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**Autor:** Stafleu, Frans A.  
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## **Charles Baehni and the Great Tradition**

Frans A. STAFLEU

Plant taxonomy is a great tradition. From Theophrastus of Eresus to the present time there have perhaps been few branches of the natural sciences in which the present has lived so much with the past, or rather in which past achievements have been such an essential part of living science. Taxonomic methods have grown steadily during more than twenty centuries while keeping their intrinsic character and being continuously renewed and re-assessed in the light of increased knowledge. Every plant taxonomist, however modern he may be, however technically refined his instruments of perception may be, is always placing his results in the great framework of traditional methods or is adding to the structure. Most characteristic of the great tradition, however, is perhaps the approach, that mixed attitude of single-minded devotion and inquisitive curiosity towards plants that has always made mutual understanding between botanists so simple. Of course, plant taxonomy is only a minor part of human culture, and in many respects its development is simply a logical consequence of the growth of human science and technical achievement. However, also in this connection it is part of a great tradition: that of human culture and values. A tradition remains alive only through continuous renewal and testing of the old against the new. Scientists play a two-fold rôle in this respect, they carry and they build. The carriers are more numerous than the builders, some are exclusively the former, others—smaller in numbers—mainly the latter. Still, almost every single scientist has something of both, although the ratio may well be that of Edison's transpiration versus inspiration.

Charles Baehni, son of Genève, centre of western culture and learning, can be seen as one who eminently fitted the tradition, who carried to keep it alive, who built, modestly, to make it richer. His place and achievement in plant taxonomy, and, through his scientific and personal qualities, in human values of wider importance, can perhaps best be seen against the rich background of Genevese botany.

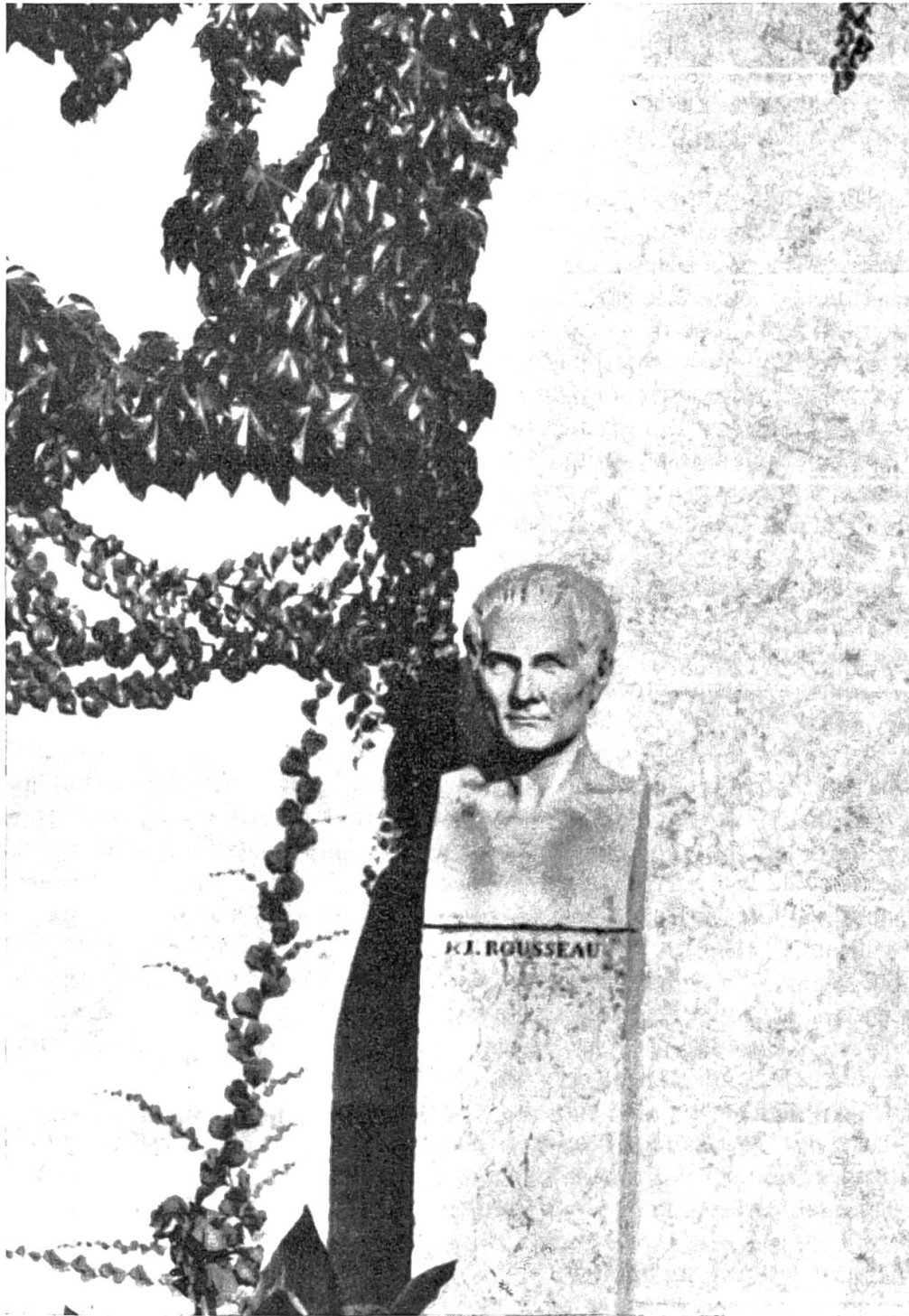
## BOTANY, GENÈVE, AND ROUSSEAU

Now one of the great centres of research in plant taxonomy, it seems difficult to realize that Geneva started making botanical history only at a relatively late date, when the science had been well established. It is possible to trace taxonomy at Genève back to Jacques Daléchamps, Dominique Chabrey, Pierre Péna, Jean de Léri, the Bauhin brothers, or Johan Heinrich Cherler, as is done by Briquet (1940), but these sixteenth and seventeenth century botanists were mere visitors and left no traces of their work in the town. The history of Genevese botany must be counted as having begun with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The rôle of this poet and humanist in botany itself was only modest, but it was through his connections with the Delessert family that, in an indirect way, his influence was most manifest. No wonder that Baehni, botanist and humanist, trustee for twenty-one years—or even thirty-one if we count the years of his assistantship—of the botanical part of the Delessert heritage, and an admirer of the French Enlightenment, was greatly interested in the life and writings of Rousseau.

