

In Memoriam



Prof.Dr.Ir. F.J. Faber
15-02-1899 – 13-03-1984

The announcement of the death of Prof.Dr. Ir. F.J. Faber was sad news indeed; at the same time it was a consoling thought that during his lifetime the Koninklijk Nederlands Geologisch Mijnbouwkundig Genootschap (Royal Geological and Mining Society of The Netherlands) awarded him the Van Waterschoot van der Gracht Medal. It all modestly it is satisfying to think that the recognition of his great service to the geology of our country did not have to await the pathetic tribute of an obituary, but that he was able to experience this recognition and admiration personally.

Yet Faber was not a man to thrust himself to the fore, to stand in the path of others. The few geology students who followed his course in mining engineering were privileged to have a direct, intense relationship with Faber and to experience his sometimes rather cryptic humour and his special brand of human nature, that were inaccessible to many others.

Those others knew Faber mainly from his books: books that emphatically witness his love for the so very much subdued geology of our country, but in which the perspicacious reader could sometimes discern, as in his book 'Van zovloed tot landijs' ('From Deluge to Ice-sheet'), his anecdotic humour.

Frederikus Jacobus Faber was born on February 15th 1899 in Alkmaar. After attending school in Vlaardingen and The Hague he commenced his studies in mining engineering in 1918 in Delft, where he qualified as an engineer in 1923. In the last year before his graduation, he worked on a study of the 'Correlatie tussen de IJstijden in de Alpen en in Scandinavië' ('Correlation between the Ice Ages in the Alps and in Scandinavia'), the subject of a competition held by the University of Amsterdam at the instigation of Prof. M.E.F.T. Dubois. This competition gave the impetus to Professor Faber's great interest in the geology of the Netherlands, that was to last throughout the rest of his entire career. His geological activities were not restricted to the Netherlands, however. Shortly after his graduation he went on a long trip to South Angola for a geological investigation, part of a copper prospecting scheme, which was to form the basis of his doctoral thesis 'Bijdrage tot de geologie van Angola' ('Contribution to the geology of Angola'). For this work Ir. Faber was awarded in 1926 his doctorate, cum laude at the Technische Hogeschool (Technical University) in Delft, with Prof. G.A.F. Molengraaf as his supervisor.

Immediately after his graduation Ir. Faber had already been asked by Professor Molengraaf to take up a senior research assistantship in Delft, a position in which he remained employed until 1926. During this period he also wrote his famous book 'Geologie van Nederland' ('Geology of The Netherlands'), the first edition of which appeared in 1926. This book was reissued in two revised editions before the Second World War, and it was because of this book that a great many people became interested in the geology of our country.

Meanwhile, after obtaining his doctorate Dr. Faber entered the employment of the Bataafse Petroleum Maatschappij and he remained attached to this company until 1946. As company geologist and after 1936 as Chief Exploitation Engineer he worked in Rumania, Venezuela and the former Dutch East Indies. In the spring of 1940 he was on leave in the Netherlands, and the boat on which he intended to return to the East Indies was due to sail from Rotterdam on May 13th, the German blitzkrieg prevented this, and Dr. Faber was forced to spend the darkest years of our history in The Netherlands.

In 1946 Dr. Faber was nominated ordinary professor in General Geology at the Technische Hogeschool in Delft, a position he held until 1969. His inaugural lecture was entitled 'Geologische krachten tegen de mens' ('Geological forces against man'). In his teachings he tried as far as possible to establish connections between science and industrial practice, not only with respect to geology and mining engineering, but also with regard to civil engineering. The latter connection he emphasized especially during his lectures for students of civil engineering. He thus anticipated what was later to become known as engineering geology.

The geology of our country equally formed an important part of his teaching, but he stimulated interest in this subject in a wider sphere also. For many years he was president of the Bestuur van de Geologische Stichting (Board of the Geological Institute), before it returned to the status of the Rijks Geologische Dienst (Geological Survey of The Netherlands). After sovereignty had been ceded to Indonesia, Professor Faber was commissioned by the Government to organize geological research in New Guinea, which at that time belonged to the Netherlands. As a consequence of this, three expeditions were made in the years 1952-1955, in the area known as the Bird's head and in the Cyclops Mountains of Dutch New Guinea. The aim of these expeditions was to investigate the potential value of ore deposits; students also took part in this research. Afterwards, for the remaining period of Dutch sovereignty Professor Faber sat on the board of the Stichting Geologisch Onderzoek Nederlands Nieuw Guinea (the Institute for Geological Research in Dutch New Guinea).

Professor Faber was a gifted writer with an excellent command of the Dutch language. His devotion to a correct usage of language is probably due to his father, who not only was headmaster of a school but at the same time teacher of Dutch at a teacher's training college. This makes reading his books a real pleasure, interlarded as they are with his anecdotal remarks.

Professor Faber was also continually active in our Society. His name appears for the first time as ordinary member at the General meeting of the Society in Delft on March 7th 1925. On June 17th 1949 he became a member of the Raad van Bestuur (Board of Control), as commissioner – deputy treasurer, a function he held until February 20th 1953.

We have lost in Prof. Dr. Ir. F.J. Faber a man who not only was a highly respected and stimulating geologist among his own colleagues, but also one of the few authors of very readable books who succeeded arousing interest in the geological sciences among a broad public.

B.P. Hageman, Haarlem