A JOURNAL ON TAXONOMIC BOTANY,
PLANT SOCIOLOGY AND ECOLOGY

REINWARDTIA

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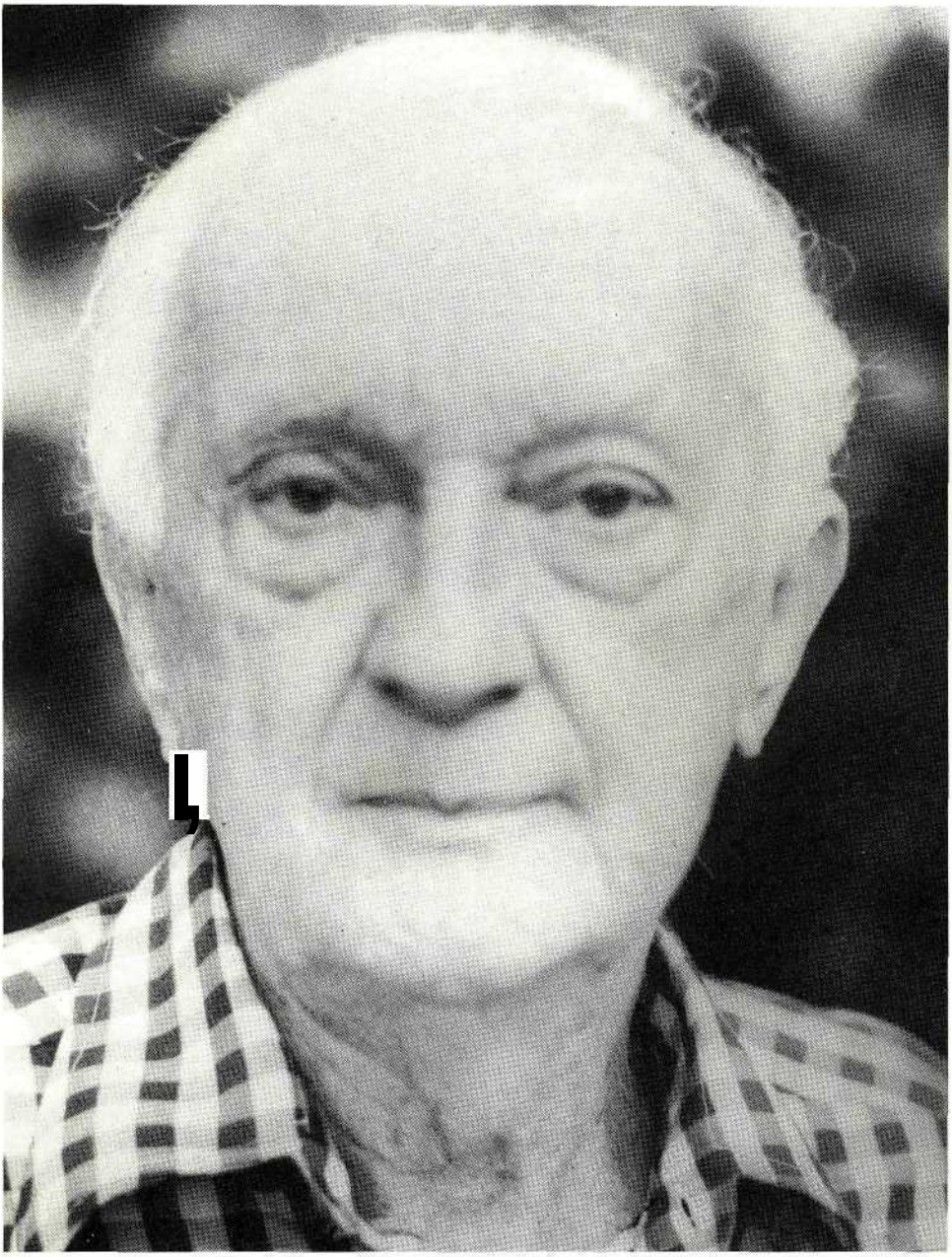
Published by
HERBARIUM BOGORIENSE
LEMBAGA BIOLOGI NASIONAL — LIPI
BOGOR, INDONESIA