The hectic life of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, born in Genève in 1712, need not be recounted here. Even though after his sixteenth year he resided only now and then in the town of his birth, the Genevese huguenot lineage in him never denied itself. After the affair of the publication of *Emile ou De l'éducation* (1726), outlawed by the Paris parliament in June 1763, Rousseau took refuge in Switzerland, settling in the Val-de-Travers near Genève. Here he developed a taste for botany under the stimulating influence of the enthusiastic Jean-Antoine d'Ivernois. When living on his île Saint-Pierre in the lake of Bienné in 1765 Rousseau was taken by the movements of the fruits of *Balsamina* and of the stamens of *Urtica* and dreamed of writing a *Flora petrinsularis*.

Rousseau's activities were two-fold: he assembled herbaria, mainly for pupils and friends, and he wrote a book on botany. His *Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique* (1781) contained eight letters addressed to Madeleine Boy de la Tour, better known as Madame Etienne Delessert, mother of Marguerite-Madeleine, Etienne, and most important of all in this respect, Benjamin Delessert. Rousseau also made a small herbarium for Marguerite-Madeleine, a collection which has always been kept with the Delessert herbarium and which may well have been its actual starting-point. No less than nine Rousseau herbaria are known to exist or to have existed. One of the most considerable among them was not brought together by Rousseau himself but consisted of part of the Fusée Aublet herbarium acquired by Rousseau. Another large collection, assembled by Rousseau himself, was at Berlin.

It is a matter of speculation whether the letters and the herbarium, meant for the education of Marguerite-Madeleine, were of decisive importance in stimulating Benjamin Delessert's later interest in botany. They were at any rate part of the climate at the home of the Delesserts, a climate characterized by devotion to nature, inquisitive collecting and the practicing of science by intelligent and keen amateurs. All this created a favorable disposition



JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU



towards Benjamin's later activities in bringing together one of the finest botanical collections and libraries ever made.

Before going on to Delessert, however, homage must be paid, and was often paid also by Baehni, to Rousseau, one of the great philosophers and educationalists of the eighteenth century, champion of spiritual freedom and of the development of the individual personality, fighter against socio-political or religious pressures. Rousseau, through his educational ideals, became a botanical enthusiast at the height of his career. His *Lettres* were eminently successful in popularizing botany and in drawing the attention of younger generations to this science. This is apparent from the many editions of his botanical work, one of which was illustrated with some of the best examples of the work of Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1805).

Baehni, in a contribution to a publication on the *Histoire des sciences à Genève* (1955), has drawn the attention to still another aspect of Rousseau's influence on Genevese botany: « Mais le philosophe genevois, en précipitant le développement de la société à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et la formation de la démocratie à Genève en particulier, a ensemencé un autre champ encore: il a fait lever les groupes d'instruction mutuelle dont les sociétés savantes sont aujourd'hui les héritières naturelles. » These scientific societies have indeed had and still have an important place in Genevese botany. This, however, is a subject by itself.

Baehni's attitude towards Rousseau and—incidentally—to botanical nomenclature, may also be understood from his quotation, with a twinkle in his eye, at one of the early meetings of the Editorial Committee of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, of Rousseau's « j'ai toujours cru qu'on pouvait être très grand botaniste sans connaître une seule plante par son nom... » A remarkable and revealing quotation, showing that Baehni could easily stand back from the subject with which he was so intimately concerned. Later (1962) Baehni also published on this theme under the significant title « Avec beaucoup de noms, vous aurez peu d'idées ».

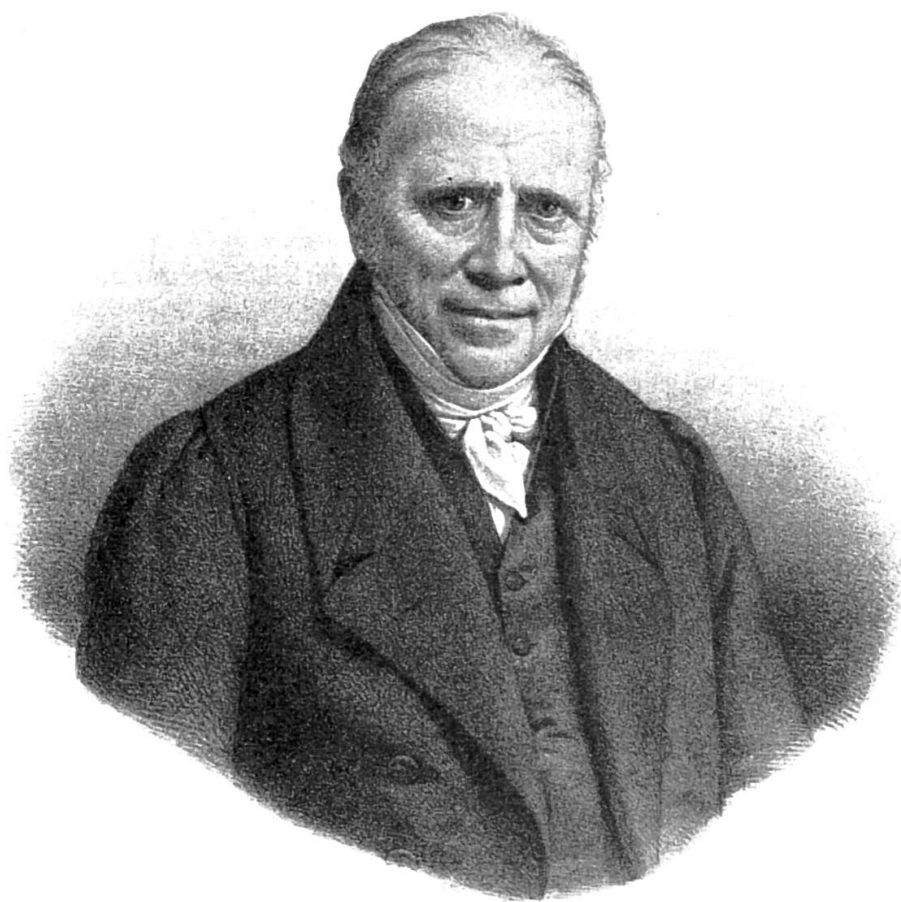
Dottrens (1962) has shown that Rousseau was hesitant to accept modern science. At times he made acrimonious remarks on rivalling systems and theories. This did not prevent him from taking sides (he was an ardent defender of the didactical values of the Linnaean artificial system) but it also led him to make scoffing remarks about town-philosophers (scientists) who knew only names and no flowers. Baehni, although more restrained in his attitude, could speak about this side of Rousseau with some satisfaction, being himself an ardent camper and out-door man. At another time, however, he would recognize the town-philosopher in himself, rationalize the apparent 'défaut' and turn the tables (Musées de Genève, April 1955): « les botanistes de cabinet ont, eux aussi, leur raison d'être. Leur rôle semble moins glorieux? C'est bien possible mais ils ne travaillent pas pour la gloire. Ils s'efforcent de débrouiller l'écheveau emmêlé des parentés probables, des liens possibles, ils s'obstinent à essayer de comprendre le chemin suivi par la nature au cours de l'évolution des êtres vivants: or dans la brousse, ou dans la forêt vierge,

ce chemin est invisible. L'homme armé d'un machete et l'homme armé d'une loupe sont les deux membres d'un même corps. Chacun d'eux, séparément, ne peut rien : ensemble, ils dominent le monde organisé."

