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Fields beloved in vain
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First let me thank Mr. O'Sullivan for the invitation to attend this annual Dinner of the Hall of Halls. I am fulfilling a promise I made to him and the Hall Chair when I visited in July last year on the occasion of the Convocation week. Let me say also what a pleasure it is to see some of the Taylorites of my vintage here this evening. Their presence adds a special spice to the occasion which like most events of this nature has to be a bit sentimental and evocative of memories which are all mostly pleasant as time has mercifully erased or at least dulled any of the unpleasantnesses that may have occurred while we were here. One of my own pleasant memories is of the three Pelican Awards that I have been given. The first was while I was chair of the Jamaican chapter of the Guild of Graduates; the second was from the Washington chapter and the third of which I am especially proud is the Pelican of the Year Award given to me by Taylor Hall in 2004.

I may not have shown it, but that visit to Taylor Hall last year stirred emotions that often arise in me when I visit places in which I spent the days of my youth. On such occasions I cannot but recall Thomas Gray's "Ode on a distant prospect of Eton College" in which the famous lines appear;

Ah, happy hills, ah, pleasing shade,

Ah, fields beloved in vain,

Where once my careless childhood strayed,

A stranger yet to pain!

I believe that in those days we genuinely believed that the hills were really our very own and indeed we knew no real pain. There might have been the discomfort of getting a C grade for a paper, or failing a viva, but no real pain, as we would come to appreciate later in life. I would take issue with Gray however and posit that these fields were not beloved in vain.

I could not help marveling at the changes that had taken place, which is of course silly, as I could not have expected that time would have stood still. But at the same time I did recognize some of the places and spaces that were landmarks of a special period of my life. The shrubs that were planted 50 odd years ago were now massive trees and were no longer in danger of being trampled by stray cows or tipsy revelers. They no longer ran the risk of being knocked over by some enthusiast trying to catch a tennis ball.

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I confess that it seems strange to be celebrating Taylor Hall away from the hard benches and the greasy tables and the dour picture of Thomas Taylor which marked the original dining room. It seems strange to be celebrating the Hall so far away from the hallowed grave of Jaghi. But I am sure that his spirit moves among us.

There is yet another reason for accepting Mr.O'Sullivan's invitation. Two years ago, by virtue of my office as Chancellor of the University I was inducted as Patron of Chancellor Hall in a very enjoyable dinner/ceremony. But later that night I was visited in a dream by Jaghi who remonstrated with me that it was bordering on the treacherous and the indecent to have embraced that other place. When I told him that my office required it and told him of the ceremony of the induction in which men called themselves mans and sang paeans to Bo Bo of blessed memory, he sucked his teeth, used a four letter word and said that my excuse was weak. With some diffidence I pointed out to him that he should be careful with that word, as the term "ras" in Amharic has three letters and means prince or lord as Dunstan Champagnie, the first author of the "Book of the Dead" knew very well.

He went on to remind me of some of his own history, which I am sure you all know-how he drove his cattle from mid-Jamaica to the Mona estate and settled there. He said that when Thomas Taylor reconnoitered the Mona estate on foot his descendants made Taylor promise that the grave of Jaghi would never be disturbed. I would not be surprised if the discussion at that time did not include a promise that the grave would be the epicenter of all things good and great in the University and that any who dwelled hard by would be the brightest and the best that the Caribbean could produce. I would not have been surprised if Taylor had not said "let it be written, let it be done".

Jaghi went on to point out that he was here long before Bo Bo and they were now good friends, but he assured me that in spite of the generous spirit and girth of Bo Bo, that other place was doomed from the very beginning as it had been populated exclusively by females when it was opened, while ours was christened by males, real men-men who could sing with joy as they peed from the balconies at midnight, or recited lines from Cyrano de Bergerac from their windows on Sunday mornings clad in shorty pajamas.

Jaghi, although he was not Christian would say to me "unlike Nazareth, can anything good come out of that place?" I pointed out to him that the females who were the first persons to come out of that place were nurses, which was a very good thing; as never in the history of the University would one see again such a large band of young virgins passing almost daily for review before the young studs of Taylor Hall. And never again would the University see naked lust shown in such forms. Jaghi was not amused and quoted from the gospel of St.Matthew:

"But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

I dared not argue with Jaghi that the lust of the young studs was not restricted to their eyes, but I simply told him that even Presidents of the United States have admitted to

such feelings. Before Jimmy Carter became President, he said the following in an interview with Playboy magazine.

"I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times. This is something that God recognizes I will do--and I have done it--and God forgives me for it."

Or in the words of Jimmy Swaggert, he looked but did not touch. I am sure I could say the same for the gentlemen of Taylor Hall of those days. Of course some of us married some of the young nurses, but that is another story!

But enough of that other place! We spoke of some of the tales of the old days and I recalled some of the stories from past Hall dinners. I could recall Doc T's grace in Latin—mercifully the short version! Those were days when men wore gowns to formal dinner—some wore them properly with long pants—some wore them to hide short pants and it is alleged that one very distinguished gentleman wore his with no pants at all. But since there were only men in our Hall at that time, what is a little matter of pants among friends. We spoke of E.V Ellington of beloved memory who on being served a bowl of thick, very thick red pea soup to begin dinner, called the waiter and remarked to him 'Tell me laddie, is this to be eaten or has been?'

