

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

Faudation

spoken by the University Orator

Professor C.O. GARDNER, B.A. (Hons.) (Natal), M.A. (Oxon).

in presenting

LESLIE EDWARD WOSTALL CODD

to the Chancellor at the Graduation Ceremony

held in Pietermaritzburg

on 31st March, 1990

Chancellor,

Leslie Codd is a botanist - a skilled and versatile, professional,
dedicated, total botanist.

Twenty years ago many people, many members of what I might perhaps call the graduation-attending public, might have been inclined to think botany (as the sciences go) a little dull. The obviously exciting discipline in those days was still physics: some physicists were probing the very composition of the material world, while others were exploring or speculating about the furthest reaches of the universe. They had also of course taught us the noble art of blowing holes in this same universe. But those heady and slightly wild days seem to be past. We realise now that a great deal of energy, perhaps our best energy, needs to be spent on watching, knowing, preserving, understanding and harvesting the earth on which we are lucky enough to live. The magic colour is green: green is the colour of nature, of fertility, of peace. Anyone who works with the green of natural life deserves to be treated with gratitude and awe. We worry, quite rightly, about pressing political issues; but more and more thoughtful commentators are predicting that in a few years time ecological questions will have found their way to the top of all the political agendas.

Seen in this light, Leslie Codd is indeed a very important person. It is doubtful whether such strategic issues passed through his mind when he first devoted himself to botany, but on the other hand the botanists feel for the beauty and significance of his field of study must have contained, if only intuitively, some of the considerations I have raised.

Dr Codd's initiation into Botany took place here in Pietermaritzburg, at what was then the Natal University College, under Professor Bews. Having gained a first class masters degree, he then went on to study plant breeding first at Cambridge, then in Trinidad.

His first appointment was in 1931 in what is now Guyana. His research was focussed on the breeding and cultivation of rice; for this work he was later awarded the DSc degree by the University of South

Africa.

He returned to this country, to Pretoria, in 1937. He was in charge of the Prinshof Grass Breeding Research Station, then of the Botanical Survey, then of the National Herbarium. In 1963 he was appointed the Director of the Botanical Research Institute, a post he held until his retirement in 1973.

In all this time he was highly productive. He is the author of more than 1130, \200\230publications, all of them of a high' scientific "standard. Included in them are the revisions of a number of major plant genera which have been recognised by the international plant taxonomic

community. He has also edited several journals and annual publications.

He has served South African Botany actively and with distinction: he has been president of three scientific societies. And his contributions to science have been recognised by the highest awards of the S.A. Association for the Advancement of Science and the S.A.

Association of Botanists.

Underneath all these appointments, achievements and awards, what can one say of Leslie Codd the man and the scientist? By all accounts he is a highly gifted botanist, possessing a rare combination of qualities: acute perception and intuition, a disciplined scientific mind, painstaking thoroughness, and a fine aesthetic sense. He played a major role in the establishment of the magnificent Botanical Gardens in Pretoria. He is also a renowned collector, and many of his collections have been new to science; his name is commemorated in several new taxa,

including the new genus, *Coddia* Verdcourt.

At the centre of all Dr Codd's fine achievements is the fact that he is a deeply caring person: he cared for all the people who worked with him and under him, and he cares for his work, for botany, and therefore for the green earth. He is indeed, in his quiet way - if I may return briefly to my first theme - the kind of person that ecologists and environmentalists have taught us to recognise as a hero of human society.

I have the honour, Mr Chancellor, to request you to confer the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa, on Leslie Edward Wostall Codd.

