

Book Reviews

The Condition of Higher Education in Africa

Universities: British, Indian, African. A Study in the Ecology of Higher Education. ERIC ASHBY. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1966. 572 pp. \$12.95.

During the years from 1945 until 1960 five university institutions were founded by the British in their African colonies. These were the university colleges of Ibadan, of the Gold Coast, and of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Makerere University College, and the Royal College, Nairobi. Since 1961 the British have joined with independent African governments and with other overseas supporters to assist with the establishment of university institutions in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, and northern Nigeria, and with the founding of additional universities in the eastern and western regions of Nigeria and in Ghana. This major endeavor in the field of higher education is likely to be judged as one of the most important contributions made by the British during the period of colonial rule to the equipment of her African territories for the independence which was so soon to be their destiny. Although Sir Eric Ashby ranges widely in his superbly written *Universities: British, Indian, African*, the main focus of his interest is Africa. The early chapter on the 19th-century British universities and the hundred pages on the universities that the British founded in India, though fascinating, are really background to his major study of the development of British thinking and British policies in regard to the universities Britain was to found in Africa after World War II.

Ashby writes as a severe critic of what he calls the Asquith pattern of higher education in Africa. In 1945, under the chairmanship of Sir Cyril Asquith, a high-powered committee of British academics and public figures proposed a pattern of development in regard to higher education in the African territories which was of the greatest influence in shaping British policy over the next 15 years. The achievements of those years were very

great. The colleges were well founded and were producing graduates whose education was in no way inferior to that obtainable in most British or American universities. They also involved an extraordinarily successful exercise in foreign aid. Anyone who knows something of the difficulties that accompany efforts by American universities to assist the developing universities in Africa is bound to be impressed by the machinery the British universities set up to assist the new African universities and by the flexibility and skill with which they—particularly the University of London—saw to it that the new universities were well supported.

Ashby acknowledges these various achievements. His criticisms are nevertheless severe. Central to them is his judgment that the Asquith Commission and the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas, which was set up to supervise British assistance to the new universities, were so concerned with the maintenance of standards, and defined "standards" so narrowly, that they became unimaginative and inflexible in adapting British university patterns to the African societies that the new institutions sought to serve. Material relating to Africa was only slowly and hesitantly integrated into regular course work; entry standards were set at a level higher than those of American or Canadian universities; a conservative prejudice against the teaching of "practical" courses was transplanted, and subject after subject was kept out even though it was of high priority to the African country served and was widely accepted as a perfectly reputable university subject in universities outside Britain.

Ashby argues that the university colleges in Africa have been saddled for the last two decades with the prejudices and unquestioned assumptions that marked conservative thinking in British universities in the mid and late '40's. Though he writes with supreme urbanity, anyone sensitive to the pol-

ished technique of British academic controversy cannot but suspect that Sir Eric has battled before with those leading members of the Inter-University Council whose influence on the African universities he appears to regard as having been, on balance, misguided.

The external relationship with the University of London, which was an important aspect of the constitutional position of all of these colleges, permitted more flexibility in the adaptation of curricula than in fact the staffs of the colleges chose to exercise. They were themselves comparatively out of touch with the newer ideas of university education which so activated British universities in the 1950's, and in consequence the African universities have been, during the last decade and a half, more conservative than the home institutions. The academically conservative values of many of the expatriates on the staff of the colleges in Africa are, I believe, a more important part of any explanation of the traditional character of these colleges than Ashby's limited references would suggest.

Ashby has very little to say about the developments that have taken place in higher education in Africa since 1960, save to summarize effectively a number of reports that have been produced concerning the English-speaking universities of Africa and to discuss several of the most dramatic of the crises that have developed in these universities. He says little about Ahmadu Bello University, the University College, Dar es Salaam, or the University College, Nairobi, though as they were established in the period 1958–61 they represent the most recent experiments of any duration in the adaptation of the Asquith model to the needs of independent African states.

A number of the major problems which the universities in tropical Africa now face are identified in the book: the problem of their entrance standards, their relations with other post-secondary-school institutions, and the relation between the pattern of university development and the needs of the communities for high-level manpower. Ashby does no more than identify these problems in passing. However, he does write at some length and with great insight on what is perhaps the most important problem the African universities now face, namely

the proper definition, and then the effective defense, of the autonomy which they require and the academic freedom which must be assured to their staffs. Ashby points out that the university constitutions which have been transplanted by the British into Africa are close copies of British ones. These constitutions work in Britain, and under them academic freedom and university autonomy are assured. This is due principally, however, to a whole set of conventions which are as well entrenched in British practice as they are essential to it. The dilemma is that these conventions have proved difficult to transplant into Africa and that it has therefore been possible for a state, with complete legality, gravely to offend university autonomy and academic freedom. As Ashby points out, in some cases this has happened when a legislature has used its law-making powers to intervene in university affairs and in other cases when the lay members of the university councils, who are normally in a majority, have chosen to use their constitutional position to intrude on matters purely academic.

