

NORMAN LOFTUS BOR

(1893–1972)

Elected F.N.I. 1941

DR. NORMAN LOFTUS BOR, C.I.E., O.B.E., M.A., D.Sc., Sc.D., F.L.S., a distinguished authority on Asiatic grasses, died at the age of 79, on the 22nd of December 1972, at the West London Hospital, after a brief illness. He had a long and distinguished scientific career, both in India and the British Isles, extending over more than half a century, during which he devoted his boundless energy and knowledge to the advancement of botany, to the study, improvement and management of Indian forests, to intensive researches on the Gramineae, to the administration of various institutions and organizations, and above all to humanitarian duties in two world wars.

Bor was a tall, well-built man of powerful physique, with great strength of character, and admirable qualities of generosity, friendliness, courage and frankness. His colleagues and numerous friends the world over will recall his rugged serious face, rapidly broken by a kindly smile, a twinkle in his eyes, and especially by his powerful hand-shake, a grip which the recipient long remembered. He was always glad to assist others with friendly help, wise advice and encouragement, especially over difficult personal or academic problems. Having travelled extensively in Germany and other parts of Europe and having acquired an excellent knowledge of its languages, he was at all times willing to translate, especially from German—a much appreciated service. He always maintained a delightful sense of good humour and of cheerfulness, was a skilful raconteur, so that many will remember the amusing witty stories he so enjoyed telling. His was a very full and happy life in which his strong love of plants, and of fairness in human affairs, played a very important part. He expressed deep satisfaction and thankfulness at being able to accomplish so much, particularly the botanical tasks he had set himself in the Indian Forest Service and at Kew, the completion of which earned him world-wide renown and respect.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Bor was born on 2nd May 1893, at Tramore, County Waterford, Ireland, the second son of Edward Norman Cavendish Bor and Mabel Lloyd Bor (nee Thornton), of Kilcoran House, County Kilkenny. His ancestors came from the Netherlands in 1689, with William of Orange (later William III), and settled in Ireland. He was educated at Kilkenny College and at Mountjoy School, Dublin. In October 1911, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, to read for a medical degree but had to give this up when he joined the Army in September 1914. Bor served with distinction throughout the First World War, in the 10th and 16th Irish Divisions, being appointed a Second





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Lieutenant in the 6th Connaught Rangers in September 1914. He was promoted Lieutenant in April 1916 and to Captain in February 1917; he was released from the Army in November 1919. During this period, he was on active service in France and Flanders from December 1915 to September 1916 when he was severely wounded. Later, he served in Macedonia and in Palestine from April 1917 to September 1918. Bor completed sufficient courses to be awarded a B.A. degree in arts in 1921. In 1927, he received the M.A. degree of the University of Dublin and in 1948, the Sc.D. degree was conferred on him for his several taxonomic and ecological publications on the grasses and vegetation of Assam. After release from the Army, he commenced studies in October 1919 in the University of Edinburgh, receiving the B.Sc. degree in the Department of Forestry in July 1921, and in December 1930, he was awarded the D.Sc. degree by this University for a Thesis on the Synecology of the Naga Hills Forests, Assam.

INTEREST IN SPORTS

From childhood and especially during the University days, he took keen interest in various sports activities, particularly rugby football, cricket, tennis and boxing. He was a good all-rounder at cricket and his skill in this game will long be remembered at Kew where, in 1936, he made the record score of 123 not out and of 151 at Dehra Dun in 1940 for the Staff side vs. Staff and Students of the Civil Engineering College, Roorkee. Although a serious heart condition forced him to withdraw from such games when he left India in 1946, his interest in them continued unabated, and he derived much pleasure from watching special events in the open or on television until a few weeks before his death.

