



Dr. Simon Jan van Oostroom, November 1970 (Photo Dr. J. van Brummelen).

DR. S. J. VAN OOSTSTROOM RETIRED

In January 1971 Dr. Simon Jan van Ooststroom, senior botanist of the Rijksherbarium, retired on reaching the age of 65, having been on the staff since November 1934. Though this event will to a certain extent change, but not interrupt, his work, it is nevertheless worth commemorating, as he has so many contacts at home and abroad, all of whom have profited from his wide knowledge which he shared freely.

He was born in Rotterdam in 1906, where he received his primary and part of his secondary education. He completed the latter in Schiedam and entered the University of Utrecht in 1924. He became the assistant of Prof. Dr. A. Pulle in January 1927. By chance he became interested in the genus *Evolvulus* and this led him to compose an excellent world monograph of this genus for which he was awarded his doctor's degree in 1934 and which furthermore caused a life-long interest in the bindweed family, on which he became a most reliable authority, especially for the Indo-Australian region. Many papers emanated from these studies, culminating in his treatment (assisted by Dr. R. D. Hoogland) of the family in *Flora Malesiana* (1953).

The study of the *Convolvulaceae*, however, could only be part of his activity, because when he arrived at the Rijksherbarium he found that many facets of the internal organisation had been neglected by the predecessors of Prof. H. J. Lam, who had a year earlier been appointed as Director of the institute. And he set himself to order, organize, or reorganize the files. He took charge of the illustrations and founded our *Icones* collection; he stimulated the orderly arrangement of the bottled collections and carpologica, of photographic negatives, cecidologica and teratologica, facsimile handwritings and the old archives, especially personalia. He also reorganized several old herbaria and herbals and the distribution of duplicate specimens.

Most of these time-consuming tasks were internal activities, but they were of vital importance for the orderly accessibility of the collections which we relish today. A tribute is due to him for all he achieved alone at a time when the staff, both scientific and technical, was negligible as compared with today. All this work he did with interest and devotion, but his special interests were teratologica, cecidia, and biohistory. His talent for unearthing historical biology led to interesting papers disclosing the life, works, and herbals of several old botanists. He owes us still a 'Thesaurus of the Rijksherbarium' on which he gave a lecture some years ago.

In addition to these tasks which he had taken on voluntarily, believing them to be necessary, he assisted Prof. Lam with the education of students, in leading practical courses in the laboratory, in the botanical gardens, and in addition in leading many excursions, both in the Netherlands and abroad. He supervised the work of many students working on a taxonomic or floristic problem. Early in the fifties he was for a short time reader in plant taxonomy, but soon found this unsatisfactory, as it interfered with other work which he found more important or interesting.

His very extensive, critical knowledge of plants brought him into closer contact with the Royal Netherlands Botanical Society, of which he had been a member from 1927 onwards. He is to be ranked among its great florists together with Jansen, Kloos, Wachter,

van Soest, Henrard, etc. He served the Society in many ways and his election as honorary member in 1970 met with general approval.

He was the obvious choice for co-editor of Heukels' Flora of the Netherlands and also for chief editor of the scientific Flora Neerlandica, a project of the Society elaborated at the Rijksherbarium. During the past twenty years his main activities have been centered round the flora of the Netherlands, on which he was and is regarded as the great authority. Naturally he also became a consultant for our country in the Flora Europaea project. When the Society stopped issuing the Dutch journal 'Nederlandsch Kruidkundig Archief' he found it necessary to have this replaced by a 'Correspondentieblad', later continued as the very popular journal 'Gorteria', which he edited in close co-operation with the late Mr. Th. Reichgelt who devotedly assisted him in his work on the Netherlands flora.

Through his wide and critical knowledge of the Netherlands flora, including the innumerable aliens, he also had numerous contacts among sociologists and ecologists and with bodies concerned with nature conservancy in our country and the cartography of the Netherlands flora.

Besides history and botany Dr. van Ooststroom has another hobby, namely entomology, and in this field he has published various papers.

Both Prof. Lam and I have enjoyed the great activity, generous advice, and disinterested assistance of Dr. van Ooststroom and feel greatly indebted to him for all that he did for the benefit of our institute in particular and botany in the Netherlands in general.

Dr. Maas Geesteranus (1971) has given an excellent account of Dr. van Ooststroom's activities, the great productivity of which is reflected in the complete bibliography compiled by Mr. L. Vogelenzang. Mrs. van Steenis-Kruseman (1958) reported the results of his tour to Java, where he savoured the tropical flora and at the well-known Tjibodas mountain garden even found a new plant for Java and for Malesia, *Callitriche verna*.

The reception held at Leyden on January 29th, 1971, to mark the occasion of his retirement was attended by many, and on behalf of his friends and colleagues, national and international, I had the privilege to present him a beautifully bound 'Album donatorum', containing the signatures of all those who had contributed to the fair sum of money presented to him to spend as he wished on excursions abroad or whatever he found suitable. A special number of Gorteria (vol. 5, pp. 97—256), containing contributions from Dutch and Belgian colleagues, was issued in his honour.

As leader of our 'Netherlands Division' he is succeeded by Mr. J. Mennema who finds the department in running order.

Dr. van Ooststroom will fortunately not be leaving us; he is granted all facilities, including working space, as he has been nominated an 'honorary staff member' of the institute. He plans to confine his future work largely to revisions or otherwise of the *Convolvulaceae*, an interest which was forcibly suppressed by the mass of routine work with which he became flooded during the past decades. This is an admirable prospect, because his taxonomical insight of this family is of the highest standard and to my mind his concept of genera and especially of species is as good as can be desired, conservative but precise. And should he get tired of bindweeds, he can always turn to the study of his beloved beetles. We hope to have him amongst us for a long time.

C. G. G. J. VAN STEENIS

REFERENCES

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