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Spalte 1

In memoriam Lothar Geitler

One year ago, on May 18th 1989, emer. Prof. Dr. Lothar Geitler celebrated his 90th birthday. At this outstanding event former students, collaborators and scientific colleagues from all over the world joined to produce a Festschrift, which grew to the enormous size of 1½ volumes (6 issues) of "Plant Systematics and Evolution" – an impressive document of Geitler's great esteem and international reputation. Geitler was really overwhelmed and deeply touched by the sympathy and reverence that met him on his jubilee.

A few days before his 91th birthday, on May 1st 1990, Geitler passed away. Though he was ailing since many years, his death came quite unexpectedly.

It is difficult or even impossible to find the right words to commemorate his person, his life and his scientific work adequately. He certainly was a man, who admitted priority to science, but never was a one-sided scientist. In the first instance, his scientific interest covered the diversity, structure and development of algae. In 1921, when still being a student, Geitler published the first paper on blue-green algae. After finishing his thesis (on the structure and function of the heterocysts) he quickly became a foremost authority on these prokaryotic organisms, surveying them in not less than six monographs and comprehensive floristic treatments. Papers on cyanophytes appear interspersed throughout his life work, and even in his publications of the last decennium, four papers refer to blue-green algae. Geitler discovered and described about 90 new taxa, including two families and over a dozen genera. Conversely, many cyanophytes were named after him, e.g., the genera *Geitleriella*, *Geitleribactron*, and *Geitlerinema*.

In the middle of the Twenties Geitler became fascinated by another algal group: the diatoms. Their structure, reproduction, life history, and problems of sex determination kept him busy all his life long. Nearly hundred publications refer to these organisms, many of them being general surveys and updated summarizing accounts. With increasing age, Geitler concentrated more and more on diatom research and it is significant that publications on these organisms also conclude his life work.

In addition, Geitler paid scientific attention to nearly all other groups of plants, predominantly cryptogams (bacteria, chlorophytes, *Xantho*-, *Chryso*- and *Rhodophyceae*, fungi, lichens), but also ferns and angiosperms (inter alia, he published a booklet on plant morphology, studied the inflorescence and floral morphology of *Neptunia oleracea*, and made observations on the seed set and fertility of orchids).

In view of the many interests and activities it is almost unbelievable that Geitler was still able to build up another extensive research project: karyology and chro-

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mosome research. Starting with epoch-making studies on endomitosis and endopolyploidy (with important observations on insect cells) he became a leading cytologist in the thirties and Forties. He published four textbooks and numerous general papers on karyological and cytological topics. For 40 (!) years (1932 – 1972) he reviewed continuously the section "cytology" in "Fortschritte der Botanik" (since 1964 in collaboration with E. TSCHERMAK-WOESS).

For more than 20 years GEITLER was the sole editor of the present journal (at that time still appearing under the original title "Österreichische Botanische Zeitschrift", since 1971 he acted as a co-editor. GEITLER was also a member of distinguished scientific societies such as the Academies of Science of Vienna and Mainz.

GEITLER's academic career essentially took place at the University of Vienna. In 1922 he made his degree (under R. v. WETTSTEIN), then he became ~~docent~~ and finally Professor of Botany. Towards the end of World War II he was invited and authorized by the "Kaiser-Wilhelms-(now Max-Planck-)Gesellschaft" to establish a research institute on cytology and genetics in Vienna, but this project could not be realized. In 1946 he became Head of the Institute of Botany and the Botanical Garden of the University of Vienna. Shortly later, by following an invitation of T. CASPERSON, he spent some time in Sweden. In Austria he was in steady contact with the "Biological Station Lunz" and its Head, F. RUTTNER. In 1970 GEITLER retired, but continued his scientific work in full force nearly until his death.

The private life of LOTHAR GEITLER took its course in a very quiet and unspectacular manner. An important event was certainly the marriage with his wife, GRETE GEITLER, in 1936. She assisted him in an absolutely unselfish and sacrificing manner until his death. Her appreciation of GEITLER's destiny and her silent work in the background laid a firm and stable foundation of his enormous productivity. Another essential component enabling such as voluminous work was certainly his avoidance of any kind of publicity. GEITLER preferred to live a life of privacy and seclusion – a life that also enabled him to follow his taste for the fine arts. In his spare time he painted in water-colours, played the piano or attended concerts. With his parents he held close and cordial contact to the composer FRANZ SCHMIDT. In any matter of taste and style, GEITLER was an unfailable authority.

In his particular way of life, in the manner of doing his scientific work in seclusion and solitude, in his comprehensive knowledge of nearly all aspects of biology, in the exceeding diversity of his research fields, and in the tight and precise manner of writing and talking, GEITLER was the personification of a scientist and professor that has become extinct in our days. His death not only terminated his personal life, but means the end of an era.

A. Weber

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