A. Teeuw

In memoriam John M. Echols

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IN MEMORIAM JOHN M. ECHOLS

25th March 1913 - 16th June 1982

On 16th June 1982 the sudden death occurred in Ithaca, N.Y., of John Minor Echols, professor emeritus of Linguistics and Asian Studies at Cornell University. A detailed memorial notice by his colleague, Professor O. W. Wolters, along with a list of Echols' scholarly publications, has meanwhile appeared in the October 1982 issue (No. 34) of the journal *Indonesia*, published by the Cornell Southeast Asia Program.

Although there is little to add to Wolters' accurate and extensive account of John Echols' life — an account that is suffused with deep admiration and great human warmth — a tribute to his memory is nevertheless in place in this journal as well, not only because of the importance of his contribution to the studies in which our Institute is specialized, but also in view of his special relations with The Netherlands, in particular Leiden and the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde. Professor Echols was *Commissaris* of our Institute for North America from 1972 until his death. In this capacity he has always wholeheartedly devoted himself to the service of the interests of both the Institute and its North American members.

To my mind the phrase 'devoted service' in fact best describes the most typical characteristic of Echols the teacher, the scholar, the administrator, and the librarian and documentator — in short, the man. Throughout his career he has served the interests of others with the utmost devotion. His was a life of service in the most literal sense of the word. He consciously served his fellow-men through his scholarly work: many of his publications were written not first and foremost to redound to his own glory, nor were they the results of egocentric research, but they were aimed primarily at making material and knowledge accessible to the greatest possible number of people. These are mainly works in the general field of translation, bibliography and documentation, or they are introductions, announcements of publications, contributions to reference works, and so on. Undoubtedly his two most important publications are *An Indonesian-English Dictionary* (1961, second, revised edition 1963) and *An English-Indonesian Dictionary* (1975), both of them published by Cornell University Press.

They are the most convincing testimonies of John's unflagging service. As a typical mark of his modesty, the title-pages of these dictionaries bear the name of John's good friend Hassan Shadily as co-author. For John his collaboration with the latter, chiefly via an almost interminable correspondence, was of such essential importance that it was for him only a foregone conclusion that both their names should be recorded as authors who contributed equally to the completion of these works. But I trust Hassan will not feel slighted if I nonetheless regard these dictionaries as chiefly John Echols' creations. Echols himself has talked with characteristic expertise, humour and self-effacement about Malay and other dictionaries and their compilation in his *Presidential Address* as President of the Association of Asian Studies in 1978 (the text of which has been printed in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 38.1, 1978:11-24). The making of dictionaries itself is generally a task that demands self-denial and a devotion bordering on the maniacal, that always provokes criticism and seldom praise, that is never definitively finished and is beset at every step by the threat of incompleteness — the adage *ars longa vita brevis* is particularly applicable to the lexicographer. In the case of the Indonesian language the frustrations for the lexicographer are even more enormous because of the unparalleled speed of the growth and renewal of the vocabulary and the low degree of either official or unofficial standardization. It is the inescapable fate of the lexicographer of this language in particular to see what he completes today outdated and superseded yesterday. John Echols was fully aware that these frustrations were part and parcel of his daily work. Even so he never lost his perseverance, humanity and even cheerfulness in carrying out this work until literally the last day of his life. In any case he also tasted the intense, well deserved satisfaction of knowing of what immense use his dictionaries, no matter how incomplete and outdated they were bound to be even before their appearance, were to tens of thousands of people, both non-Indonesians the world over in their efforts to learn and use Indonesian, and Indonesians trying to improve their knowledge of English. Regrettably he has left the revision of the Indonesian-English version uncompleted. I should think it would be a duty of honour for those to whom his scholarly legacy has been entrusted to do all they can to ensure that the third impression of this work will appear with the least possible delay. They owe this to the memory of John Echols no less than to the present and future generations of students of Indonesian who are anxiously awaiting this indispensable tool.

Many of John Echols' activities in the fields of education, administration and organization must be passed over in silence here. But there is one aspect of his work that merits extra emphasis in our Institute's journal. The enormous devotion, self-denial and fanaticism (if this is an appropriate word with reference to his amiable per-

PROF. JOHN M. ECHOLS †

sonality!) with which John has built up the Southeast Asia Collection of Cornell University Libraries, initially bare- and single-handed and sacrificing what might have been referred to by others as 'holidays' and 'leisure time', is well known. It is not without reason that this collection, formerly known as the Wason Collection, now bears the name of its true builder and has been known as the John M. Echols Collection since 1977. But Echols also realized that libraries are there for the persons using them and that it is imperative in the name of scholarship that source materials, and particularly unique collections, be as readily available and accessible as possible to as many as possible. Accordingly when in 1968 our Institute, which after its transfer to Leiden had entered a phase of renewal and expansion, approached Professor Echols during the sabbatical year spent by him in Leiden with the request to make this unique Indonesian collection of Cornell's for the period 1945-1968 accessible elsewhere in the world via a microfiche project, he did not hesitate for one moment. Perhaps to others the idea of protecting the world monopoly position Cornell had secured itself with this collection would have been attractive. But John Echols was incapable of such a thought. Books are there to be used, and the more people make use of them the better. The proposed project moreover had the special attraction for him that in this way Indonesia would be put in possession of a collection of material from an eventful period in its history that had for the greater part become lost in the country itself. He subsequently lent all his support to the realization of this project, which was implemented in an exemplary spirit of cooperation between Cornell University Libraries and the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde in the years 1969-1974. Thanks to this project, the Echols Collection from the period 1945-1968 is now also available on microfiche in the principal centres of Indonesian studies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Great Britain and The Netherlands, besides the USA itself.

In spite of the deep regret at the loss of this devoted, kindly and unassuming scholar, and notwithstanding the concern about the work that for the time being remains uncompleted, we must be grateful for what John Echols has accomplished. It is a consoling thought that his name will live on, not only as a vague memory, but in the daily work of all those involved in the study of Indonesia and its language.

A. TEEUW.