After Rousseau, the development of plant taxonomy in Genève took place along three main lines : those of Delessert, de Candolle, and Boissier. These three lines were to converge in the twentieth century but complete integration would be achieved only by Charles Baehni. The *Conservatoire botanique* as it stands to-day with a fully integrated herbarium, library, and staff is essentially of his making. This integration was one of Baehni's major achievements, and the developments leading towards it will therefore be shortly narrated here.

### BENJAMIN DELESSERT

Although Jules-Paul-Benjamin, baron Delessert, born on 14 February 1773 in Lyon, came from a family which had its origins in French Switzerland (Vaud), he never actually lived at Genève. In later years he had a summer-house in Vaud but apart from this he stayed mainly at Paris. His capital importance for Genevese botany stems from his association with A.-P. de Candolle and the assignment of his enormous botanical and conchyological collections to the city of Genève. This is not the place to sketch his life : his career was mainly political and governmental, but his great side-interest was in collecting art and objects of natural history, predominantly botanical. The history of his herbarium is told by Lasègue in his *Musée botanique de Benjamin Delessert* (1845), a book which gives far more than the main title promises because of the additional information on botanical exploration and on the other major European herbaria. Delessert's house in the rue Montmartre was for a long period a place of rendez-vous and study for taxonomists of the early part of the nineteenth century. His ample means allowed him not only to buy some of the world's most important historical herbaria (e.g. those of the Burmans) but also to act as a Maecenas and finance various important botanical publications. In some ways Delessert's place in botany is not unlike that of Sir Joseph Banks. Both men had a consuming interest in botany, helped many others, were typical carriers of the great taxonomic tradition, but were themselves not creative builders. They collected, curated and served in such a way as to become immortal. The Delessert collections went first, after his death in 1847, to Benjamin's youngest brother François. After the latter's death in 1868 his two daughters, baroness Hottinger and baroness Bartholdi, gave the collections of plants and shells to the city of Genève (1869). The botanical library, marvellously rich, also containing the herbaria in bookform (such as Linnaeus' Lapland and Hermann's Ceylon herbarium), went to the Institut de France. The herbaria were well taken care of and almost immediately placed at the disposal of the scientific public; the rules and traditions around the Institut de France, however, did not, alas, allow a similar destiny for the library.



BENJAMIN DELESSERT

The *Conservatoire botanique* which had been founded in 1824, was to accomodate the Delessert herbaria. This tremendous acquisition suddenly made a small institution into one of the most important of its kind. After 1874 its real development started, first under Jean Müller ('Argoviensis') until 1896, and then under John Briquet, Hochreutiner, and Baehni.

## THE DE CANDOLLE DYNASTY

We have to go back to the early nineteenth century to trace the second main line in Genevese plant taxonomy; to its founder Augustin-Pyramus de Candolle (1778-1841). Here again it is unnecessary to give a sketch of the life and work of this great botanist. The recognition of his importance is general; his work is still part of the taxonomy of our time. A.-P. de Candolle was one of the great architects of the taxonomic tradition mainly through his theoretical works (for instance the *Théorie élémentaire de la botanique*, first edition 1813) and his great synthetic treatment of the plant kingdom, the *Prodromus systematis naturalis regni vegetabilis*. Through A.-P. de Candolle and his contemporaries Robert Brown and K. H. Schultz the natural system of classification became well established. These three botanists made the methods of comparative morphology the basis of taxonomic research.

Although there are numerous *éloges* and *notices historiques* on A.-P. de Candolle in addition to his own *Mémoires et souvenirs* (1862), no really profound biography, giving a critical assessment of the work of this great taxonomist, has as yet been published. Baehni was certainly well qualified to make an attempt. He had an intimate knowledge of the man and his work, entertained close connections with the de Candolle family, and possessed the literary gifts to undertake this task. However, he did not live to do so. In his writings we find only occasional references to the first de Candolle and his work, always more or less taking for granted "la contribution géniale d'Augustin-Pyrame de Candolle, théoréticien et praticien" (Gesnerus 14: 90.1957). In two instances (1955, 1959) Baehni drew the attention, with respect to the de Candolle dynasty and its urge to collect, to the influence of protestantism: "le protestantisme favorise indubitablement — pour des raisons qu'il serait trop long d'analyser ici, mais qu'on distingue assez bien — le sens de la collection scientifique". These reasons are indeed clear, but only to those who have a more than superficial knowledge of the rôle of property among the followers of, especially, Calvin. It is indeed, as Baehni says, not the place to analyze this interesting phenomenon here. Delessert, the de Candolle's, Boissier, Burnat and Barbey, they were all convinced protestants, and they all brought together considerable collections. Baehni pointed out that from the *Index Herbariorum* it was clear that there were four times as many big herbaria (over 500.000 specimens) in the protestant countries than in the roman catholic ones. The Genevese character was, according to him, characterised by "la banque, le commerce, le protestantisme, le mécénat".



AUGUSTIN-PYRAME DE CANDOLLE

Furthermore “il faut ajouter qu'on rencontre encore chez les Genevois un amour sincère de la nature”, which, we may add, is more a result of the influence of the enlightenment than of protestantism.

