In Memoriam Professor Dekking

Professor Dr. Henri Marinus Dekking died on 10 November 1966 at the age of 64. After qualifying as a doctor in 1927, Dekking was appointed assistant at the Eye Hospital (Inrichting voor Ooglijders) at Groningen, of which Prof. Dr. G. F. Rochat was then the director. Dekking’s interest for diagnostic photography was stimulated by Rochat. Within three years he had constructed an apparatus for the photography of the cornea surface, based on the ring figure of Placido. Dekking wrote his dissertation on this, and in 1930 obtained his doctorate cum laude. The same year he moved to Nijmegen to become director of the Eye Hospital there. In the following years he published a number of articles on the infra-red and colour photography of the eye. These new photographic techniques were of value both for diagnosis and for demonstration.

In 1935 he published this work as a book, Photographic Investigation of the Eye. As well as this, Dekking found time for experiments in measuring the opacity of the frontal eye-segment. He developed his opacity meter, based on the principles of nephelo-metry; after many modifications this apparatus was perfected in 1948. In 1932 Dekking proposed a modification of the ophthalmoscope, and in the following years he investigated the influence of infra-red rays on the retina.

During the war years he constructed an adaptometer with automatic registration. His findings with this apparatus were expressed in a theory on the mechanism of retinal adaptation. After the war Dekking worked for a year in Indonesia, where he took up a temporary appointment as professor in Batavia. His original publication on the cause of ‘camp-eyes’ date from this period. In 1947 Dekking succeeded his teacher Rochat as Professor at Groningen. He found a difficult situation there: after the war it was almost impossible to find permanent staff for the University clinic. This difficulty, together with the lack of adequate facilities for clinical research, formed a troublesome accompaniment to his professorial career.

Despite his almost overwhelming clinical duties, Dekking nevertheless found time to develop his work in the field of diagnostic photography and also developed his original recording apparatus for audio-visual documentation.

His clinical publications dealt with a variety of subjects and constantly illustrated his talent for the development of new apparatuses for diagnostics and for operative treatment. These publications can be found in the international periodical Ophthalmologica, of which he was one of the editors-in-chief, and also in the periodicals on medical photography.

Dekking was a very lucid teacher, and he enjoyed giving lectures and conducting seminars. An important part of his work in photography and films was concerned with the improvement of teaching methods. An excellent film on the operative treatment of detachment of the retina, for
which he himself did a considerable amount of the drawings, is a classic example of the art of medical films.

His talent for the artistic forms of photography is well known, and his pioneering work in diagnostic photography is based on this talent. A small book on photographic objectives illustrates his deep technical knowledge of this material; the relationship to his interest in optical problems of the eye is here very clear. Many of his students will remember his excellent lectures on these and similar subjects. In the International Scientific Film Association his authority in the field of medical films was generally recognized. From 1952 onwards, apart from a break of two years, he was chairman of the Dutch Society for Scientific Films. In 1951 and 1952 he was chairman of the Dutch Ophthalmological Association, and at the same time, at the request of the late Professor Weve, he undertook the editorship of Ophthalmologica.

However much Dekking was absorbed in his work, he tried at the same time to keep up his other interests. A survey of all the fields in which he was active makes it reasonable to conclude that he was principally inspired by an interest in the visual—from this derived this choice of ophthalmology as a specialism, his studies on visual perception, as well as many of his other interests.

Such an artistic man would never have been satisfied with an administrative career, and indeed the administrative aspects of his professional duties had very little attraction for him. He was a man of great savoir vivre. He made an immediate impression of courtesy without formality; he was a man of cultivated and easy manners. As a student he had been a member of a well-known cabaret company, and he kept up his love of the theatre. Even as a professor he took a constant pleasure in directing and acting. And as well as this he also found time to produce excellent drawings and paintings.

Dekking faced sickness and approaching death with great courage. His death leaves me with a deep feeling of regret. Dekking was always improvising on the border where his speciality and his other interest met, and he gave us the impression that his reflections on ophthalmological subjects were partly inspired by his artistic talents. In this he was exceptional; but he was also very vulnerable, for he was by nature a very sensitive man.

W. We share in the loss which his wife Mrs. Dekking-van Haeften his daughters and all his colleagues and friends have suffered. We shall always remember him.
Nijmegen  Prof. Dr. J. E. A. van den Heuvel