Reinwardtia Vol. 10, Part 1, 1 — 106 28 February 1982

IO ISSN 0034 — 365X



Prof. Dr. A.J.G.H. KOSTERMANS

REINWARDTIA
Published by Herbarium Bogoriense — LBN, Bogor
Vol. 10, Part 1, pp. 9 — 20 (1982)

KOSTERMANS SEVENTY-FIVE

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On 1 July 1981 'Doc', as he is widely known, has reached the age of 75. Ten months earlier he returned from Ceylon to Bogor, his health restored, largely by his own efforts. Life brought him fame as well as frowns, of fortune and of people. On his part, he brought much to life. A biographical sketch in the customary sense cannot be attempted here: it would require an amount of documentation hard to obtain, harder to sift and check. Basic facts can be found in literature *, in addition, he gave me a number of interviews about his life. This happened in the first half of 1978; the text was taped, and later transcribed by me. The 5 tapes and the text will be deposited in the Rijksherbarium files. The story in them has all the charm of spontaneity. On it, the present account has been based. I made efforts to strengthen the factual basis, but on several points am not sure that I succeeded.

We met for the first time about May 1955, when he returned from a tour in Borneo, and I had just taken up duties as a young plant taxonomist at the Herbarium Bogoriense. We made some joint excursions but never an expedition together; however, at Bogor and later at Leiden I saw much of him, and we both attended the Dipterocarp Round Tables at Paris and Kepong. We had much fun together. He is a man of unexpected turns. I liked the quickness of his mind, his casual mockery, and the great ideals which shine through his deeds, if you observe him over the years.

Professor C.G.G.J. van Steenis thought long and hard before he would acknowledge Kostermans as the largest collector of rain forest

* For elementary biographical facts and collecting tours in Indonesia, see Flora Malesiana i 1: 298-289 (1950), i .5: 59-60, portr. (1958), i 8: 57 (1974). In Flora Malesiana Bulletin, so far 105 publications by him have been listed. His name is there mentioned 77 times, with important items on pages 43, 470, 550, 623, 802, 877, 884, 976, 1116, 1248, 1396, 1516, 1773, 1883, 2150, 2312, 2339, 2756, 2759, 2976. The account of the UNESCO Symposium at Tjiawi, too, gives a number of biographical facts, p. 162-163 (1961).

trees in Indonesia. In the opinion of Professor C. Kalkman, two pages of typescript would be enough for the present paper. But the draft had already been completed by then, and still, in my view, achievements far outshine shortcomings. So here is the story.

André Joseph Guillaume Henri Kostermans was born in Poerworedjo (now spelt Purworejo) in Central Java, on 1 July 1906. His parents were by his own account, unremarkable people. His father was a teacher at a 'Dutch-Native' primary school, subsequently in Wonosobo, Ngawi, and Yogyakarta, all in Central Java. There were two children; his younger brother, D.G.F.R. Kostermans, became a chemist, first in Indonesia, and now lives at The Hague.

He grew up rather lonely, the father taught all the time to support his family. A love for insects and minerals came spontaneously, and in the garden he collected butterflies, but he did not receive real stimulation before secondary school at Bandung, where he had an excellent teacher of biology. As a boy he fell from a tree and broke his nose; to this event it owes its characteristic, hook-like shape.

After about 1 or 1 1/2 years at the Bandung school (HBS in Dutch) he had to leave for Holland, as the father had completed his years of service and at 45 went on retirement. The family moved to Maastricht in the very South of The Netherlands, whence his mother came. French was frequently spoken in those quarters, and he learnt the language quickly. He also perfected Dutch; from the beginning, he had been more familiar with Javanese and Malay. Here, too, was an inspiring teacher of biology. He three times received the prize for being the best pupil of the class ... and about 18 disciplines were taught for the final exam, in those days. Having passed with high marks, he could opt for an interest-free loan to finance a study, and chose biology, at Utrecht. He went there in 1925 and, like H.J. Lam before, was fascinated by H.F. Nierstrasz, professor of zoology, whom he reports to have said: "In science, you may deceive everyone except yourself." He wanted to join the student's corporation and had his head shaven as required, but could not persevere for lack of money.

Initially, he felt attracted to animals rather than plants, and for a time was assistant to H.J. Jordan, the professor of zoophysiology. However, as financial prospects looked better for botanists, he turned to A.A. Pulle for guidance, and still recollected that Pulle sent him to the basement of the Utrecht Herbarium and to select himself a family to work up for the Flora of Surinam. He came up with the Lauraceae;

for his thesis, the Malpighiaceae and Hernandiaceae were added. He took his Ph.D. degree on 20 January 1936.

