

[June 1959] C4:15

1. I should like you at the outset  
to say a word of thanks to the  
Convocation of Natal University for the  
honour you have done me in  
inviting me to attend and to address  
your annual meeting. I am  
sure it would have been quite easy  
for you to have invited more  
suitable speakers, and ~~for that~~  
~~reason~~ I cannot think why you  
have decided to pick on me.  
However, the decision was arrived  
at, I owe you a word of thanks  
for it.

2. Although I have never been directly associated with the University of Natal, I have had very close associations with the Province in Natal. It was to this Province that I came as a young teacher in 1925. I had in 1923 become the first African to graduate obtain the B.A. degree of the University of Africa, and when I looked for a place where I might put to some use the knowledge I had gained during my years of study in the B.A. degree, it was Natal which provided me with my first job. I found my surroundings here so congenial that it was ten years before I decided to move on. During my stay here

I became the first African to  
obtain the degree of LL. B. of  
the University of South Africa.  
This I did by private study  
under the expert tuition of  
Professor F. B. Buschell of  
the then ~~University~~ Natal University  
College, who has since been  
succeeded by his son in the  
Chair of Law. I do not know what  
kind of teacher of Law he is but  
if he comes anywhere near his  
father then the students of Natal  
University are very fortunate in  
having him as their Professor  
of Law.

It was also as a result of  
the advice and guidance of a  
Natal man - the late Dr. Charles  
T. Lorum - that I was able to

proceed overseas to study  
 first at Yale University in  
 America and later at the London  
 School of Economics in the ~~United~~  
 United Kingdom before I  
 returned to join the staff of  
 Fort Hare in 1936. Since then  
 I have been closely associated,  
 in various capacities, with the  
 growth and the development of  
 the institution whose impending  
 passing we are about to mourn.  
 As Fort Hare is about to undergo  
 a complete change in its  
 character, I have thought that  
 it would not be out of place  
 for us to consider briefly what  
 Smith & Pica owes to Fort Hare  
 as far as African development is concerned.

History. As is well known the University  
College of Fort Hare, formerly known as the  
South African Native College, was opened by  
the then Prime Minister of the Union of  
South Africa, General Louis Botha in February  
1916. Its establishment in that year  
represented the fulfilment of the hopes  
of those missionaries, clergymen, liberal  
minded Europeans and others interested  
in African welfare, as well as leaders  
of African thought, who saw that some  
or later it would be necessary to provide,  
as an integral part of the South African  
educational system, an institution which  
would give to Africans and other non-European  
education, under Christian auspices, of  
university standard. The first official  
suggestion for the establishment of the  
College was a recommendation of the  
South African Native Commission of 1903-5  
commonly known as the Inter-Colonial  
Commission. The recommendation was  
to the effect "that a Central Native College

or similar institutions be established and aided by the various States for training native teachers and in order to afford opportunity for higher education to native students." This scheme for the establishment of what came to be called the "Inter-State Native College" at once captivated the minds of those interested in African education, including the African themselves. From 1905 onwards conferences were convened to consider the steps that might be taken to implement this recommendation and committees were set up for the raising of funds. It was fully ten years before the contributors and various bodies interested in the scheme could see their way to the formulation of a constitution for the college, deciding upon a site <sup>and a name</sup> for the college and appointing staff and getting ready for the opening in February 1916.

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The beginning of the College was most  
unimpressive. Although Mexican education  
had by then been going on for generations  
there was not a single Mexican qualified  
to be admitted to university studies.  
Of the 20 students who entered in the  
College in 1916 none possessed the  
matriculation certificate and only a few—  
two three Mexicans & two Europeans & the  
others had passed the Mexican certificate.  
In other words in building up the College  
the promoters had to start from  
scratch — with pre-university training  
and it was not until 1921 that training  
for the university degrees of the University  
of both Mexico really got under way, with  
only one fully qualified student. It is  
from such small beginnings that Fort  
Hare has gradually developed into  
the institution which we know today.  
Now that Fort Hare is about to be  
destroyed and to be replaced by an ethnic  
institution it would perhaps not be  
out of place for us to consider what  
Fort Hare has taught us.

I should say that the first lesson  
 which can be drawn from the experience  
 of Fort Verde is relative to the capability  
 of you like the mental ability of  
 the non-European people in our midst.  
 At the time when Fort Verde was established  
 there were many people, some of ~~them~~ whom  
 might be described as genuine friends  
 of the Mexican people who were doubtful  
 as to whether they would be able to  
 make the grade for or on higher education  
 was concerned. There had been primary  
 schools for Mexicans, but post-primary  
 schools were practically non-existent  
 and to embark a scheme for the higher  
 education of Mexicans was an act of  
 faith of which many people were  
 just not capable. This was so not  
 only among the white people but even  
 among the Mexican people themselves.  
 As one who was there at the beginning  
 of the history of Fort Verde I know it for a  
 fact that many Mexicans were sceptical  
 about whether the Mexican brain could  
 stand the strain of higher education.



