

OBITUARIES

Prof. G. G. Henderson, F.R.S.

GEORGE GERALD HENDERSON was born at Glasgow on January 30, 1862. After preliminary education at a private school he proceeded to the University of Glasgow where, taking up the study of chemistry, he graduated B.Sc. in 1881 and later on took also an honours degree in arts. He spent in addition some time in Leipzig studying chemistry with Johannes Wislicenus. In 1884 he joined the staff of the Chemistry Department at the University of Glasgow under Prof. John Ferguson, and about the same time he became secretary to the Glasgow Section of the Society of Chemical Industry, carrying out the duties of the post with great acceptance until 1893, thus beginning a connexion with that body which became closer and closer to the end of his life.

In 1889 he became lecturer in chemistry at Queen Margaret College, the women's branch of the University, where he had practically an independent department. In 1892 he was appointed to succeed Prof. William Dittmar in the Freeland chair of chemistry at the Andersonian College, and in his twenty-seven years in this post he did the chief part of his life-work. At the time of his appointment the laboratories and equipment were very archaic, and he had to work in these adverse conditions for a good many years. In 1901, however, the fine new buildings of the Royal Technical College were commenced and in 1905 they were completed, Henderson having given much time and thought to their planning and equipment. Some ten years later he was active in a consultative capacity when, in 1913, the affiliation of the Royal Technical College with the University in respect to engineering and other applied subjects was carried through.

During all these years Henderson was steadily developing his department, and especially instilling an appreciation of research work in chemistry into a considerable number of senior students. Henderson being an all-round man, his work was on various subjects. It included the investigation of salts of some hydroxy acids, action of ammonia on metals at high temperatures with the late (Sir) George Beilby, molybdenum and tungsten derivatives of lactic acid, etc., but his work tended more and more in the direction of terpene chemistry; to investigation of the action of chromium oxychloride, hypochlorous acid and hydrogen peroxide on camphene, pinene, bornylene and limonene, with the relationship of borneol and isoborneol and of camphene and bornylene, and other similar problems. It is with this that his name is most likely to be associated in the future. In it he has had many collaborators, who are carrying the work begun with him to further stages.

During 1914-15 he was president of the Society of Chemical Industry; in 1916 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society, and he was also in that year president of Section B of the British Association; in 1919 he was appointed to the regius professorship of chemistry in the University of Glasgow. There he had under his own particular charge the junior and the senior inorganic work, but he carried on as well, with various assistants, his investigations on terpenes and other subjects. He devoted himself, at the University, with great assiduity to the routine of his department, and played a very active and useful part on the business side of University affairs in many capacities. He was dean of the Faculty of

Science for three years, member of the Library Committee for three years, and for eight years, from 1925 until 1933, he was a member of the University Court. He also planned with the architect the major part of the new chemistry buildings. It is clear from his career that he has always been regarded by others as a man of affairs whose wise counsel was held in high esteem.

While at Glasgow he was president of the Institute of Chemistry during 1924-27 and president of the Chemical Society during 1931-33. At seventy years of age the railway travel which the last office entailed meant for one, even of his robust constitution, a considerable strain. In 1937 there came to him, as a peculiarly fitting tribute at the end of a long and active life spent in promoting chemistry and chemical industry, the award of the Medal of the Society of Chemical Industry, a recognition conferred in alternate years for "conspicuous service rendered to applied Chemistry by research, discovery, invention, or improvements in processes".

Henderson was so well known that anything about his personality may seem superfluous, but for those who had not met him it may be said that he was of full middle height, spare of form, with brown moustache which never altered its shape in obedience to the dictates of fashion. In fact, Henderson was one of the most unchangeable of men. He always smoked the same kind of pipe and the same kind of tobacco; he always wore the same kind of eye-glasses—no tortoiseshells for him; always the same type of clothing, well tailored, rich not gaudy; and he had the kind of figure that a tailor must rejoice in. The writer was one of the students at the old Andersonian College on the day that Henderson was inducted to his new charge, and it is hardly any exaggeration to say that since then he had altered not at all when he took his last farewell of us in 1937.

He had a rather deliberate manner of speech which, in most anecdotes, crystallized into "Ah, yes", and it often helped to make his replies effective; he was not easily taken at a disadvantage. Once during the big strike of 1926 he came into the writer's room and mentioned casually that he had just been interviewed by a student who had started the conversation by explaining, in very truculent fashion, that his father was a working-man. "Ah," said G. G., "I'm very glad to hear that. So was mine!"

He had decided to retire at the end of September 1937 and he looked forward to a peaceful time at Horsaclett, the house he had bought some years previously near Tarbert, Harris, and where he indulged himself in what was certainly his chief sporting interest, fishing. Mrs. Henderson (his cousin Agnes Mackenzie Kerr whom he had married in 1895 and whom everyone who knew her remembers with pleasure) went north in early summer, as she usually did, to get things ready, but shortly after arrival at Tarbert she died suddenly of heart failure. Thus, just on the threshold of the quiet companionship they had looked forward to, and which indeed had always been their ideal, his hopes were utterly dashed. It was a stunning blow which Henderson bore with stoical fortitude. He had never been accustomed to wear his heart upon his sleeve, and he did not do so then, but the rest of his life can have been little more than patient endurance. Outwardly, however, he remained what he had always been until about the middle of last June, when he rather suddenly became ill and was removed to hospital with the prospect of an operation. This could not be fully performed, and,

back in his home, he gradually sank, clear in mind while slowly wasting away, until the end came on September 28. In unostentatious fashion he had lived an active, useful life, and he will be remembered with gratitude and affection by many old students and colleagues, the world over. He died in surroundings very dear to him, and there he now rests beside his beloved companion of more than forty years.