To make ends meet, he was already teaching in secondary schools and this he continued for the next two years, mainly at Maastricht and Amsterdam. In 1938, he was awarded the Buitenzorg Fund, so he went back to Indonesia and at Batavia (now Jakarta) found himself a job as a teacher. For the Buitenzorg Fund, he undertook collecting beach plants on the islets in Jakarta Bay and Nusa Kambangan. This first harvest was not particularly good; the displeasure felt at the Bogor Herbarium has been recorded for posterity in Flora Malesiana i 1: 299. Personally, he was none too fortunate, either; he lost his job and had a difficult time. During it, he made a card file of Lauraceae names; this was the beginning of his big bibliography of this family, so Dr. Van Steenis told me.

World War II, which in Java began with the Japanese invasion early in 1942, changed his life. He was called once again into military service *, helped defend the small airfield of Semplak, west of Bogor, and told me that from an ambush he killed a handful of Japanese soldiers on bicycles, with a hand grenade. He withdrew to Bandung, and was there made a Prisoner Of War. Like his fellows he began to suffer from bad conditions, but learnt some Japanese and kept on the lookout for opportunities. He was transported to Singapore, there in an abandoned Chinese shop discovered a lined coffin, which he used as his bed for a month. When food became scanty and bad, he even learnt to prepare and eat the snail *Achatina fulica*. Hedges by then were stripped of their leaves by the prisoners.

He was lucky in being assigned to the advance party for construction of the infamous Burma Railway. He was marched along the Kwae Noi River, to the Three Pagodas Pass. From leaves of *Psidium guajava* (Myrtaceae) he brewed 'tea for diarrhoea' which helped many prisoners to get better. He always made enquiries about local medicinal plants, went to volunteer in a camp where cholera had broken out, and thus gradually penetrated the medical sector. He told me a number of horror stories, with cheerful equanimity.

During the last year of the war, when he was a nurse in the large camp at Nakon Patong near Bangkok, he set up a distillery for alcohol.

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* Mrs. J.C. Kostermans - Lanzing at The Hague kindly gave me several old photographs of her brother-in-law, which are now in the Rijksherbarium file. On one of them, André wears military uniform; it is dated August 1924.

For the soldering of the pipes, he told me, HC1 was used which was taken from the stomachs of just-deceased prisoners. He developed a recipe for a kind of soup from leaves of various plants rich in vitamins. After the war, General Spoor sent him a personal letter in acknowledgement of such services.

While busy along the railway he noticed interesting plants, and as after the liberation there was not much to do at Bangkok, he made a plan to go back for collecting. He approached E.D. Merrill for funds, successfully; S. Bloembergen, also freed from captivity, tried Dutch sources for the same, and they did some work together. Bloembergen left before long, however, and Kostermans went on alone, assisted by a crew of Japanese who now in turn were POW. The railway to Burma had been completed but soon fell into disuse. Certain stretches could be used, however, he had an engine at his disposal and on this, so to speak, rode into botanical history. When passages looked risky — some beams of bridges began to sprout already — the engine was sent across first, followed by Kostermans and his crew running at a distance. The Japanese gave good help, and the sergeant even offered to come over to Java to serve him as a valet. It demonstrates Kostermans's lack of hard feelings.

Back in Java, at last, with his collections of about 2000 numbers from the Kwae Noi, he saw F.H. Endert again, who was a prominent member of a long-standing committee in the Forestry Service, for the study of useful plants, and was commissioned to prepare a new edition of K. Heyne's book. Endert sent him to Thailand and Indo-China to collect useful plants for introduction into Indonesia. He went and came back with a seedless mango which he had spotted during captivity, and with 'floating rice' which can grow on long-inundated land.

Once L.G.M. Baas Becking, then Director of the Bogor Gardens, asked him why he mixed with all those natives. He replied that as to him it was evident that the Dutch would never be able to hold the country, he could as well make friends with the people.

