

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR DOCTOR ROBERT POTONIÉ (1839—1974)

Prof. Dr. Robert Potonié, the founder of Coal Petrography and Palaeopalynology, died on 26 January, 1974. His demise has deprived the scientific world of an eminent personality who contributed richly to knowledge during his active career of over 60 years. He was a well recognized authority on Biopetrology of coal and oil shales including their genesis and micropalaeontology.

Robert Potonié, the eldest son of the celebrated palaeobotanist, Prof. Dr. Henry Potonié, was born on 2nd December, 1889. His association with such a father instilled in him quite early a fascination for plants and their fossil history. The unfortunate premature death of his father in 1913 caused him to opt for Geology as a profession which he enriched through elucidation of structure, systematics and ecology of fossil plants in bituminous sediments. His lifelong multipronged study of coaly and oil bearing sediments contributed richly to the geology of these important sources of energy.

In 1944, while working in the oil organization of Rumania, he was taken prisoner by the U.S.S.R. forces. He was released from captivity in 1948 and joined the Geologisches Landesamt f. Nordrhein Westfalen at Krefeld where from he retired as a Director in December, 1954. Besides having been a Professor at the Technischen Hochschule in Berlin before the war, he was Honorary Professor of Coal Petrology at the University of Bonn, after the war.

With over 200 publications including monographs and text books on the chemistry, genesis and classification of coals and organic sediments, coal petrographic methods and their application in stratigraphy, the structure, systematics and ecology of spores and pollen grains in sedimentary rocks, he richly contributed to these aspects of geology and botany. *Synopsis der Gattungen der Sporae dispersae* Vols. I-VI, are his outstanding contributions to palaeopalynological literature.

Professor Dr. Robert Potonié was President of International Coal Petrology Commission and International Commission for Palaeozoic Microfloras since their inception in 1951 and 1958 respectively and continued to occupy these august offices till few years back. The Palaeobotanical Society invited him as a Visiting Scientist to the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany during 1957-58 and honoured him as its Honorary member in 1961. Since 1966 he was a Corresponding member of the Société Royal des Sciences de Liège. Professor Potonié was also recipient of the Services Grand Cross of F. D. R., the Reinhardt-Thiessen medal, Liège University medal, and Silver Jubilee medal of the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany in appreciation of his scientific contributions.

Professor Potonié was a man of refinements and taste. His courtesy and friendliness won him admiration and cordiality from his friends, associates and pupils. He was widely respected and honoured as a thorough gentleman and profound scientist.

His loss will be mourned by all who knew him and especially by Madam Olga Potonié, whose devoted companionship of 37 years with the late Professor has come to an end now.