

FRANZ PETRAK, 1886—1973

(With Plate 19)

Dr. F. Petrak passed away on October 9, 1973 in Vienna at the age of 87 years. He was born on October 9, 1886 in Mährisch-Weisskirchen, at that time a small town in the Moravian province of the Austrian Monarchy, but now belonging to the CSSR under the Czech name Hranice. A gift of some books, especially some volumes of 'Rabenhorst's Kryptogemenflora', and a small herbarium collection, stimulated Petrak's interest in mycology in 1910. He had previously been a botany student at the University of Vienna and his thesis, written under the supervision of R. von Wettstein, dealt with some species of the thistle genus *Cirsium*. During World War I he served in the Austrian army and was able to collect fungi in Galicia, Bosnia, Albania, and Macedonia. After the war he could not find a suitable appointment in Vienna or elsewhere in the remaining parts of Austria, and returned to Mährisch-Weisskirchen where he modestly started a career as a private scientist. He married in 1917 and in 1921 a son was born, the family income consisting of meagre honoraria for writings in 'Just's Botanischem Jahresbericht' and from the sale of exsiccata (e.g. *Flora Bohemiae et Moraviae exsiccata*).

Petrak became a well known mycologist through his numerous publications which have appeared in *Hedwigia* and *Annales Mycologici* since 1914. In 1919 the series 'Mykologische Notizen' was started; about 1000 numbers appearing filling more than 1400 pages. Petrak maintained an extensive correspondence with mycologists all over the world, especially with H. Sydow in Berlin. Large herbarium collections were sent to him and therefore he also became familiar with tropical fungi. This again resulted in publications by Petrak, with the senders of the specimens as co-authors. In 1938 he was appointed to the Botanical Department of the Museum of Natural History at Vienna. After World War II he edited *Sydowia* (*Annales Mycologici*, Series 2), of which 25 volumes have been published to date. Petrak was also given the opportunity to travel, and in 1950 he stayed at the Division of Mycology, United States Department of Agriculture, in Beltsville for nearly one year. There he identified numerous, mainly tropical, fungus collections and examined many type collections.

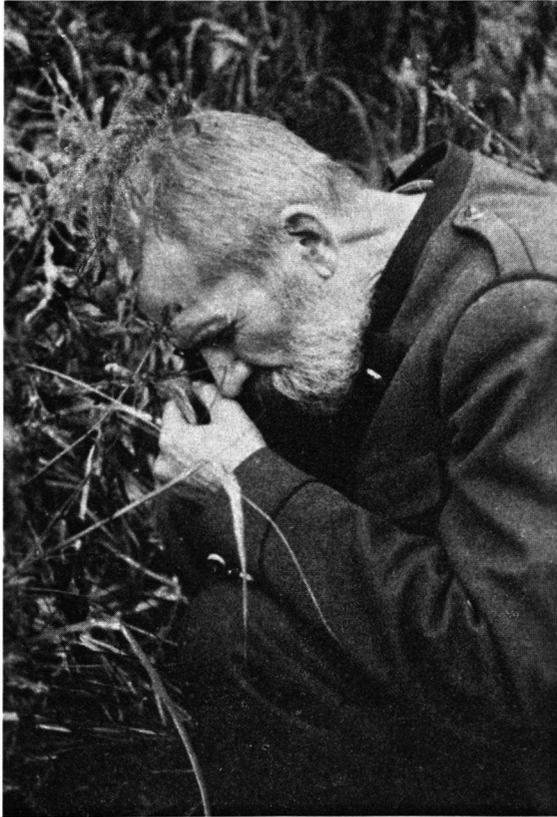
Franz von Höhnelt, Hans Sydow, Ferdinand Theissen, and Franz Petrak by their critical studies pioneered the natural classification of the Ascomycetes and Coelomycetes. All this work was done without the aid of well equipped laboratories or libraries and without any assistance from governmental or other bodies (in fact the work was often obstructed). Petrak, in particular, encountered many set-backs during his life; he and his family often hardly keeping body and soul together. He was a self-conscious, shy, but friendly and helpful person with a warm heart. He was,

on the other hand, confident of his capacity as a taxonomist, being quickly offended and sensitive to criticism. His knowledge, not only of Micromycetes, but also of toadstools and higher plants was enormous. A small piece of dead twig, bark or rotting wood was sufficient for him to identify a host-plant and he had an amazing memory.

Franz Petrak was a corresponding member of the Mycological Society of America and of the British Mycological Society. As a student in 1947, the writer of this obituary worked for half a year under the guidance of Franz Petrak who stimulated his enthusiasm and familiarised him with mycological taxonomy.

With Petrak the mycological world has lost the last of a group of leading German-speaking taxonomists of microfungi and his author's name remains attached to a large number of fungal taxa.

J. A. von Arx
Centraalbureau voor Schimmelcultures
Baarn (The Netherlands)



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Photograph, made in 1947 by H. Petrak (his son)