GENERAL SCIENCE

Smithsonian Honored

The Smithsonian Institution is in the vanguard of a movement to expand and improve worldwide educational aims and achievements.

Remarks of President Lyndon B. Johnson, at the Smithsonian Institution Bicentennial Celebration in Washington, D.C., Sept. 16.

➤ AMID THIS POMP and pageantry we have gathered to celebrate a man about whom we know very little but to whom we owe very much. James Smithson was a scientist who achieved no great distinction. He was an Englishman who never visited the United States. He never even expressed a desire to do so.

But this man became our nation's first great benefactor. He gave his entire fortune to establish this Institution which would serve "for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men."

He had a vision which lifted him ahead of his time—or at least of some politicians of his time. One illustrious United States Senator argued that it was "beneath the dignity of the country to accept such gifts from foreigners." Congress debated eight long years before deciding to receive Smithson's bequest.

James Smithson's Legacy

Yet James Smithson's life and legacy brought meaning to three ideas more powerful than anyone at that time ever dreamed.

The first idea was that learning respects no geographic boundaries. The Institution bearing his name became the first agency in the United States to promote scientific and scholarly exchange with all the nations of the world.

The second idea was that partnership between government and private enterprise can serve the greater good of both. The Smithsonian Institution started a new kind of venture in this country, chartered by act of Congress, maintained by both public funds and private contributions. It inspired a relationship which has grown and flowered in a thousand different ways.

Finally, the institution financed by Smithson breathed life in the idea that the growth and spread of learning must be the first work of a nation that seeks to be free.

These ideas have not always gained easy acceptance among those employed in my line of work. The government official must cope with the daily disorder he finds in the world around him.

But today, the official, the scholar and the scientist cannot settle for limited objectives. We must pursue knowledge no matter what the consequences. We must value the tried less than the true.

To split the atom, to launch the rocket, to explore the innermost mysteries and the outermost reaches of the universe—these are your God-given chores. Even when you risk bringing fresh disorder to the politics of men and nations, these explorations still must go on.

The men who founded our country were passionate believers in the revolutionary power of ideas.

They knew that once a nation commits itself to the increase and diffusion of knowledge, the real revolution begins. It can never be stopped.

In my own life, I have had cause again and again to bless the chance events which started me as a teacher. In our country and in our time we have recognized, with new passion, that learning is basic to our hopes for America.

Learning Is the Taproot

It is the taproot which gives sustaining life to all of our purposes. Whatever we seek to do—to wage the war on poverty—to set new goals for health and happiness—to curb crime—or try to bring beauty to our cities and countryside—all of these and more depend on education.

But the legacy we inherit from James Smithson cannot be limited to these shores. He called for the increase and diffusion of knowledge "among men"—not just Americans, not just Anglo-Saxons and not just the citizens of the western world—but all men everywhere.

The world that we face on his bicentennial anniversary makes that mandate much more urgent than it ever was. For we know today that certain truths are self-evident in every nation on this earth:

—that ideas, not armaments, will shape our lasting prospects for peace.

—that the conduct of our foreign policy will advance no faster than the curriculum of our classrooms.

—that the knowledge of our citizens is the one treasure which grows only when it is shared.

It would profit us little to limit the world's exchange to those who can afford it. We must extend the treasure to those lands where learning is still a luxury for the few.

Export Knowledge

Today, more than 700 million adults—four out of ten of the world's population—dwell in darkness where they cannot read or write. Almost half the nations of this globe suffer from illiteracy among half or more of their people. And unless the world can find a way to extend the light, the force of that darkness may engulf us all.

For our part, this Government and this Nation prepared to join in finding the way. During recent years we have made many hopeful beginnings. But we can and we must do more. That is why I have directed a special task force within my Administration to recommend a broad and long-range plan of world-wide educational endeavor. Secretary of State Dean Rusk has accepted my request to chair this task force. Secretary John Gardner of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare will serve on it. Both these men have proved in their past careers how great is their devotion to international education. I intend to call on leaders in both public and private enterprise to join with us in mapping this effort.

We must move ahead on every front and at every level of learning. We can support Secretary Ripley's dream of creating a center here at the Smithsonian where great scholars from every nation will come and collaborate. At a more junior level, we can promote the growth of the school-to-school program started under Peace Corps auspices so that our children may learn about—and care about—each other.

Not Only An American Dream

We mean to show that this nation's dream of a Great Society does not stop at the water's edge. And that is not just an American dream. All are welcome to share in it. All are invited to contribute to it.

Together we must embark on a new and noble adventure:

First, to assist the education effort of the developing nations and the developing regions.

Second, to help our schools and universities increase their knowledge of the world and the people who inhabit it.

Third, to advance the exchange of students and teachers who travel and work outside their native lands.

Fourth, to increase the free flow of books and ideas and art, of works of science and imagination.

And, fifth, to assemble meetings of men and women from every discipline and every culture to ponder the common problems of mankind.

U.S. to Play Full Role

In all these endeavors, I pledge that the United States will play its full role.

By January, I intend to present such a program to the Congress.

Despite the noise of daily events, history is made by men and the ideas of men. We—and only we—can generate growing light in our universe, or we can allow the darkness to gather.

De Toqueville challenged us more than a century ago: "Men cannot remain strangers to each other or be ignorant of what is taking place in any corner of the globe." We must banish the strangeness and the ignorance.

In all we do toward one another we must try—and try again—to live the words of the prophet: "I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart which shall not be put out."