

**Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c.  
ANDRÉ PIRSON**

26 March 1910–7 February 2004



*André Pirson (1910–2004) was a pioneer in algal physiology and photosynthesis. The main topics of his research reached from the influence of ions on metabolism of plants, mineral nutrition, and the mechanism of synchronous division of unicellular algae over the effect of monochromatic radiation on biochemistry and development of micro-algae to the expression of photosynthesis-related enzymes in seedlings of higher plants.*

*A. Pirson studied chemistry at the University of Erlangen and botany under the guidance of Prof. Kurt Noack at the University of Berlin. He obtained his PhD in 1936 with a thesis on “Nutritional and Metabolic Investigations with Fontinalis and Chlorella”. In this thesis he reported that photosynthesis is dependent on the presence of manganese, a discovery which established his reputation as one of the pioneers of photosynthesis.*

*At the beginning of World War II he was drafted to the army. In 1943 the service was interrupted for three days for the final examination of his „Habilitation“. In October 1944, still serving in the army, he was appointed Associate Professor of Botany at the Philipps-University in Marburg, Germany. After six years embracing military service and subsequent internment as prisoner of war, he returned to Marburg and was immediately appointed director of the Botanical Institute and the Botanical Garden. The circumstances were miserable and the load of teaching was tremendous. In 1958, after 14 successful years of teaching and research in Marburg, he accepted the call to the University of Göttingen. He succeeded Prof. Richard Harder and was appointed Director of the Institute of Plant Physiology in a brand new building. A successful co-operation developed with E.G. Pringsheim, honorary professor emeritus at the University of Göttingen and his famous*

collection of algae. This led to the establishing of a Department of Experimental Phycology that was guided by Wolfgang Wießner. In order to broaden the spectrum of research, Pirson established as part of his institute the Department of Plant Biochemistry, guided in sequence by Günter Jacobi, Achim Trebst, and Hans Held. Prof. Pirson has trained more than 50 doctoral students, from which so far 18 were promoted to professors.

Remarkable are Pirson's activities as editor. For several years he reported the section photosynthesis for the "Fortschritte der Botanik" (later "Progress in Botany") and for the "Handbuch für Pflanzenphysiologie". Later he became editor in chief of the "Encyclopedia of Plant Physiology" (formerly "Handbuch der Pflanzenphysiologie"). From the beginning of the international journal "Photosynthetica" he served at its Editorial Board. Pirson has also contributed several reviews in the fields of photosynthesis and algal physiology.

Prof. Pirson received many honours. For a decade he was President of the German Botanical Society. He was elected member of the "Akademie der Wissenschaften" in Göttingen and the "Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina" in Halle. The Department of Biology of the Philipps-University of Marburg honoured him with a "PhD honoris causa". Professor Schnepf (University of Heidelberg) named a new genus of Flagellatae *Pirsonia* in his honour.

Prof. Pirson was an excellent teacher. His lectures were best prepared, always up to date and supported by experimental demonstrations. His fascinating lectures were for many of his students the trigger to choose plant physiology as their field and to work under Pirson's guidance.

The scientific community will miss André Pirson as outstanding scientist, a highly respected colleague and friend. In the first half of sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he, together with Prof. Karl Egle, succeeded in building the first bridges between west-German scientists and plant physiologists from behind the so-called "iron curtain", including Czechoslovakia. Also for these activities he will never be forgotten.

H. SENGER (Marburg), Z. ŠESTÁK (Praha)