The de Candolle family was certainly true to type: they fulfilled all the above requirements. The family was one of high-ranking magistrates and bankers in the republic of Genève, having come originally from the Provence in Southern France as religious refugees. Augustin-Pyramus (born 1778) took his botany courses in Geneva under J.-P. Vaucher, algologist-physiologist, and was in contact with the erudite Jean Senebier. In 1798 he settled in Paris, and decided to make a botanical career in that city. We shall not follow this career step by step, although this early phase of de Candolle's life, which lasted until 1808, would make a fascinating story from the personal as well as from the general point of view. France was then just reviving, science started flourishing again after the darkest years of the revolution, flourishing certainly also just because of the new society created by that revolution. De Candolle switched from plant physiology to taxonomy during these years and laid the foundation of his herbarium and library through the acquisition of the herbarium, manuscripts, and part of the library of Charles-Louis L'Héritier de Brutelle. The L'Héritier herbarium, built up by a French ancien-régime magistrate of the circles around Malesherbes and Rousseau, thus became the basis of one of the world's richest herbaria. In 1808 de Candolle accepted a position as professor of botany at Montpellier. During all those years, until 1816, he was able to build up his herbarium and library free of financial troubles, and to make himself one of the foremost botanists of all times. His *Théorie élémentaire* was written during the Montpellier period, and formed the basis of his work—and of those of countless others—ever since. Towards the end of September 1816 Augustin-Pyramus was back at Genève in the now famous house 3 Cour St. Pierre in the heart of the old city.

One of de Candolle's first objects was the creation of a botanic garden. He soon started preparations, found a site between the present Promenade des Bastions and the Rue de la Croix-Rouge and was able, through a private subscription, to finance the project. The money was received mainly from four wealthy Genevese citizens, but was not sufficient to erect an administration building which could also house museum collections and herbaria. The garden was laid out in 1817, and in 1824 de Candolle obtained special financial support for the building of a *Conservatoire botanique*. To this effect the small porter's lodge was considerably enlarged to house the porter and to provide working space for the gardeners and their tools. In addition, room was provided for future collections. Such collections soon came, all in the form of gifts. The most important herbaria received by the Conservatoire in that first period of its existence were those of J. Necker de Saussure (1757-1825), J.-D. Choisy (1799-1859), J. Roux (1773-1822), Jean-Antoine Colladon (1755-1830) and Albrecht von Haller fil. (1758-1823). The latter herbarium was the first important Swiss collection. It had been left to the town of Genève by



Haller together with his library. The anonymous patron who advanced the money for the building of the Conservatoire in 1824 had made it a condition that this herbarium and library were to be housed there. Garden and Conservatoire were under the direction of an administrative commission which often contained prominent—and wealthy—Genevese citizens. Its importance, however, remained relatively modest until the great Delessert herbarium was received in 1869. The quarters then became extremely cramped, but the first curator of the enlarged collections, Jean Müller (Argoviensis) still worked there. Under Briquet, in 1904, garden and conservatoire moved to its present location.

De Candolle did not make his headquarters at the Conservatoire. Following the eighteenth century tradition he had already built up a sizeable herbarium and library of his own and on his return to Genève, in September 1816, he turned 3 Cour St.-Pierre into his “cabinet d’histoire naturelle”. A few weeks after he had himself reached Genève his collections arrived from Montpellier in a stately procession of not less than forty small mountain-carts: “mes voisins croyaient que j’avais perdu la tête...”. The collections were already in excellent order, and the next day de Candolle could start working as if he had been there for many years. Such was the beginning of the great Candollean era in botany. From September 1816 until May 1920 this house was a botanical sanctuary; here some of the greatest taxonomic works ever published were prepared; here many of the most outstanding botanists of the nineteenth century—the other de Candolles, Duby, Reuter, Boissier, Barbey, Jean Müller, Briquet, to mention only the most conspicuous—received at least part of their early training. The herbarium and library grew into a work-shop for plant-taxonomy which was equalled in quality and hospitality only by that of Sir Joseph Banks in Soho square, but which remained unsurpassed in scientific output and sheer duration of high-level taxonomic production. Private natural history cabinets of the Candolle, Delessert and Banks type were more characteristic of the eighteenth than of the nineteenth century. In the course of the last century almost all of them, great and small, became institutionalized. The Candolle cabinet, however,—the word cabinet is used here in its widest sense as a private biological workshop—was one of the last of the great private collections to remain alive well into the twentieth century. The very last at this moment, that of Paul Aellen, is—significantly—also Swiss.

Four generations of de Candolle’s worked here. After Augustin-Pyramus came his son Alphonse 1806-1893; a great taxonomist himself, and the founder of our present International Code of Botanical Nomenclature. This then was also part of the heritage which Baehni was to administer and to continue. After Alphonse came Casimir, his eldest son (1836-1918), and then the great-grandson Augustin (1868-1920), with whom the botanical branch of the de Candolle dynasty came to an end.

Baehni, summing up the mental attitude which had made of the de Candolle school one of the finest traditions of nineteenth century botany, chose the



following quotation from A.-P. de Candolle's *Mémoires et Souvenirs* (Musées de Genève Oct. 1947). The paragraph nicely illustrates the contrast between the performing type—so characteristic of the city of Calvin—and the 'living' type: "Jeunes gens, sachez choisir une direction conforme à vos talents et vous y tenir avec énergie. Sachez résister à la séduction avec laquelle nos habitudes publiques et domestiques morcellent en lambeaux le temps des hommes actifs. Sachez vous arracher aux douceurs entraînantes d'une vie agréable, car il n'y a plus de succès possible sans beaucoup de travail et une grande persévérance de volonté." The choice of this quotation marks the character of Baehni: it might have been one of his mottos for life.

### THE THIRD LINE OF ACHIEVEMENT: BOISSIER

Achievement therefore, rather than 'la douceur de vivre', was characteristic of the three lines along which Genevese botany developed, and which were to meet in Charles Baehni. The accomplishments of Pierre-Edmond Boissier, author of the *Voyage botanique dans le midi de l'Espagne*, of the many series of *Diagnoses plantarum novarum*, of the marvellous *Flora orientalis*—42 years of work—need no praise in the journal honoring him by its name. Two figures may indicate the working-power of Boissier and A.-P. de Candolle: nearly 6000 new species were described by the former, nearly 6350 by the latter. However similar these numbers may be, the life histories of these two botanists were as fundamentally different as their characters. Baehni, in one of his many erudite articles in that splendid journal *Les Musées de Genève* (April 1955) wrote on *botanistes voyageurs et botanistes de cabinet*. De Candolle—like Baehni—was a typical *botaniste de cabinet*. He made no major trips, but was content to work at home with the material assembled by others. His disposition was towards profound theoretical generalization as well as towards the always intriguing work of chronicling the new data, basic as they are for any general approach. Boissier, on the other hand, was a great traveller, a marvellous collector, a profound and typically floristic taxonomist, but not a theorist. De Candolle had a great synthetic talent, Boissier's gift was towards the ultimate detail.

