

SIR GEORGE PATON

Sir George 'retired' as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne in 1968; but he has done so much since then that he puts many a youngster to shame. He has been, at various times, Chairman of Pitmans, Australia, and of the Melbourne Theatre Company, a trustee for the Rhodes and Buckland Trusts, and an executor of various wills benefiting the University — and has, on occasion, even acted as temporary Supreme Court Librarian.

When I saw Sir George recently, I suggested that most older law students knew that he 'had something to do with admissions', but were not quite sure of his precise role. He explained that, for a considerable time, he has been Secretary to the Board of Examiners for Barristers and Solicitors, a body comprising the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General as *ex officio* members, in addition to three barristers and three solicitors. The name 'Board of Examiners' is somewhat misleading, added Sir George, pointing out that it scrutinizes, rather than examines in the sense familiar to students. For a start, the Board must approve all articles of clerkship, and subsequently it has to approve the credentials of all applicants for admission to practice. The latter must submit, in each case, and among other things, two references from legal practitioners, and must make full disclosure of any criminal charges brought against them. Such charges will not necessarily preclude admission, but full disclosure *is* demanded. Criminal charges, incidentally, include all traffic charges (except those related to parking), stressed Sir George, who finds some applicants unwilling to concede this basic fact.

With nine admission days this year, Sir George is often kept extremely busy: lately, on April 1st, for instance, six admission sessions had to be held to admit 188 new practitioners. I can testify to his frantic phone and to the stream of applicants, papers in hand, waiting outside his office to see him. Nor is his work made easier by those seeking present admission, whose affidavits aver that they began articles in 1982. He sometimes reels when applicants, 'to save time', want then and there, themselves, to alter their principals' faulty paper work. Kindly Sir George, however, cannot bring himself to act like one of his predecessors, who was wont to thrust back at startled applicants their unsatisfactory documents, barking that they were defective, but refusing to pin-point errors.

The present Secretary does foresee overcrowding in the profession for at least the next few years. In 1945, a mere 20 barristers and solicitors were admitted to practice in Victoria, and it was 1961 before the figure rose to 100 a year. But twenty years later, in 1981, 549 were admitted, including

122 non-Victorians, of whom about half were from other Australian states, and the rest from New Zealand and other countries.

Pressures like these on young lawyers are considerable; but Sir George admires many of them, along with bodies like the Law Institute of Victoria, for their valuable work in helping to bring legal aid to those in need — one of the most important tasks that lawyers can perform, and one much neglected in the past. He is also pleased to see some young lawyers active in the Institute, working for simplification of admission rules in each State and for unification of these throughout Australia.

Sir George remains at heart a young lawyer himself, and clearly retains an affection for aspiring legal practitioners. By and large he considers them 'a good thing', and sent me off to 'give his love to the students'. His own illustrious career must be a stunning example for law students for all time. A first class honours Arts graduate from Melbourne, an M.A., and Rhodes Scholar for Victoria for 1926 (middle distance running was his sport), he went on to acquire first class honours degrees in Jurisprudence and in Civil Law at Oxford. During 1930 Sir George lectured at the London School of Economics, and was then appointed Professor of Jurisprudence at Melbourne, where he soon married Science graduate Miss Alice Watson. In time, the rigours of World War II tried him to the hilt: naturally he was not found wanting. He was Acting-Dean of the Faculty of Law from early 1943, and Dean in the post-war period until late 1950, when he was elected Vice-Chancellor of the University, a position he held till the election of Professor (now Sir) David Derham.

His 1946 text on Jurisprudence, currently in its fourth edition, was and is a most significant work, along with his book on bailment, published in 1952. Sir George was also, in 1948, joint author, with Messrs J. V. Barry and G. Sawyer, of what became a well-known text on criminal law in Australia.

Neatly filed in Sir George's memory are some marvellous stories, which I, for one, hope he will commit to print. He is nothing if not human, and recalled for me his paralysis, half-way through delivering a lecture in Roman Law, on suddenly noticing that his students, constantly adjured by him to respect University property, had placed right under his nose a little old University table, very deeply scored with the letters 'G.W.P.'. Recognizing his own handiwork, by-gone product of not days but weeks of toil, the erstwhile vandal stopped dead — and lost his Roman thread.

Sir George likes to remember, too, things like the beautifully resonant voice of Mr (later Justice) Norman O'Bryan, when a lecturer in Private International Law. So sonorous were his tones, that late-comers in the cloisters could hear his discourse there, though enamating from the Philosophy Lecture Room in Old Arts.

The former Dean remembers well the great student effort that went into producing, from 1935, the first numbers of 'Res Judicatae' — a name, by

the way, Sir George never liked much: he much prefers that of its successor, 'Melbourne University Law Review', identifying, as it does, both University and journal. 'Res Judicatae' had to be produced 'on the smell of an oil rag', for subsidies of any sort were unknown. A great debt, though, was due to the Law Book Company, for its considerable promotion of the publication in its infancy.

The very first issue intrigues Sir George, as it does us all. Its student editor was J. B. Harper, today the senior partner in Arthur Robinson and Company, and Honorary Secretary of the Council of Legal Education. The magazine's business manager was E. I. Sykes, long-since Professor 'Ted' Sykes, teacher and learned author. Five of its contributors became judges, but their names then merely read: Arthur Dean, A. D. G. Adam, J. G. Norris, C. I. Menhennit and G. H. Lush. Two other contributors were to become professors of law, E. I. Sykes and G. Sawyer, which two already were: Professor Bailey and Professor Paton. The second issue added the name of K. A. Aickin to the list of contributors — a student who would, in time, take his place on the High Court Bench.

The high standard of this publication was maintained by 'The Melbourne University Law Review', when it superseded 'Res Judicatae' in 1957. Sir George Paton admires the Review, which, he feels, has gone from strength to strength. He observes that it is to be found in the Supreme Court Library (which takes in very few student journals), and greets both M.U.L.R. and its staff on the occasion of the anniversary of the Review's first quarter century.

When he is not hard at work in his pleasant old room in the Supreme Court, the affable Sir George revels in one advantage of his so-called retirement: having time to pursue irrelevant but arresting cases. An avid reader, he also walks, gardens and plays tennis, but only swims in heatwaves. He is a happy family man, who patently enjoys people at large, and who gets 'a great kick' out of life. We pay tribute to him on his eightieth birthday and wish him well.

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