dialect to dialect). The majority of primary school children have few opportunities of hearing English systematically from the lips of

those to whom it is a home language: and with the very rapid extension of African education the general level of spoken and written English will tend to go down. Even to prevent a decline will call for the participation of many minds. To diffuse an appreciation of the factors involved we have made Phonetics a normal part of our B.A. General English course, and are encouraging greater emphasis on spoken English in the training colleges. The widespread use of radio sets in African schools would help, but they would have to be of revolutionary design, independent of electricity mains or of stores selling batteries. There are said to be some radios which can create their own minute but sufficient current by means of paraffin, which is both cheap and obtainable almost anywhere; no expert I have met, however, has as yet been able to tell me anything of their design.

I have spoken of the errors which even educated people commit with books which they think they are comprehending completely. Their errors are negligible compared with the misplaced convictions of the totally illiterate. Within our territories there are still some two and a half million adults who can neither read nor write any language. Accurate statistics are hard to reach, but it is doubtful whether out of every hundred adults in Nyasaland, there are more than five or at most ten who have the most rudimentary ability to read anything. News and rumours spread among such people by word of mouth, and like the echo of gunfire ricocheting down a rocky defile, they reach the remoter regions reduplicated and distorted.

Indignation that so many have been allowed to 'remain ignorant' is no way out of this dangerous situation. Education is not identical with the ability to read, and Africans have had for centuries their traditional ways of passing on

their culture from father to son. General literacy in England itself has a shorter history than most of us realize, and in Rhodesia even as recently as 1939 many African parents were suspicious of mission schools, and would go so far as to hide their children in corn bins when teachers came round to recruit pupils. (How different their response is now!) We must also remember that illiteracy is a world problem: about 40 per cent. of all adults alive today are completely unable to read the plainest notice, or to put upon paper the most elementary message. And in certain countries in spite of intense efforts to deal with the problem, the population is multiplying faster than the educational system, and the number of illiterates is increasing rather than melting away.

What then of the immense multitude of African adults whose hope of admission to our over-crowded schools has gone? How are we to communicate with them or they with the outside world? The gap between us is unfortunate for both sides. As yet no large-scale concerted effort is being made to grapple with this huge problem, and in order to organize the numerous independent bodies which are trying to reach some of these two to three million poorly educated or completely illiterate Africans in Central Africa, the College is attempting to add to its Departments an Institute of Adult Education. The task of dealing with mass illiteracy will be enormous. If the College were to undertake the actual teaching itself, it would find that instead of its contribution to Federal Education being at the upper end of the range, it would be enmeshed in the rudiments of the Three R's. The Institute of Adult Education would therefore aim at co-ordinating rather than conducting teaching activities, endeavouring to reason out through research the fundamental policies involved. The first decision

which will have to be taken is whether these adults ought to be taught to read their own vernaculars, or whether they should by-pass this intermediate stage, and go straight on to the elements of English. I believe that in general there are serious disadvantages in attempting to make the more rural peoples literate in a foreign language before they can read their own; but with the peri-urban Africans this course might nevertheless succeed. They live among such a welter of different vernaculars and dialects that they often fall back on English as a *lingua franca*; and their impatience with their own languages and desire to acquire a command of English would ensure more eager co-operation if they were offered English from the start.

What then is the outlook for English among our African peoples? Various African languages are adapting themselves amazingly well to the social and mental transformation which the last half century has brought. But most educated Africans are all too aware of the desperate limitations of literature in their native tongues (few of which can offer enough books to provide an intelligent man with non-ephemeral reading matter for a month, let alone a lifetime). They regret the barriers interposed between tribes by their separate languages (there are some 370 different languages and dialect groups spoken in Africa, of which about 163 belong to the Bantu division). There is therefore on both counts a strong inclination towards English among the leaders of the people.