In the course of 1947, he was appointed Forest Botanist, in the Forestry Service, and his next destination was Momi-Ransiki in western New Guinea, to survey an area which was singled out for transmigration — mistakenly, as it turned out. A substantial report, *Bosonderzoek kolonisatie object Momi-Ransiki/Nieuw Guinea,* 2 vol. (1948), was published, anonymously for bureaucratic reasons, but the text on vegetation is nearly all his; the calculations were made by P. Tideman. This

field work done, he had a month to spare before the ship would be back to pick him up. He had some food left, and decided to explore the Arfak Mountains. His two Javanese assistants, who did not want to come with him, were stationed on the beach to dry the plants, in ovens manufactured from discarded oil drums. So with a few Papuans he went up the Arfak, 2000 m. Instead of drying paper, which he did not have, they took big leaves of a *Macaranga* species (Euphorbiaceae) and these served to keep the plants fresh as they were carried down to the ovens, in makeshift bamboo presses or 'sasak'.

On hearing that the famous 'massoi' tree might occur in the Namtu Mountains, further South, he went there, barefoot. He took to eating grubs, and small birds which were roasted quickly and consumed half-raw; the feathers were spat out. He found the tree, *Cryptocarya aromatica* (Lauraceae) at 800 m, fully fertile. The bark is medicinally important, and plantations are now said to exist in Papua New Guinea. When he returned to the coast, his Javanese had dutifully dried c. 3000 plants, but the party had to wait another fortnight until the boat came. Meanwhile they survived on leaves, lizards, ants, &c.; there was no habitation whatever. (See W. Vink, Nova Guinea 10, Bot.: 488 - 489. 1965; according to him, Kostermans was accompanied by at least one European assistant.)

Now that he had mastered field work under such conditions, and loving it, he looked for more, and found it with the Division of Planning ('Planologie') in the Forestry Service. For many years, this agency had commercial 'strip-surveys' made of forest lands. Tracks 10 m wide, projected in straight lines with the aid of a compass, and stretching for kilometres, were inventorized with the help of knowledgeable natives ('boomkenner'), who identified the trees on the spot by vernacular names. Using lists of tree names, in which the vernacular names were referred to scientific ones, the results could be mapped and tabulated. Kostermans was to conduct botanical checks in the field, and to collect herbarium material as proof. According to the tradition set by Endert, it was considered sufficient in most cases to bring back sterile material, for which Endert had devised keys. Kostermans, characteristically, did different things than were expected of him. In the first place, he became devastatingly critical of the quality of the work done — if it had been actually done at all — in the strip surveys he examined. Second, he made large collections of fertile material, also from beside the strips, where he was not supposed to look. Only much later, in

Holland, he told me, did his superior, J.F. Kools, then professor at Wageningen, acknowledged that he had been right.

His tours have been listed in Flora Malesiana, as said. Worth mentioning is a trip to the Malili area in Central Celebes, in 1950. The entire collection was lost in a fire owing to riots in Makassar (now Ujung Pandang) ; what he saved was a Toraja child that had been brought to him almost dead. He restored it to life with quinine shots, took it with him for the rest of the tour, but when time for departure came it did not want to be left behind. What to do? One of the field assistants from Bogor offered to take the boy in his own house if Kostermans would pay Dfl. 25 a month for expenses, and so it happened. Before long, in Borneo, he likewise took up a small boy who was sick with polio and had been abandoned by its own people. Through swimming exercises, in the Bogor pool, he invalidated it. When he bought the spacious house at Jl. Pangrango 20 in Bogor, with its magnificent view on the Botanical Garden and Mount Salak, he took the children in. Other boys soon followed, often bright ones recommended by their school teachers who sensed that in this manner their ambition would be activated. Mostly there were between six and twelve at a time; he gave them a good education, often secured fellowships for them, and many of them did very well at school and in later life.

However, one of them was unruly, stole money, and another went after him; this ended in the latter killing the former with a knife. It turned out that also a handgun, forgotten by a policeman, also a former foster child, was kept in the Kostermans house, and for this he was arrested; he was also needed as a witness in the murder case. This happened in mid-1969. For three months he was kept in custody in Jakarta, under atrocious conditions. After much publicity, nationally and internationally, things improved for him and he was interned at Bogor under much better conditions, which also permitted him to work, and thus complete the sentence he had to serve of 6 1/2 months. The preparations for a guest professorship in Aarhus, Denmark, also kept him busy; he went there as soon as he was free, on 1 March 1970.

