

AUGUST A. PULLE

1878—1955

by

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On the 28th of February 1955 Prof. Dr A. A. Pulle died at Utrecht after a long and painful illness.

August Adriaan Pulle was born on the 10th of January 1878 at Arnhem, where he also attended the primary and the secondary school. During the later years at the high school his interest in plants was awakened, and by numerous excursions in the neighbourhood, which is well-known for its varied vegetation, he obtained a good knowledge of the Dutch flora. However, he was at that time even more attracted by chemistry, and when he had finished the high school he thought that a university study of pharmacy would best suit his leanings. As the certificate of the type of high school he had attended gave at that time no access to the university, he had to qualify for the latter by submitting himself to a special examination in the classical languages. After a one-year preparatory course he passed this examination, and in 1897 he entered the Utrecht University as a pharmaceutical student. In 1899 he obtained the B.Sc. degree. In the meantime, however, his interest in botany was once more stirred into activity, especially by the contact with the young and enthusiastic botany professor, Dr F. A. F. C. Went, and he decided to discontinue his pharmaceutical study, and to take up botany as a major subject. To this end he had to submit himself once more to a supplementary examination, this time in botany and zoology. Shortly afterwards he became assistant to professor Went. On the 11th of September 1902 he obtained the M.Sc. degree, and a few days later he departed for Suriname to participate in the Saramacca Expedition. In 1903 he returned with a large amount of herbarium material and with a good deal of experience regarding tropical vegetation. This first confrontation with a tropical flora made a lasting impression on his mind, and henceforth the study of tropical vegetation and especially that of the flora of Suriname became his main scientific concern.

In 1906 he obtained the doctors degree — first class — with a thesis called “An enumeration of the Vascular Plants known from Suriname, together with their distribution and synonymy”. This work was to become the foundation on which all subsequent study of the flora of Suriname was based.

In the same year 1906 he was appointed lecturer in systematic botany and plant geography at the Utrecht University, but in order to acquaint himself by direct contact with the tropical flora of Asia he at once departed to Java. For this journey he received the stipend of the “Buitenzorg Fund”.

In the years 1912 and 1913 he took part in the third expedition to South New Guinea. Very important botanical collections were brought back, and for some time afterwards he was occupied with the elaboration of part of these materials.

In 1914 followed his appointment to ordinary professor of systematic botany and plant geography at the Utrecht University. This enabled him to unfold his gifts to full extent, for now he could raise students according to his own ideas, and he could develop the Botanical Museum and Herbarium to what it has since become, i.e. to an institute that has found universal recognition.

It was a very characteristic feature of Pulle's personality that he never tried to form a school. The collaboration with his pupils nevertheless resulted in work that was highly appreciated all over the world and that brought fame to his institute.

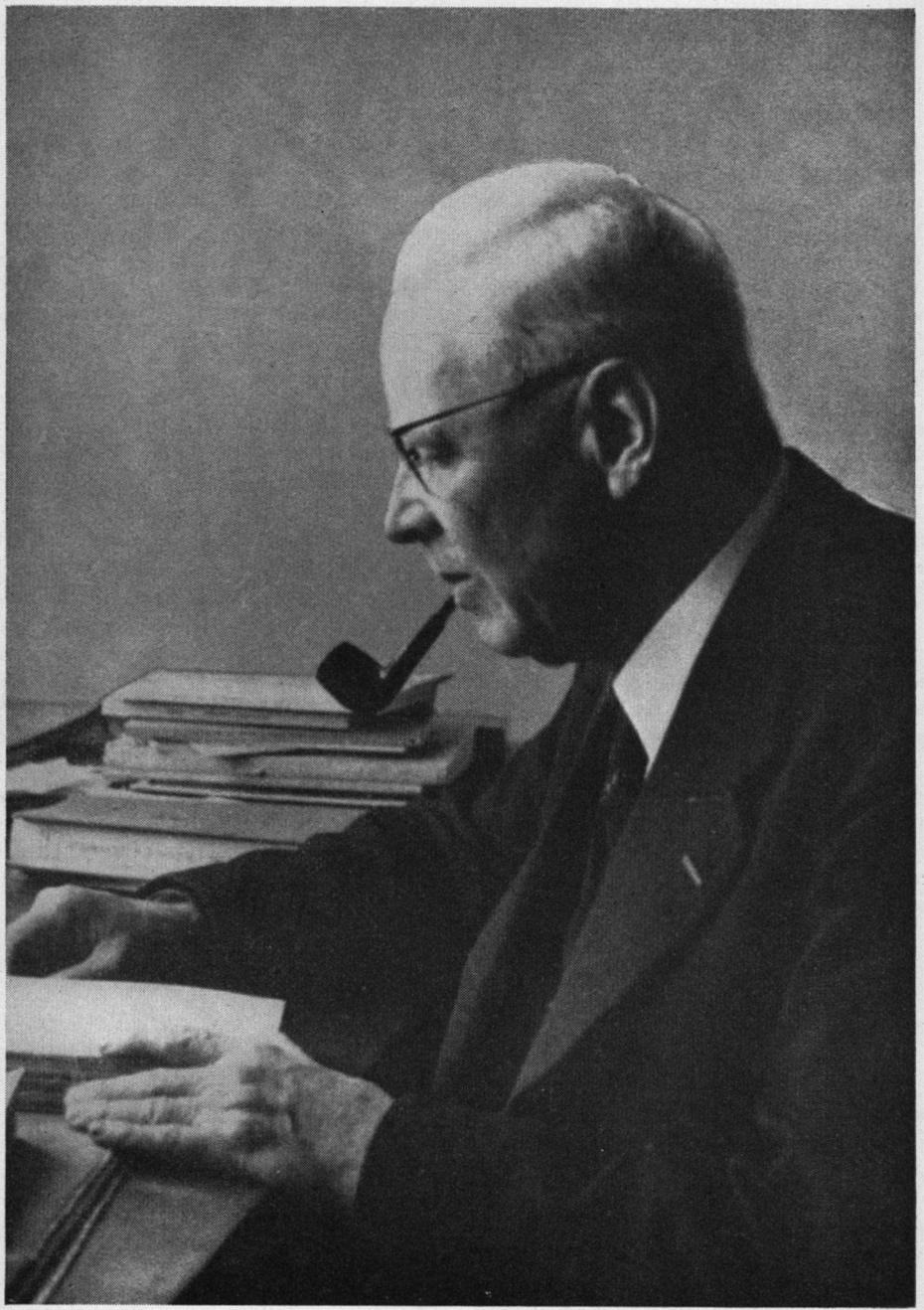
The backbone of his reputation is doubtless formed by the long series of publications issued by those of his pupils who occupied themselves with the study of the tropical flora. They were for a large part collected in the well-known "Flora of Suriname", of which he was the editor. However, a look at the list of doctor theses and of other publications issued from his institute will convince us that his interest was by no means restricted to the flora of Suriname, but that it was also extended to the flora of other regions and to other branches of systematic botany and plant geography. In the first place his interest in the study of peat deposits in the Netherlands by means of the analysis of pollen diagrams should here be mentioned. The first studies in this field were carried out at his instigation by F. Florschütz, and after the latter's depart to Leiden they were continued by F. P. Jonker, who in his turn has already trained several younger botanists in this method of research. At one time Pulle also took an active part in the study of the Malesian flora. The first students who worked under his guidance for the doctor's degree were H. J. Lam and D. F. van Slooten, who revised some families of Malesian plants, and some years later C. G. G. J. van Steenis was to follow in their footsteps. The study of the vegetation of the Netherlands was not neglected either, and several of his students made this their main concern. The studies of D. M. de Vries, A. Scheygrond and V. Westhoff, to quote only the more important workers in this field, are an eloquent testimony of his interest in this direction. Especially in the later part of his career he also stimulated monographical work, e.g. that of S. J. van Ooststroom on the Convolvulaceae, that of J. Swart on the Burseraceae, that of F. P. Jonker on the Burmanniaceae, and that of F. A. Stafleu on the Vochysiaceae. Doctor theses dealing with families belonging to the flora of Suriname were prepared by P. J. Eyma, J. Lanjouw, A. J. G. H. Kostermans and G. J. H. Amshoff.

