

The Vitality of Oxford

(Jon Wisenthal, former editor of The Campus, Bishop's University, is presently attending Baliol College in England on a Commonwealth Scholarship.)

One of Oxford University's most distinguished products, Dr. Samuel Johnson, claimed that when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life. The same could be said for a student who is tired of Oxford: the last criticism one could make of Oxford is that it is boring.

My strongest impression of Oxford is its vitality. Interesting and important events are always taking place; intelligent discussion abounds; and in most academic fields, impressive things seem to be happening.

This vitality is most evident on the surface, in the university's undergraduate activities. I counted 146 non-athletic university clubs in a guide to university events; on top of these there are countless college clubs and flimsy organizations which exist for a few months while a few people maintain some common interest.

A freshman can become a member of anything from the Communist Club to the Tercenary Society, which exists "to uphold all rightful monarchy"; from the Humanist Group to the League for Christ the King; from the Classical Society to the P. G. Wodehouse Society, "which exists to entertain its members."

The most important undergraduate organization is the

Union — the Oxford Union Society, which is the world's most famous debating club (the Canadian Senate aside). It is expensive to join the Union — about \$16 a year — but most freshmen do join.

Not only does it offer debates, but club facilities as well as a lounge, a bar, a dining room and so on.

Debates are held each Thursday night, and the debating hall, which holds about 500 is generally packed. Debating style is

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very different from that in Canada, but the standard is high. Here the successful debator is the entertaining one.

Whereas in Canada a logical but dull argument can usually win the day, at the Union an amusing but not necessarily relevant talk is what is called for. In addition to four undergraduate speakers there are always two guests — usually noted figures in public life. Nehru spoke in the Union last academic year, and Harold Macmillan, himself former member of the Union's executive, was a guest in recent years.

Ambitious undergraduates make a point of being heard in the Union, and set their sights on

election to one of the executive positions. It has often been said that the presidency of the Oxford Union is the surest way to a cabinet post in this country — many of Britain's leading political figures in the past century faced their first cries of "Shame! Shame!" on the Union floor.

Along with the host of extra-curricular activities, I mention people and studies as other sources of Oxford's vitality.

A much smaller percentage of young people attend university in Britain than in Canada and one finds a more intelligent undergraduate population as the result. This is especially true here at Oxford, since it and Cambridge are the most selective of the universities.

Of every five schoolboys writing entrance exams to Oxford, only one manages to get a place and only a small proportion of the country's youth can even think about writing these exams.

Therefore, undergraduates here are on the whole more impressive intellectually than undergraduates in North America, where the tendency seems to be to let as many people into university as space will permit, and then, fail out those who are inadequate.

On the academic side, one gets the feeling here that one is at the centre of things. Lists of new books on academic subjects printed in this country almost

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Birney Says College A Help to Aspiring Writers

The young Canadian who wants to write cannot afford to bypass a university education but he still must be prepared for some old fashioned sacrificial energy and persistence in the face of a tough road ahead.

Dr. Earle Birney made this point in an address to University of New Brunswick graduate students at a dinner in their honor Tuesday night at the Lord Beaverbrook Hotel. His subject was the "Canadian Writer in the University".

If the young writer wants his creative roots to grow in Canada, Dr. Birney said, he should go to a Canadian University at least for his undergraduate work.

"I think only the very unusual youth, habits organized and disciplined beyond what most with the writing temperament tend to be, is going to acquire anything like as balanced or judical an understanding of the world of ideas around him and of the literary and scientific heritage to which he is heir, by such do-it-yourself methods of education as by putting himself into the environment of even the humblest Arts College in Canada.

"There at least he will share

with non-writing students the benefits of a living teacher, if not always very live ones, teachers who may — who knows — even stimulate his thinking and at least direct his energies."

Dr. Birney pointed out that despite marked exceptions most Canadian writers have attended University. No poet, today, has to abandon college to examine life.

Those with high literary gifts who attend college need not take courses in the Arts Faculty. Dr. Birney listed several successful authors who studied for such professions as medicine and law. But students really serious about writing will as a rule seek out their own kin.

The noted poet, lecturer, teacher
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Social Faux Pas

When does a person become a mature and responsible adult? It is quite obvious that for some it is not during their university career. At a recent students' organization function three of these childish students, in ski attire crashed the function made up of well dressed couples.

Such flagrant violation of social customs at a university dignified and refined as UNB should not be condoned.

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