An enormous diffusion of energy and money would be involved in any attempt to provide innumerable language groups with adequate textbooks for schools, along with a literature sufficiently valuable and interesting to make the effort of learning to read worth while. Not only would we have to find numberless authors (or at least competent

translators): we would have to persuade publishers to print uneconomic numbers of copies, since they would be unsaleable outside restricted areas. Even countries with limitless resources could not contemplate the squandering of time, talent and capital involved in building up a library in all their many native languages. Yet an attempt to single out one dialect for preferential treatment above others is liable to stir up jealousies—witness the fate in Ghana which has overtaken the theoretically sensible policy adopted a century ago by missionaries, who decided to concentrate upon producing literature in only one of the three main dialects of Twi, namely Akuapem. This delicate decision was taken after a careful examination of the various dialects, and for over a hundred years the Basel Mission busied itself in preparing school texts and religious books which, though written in the Akuapem dialect of Twi, were not unintelligible to speakers of other Twi and Fante dialects. The scheme worked reasonably well up to a point. But in recent times nationalistic feelings among the Ashanti reached a stage at which they began to resent the imposition of a strange dialect upon their own children, and rebelled against the teachers (largely from rival tribes) who persisted in describing all deviations from their own Akuapem forms as errors to be condemned and corrected.¹

In our own territories the difficulty of selecting dialects has naturally also occurred, and in Nyasaland many educated Africans are as certain that they do not like the brand of Nyanja which is officially taught and recognized as they are uncertain whether any other particular form of the language can as yet be adopted to the gradual replacement

¹ See Prof. Ida C. Ward, 'Report on an investigation of some Gold Coast Language problems', London, 1945; and E. A. Asmoa, 'The problem of Language in education in the Gold Coast', *Africa*, vol. xxv. 1, 1955.

of all the rest. Premature decisions in favour of one dialect are certainly liable to produce jealous reactions.

Under these circumstances many Africans now at school might well be middle-aged before they could, at the most optimistic, expect to have sufficient literature in each of their own dialects to nourish their inquiring minds. For a great many, the only hope lies in English. I am eager to see a number of the principal Bantu languages develop their own novels, plays, and poetry. But many of the best educated Africans have already begun to feel that English is their own tongue, and more and more are likely to use it as their chosen vehicle for self-expression in the future.

Let me say at this point that I start with a very strong prejudice in favour of vernacular languages for a child's first years at school. Education in African primary schools can all too easily become channelled into two main activities—a laudable effort to master the English language (the gold-stamped visa which admits them to lucrative jobs far from the subsistence pattern of their native villages); and an almost frighteningly conscientious committing to memory of the most indigestible and remote facts, possession of which may produce a coveted qualification.

The education we offer our Africans must not lead merely to certificates but to citizenship, and we cannot allow a child to start his school life not only surrounded with foreign concepts but learning about them in a tongue which his parents may scarcely understand themselves. In spite of many arguments to the contrary, I would be unhappy to see English replace African vernaculars in the near future as the medium of instruction during the first three years of the primary school—though English numerals being much more manageable than African ones should no doubt be adopted from the start. I therefore support the existing

practice of allowing English to become the vehicle for instruction in all subjects only after two to four years of schooling, while the vernacular continues to be widely studied as a school subject until the end of the fourth form.

This policy is surely a very sensible one, and should lead in time to an African population which will be bilingual—holding on to the soil of Africa with its main roots in a vernacular language, and at the same time, through possession of a world language, climbing the great spreading wall of Western science and culture. English should in time become the one common language shared by all races in Commonwealth territories, overleaping the boundary marks of tribes and colours. All races would have access to the riches of enlightenment and amusement to be found amongst the flood which pours from the presses of the English-speaking world. They would share with some 300 million other readers the works of great and lesser literature, the books explaining the earth and the heavens, the history of many nations, and the various political theories of our statesmen and philosophers.

In the upper reaches of the school and at the University there can surely be no real substitute for a world language. Yet the creation of language loyalties could work against even this theoretical ideal. We have only to think of Indonesia, where the rise of a nationalist movement, accompanied by an official reluctance on the part of the government to see too many Indonesians acquire a command of Dutch, led to the cry for 'one country, Indonesia; one people, the Indonesian people; one language, the Indonesian language'.

Although Javanese was spoken by some forty million people, and possessed a wide and living literature, the nationalists did not favour it: it seemed too complicated for

common use; and they passed it by in favour of Malay, the lingua franca of the sea coast and the bazaars. Yet even their elevation of Malay into Bahasa Indonesia could not have made it the common language of Indonesia in a few brief years without the Second World War. The Japanese conquerors forbade the use of Dutch, but finding that Japanese could not replace it without a laborious education programme, they declared Indonesian the official language in an effort to weld the islands into a productive war unit. When the country won its independence, Indonesian remained the official language, and today Dutch hardly figures in the secondary schools even as a subject, though some English is studied as a means of keeping contact with the great world of learning and commerce outside.