The herbarium assembled by Boissier on his own travels was greatly enlarged by the acquisition of other extremely important collections. One of the best sets of Aucher-Eloy's oriental plants was added to Boissier's personal collections at an early stage, and many others were to follow. His associate and later curator of his collections, Reuter, discovered an important section of the Ruiz and Pavon collections in an attic in Madrid in 1841 and bought it for the Boissier herbarium. Boissier, who had ample means, bought all collections from the 'Orient' that he could lay his hand on, but in addition a great many other ones as well, too numerous to be mentioned here. Boissier was in correspondence with all prominent botanists and botanical travellers of his day. His archives, in perfect order, together with the



EDMOND BOISSIER

Candollean manuscripts and correspondence constitute a magnificent basis for the future historian of nineteenth century botany.

The Boissier collections came to William Barbey (1842-1914) upon the former's death in 1885. Barbey developed the cabinet along the same lines as the de Candolle's did with theirs. The *Bulletin de l'Herbier Boissier* was published under his direction by his curator Gustave Beauverd, as well as the *Index botanique universel des genres, espèces et variétés de plantes parus depuis le 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 1901*, a series of cards (17 199 numbers) designed to supplement the famous Gray herbarium index, but alas not continued beyond 1906.

Upon Barbey's death in 1914 the Boissier and Barbey-Boissier collections, archives and library were given to the University of Genève, and placed under the administration of the Institut de Botanique. The University being administered by the state of Genève, and the Conservatoire botanique by the city, the two great collections remained separate: Baehni was to bring them together.

### CONVERGENCE: BRIQUET AND HOCHREUTINER

John Briquet (1870-1931) was again one of these Genevese botanists who impress us primarily by the sheer size of their scientific output. Upon the death of Jean Mueller ('Argoviensis') in 1896, Briquet became curator of the Conservatoire botanique, then still in its cramped quarters, rue de la Croix-Rouge, in the old botanic garden of the town of Genève. His predecessor had still been able to combine his quiet duties of curating the Delessert heritage, with its enormous herbarium and minute library, with that of teaching at the University. Briquet was never asked to occupy a chair of botany at Genève; certainly a reflection upon the judgment of the university authorities of the time. Since Alphonse de Candolle, Genève had not seen a taxonomist of the scientific and international standing of John Briquet. One detail is sufficient to illustrate this: Briquet received the rare honor, as a plant taxonomist, of an honorary degree at the University of Cambridge, England. His career, however, is hardly relevant here except in connection with the spiritual and material heritage that would come to Baehni. An important side of John Briquet's activities was that in the field of nomenclature. After Alphonse de Candolle, Briquet took up again the task of trying to pacify conflicting movements in this field. At the Vienna Congress of 1905 he acted as the first rapporteur-général, and he remained the central figure in botanical nomenclature from then onward until his death in 1931. His great skill as a moderator combined with a good psychological insight and his having all the other elements of a diplomatist made him victorious, to the benefit of all, in the conflict between opposing factions at the Cambridge botanical Congress. His successors Hochreutiner and Baehni both followed his example and rendered signal services to the cause of botany's 'handmaiden'. In addition to this, however, Briquet was a skilled taxonomist, specialized in Labiatae and Verbenaceae, and the author of an impressive series of biographies of Genevese botanists (1940), a publication used many times for the purposes of

this short chronicle of the Genevese botanical tradition. More important, however, in this respect was Briquet's rôle in the organization of the collections of the Conservatoire.

Before 1912—a year of crucial importance for the Conservatoire—there were in Genève and its immediate surroundings four centres of taxonomic research: (1) 3 Cour St.-Pierre, the de Candolle house; (2) the Boissier collections under Barbey; (3) the Emile Burnat museum (see below), and (4) the Conservatoire. The latter, although well housed since 1904 in its present quarters 'à la Console' on the banks of Lac Léman, had only a minute staff, and a very small library in addition to its rich herbarium.

This situation changed greatly in 1912 when Emile Burnat financed an enlargement of the building to house his own collections given to the town of Genève on that occasion. The great synthesis, and the trend from a provincial institute to one of international significance and fame had started.

Emile Burnat (1829-1920) was an amateur botanist of the Delessert type. After having followed an industrial career in the firm of Dollfuss-Mieg, he had retired from business as early as 1870 to devote himself to the study of the European flora, and more especially to that of the maritime Alps. At his country house at Nant near Vevey he developed his own centre of research. In the course of his work Burnat liberally—he was a true *Maecenas*—enabled others to travel and publish. Among his closest associates were John Briquet and François Cavillier. The Burnat herbarium numbered 200,000 specimens, all European. This herbarium came to the Conservatoire in 1912 together with the rich library and a wonderful collection of letters, manuscript material, and portraits of botanists.

The acquisition of the library was perhaps even more important at that moment than that of the herbarium. In the past it had often been necessary to go to the city-centre to find the literature. The Burnat herbarium occupied the new wing and was to remain separate up till the present. With this acquisition the convergence of the great Genevese collections had started, two of them now being housed under the same roof.

A very important further step in this direction was taken in 1921. In that year the Candollean collections were transferred from the old quarters in the de Candolle residence to the Conservatoire.

Alphonse de Candolle had directed his family to give his botanical collections to the town of Genève if none of his descendents showed an interest in botany. This situation was realised upon the premature death of his grand-son Augustin on 9 May 1920. The family decided to follow Alphonse's directions and offered the herbarium and library to the town, the herbarium as a gift, the library for a very modest price. These collections came also to the Conservatoire. The type-herbarium of the *Prodromus* was, and still is, kept separate but the remainder of the extensive Candollean collections were incorporated in the general herbarium, that is the Delessert herbarium. In later years the de Candolle family also parted with the botanical manuscripts and correspondence from their archives.

