

John E. Potzger, Student of Vegetation

Tremendous vitality and drive were characteristic of John E. Potzger. He chose for his principal research a field of study that demanded hard physical labor, and his work took him into places that were very difficult to reach throughout eastern North America from Texas to Hudson Bay. His work took him into bogs that are the wildest, least frequented kinds of places. He was searching for buried records of past vegetation. He was studying late glacial and postglacial history over this extensive area, using the techniques of pollen analysis. It is true that he also conducted other types of ecological research, but it is this for which he will long be known. There is almost no part of eastern North America where a student of postglacial vegetation can fail to recognize the pioneer work of John Potzger. Although others may have made more intensive local studies, he has covered a broader territory in this work in the United States and Canada than any other one person.

The circumstances of Dr. Potzger's early life undoubtedly conditioned a natural inclination to turn to the wilderness for his research and to pursue it with physical and mental discipline. His father

was a Lutheran minister in the "lumber" country of Presque Isle County, Mich. This region was then a wilderness in which pioneers lived in small communities in the generally forested country with very poor roads connecting them. In writing about his early life there, Dr. Potzger has said, "I was born July 21, 1886, and from my earliest recollections I loved the unrestricted life of the wilderness, and much time was spent in the woods. We knew there were wildcats and bears in abundance, but we never 'worried' about them and neither did our parents. We had no high school, no dentist, no doctor or railroad in our county. Mail came by stagecoach from Alpena, and when snow lay deep in winter the outside world had no meaning for us." After 7 years of very rural grade-school training at 4 months a year, Dr. Potzger entered the Lutheran Teachers' College at River Forest, Ill. There he became interested in music. Then for 24 years he taught in a Lutheran Day School in Indianapolis, Ind. He was organist, choir director, and leader of young people. During this time he also devoted much time to the study of music.

This experience ended when he de-

cided to earn an A.B. degree at Butler University. He was 39 years old when he enrolled in the general botany course taught by the late Dr. Friesner. As has so often happened to people with enthusiasm, drive, and ability who came under Dr. Friesner's influence, John Potzger was thenceforth destined to become a botanist. A new life was beginning at age 40. Perhaps this is why Dr. Potzger always seemed young to those of us who knew him well. He entered a new field of work at 40 with the freshness and energy of a young graduate student just out of college. At age 46 he received the Ph.D. degree at the Indiana University; his research was on the forest vegetation of Indiana. But he soon entered the field of postglacial vegetation study, the initiation of his long and extensive work on pollen analysis.

At the time of his death, Dr. Potzger had not even reached "middle age" in this scientific career. He still had a youthful enthusiasm and fascination for his work. Few people who knew him would have guessed within a decade his age. On 6 September 1955, he delivered his address as past president of the Ecological Society of America. When he died less than a month later (18 September), he was well along in his 70th year. He had been on the staff of the department of botany of Butler University for 23 years and had published more than 80 scientific papers during that time. While he will be remembered by his friends for his dynamic personality, he will be known much longer in the scientific world, partly for his contribution to Indiana botany, but much more widely for his extensive work in the postglacial vegetational history of eastern North America.

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*Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car?
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?*

EDGAR ALLAN POE, *Sonnet: To Science*