

OBITUARY NOTICE

Prof. Dr. Carl Friedrich Roewer

(12th October 1881 to 17th June 1963)

A scholar working on the correspondence and papers of the historian Lord Acton once said that reading his letters was like "looking into the mind of God." On going through the now massive file of correspondence of my old friend Prof. Roewer, since his death on the 17th June last, my feelings are not unlike those of Acton's biographer. For most of his long life Roewer occupied a foremost place among the leading arachnologists of the world and, without a doubt, the total output of his work, in volume alone, must eclipse that of any two other such experts of similar authority.

Born at Neustrelitz in Mecklenberg, son of an army colonel, he went from a school at Wessenfels where he matriculated at Easter 1902 to the University of Jena where he studied zoology, botany, geology, mineralogy and geography and in 1906, after passing the state examinations for the "Lehrfacultas" with honours in all these subjects, was granted his D.Phil. degree and became senior assistant to Ernst Haeckel at the Zoological Institute of Jena. Whilst in this post he worked at marine biology at the Russian biological station at Villefranche on the Mediterranean but, to be near his father, he later went to Hamburg, and was appointed zoologist to the Zoological Museum where he worked with that great arachnologist, Karl Kraepelin, who turned Roewer's special interests to where they were to remain for the rest of his life, the Arachnida. In 1910 he became students' tutor at Bremen and, in 1924, on account of the growing volume of his work on the Arachnids and his standing as a world authority, he was granted the title of Professor.

His magistral work on the harvestmen of the world (*Weberknechte der Erde*) was published in 1923 and was later followed by some 20, mostly lengthy, supplements. In 1926 he undertook a speleological expedition to Crete and for the years 1933—1945 was director of the Deutschen Kolonial- und Uebersee-Museums in Bremen where he interested himself not only in zoology but in ethnography. Nor were his activities confined to the academic aspects of these sciences: in the educational field he was also active, being responsible for the planning of the great zoological panoramas of that museum and for many of the ethnological groups in the public galleries.

The volume of his work is astounding. He monographed at various times, down to species, the Opiliones, Solifugida, and Palpigradi of the world and the Cheloneuthida to genera; in addition he produced an immense two-volume catalogue of the Spiders of the world and included in his writings the occasional identification and description of a scorpion. All these works were prefaced with lengthy treatises on the morphology, microscopic anatomy and general biology of each of these groups. His

own private collections of Arachnida numbered over 12,000 tubes and these and his extensive library of works on the group are now in the Museum of Natural History at Frankfurt.

It is the general rule that with people who invest their intellectual and physical energies on such a wide front, Time deals most ungenerously : nor has Roewer entirely escaped this. The detailed grouping of the smaller units of Opilionid systematics has been, in places, much modified even in his lifetime whilst the choice of characters which he selected for his generic divisions of the Solifugids has proved to be mostly untenable. Perhaps because of some curious innate impatience, Roewer could never commit himself to the detailed study of post-embryonic development so necessary in all these orders. Yet Roewer's works are essential tools for the specialist and will continue so for more generations than that of the present workers in arachnology ; of very few men of science can this be said today. Not only by his death but by his life's work has he "outsoared our night". Whilst minds of a different temper, in narrower fields, make wider reputations, it may be safe to predict that, one or two of the older generation of workers apart, it is doubtful if ever again will one man have such a complete cognisance of the Arachnid fauna of the earth as Carl Roewer.

His health failed much with increasing age and he suffered many personal hardships in the years following the war, yet not only did his arachnological studies continue in a steady stream of publications — any one of which would have made a small reputation for a younger worker — but he found time for many other activities as well. He cultivated over 100 kinds of roses, all of which had been budded by himself, and tended, cultivated and studied a large collection of living cacti and other succulent plants as well as filling his "leisure" hours with a continuation of a lifelong devotion to angling.

As a fellow-worker in these fields I found him prodigal of help, almost to the point of embarrassment and, as a friend, his sympathies were both wide and profound. For but one example ; in 1947, when conditions in Germany entailed much suffering for him, learning of a projected trip of mine from Cornwall to the Isles of Scilly, he read a novel ("Die Tillman-Söhne,") which deals with some aspects of Cornwall and Scilly. This much interested him and he asked me to read it. Finding that he could not send me a copy nor could I obtain one, he copied out in typescript many pages of the book *verbatim* ! If Burmann be right :

" Arbeit macht das Leben süß,
Macht es nie zur Last,
Der nur hat Bekümnerniss
Der die Arbeit hasst. "

then Roewer's life was indeed a happy one.

F. A. TURK.