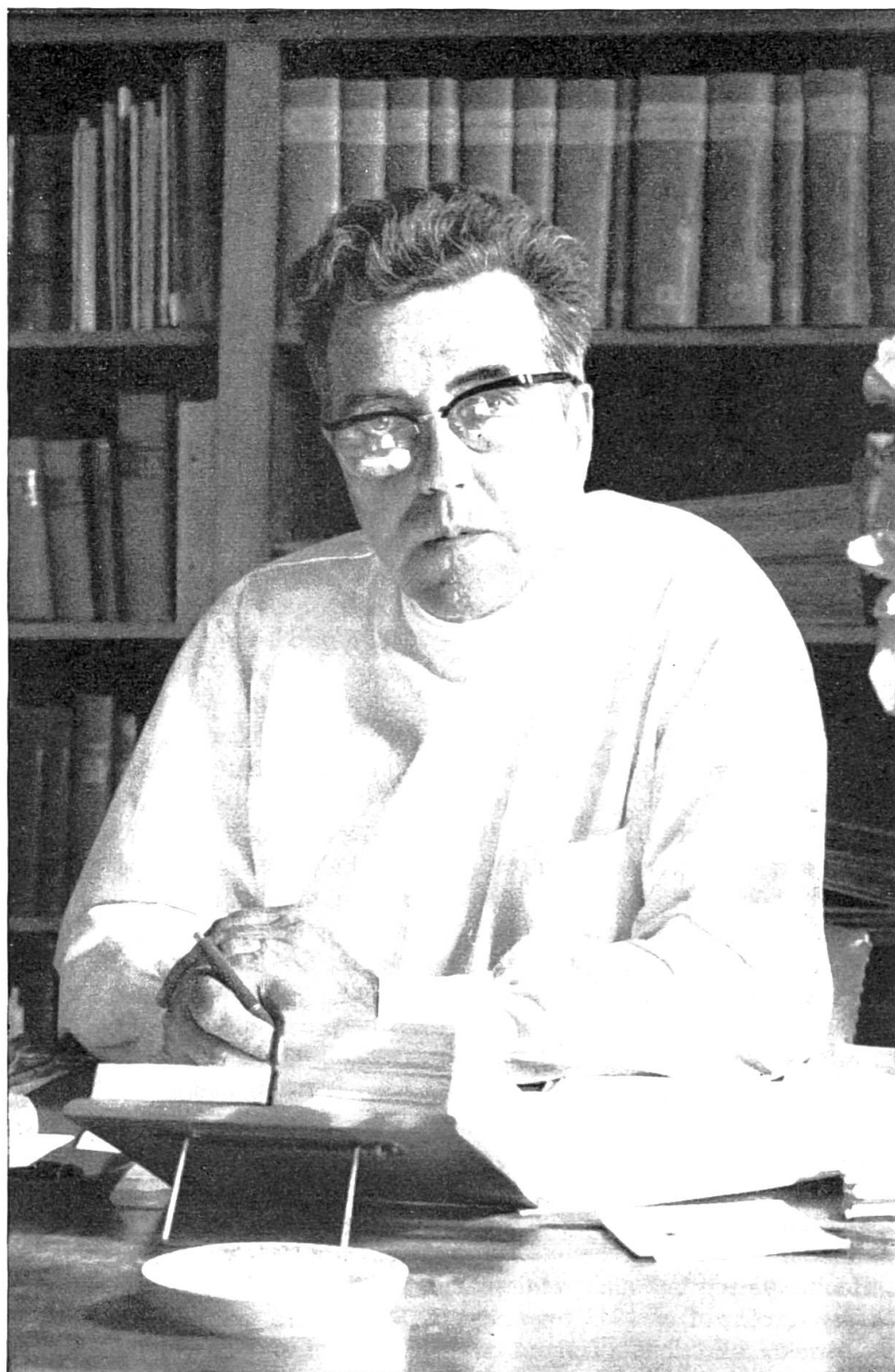
In 1921 then, when the Candolle collections arrived in the Conservatoire, further integration could have started. This happened with the library, but the herbaria remained divided to a certain extent in various collections, arranged according to different systems. They would have to await the firm organizational resolution of Baehni and the ultimate move of the Boissier and Barbey-Boissier collections to the Conservatoire before they were put into a really workable order.

Some further progress, however, was made under Briquet's successor, Hochreutiner (1873-1959). From 1931 on Hochreutiner was in charge of the Conservatoire and the botanical garden, and from 1934 he was also responsible for teaching systematics at the University of Genève. Since the time of Jean Müller systematic botany had not had a special teacher at the University. Baehni, who studied at Genève, still took his doctor's degree in 1932 under Robert Chodat (1869-1934), who was teaching all botany, on a thesis dealing with phytopathology. This neglect of the teaching of plant taxonomy during the first third part of our century was not characteristic of Genève alone. It should certainly not be said to have been the fault of Chodat; it was rather a general result of a temporary swing away from descriptive botany caused by important discoveries in the experimental field. Chodat, like his contemporary colleague at Utrecht, F.A.F.C. Went, was a broad-minded physiologist who had a good knowledge of, and a certain interest in, taxonomy. Botany is more subject to fashions than seems justified from a scientific point of view. At every period there are slogans, and new or 'new' movements, accompanied by a steady tendency to denigrate the 'old'. Whether the slogan is 'phylogeny', 'physiology', or 'molecular' ('atomic' is still to come), the most eager advocates have always been one-sided. Each time, however, the balance has been restored, and will be restored, because of the perpetual rejuvenation of plant taxonomy through incorporation of the new elements and re-adjustment of the theoretical bases. This branch of science may be old, even very old, going back to the pre-Christian era, but as life itself it remains vigorous and ever young. Taxonomy has benefited immensely from all new fashions and branches of research however inimical some of their proponents may have been. Alphonse de Candolle already faced this problem and gave a philosophically resigned answer in his *Phytographie* (1880):

“Que reste-t-il donc qui soit durable en fait de catégories de publications botaniques? Le voici: Les descriptions de plantes ou de groupes qui étaient nouvelles ou contenaient quelque chose de nouveau, ne fût-ce que des noms. On les consulte et consultera toujours, par des causes qui ne peuvent changer.” —“So viel über dieses Thema” (Freyn, 1887).

Hochreutiner's last main achievement for the benefit of Genevese botany was the agreement of 1943 by which the city-owned Conservatoire and the state-owned collections of the University botanical institute (the Boissier herbarium) were put under the same direction. That same year, Charles Baehni was put in charge of both these collections, and faced the problem of real integration.





CHARLES BAEHNI

## CHARLES BAEHNI

All lines of Genevese botany converged on Baehni in the year 1943. Most of us, outside Switzerland, were not exactly orientated towards botany at that time, engaged as we were, active or forcedly passive, in a great struggle for those institutions and values under which a free science could flourish in any form. Switzerland, outside that struggle, but still deeply affected by it, seemed to be one of the few parts of Europe where the best of the past still continued.

It was certainly the best of the past of Genevese botany which Baehni inherited. In 1943 there was at least nominal integration of all collections and libraries, and the prospect of the change from nominal to actual was Baehni's great challenge. No wonder that he struck some of us, who met him in Genève shortly after the war, as somewhat overawed by the task before him. With his acute historical sense and precise knowledge of the potential value of the collections, library, and archives entrusted to his care, Baehni, facing a discouraging impossibility of increasing his skeleton staff, must sometimes have despaired. Would he ever be able to achieve harmonious unity and make all this into an efficient working instrument not only for himself, but for taxonomy as a whole?

