

DR. T. S. VAN ROOYEN — AN APPRECIATION

Dr. Thomas Stephanus van Rooyen passed away suddenly on 14 December, 1967, while on holiday with his family in Durban. At the time of his death he was Senior lecturer in History at the University of Pretoria, a post which he had held with distinction for the past seven years.

Born on 2 February, 1922, at Pietersburg, Dr. Van Rooyen matriculated at the Pietersburg High School in 1939. He came to the University of Pretoria in 1940 where, three years later, he obtained his B.A. degree with a distinction in history. He received his Teacher's Diploma a year later, and taught in Pietersburg during 1944. From 1945 to the end of 1947 he did research in Sekhukhuniland, after which he taught for a period of three years at an Indian School in Johannesburg. In the meantime he had obtained his M.A. degree in 1948 with the dissertation, *Die Sendeling Alexander Merensky in die Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek, 1859-1882*. In 1951, at the age of 29, he received his doctorate with a thesis entitled, *Die Verhoudinge tussen die Boere, Engelse en Naturelle in die Geskiedenis van die Oos-Transvaal tot 1882*. Both his dissertation and thesis were accepted for publication in the South African Archives Year Book.

In 1951 he accepted an appointment as lecturer in History at the University of Pretoria, and at the end of 1953 Dr. Van Rooyen joined the then Department of Native Affairs as Assistant-Chief Information Officer, in which capacity he was responsible for all liaison with the press. As civil-servant Dr. Van Rooyen was closely associated with the implementation of the government's policy of separate development and the institution of local territorial authorities. In 1957, as a result of a Cabinet decision, he was sent to the Press Commission where he served for two years before returning to the Department of Native Affairs.

Subsequent to 1951 he served on the editorial committee of *Sabra's Journal for Racial Affairs, Pretoriana* and *Historia*. He became a Faculty member of the *Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* and was a member of the Transvaal and Union Executive of *Sabra*, and for several years he served on the executive of the *Association of Old Pretoria*, of which he was Chairman in 1964/65.

His untimely demise, at the age of 45, is a loss which South African historical writing can ill afford. A man of his tremendous agility of mind and penetrating insight could still have made many valuable contributions, especially in the fields of the philosophy of history and historical methodology. This is especially tragic, as at present there is in South Africa a dearth of men capable of speaking with authority on the complexities of the philosophy of history or on problems of historical method. At the time of his death there were a limited number of South African historians who could be considered his peer in these spheres of historical knowledge.

His pre-graduate lectures were of a high standard and greatly appreciated, but it was especially in the honours course where Dr. Van Rooyen lectured in the philosophy of history and historical methodology, that his composed manner and logical reasoning guided his students toward an appreciation and a more thorough understanding of the complex problems encountered in the writing and interpretation of history. It was a privilege for an honours student to attend his lectures and an experience which could only make them more mature and responsible aspirant historians. No wonder then that his students usually delivered work of a very high standard. During the short period that he was senior lecturer, four of his post-graduate students received appointments at various Universities throughout the country.

The void created by his absence will be keenly felt by all his students. For them he was tutor, friend and intellectual father; for his colleagues his stimulating and thought provoking ideas were both a challenge and an inspiration. An historian who had brilliantly mastered his chosen field of study, he nevertheless retained the ability to convey his knowledge and understanding clearly and lucidly to his students. Some of their most vivid recollections are no doubt of pleasant and fruitful hours spent in the comfort of his study, while he guided them, sometimes slowly and painfully, but always sympathetically, to an understanding of the kaleidoscopic events that constitute the past.

One lesson for which they are indebted to Dr. Van Rooyen, is that he impressed on them the futility of prescribing an interpretation; he always believed that the student should be encouraged to think independently, but with the proviso that he should think historically and that his ideas and interpretations should be substantiated by verifiable historical facts. He was also an opponent of "one-book" history; the idea that a student was proficient in his subject if he had memorized a conglomeration of factual data from one specified text-book and was then capable of reproducing it in somewhat similar chronological sequence. The historian, he insisted, should merely consider the individual book or document as a point of departure — he should go beyond them in his search for truth and in his attempt to reconstruct the reality of the past.

One of the most permanent services that he rendered to his students was his attempt to imbue them with a sense of honesty in their historical writing; he despised plagiarism and considered it one of the cardinal sins that an historian could commit.

Dr. Van Rooyen was particularly interested in the problems of contact between the European and the Bantu, in which field he was recognised as a leading authority. From 1944 to the end of 1947, while at the Bothšabêlo training school in Sekhukhuniland, he made an intensive study of the anthropological-historical implications of the earliest contact between White and Bantu in the Transvaal. The results of this study together with later primary archival research was consolidated in his M.A. dissertation and D.Phil. thesis.



The late Dr. T. S. van Rooyen.

While attached to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development he acquired an intimate knowledge of the Bantu Press. The well-known magazine, *Bantu*, was his brain-child, and he often served as advisor for Bantu publications. From 1951 onwards he wrote approximately 20 authoritative articles on the problem of White-Black contact and other related topics, which were published in a wide variety of academic periodicals. One of the most noteworthy was the article entitled *The Bantu and European Occupation of Southern Africa*, published in *Mankind Quarterly*, September 1963, which was well received overseas and stimulated world-wide interest. He wrote a chapter, *Die Bantoe in die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie* incorporated in the work, *Aspekte van die Suid-Afrikaanse Historiografie* (published last year) which constituted yet another excellent contribution to the study of contact problems between the European and the Bantu.

Dr. Van Rooyen published well over 150 articles and was often approached by newsmen for his opinion on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from the British Labour Party to the Vietnam War and the ancient civilizations of Mexico.

Dr. Van Rooyen's unbiased and critical book reviews ensured him of recognition abroad. His critical reviews of books on Africa attracted favourable comment from as far afield as Budapest, Hungary, while Cambridge Press often approached him for his opinion on a variety of books on African affairs published by them.

Although they differed in many respects, Dr. Van Rooyen and Lord Acton, the nineteenth-century British historian, had two things in common: neither had a full scale work published during their lifetime, but on the other hand they both gave generously of their time and energy to their students. However, at the time of his death, Dr. Van Rooyen was writing a number of highly interesting and valuable sketches which would have been published later this year.

By the very nature of his work, his name will long be remembered by historically conscious South Africans. One can only hope that his ideals and dedication to his subject will be continued by those students who were privileged to study under his guidance.

J. L. Hattingh.

J. W. Kew.