

Bergsma, Cornelius, Adrianus

Born: May 12, 1798 - Leeuwarden(NL)

Died: May 2, 1859

His father is a notary and lawyer and holds an important position in the financial administration of Friesland.

Bergsma studies at the college of Franeken (see also Brugmans) where he is a pupil of JGS Van Breda, who lectures chemistry and herbal medicine. After the early death of his parents in 1829, Cornelius takes up the study of medicine and is admitted to the degree of doctor with a treatise on tea. For a short time he is a medical practitioner.

William I, prince of Orange anticipates the importance of the (chemical) industry. To provide the knowledge, higher institutes are needed where qualified scientists lecture. Bergsma is appointed professor of chemistry and with his young wife settles in Ghent where the household lives close the school and laboratories at St. Agnes. This becomes the "*Ecole Industrielle*" or "*Nyverheyds-School*" still in existence almost on the same spot in the Lindenlei. In his inaugural speech Bergsma stresses the importance of the usefulness of chemistry for the industry. He gives free lectures in Dutch to cater for an ever wider inquisitive audience.

However, following the Independence of Belgium (1830) most Dutch return to their homeland. So does Bergsma and he is appointed lecturer of mathematics and physics at the University of Utrecht, becomes superintendent of the botanical garden and professor of botany.

Bergsma is the co-founder and active member of the botanical and agricultural society of Utrecht from 1841 till 1851.

Scientific Realizations

His main interest concerns at first descriptive botany. He contributes to the "Flora Belgii Septentrionalis". For his chemical research he is awarded prizes for a paper on the analysis of milk and the composition of peat and the use of its ashes as a fertilizer.

This is the start of an outspoken interest in the practical and industrial applications of chemistry and botany. He researches on the pollution and purifying of water (of the Amsterdam canals) and lead-poisoning.

His friend Van Hall enlists his help for the analysis of bread and he becomes a member of the committee which considers the erection of a municipal bakery in Ghent.

He also meddles with the chemical nomenclature and writes a short study about calcium hypochlorite.

What strikes one most is that Bergsma is a scientist with an eye for social problems linked to health and agriculture and who looks for solving the difficulties with the help of applied chemistry.