Born in Genève, August 21st 1906, Baehni spent nearly all his life in this town. He received his primary and secondary education here and studied at Genève University. Like most Swiss he showed already at an early age a great proficiency in languages, and, for this reason, had no difficulty in teaching some courses in Germany in the years 1928 and 1930. Later this great ability to express himself quickly and precisely in several languages made him excellently suited for the various tasks he had to perform in international botany.

His first publications, still the work of a student, were in anthropology under Eugène Pittard. The three papers resulting from this early, but ephemeral, love all deal with characteristics of the tibia in various peoples: Swiss, Hottentots and Bosjesmannen undoubtedly being somewhat astonished to see themselves together. His thesis, under Robert Chodat, already mentioned above, was on a phytopathological subject. Although Baehni, judging from what he told me, was already interested in taxonomy during his early student years, the choice of this subject in applied botany shows that he was not yet decided upon his destination. In those years, being interested in plant taxonomy was anyhow not quite looked upon as adding to one's scientific status. Still, young Baehni was not unknown at the Conservatoire and in 1933 Hochreutiner offered him a position as an assistant.

Soon after his appointment Baehni had the opportunity to spend some time (1934-1935) in the United States, at Chicago, mainly to collaborate with J. Francis Macbride. This visit to America and the collaboration with the enthusiastic and stimulating author of the *Flora of Peru* had a profound



influence on Baehni. Emigration to the United States was still a familiar notion in the minds of Europeans, even at a time when the great crisis had seriously diminished the possibilities. However, it was rather unusual in the mid-thirties for a scientist to finish his training by means of a transatlantic 'stage'.

The United States provided—at that time—in almost all respects, a contrast with the social atmosphere and living conditions of Genève. This early contact made Baehni shed the most persistent misconceptions about the New World long before many of his European contemporaries. His stay at Chicago, and his travelling there, opened his eyes to a world with different criteria and deepened his understanding of human achievement in general.

A direct result of the American period was a stream of publications on South-american plants, and perhaps most important of all, the discovery of his own special field of research, that of the Sapotaceae, through a revision of the genus *Pouteria* in connection with Peruvian material. In 1938 appeared his first major contribution on this family in the journal *Candollea*. Baehni's treatment of the Sapotaceae for Macbride's *Flora of Peru* is among his posthumous publications. His association with this project and its originator found expression, therefore, at the very beginning as well as at the end of Baehni's career.

Following the Genevese tradition Baehni developed an amazing productivity in those early years. He was still relatively free of administrative duties ("Asche in's Haar des Gelehrten" Martius) and could devote the greater part of his time to research. With the publication of his monograph of *Pouteria*, in 1942, just before his appointment as successor to Hochreutiner, Baehni reached the peak of his activity and productivity in pure taxonomic research. With these publications he had made himself a man who knew the ins and outs of plant taxonomy, the collections and the history. Although still fairly young (37) he had, therefore, become well qualified to start the second and decisive part of his career.

After his appointment Baehni still published numerous papers, some of which will be mentioned below, but among them was only one of major size and great taxonomic importance. In addition there was of course, during the last few years, the preparation of the third great study in the Sapotacées, the publication of which is the *raison-d'être* of the homage paid by us on this occasion.

The one major publication mentioned above was that on *L'ouverture du bouton chez les fleurs de Solanées* (1946). Baehni looked upon this as one of his best achievements. The approach is original. A comparative study is made of three characteristics which are usually overlooked: dehiscence of the anthers, aestivation, and opening of calyx and corolla. The method of singling out relatively small groups of characteristics, studying them profoundly on a comparative basis, and testing the results against previous classifications based upon a greater variety of data, was characteristic of Baehni's scientific work. After all, a certain tendency of giving primacy to deductive over inductive methods was not foreign to Baehni's thinking. This attitude was especially

pronounced in his more philosophical writings and, understandably, in his dealings with plant nomenclature.

His output of later years may perhaps be limited, especially if judged by those rather irrelevant and at any rate one-sided criteria of numbers of pages and of new species. Still, the scientific stature of Baehni grew steadily after that critical publication on the Solanaceae. Scientifically this was a turning point because Baehni discovered that his talents were towards the eclectic rather than towards the broad scope. However, it should also be realized that there were pressing duties of an organizational nature at the Conservatoire in addition to a family with growing children and a greater involvement in international work which made demands upon his time.

Among the publications of these later years there are two groups that require further mention since they shed light on some aspects of Baehni as a scientist and an erudite humanist in the original meaning of the word.

Baehni published in the first place a number of profound studies on the history of plant taxonomy and comparative morphology. The main items of this series are *Naissance et développement de la systématique moderne* (Gesnerus 1947), *M. de Gæthe, botaniste* (ib. 1949), *Correspondance de Charles Darwin et d'Alphonse de Candolle* (ib. 1955) and *Les relations de Rafinesque et d'Augustin-Pyramus de Candolle* (in 'Les botanistes français en Amérique du Nord, 1956). All these studies, as well as several shorter ones, reveal Baehni as a botanical historian with an original approach having the benefit of a profound knowledge of working taxonomy and a wide cultural background. The articles show that we lost in Baehni the promise of the final chronicler of Genevese botany, a task also begun but remaining unaccomplished by his predecessor John Briquet.

The great erudition of Baehni, and his facility of placing plant taxonomy in the perspective of human culture, is even more evident from his numerous contributions to *Les Musées de Genève*. This journal, originally produced with a war-time and post-war austerity, is now one of the finest of its kind. It contains regular contributions from the staffs of the various Genevese museums which compete in lucidity, illustration, and presentation. Admittedly articles called 'de vulgarisation' in French, they usually maintain high scientific standards. Baehni's many contributions to this journal often make fascinating reading and it must be deplored that they are so relatively inaccessible. In the above account I have quoted several times from these articles because they reveal Baehni's scientific and cultural personality to its best advantage. It is given to few scientists to write understandably about their science for the general public. This gift was Baehni's *par excellence*: his pronounced literary talents found an outlet here unhindered by the sometimes too rigid orthodoxy of more regular scientific publications. It is in view of this that I append to this appreciation of Baehni a full list of his publications as brought together by his staff-members.

The abilities shown by Baehni in these publications made it great joy to meet him outside the purely professional surroundings of his institute. For

a moment I must exchange my pen of a chronicler for that of a witness. Everybody who had the privilege to savour the richness and fullness of Baehni's family life became enchanted. Whether as a camper, a father, a companion in music-making, or in any of the many other facets of his private life, Baehni was a delightful personality. A similar impression was gained from Baehni abroad, when working in Paris for instance, or when taking part in international meetings. He was always the perfect companion, the charming host or guest as the case might be, with a wonderful capacity to relax, and with a great gift to communicate his enthusiasm for the things he loved such as museums, concerts, French cathedrals.

