of Scotland have done excellent work and still do so even to-day, though they too seem doomed for destruction. It is not obvious that what is suitable for Croydon must be equally suitable for Strathyre. Nor is it obvious to me – though it may be to some administrators – that money is better spent on vast new buildings than on the salaries of teachers: I would rather be taught by a man of genius in a hovel than by a mediocrity in a palace. But what I am arguing here is only that Scotland should have the power to develop her own educational system in her own way without regard to a mass of irrelevant considerations intruded from the South. She might make a mess of it, but at least the mess would be her own.

CHAPTER XV

THE UNIVERSITIES

Cameron (the ghillie): '*When my father has taken his degree in Aberdeen he will return and be a crofter again.*'
Simon: '*In that case I don't see what he is getting out of it.*'
Cameron: '*He iss getting the grandest thing in the world out of it, he iss getting education.*'
Sir James Barrie

1. *The ancient universities*

Great as is the importance of the schools, it is the universities which in the last resort determine the academic reputation of a country. Of the four ancient universities of Scotland – St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh – the first three were founded by Papal Bulls in the Fifteenth Century; and like Oxford and Cambridge they inherited from the Middle Ages the twin ideals of a liberal education and academic independence. Edinburgh was founded soon after the Reformation and carried on the same ideals. All four were established before the Union of the Crowns in 1603; and like the Church of Scotland, with which they were so closely connected, they received guarantees under the Treaty of Union in 1707. Cynics maintain that but for this good fortune Scotland would still be waiting at the end of an English queue hoping that one day she might be allowed a university of her own.

In the beginning, and indeed later, these universities had to struggle against poverty, but the astonishing thing is how much they did with how little money. Much of the teaching was elementary, but they carried on the democratic tradition of being open to able boys from all classes. Even in the earlier centuries they produced outstanding scholars, such as George

Buchanan and John Mair, who influenced European political and religious thought. In the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries they enjoyed a still higher reputation and exercised a still wider influence. Their graduates played a conspicuous part in the developing universities of the British Dominions and the United States. Their gates were open to English non-conformists, so long excluded from Oxford and Cambridge; and even English noblemen, like Lord Melbourne, after a period of dalliance at Oxford or Cambridge, sometimes came to Scotland in order to be educated. Without the Scottish universities it would not have been easy to develop modern science and medicine and industry or to administer the British Empire. It is in the face of such achievements that criticisms from South of the Border have to be judged.

It is hazardous, and perhaps foolish, to compare institutions whose character has varied during so many centuries, but it may be true that some of the education provided in Oxford and Cambridge was on a higher level than that in the Scottish universities. On the other hand, it was confined to a privileged few, not all of whom took full advantage of their opportunities. In more recent times English university education at the undergraduate level has become more and more specialised, whereas the Scottish tradition was that specialisation should be preceded by a wide general education, even if this had to be at a modest level. This difference can perhaps be exaggerated. It may be claimed – if gross over-simplification may be pardoned – that if Oxford gave the most thorough training in Classics, and Cambridge in Mathematics, the Scottish universities at the peak of their fame were pre-eminent in philosophy. It may even be argued, as Dr. G. E. Davie has done in his book *The Democratic Intellect*, that in Scotland the approach to every subject was philosophical. That is to say, it was an attempt to stimulate youthful minds, not so much to precise scholarship as to the habit of thinking about what they were doing.

So dangerous an ambition may have been regarded in England as grotesque, and perhaps from one point of view it was; but the ideal that every one before being admitted to courses on Theology, Law, or Medicine should study (1)

literature (at that time mainly Latin and Greek), (2) *science* (mathematics and physics), and (3) *philosophy* is certainly not to be despised. It resembled in its modest way the Oxford ideal of Literae Humaniores before Classics and Mathematics had been divorced from one another; but Scotland may have been quicker to recognise that philosophy need not be confined to a close study of Aristotelian texts. In any case it might have been thought that variety in methods enriched British education. This view was not accepted south of the Border.

