

## Return to Oxford, 1953

In the summer of 1953 four hundred former Rhodes Scholars from all parts of the world assembled at Oxford for a Centenary and Jubilee Reunion. Four of those present had been scholars from Iowa — W. B. Millen (1908), Virgil M. Hancher (1918), S. R. Dunlap (1935), and Courtney C. Smith (1938).

It had been a hundred years since the birth of Cecil Rhodes, and fifty years since the first Rhodes Scholars matriculated in Michaelmas Term, 1903. At that time, according to all accounts, the prospect of such an annual invasion from overseas left the ancient University by no means happy ("I won't say horrified," recalls Lord Elton, "but certainly very much startled"). Some of the scholars themselves may have been dubious as to what they might expect. But almost at once it became clear that such misgivings were unjustified. And the welcome which the returning scholars received in 1953 left no doubt of the success — in Oxford eyes, at least — of the first fifty years of the scholarships.

In awarding honorary degrees to five of the scholars, the Vice-Chancellor declared that "they typify what other Rhodes Scholars have done, in

government, in law, in learning, in science, in industry, in education, in all the many activities which civilization needs for its maintenance and its survival." And the *Oxford Magazine* commented: "Rarely has a dream come to life with the majesty of that of Cecil Rhodes; the jubilee is a very great event."

Each returning scholar, where possible, was assigned to his old rooms in college. In not many cases would the familiar walls have shown much change; when a building is already several centuries old the passage of a few, or a few dozen, years is not likely to leave much of a mark. The way of life, too, seemed to persist, and at some moments at least I could imagine I was myself a student again. The "Good morning, Sir" of my scout, as he brought in a typically hearty English breakfast, was for me like a voice straight out of the 1930's. Actually it was more truly a voice from the past than I at first realized; since the war (as I later learned) students have not been served breakfast in their rooms.

The city had been untouched by enemy action during the war. Meanwhile the population had grown from about 60,000 to well over 100,000. The traffic problem must be one of the most nearly insoluble in the world. But miraculously the University seemed not to have been overwhelmed by the mushrooming city. The authorities, having prevented an unsightly expansion of a gas works,

were now busy investigating whether they ought to forbid the erection of a new — and perhaps too garish — Woolworth's.

As for the University itself, it was clearly alive and growing. Just after the war its numbers had been doubled by an influx of veterans, many of them with wives and children, and housing for them had had to be erected on some of the famous playing fields. Now — as in American universities — there were fewer veterans, but the enrollment remained at about 7,000 as compared with 4,000 before the war. Everywhere change was visible, even though the basic patterns remained. New scientific laboratories encroached on the green expanse of the University parks. In "Duke Humphrey," the oldest section of the Bodleian Library, heating pipes were at last being installed after several frigid centuries. There was a New Bodleian to supplement the old Library. Several of the colleges had acquired new buildings. There was even a new college just getting under way — St. Anthony's, founded by a wealthy French merchant. It would be junior to some of its sister colleges by seven centuries, but it seemed destined to make no important break with cherished traditions. Its planners were reported to be giving special attention to the amenities of the dining hall and wine-cellar.

The events scheduled during the four days of the Reunion left not nearly enough time for talk.

But along with the receptions, the ceremonies, the dinners, and special services at the Cathedral, there was a General Conference on problems relating to Oxford and the scholarships.

But the keynote was that of celebration and of paying tribute. And not only at Oxford were the returning scholars made welcome. The British government itself, taking note of the Reunion, invited us to proceed by motor launch down the Thames to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, where we were received by the First Lord of the Admiralty. And perhaps the most memorable occasion for many of us came when we gathered in Westminster Abbey, still splendid in its Coronation trappings, to hear a special performance of Handel's "Messiah."

Such pomp and circumstance, though fully appropriate to the ambitious design of the scholarships and to the important achievements which they can truly claim, implied a standard of accomplishment which many of us individually, in whatever field, could hardly say that we had yet fully satisfied. And the entire Reunion, so intimately bringing together the past and the present, was an occasion for individual stock-taking. Many of us, I think, went away feeling very humble, but with a renewed regard for the excellent and lasting things which Oxford and the scholarships had helped to set before us.

RHODES DUNLAP

