

Professor F. W. Went — octogenarian

55 years ago an experiment was described which turned the hypothesis of the existence of phytohormones into reality. The experiment was a feat of genius and simplicity. Intact tips of *Avena* coleoptile supplied diffusible material into blocks of agar which were placed unilaterally on decapitated coleoptiles. The extent of the resulting curvature was proportional to the time of block exposure and the number of tips. This was the main issue contained in the PhD Thesis written by F. W. Went, then student of the Department of Botany of Utrecht University. The phytohormone content has been measurable since, and an avalanche of new discoveries and ideas was set in motion. The result became a milestone in the history of plant physiology.

Someone not knowing professor Went might be surprised that the monograph "Experimental Control of Plant Growth", which appeared in 1956, was written by the discoverer of auxin. Completely different problems were tackled here — those of the interaction of climatic factors in regulating plant growth and development, and problems of plant uniformity. The solution was as much technical as it was biological. The technical part happened to be a real breakthrough. Earhart Plant Research Laboratory is known today as the first phytotron in the world (built in Pasadena, California). Once again professor Went had started rapid development in a completely new field — phytotronics.

Yet another new idea was pioneered by F. W. Went — an air conditioned botanical garden. The St. Louis climatron represented not only a new way of displaying plants but was also an important experimental instrument in its own right.

There is still the professor Went of the Laboratory of Desert Biology in Reno, developing methods and approaches to study the water regime of desert plants and air pollution.

Most Czech readers know F. W. Went as the author of "The Plants" — translated into Czech as „Rostliny“ in 1979. The book is an attractive messenger from the plant kingdom, convincingly illustrating not only the functions of plants but also their diversity and beauty. It was this wide range of botanical knowledge which mostly impressed Czech plant physiologists during Prof. Went's first visit to Czechoslovakia in 1959. The man who chose the topic "The Humanizing Significance of Botany" for the address of the retiring president of the Botanical Society of America (1959) certainly belongs to a rare breed of personalities. And we are in great need of personalities — to help us draw up priorities, and to reassess data in order to assist in absorbing the increasing multitude of new information.

Professor F. W. Went is 80. We would like to wish him many happy returns of the day — and to thank him for all he has done for plant physiology and botany in general.

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