During the Nineteenth Century, British Governments endeavoured by a series of Royal Commissions to impose what they assumed to be better ideals on Scotland. Gentlemen like T. H. Huxley and J. A. Froude were sent from London to instruct the Scots on the best methods of popular education (then in its infancy in England) and to see – in the words of their Commission – that 'the local peculiarities' of Scottish higher education should disappear. At that time the Scottish Universities were still in a position to put up some resistance, and the result was a series of prolonged and embittered controversies not calculated to further the interests of education. In the end a kind of compromise was reached which has worked not too badly. The Scottish universities still retain fragments of their old tradition that philosophy should be encouraged and that specialisation should be preceded by some general education.

In spite of this partial success it seems a pity that the Scottish universities should not have been allowed to develop in their own way, as they could have under a Scottish Parliament. In many ways they were in advance of their time, and there was a strong movement to meet new needs – especially those of science – by introducing new post-graduate schools after the general degree in Arts had been attained. Such proposals for advanced teaching and research could be carried out only with Government help; and even if a Royal Commission might show some interest, the British Parliament was determined that no grants should be given to Scottish universities pursuing an independent policy of their own. Such modest grants as were given out of British taxation were confined to the English

universities and their off-shoots in Ireland. Only the Scots considered this to be unjust.

Whatever be our view of differing educational ideals, there can be no doubt that the Scottish Universities were prevented from realising independent ideals of their own.

By the irony of fate a system of post-graduate education is now being developed in England, and Scotland in some ways is being left behind. In the very newest universities experiments are being made which are lauded as revolutionary. What are these revolutionary changes?

Curiously enough, at least some of them are attempts to impose a little general education before specialisation begins. There is even, at least in one case, an attempt to make philosophy compulsory. It is irritating when ill-informed critics, both in Scotland and outside, lament the failure of the Scottish universities to make revolutionary experiments of this kind. All the more so because the impetus towards these alleged revolutions was given by the late Lord Lindsay of Birker, who was applying to English conditions principles long familiar to him as a student and professor at the University of Glasgow – the very principles which the Scottish universities had been defending during so many years in the teeth of English opposition.

Here perhaps I may be allowed to register and repudiate the often inconsistent sneers sometimes directed, in the press and in broadcasting, against the Scottish universities and their students. 'The universities were far too academic'. 'The universities aimed only at a practical training for ministers, lawyers, and doctors'. 'The students sought learning only in the hope of future monetary gain.' 'The students never thought of entering the Civil Service or of pursuing a political career'.

Such unfounded aspersions are offensive, not so much when they come from a visiting Englishman like the late Dr. Joad, perhaps himself not the most obviously disinterested of philosophers, but from half-baked Scotsmen anxious to show how superior they are to the traditions of their own country. It would be easy to refute these charges in detail, both from the records and from personal experience, but they hardly deserve to be treated seriously. I have merely put at the head of this

chapter a rather trite quotation from Sir James Barrie to remind us of an older legend. I follow this up, not too solemnly, with memories of a conversation I was lucky enough to have with Mr. Ramsay Macdonald long ago at Chequers.

In talking about Scottish education he spoke of his visit to India some years before and his discussion there with an Englishman perhaps not too tactful in his choice of audience. Let us call him 'Mr. Tactless'. The dialogue ran something like this.

Mr. Tactless: 'The Indian Civil Service should be confined to young men educated in the English Public Schools.'
Macdonald: 'Why?'
Mr. Tactless: 'Because they are the only chaps who know how to handle the natives.'
Macdonald: 'Is this an *a priori* truth or does it rest on empeerical evidence?'
Mr. Tactless: 'I should say it rests on empirical evidence.'
Macdonald: 'Then perhaps we might examine the empeerical evidence. Let us look at the Official Gazette.'

This may not be its correct name, but it was an official publication listing the Provinces and their Governors. Macdonald remembered the names of both in precise detail. I cannot do the same, but the list began something like this.

United Provinces. Governor: Sir Alexander MacPherson. Education: Gordon's College and the University of Aberdeen.

It may sound incredible, but according to Macdonald the first four governors on the list – or was it the first five? – not only had Scottish names, but they had all been educated at Gordon's College and the University of Aberdeen.