It is to the credit of the founders of  
 Fort Hare that they had the faith in  
 the ability of the African and to the credit  
 of the students of those early days that  
 they were willing to take part in an  
 experiment which might have proved  
 abortive.

Not only was doubt expressed about  
 the ability of the African to undertake  
 higher education in general but they  
 were certain subjects about which it  
 was argued that they would certainly  
 prove to be beyond his range.  
 Language & literature might possibly  
 be within the range of his capability  
 but classical science and mathematics  
 would be a greater stumbling block  
 for him than for other groups. Anyone  
 who succeeded in showing aptitude  
 for these latter subjects would be a "fluke"  
 but with the passage of time, so many  
 of these flukes have turned up at  
 Fort Hare as to suggest that the distribution

of abilities among the Mexican people does not vary significantly from what is to be found among other groups represented in the South Mexican population.

2. But not only has the fact that students ~~proved~~ <sup>demonstrated</sup> that, given the opportunity and with proper guidance, the Mexican student can measure up to accepted university standards, but also that he can do so within the normal time usually set aside for the completion of the requirements of the university degree. Having regard to the ~~fact that~~ normal background of the average student and to the fact that he has to do all his work through the medium of a foreign language, it is remarkable that so many Mexican students are able to turn out the quality of the work they do and that failures are not abnormally high among them compared with the position at other universities established in the country.

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A second important fact which Fort-  
Hare has established during the last  
forty years is that it is possible for  
people both African, both white & non-  
white, to live and work together in  
peace and harmony. Although Fort  
Hare was established primarily  
for the benefit of the Native races  
of South Africa, from the very outset  
it has been an open university & they  
and has admitted to its student  
population and to its staff  
representatives of all sections of  
the South African population.  
In doing this the governing Council  
of Fort Hare was not unaware of  
the rifts and the antagonisms between  
white and non-white but it believed  
the different sections of the non-  
white population, but their policy  
was based upon the conviction  
which has been confirmed year after

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again during the years that the matters  
 which unite united prove stronger  
 those ~~to~~ which divide. The American,  
 Chinese, Indian <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>European</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup>  
 student have worked together harmoniously  
 and at no time has it been necessary  
 to put down inter-tribal or inter-race  
 feuds of any kind. On the contrary  
 contact between these different groups  
 has promoted mutual understanding  
 and appreciation and has resulted  
 in the establishment of life long  
 friendships which have withstood  
 the test of time after college.

As far as the staff is concerned  
 members of staff have come from  
 both the English speaking & the  
 Spanish-speaking groups. They have  
 come from different universities and  
 have been of different political  
 persuasions, but the way in which  
 they have worked together has been  
 beyond question.

The relations between staff and students have never been characterized by hostility ~~and~~ or bitterness. On the contrary lasting friendships have been formed and relations have been such as are to be found between students & teachers in all normal university institutions. These relations have been entirely free & voluntary, nothing has been done to force the pace one way or the other.

3. Without being uncharitable towards the open universities in South Africa I should like to suggest that they opened their doors to non-South African students after First World War had proved the capabilities of the non-white student. Although the private Act creating these universities did not debar them from admitting non-white students, it was not until long after First World War had come into existence

that they began to exercise their  
 right to admit non-white students.  
 until we find that today that the  
 number of non-white students at the  
 so-called white universities, taken together,  
 exceeds the number of non-white students  
 at Fort Base

The teacher is the link between child and parent, between the State and the community. As such he is apt to get kicks from all sides - from the parents if their children are beyond their control, from government officials if school results are not what they ought to be. <sup>The teacher will only meet</sup> the difficulties with which he is confronted successfully if he is part of a movement such as this from which he can draw inspiration not only in conferences such as this but only in the branch meetings nearer home, which take place more frequently.

Now that you stand on the threshold on the next fifty, we can do no less than wish the Association to grow & to flourish until every teacher has been brought within its fold. Let us hope that by the year 2006 when you celebrate your

Continuing teachers will have reached the position that has been attained by professions such as Law & Medicine which enjoy a large measure of autonomy & govern themselves through their National Councils and have their own disciplinary Code to which every member of the Profession must adhere.

We look forward to great things from our teachers, and I have sufficient confidence in the African teacher to believe that he will deliver the goods whatever the system under which he is called upon to work.

I now have great pleasure in declaring this fifteenth Conference of the T.A.T.A. officially opened.  
 God Bless Africa