T. S. PATTERSON.

Prof. H. D. Wright

THE death of Hedley Duncan Wright at his home in Liverpool, on September 9 at the early age of fifty-one, has deprived bacteriology prematurely of one of its most distinguished and indefatigable workers.

Wright was born at Ulverstone, Tasmania, on March 3, 1891. He arrived in Great Britain in 1910 to read medicine at the University of Edinburgh after taking his B.A. in classics at the University of Tasmania. While still a student he served as a dresser in the Scottish Red Cross Unit in Serbia during the second Balkan War. In 1916 he graduated in medicine with first class honours and immediately joined the R.A.M.C., in which he held a commission until 1920. He saw active service in France, India and East Persia. His first appointment after demobilization was as lecturer in bacteriology at Edinburgh under his old professor (James Ritchie). During 1921-23 he was the assistant superintendent of the research laboratory of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, where he obtained valuable experience in statistical methods from the director, A. G. Kendrick, later to be of great value to him in his research work.

In 1923 Wright was appointed lecturer in bacteriology at University College Hospital, London, becoming University reader in 1928. It was here, working under A. E. Boycott, that he first embarked on those studies in clinical bacteriology, notably subacute infective endocarditis and pneumococcal septicaemia, which first directed the attention of his colleagues to his outstanding ability. The submission of a thesis on this work, which has since become classical, earned for him in 1925 the Edinburgh M.D., with gold medal, and the D.Sc. followed in 1927. In 1930 he became the first holder of the newly created chair of bacteriology in the University of Sydney, where he remained for four years. In 1934 he was invited to succeed J. M. Beattie as professor of bacteriology in the University of Liverpool and bacteriologist to the Port and City of Liverpool.

In addition to these academic posts, the recognition of Wright as an eminent authority on his subject led to his appointment in 1937 to the Bacteriological Committee of the Medical Research Council, where his wide personal experience and deep knowledge of the literature were often of great assistance; in 1939 he served on the Council's sub-committees on cross-infection in hospitals and on diphtheria immunization. He joined the Pathological Society of Great Britain in 1921, and performed invaluable work as assistant editor of the journal, first during 1928-30 and again from 1937 until his death. Many contributors have had reason to be grateful for the careful scrutiny which he gave their papers.

Wright's scientific work was noteworthy for its thoroughness and attention to detail, and his papers are models of lucidity. Perhaps his most important contribution was the convincing demonstration that the blood of a patient with subacute infective endocarditis was actively bactericidal, a conclusion made possible by his use of methods of quantitative cultivation. This necessitated research into the factors which tended to inhibit the growth of delicate pathogens in artificial media, and "Wright's" broth is well known as an excellent and easily prepared medium for the cultivation of such organisms. He always contended that one should work on problems which lay ready to hand for solution, so it was not surprising that when he came to Liverpool and found himself in charge of a large public health laboratory he should start investigations on the epidemiology of diphtheria, especially cross-infection in diphtheria wards, which had far-reaching practical results, and on the reliability of bacteriological analysis of water supplies. Many improvements in the technique for the isolation of intestinal pathogens also emanated from his laboratory, and he took the opportunity of a recent outbreak of paratyphoid B fever to write a masterly account of its bacteriology.

By his death, the University of Liverpool has lost a wise administrator and a stimulating teacher. He was one of the ablest of committee men, and no sub-committee of importance in the Medical Faculty was appointed which did not include him. At various times he acted as external examiner to the Universities of Leeds, London and Manchester.

Though ill-health attended Wright's later years, it was borne with characteristic fortitude. He married in 1917 Matilda B. Spittal. Her death barely a month before his own was a grievous blow. Their three sons survive them. A. C. T. VAUGHAN.

NEWS and VIEWS

Prof. J. K. Parnas

PHYSIOLOGISTS and others will be glad to learn from the following extracts from a card received by Prof. A. V. Hill that Prof. J. K. Parnas, till 1939 professor of medical chemistry in the University of Lwów, escaped to the U.S.S.R. and is alive and well:

"I am still in Ufa, in the Bashkiria, with my wife; my son is in Central Asia, in the Polish army. All my people, my pupils and friends, remained in Lwów, unfortunately, and I do not know anything certain about their fate. I myself had a narrow escape, the events have been so quick. I am living here quite comfortably and have good company of people from

the Western Russian cities, and I am treated with so much consideration and given everything that can be given from the moment when they received me from Lwów. From time to time I am getting news of your activities through notices in NATURE and other periodicals. I hope the strange and tragical perturbations through which we are given to live will sometime ebb down, and I shall see my liberty, and my town again, and perhaps also my Western friends—and join them at some Physiological Congress. But verily I never shall forget these good and brave people here, and the time I was living among them."