

Genius of the founders of King's College Budo

Dear Tingasiga: There are institutions that merely educate, and there are institutions that shape the destiny of nations. King's College Budo, the guardian of the sacred hill of Naggalabi in Busiro County of Buganda, belongs to the latter category. At age 120, Budo, which was formerly established on March 29, 1906, has an impressively long list of physicians, surgeons, economists, teachers, bankers, accountants, public administrators, lawyers, judges, engineers of all types, veterinarians, agriculturalists, scholars, industrial chemists, poets, writers, fine artists, musicians, journalists, world-class businesspeople, theologians, and even upright politicians.

This is no accident. It is the direct fruit of the extraordinary genius — visionary, practical, and moral — of its founders. To understand Budo, and its relentless march towards its unreachable endpoint, is to understand the brilliance of the men who conceived it. The founding of Budo was not a single man's dream but a confluence of remarkable minds.

The project was particularly accelerated by Henry Walter Weatherhead, an Anglican Church Missionary, Sir Apollo Kagwa, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Buganda, who was acting on behalf of the young Kabaka Daudi Chwa, and Alfred Robert Tucker, the maiden Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Uganda. Whereas no major buildings or programmes at Budo are named in their memory, each of these three men brought a distinct and indispensable genius to the enterprise. Without them, there would not have been Budo as we know it.

Bishop Tucker's genius was above all visionary. The bishop's vision for Uganda went even beyond a school — he saw the absolute necessity of higher education and even dreamed of the establishment of a university. Meanwhile, he planned to found an intermediate college, approaching the Church Missionary Society with the suggestion, offering to run the whole scheme himself if the society would lend the missionaries and build

them houses. This was a man who looked at a land still finding its footing under colonial administration and saw not limitation but limitless possibility. When the Church Missionary Society declined his initial overtures due to lack of funds, Tucker did not abandon the vision. He raised the resources himself, personally authorising financing of the project from his diocese treasury. His was the genius of the unconquerable dreamer — the man who refuses to let circumstance extinguish ambition.

Henry Walter Weatherhead, an ordained priest of Trinity College Cambridge, who became the school's first headmaster, brought a different but equally vital genius: the genius of execution. It was Weatherhead who walked the hills of Buganda, assessed the terrain, and made the inspired geographical choice that would define the school's character. As he later wrote, "I don't know who first told me about Budo Hill, but it did not take me long to decide upon it as the most desirable place for the purpose — the unusually broad, level top, the good water spring close by and, I will admit, the fine view of the lake." That aesthetic and practical sensitivity — recognising that a school's physical environment shapes its spirit — speaks to a remarkably holistic educational philosophy for the early 20th Century.

Yet the choice of Budo Hill was not without controversy, and it is here that we see another dimension of the founders' genius: diplomatic courage. Weatherhead found himself set against the whole of Buganda because Budo was a royal hill where Buganda kings were crowned. He credited Apollo Kagwa, regent for the young Kabaka Daudi Chwa, and Katikikiro (prime minister) of Buganda, for enabling him to succeed despite great opposition. Sir Apollo Kagwa's role is often understated in accounts of Budo's founding, but his genius was perhaps the most consequential of all. As the guardian of a deeply traditional kingdom, he possessed the political wisdom to understand that a new kind of education was not a threat to Buganda's identity but a shield for its future. By securing

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Letter to a
Kampala Friend



the sacred hill for a school, he married tradition and progress in a way that few statesmen of any era have managed.

The founders' genius is perhaps most powerfully demonstrated in the breadth of their original conception. King's College Budo was founded as an intermediate school offering some form of higher education to the sons of chiefs who had completed training at Mengo High School. But even from the beginning, the vision was never merely to polish an elite. The founders built in-

to the school's culture a commitment to practical, holistic learning.

Technical education at Budo was particularly promoted by Herbert Thomas Candy Weatherhead, a pioneer Budo teacher who was the brother of the first headmaster. On one of his vacations in England, HTC Weatherhead fundraised to build an equipped technical workshop at Budo, functional by the end of 1908. Thereafter, every Budo student chose a practical skill to learn, including carpentry, metalwork, motor maintenance, shoe repairing, music instruments and printing. Here was a school that refused to separate the life of the mind from the work of the hands — a philosophy that was generations ahead of its time.

The founders also laid the groundwork for a crucial social transformation. The decision by Rev Canon Harold Myers Grace to admit girls, realised in 1933, was not inevitable — it required founders whose vision of education transcended the conventions of their age. Mixed gender education was a very rare phenomenon in the British Empire. Budo was one of the pacesetters in this regard.

The school's enduring motto, "Gakyali Mabaga" — We are Still Building — was a humble acknowledgement that the work of education is never finished. It is a motto that speaks directly to the character of those who founded the institution: restless, purposeful, never satisfied with what had already been achieved.

For 120 years, King's College Budo has been famous for producing leaders within Uganda and abroad, a group known as "Budonians," with a legacy that is not the product of chance.

It is the harvest of genius — the genius of three men who planted a single mustard seed that would grow into one of Africa's most celebrated educational institutions. They saw a hill, imagined a school, changed a region, and secured a worldwide legacy.

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