These visiting professorships (also at Lexington, Kentucky, USA in 1967, and in Zùrich, Switzerland, in 1973), and his time at Leiden as a B.A. Krukoff Botanist (1974 -1978) provided him with much-needed income for the upkeep of his foster family, for which his Indonesian salary was insufficient, although he supplemented it with temporary professorships at Bandung Institute of Technology from about 1961

onwards. He never had anything for himself but a bicycle, and already in the Japanese camps it was his habit to share things with those who had less. After his detention in Jakarta, two fellow-prisoners when they too were free again, came to Bogor to thank him for what he had given them.

In January 1960 he became Head of the Division of Botany in the Forestry Service, at Bogor, and of its modest Herbarium. His association with the (much larger) Herbarium Bogoriense, where nearly all the scientific work had to be done anyway, was never official, and he preferred it that way. Without infringing on anybody's position, he could work and advise freely, and this is what he did through the years, especially after M.A. Donk left as Director of the Herbarium in 1954. His close cooperation with the new Director A. Dilmy, who led the Herbarium from 1955 till 1969, is a success story of early 'counterpartship', although in Dilmy's obituary in Fl. Males. Bull. (33) 3363 - 3365 (1980) this is unmentioned. Witness to it is *Beilschmiedia dilmyana* (Lauraceae), Reinwardtia 4: 23, fig. 15 (1956), which Kostermans named in Dilmy's honour when the latter had succeeded in obtaining new roofing for the Herbarium. Another benefit of his vantage point in the Forestry Service was, that this had more funds, to make field work possible and to finance publications for the good of both institutions alike.

From his officially modest position, Kostermans played a crucial role in four crucial achievements; these will now briefly be discussed.

1. Collecting in the lowland rain forests of Indonesia. With a roughly estimated 25,000 numbers in his name (plus an amount collected in joint series with others, like KKSS, for Kostermans, Kuswata, Soegeng, & Soepadmo), of which the majority were taken in Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, Kostermans is the largest single collector in the lowland rain forests of Indonesia. It is the most difficult vegetation type to work in, the most valuable, and the least known. Unlike many botanists in the Forestry Service before him, he never took sterile material. His collections are of high quality (after the ominous beginnings), in many duplicates, well-labelled, and always were speedily distributed.

We might wish that he took photographs, and made extensive tour reports of the enormously diverse forests where he went, in the way L.J. Brass did in New Guinea. However, in that case he would have collected perhaps half of what he took now, and in view of the low

density of collecting in the lowland rain forests, there is no doubt that by confining himself to gathering specimens, he did the right thing under the circumstances. Some of his observations and remarks on forest types can be found in the UNESCO Symposia on Humid Tropics Vegetation: Kandy in 1956, Tjiawi in 1958, Goroka in 1960, Kuching in 1962, of which the Proceedings were published in subsequent years.

He would not have come the long way he did without his amazing toughness. In Thailand as a POW he contracted gangrene; he recovered. In New Guinea he fell into a thin freshly cut branch which pierced his arm, but in a couple of days he was again at work. In Borneo, while roaming alone through the forest with his field glasses to select trees for the next day, he fell between rocks in a gully and broke his arm with the bone sticking out. He was found the following morning and transported in such pain that he nearly fainted, until a hospital was reached on the fourth day. Shortly after being operated on, his arm still in a cast, he felt better and escaped from the hospital, furtively, and returned to the site, where he had ordered his men to keep working.

2. New generation of Indonesian biologists. In 1954, when things in Indonesia were going downhill, there was no view on attracting Indonesian staff to the institutes of the Bogor Botanic Gardens (then Kebun Raya Indonesia, now Lembaga Biologi Nasional; the Herbarium is one of those institutes), to replace the old hands (mostly Dutch) who were gradually leaving. Kostermans helped design a plan for an 'Akademi Biologi', which was to be manned by the available Kebun Raya staff. Pupils were given free board and teaching; in those bad times, this provided a great attraction and about 900 applications came in, from which the very best were selected. Kostermans was among the Kebun Raya people who gave themselves great pains to educate these students; this too is a fine example of early multiple collaboration. He pushed hard for botany, of course, exposing his students to the hardships of field work (even if their tears had to be shed), all the way to processing and distributing the material; they surely learnt to make their hands dirty on the Friday afternoons reserved for that. Four times a class was enrolled at the Akademi Biologi; most of the Indonesians who now hold positions in LBN were educated there. Many students were given further training in taxonomy by Kostermans personally; thereafter he would make efforts to get them a fellowship for a Ph.D. abroad.

