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ALBERT JAN KLUYVER

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During the night of May 13-14, 1956, Dr. A. J. Kluyver, professor of microbiology at the Technical University of Delft, Holland, passed away, stricken suddenly, by a heart attack at the age of almost 68 years.

It is difficult to realize that this great scientist, who has played such an important role in shaping the present day trends in microbiology, is no longer with us.

For those who had the privilege of knowing this great master of science more intimately (and they are many) he will always be remembered as the prototype of nobility of the mind.

His large study above and adjacent to his modest laboratories, along one of the Dutch canals in the small country town of Delft, was far from an "ivory tower." Here, over a period of almost 35 years, people from all over the world were met with a friendly, human understanding of their problems. Seldom would one leave the company of this great and humble man without a feeling of inspiration, encouragement and scientific enthusiasm.

It is infrequent that Nature bestows on one human being a combination of precious gifts as Kluyver possessed. He had an outstanding scientific mind, an inexhaustable capacity and love for work, unexcelled leadership, was an inspiring teacher with a remarkable common sense, friendly, humane, a noble personality, yet with a truly humble mind, never angry, always ready to help others.

Albert Jan Kluyver not only will leave behind him the deep marks which he permanently carved out as scientist, but he will always be remembered as a true friend, a noble, honest human being.

Born June 3rd, 1888, at Breda, Holland, he lived for several years at the University town of Leiden where his father was a mathematics professor. He studied chemical engineering at the Technical University of Delft from 1905-1910 and, from 1910 to 1916, was assistant to Professor Van Iterson in the department of Technical Botany where he obtained his Ph.D. degree in 1914 on a brilliant thesis entitled: "Biochemical sugar determinations."

After a period of 5 years of government service in the tropics, he was appointed in 1921 professor of microbiology at his Alma Mater, as a successor to Dr. M. W. Beyerinck who had reached the retirement age of 70.

Rather than follow in the footsteps of his famous predecessor, Kluyver designed his own research program. His pioneer work and that of his students on the biochemical activity of microorganisms undoubtedly was largely responsible for the general interest of today in this field. Yet, Kluyver considered his microorganisms mainly as (probably) the most simple forms of life, therefore the ones that might be the most profitably used as study objects for life phenomena. He strongly believed that the underlying principles of life learned from his microbes were applicable to the more complex forms of living organisms.

These concepts of unity in biochemistry are clearly illustrated in his most recent book "The Microbe's Contribution to Biology" and are now quite universally accepted.

It is hardly surprising that this great mind which tried to create order whenever a seemingly chaotic condition existed also turned his attention to the field of Taxonomy.

For many years the international yeast collection of the Central Bureau voor Schimmelcultures was housed in his laboratory. Under Dr. Kluyver's direction, extremely important taxonomic studies were conducted aimed at bringing order in the seemingly endless stream of "new" yeast species reaching his laboratories.

His profound knowledge of the vast variety of microbes and their activities was also repeatedly applied. Many contributions from his hand on the problem of taxonomy show the constant interest he had in this branch of bacteriology.

Dr. Kluyver's death will leave a strange emptiness in the hearts of his many friends. He died "with his boots on" at the height of his career. He dreaded retirement which was a way of life he could not appreciate or understand.

Little Holland and the rest of the world have lost a great man.

J. C. Hoogerheide

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