MARRIED LIFE

In 1931, while in Assam, Bor married Eleanor Constance Rundall, a charming and talented lady who contributed much to their social activities. They had an exceedingly happy and adventurous life, travelling through many parts of India and Europe, and visiting Malaya, Hong Kong and the United States on their way to Britain on leave. In her very entertaining book, '*The Adventures of a Botanist's Wife* (1952)', she gives a fascinating account of their life and travels, and especially of her husband's work in northern India, illustrated by her own delightful drawings, and by photographs of vegetation, of native peoples, and of themselves. Mrs. Bor died on 14th April 1957, after a long and exhausting illness. Her ashes, and later, those of her husband, were scattered in the Kew Azalea Garden at their special request. A garden seat, presented by the Bentham-Moxon Trust in Bor's Memory, has been placed near the beds of Grasses at Kew.

BOR'S SERVICES TO INDIAN FORESTRY

Bor joined the Indian Forest Service in December 1921, and during the following twenty-five years he occupied many important Forestry, Botanical and Administrative



posts before his retirement in 1946. At first he was stationed in Assam, in charge of vast areas of forest and was engaged in selecting forests for felling and in the preparation of plans for their regeneration. This work as a Forest Officer brought him into contact with several different native tribes where his flair for languages proved most valuable, as it did in later life. In fact, his wife testified that he could converse effectively in as many as seven tribal languages of Assam by the time of their marriage in 1931. Wherever he was posted he soon acquired a good working knowledge of the local languages, and prepared vocabularies and grammars of them, several of which were eventually published. He was keenly interested in the vegetation of the forests and in their general natural history, and had many exciting experiences with wild animals of the jungle. For a time he kept a stray baby rhinoceros which he first fed with a bottle. When it became too big it was sent to the Paris Zoo; years later when he and his wife visited the Zoo, the rhinoceros still remembered them. He also hunted and purchased elephants for use in the forests. Bor's knowledge of the country and its people led to his appointment as Political Officer of the Balipara Frontier Tract from 1931 to 1934, and his duties were combined with those of Divisional Forest Officer. In 1935, he officiated as Deputy Commissioner of Forests in the Naga Hills, and from 1936 to 1937 he was Forest Botanist and Silviculturist at Shillong, where he revised the herbarium collections. These duties were followed by five happy and productive years as Forest Botanist at the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, where the use of the large herbarium and library enabled him to prepare and publish several papers on grasses and other plants. For several years he gave courses on forest botany to the College students, and he took a very active part in the social life of the Institute, where he was very popular. During this period, he acted for a time as President of the Institute and Inspector-General of Forests, and for a year edited the *'Indian Forester'*.

In April 1942, Bor was recalled to Assam for urgent special duties in the part of the country he knew so well. At first he was posted to the Naga Hills to take on administrative duties connected with the war effort, but in a short time he was appointed Chief Administrator of the Burma Refugee Organisation, based in Shillong, to deal with the refugees pouring into Assam from Burma. Later, in 1944-45, he became Director of the Assam Relief Measures, a body set up for the rehabilitation of the peoples in the Naga Hills and Manipur State. This strenuous work entailed incessant and often dangerous travelling between Shillong and the Burma frontier. It demanded outstanding qualities of leadership, physical endurance, drive and tact, all of which Bor possessed in abundant measure. It was due to his energy, determination, organizing ability and his intimate knowledge of the country and its people, that these difficult tasks were successfully accomplished. He retired in 1946 from service in India with the rank of Conservator of Forests and returned to Britain for a well-earned rest, to find a new home, and a post where his extensive knowledge and experience were of value in the botanical field.

Bor was appointed Assistant Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in May 1948, a post he occupied with distinction until September 1959. At Kew, his very considerable administrative ability and scientific knowledge were fully utilized, for in those days he often not only deputized for the Director but also edited the



'*Kew Bulletin*'. He supervised the finances of the establishment, the education of the Student-Gardeners, served on Selection Boards and Committees, besides dealing with the day-to-day scientific correspondence of the Gardens. Despite his heavy schedule of work, he was always cheerful and helpful, and in the evenings found time to continue his botanical researches in the Herbarium.

