

## RETIREMENT OF MR. J. H. KERN

The 3rd of January 1969, Johannes Hendrikus Kern, principal scientific officer of the Rijksherbarium, officially retired on reaching the age limit of 65 years. Though this in no way, I trust, means an interruption in the scientific work of Mr Kern, it provides a welcome occasion to dwell upon his noteworthy career and scientific achievement.

Born December 21st, 1903, at Nijmegen, he intended to be a teacher, for which he obtained the diploma in 1922 in his native town. This was soon followed by additional diplomas, for head-teacher in 1927, for French in 1928, and for German in 1933, testimonies of his ambition, energy, and capability to develop his knowledge for educational purpose. From 1922—1927 he was an elementary school teacher at Mill, 1927—1940 at Vlaardingen; 1940—1942 he served as head-teacher at Dedemsvaart, 1942—1946 at Gorinchem, 1946—1949 at Nijmegen.

From his youth he was most interested in Botany and especially in the Netherlands flora. Many who pursue this floristic hobby have as their chief purpose the addition of new records for the local flora and although he added, by his meticulous field-work and his sharp eye, much to the knowledge of the flora of the Netherlands, his ambition went much deeper. This scientific approach led him to give particular attention to difficult groups of the flora, and as early as 1924 he published on Netherlands *Carices*, northern representatives of the large and complex group in which he would later become a world authority. I refrain from an appreciation of his work on the Netherlands flora which is being done separately in *Gorteria*, volume 4, number 6, by Dr S. J. van Oostroom.

When, shortly after the second world war, I had to advise the director of the Botanic Gardens at Bogor (Java) on the restaffing of the Herbarium Bogoriense, this appeared extremely difficult, as several experienced pre-war professional systematists had died (among them Dr H. Uittien, Dr P. J. Eyma, and Dr P. Buwalda), or were not disposed to venture on a career in the uncertain conditions of the East.

Having been impressed by the soundness and clarity of Kern's contributions to meetings of the Netherlands Botanical Society, I accordingly approached him in this connexion and I remember vividly two things at our first meeting at his home at Nijmegen: first his surprise at the subject of my visit, second his enthusiasm to accept. Although this was followed by an afterthought that he felt himself incompetent, at least insecure, as an amateur, to assume a scientific botanical position — his innate modesty never leaving him — and although some difficulties arose over persuading his school to let him go, Kern set out for the East in 1949. Neither we nor he have ever regretted the important turn his life then took. He became now confronted with creative taxonomical work, and with all its implications of study of languages, including Latin, of terminology, nomenclature, literature, etc., knowledge which he had to acquire by self-study. He always remained a student, as do all good scientists. His first subject was a revision of *Viburnum* in Malesia, after which he began a revision of the sedge family, in which he is still absorbed. He left Bogor to join the staff of the Flora Malesiana Foundation, situated in the Rijksherbarium at Leiden, in November 1952. Some years afterwards he accepted appointment to the staff of the Rijksherbarium, June 1957, on the understanding that he would continue to work at the *Cyperaceae* of Malesia and necessarily the adjacent regions. This work pro-

ceeded steadily, and as it grew Kern acquired an astonishing overall knowledge of the *Cyperaceae*, since he mastered not only the taxonomy but also the morphology of the family, which in turn led him to concepts of homology between organs in the family and to its taxonomic re-organisation. He showed that several genera were misplaced and that the *Rhynchosporoideae* are an artificial group. Hereby he enriched our knowledge of the family with essential large-scale precursory contributions which are listed below in the bibliography confined to his publications on the tropical flora.

This was recognized by the invitation to give an important lecture 'New Look at Cyperaceae' before the Norwich Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in August 1961. A few years ago the editors of the 'Pflanzenfamilien' asked him if he would consider to provide an account of the *Cyperaceae* for that work. His sense of obligation to complete his work for Flora Malesiana led him, however, to postpone that project.

Having from 1962 onwards to edit the 'Flora of Java' by C. A. Backer & R. C. Bakhuizen van den Brink Jr, I have reluctantly trespassed on his time, he being the best balanced person on the staff to assist me in polishing the manuscript of this huge work. Both he and I were very friendly with Backer and admired his wide and deep knowledge of the Javan flora and his industry in portraying it systematically single-handed. We felt it a moral duty to turn it out as best as could be done, Dr Bakhuizen van den Brink Jr taking as his colossal share the revision of its nomenclature. This time-consuming and tedious work, in addition to sad personal circumstances, interfered with the progress of Kern's monograph of Malesian *Cyperaceae* of which, fortunately, the account of its last genus, *Carex*, is now nearing completion. We hope that it will not take long before this *magnum opus* can go into print.

As a friend and colleague I have to thank Jan Kern for the generous way in which he helped me in various ways, including his assistance in tutoring some students and his balanced lectures for staff, students, and Botanical Society which excelled in clarity and command of matter and were a pride of our institute.

A birthday is for a man devoted to science of course not a serious event. It has been a privilege to have had Kern on our official staff; it will be a privilege to have him as a honorary collaborator after January 3rd, 1969.

C. G. G. J. VAN STEENIS

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