

A SPEECH IN HONOUR OF IAN LITTLE ON THE OCCASION OF THE
PRESENTATION OF A FESTSCHRIFT - JAN. 8, 1990.

Ladies and gentlemen

We are gathered together to present a Festschrift to Ian. A speech on this occasion could adopt the line in Mark Antony's oration at Caesar's funeral. As you will see from the first chapter in the Festschrift, Francis Seton has already done this in his 'Salute Inter Vivos' to Ian. Following Mark Antony's ploy he begins his piece with the statement: "The title is intended to put the reader on notice not to expect an *éloge*." So to differentiate my product I will turn the Mark Antony opening gambit around and say: "I come to praise Ian not to bury him."

A Festschrift, my OED tells me, is "a collection of writings in book form presented to a scholar or savant on the occasion of his attaining a certain age or period in his career."

Ian is certainly a scholar and savant, but it would be difficult to say that he has reached a "certain age or period in his career" which would justify (in these green times) the destruction of whatever number of trees that have gone into transferring these essays into print. So perhaps I can begin by describing the genesis of this Festschrift. I think that it was sometime in late 85 or early 86 when I was lunching with Ian at the World Bank that it occurred to me that Ian should have a Festschrift. I had just received a copy of a Festschrift for someone you all know who was till recently resident on the other side of St. Giles. In his case the "attaining of a certain age or period in his career" was perhaps sufficient justification for a Festschrift. But I at least had not thought (and still do not) of Ian having "attained a certain age or period in his career". Like our blessed Prime Minister I see him, and wish him, to go on and on and on! But I still felt that it seemed unfair that Ian did not have a Festschrift. For in this age of self-promotion, when anyone appearing in Mark Blaug's "Who's Who in Economics" rushes to collect his or her so-called 'scientific papers' into a volume - with a copy discretely posted to Assar Lindbeck in Stockholm - and cajoles or coerces associates into organising a Festschrift, Ian was too much of a gentleman to do either.

'Gentlemen', now that is a term that has a strange ring to it these days. I recognised this some years ago in a conversation with Ian. We were at a conference in some manor house - pretty close to the one in which Ian was brought up. I had just been gazaumped by a rather famous and brilliant pianist. My wife of course had assured me that she had established a personal relationship with him and that he would not go back on his word for a trifling 10,000 more than he had agreed to sell his house to us. She of course was wrong, and incensed I told Ian - at the conference soon afterwards - how the times were 'all out of joint' when one could no longer take a gentleman at his word.

Whereupon Ian retorted: "But since when have pianists been considered to be gentlemen." Quite! Of course I should have known, gentlemen were synonymouss with the landed gentry - and Ian of course is a true gentleman in that sense. Such gentlemen do not (and need not) indulge in self-promotion.

But Ian clearly deserved a Festschrift and I told him so. I wrote to Maurice, who concurred, and then did most of the work to ensure this volume appeared.

Ian undoubtedly deserved a Festschrift on professional grounds, it seemed to me, because of his indubitable eminence. For even those on the other side recognise him as the 'eminence grise' of what Ian has labelled the "neoclassical resurgence" in development economics. You will see therefore why the grey cover with the author's photograph that OUP has designed for the volume is wholly appropriate. Andrew Shuller and Anna Zaranko are to be thanked for producing what I hope you will agree is a beautiful volume.

Though his fame is international, Ian is, at least for me, quintessentially in the great tradition of English economists from Ricardo, Mill, Marshall to Keynes - which regrettably seems to have atrophied in more recent times. Moreover, he is also an exemplar of what used to be the great tradition of Oxford economics. For my generation there were three great economists practising at Oxford - Hicks, Harrod and Little. Despite the differences in their natural gifts and interests, they were the leaders of an Oxford 'culture of economics' which always looked upon the subject as a wordly enterprise. For them, whilst logical rigour was essential, economics was not a mere branch of applied mathematics, with economists engaged in deriving new "theorems" - in the pretentious current scientistic parlance. Theory for theory's sake was less at a premium than its uses in understanding and changing the world around us. This Ian Little has done superlatively in the major area of economics that he has concerned himself with - economic development. Suppose you had to choose the 10 most important books in development economics, which needed to be preserved in a time capsule for the time when the book-burning holocaust occurred. Which would you choose? Well, here is my list:

