

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG--INITIAL REPORT

7 Longwall Street
Oxford, England

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Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Everything is fine at Oxford. The trip over was pleasant and uneventful, and I have had no trouble at all getting to hear the lectures, being assigned a tutor, having a program of study planned out, etc. Mr. Veale set the wheels in motion as soon as I called at his office, handing me over to Mr. Robinson who is in charge of the Colonial Service program. Mr. Robinson has finished everything except the final detail of getting me formally admitted to the University, which he wishes to accomplish through the standard method of first having me accepted by one of the colleges. I believe he wants me in a college because the other Colonial Service students are in colleges and there seems to be a certain amount of prestige and social advantage involved. The amount of obligation these people feel toward yourself and Mr. Moe is being well demonstrated by their going beyond mere fulfillment of your basic request that I be allowed to participate in the program. I feel sure they are doing all possible for me, and they tell me that the final wrinkle of college admittance will be ironed out in a few days. I have held off writing this long because I hoped to be able to tell you that the last detail had been settled and name my college also.

The Colonial Service program fits in nicely with my plans, being of two term duration so that I can leave by late spring for my area. I am advised also that it will be possible to work toward a Bachelor of Letters, and perhaps switch later to a Ph. D. without taking any courses outside the Colonial Service or "Colonial Government" purview. They tell me this might be especially convenient in my case since non-resident study of the sort I might be doing in Africa can be considered for resident credit at Oxford. After I get my feet on the ground I'll be able to learn more about this, and also appraise the likelihood of my returning here for further (useful) study after a while in the field. The Colonial Officers I have talked to differ in attitude toward this; some think Oxford is a good idea to start a man going on the job, some think it is worth while to return every few years for "refresher" purposes. I have met two extreme cases who are here against their will, having been "selected" by local superior officers who they allege had sent them to Oxford simply to be rid of them in Africa. These two are

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unguardedly bitter about the whole idea. I guess it is a not wholly pleasant experience to be dragged away from a comfortable colonial area and sent to the poor food, poor housing, and (in their eyes) the poor instruction in such useless things as colonial history and Commonwealth relations. This last criticism is made less emphatically by nearly all the students, beginners and veteran officers alike, who are much concerned with contemporary, practical problems of administration. They feel the history and Commonwealth stuff is important but not enough so to justify inclusion in a concentrated two-term course. It strikes me as the same old basic conflict of the Academic versus the Practical, reminding me of some of the staff schools I attended in the army. Watching it will afford quite a few good laughs; like this morning when I heard Prof. Harlowe spend his first lecture hour making what seemed to me a rather frantic apology for the history subjects being forced into the program. He spoke of the "value of past experience in rising to meet the dire test to which every Imperial Power must subject itself at the moment it becomes an Imperial Power." And he preceded this with his own definition of the word imperialism which implied a sort of patriarchal benignity on the part of the colonial power. Incidentally, Prof. Harlowe, the first full prof. I have heard lecture, is the most competent lecturer I have ever heard from the standpoint of presentation and convincing dialectics. So even at this date I know that not all of Oxford will be disenchantment, as was predominantly the case at Princeton!

I think this tells about all I can say now about the scholastic side. The vagueness is not my own but a characteristic of the University itself, and as I get on the mysteries will continue to unfold. Barring very bad luck I should be in collage very soon. Inside information will then be much easier to obtain.

On the personal side everything is equally good. The train ride up from London was enjoyable; the countryside appeared much as I expected, the weather still being very mild. Dick Nolte has been very hospitable; after a first night spent sleeping myself in the atmosphere and inconvenience of the Mitre Hotel I moved to his place and spent two days while looking for permanent quarters. For something less than five pounds weekly I am now rooming and eating breakfast and dinner at 7 Longwall. I think it is a good deal better than staying at a hotel not only because of the expense but also because it has thrown me into contact with several other students who are entirely different from any other Britons I have ever met. I can hardly understand their individual versions of the King's English, and did not realize until now how much the accents of the British I met during the war had been altered (for the better) by continuous contact with Yanks. The only thing which would lead me to give up this priceless breakfast-and-dinner-table schooling in a foreign language would be a chance to room with one

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of my fellow Colonial Service students. There is no immediate prospect of such an opportunity but I am making some firm friends among the veteran colonial officers without much difficulty because many of them served in India and Burma during the war. (The biggest trouble is that the most candid and spontaneous conversations among colonial officers can be gotten under way only under the influence of warm, weak beer in smoky, low-ceilinged pubs. I'm afraid my intestinal tract will decay in proportion to the amount of unstinted, uncensored opinions I hear.)

