Address by the Chief Justice, Sir Hugh Wooding, on the occasion of the ceremonial opening of the Supreme Court of Trinidad and Tobago at the beginning of Term on 4th October 1963.

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Last year it became my privilege for the first time to address you from this Bench. I referred then to the considerable backlog of cases congesting the Lists, and I put forward the view that justice delayed is not very far short of a denial of Justice itself. I am happy, therefore, to be able to report that the trend has been reversed, that criminal trials are moving at a somewhat faster pace, and that there are now approximately 65 less civil cases in the High Court Lists than there were 12 months ago. Two (2) statistics are perhaps worth mentioning:

In Port of Spain the number of untried cases in the List on 1st September 1962 was 498 to which there were added up to 30th June 1963 a further 182 making a total of 680. From these we were able within the same period to dispose finally of 294 so that there now remains on the List a total of 386 cases, that is to say 112 less than at the beginning of Term this time last year.

I regret that the situation in San Fernando is rather different. The number of untried cases in the List on 1st September 1962 was 255 to which there were added up to 30th June 1963 a further 118 making a total of 373. From these we were able within the same period to dispose of no more than 71 so that there is now in the List a total of 302 cases or 47 more that at the same time last year. In view of this, I propose making arrangements for more civil courts to be held in San Fernando for the year just commencing and I hope that at year's end the picture will be rather brighter. I trust that practitioners will cooperate to make the effort successful.

Unfortunately, there are no precise statistics available as regards Tobago but I am happy to say that the Lists there, both civil and criminal, were entirely cleared so that there are no arrears.

As regards the Court of Appeal, during the past twelve (12) months we have heard and finally determined the following:

Appeals from magistrates in the Summary Courts in respect of Police and Private Cases	504
Appeals from judgments of the Petty Civil Courts	61
Appeals in criminal matters from the High Court	57
Appeals in civil matters from the High Court	36
	658

I have told of these achievements for three (3) principal reasons:

Firstly, I desire to thank my Brethren on the Bench (which is why I have asked them all to be here, and I regret the absence of Mr. Justice Achong who is due back this evening), and to thank also the members of the profession (both barristers and solicitors, representatives of whom have gathered in such numbers today) for their splendid and consistent cooperation in getting to grips with the work and for their unrelenting resolution to dispose of the Lists with efficiency and despatch. My thanks go out also to the several Registries of the Supreme Court and to the Magistrates and their staffs for their loyalty and their endeavours as a team of which I am very proud.

Secondly, coming as we have from divine service in our Cathedrals, I want to pass on to you, if I may, a text of my own selection: Let us not weary in well-doing. Rather, let us press on to the mark of our high calling. And thirdly, I want to remind the public whom we serve that the courts are a symbol by which a community can be judged. In this respect, I would quote from a speech by the Rt. Hon. Vincent Massey which I read a few weeks ago and which he delivered when he held the high office of Governor-General of Canada. Speaking on the subject "Law and Liberty", he said:

> "Our fathers…. expressed very clearly their conviction that only an impressive building would be a fitting place for the sittings of a court of justice. Today in this, as in so many other matters, we tend to confuse the simple with the mean and we wrongly identify dignity with pomposity. It is, I think, a sound instinct of the legal profession to maintain in all strictness their ancient forms, not only in legal language and procedure, but in the apparently less essential details of custom and ceremonial. In our 'practical' age, impatient of delay, we are inclined to dismiss these things as useless trappings. In our minds we contrast them unfavourably with the much-respected white garb and mask of the surgeon. These we think of as functional. May I suggest that there is here a distinction but not a contrast. The judge's robes, the lawyer's gown, the stately ceremony of the court, are functional in - a special sense. To those who take part in the ceremonial they should serve, and I believe they do serve, as a constant and solemn reminder of the duties and obligations of the profession. To those who observe the ceremonial they serve as an ocular demonstration or may I be modern and say as a 'visual aid'. They suggest to the bystander the majesty if not the full meaning of the Law. We cannot dispense with

these things. We cannot dispense with any means of maintaining and preserving the rule of law which is the very ground of our Liberty".

Let us think on these things. Let us remember that the bystander should constantly be impressed not only with the Law's majesty but also, and more especially, with the Law's intent and meaning. The bystander will not be impressed with the Law's majesty if it labours in a mews, if its dignities are absent, if its administrators are undistinguished or if its practitioners are unethical. That, then, is the measure of our responsibility – and when I say 'our', I refer to everyone, both within and without the profession. As to the Law's intent and meaning, I would remind you of the pre-eminent responsibilities which devolve on the profession. It is a common-place to refer to ours as a learned and an honourable profession. But there are implications from this which we cannot ignore. I have been reading recently an article in the International and Comparative Law Quarterly entitled "English Law in the West Indies", and also a book "Law Reform Now" written by a group of Labour lawyers and edited by two (2) distinguished members of the profession. Both seem to me to underline the importance of Law to the cause of social justice. To my mind, the intent and meaning of the Law is precisely that of disciplined endeavour in the cause of social justice. What do we do about it? Do we merely practise our profession or do we set about informing ourselves of the law's inadequacies so that, armed with knowledge, we may give an impetus to social reform? Put another way, I would phrase it in this wise – that our purpose should not be limited administering the laws justly but should extend to seeing that the laws just.

Two last comments I would make. The first is to announce that as from Monday this country will see for the first time women functioning as jurors. We welcome the innovation. Women are often more discerning than men – perhaps because they are more single-minded or, more accurately, less preoccupied. It is confidently to be expected that the feminine presence will bring a fragrance which should be a welcome relief to the present drabness of our courts. The second is to say to the profession that I shall welcome their views on legal aid, a subject about which we ought all to be much concerned.

And so – we begin a new Term. May Heaven aid out united endeavours!