In other countries, again, we find that though English is the lingua franca forming a bond of communication between the users of scores of different languages, it has in popular use assumed so distinctive a shape as to be a hybrid language in its own right. This applies (in varying degrees) to the pidgin English spoken in the Trust Territory of New Guinea, and the very different pidgin English of Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the British Cameroons. Such new hybrids display great virility, and linguists are fascinated by the picturesque bridge which they provide between two cultures. Nevertheless to those concerned with the fullness of communication, the development of peculiarities to the point of hybridism is not so welcome.

We must recognize, however, that with a percentage of adult illiterates varying in our own territories from 70 per cent. to 95 per cent., the educational forces in our schools might be insufficient to counteract the tendency to develop an isolating form of pidgin English in Central Africa. Experience in Mexico and many other regions has

demonstrated that to affect the population as a whole it is not enough to teach a world language such as Spanish to selected pupils in special centres, and expect them to spread their knowledge through the country areas. These accomplished pupils tend to agglomerate in the congenial atmosphere of the towns rather than return as torch-bearers into the outer fringes. Our advance must be made instead on a very substantial front.

I hope and believe that out of Africa will come a new energy of English speech which will not only enrich our idioms, but bring with it a rejuvenation of our literature. Our language has been revitalized time and again by such infusions as the vigorous idioms of the Irish peasantry combined with the genius of a man like Synge. When the *Observer* recently organized a competition for new plays, out of nearly two thousand entries from Great Britain and the whole English-speaking world, the top prize went to a young West-Indian actor-dramatist. We may expect that an increasing number of African writers will make English their own language, and that in so doing they will not only add their own distinct and distinctive riches to our present wealth of style and tonal pattern but in time produce some writers who will be recognized in the future as among the cardinal figures in our main English heritage.

And now let us ask ourselves what sort of lead we who are English-speaking are giving in this respect. Are we in Central Africa contributing all we could reasonably be expected to do to the virile evolution of our own language?

The aspects of communication in which we are all involved are varied. There is, first and most obviously, the patterning of our ideas into shape and relationship. Every teacher of English knows that he ought to infect his students with his own pleased recognition of successful writing, and

to encourage them to write refreshing English themselves. Alas! the English master also knows that what a class writes in ten minutes may take him an hour to correct; and when he does manage to take in a batch of books, he may not always have the leisure, even in the Sixth Form, to draw attention to important mistakes. When our University College instituted a test of Proficiency in English to provide ourselves with additional evidence on which to decide admissions, there were some protests that scholars who came from English-speaking homes, who had studied both English Language and Literature up to the School Certificate, and who passed the General Paper of the Cambridge Higher Certificate, should surely be recognized as competent in English. The hundreds of scripts we have examined so far prove that such an assumption would be unwise. From the well-trained candidates we have clear answers and lively essays, but from many others who have passed the same examinations, a wreckage of twisted sentences which convey nothing. As you leave you may carry away with you some of our 'Anthologies of Bad Writing' which we have compiled with the assistance of these students. You should bear in mind that these are highly selected candidates for University entrance, and that at least a third of them, including many whose home language is English, contributed writing sufficiently obscure or misguided to entitle them to a place in our collection. It is small consolation to hear our complaints echoed from many other parts of the world, including Great Britain itself.

Desmond McCarthy once described H. G. Wells's method of constructing a book as 'just to take the back out of the cart of his mind, tilt up the shafts, and let the contents fall with an exhilarating rumble'. The rumble is not always exhilarating when the formula is emulated by students in

their essays! I complain not about slips in syntax, but about writing so baffling as to defeat even our detective ingenuity.

For students who cannot communicate straightforward ideas, the prospects of success at University are far from good—not merely in English but in Social Anthropology, History, Botany—unless they are particularly gifted in other directions and are prepared to make systematic efforts to improve their mastery of language. In order to help those whose fluency is well below their attainment in other subjects the Department of English is organizing English Proficiency Classes for First Year students, whether they are reading Arts or Science. We would like to see these extra classes made compulsory for those who have failed the English Proficiency Test but who have nevertheless been thought worthy of admission; and to throw them open on a voluntary basis to any students who, no matter what their course of study, find that they are being handicapped by their inability to express themselves. We regard this as, in the main, an interim measure, until the growing attention in the Sixth Form to fluid writing has produced better results.

