Pieter Harting
1812-1885

Harting was born in Rotterdam in 1812, the son of a tobacco merchant. From 1823 to 1828, he attended secondary school in Elburg, a small town in Gelderland. In 1828 he matriculated at the university of Utrecht to study medicine. There he attended the lectures of G.J. Mulder in chemistry, G. Moll in physics, and J.L.C. Schroeder van der Kolk in physiology. His study was interrupted from November 1830 to October 1831 when he was in the army that fought against the Belgians in their struggle for independence. In 1835 he obtained his medical doctorate, and two years later his doctorate in obstetrics, both from the University of Utrecht.

By this time, Harting had already settled in Oudewater, where he had a small practice. Here he began making and improving scientific instruments: a microscope and a pair of scales. He used these instruments in his own scientific research, especially in chemistry and biology, which resulted in a number of publications. In 1837 he married Catharina Suzanna Goetzee, who bore him two sons and two daughters.

In 1841 Harting was appointed to the chair of botany, chemistry, and pharmacology at the Athenaeum of Franeker in Friesland. In his inaugural oration of 1842 he recommended the use of the microscope to every student of nature. The Franeker episode did not last long: the Athenaeum was closed in 1843. Its professors received appointments at other universities. As a result, Harting became extraordinary professor in the faculty of mathematics and physics of the University of Utrecht. An ordinarius professorship followed in 1846. At Utrecht, Harting lectured on pharmacology, plant physiology, comparative anatomy and zoology. He also published a few geological studies on soil conditions. In 1856 he became director of the Zoological Museum, and from 1858 onwards he concentrated his researches on zoological topics.

Harting's interest in microscopy resulted in the four-volume *Het microscoop, deszelfs gebruik, geschiedenis en tegenwoordige toestand* (The Microscope, its use, history and current condition) (1848-1854). The first three volumes of this standard work were quickly translated into German. His wide-ranging zoological, physiological, and anthropological researches dealt, among other things, with shipworms, which were a continuous threat to the Dutch dikes. He became the moving

force of a special research commission of the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences to study these animals. Its results were published from 1860 to 1871. Harting's main publication in zoology was the three-volume *Leerboek van de grondbeginselen der dierkunde* (Textbook of the first principles of zoology) (1862-1870). In 1874 he was in charge of the establishment of a Dutch subsection at the international Zoological Station at Naples, and in 1876 he founded a movable zoological station to be used in the Netherlands.

Because he believed that scientific knowledge was the basis of civilization, Harting was very interested in the popularization of science. For that reason he started, together with D. Lubach, the popular scientific journal *Album der Natuur* in 1852 and served as one of its editors until his death. Both in the *Leerboek* and in the *Album* Harting advocated the new evolutionary theory of Darwin. Harting was active in other social and political fields as well. He advocated cremation and opposed spiritism and alcoholism, argued for support of the Boer republic of Transvaal and against the lack of civil rights of the Jews in Russia. He retired from his chair in 1882 and died three years later in Rotterdam.

Primary works

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[L.C.P.]