3. New Herbarium building. In President Sukarno's early days, the two occasionally met and chatted during walks in the Botanic

Garden, next to the Palace grounds. Kostermans, always a ready talker, did not forget to mention the dilapidated state of the buildings where the archives of the country's plant resource were kept. He also spoke extensively about it to Professor Sarwono, then Chairman of the Indonesian Council of Sciences (LIPI), and indeed enough support materialized to decide upon a new Herbarium building. Kostermans was unexpectedly requested to supply construction drawings the next day; after a long night of work, he and a few pupils succeeded in producing them in time. After ramshackle accommodation was found to store the collections during the construction, the old buildings were demolished (of the main one, see photograph in Fl. Males, i 4: cxiv. 1949). President Sukarno opened the new construction site.

All went well at first, until after Sukarno's fall from power, the work slowed down and came to a standstill. Funds were also exhausted, the economy was at low ebb, and even Professor Sarwono seemed unable to get construction resumed. In despair Kostermans accompanied by Soegeng Reksodihardjo and Mien Rifai went to Jakarta to see General Piet Harjono. Unannounced, they came to his house at 7 a.m., to plead the cause of the Herbarium. The General was impressed, sent aides to view the situation in Bogor, and one month later, Kostermans was called to Jakarta because Rp. 30 million would be made available.

Kostermans went there, and during an animated conversation, told the general about his work and his foster boys. Suddenly General Piet said: "I wonder, wouldn't Rp. 40 million be better ?" Kostermans thereupon flung himself onto the general in a spontaneous embrace, and promised that he would see to it that not one bag of cement would be stolen. This was late in 1968.

Sure enough, one night he was waked up by one of the boys who was on patrol: cement was being loaded on a truck . . . . . with policemen passively standing by. He went immediately, and resolutely demanded unloading, white of hair and fury in the dark, a plain show of strength, and Kostermans won. On 1 April 1970, the new building was officially used. Flora Malesiana Bulletin 25 carries its picture on the cover. On the ground floor, on the Bibliotheca side, a relief is worth seeing, presented by the Archipel Printer Djulie, where Reinwardtia and other scientific journals are printed. A truly Indonesian landscape is populated with remarkable plants, but also with people and animals who have the features of staff members. A monkey up in the tree on the left bears a human face with Kostermans's profile.

He obviously could never have done this without being an Indonesian citizen. When in 1958 the Dutch were expelled from the country, he was actually given the choice by his director, E. Soesilo: leave as a Dutchman or stay as an Indonesian. The choice was an easy one for him, and he never had any regrets. He had to take an exam in language and history, thereafter was called back by cable from field work in Sumbawa, for the ceremony. He hurried back, only to learn that his presence was not necessary, and that as a consequence of bis decision he had to give up over Dfl. 10,000. He took it cheerfully, and threw a big party for his friends. From four of them, he took a new first name: Ahmad Jahja Goh Hartono, only his surname was unchanged with the final s (never pronounced in Indonesian) was retained. This was in 1962.

4. Keeping taxonomy going at Bogor. The Herbarium's journal Reinwardtia was established in 1950; by 1974 it had gone through 8 volumes with a total of 4200 pages (the indexes not reckoned). Kostermans is the largest single contributor to these volumes, with 45 papers totalling about 1100 pages; for many of them he raised the funds himself. The 105 papers listed in the Flora Malesiana Bulletin constitute by no means his entire production; there are others, mostly dealing with Lauraceae, on Africa-Madagascar, and on Tropical America. Papers by his pupils K. Kartawinata, B. Prijanto, S. Reksodihardjo, Roekrnowaii-Hartono, S. Soenarko, E. Soepadmo, and N. Wirawan, were published in Reinwardtia volumes 5 (1959) through 9 (1980).

His best-known family is, of course, Lauraceae, on which he produced three comprehensive, fundamental publications: *A historical survey of Lauraceae,* J. Sc. Res. Indon. 1: 88-159 (1952) ; *Lauraceae,* Reinwardtia 4: 193-256 (1957), a discussion of all genera: *Bihliographia. Lauracaerum,* xvi ± 1450 p. (1964) *. He produced monographs of several genera as well as many revisions in local Floras, and many papers with taxonomic suggestions., alterations, descriptions of new species and discoveries of old types, and in many Herbaria named innumerable specimens.