The dialogue ended like this.

Macdonald: 'If we are to go by the empeerical evidence, it looks as if entry into the Indian Civil Service should be confined to young men educated at Gordon's College and the University of Aberdeen.'

2. *The present prospects*

However much we may regret lost opportunities, what really matters is what is happening now. It is to be feared that the

prospects are not rosy. The 'local peculiarities' which made Scotland famous are still in process of being ironed out.

Modern science demands an ever-increasing specialisation not always easy to reconcile with a general education. Above all it demands more and more money, especially for laboratories and apparatus, and this can be supplied only by the State. As a result even the two ancient universities of England had to surrender, however reluctantly, much of their traditional independence, although they have the immense advantage that their claims will always be represented in any British cabinet. He who holds the purse-strings is bound to have ever more control over policy. In the case of Scotland this means in present circumstances ever more control from the South.

It is true that government control has hitherto been cushioned by a University Grants Committee which was given the task of distributing most of the huge, even if still inadequate, sums that are now available. This Committee is composed of distinguished academic men, who are certainly not unsympathetic to Scotland or to the independence of universities in general. Even so, there has been an ever-growing tendency for them to exercise control over university policy and expenditure. More and more voices are now raised demanding that government money should be administered directly by the Government itself.

It is impossible to discuss here the incoherent changes endured, even under the University Grants Committee, by the ancient University of St. Andrews – presumably because of varying policies in London. It was pressed, for example, to increase its numbers far beyond the capacity of its own buildings and of a lovely university town of only 10,000 inhabitants. In 1953 it was amalgamated with the University College of Dundee, and years of labour were spent in dividing up subjects and faculties between the two institutions. Then at the very moment when the new Tay Road Bridge made co-operation between the two halves of the University much easier, it had to be divided into two independent universities both lopsided because of all the work that had been wasted. Such changes become all the more disturbing when the Government

in its spasms of economy fails to find the funds necessary to finance them properly.

Complaints of this kind are now overshadowed by the revolutions recommended for Scotland in what is known as the Robbins Report on Higher Education. This was published in 1963 and accepted by the Government almost before the ink was dry. It is, as we might expect, an able document, clear, informed, full of good intentions, and anxious to be fair, though much of it seems to rest on the assumption that the esteem in which an institution is held depends not so much on its achievements as on the labels we attach to it. It would be out of place to criticise the Report here in detail, but some casual remarks may be hazarded about its general attitude.

The dominant point of view seems to be that of the London administrator anxious to get rid of 'anomalies' and to further the aim of 'co-ordination'. There is one illuminating sentence about Oxford and Cambridge – I quote it only in part. 'The number of times when it is necessary to except Oxford and Cambridge from general statements about British universities . . . are not compatible with a situation in which they, like other universities, are largely dependent on public funds'. This appears to mean that universities in receipt of public funds ought to be made so alike that administrators can find it easier to generalise about them. In itself this already bodes ill for Scotland.

As its authors claim, the Robbins Report is unique inasmuch as it is the first to be concerned with higher education in Great Britain. In an elaborate explanation of what this means they fail even to notice that it is the first to lump together English and Scottish education: so revolutionary an innovation, it would seem, requires neither mention nor defence. As a result education in Scotland has to be looked at through predominantly English eyes on the basis of predominantly English assumptions: it has in fact to be considered mainly in what may be called footnotes and afterthoughts.

The general outlook is revealed by the statement that the way was paved for free and elementary education by the Forster Act of 1870 and a corresponding Scottish Act two years later;

and again that the foundation was laid for a system of secondary schools for all children by the Education Acts of 1944 and 1945. This already shows the London perspective we have noted earlier – what happens in Britain outside England doesn't happen at all. It ignores the Scottish belief that this paving the way and laying the foundation was already begun by John Knox three hundred years earlier, or even – if we remember the higher education in the ancient Scottish universities – half a millennium earlier.