1. Kuznets: Modern Economic Growth
2. Lewis: Theory of Economic Growth
3. Schultz: Transforming Traditional Agriculture
4. Roserup: The Conditions of Agricultural Progress
5. Bauer: Dissent on Development
6. Sen: Employment, Technology and Development

The next three books are either by Ian or co-authored by him: Economic Development, Industry and Trade in Some Developing Countries and Project Appraisal and Planning in Developing Countries.

This makes nine. There is still room for a tenth. As you can see, a book on the macroeconomics of development is missing from my list. And of course this is the next book which is due from Ian!

Of course in this technocratic age, this listing of books will seem archaic. This was brought home to me some years ago during a review of research institutes I had to undertake as Research Administrator at the World Bank. I visited a newly set up institute in Buenos Aires. It was run by two young, very able and well known American trained economists. They were justly proud of turning out postgraduate students who were on a par with those from American universities in terms of technical expertise. They showed me around their institute, and then we came to the library, which they said was very well stocked. Imagine my surprise when I found it consisted entirely of bound copies of every conceivable economics journal, but going back no more than 10 years. There were no books. They told me proudly that as economics was a science, only the latest articles in journals were relevant for researchers, and books were redundant. To buy them would be like wasting scarce money in a science library on defunct books by Bacon and Newton!

I hope this scientific disease does not spread too widely. Because as all the great economists have realised, economics is not like physics in this respect. It is a human or social science, in which, as Michael Oakeshott has emphasised, the role of what he calls "human conversation" is paramount. And in economics, books unlike articles - with their increasingly rigid formalism and structure - are the only way in which conversations (which require spaciousness) can be economically enshrined for posterity. To show what Oakeshott means I would like to quote a passage from him, which will allow me to pinpoint another major reason why those who have known Ian personally have been so fortunate. Oakeshott writes:

"As civilised human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and inquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages. It is the ability to participate in this conversation, and not the ability to reason cogently, to make discoveries about the world, or to contrive a better world, which distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilized man from the barbarian. Indeed, it seems not improbable that it was the engagement in this

conversation (where talk is without a conclusion) that gave us our present appearance, man being descended from a race of apes who sat in talk so long and so late that they wore out their tails. Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation."

Ian is a past master at such conversations, and I, as I am sure many others, cherish conversations with him in the past and look forward to many more in the future. Ian always wants for himself, and for others, quite rightly, someone to talk to. Unfortunately, perhaps due to advancing middle age, I find that there are fewer and fewer economists in the younger generations one can talk to. I do not think this is just middle aged dyspepsia but the result of what has happened to the economics profession over the last few decades. Most of the younger generation seem to have absorbed the currently fashionable view that anything which cannot be put into symbols is meaningless and can't be economics, and who (as John Hicks noted in one of his last essays) largely rely on econometrics "to make their contact with reality". Alas, it is rather difficult to have a conversation with a differential equation!

Finally, I cannot conclude without offering a salute (sadly posthumous) to Dobs. Her gaiety, charm and warmth were an essential part of the 'exciting' and glamorous atmosphere surrounding the Littles. But above all she deserves to be remembered on this occasion, because she was such an essential part of the enterprise which helped to produce Ian's intellectual work which we are honouring tonight. This was brought home to me most vividly, soon after Dobs died, when Ian and I shared a 'bachelor pad' - as the Americans call it - in Washington, as widowers - myself I hasten to add of the verdant variety. It seemed to me then that a bulwark in Ian's life had been taken away, and it speaks for his great resilience that he has since then made a life on his own and achieved some serenity - not least I gather from the joys of being a grandfather.

To Ian, then, friend, mentor, and great economist, we would like to present this modest token of our appreciation for what has gone and in anticipation of what is still to come.

Deepak Lal