

REV. FR. HERMENGILD SANTAPAU, S. J.
(1903-1970)

REV. J. MISQUITTA, S. J.
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In a well-deserved tribute to the memory of the late Rev. Fr. Hermenegild Santapau, S. J., who died on January 13, 1970, the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, wrote on January 22 : "In Rev. Fr. Santapau's death we have lost an eminent scholar who has served education and science for over 40 years. His deep love for India urged him to become a citizen of the country. He had a great knowledge of, and concern for, our plant wealth and wrote intensively on it for experts and laymen. May his memory long continue to inspire all those interested in our flora."

Fr. Santapau achieved an outstanding position in the field of Indian Botany by the extent and excellence of his research and by the publication of scientific notes and books, numbering over 300. His deep love for India and his devotion to botany are revealed in two of his letters to his old students, Dr. G. M. Oza of the University of Baroda and a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London (the original Biological Society of Great Britain and one of the oldest in the world). After the President of India conferred upon him the distinction of *PADMA SHRI* in 1967, he wrote to Dr. Oza on February 16th, 1967 : "My earnest prayer is that whatever time is left to me may be employed in the service of India and of my fellow botanists....." Again when he was honoured with the "*ORDER OF ALPHONSO X, THE WISE*" by the



Spanish Government in September 1967, he confessed to Dr. Oza on October 5th, 1967 : "Personally I feel happy because Spain, my mother country, has given me this distinction on account of my long years in education and research in the service of India, my country of adoption."

Born at La Galera, Tarragona, Spain, on December 5, 1903, Fr. Santapau joined the Society of Jesus at Gandia, Valencia, at the age of 16. After getting his education in the classics and languages, principally, in Spain and London, he proceeded to Rome where he obtained from the Gregorian University the degree of Ph. D. (Philosophy) in the summer of 1927. He left for India in 1928 to serve

out the period of his regency and to complete his theological studies. In 1936 he became a student of the Royal College of Science and, subsequently, of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, London. He acquired the B. Sc. Hons. and Ph. D. degrees in Botany of the London University as well as the A.R.C.S. (Associateship Diploma of the Royal College of Science) and the D.I.C. (Diploma of the Imperial College), also in Botany. Then followed his two years of experience at the Herbarium of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, Surrey, England, before joining the teaching staff of St. Xavier's College in 1940.

Even before taking up the post of Professor of Botany, Fr. Santapau had begun his life's work by his botanical exploration in the Eastern Pyreness (1934) and in the Italian Alps (1936). He continued his labours in Baluchistan (1946), in Kathiawar during 1946-54 and in the Dangs Forest during 1950-55. The Western Ghats from Karjat and Khandala down to Goa and the Eastern Ghats from Waltair to Vijayawada, together with the Pulneys and the Nilgiris came under his scientific scrutiny. He next turned his attention to the North-east and North regions—to Assam in the Khasia and Jaintia Hills, to Darjeeling and Kalimpong in the Eastern Himalayas and to Dehra Dun and Mussoorie. During his tours in these areas he collected over a lakh of specimens most of which are kept in Bombay, but representative collections were sent to Kew (London), to the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, to the Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis and other national and international herbaria.

During the holidays he explored various parts of India and during the

academic terms he lectured, chiefly, in St. Xavier's College and in the University of Bombay. Being in great demand, however, he had to deliver lectures all over the country—in the universities at Punjab, Delhi, Agra, Banaras, Ranchi, Bhagalpur, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Allahabad etc. and in the Research Institutes at Delhi, Dehra Dun, Coimbatore, Shillong, Lucknow, Calcutta, Darjeeling, etc. He was recognised as a postgraduate teacher in Botany by the Universities of Bombay, Poona, Agra, Calcutta and others. The Government of India nominated him 'Visitor' to Delhi University for the triennial inspection in 1963 and the Court of the University of Poona did likewise in 1964 when he became 'Visitor' to Poona University. He was also a member of the Recognition Committee for new colleges, University of Bombay.

His boundless energy and tireless activity can be gauged from his educational labours, and from his publications, a few of which are: *The Flora of Khandala in the Western Ghats of India*, the first edition of which appeared in 1953, the second in 1960 and the third in 1968, *Botanical Collector's Manual* 1955. Official publications of the Botanical Survey of India.

The Flora of Purandhar, 1958.

The Flora of Saurashtra, Part I, 1962.

The Acanthaceae of Bombay, 1952. Bombay University.

The Asclepiadaceae and Periplocaceae of Bombay, 1962. Bombay University.

Publication Dates, 1965. Printed for the use of the officers of the Botanical Survey of India.

The Orchids of Bombay, 1956.

Common Trees, 1966. Published in English in 1966; in Hindi in 1967. at present in the press Marathi

Bengali and Tamil editions. Among these are some books that have achieved an international reputation.

He was associated with numerous learned societies and scientific bodies. He was Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences of India, (now Indian National Science Academy), of the Linnean Society, London, and of the Indian Botanical Society, of which he was President in 1955. Besides, he was a member of

- (1) The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal ;
- (2) The Botanical Society of Bengal ; president in 1965 and 1966.
- (3) Bombay Natural History Society ; Vice-President and botanical editor from 1950-1968.
- (4) Indian Science Congress Association ; president of Botanical section in 1965.
- (5) Other Societies : Phytopathological Society of India, International Society of Plant Morphologists, International Association for Plant Taxonomy, International Association of Botanical Gardens, honorary life member of the Royal Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Bengal, etc.

Fr. Santapau served on some of the committees appointed by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research like Publications, Biological Research, National Biological Laboratory, National Botanic Gardens, Regional Research Laboratory (Johrat), Pharmaceutical and Drugs Committee Central Indian Medicinal Plants Organisation, etc. He was also a member of the 1964 Review Committee of the Bose Research Institute, Calcutta and of the 1967-68 R.C. of

the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow, and Chairman of the Parks and Gardens Committee of the Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay. Other Government committees that utilised his services were connected with the Indian Standard Institution, and the Indian Councils of Medical and of Ayurvedic Research.

In 1954 the Government of India nominated Fr. Santapau as *Chief Botanist* on contract for one year for the revival of the Botanical Survey of India. Again in 1961 he was appointed to the same post under the name of Director, Botanical Survey of India, on contract for two and a half years, but he occupied the post for seven years till June 1968.

As Director of the Botanical Survey of India, he was asked by the Government of India to take a delegation of six Indian botanists for a three months' tour of the U.S.S.R. in 1962 and to head the Indian contingent to the tenth International Botanical Congress, Edinburgh, in 1964. He was also an official delegate at the International Standards Organisation meeting in New Delhi in 1964.

For his signal services to the country in education and research Fr. Santapau, as mentioned earlier, was the recipient of the distinctions of *Padma Shri* from the Government of India and of the *Oderr of Alphonsus X, the Wise* from the Spanish Government. It was in 1964, however, that the Indian Botanical Society bestowed on him the Birbal Sahni Medal for 1963, the first award that he won.

Indian botany is the loser by the death of Fr. Santapau whose research has unearthed a valuable treasure of scientific lore and placed it before Indian students, enabling them to keep in touch with the works of acknowledged masters

in the subject of Botany. Fr. Santapau's labours have won international recognition, no doubt, but at home he has not only helped to initiate, popularise and maintain the disciplines of Taxonomy

but also endeared himself to research students by latinising the names of hundreds of new specimens. As an educationist and as a man of science, he has deserved well of India.