He first came to Kew in the summer of 1936, having been instructed by the Government of Assam to prepare an account of the grasses of that province. He brought with him an extensive collection of Assamese grasses, the majority of which he had collected and these, together with the Kew collections, provided an excellent basis for his investigations. He applied himself to this work, an unusual task for a forest officer, with great enthusiasm, energy and concentration, so that within about three months he had acquired a very good knowledge of the structure and classification of these valuable plants. By the time of his return to India he had prepared a '*List of the Grasses of Assam*', published in 1938, and the draft of his account of them, published in 1940, as volume five of the '*Flora of Assam*'.

These investigations at Kew into grass structure and classification stimulated and intrigued Bor so much that he continued research on these plants in India, studies which gradually expanded on his return to Kew as Assistant Director. There, during his leisure hours mainly in the evenings, he revised the genera of the Indian grasses in the Herbarium, examined the types in other British and in overseas herbaria, monographed several of the taxonomically difficult genera, including *Arundinella*, *Cymbopogon*, *Digitaria*, *Dimeria*, *Microstegium* and *Poa*, described numerous new genera and species from Asia, and named large collections from many parts of India, all of which enabled him to correct numerous errors of identification and bring the nomenclature of the Sub-continent's grasses up-to-date. In 1960, the fruits of these many years of thorough and patient labour were published in his '*Grasses of Burma, Ceylon, India and Pakistan*,' thus fulfilling his aim and ambition to provide these countries with a modern treatment of their grasses. A facsimile edition of this indispensable work, with corrections and additions, was issued after his death.

While his studies of Indian grasses were in progress, the Floras of Cyprus and of Iraq were being written at Kew, and Bor gladly undertook the preparation of the accounts of their Gramineae. That for Iraq, a fine well illustrated volume was published in 1968, while the Cyprus account still awaits publication. After his retirement from the Assistant Directorship in 1959, Bor laboured daily and willingly on his agrostological work, thoroughly enjoying his freedom to work in the Herbarium. Despite advancing years and spells of ill-health, he was delighted to revise and write accounts of the Gramineae for Dr. K. Rechinger's '*Flora of Lowland Iraq*' (1964) and for his '*Flora Iranica*' (1970), both of which he accomplished in a praiseworthy manner and to his great satisfaction. In addition to these extensive floristic works, Bor determined numerous Asiatic collections sent to Kew for naming. He has many other scientific publications to his credit, including numerous studies of grasses in the '*Indian Forester*', '*Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*', '*Kew Bulletin*', and other Journals. He also wrote a '*Manual of Indian Botany*' (1953) for the benefit of his forestry students, and collaborated with the present author in the preparation of a book on '*Some Beautiful Indian Climbers and Shrubs*' (1954).



Bor travelled extensively in many parts of Asia and Europe, particularly in Assam, the Gangetic Plain, and North West India, and visited Lahoul, Sikkim and Tibet, in the company of the present author, making valuable botanical collections, mainly of grasses, which are now deposited in various Indian and British herbaria. His wife gave a most interesting account of their journey to Lahoul in an article 'Land of Hopeless Glory' in the *Indian Forester*, 67 and 68 (1941-42).

HONOURS

For his outstanding services in India, Bor was awarded the C.I.E. in 1945, and for his botanical researches he received the 'Paul Johannes Brühl Medal' from the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1945, the O.B.E. in 1957, and the 'Gold Medal of the Linnean Society of London' in 1962. He was a member of several British and Indian learned societies, President of the Botanical Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1942, and of the Indian Botanical Society in 1945.

QUALITIES

Dr. Bor was very human and humorous. Innumerable instances of his personal benevolence, jovial disposition and witty conversation are narrated by Mrs. Bor in her book '*Adventures of a Botanist's Wife*'. It is within the present author's personal knowledge that even after his retirement he used to send monthly by money order or through the present author substantial amounts to a dozen persons who served with him or under him in Assam or Dehra Dun. Bor had wide correspondence with agrostologists and taxonomists all over the world and was very prompt in answering even intricate enquiries. The present writer can personally testify to this as he used to correspond with Bor frequently. He used to write a very bold hand with big loops and connectives, sometimes covering a whole page.

A kindly personality with a keen sense of humour, he will be remembered for long in our country for his eminent services to the cause of Indian forest botany and agrostology in particular.

M. B. RAIZADA.

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