The actual treatment of Scottish higher education follows the usual pattern. We have first of all the formal compliments. 'The Scottish universities are right to say that their standards and characteristics should be preserved'. Elsewhere we have the customary criticisms based on the acceptance of English norms. The Scots have not developed the English and Welsh practice of spending two or three years in the sixth form. The level of work in Scottish first year university classes tends to be less advanced in those subjects which are taught at school, in comparison with similar classes in England and Wales. Because of the wider spread of subjects in the early years, and the rather less specialised nature of many honours courses, the Scottish four-year honours degree is approximately the same as that of the three-year degree in England and Wales.

I do not know on what evidence these one-sided generalisations are based, but they seem to accept a purely English norm: they take early specialisation both in schools and universities as the sole standard of value. Early specialisation may, though again it may not, be the best way of producing professors; but as a way of producing graduates fitted for all walks of life it is highly questionable. Indeed the Report itself admits this elsewhere. A distinction of ideals should not be elevated into a standard of merit.

The distinctive character of the ancient Scottish universities, however little this may be recognised in England, was secured by the Act of 1889, which gave them special relations to each other and to the Privy Council. The Report, however, has no hesitation in recommending that the Act should be repealed. The arguments advanced in favour of this cannot be discussed

here: my own experience suggests that they are grossly biased. Scotsmen may believe that the alleged 'possible' disadvantages of the present system could have been more easily met by amending the Act itself – and perhaps even by bringing the new Scottish universities under it. This possibility is not discussed. The 'anomaly' of the Scottish universities must be removed, and their distinctive rights must be swept away. They must fall into the ruck of so-called civic universities whose origins and traditions have been entirely different.

More menacing still is the proposal to extend the powers of the University Grants Committee and to make it – under a fresh name – subject to a London Ministry of Arts and Science concerned with all 'autonomous' institutions, including universities, and also with research. This may be better, as the Report itself argues, than putting the Scottish universities under an English Ministry of Education; but whatever concessions may be made to Scotland, the general principle appears to be that – as is said elsewhere in a more limited context – the arrangements proposed for England and Wales 'should, of course, also obtain in Scotland'. With enthusiastic approval from the 'overwhelming' majority of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals – presumably the English majority – the Scottish universities are to be deprived even of the frail protection offered by the Secretary of State for Scotland, though his views would be 'taken into account' by the English Minister – we know already how little this means in practice.

The actual results of the Report are already worse than the Report itself. Any new university in Scotland must be based on a separate Charter like the civic universities in England – so much so that in one case the Charter is said to have been drawn up in terms of English law, which has no place in Scotland. Apparently, we are all to have English 'statutes' instead of Scottish 'ordinances'. The ancient Scottish universities are threatened with dire consequences if they should wish to make the necessary reforms by using the powers given them under the Act of 1966 instead of starting afresh with a separate Charter for each. The common character and distinctive standards of the Scottish universities must be swept away. Furthermore,

instead of being put under a Ministry of Arts and Science as proposed in the Robbins Report, they were made subject to a new London Ministry of Education and Science set up in 1964 and so are now geared to English schools instead of the Scottish schools with which they have been connected for so many centuries. The painful results of this outrage have already begun to make themselves felt. The high-handed action of Mr. Crosland in suddenly increasing the fees of overseas students (to which we refer later) is a case in point.

3. *Financial inequalities*

Under present conditions a great deal must turn on finance. Here, as usual, there are no easily intelligible principles governing the allocation of grants to Scotland; and there are many complaints, supported sometimes by detached observers, that she does not receive her fair share of the funds available.

Some of the money allotted to higher education in Scotland comes direct from the Government and is administered by the local authorities and the Scottish Education Department. This concerns only the grants allocated to universty students for their fees and subsistence. It is possible, though no one seems to know, that Scotland receives the Goschen proportion of the total amount allotted for this purpose; but for some inexplicable reason the grants to Scottish students were for years less than those given to students at the red-brick universities – less also than those given to English students at the Scottish universities, who were thus put, through no fault of their own, in a position where they could seem to be more lordly than their local contemporaries. What was worse, the grants given depended on a means test much more severe in Scotland than it was in England so that Scottish parents had to make greater sacrifices than their English counterparts of the same level of income. The old university bursaries, which were given mainly for merit, had become of little value because of inflation; and under the new system Scottish students, if their parents enjoyed an income above the severe means test, were deprived, no matter how able, of their traditional pride in paying for their own education. In Scotland this curious system was not mitigated, as it was in

