

# "THE UNIVERSITY OF UTOPIA"

## A lecture by Sir Archibald Garrod, 3rd November 1917, Malta

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Between the end of 1915 and the beginning of 1917, Sir Archibald Garrod served as a Colonel in the Army Medical Services and, during most of this time, was stationed on the Island of Malta. He played a leading role, as Senior Medical Specialist, in the medical activities of which that Island became the stage during the Gallipoli and Salonika campaigns. Here he commanded the respect and esteem of all who came in contact with him. Not the least amongst these were the Maltese people he met both socially and in the exercise of his medical duties. He was often called upon to lecture and soon achieved a reputation for being "a very good speaker who could be relied on to give an interesting lecture even

without any previous notice". (Mifsud 1965) Some notes on this period of Garrod's life have been published already (Vella F. 1965 and 1966).

It is not surprising then, that records are available that he delivered at least four public lectures during his stay in Malta. Two of these were given under the auspices of the University of Malta and were entitled "Islands" (Garrod, A.E. 1919) and "The University of Utopia" (Garrod, A.E. 1919), while the other two were organized by the Church of England Men's Society in Valetta and were entitled "Other worlds than ours" (Daily Malta Chronicle 1918) and "Life on other worlds" (Daily Malta Chronicle 1918). Garrod also addressed the

Malta Medical Conference on the subject of "War Hearts" (Nicholson-letter) and this talk was probably based on a paper he published about this time (Garrod, A.E. 1917).

Both the University lectures were given at the Aula Magna and were published. However, only the lecture on "Islands", delivered just before Garrod left Malta soon after the end of the First World War, is listed in the bibliography of Garrod's writings included in Harris's reprint of Garrod's *Inborn Errors of Metabolism* (Garrod, A.E. 1963).

The other two lectures were given at the Valletta Gymnasium and there is no evidence that they were published. They were advertised as "Lantern Lectures", but there is no record of their content. It is very likely, however, that "Other worlds than ours" dealt with Malta's pre-history, a subject which intrigued Garrod and on which he was very knowledgeable through a close friendship and association with Professor (later Sir) Themistocles Zammit who was then excavating the Tarxien Neolithic Temples. The lantern slides used in this talk were lent by Professor Zammit (Daily Malta Chronicle 1918). The talk "Life on other worlds" was delivered on 12 November, 1918 when Malta was celebrating the signing of the Armistice. In fact, the talk was postponed by an hour because of the "Te Deum" at St. John's Cathedral in Valletta, which no doubt, Sir Archibald also attended (Daily Malta Chronicle 1918). It probably was concerned with astronomy. As a young undergraduate at Oxford, Garrod was awarded the Johnson Memorial Prize for an essay on nebulae, and, a few years later when a clinical student at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, he re-wrote this essay and published it privately (Hart, C.J.R. 1949).

"The University of Utopia" was Garrod's first public lecture in Malta. It was delivered in the same Aula Magna where, on the 15th December 1916, the University of Malta had honoured him with the degree of Doctor of Medicine and thus numbered him amongst her first honorary graduates. In the chair, as had also been the case at the degree conferment ceremony, was Field

Marshal Lord Methuen, Governor of Malta and Visitor to the University. The great hall was probably packed to capacity, not only with Maltese intelligentsia but also with fellow officers, and there is no doubt that his talk was received enthusiastically (Daily Chronicle 1917). Garrod's interest in University education was well known in England. Early in 1914 he had given evidence before the Haldane Commission on University Education in London, and recommended closer association between the hospital and the University (Hart, C.J.R. 1949). His audience cannot have been surprised when, four years later, Garrod (then Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University) acted as a delegate from the University of Malta at the Congress of Universities of the British Empire held at Oxford during July 1921 (Minutes General Council University of Malta).

The talk, in its published pamphlet form, covers eighteen pages. Its contents can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Introduction: the state of University education in Britain.
- (b) The origin of the University and of the curriculum.
- (c) The four functions of a University.
- (d) The curriculum: classical studies versus natural science.
- (e) Conclusion: need for education in educational methods, problems of time and money and the University of Utopia.

Some two-thirds of the pamphlet are devoted to an analysis of the functions of a University and to the claims of classical studies and natural science as a basis for a University education.

