

Sweden Honours a New Zealand Botanist

H. H. Allan, F.L.S., F.R.S.N.Z.

A broadcast talk given by Lucy B. Moore, Wellington, in July, 1957, four months before Dr. Allan's death.

SOME of you will have noticed that recently a Swedish University conferred an honorary degree on the distinguished New Zealand botanist, Dr. H. H. Allan of Wellington. It's a long long way from here to Sweden, stretching north from the Baltic Sea to the land of the mid-night sun, and you might ask "Why a New Zealand botanist?" I would like to tell you how the link between these two countries goes back for nearly 200 years.

Let's think for a moment of that October afternoon in 1769 when Capt. Cook first set foot in New Zealand, near where Gisborne now stands. He went ashore "accompanied by Mr. Banks and Dr. Solander"—and this Daniel Solander was a Swedish botanist. Banks complained that they got "not above forty species of plants" in their boxes at Poverty Bay. Still, that was the beginning of New Zealand botany, and that was our first connection with Sweden.

Solander never returned to his own country, but while he was working on the Pacific collections in London his old teacher, Carl Linnaeus, used to write rather impatiently for news of the wonderful plants from this part of the world. Few biologists realize that the great Linnaeus had an almost personal interest in New Zealand. Of course we all know him as the father of modern botany, and everyone who talks of *Pinus radiata* or *Poa pratensis* has reason to be grateful to him. It was Linnaeus who first insisted that every plant and animal should have an official Latin name of two and only two words, a sort of surname and christian name, and that scheme has been used ever since his day. The 250th anniversary of his birth fell on May 23rd of this year, and celebrations to honour him have been held in many parts of the world. The most colourful would be at his old university of Uppsala, an hour's journey north of Stockholm, and it was there that Dr. Allan's degree was conferred.

I would like to tell you something of Uppsala and its university that was founded in 1477, and of the twin-spired cathedral where botanists pay homage at the tomb of Linnaeus. His garden is there, with the flower beds kept almost as he made them, and at his country home nearby I once saw a room completely lined with pictures of the great man—there are supposed to be 500 portraits in existence.

But I must turn to other botanists who have kept us in touch with Sweden. There was in fact another pupil of Linnaeus—it is well known that the men he taught were great travellers. This was Anders

Sparmann, who came with Capt. Cook on his second voyage and collected plants in Fiordland and at Queen Charlotte Sound. He joined the expedition at Cape Town, although Cook possibly thought the two botanists he already had aboard—the Forsters—were enough for the good ship *Resolution* of only 462 tons !

Moving forward now to the nineteenth century we find Sven Berggren here in the middle seventies. He collected all kinds of plants, including seaweeds from Hokianga to Cook Strait and Bluff, grasses from the slopes Ruapehu and mountain flowers from Arthurs Pass and the Torlesse Range. These he took home, not to Uppsala this time, but to the younger but still venerable university of Lund in the gently rolling country of the south of Sweden.

I like to think of the quiet university town of Lund as I saw it in high summer—the shady trees, the white velvet caps of the students and the lovely botanical garden where I made friends with a little red squirrel. In the Museum there I watched the Berggren specimens being brought out, almost reverently, from the vault where they are stored. They're very precious. In an old book you could find as much as three pages of discussion—in Latin of course—devoted to a single seaweed from Lyall Bay. Wellingtonians living near the coast would regard it only as so much storm-tossed debris to be cleared as quickly as possible from gardens and even from roof tops after a fierce southerly.