England, by State Scholarships given for merit. All you had to do was to obtain the low minimum entrance qualifications, and after that the amount of your grant was determined solely by the relative impecuniousness of your parents. What a way to encourage mediocrity and idleness! After years of protest some of the worst inequalities were removed in 1963; but why should it be necessary to fight so long in order to obtain elementary justice?

If we turn to the revenue of the universities themselves, the great bulk of this now comes, not from fees or endowments, but from the University Grants Committee. Here there is no question of any Goschen formula for Scotland. The principle governing the distribution seems to be that of need.

As a result of past neglect the needs of England are proportionately greater than those of Scotland. During the Nineteenth Century several 'civic' or 'red-brick' universities – unhappily so described – were added to the two ancient English universities; but the luxuriant proliferation of new universities has taken place in the last forty years or so. England is now able to boast of twenty-nine universities in all. Scotland still has her original four, although four more are being added, mainly by the elevation of existing institutions and by dividing St. Andrews into two. The proportion of students attending the Scottish universities is still relatively high – it was estimated not very long ago as 33 per 10,000 of the population, while in England it was said to be only 19.

As a general rule no financial provision can be made for special needs in Scotland – or at least not without a bitter fight. The special needs of England must, on the other hand, be met from the taxation of which Scotland pays her share.

On this basis needs seem to be assessed on the assumption that the Scottish universities can have no needs beyond those of the red-brick universities – only Oxford, Cambridge, and London have special needs peculiar to themselves. Even if we accept this assumption – and why should we? – it still appears to be true that Manchester and Birmingham receive larger sums than do Edinburgh and Glasgow in relation to the number of their students. How can this be justified?

Whatever be the explanation of this particular anomaly, the general principle seems to be that subsidies should depend on promises rather than on achievement. Much of the available money must go to infant institutions which can promise to increase their intake in the future. Residences are built at great cost in budding English universities in order to house in comfort the students they have yet to acquire. The University of Glasgow where thousands of students already pant anxiously after truth, too often under conditions which make study difficult, is apparently expected to wait for full modern amenities until the future needs of England have been satisfied.

Let us hope that these financial inequalities are less than appears at first sight. But the point is that, whether they are or not, there is little that Scotsmen can do about them except make ineffectual protests which are apt to be dismissed without argument as another sample of Scottish parochialism and irrationality.

4. *Grumbles galore*

Other disadvantages from which Scotland suffers can be mentioned only in a summary way.

Where a university had endowments for its own chairs, its grant was reduced by the amount of income these provided. This looks as if Scottish endowments were swallowed in order to benefit the more needy universities of England. One result of this was that the higher professorial salaries which used to attract so many outstanding scholars to Scotland had to be brought down to the level fixed for the English universities – apart from London, which is specially favoured with allowances for travelling.

The low fees in Scotland had to be raised, if not quite to the English level, at least to a level at which the traditional difference is greatly reduced. It may be thought that this aim could have been attained with greater advantage by lowering the English charges, especially now that most fees are in effect paid through government grants. High fees press only on parents already suffering under the means test. But assimilation, it seems, has to work only in one direction even where the Scottish practice is obviously better.

It may be that some of these decisions could be defended separately on rational grounds. As a whole they have an effect not obviously advantageous to the Scottish universities, and the fact stands out that Scotland has no power to decide these matters for herself.

This complaint becomes all the more serious because something has gone wrong under the present régime. For the first time in all their long history Scottish universities are said to have refused admission to Scots who have duly qualified for entrance. The numbers affected may be subject to dispute, but even a few years ago such a position would have been inconceivable. It should surely be possible to provide extra places for the Scottish students who are now excluded.

