

INTRODUCTORY SPEECH BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR DR D S HENDERSON
FOR PROFESSOR JOHN VERNON LOCKHART RENNIE

PROFESSOR RENNIE, PROFESSOR DANIEL, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT WOULD BE SO EASY FOR ME TO DEVELOP A PHRASE OR A SENTENCE OR TWO BY WHICH OCCASIONS SUCH AS THIS COULD BE STARTED.

FOR EXAMPLE I COULD SAY, "THIS REALLY IS A AUSPICIOUS OCCASION AND I AM DELIGHTED AT HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO WELCOME YOU HERE THIS EVENING AND TO TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT BLOGGS" OR MORE SPECIFICALLY ABOUT PROFESSOR JOHN VERNON LOCKHART RENNIE.

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WHY DO I NOT DO IT THEN? WHY DO I NOT ALWAYS BEGIN SIMILAR INTRODUCTORY SPEECHES WITH THE SAME TRIED AND TRUSTED WORDS.

I SUPPOSE THE REASON IS QUITE SIMPLE. TRIED AND TRUSTED FORMULAE AND PHRASES CAN BECOME CLICHES, SOUNDING LIMP AND SHORT ON SINCERITY. I DO NOT BELIEVE I WOULD BE RECOGNIZING THE UNIQUENESS OF EVERY OCCASION NOR WOULD I BE MAKING ANY REAL ATTEMPT TO DO JUSTICE TO THIS UNIQUENESS.

THAT I SHOULD HAVE BEEN INVITED TO INTRODUCE PROFESSOR RENNIE TO YOU IS AN HONOUR AND IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE. IN SO DOING I KNOW I EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE THAT IN 1936 JOHN RENNIE BEGAN TEACHING GEOGRAPHY AT RHODES UNIVERSITY AND THAT THE DEPARTMENT WAS ESTABLISHED

THE NEXT YEAR. PROFESSOR RENNIE, WE ARE ALL HERE THIS EVENING TO SAY A PARTICULAR THANK YOU TO YOU AS WE CELEBRATE THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPARTMENT.

SOME OF YOU MAY RECALL SOME OF THE PRAISES WHICH WERE HEAPED UPON PROFESSOR JOHN RENNIE WHEN HE RECEIVED HIS HONORARY DOCTOR OF LAWS DEGREE IN 1977. ALL, I AM SURE, WOULD LIKE TO BE REMINDED OF JUST A FEW OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF HIS ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER.

JOHN RENNIE'S CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH RHODES UNIVERSITY BEGAN IN JANUARY 1931 AND CONTINUED FOR AN UNBROKEN PERIOD OF FORTY YEARS, UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN DECEMBER 1970. OF COURSE, THERE HAS BEEN A CONTINUING CONTACT EVER SINCE.

BEFORE 1936 ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY WAS TAUGHT IN GEOLOGY BY PROFESSOR MOUNTAIN AND BEFORE HIM, BY PROFESSOR SCHWARTZ. WHEN IT WAS HINTED THAT THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD OFFER COURSES IN GEOGRAPHY, NOT JUST ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY, DR RENNIE WAS A LECTURER IN THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY. IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WHICH FOLLOWED, PROFESSOR MOUNTAIN AGREED THAT IN ORDER TO START THE TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO RELEASE DR RENNIE.

DR RENNIE USED A PERIOD OF SABBATICAL LEAVE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON AND A FURTHER SIX MONTHS TO COMPLETE IN ONE YEAR THE ACADEMIC DIPLOMA IN GEOGRAPHY.

HE WAS APPOINTED AS THE FIRST PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY AT THE EARLY AGE OF FORTY-TWO, AND TWO YEARS LATER BECAME A SENATE REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COUNCIL OF RHODES.

AS DR RENNIE HE MADE A SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE PALAEOLOGY OF OUR FOSSIL MARINE BEDS AND THE MANY SCIENTIFIC PAPERS HE WROTE REMAIN DEFINITIVE IN THIS FIELD TO THIS DAY. FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION IN THE FIELD OF SCIENTIFIC ENDEAVOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA, DR RENNIE WAS ELECTED FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA IN 1939.

THROUGH THE YEARS 1948 TO 1968 HIS RESPONSIBILITIES COVERED NOT ONLY HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY BUT ACTING DEPUTY MASTER AND DEPUTY MASTER. IN 1964, HE BECAME THE UNIVERSITY'S FIRST FULL-TIME VICE-PRINCIPAL.

IT WOULD BE STRANGE INDEED IF ANYONE WERE TO THINK THAT PROFESSOR RENNIE'S ENERGIES WERE RESTRICTED TO UNIVERSITY ACTIVITIES ONLY. HIS ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE WAS CONSIDERABLE.

HE BECAME THE VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE 1820 SETTLER MONUMENT FOUNDATION FROM ITS INCEPTION IN 1969 UNTIL 1974 AND WAS ELECTED AN HONORARY MEMBER OF THE 1820 MEMORIAL SETTLERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA.

HE GAVE HIS SERVICES FREELY TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH AND VARIOUS OF ITS COMMITTEES. IN 1960 HE WAS APPOINTED BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION TO THE COMMISSION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL AND HISTORICAL MONUMENTS - THE NATIONAL MONUMENTS COUNCIL AND FROM 1964 TO 1969 HE SERVED ON THE PRIME MINISTER'S SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COUNCIL.

ANOTHER MAJOR PUBLIC SERVICE WAS AS CHAIRMAN OF THE ALBANY MUSEUM BOARD OF TRUSTEES. HIS CHAIRMANSHIP EXTENDED OVER THE PERIOD 1949 TO 1973 AND WAS RECOGNIZED BY THE NAMING OF THE NORTH WING OF THE MUSEUM AS THE JOHN V L RENNIE WING IN MARCH 1975.

MORE RECENTLY HE HAS BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN RESEARCH INTO THE SCOTTISH PARTY OF 1820 SETTLERS FROM WHENCE HIS SOUTH AFRICAN FOREBEARS AND THOSE OF THE PRINGLE FAMILY CAME. THIS WORK IS NEARING COMPLETION.

WE REGRET THAT PROFESSOR VERNON FORBES, HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT IN THE LATE 1960s, COULD NOT BE WITH US THIS EVENING, BUT WE ARE VERY HAPPY TO SEE THAT MISS JOAN WHITMORE COULD JOIN US.

JOAN, ONE OF THE FIRST MASTERS GRADUATES FROM RHODES, LEARNED OF THE FACT THAT SHE HAD ACQUIRED HER MSc WITH DISTINCTION ON THE SAME DAY AS DR RENNIE WAS APPOINTED PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY, AND SHE SUBSEQUENTLY MADE HER OWN MARK IN THE FIELD OF HYDROLOGY. WE ARE DELIGHTED TO HAVE YOU WITH US THIS EVENING, MISS WHITMORE.

FINALLY LET ME ASK YOU ALL TO DRINK A TOAST TO THE MAN WHO PLAYED SO MAJOR A ROLE IN ESTABLISHING THE DEPARTMENT AND TO THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY OF WHICH MANY OF YOU ARE MEMBERS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PROFESSOR JOHN RENNIE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY.

D S HENDERSON

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