I'm pretty much the complete Oxford man now, in appearance. The one suit I brought on the plane is fittingly wrinkled and my shirts have all been worn twice, laundry taking weeks here. I bought a bike (a grim necessity at Oxford) and have ridden it three days and nights without being killed by speeding lorries and Austins whose numbers belie the petrol rationing program. I tried to buy an odd sports jacket and trousers but found Phil Talbot's warning about the quality and price of woollens to be very correct. Quality merchandise is being exported---to the point of irony in the instance where Oxford weave shirting has been unavailable in Oxford for more than six years.

Phil (and I) however were dead wrong about the typewriter situation. Foreign typewriters are on a two year waiting list in Oxford, and English machines are little less difficult to buy at any price. By dint of all the string-pulling I have dared to do I have an Oliver Portable (a really fine little machine) promised for delivery by Christmas. In the meantime I'll beg and borrow unless you happen across some very convenient way of getting an American machine to me. This is a very minor detail since plenty of typewriters are available for borrowing; so think nothing of it unless the chance arises and incurs no obligation at all. The machine I left with Phil, if he has not yet disposed of it, would be okay, or any other type of American portable. But the delay and inconvenience of getting one here by routine means would certainly not be worth while. Besides, in seeking out the devious ways Britons themselves go about obtaining their own good products which are largely earmarked for export only, I am learning a lot about British economics and individual attitudes toward the policies of the government. On second thought, better let me go ahead and wait for this British typewriter. Maybe after I use it for a while I will have some profound observations to make on the subject of British mechanical genius. (I could do so now on the basis of my limited experience with British water closets but I know they would be trite, to you.)

Well, after these few days Oxford still seems a fascinating place. There are a million and one impressions that I've scribbled down in my notebook; later I'll read back and see

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how well they stand. I've changed a little bit all ready, one example being my coming round to a new set of values so that I can appreciate just how much your suggestion that I bring a ham to the Nolte family really meant. There is plenty of food over here but the quantity and quality of meats are not up to American standards. This bald fact becomes more interesting when you talk with young undergraduates, who, being perhaps ten years of age when England declared war, have never in their lives known what Americans believe to be a balanced and healthful diet. It is also worth noting that the attitudes of shopkeepers, like the instance you described in the shoe shop, are more pleasant than in the States. People are generally willing to help a stranger, and they seem to do so in the face of far greater frustrations than we ever encounter on the other side. At first glance, at least, there seems to be a good deal of evidence that a hard core of greatness lies beneath the material mediocrity on this Island. . .

I know this letter hasn't told you very much, and I haven't taken time to condense it into length commensurate with its factual import. I'll write again and try to tell you what I've overlooked. Oxford is following Princeton's pattern of demanding written papers, so for a while at least a lot of energy and time will be taken up trying to catch up my background of British history, etc., to make my papers acceptable. So for a while I may be a little slow in writing to you and to those who played host to us on our trip through the Mid-Northwest by Ford. . .

Everything I have learned here seems to point up the wisdom of hastening over here in time for the Colonial Service Course. Being entered in it is a tremendous advantage from both the educational and "contacts" points of view. I'm glad you saw fit to rush me across, and grateful. . . As soon as my plan of study shapes itself up I'll describe it in detail. . . Right now I think I'll start trying to turn out a paper of some sort on "The Current Popular Attitude Toward 'Intolerable' Indirect Government." (I had nothing to do with the selection of this ultra-controversial topic. Mr. Robinson suggested it, perhaps with malice aforethought; and it would have been very awkward to try to get it changed to something less sensitive. . .)

Sincerely yours,

