

In the evolution of this free association of independent states, the role of the university has been an enormously important one. This is not casual speculation but an indisputable fact. In particular, the Commonwealth stands greatly in the debt of the older universities of the United Kingdom which in earlier days formed the intellectual focus of the Empire, drawing students from the most remote corners of a far-flung imperial system. It is a tribute to the overriding wisdom and to the independence of these institutions that the ideas and ideals which they promulgated were not dictated by political exigencies. That students who, during the most formative years of their lives studied in the United Kingdom, later returned home to play leading roles in the achievement of independence for their countries is beyond doubt. At the same time these same leaders have insisted on maintaining close association with other Commonwealth members with whom they share similar values and ideals.

In recognition of the singular importance which universities have played in the ever-changing mosaic of the Commonwealth, a decision was recently taken at the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference which met in Montreal in September, to institute a far-reaching programme of scholarships and fellowships for Commonwealth students. Although the details of this programme remain to be settled, it is envisaged that when in full operation, almost one thousand students from Commonwealth countries will be studying in any given year in the universities of other Commonwealth members. Conferences of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers provide governments with splendid opportunities for exchanging views. Beyond the realm of policy, however, there is the important - and in the relations between democratic states, perhaps more important - area of understanding and friendship amongst private citizens. If this new scholarship programme helps to train those who will occupy positions of authority and responsibility in the public life of their countries, we will be satisfied. We will be better satisfied if it results over the course of years, in the predisposition on the part of anyone, regardless of his citizenship or vocation, towards a more sympathetic understanding of those who may differ from him; if it results in an engineer from Asia having a clearer idea of parliamentary democracy in Canada and a Canadian teacher having deeper and fuller appreciation of the rich and colourful heritage of Asia. Such benefits as may accrue from this imaginative project are not those, we expect, that will be measured in terms of kilowatts or miles of paved highway or even in terms of the new fetish of our times, the gross national product. If this multilateral exchange can open new intellectual perspectives for even a few citizens of some countries of the world, and if it can foster an awareness on the part of only a relative few that the inevitable differences which exist between and among the peoples of the world need not be regarded as threatening, the universities of the Commonwealth will have provided an enormous service, not only to the Commonwealth, but also to the whole world. For in this association, we see not an exclusive club but an international testing ground, a microcosm of things as they might be.