I recounted for him that history should show that the steel band was introduced into the University and to Jamaica by Mano Raymond who made the first tenor pan in Taylor Hall. I told him that wind ball cricket on the spine was begun and nurtured in Taylor Hall, and that Taylor Hall was the only breeding ground for Nobel Prize winners from the University. They were men who were recognized from the beginning by their capacity to write, paint and drink.

He asked me if Taylor Hall is still a place that resonates with discussion and debate about things which are of concern to the Caribbean, such as politics and sport, whether one can still hear the slapping of dominoes and the appropriate cry when double six is about to be killed. In my day one said "*send for Madden*" as Madden was then the premier undertaker in Kingston.

I could not answer these questions and I think it was about that time that my dream or reverie ended.

But over the past few years and as my contact with the University as a whole has intensified, I have had good cause to reflect on whether I am correct in taking issue with Gray that these fields are beloved in vain. I would posit that there is every good reason for West Indians like myself to love these places that formed us. The University and Taylor Hall were the places that exposed us to fellow West Indians and burned into many of us the idea that we had a common future in the world especially as the world itself got smaller and colder. Nothing that has happened in recent times has caused me to change that view.

Of course I regret that every student cannot have the experience that I and many of us had of living on campus and in a hall of residence that facilitated the kind of

dialogue that is so necessary in our formative years. Of course I regret that everyone cannot have the opportunity to forge the kind of lifelong friendships that derive from the shared experiences and the shared spaces that are facilitated by living on a campus. I am struck by the number of students who although formally attached to a Hall are now really commuters. I believe the time has come for us to recognize that and have some place on campus to which they can go and be comfortable during the day and in between classes. We obviously cannot and should not go back to a fully residential University. There is no way that we can accommodate forty thousand students in residence, but we must still find a way to give all students a sense of belonging to a single enterprise, of partaking in a learning experience that has more in common than the expectation of receiving a degree with the same crest engraved upon it. There must be a way to ensure that the symbol of the Pelican and the ideal of the light arising from the west mean something to the young while they are here and after they leave.

And it is here that I think the alumni have a role which to date is not being discharged as fully as I would wish. In every major educational institution that calls itself a university, there are focused efforts at mobilizing the alumni to contribute financially to the institution. I know that some of us here do, but we are in the minority. I am pleased to note that especially in recent years there has been a much more aggressive effort to contact alumni and seek their support, but the response has not been as enthusiastic as I would have wished.

It has been said that the tradition or culture of philanthropy is weak in the Caribbean, but if we accept that thesis, then I put it to you that we must endeavor to change it. Such a change cannot be the unique responsibility of the institution. It has to have the help of the target audience as well, so this evening I am asking your help in fostering the culture of giving to the institution. I have no difficulty if you elect to give to one or other part of the institution or to a special project or to the general funds of the institution. Experience has shown that there is more success with requests for targeted giving and I trust that you will encourage your circle of fellow alumni to consider contributing to one or other part or project of the University. We are not old enough to have alumni who are so wealthy that we can expect massive endowment gifts, but we are old enough and numerous enough to expect that more of us will give.

Contributing to the University is enhanced by the constant presence in our midst of the symbols that make us conscious of it. I am thus very pleased to see that there is now a plethora of publications on and about the university and its various parts and its symbols. There is the modern Pelican, the campus magazines and the Alumni newsletter to name a few. We cannot have too many of them. At many of the Caribbean airports there are signs of welcome on behalf of the alumni. Given the modern capacity for electronic communication, there is no reason why any alumnus should not be informed on a regular basis about the University.

I know that especially in times of hardship there is increasing interest in measuring the value of the output of institutions of higher education. There is a legitimate desire to establish some economic value and impact measures of institutions such as ours.

Without going into the kinds of metrics and analyses to be used, I would only sound two cautionary notes. First we must never ignore that there are critical non-market aspects of the work of institutions like ours. Second the debate on the value of one or other level of education is best not cast as a zero sum game and I ask those of you in positions of influence to advocate for those views.

I forgot to tell you that Jaghi did ask me what I was doing now and when I mentioned that I was still the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, he was very interested. We spoke of the various efforts to control the disease and I had to confess to him that there was still rampant homophobia in the Caribbean and the laws in many countries made it illegal for consenting males to have sex in private. These were inhibiting an optimal public health response to the epidemic. I also told him that one of the few, perhaps the only time I was ashamed of Taylor Hall was on reading that a man had been assaulted there purely because of his presumed sexual orientation. But Jaghi corrected and scolded me as actually the man was assaulted elsewhere and took refuge in Taylor Hall which indeed saved his life. However, I would hope that at least in a University where the respect for human rights should be a given, there should be no further incidents of this nature. He agreed with me in hoping that the day would soon come when the laws against buggery for which the Caribbean stands out in contradistinction to the rest of the Americas would be a thing of the past.

Let me end with the last verse of Gray's Ode.

*To each his sufferings: all are men,
Condemned alike to groan,
The tender for another's pain;
The unfeeling for his own.
Yet ah! Why should they know their fate?
Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too swiftly flies.
Thought would destroy their paradise.
No more; where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise.*

Gray suggests that such is the harshness of adult life, and the happiness of student days is so fleeting, it is better if the young did not think too deeply about anything serious. But I believe the young should think about things of importance and I trust that the debate and discussion that goes on in Taylor Hall does deal in great measure with the desired future and therefore the future the men and women who sport the blue and white will create for the good of their University and the good of the Caribbean as a whole.

Thanks and good luck to Taylor Hall. Long may it remain the Hall of Halls!