Ashby recognizes that there is no final protection for a university in any state whose political leaders are determined to intervene. He recommends, however, that the African universities be more concerned about their public relations and seek to convince their societies that autonomy is essential to the effective performance of their responsibilities to the community. Ashby also advocates a formal concordat between university and state, if possible embodied in the constitution of the state itself, in which the autonomy essential to a university would be spelled out and thereby entrenched and protected. Ashby is at his best in this chapter, and his best is very good indeed. What he writes is both extremely important and eminently wise. Possibly, however—and this is an illustration of a more general characteristic of the book—he is a little insensitive to the range of considerations that have motivated some of the political interference. This interference may sometimes be an exercise in megalomania, in patronage, or in political suppression; but it may on other occasions be an expression of a deep concern that the university does not appear to be serving essential national interests. More perhaps could have been said about the universities' duties

in this regard. The African universities are, after all, foreign institutions, in many cases still with a majority of expatriate professors and lecturers. They impart knowledge that often must appear to have little relevance to the African community, and they enjoy a standard of comfort vastly higher than that of the rest of the society. Yet, somehow, if they are to play the full role which it is essential that they play, these universities must be seen to be national institutions and must be an integral part of the national life. In writing of the University of Ghana, Ashby mentions an initial skirmish between Nkrumah and the university over the leave arrangements for academic staff and comments that the university rallied to defend its rights. It is a revealing issue, for the "right" involved

was the right of African academic staff members to enjoy the home (that is, European) leave for the three months each year, with passage paid, which was a feature of the contracts with European expatriate staff. If a university in a very poor country, and in a country moreover that aspires to be socialist, chooses to make such an issue an issue of principle, it must surely bear some of the responsibility for any subsequent break in its relations with the state.

Sir Eric's book will fascinate, provoke, and instruct any who are interested in university education in Africa. It is an important book which should not be ignored.

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Phenomena in Interplanetary Space

The Solar Wind. Proceedings of a conference held in Pasadena, California, in April 1964. ROBERT J. MACKIN, JR., and MARCIA NEUGEBAUER, Eds. Pergamon, New York, 1966. 449 pp., illus. \$17.

Planning for the conference recorded in this volume was inspired by the success of Mariner II in observing the solar wind, the magnetic field, and energetic particle fluxes in interplanetary space during its long voyage to Venus. The first IMP satellite was successfully observing the solar wind before the conference was actually held, and this added considerable excitement to the meeting. The Mariner II and IMP satellites were the first to establish by direct observation far removed from the local effects of Earth the existence and general hydrodynamic nature of the solar wind and magnetic fields. The basic theoretical properties of the wind, fields, and cosmic ray variations had been worked out six years earlier, but were variously disputed until the developing sequence of Explorer X, Mariner II, IMP I observations demonstrated the theory to be correct.

The Solar Wind, which contains not only the papers but also the discussion presented at the conference, represents a milestone on the road to understanding the extension of the solar corona and magnetic fields outward through interplanetary space. The preface by Mackin and Neugebauer, on the problems of converting stenotype transcripts

and tape recording into printed papers, is a masterly understatement of the task and can be read profitably if this is understood. The readability of the papers is ample tribute to the perseverance and scientific competence of the editors. Generally speaking they have sidestepped none of the many confusions which must have arisen in translating the chaotic spoken transcript into the lower-entropy state of coherent written English.

The foreword, by Sydney Chapman, consists of a historical review of the many and often quite separate fields of study which have now merged in the general topic of the solar wind and its interaction with the geomagnetic field. Chapman makes no attempt at a critical discussion of present issues but points out the papers in the volume which are relevant to the many separate phenomena—auroras, magnetic storms, cosmic ray variations, energetic solar particle events, solar corpuscular radiation, and so on—that enter into the historical development of the subject.

Altogether the planning that went into arranging papers for the conference and the careful work of the editors have made this book one of the most readable and instructive conference proceedings to be published in the field of space science.

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