He questions

*"whether classical studies are so preeminent in training the mind, that it is necessary to put ALL pupils of higher schools through the mill of Greek and Latin grammar, whatever their aptitudes and bents, or whether the time at their disposal might not be better spent in other studies".*

He considers that

*"the ignorance of natural science at present prevailing is far more deplorable than would be the disappearance of Greek from the curriculum of other than classical students"*.

To Garrod

*"the claim of natural science to its due place in the curriculum . . . is not based upon the importance of a knowledge of scientific facts alone, but much more upon the educational value of scientific methods of thought"*.

For

*"Science is not, as many seem to think, something apart which has to do with telescopes, retorts and test tubes, and especially with nasty smells, but is a way of searching out by observation, trial and classification; whether the phenomena investigated be the outcome of human activities, or of the more direct workings of nature's laws. Its methods admit of nothing untidy or slipshod, its keynote is accuracy and its goal is truth. What form of intellectual training can serve better to develop the students' reasoning powers, can provide a better vehicle of education?"*

Garrod must have approved of the changes in the pattern of education that took place during the post-war years and might well have reiterated today:

*"Nevertheless an education that is wholly scientific is just as lop-sided as one from which science is excluded; for there are great fields of thought which are not controlled by scientific reasoning, but, shorn of which man would lose many of his highest attributes".*

One paragraph is particularly striking as it is almost certainly autobiographical:

*"Doubtless each one of us cherishes the memory of some one or more teachers whose influence did much to shape his mind and character. The encouraging word spoken in season, the flash of humour which illuminates, in passing, the true inwardness of a problem, the magnetic power which leads us on to utilize such talents as we possess, are never forgotten. They are the ferments of life, and help to make us what we are"*.

According to Hart (1949), Garrod always considered he owed his career to Dr. Farrar, Master of Marlborough College which Garrod entered in January 1873. Within two years, Farrar, who considered Garrod to show scientific promise, managed to persuade his father (then Professor of Therapeutics and Clinical Medicine at University College, London) to revoke his decision to remove him from Marlborough and put him to business. A passage from his address to the Osler Club some years later expresses similar sentiments:

*"We recall the schoolmaster who awakened our interest in what has been our life's work; he who by a word of encouragement spoken in good season helped to give us confidence and showed that one person at least believed that there was something in us. Another may have succeeded in interesting us in subjects for which we had no appetite — classics perhaps . . ." (Hart C.J.R. 1949).*

Contrary to what this last statement suggests, Garrod does not appear to have minded greatly his experience of classical studies:

*"But although I am convinced that compulsory Greek is doomed, and that its passing is merely a matter of time, I, for one, shall ever feel thankful that, in the days of my youth*

*some knowledge of the tongue was drilled into me against my inclination and will".*

His views on the *raison d'être* of a University are to the point:

*"The main functions of the University are four in number. The more important are instruction and research, the less important, examination and the bestowal of degrees".*

His views on what professors should be, and, do are still today's ideals:

*"Just as pupils originally gathered to the informal teaching of eminent men, renowned for their erudition, so nowadays the university system calls for professors who possess such knowledge as is only to be acquired at first hand. They should be investigators whether the field of their studies be the lofty concepts of theology and philosophy, the minutiae of grammatical form, the foundations of history, or the study of the phenomena of nature by observation and experiment. In virtue of the studies of such men the university in which they carry out their work must needs become a centre of original research in many fields".*

A little later on he stated:

*"So the teacher who has a radio-active mind, and moves naturally upon a higher plane of thought, beckons his pupils up to his level, and reveals to them untold possibilities in subjects which in other hands are dull and uninspiring. He stimulates them to investigate for themselves, and directs their early footsteps on the path of research".*

His thoughts on the duties of students are brief:

*"He who emerges from his un-*

*dergraduate days without a changed outlook upon life, and a more mature grip of its obligations and responsibilities has failed to avail himself of the gifts placed within his reach".*

Garrod's deep interest in ancient history and in archeology has already been alluded to. During his three year stay in Malta, he often accompanied Professor Zammit (then Curator of the Malta Archeological Department) on excavations at the Tarxien Neolithic Temples which had been discovered in 1913. A photograph has been published which shows Garrod in uniform, with three service colleagues watching Zammit excavating at Tarxien (Vella F. 1965). It is also recorded that Garrod contributed towards the cost of the papier maché model of the Tarxien Neolithic Temples which can still be seen by visitors to the Malta Museum in Valletta (Daily Malta Chronicle 1919). His appreciation of the principles and methods of archeological research were amply demonstrated in his talk.