The diversity of the fields in which investigations were carried out in his institute made the latter a stimulating centre in which his collaborators found it pleasant to work.

In the beginning the means he had at his disposal were very limited, but he never relaxed in his attempts to find ways and means to improve his institute and to enlarge the collections. He also did his best to find financial support for those of his collaborators who wished to visit foreign countries in order to increase their knowledge. For most of them these visits began already in their student days, for Pulle very often made excursions with his pupils to other parts of Europe. This not only gave them some idea of the vegetation of those regions, but it also brought them in contact with foreign botanists. When in the thirties the means of most of the students were no longer sufficient to enable them to participate in such excursions, he came to their aid by creating an "Excursion Fund". The amount brought together by his pupils and friends at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his appointment to the chair of systematic botany was donated by him to this fund. In this way he gave expression to his conviction that such excursions form an integral part of the training of systematic botanists.

Although Pulle did not take a very active part in the attempts to arrive at international botanical cooperation he showed always a very keen interest when I told him of my own efforts in that direction, and he did everything in his power to enable me to proceed with my plans.

There was, however, one field of international cooperation in which he himself was at one time actively engaged, viz. that of International Botanical Nomenclature.



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His interest in this subject probably reached its zenith when he acted as Recorder to the Nomenclature Committee at the Sixth International Botanical Congress held in 1935 at Amsterdam. His interest in and knowledge of nomenclature problems is clearly shown in his "Compendium van de terminologie, nomenclatuur en systematiek van de Spermatophyta" (Compendium of the terminology, nomenclature and classification of the Spermatophytes). His own students were taught from the very first that accuracy in this matter is an indispensable condition for the production of useful work.

To the members of his staff and to the botanists with whom he regularly collaborated his astonishing memory was a valuable asset, for he had read much and had gathered a wide experience. He knew a large number of plants by sight, and this is doubtless a great advantage to a taxonomist. Especially his knowledge of the flora of Suriname was very extensive. His interest in this flora never relaxed, and until shortly before his death he retained an unsatiable curiosity for everything that pertained to Suriname. It was always a real treat to him when he heard that something new had been found in that country.

In his own environment as well as abroad he had made many friends. On the whole he was easy of approach; he liked a friendly chat and loved to attend a party. Generally speaking he was very fond of company. At meetings and congresses he was a wellcome visitor and collaborator, because he knew how to create a friendly atmosphere, and also because he was always willing to sacrifice his time for administrative and organisatory work. Especially the Royal Dutch Botanical Society is for his activity in her behalf greatly indebted to him.

All those who attended the International Botanical Congresses held in 1930 at Cambridge, in 1935 at Amsterdam and in 1950 at Stockholm, will remember him with friendly feelings. Of the two South American Botanical Congresses, the one held at Rio de Janeiro in 1938, of which he was an Honorary President, and that held at Tucuman in 1948, he was an active participant. From the condolatory letters we received at the occasion of his decease we learned how many friends and admirers he had found abroad.

That the Dutch phytotaxonomists and plant geographers occupy at present a prominent position in the botanical world, is to a large extent due to the activity displayed by him in the fifty years of his career. His name will for always remain connected with this period in the history of taxonomic botany, and his personal qualities will be remembered with gratitude by his many pupils and friends.