He confined himself to tree families, and did considerable work in Bombacaceae (monograph of *Durio,* Reinwardtia 4: 357-460. 1958, see also 7: 215), in Guttiferae and Meliaceae (monograph of *Aglaia* sect. *Lansium,* Reinwardtia 7: 221-282. 1966), Mimosaceae (revision of *Aba-*

* Critically reviewed by C.G.G.J van Steenis in FMBull. (IS) 1157 (1864). The author's interleaved, annotated personal copy got lost in the mail between Leiden and Sri Lanka in 1978, but a xerox of it survives at Leiden.

rema e.a., Org. Sc. Res. Indon. Bull. 20, 122 p. 1954), Rosaceae (revision of *Parinari* Reinwardtia 7: 147-213. 1965), Sterculiaceae (monographs of *Firmiana,* Reinwardtia 4: 281-310. 1957, and *Heritiera,* ditto 465-583. 1959), and Tiliaceae.

Much of this work was done at the Herbarium Bogoriense, and there prepared for the press. Loans were sometimes received there and if not granted, the data had to be amplified with visits to Herbaria, during several journeys. Also, he often takes in hand two or three families at a time. As a consequence, the work is uneven in scope and perfection, and in the Flora Malesiana Bulletin received many a rap from C.G.G.J. van Steenis (see pages 946, 1326, 1663, 1962, 2112). He on his part did not always spare others, either (e.g. P.S. Ashton, in Meded. Landbouwhogeseh. Wagen. 19: 207-219. 1980).

When questioned about his lack of reverence for taxonomic rectitude, so prevalent at Leiden, he answers disarmingly: "I find people more important than business." I think indeed that the sustained consistency in methodology required to deal with a big family does not precisely tally with his mental make-up. "Switching from one family to another enables me to come back fresh", he declares, "and to maintain pleasure". He does not shun the long taxonomic drudgery, but it is so incompatible with his spontaneity, and with his inexhaustible ingenuity to improvise under adverse conditions. His contribution remains very great all the same, but whether his taxonomy will last — even in the Lauraceae, where limits between several genera are still doubtful — remains to be seen.

As a B.A. Krukoff Botanist at Leiden, he found it hard to digest the very large, exceedingly difficult genus *Cinnamomum* as he was supposed to do all the time. As the task was so much bigger, too, than anyone (including myself, who had intended to assist him) had anticipated, hope for a Flora Malesiana revision did not materialize. He must be credited, however, with taking up the most difficult parts of the job first, which besides *Cinnamomum* was the sorting out of *Cryptocarya* and *Litsea,* and this in turn required huge amounts of rearrangement among the specimens. Homesick for the forest, he was glad to spend his holidays on a stint of field work in South India, together with C.E. Ridsdale (report in Fl. Males. Bull. 30: 2759-2766. 1977), and felt it as a relief when he moved to Sri Lanka to work at Peradeniya University with time for large-scale collecting. Altogether, he took over 6000 numbers in Ceylon, and now claims to *he* the largest single collector in that island as well. He there also succeeded, after long efforts on the part of medical men, to cure himself of a nasty amoebic dysentery; the recipe is at Leiden

Three genera were named after him: *Kosiermansia,* Soegeng (Bombacaceae), *Kostermansinda* Rifai (Hyphomycetes), *Kostermanthus* Prance (Rosaceae-Chrysobalanoideae), and dozens of species.

Refreshingly indifferent to (reputations, for himself and for others, everything to him seems natural. He takes people as they are ("In Rome, do as the Romans do"), and is careful never to expect too much of anyone. He is always keen on new people, new species, new adventures, yet unshakably dedicated, in his love for botany and for Indonesia which he never mentions. Across differences in life style and character, by example only, he opened my eyes to what it might mean to be a botanist in Indonesia, and for these lessons I feel to him immensely grateful.

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VOL. 10 NO. 1

Distributor

LEMBAGA BIOLOGI NASIONAL — LIPI
JALAN RAYA JUANDA 18
BOGOR — INDONESIA

Printed by ARCHIPEL. Bogor. Java