New Zealanders soon began to take a hand in keeping up the traditional friendship with Sweden, and no one was more active in this than Dr. Leonard Cockayne. Many a fat letter went off to Sweden from his home in the Wellington suburb of Ngaio—some of them bulging with seeds and all full of information about our plants and his determination to make them better known. To Dr. Cockayne in 1926 came two young Swedes, Einar Du Rietz and his wife Greta, and what a time they had ! Many of us remember Cockayne's enthusiasm that led to a benevolent sort of slave-driving, and he was determined that the visitors should miss nothing. They scoured the country from the kauri forests of the far north to the subantarctic islands of the deep south, collecting everywhere. They took photos too, and throughout the country they learned how the species of plants were grouped together in scrub and forest, in tussock grassland and alpine herbfield. All this material went back to the university of Uppsala, and has been used for teaching. There was a real welcome in 1950 for half a dozen New Zealanders who joined an international party of botanists that Du Rietz was taking to Lappland, well north of the Arctic Circle. We had a week of continuous daylight, and in the tundra and on the mountains and up the fiords all sorts of discussions showed how much the Swedish students had learned about our vegetation.

The next on my list of Swedish visitors is a geologist, but his work here has had an enormous effect on our botanical outlook. Dr. Caldenius, in the early 1930's, bored into six peaty bogs in Otago and Southland,



REV. J. E. HOLLOWAY and Dr. H. H. Allan in Dr. Cockayne's rockery at Otari about 1940. Both attended Nelson College, Dr. Holloway being the older by one year. Each was irresistably drawn into botany after taking up another career, and each attained world-wide fame in his chosen sphere of research. Dr. Holloway died in 1945, Dr. Allan on 29 October, 1957.

Dr. Allan was a foundation member of our Society, serving as Vice-President for our first four years and then following Dr. Oliver as President. For many years he took an active part in meetings and excursions and contributed articles to the Bulletin, and he never lost interest in the Society's doings. For the meeting only a week before he died he had looked out exhibits to help us to mark the 250th Linnean anniversary.

All older members will be glad that the Society gave them the opportunity to know Dr. Allan not only as a famous scientist but also as a quiet and kindly friend.

and took peat samples back to Sweden. The person who studied them was Lucy Cranwell, then a young graduate newly appointed as botanist at the Auckland Museum. She went to Sweden in 1935, and spent the long dark winter in Stockholm poring over microscope preparations made from this peat. She found thousands of pollen grains of long-dead plants, and learned to read the story they told of forest movement, determined by climatic changes, since the last ice-sheet retreated from southern New Zealand.

The history of our plants even further back in geological time has been studied by another Swede, Professor Carl Skottsberg. His interest was aroused in 1907 when he was with the Swedish expedition that discovered the first fossils on the Antarctic continent. In frozen Graham Land they found remains of temperate zone plants resembling

our beeches and rewarewa, and horopito and pukatea. Skottsberg made himself familiar with related species of plants in South America and later found subantarctic links in the mountains of Hawaii. It was a great day when at last in 1938 he visited us to see the home of many plants he already knew quite well—he had a lot of them growing in his wonderful rock garden at Gothenburg on the Swedish west coast. His good friend Leonard Cockayne had sent him ample seed, and his one regret was that he came too late to meet the man whose letters had taught him so much.

Since the last war the flow of Swedish botanist visitors has continued and several of our people have gone to the old universities of Sweden to learn what is newest about plant physiology and plant breeding. I will not try to tell about them, but will finish with a few words about Dr. Allan, whose name is perhaps almost better known to Swedish botanists than to some New Zealanders.

Some of you who are not too young may remember H. H. Allan as a pioneer teacher of agricultural botany in high schools at Waitaki or Ashburton or Feilding. Pupils of those days tell me that his classes in English language and literature were outstandingly successful too. It was his work with Dr. Cockayne on wild hybrids amongst New Zealand plants that brought him to the notice of overseas botanists. Officially his most important job was as first Director of the Botany Division of D.S.I.R., during its fruitful years from 1936 to 1949. Now in his retirement he is writing a book that will be used almost daily by the next generation of botanists, and will be a reference work long after they are gone. We know the value of Dr. Allan's teaching and personal influence, but it is the quality of his published technical work that has won him the degree of doctor of philosophy in the University of Uppsala, indeed a very high honour from Sweden, the land of Linnaeus.