

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JH - 1
Honorary Degrees

Scott Polar Research Institute
Cambridge, England
November 10, 1958

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

As we stood in the quietly dripping rain in the Yard of the Senate House watching the medieval procession file by in multi-colored splendor, we both felt that we were in the midst of the Middle Ages. Directly in front of us stood venerable Gonville and Caius College, which was founded by a parish priest Edmund Gonville in 1349, over 600 years ago. Behind us was Kings College and to the right Great St. Mary's Church.

The procession was headed by the Chancellor of Cambridge University, Lord Tedder. He was followed by the University Marshal and Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret, who was about to be given an honorary degree of LL.D at a special convocation of Senate House. Making up the balance of the scarlet and black robed procession were the Vice-Chancellor, Lord Adrian, and the assembled Proctors, Stewards, Heads of Colleges, Doctors of Divinity, Law, Medicine, Science, Letters and Music, and the remaining members of the Council of the Senate.

We had chosen to watch the procession from the Yard so that I could obtain some color photographs. The crowd in the Yard was sparse, space being limited to members of the University and their guests. They lined the walks over which the procession moved in great dignity. Outside the Yard great throngs of townspeople and undergraduates were cheering as Princess came into view. She is indeed a beautiful woman, and walked along the path with regal grace.

In presenting the Princess for her degree the Orator said "Once upon a time it was enough for a king's daughter to be seen to be both beautiful and good" (*satis olim habebatur in regis filia si et pulchra et bona versaretur*), and continuing, paid tribute to her accomplishments as a singer to her own accompaniment (*'dulces docta modos, cuius' digiti cum voce loquuntur.*) The actual presentation was very brief, and, like all formal University Congregations, was conducted in Latin prose, but especially written in her honor.

Earlier this year in June Cambridge conferred honorary degrees upon eight distinguished representatives of the arts, the sciences, and the public service. Included in the four recipients of the degree of LL.D was Dean Acheson, who was cited as being "the prime mover of the principle of lease-lend" during the crisis of World War II, and was

further described as bearing "perhaps the heaviest burden ever imposed upon a single man" during his tenure as Secretary of State.

Dag Hammarskjold also received the degree at that time, and Dr. Sydney Chapman, President of the international "Special Committee for the IGY", was given an Sc.D. Who, asked the Orator in presenting the degree, has not heard of the Geophysical Year.

Oxford gives many more Honorary Degrees than Cambridge. Although this fact would seem to indicate that such extreme selectivity raises the standing of a Cambridge Honorary Doctorate, a local writer states that this is indeed a mistaken opinion: "Not only do we award few doctorates; we are exceedingly rigid in allocating them. It appears as if the claims of every walk of life which universities offer were rigorously weighed against each other and the sternest care were taken to see that none could be said to be unfairly favored."

Names to be considered for Honorary Degrees at Cambridge are submitted to the Vice-Chancellor (the actual head of the University) as early as the middle of Michaelmas Term, beginning in October. These are then examined by the University Council in private. Public discussion by members of the Council or others would be considered as lobbying - thus deep secrecy has always shrouded the procedures.

Annual awards are given in June, although Oxford is flexible enough to be able to give the award at almost any time, a procedure which makes it able to take advantage of a visit of some distinguished foreigner and award him a degree instead of forcing him to come at a time when it may be very inconvenient.

Although a less important matter of concern than many other issues in a university, Honorary Degrees are considered significant here as they are the means by which the Members of the University collectively recognize distinction outside its walls.

However, criticism is often made here at Cambridge that foreign artists are so rarely given a degree - only four since 1946. Reasons are advanced why no one in the world of art should ever be recognised. Some are opposed to interpreters of the arts being honored partly on the grounds that they already have the awards of applause and publicity.

Others are apprehensive lest those whom they regard as charlatans or second-rate fashionable artists would be honored and would rather that none was ever given a degree. Others argue that there is no generally accepted standard such as exists in the world of scholarship against which to measure a name.

Bolder ones suggest that the names of those declining degrees also be published as did Oxford this spring when Picasso refused. It is said that Picasso felt that if he accepted an Oxford degree he would have to accept one from Harvard; and that at his age the prospect of a line of similar ceremonies stretching into the future was too daunting....

Received New York, November 18, 1958

Yours sincerely,
John Hanessian, Jr.
John Hanessian, Jr.