

435, Haven Avenue,

Ann Arbor,

Michigan, U.S.A.

5th. November 1930.

Dear Harrod,

I was exceedingly glad to have your very stimulating and helpful letter. (It has only just come ^{after lying in the Post Office for a week,} into my hands, though an announcement in the university daily, or I would have answered it before).

When I read it this afternoon, I was almost startled at the resemblance of its suggestions to my own impressions of the American setting as I had tried to formulate them last night. Though Ann Arbor has not proved the best of schools, it has been fully sufficient to make me feel the difference between economics in America and economics in Oxford.

In a phrase, I think the difference is that the latter ^{kind} is a ~~branch~~ of philosophy, the former a ^{kind} ~~branch~~ of botany; the Oxford economist uses the armchair, the



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American the collecting-case and the adding-machine.

~~Now~~ I'm not here 'scorning the armchair: it's obviously essential to have rigorous reasoning from simple, if hypothetical, premises, and after attempting to read Mills' "Behavior of Prices", I have no love for fact without theory. But ~~that~~^{it} remains true that it's nice to have some premises which are not hypothetical —

— that the collection of data ~~is~~^{is} an essential part of economic study, and that in Oxford no one is collecting. If the Cabinet wants to know the course of British foreign trade since the war, or changes in the incidence of unemployment by age-groups, has anyone in Oxford got the answer ready?

I am afraid that most of us are not only unready, but unable^{even} to set about it. Or take the possibility of inquiries: the amazing gap, for instance, between wholesale and retail prices — could we not send out an army of young women into the shops of back street and front street to find what no one now, I think, knows at all accurately, despite some index-numbers — the week

by week response of retail prices to wholesale prices?

Or fluctuations in consumers' demand: could we not take some town like Aylesbury or Banbury, where there is a mixture of agricultural and industrial spending, and cajole the shopkeepers, publicans, ~~and~~ cinema managers, and churchwardens, into letting us have returns of their weekly takings? The examples may be badly chosen, as certainly they have been chosen hastily; but I am convinced that it should be the function of an Oxford school of economics to find out facts as well as to argue from premises.

So at least I concluded last night, and you will forgive me if I have been labouring (or misstating) the obvious. But one practical corollary of this

conclusion is that economics cannot advance in Oxford without a Department, and this department must be part of the university library: there the secondary sources, the books, reports, bulletins, works of research, and periodicals, can be all at hand ~~and~~

for both teacher and pupil, and there too the machines and the indices can be for the research workers. We need our laboratory as much as the zoologists need theirs.

But to reach the purpose of your letter: I am so grateful to you for making clear to me what I had dimly and only dimly recognized: that my best way of spending my time here will be in ~~just~~ going around and finding out what sort of work (in the application of statistical methods) is going on, and how it is being done. ~~WAS~~ Some time ago I had proposed moving on say to Chicago in the New Year, and there settling down to work on a project of research which Robbins suggested to me - a History of the Theory of International Trade. This work, however, could be done as well in England as in America; as I should be beginning from scratch, I should not be in a position to discuss and argue with scholars here, and I should spend my time simply in reading. The programme which you suggest has

~~the~~ the nervous appeal of not requiring
sustained chair-folishing, but I think I am
^{over and above all that,}
honestly convinced that, ^{it} it would be the best
course. And until you suggested it, I had
not realized that the Rockefeller (or Social Science)
people would endorse it; in my interview in
New York ~~was~~ I was treated as a quite small boy.

Here in Ann Arbor

^^ I made the mistake of regarding myself
~~that~~ as a member of the graduate school, only
to discover that a graduate is for the most part
one who with a year's preparation might hope to
get through P. Mods. There is, however, Morris A.
Copeland, an institutionalist who thinks in formulae,
and has dialectic abilities of a considerable order.
(He is accordingly regarded as very brutal in controversy;
for here every inconsistent view appears only as "another
angle on the subject".) I have now withdrawn from
most of the courses into which I blundered, and
am spending my time on textbooks of statistical ^{theory} ~~theory~~;

by the New Year I think I should be able to understand most practical applications of statistical method, though of course I could not follow advanced mathematical procedure.

I shall, then, write to my adviser (Givens of the Social Science Council), and suggest this plan; it means a volte-face, but is worth some loss of consistency. And I am particularly grateful for your suggestion that I might get work in some piece of research in order to get understanding and practical training together.

I promised to give you my experience of the workings of the library here, but I do not know that I have anything to say except in praise. The rapidity with which a book is brought to the counter is (to those broken in the wheel of the Camera) a constant delight^{*}; and you can take books home. Access to the stacks is exceedingly useful; and the method

^{*} I suppose $2\frac{1}{2}$ minutes is an outside figure.

whereby the staple textbooks of each subject, together with special shelves of books chosen by professors to ^{are kept in separate teaching rooms,} support their courses of lectures, must save both students and assistants a great deal of time; though of course one assistant has to be kept in each such room.

My chief doubt is whether the teaching-home system would be expedient in a university where people read as much as they do in Oxford; it is certainly not pushed to the point of diminishing returns here. I may add one point which may seem childish, but is perhaps not without ~~impolite~~ suggestiveness: the library is evidently intended to be the students' library, and not the librarian's - you may take out fiction freely, and a list of the fifty great novels of the world is posted up for your guidance. This list would raise superior smiles in Congregation, but I must confess I've been very interested in it myself; and in any case it stands for an attitude towards the library which is strange to an institution whose

attitude towards its books seems to be in choicest descent
from the monk's attitude towards his manuscripts.

There is even a kind of book club - a row of shelves
in which the most interesting (or, perhaps, 'suitable')
of recent intake is set out to tempt the passer by. —
That there should be a separate reference library goes
also without saying.

So, if I may answer your wishes with one of
my own. I hope you'll fight a tenacious,
cunning, unyielding battle for an imaginative and
expensive new library in Oxford. In these things,
whatever is Big is Right.

Thank you again for your letter; it has been
a ^{great} ~~very~~ help to me.

Yours

Henry Phelps Brown.

P.S. I hope you have not missed Bishop Talbot's article
on the Oxford Mission to Calcutta in The Times of Oct. 24,
beginning: "Oxford & Calcutta! The names suggest remoteness
and contrast rather than affinity."