The situation is not made easier by the fact that the coveted places are filled by students mainly from England. Any murmurings about this are greeted by prominent Englishmen with the customary homilies about the parochialism of Scotsmen and their failure to recognise that universities must be international. It seems even to be hinted that the presence of English students is necessary to make a university like St. Andrews truly 'chic' – that is, presumably, more like Oxford and Cambridge.

It is in the oldest, and in some ways the most attractive, of Scotland's universities that the trouble about places becomes acute. In the year 1965 56 per cent of the entrants to Queen's College, then a constituent college of St. Andrews University, though soon to become the independent University of Dundee, came from outside Scotland; for the University of St. Andrews as a whole the figure was 47 per cent. Is there any English university which can claim that half its students come from outside England? Nothing remotely like this is found, so far as I know, in great international universities like Harvard or Paris.

English critics display high moral enthusiasm for international universities, when by 'an international university' they mean a Scottish university in which the Scots are outnumbered by the English; but their zeal appears to cool when the word 'international' is taken in a more normal sense. The Scottish universities have always been international: they have always welcomed students not only from England but also from

Europe and America and the British Commonwealth. They still do. Such genuine internationalism was given short shrift by an English Minister of Education, when without consulting the universities he suddenly ordered the fees of overseas students in Scotland to be raised from £70 to the £250 he imposed elsewhere. So gross an offence against the comity of nations is alien to the whole academic tradition. Why should the Scottish universities have been subjected to such short-sighted and high-handed direction from the South? Is this an example of what they now have to expect?

Two of the ancient Scottish universities have already agreed to send to London all applications for admission, since Scotland lacks the necessary computer; and it looks as if the other Scottish universities may be pressed to follow suit. The unfortunate effects of these and other probable changes cannot be discussed here; but in general the homogeneous system of education enjoyed by Scotland for centuries can no longer be developed by Scotsmen in accordance with their own ideals. It must be twisted bit by bit to fit in with English norms and with a system of English education which, whatever its merits, has never really been a system at all.

One last point. The amount and quality of research in Scotland can no longer be determined in Scotland itself. When we remember that government research institutes, except on rare occasions and after bitter fights, are confined to the South, it becomes obvious that the reputation she enjoyed in the past can never under present conditions be restored. More and more money will naturally be allotted where most research has already been done, and Scottish men of genius, like Sir Alexander Fleming and Sir Robert Watson-Watt, will continue to make their discoveries in laboratories outside their native land.

5. *A reasonable claim*

In the field of education, as elsewhere, Scotland needs genuine autonomy if she is not to be unworthy of her past. It is important that so reasonable a claim should not be misunderstood.

No one suggests that in education Scotland is deliberately persecuted or oppressed. The days are past since Cromwell

could impose his puppets on the Scottish universities with power to 'plant and dis-plant' the teachers. In the Nineteenth Century there was still far too much of the 'jealous, tenacious, wrangling, over-bearing humour' of which Sir Walter Scott complained, but this is now confined to occasional outbursts from a few distinguished English professors in Scotland. The methods employed to-day are more gentle – and for that reason all the more effective. What is so dangerous is the English benevolence which is determined to share its own – unachieved – ideals with other people whether they want to have them or not.

The argument does not turn on the alleged superiority of Scottish achievements. Still less is it a claim for sticking to old methods without change. On the contrary, it is a claim for freedom to choose new methods in the light of past experience and to learn from other civilised countries instead of having to imitate blindly the untested models imported from the South. This is the elementary right of any nation, but Scotland's claim is particularly strong in view of her achievements in the past.

What stands in the way of so reasonable a claim? Nothing, it would seem, but a centralising bureaucracy supported by the unconscious passion of the English for assimilation and their habit of treating Scotland as an English province. No genuine English interest is at stake, let alone a British one.

If some of the details here discussed seem relatively trivial, their cumulative effect may be great. It is not enough to see that Scotland suffers in general from a clumsy and creaking machinery of government which places her at a permanent disadvantage. It has also to be made clear that she suffers from frustration in the details of ordinary life and even – if I may use the term without pomposity – of spiritual life. What happens in education is sadly typical of what happens everywhere. There can be no cure unless the whole system is ended and something better put in its place.