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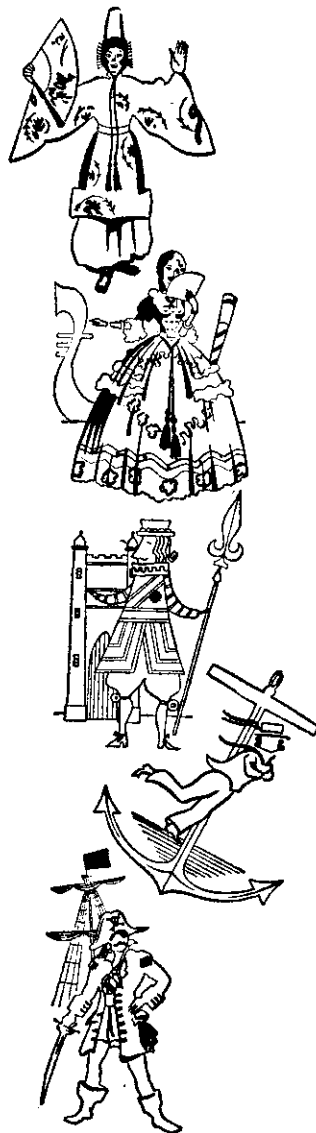
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APRIL 5, 1957

Academic Colour Bar

CABLE messages in the news-
papers have drawn attention
to a new and disturbing
aspect of *apartheid* in South
Africa. The Government an-
nounced some time ago that it
intended to take power by legis-
lation to prohibit the entry of
non-white students to the "open"
universities. These are the Uni-
versities of Cape Town and the
Witwatersrand (Johannesburg).
They are called "open" because
they admit students of all races;
their aim in academic matters is
to provide full equality without
segregation. According to the
terms of the Separate University
Education Bill, announced re-
cently, there will be no inter-
ference with present arrange-
ments until colleges have been es-
tablished for Africans, Indians and
"Coloureds." After that, however,
open universities will disappear.

When the Government's plans
became known, the Councils of the
Universities of Cape Town and the
Witwatersrand organised a confer-
ence of senior members of their
academic staffs. The conference
met in January, and afterwards an
editorial committee prepared a
small book* in which the ideas
put forward and discussed were
drawn into a reasoned statement.
Its first task is to describe the
present system in South Africa. In
addition to the two open universi-
ties, the University of Natal admits
non-white students, but except
for post-graduate work they are
obliged to attend separate classes.
Nearly 400 non-whites also attend
the University College of Fort
Hare, founded primarily for the
higher education of Africans, and
now virtually closed to white
students. Four Afrikaans-medium
universities are "closed": no non-
whites are admitted. Of 22,000
students in the universities of
South Africa, only about 1300 are
non-white, and nearly 500 of these
are at Cape Town and the Wit-
watersrand. The open universities
may therefore seem to be speak-
ing for a small minority. But they
are also upholding the principle of
academic freedom, and their lead-
ers understand that in doing this
they are trying to protect the
interests of the majority.

*THE OPEN UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH
AFRICA, published in Johannesburg by the
Witwatersrand University Press, South African
price 5/-.

The open universities "believe
that the policy of academic non-
segregation provides the conditions
under which the pursuit of truth
may best be furthered." Any sort
of restriction on the spirit of free
inquiry is an attack upon the ideal
of Socrates—"to follow the argu-
ment where it leads"; and a racial
dogma, insisting that the welfare
of a State requires the separation
of people according to the colour
of their skins, ties scholarship to a
myth. The practical results will
be harmful. Men and women fitted
for research and higher training
are not unlimited in number, and
if some of them are excluded for
non-academic reasons the work of
a university is weakened. It is no
answer to say that they can be
given their opportunities in separ-
ate colleges. The opportunities
become quite different if the
values of diversity are lost; and
the loss is shared by the colleges
from which non-whites are ex-
cluded. "A closed university in
South Africa throws away, in the
field of social and linguistic
studies, the very advantage which
is afforded by its position in a
continent of diverse cultures and
languages."

No university can turn away
from toleration, or pretend that
toleration can be segregated, with-
out loss of spiritual authority. It
has been said of the open universi-
ties that they will become "black"
if their present policy is continued.
The answer is partly a declaration
of faith in the capacity of white
people "to maintain their place in
the intellectual life of the coun-
try." But the spokesmen go further
than that. "When in time to come
our Western civilisation has spread
through the majority of South
Africa's multiracial population, it
will still be the proud duty of the
open universities to train the lead-
ers of the people whatever the
colour of their skins. What con-
cerns us as universities is not the
colour of a man who is the bearer
of civilisation, but the quality of
the civilisation which he repre-
sents." Academic freedom may
suffer in South Africa; but while
there are men in the universities
who can speak for it in those
words, we may still hope that ulti-
mately the policy of fear will be
defeated.

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 5, 1957.