Having glanced uneasily at the outlook for good English writing, let us ask ourselves a further question: With the thousands of valuable and thought-provoking books which come every year from English presses, what efforts are we in Central Africa making to produce a nation which reads and thinks? The satisfaction of using a great library is something which we never outgrow once we have really tasted it—that exhilarating confidence that no matter what questions may be aroused in our minds, somewhere within reach (if we can only trace them) are books which will set us upon the way to discovering the answers. To exploit a large library to the full requires some years of practice: it is

therefore a serious matter if undergraduates waste half their brief spell at College before they begin to feel the intellectual excitement of chasing a topic on their own, with all its unforeseeable ramifications, from author to author. Are we giving our young students the right start at school? Let us probe this question rather thoroughly, because it is a desperately important one.

It is not yet fully realized in this country that the true function of the Sixth Form is not to inject stiffer doses of fact into passive bodies, but to transform pupils into students. In the lower forms they have been carried up the mountain slopes of knowledge in a funicular: their teachers have supplied vigour and inducement almost sufficient in themselves to satisfy the demands of the School Certificate. By the Sixth Form it is fully time for our charges to get out and learn the art of climbing. Progress will naturally be slower to begin with, and one or two will slide down the slopes instead of labouring up them. Nevertheless somewhere in the Lower Sixth they should meet the notice: 'Funicular stops here!' If they reach university without having found their mountain legs, they may very well fall over a precipice and terminate their academic careers abruptly.

Sixth Forms in the Federation are of very recent origin. We must therefore express our pleasure at how much has been accomplished in a very short time to bridge the gap between the School Certificate and the University. In the case of certain subjects in certain schools, the progress has been better than we had any right to expect. But in other schools owing to a complex of causes, those entering the post-certificate years have met a steeper syllabus but the same obliging mountain haulage system for sparing them exertion. We hope that within the next five years this

College will have begun to produce Honours graduates who will bring their own relish and zest in books and libraries to reinforce the work of other specialist teachers in the schools. What attitudes to books do our teachers of English encounter, and what libraries can they encourage their students to use?

A great responsibility lies with teachers and parents, because if we enjoy reading intelligent books ourselves, our example may carry spontaneously to those in our care. But first we must have the books in our homes and in our schools with which to tempt them. If we were to judge the intellectual calibre of some leading citizens by the books they have gathered around them—we wouldn't be far wrong! As for our school-libraries, that is a matter which in some cases merits almost emergency treatment.

During the short time I have been back in the Federation I have had the opportunity of visiting some forty schools throughout Southern and Northern Rhodesia, many of them from two to five times. Their libraries are in some cases very creditable, with enlightened Principals and keen librarians. But all too frequently, in the phenomenal and almost overwhelming expansion of our secondary education, the purchase of books has lagged seriously behind the general advance. The leading African high schools can sometimes shame their European parallels. Casting one's memory back over visits to certain private and Government schools, one thinks not merely of the restricted range of their libraries—inadequate for the middle school, let alone for the Sixth Forms—but of their unattractiveness. There are often comparatively few volumes that would tempt one to read. An alarming number of schools have not so far found it possible to set aside a separate room for a library at all: other amenities have been given priority.

Boys' Schools are here the most guilty parties. The Principal of one High School with some 600 pupils, when I asked to see his Library, escorted me to two stationery cupboards on a draughty landing.

A library belonging to another very large and long-established school had, when first I visited it, thousands of miscellaneous books scattered around the shelves, distributed in no conceivable order, either by subject, title, author, colour or size. It was easy to deduce that since nobody without the gift of divination could ever find any book he needed, very few must try: my forebodings were confirmed by an English master who confessed that in some six years on that staff he had scarcely ever seen his boys reading for pleasure. All the ideas in their essays had to be painfully syringed into their veins by their teachers. I was therefore not at all surprised recently to receive from the Headmaster of that last school a letter, admitting that though his boys read little and wrote badly, for his own part he had abandoned the struggle to convert them. He offered me, with I am sure the most generous of motives, the friendly advice to stop attempting the impossible. After pointing out that the demands of sport left his boys very little time for reading books that were not necessary, he ended his letter thus: 'I don't think you will ever put the clock back! I don't want to be depressing, but the "Reading Age" as our predecessors knew it is over in Africa, and perhaps to a lesser extent elsewhere.'

