

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

FLaudation

spoken by the University Orator
Professor P.J.H. SCHOLTZ, B.A. (Hons.), H.E.D. (Natal).

in presenting
ARTHUR MERVYN KEPPEL-JONES

to the Chancellor at the Graduation Ceremony
held in Durban

on 16th April, 1988

Mr Chancellor,

ARTHUR KEPPEL-JONES' pupils are scattered across the universities of the English-speaking world; several, including Noel Garson, Colin Webb and Burridge Spies, have achieved distinction at home and would be the first to acknowledge the intellectual debt they

owe their former teacher.

Affectionately known as Keppel or K-J, he started his teaching career at Natal in the mid-1930s before moving to the University of the Witwatersrand and then returning to Natal as Professor and Head

of the Department of History and Politics in the early 1950s.

In 1959 he moved to a chair at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, where he inducted a younger generation of Canadian historians into the study of South African history. In the post-Sharpeville period he was an unfailing source of help to those South African academics who, disillusioned with the politics of

their country, sought new and more promising careers abroad.

This bald account does scant justice to the impact he made on several generations of South African students as well as a wider

audience familiar with his voice on the radio as a terrifyingly

erudite member of the Brains Trust, and his perceptive commentaries in the Press. Professor Jack Spence, another distinguished pupil of Arthur Keppel-Jones, recalls that when he first encountered K-J at Wits in 1949, his lectures on medieval history revealed a world remote, yet fascinating, to one for whom history had hitherto

seemed to begin and end with the Great Trek.

The History Department at Wits was small in number but formidable in intellectual range and depth: with the Late J S Marais, Jeffrey Horton and Phyllis Lewson, Arthur Keppel-Jones taught a syllabus which would astonish, indeed intimidate, their more specialised brethren today. The fourth-year Honours course, for those lucky enough to be admitted, was a rare intellectual treat: modelled on the Oxbridge tutorial system, essays were dissected line by line. Like students the world over, they contrived to keep K-J talking in

the forlorn hope of disguising the wickedness of an incomplete,

hastily scribbled essay.

Professor Spence recalls on one occasion being sent with Noel Garson to search the 40-volume archive of German documents on the outbreak of World War I for an explanation of why the archduke's chauffeur took the wrong turning at Sarajevo on that fateful day in July 1914. Arthur knew and they knew that better men had tried and

failed; no matter, for he expected them to learn at least something.

of the excitement of historical research.

Yet, despite the demands of a heavy teaching load, Arthur Keppel - : Jones always found time to offer a course of lectures unrelated to the syllabus and designed to expose his charges to modes of thought rarely found in the orthodox textbooks.

Above all, Arthur Keppel-Jones will be remembered for his contribution to the debate about South Africa's treatment of its black majority. With his colleagues, the Late Edgar Brooks and Mark Prestwich, he gave the Pietermaritzburg department a distinctive and well-deserved reputation for incisive yet sensitive teaching, with the young encouraged to look beyond parochial boundaries to the very different historical experience of 17th century England or 19th century America.

He has remained a passionate liberal and those who sat at his feet have cause to be profoundly grateful for his trenchant analysis of this country's past and the dilemmas its peoples face. His liberalism has always been unsentimental, acknowledging the virtues of fairmindedness and detachment in the analysis of opposing views.

Liberalism of the Keppel-Jones vintage is unfashionable in some academic and political circles, but those who came to Wits in the 1930s and 1940s were given a point of reference for understanding South Africa's complexities which, given its emphasis on civil liberty and the rule of law, has a perennial relevance.

Those who dismissed these values as "bourgeois constructs" neglect . what Keppel-Jones with his sure grasp of history has taught for more than 50 years: that constitutional government is worth defending for its own sake against the corrupting influence of nationalist ideology.

This theme emerges clearly in his HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA, a volume that ran to several editions providing a masterly survey of his country's political development and an invaluable guide to scholar and layman alike. His prophetic WHEN SMUTS GOES was combined with serious intent; its vision of the future was all the more compelling, based as it was on a profound understanding of the past.

The University of Natal does well to honour Arthur Keppel-Jones. He has taught his students many things - not least a respect for evidence, for the sanctity of the individual, and for the 18th century virtue of civility in the conduct of personal relations. As a teacher he combines formality with kindness and is a splendid example to all those he encouraged, indeed helped, to enter academic life.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to present to you for the degree of Doctor of Literature, Honoris Causa, Arthur Mervyn Keppel-Jones.

