

THE HENDERSON PAPERS

B.S. Baldwin

George Cockburn Henderson, M.A. (Oxon.), was elected to the Chair of Modern History and English Language and Literature at the University of Adelaide in 1902. The appointment of the first Jury professor in 1922 relieved him of the branch of English Language and Literature. Ill health caused him to relinquish his duties in 1923, and he retired from university life in Adelaide in January 1924.

As a member of the Board of Governors of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery of South Australia and Chairman of the Library Committee he was instrumental in the establishment of the Archives. (The Letters Patent granted on 5 December 1913 appointing him Honorary Commissioner to enquire into and report upon the Methods of Collection, Classification and Storage of Archives adopted in Great Britain and on the Continent of Europe form an item amongst his papers).

Mrs M.R. Casson, Assistant to Professor Henderson in English Literature from 1916 to 1922, recently approached his niece, Miss Elsie J. Henderson of Dora Creek, N.S.W. (where Professor Henderson lived during his retirement) for original papers for use in preparing a biography. It was Miss Henderson's wish, in view of her uncle's long association with South Australia and his special connection with the Archives, that his papers should remain with the Public Library of South Australia, Archives Department. They were deposited in May 1962.

Henderson was born at Hamilton, N.S.W., on 1 May 1870, the son of English parents. Beginning his career in 1886 under the N.S.W. Department of Public Instruction as a Pupil-Teacher at Port Macquarie, he succeeded between 1890 and 1893, while still teaching, in brilliantly distinguishing himself at the University of Sydney. He proceeded to Balliol College, Oxford, with a James King of Irrawang Travelling Scholarship in 1894. At Balliol he won the Brackenbury History Scholarship against strong competition in his first term. His tutor later wrote, "He had so much to do and so many examinations to pass, owing to the almost complete ignoring by Oxford University of degrees taken in Colonial universities, that in spite of his industry and great power of concentration, he had not time to cover all the wide ground required for the History Schools; so that his only being placed in the Second Class in his Final Examination is no reflection on his ability..." He was appointed the same year (1897) to a lectureship on the staff of the Oxford University Extension

Delegacy, retaining this capacity until 1902. In 1899 and 1900 he was, however, back in Sydney, where he was made Acting Professor of History in the University during the absence of Professor Wood. In 1900, during the absence of Professor Anderson, he was also Acting Professor of Philosophy. It was in 1902 that he accepted the Chair at Adelaide.

The following is a list of Henderson's major works in order of publication: Sir George Grey, Pioneer of Empire in Southern Lands (1907); Reflections on the War (1916); The British Navy at War (1917); Journal of Thomas Williams, Missionary in Fiji, 1840-1853 [ed.] (1931); Fiji and the Fijians (1931); The Discoverers of the Fiji Islands (1933); The Evolution of Government in Fiji (1935).

The exceptional thoroughness of Professor Henderson's research has been readily granted in appraisals of his work. Some 250 quarto size notebooks amply confirm this. Notebooks, their pages carefully numbered in pencil, were his working tools, except in the case of one series (Notes on the Fijian language) where he used cards. Over 70 stapled sheaves of manuscript drafts of lectures and published writings are preserved. The papers emphasize more than ever Henderson's devotion to the British Commonwealth, and within that to the broad cultural traditions fostered at the older universities. His years at Balliol formed his outlook decisively. There was mutual esteem between Henderson, the pupil, and Dr Caird, the Master, who warmly testifies to Henderson's abilities. The idea of organized sport as an essential part of university life is present in writings both in his undergraduate days and during his professorship at Adelaide, where he lent particular support to the development of the Rowing Club. Photographs of Henderson himself rowing for Balliol are amongst his papers.

Henderson was outstanding as a lecturer to adult education audiences. "He is in strong sympathy with democratic movements, but not afraid to speak the truth to popular audiences", his tutor writes of him. There are several hundred lantern slide illustrations and a great deal of other pictorial matter, particularly on the Shakespeare country and Italy.

Seven original letters of Lady Grey are with the papers. The insistence with which Henderson pursued all possible clues to the life of Grey is well revealed in the notebooks and in correspondence. The latter, chiefly letters received but with some drafts of letters sent, is from all periods of his adult life. (He died on 9 April 1944.) There is evidence that he played an important part on the University Council in the development of Adelaide University as a whole. The admiration and affection he inspired in pupils and colleagues alike is apparent throughout the correspondence.