An English master at yet another very large boys' school who had heard of my pained surprise on visiting their library, waylaid me afterwards to protest that to spend more money on books for his charges would be wasteful. 'After all', he exclaimed in injured tones, 'you must admit that Rhodesian boys don't read.' Looking back at the

far-spreading façade of their lavish buildings, and thinking of the contrast with their meagre bookshelves, I wondered how they could be expected to cultivate the taste for it. General Purposes Funds, which in large schools amount to thousands of pounds per annum, are in such schools as those deftly punted into sports equipment and playing fields, while the Library is allocated by some Principals a sort of booby prize, a meagre £60 a year. Boys and girls are shrewd enough to make their own deductions, and it is perfectly clear that the paltry space occupied in their lives by the reading of English for pleasure has been subconsciously based on their estimates of its officially recognized unimportance.

Response-patterns spread like measles in a large school, and can lay a whole community low. In fact there is a serious danger of this particular situation revolving in a self-perpetuating cycle. Children who have grown up with the overt belief that a boy who likes books is a 'swot' and a 'sissy' may in their turn become teachers, who (without perhaps being fully aware of it) feel that their powers of discipline depend to some extent on their accepting the existing standards of schoolboy valuation. In this, as in all things, we need to preserve a balance. And the rising demands for intelligence in a rapidly changing Africa, the need for citizens with a view of society gathered from horizons beyond the orbit of their Sunday newspapers, require us to take very seriously this problem of the student who has been conditioned into regarding reading out of school hours as a slightly shabby pursuit.

Too many European headmasters in Southern Africa seem to believe that character can be formed and directed only by concentration upon manly games. They have always at the back of their minds the remark attributed to

Wellington that 'the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton'. We might observe in passing that if more people had shown more intelligence sooner that battle might not have been necessary: it is always wise to recognize that foreigners may have more brains than they are credited with. Rhodesian schools are turning out men and women of whom they have no reason to be ashamed, but if we are to adjust ourselves to an increasingly complex world we cannot rely upon physical stamina. The playing fields are an essential adjunct to every school: team games are of value in the development of a child; the discipline and rigour of a match help a boy to put the cause of his side above physical discomfort and near exhaustion. But if a scholar has too many afternoons filled for him with organized and tiring activities, how can he read or think? The result will be a man highly susceptible to the herd instinct, and a herd strongly resistant to new ideas. The Gadarene herd certainly kept together: we might nevertheless ask ourselves if the society in which many Rhodesians put their trust is not in danger of sharing their fate—of running violently down a steep place into the sea, and being drowned.

If we put our emphasis upon courage and character, surely we must concede that nothing so stiffens courage and creates staying power as emotional maturity and spiritual conviction. Many a man who became a great leader had his imagination extended in the impressionable years at school by reading accounts of human achievement at its best and human failure at its most regrettable. It is not enough to put before our scholars abstract ideals of the just and the good, chilly as marble statues: our boys and girls need to be warmed by emotion to seek out ideals which will be their own. Wordsworth spoke of literature as 'Truth . . . carried into the heart by passion'. The standards by which

we live cannot easily be acquired during the hours of formal instruction. Still less can they be nourished by a diet of sport and discipline—especially if the reigning motive in the sport is the winning of a place in the first team, and the automatic adulation which will follow.

Even in modern war, the ability to 'hold on' may depend more upon mental stamina than upon powers of physical exertion acquired on the sports field. Others may have come to quite different conclusions, but from my own limited opportunities of observation I tend to believe that the vital factors are mental resources, the ability to transcend the seemingly unendurable crisis by being able to see it in a larger context, the possession of ideals which have been won and not borrowed. Mental discipline can be cultivated as readily in the field of study as in the rugby pack. Looking back on our own fragment of a war that involved in its grip hundreds of millions among many nations, I remember with great respect the immense contribution to morale made by a Eurasian university student, whose strength lay in the infectious grip which his will had upon an unimpressive physique; and another cheerful Eurasian who every day ran the risk of being shot as he stole and translated Japanese papers, so that fragments of news might keep alive the hope of relief coming before it was too late.