It is far more difficult, however, to write about Baehni in his professional setting. Although basically present, and noticeable to his friends, this relaxed delight in life seemed to be non-existent to many who met him only superficially at the office or during meetings. The reason for this must have been the great sense of civic duty and responsibility which made it impossible for him to take his official duties lightly. Whenever he undertook an obligation, whether as a director of his magnificent institute, or as a private scientist, for instance in international work, he took this extremely seriously. This seriousness, essentially a sense of duty, made him sometimes difficult to negotiate with. He realized for instance that his election by the Stockholm Congress as the first president (1950-1954) of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy was a great honour bestowed upon him. It was very characteristic of Baehni that here too he felt primarily a sense of duty: he wanted to "do" something and sometimes expressed regret that the office of the president, as in so many of these organizations, was more honorary than exacting.

In his work on botanical nomenclature Baehni was acutely conscious of his position as spiritual successor, at Genève, of Alphonse de Candolle and John Briquet. His high and quick intelligence, his strictly logical approach, combined with his sense of responsibility, made him one of the most painstaking members of the Editorial Committee. Here too, when conflicting opinions arose, Baehni was a hard and sharply critical negotiator. He was often outvoted, but his contribution was nevertheless fundamental. His sense of precision, his craving for legal clarity and his classical French approach deriving from Roman and Napoleonic legislation was of essential importance in clarifying the text of the Code. The Code was, and is, first drawn up in English, and later translated into French by the French speaking members of the Editorial Committee. Here again Baehni's rôle was important: each time he took it upon himself to provide a first draft as a working document. During this work and the subsequent meetings of the "French" subcommittee Baehni often commented on the superiority of French as a language of legal precision. The idiomatic character of the English language, although perfectly understood and mastered by him, always remained foreign to his Cartesian spirit.

\* \* \*

Let us return for a moment to 1943 to start anew and follow Baehni in his career as a public servant and a teacher.

Baehni succeeded Hochreutiner also as a teacher at the University of Genève. The professorship was not a full one: for this the times were not yet ripe. Still, as a teacher, Baehni occupied the chair which had been occupied by Augustin-Pyramus and Alphonse de Candolle as well as by Jean Müller of Aargau. It was not a heavy duty, certainly not in the beginning, because of the low number of students that are interested in taxonomy at Universities in the area of the French language. Traditions and images of science change slowly, and the image of descriptive plant taxonomy has remained a bleak one at many universities long after the great post-war revival brought about by various stimulating new approaches, as well as by the further development of existing methods. The completely out-moded image of taxonomy was for a long time a brake upon its progress at many universities. Rollins' reflections on this subject (1965) are particularly appropriate here. Baehni too was faced with this difficulty and it must have been a great satisfaction to him that, shortly before his death, in January 1964, he was made aware of the change in this respect at Genève through his appointment, at last, as a full professor.

Baehni's task at the Conservatoire was a hard one. Most collections had been brought together under Hochreutiner, at any rate officially. However, in 1943 the situation was as yet far from ideal. At the Conservatoire itself the collections had not yet been fully integrated, neither had the rich library been adequately indexed, nor had the invaluable archives been made readily available. In addition there was still the Boissier herbarium at the Institut Botanique, in the old town, far away from the Conservatoire, with a library of its own, a minute staff and a rich herbarium on sheets of an appreciably larger size than those of Delessert and de Candolle.

Baehni succeeded in achieving full integration. What energy and time must have gone into this can only be surmised. It was only through his severe sense of civic duty, already mentioned above in a different context, that Baehni, with a far too small staff, with a meagre budget to say the least of it, but with a great devotion and a passionate conviction of an obligation to do this, could almost fully answer the challenge of his position. Almost, because his life was cut short, cruelly, at the height of his performance.

Baehni described the integration of the Boissier collections into those at the Conservatoire himself in *Taxon* (9: 61-63). It is therefore unnecessary to recall the details here but it is evident that Baehni succeeded because he met the same devotion to public duty in his staff.

For a visitor at the Conservatoire it is now a delight to work there, notwithstanding the cramped quarters. Many workers will not realize when they have easy access to the integrated collections, or make use of the exceptionally good indexes in the library, how recently this came about. It may now seem to be self-evident, and perhaps it is, but it is one of the great achievements of Baehni to have organized the many treasures of Genevese botany in such a way that they are now available to all of us.

The Conservatoire as it stands to-day reflects the work done by Charles Baehni as a faithful and inspired servant of plant taxonomy: he "carried" most of the time but while carrying he never stopped building. Let us not forget though that Baehni's distinction was not only in the field of organization. Certainly, he met the challenge and successfully completed the job, but it is also a notable fact that he saw the challenge at all, and that he was critically aware of the circumstance that this would be his part of the great tradition. Highly gifted in various directions, he gave such a great part of his life to his institution, that he could not fully develop his other inclinations. He was a child of Genève in all respects and showed the same sense of achievement and civic duty as so many of his great predecessors. This part of his personality inspired respect, and the combination of his devotion to the great traditional cause with his wide cultural interest, sincere scientific attitude, and engaging personality made it a privilege and delight to know him.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND NOTES

I am indebted to Dr. L. Bernardi for his stimulating help in writing this article and for the selection of the illustrations. The biographical details concerning Baehni's life were in part derived from the published obituaries which are listed below, of which those by Dr. G. Bocquet and Dr. C.E.B. Bonner proved to be especially helpful. Mr. J.S.L. Gilmour read my manuscript and suggested several improvements. My sincere thanks are due to all these colleagues.

All those who will read, use, and appreciate Baehni's third memoir on the Sapotaceae printed in this issue of Boissiera will be extremely grateful to M<sup>lle</sup> V. Nicolet, who undertook the task to make the manuscript ready for the press. On Baehni's death this manuscript was ready for editing as far as the scientific side was concerned. It consisted of a great many sheets and slips, mainly held together—after the true fashion of the Conservatoire—by means of pins. "Je joue à la couturière" was one of Baehni's last comments. It fell to M<sup>lle</sup> Nicolet to transcribe and edit this manuscript and to give it its present shape. Since Baehni would never have dreamed of letting this be done by somebody else it is understandable that one or two minor imperfections may have remained due to the fact that some indications were too abbreviated to be free from ambiguity. These imperfections serve as "taches de beauté" to Baehni's work. Having seen part of the original manuscript I congratulate M<sup>lle</sup> Nicolet on her achievement.



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## 1932

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