*"There are few branches of knowledge which are not becoming permeated by scientific method, and even classical studies are awaking to new life under the influence of scientific work upon the relics of the past. The archeologist is the practical historian, and his methods, which are strictly scientific, closely resemble those of the geologist. The broken sherd, the dropped coin or weapon, the hidden treasure, serve to date the successive deposits on a buried site, just as the fossils which they contain date the several strata of the earth's crust. A child's toy, a votive offering, the wares exposed for sale in a buried shop, are for the archeologist precious documents. Even the scribblings of idle hands upon the walls help to reveal the daily*

*life of remote peoples, and it is a comfort to think that those who so deface historic spots nowadays may be providing valuable graffiti for archeologists of the future".*

Those who know the Tarxien Neolithic Temples will appreciate how deftly he used his first-hand knowledge on the subject in providing an illuminating summary of the findings at these Temples:

*"Here in Malta we have ample opportunities of studying the methods of scientific archeology. As the spade brings to life the sanctuaries of our neolithic predecessors of five thousand years ago, the explorer needs to note, label where they lay and at what depths. Pottery is of special value to him, for from its materials and decorations it can be identified as neolithic, bronze-age, Punic or Roman. From the plans of the sanctuaries, from archaic statuettes and votive offerings, he can reconstruct, to some extent, their cults and ceremonial, and from fragments of bone can identify the animals offered in sacrifice. The artistic level of the neolithic peoples can be appreciated in graceful carvings, painted ceilings, and pottery of exquisite shapes and finish. Furthermore, he can trace the coming of a bronze-age race, which finding the sanctuaries desolate, used them as burning places of its dead and burial places of their ashes".*

In the concluding part of the talk Garrod alluded to "the two great influences which hamper university education, want of time and want of money". The ideal situation for him was one where

*"every educated man should have a thorough grounding of general knowledge, in languages, literature, mathemat-*

*ics, history and geography, as well as in natural science, and that after such a foundation has been acquired he should proceed to the special studies preparatory for his chosen career".*

He was practical enough, however, to appreciate that

*"for the majority the curriculum must needs be curtailed by the jettison of the ornamental rather than the strictly useful parts".*

and that

*"Money, and money in large amounts, is needed for the efficient equipment of a University".*

To him

*"The University of Utopia is a dream. It has never existed and never will exist. It is but an ideal at which it behoves us to aim".*

One can imagine Garrod surveying his audience, in a hall covered with paintings of several generations of Maltese worthies — a sight with which he had become very familiar — concluding his talk with:

*"In an ancient and renowned foundation, the teachers and students of today are trustees of a great tradition. The paths and corridors which they tread have echoed to the steps of great men of the past, scholars, divines, poets, philosophers, scientists and statesmen, men who have made history and shaped thought, and who departing have left behind them 'footprints on the sands of time'. To their successors of the present falls the task of carrying on their work, and of taking their share in shaping the history and thought of future generations. Such is their responsibility and such their privilege. They must not rest content to hand down their inheritance unimpaired,*

*like the talent wrapped in a napkin, but must seek to leave to those who come after a wider knowledge and a still nobler civilization".*

One who was present at the lecture has left the following record of his impressions:

*"Col. Garrod's lecture was an intellectual treat of the highest kind. To listen to such a discourse, so full of thought and suggestion, couched in language that revealed the instinct of the scholar, and delivered with a perfect grace of simplicity was a liberal education in itself. It was a lecture worthy of the ideal University of his conception, a lecture to inspire the true teacher and to make the student more of a student than before. It was a lecture that none but the sourest critic and cynic could carp at, an academical achievement, as His Excellency the Governor fitly remarked, such as we have seldom been privileged to hear in the Aula Magna of our University".*  
(Daily Malta Chronicle 1917).

Within twelve months after Garrod first set foot on Malta, the University invited him to accept an honorary M.D. "in recognition of the high qualifications possessed and of services rendered . . . in the cause of hum-

anity during the war". Barely a year later, he publicly reciprocated the honour bestowed upon him with "The University of Utopia". Thus began the warm and close relationship between the Island of Malta and Sir Archibald Garrod that lasted until his death in 1936.

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