I would not like you to think that I believe (with Matthew Arnold and John Lehmann) that literature can be an adequate substitute for religion. Literature cannot be a substitute for anything which exists in its own right—least of all a substitute for living. It cannot replace Economics, or Social Anthropology or Psychology as a means of studying human reactions. And yet in a General Degree course which is as yet all we can offer, I am convinced that the study of literature has a contribution to make to those whose

main interests lie in those other fields. It is not as divorced from life as critics of the purest school would have us believe. Great works of imagination were certainly not composed to be analysed dispassionately for a B.A. examination: they were written because ideas and words had seized the minds of their authors, and they were given out to the public so that they might lay hands upon the thoughts and feelings of other men. It is true that the artist seldom has an immediate practical purpose in view, and the reading of his work does not often lead to quick and resolute action. In teaching literature we are not constantly endeavouring to pin some moral tailpiece on to every work of art. There is a great deal of sense in Lord Acton's hyperbole: 'I think our studies ought to be all but purposeless. They want to be pursued with chastity—like mathematics.' The effect of literature is indirect. Yet every great writer impinges himself upon his audience, demanding to be taken as he is, to be at any rate understood even if his concepts may appear alien and unacceptable. There is much to be said, in a General English course, for a syllabus which does not settle upon a narrow period, within which it would have to digest both greater and lesser authors all of whom tend to carry the impress of their own single age. In this College we have chosen instead a syllabus which introduces students to the contending personalities of certain outstanding poets and novelists taken from widely variant centuries, from Chaucer to our own day. In so far as students allow themselves to be seized and moved now by this strong presence and now by that, each one differing in his radius of ideas and centre of emphasis, so their critical faculties ought to be stimulated, and at the same time their sympathies stretched to embrace ways of living and thinking which are foreign to their own.

To the solution of the many human problem which surround us in a society such as ours in Central Africa we cannot bring our micrometers and electronic balances, our radioactive tracers or X-rays. These instruments are, in their own spheres, irreplaceable. But in terms of the interrelation of personalities we are constantly driven beyond the resources of the sciences, even of the social sciences, into realms where we have to rely upon human insights, upon the sympathetic imagination, upon judgements based upon glimpses rather than a complete vision. In spite of our attempts to introduce complete accuracy of analysis and certainty of decision into our dealings with human beings—in spite, too, of the invention of whole vocabularies of psycho-economico-sociologico-scientific terminologies—the psychologist and the economist and the social anthropologist, when faced with a problem involving people, cannot as yet do without the ordinary weighing up of this or that almost imponderable impression, an exercise of inference which the novelist, the dramatist, the poet constantly invite us to make in their fictitious worlds with the aid of their own sharp vision.

We naturally hope that students of English literature for the General Degree will retain the special techniques which enable us to reveal something of the inner significance of a complete and satisfying art form. But if their future steps carry them into administration or business, in which the technical approach is forgotten, we cannot regard their study of English literature as having been an irrelevance. They will have seen language at its best exemplified in action; they will have met the spirit of this or that past century viewed through the eyes of its own keenest writers, and reviewed again by powerful minds in succeeding ages in reaction or sympathy; they will, at the lowest estimate,

have acquired a liking for the books which can enrich their leisure. And is it too much to hope that in a world where the future depends upon the extent of our mutual understanding and a readiness to hear the other man's case, the effort which every student of literature must make to adjust himself to diverse and powerful authors, to weigh up motives and influences, may in some measure be consciously transferred to ordinary human situations? There is something to be said for Stephen Spender's contention, that 'the quality of the poet's feeling for life is more significant than the influences that enter into his poetry'. Let us hope that a feeling for life will emerge from our lectures in English, whatever else preoccupies our professional attention.

The outlook for English in Central Africa? That depends largely upon our assessment of its importance, and the vigour of our determination to develop it. We have inherited one of the greatest literatures in the world, a language which, in capable hands, can be stirring and infinitely expressive. If the future is to bring finer powers of communication rather than a gradual blurring and confusing, we will have to give to the task careful thought and experiment. And of the various duties which the Department of English at this College must assume, this must be reckoned among its most rewarding privileges.

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