An exceptional Sri Lankan

Editor's note

We are privileged to publish today in the *CMJ* the following citation given by Professor Charles A Fewson of the University of Glasgow, at the graduation ceremony held on 11 July 2000, when the University conferred the honorary degree of the Doctor of Science on an exceptional Sri Lankan. He is Professor T W Wikramanayake

MBBS (Cey), PhD (Glasgow), Hon DSc (Universities of Peradeniya, Ruhuna and Glasgow), Fellow of the National Academy of Sciences (Sri Lanka), Hon Fellow of the Sri Lanka College of Paediatricians, and Professor Emeritus, University of Peradeniya. Professor Wikramanayake is a brilliant researcher, prolific author, and a pioneer in every sense of the word in biochemistry, nutrition, nuclear medicine and medical education.

Professor Thomas Walter Wikramanayake

Mr Vice-Chancellor, by authority of the Senate, I present to you this person on whom the Senate desires you to confer the honorary degree of Doctor of Science: Thomas Walter Wikramanayake.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wikramanayake was born in 1918 in what was then known as Ceylon and is now Sri Lanka. He graduated in medicine in Colombo. His academic excellence had been noted at an early stage, and he was appointed to a Lecturership in Physiology in the University of Ceylon.

He then came to Glasgow to carry out his doctoral work under the supervision of Hamish Munro in the Institute of Biochemistry. He arrived at the West Medical Building on 1 January 1950 and was surprised to find it almost completely deserted. The New Year was then celebrated in Scotland with even more fervour than it is now. However, he rapidly settled into the exciting scientific atmosphere because Glasgow had long been an international centre for research into nutrition. He graduated PhD in 1952: he thus preceded by almost half a century the graduands sitting in the front rows today.

He then embarked on a career which brought great eminence in biochemistry, in nuclear medicine, in nutrition and in higher education more generally.

He has spent periods doing research in places as diverse as Wisconsin, California, Russia, the West Indies and Central America. We especially recall a postdoctoral year that he spent back here in Glasgow in the 1960s, when he was accompanied by his wife Eugene, whom we are delighted to welcome here today, and who has a Glasgow PhD in medical genetics.

It is as a nutritionist that Tommy Wikramanayake is best known. We would claim him as a member of that distinguished series of Glasgow nutritionists which includes Cathcart, Cuthbertson and Boyd Orr (the Nobel Prize winner after whom is named the building in which nearly every graduand in this hall must have studied). On his return to Colombo, Wikramanayake was involved in extensive nutritional surveys. The results in Ceylon were strikingly simi-

lar to those found by Boyd Orr here in Glasgow in the early part of this century. Malnutrition was linked to economic circumstances. There was lower resistance to disease and lower ability to work to support the family. Importantly, and like Boyd Orr, Wikramanayake advocated a holistic approach to the dreadful problem of malnutrition. He was a member of the Lankan National Nutrition Co-ordinating Committee which worked directly with the Prime Minister. He drafted a milestone memorandum on the need for a national nutrition policy that took account of all aspects of the situation. He advocated the need for an inter-sectoral approach to nutritional problems. Perhaps his main achievement was to inject the sense of urgency, importance and direction that led to effective co-ordination of actions in health, education, agriculture and fisheries, and science and Technology. Not surprisingly, he helped found, and was President of, the Sri Lankan Nutrition Society. His experience and advice on nutritional matters has not been restricted to Sri Lanka but he has had an international influence, especially in the nutritionally worst affected areas of South East Asia. He has written two excellent textbooks, in Sinhalese and in English. Importantly, he has been a prolific writer on nutrition in the popular press.

Wikramanayake was also the pioneer of nuclear medicine in Sri Lanka. He was a key member of the committee which drafted national legislation on the use and holding of radioactive materials. The subsequent introduction of diagnostic and curative methods has been an extremely important component of the improvement of national health care in Sri Lanka.

He has played a substantial role in the development of medical education in Sri Lanka. He has been Professor or Dean in most, if not all, the medical schools. In Peradeniya, where he was Head of the Department of Biochemistry and Director of the Nuclear Medicine Unit; in Ruhuna, where he was Dean of the Faculty of Medicine; in Kelaniya; and in Colombo.

But is it not only as a scientist and as an educationist that Tommy is well known. As a student, he was the first

Perspectives

captain of swimming in the University College, Colombo. I know from first-hand experience what an excellent swimmer he is; but perhaps the sea temperature at Mount Lavinia is more attractive than that at Ayr. He has produced and directed plays for the University Dramatic Society in Colombo.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, for his many contributions to nutrition and thus to the well-being of fellow citizens, as well as for his contributions to science, medicine and higher education more generally, I now invite you to confer on Thomas Wikramanayake the honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

Professor Charles A Fewson, *Director, Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow.*