



Prof. Dr. Wiktor Kemula

On October 17th, 1985, during a concert commemorating the anniversary of Chopin's death, in the church of Holy Cross in Warsaw died Prof. Dr. Wiktor Kemula, one of the outstanding chemists of Poland and the whole world.

Wiktor Kemula was born on March 6th, 1902 in Izmail, Bessarabia. He lost his parents early; in 1921, after graduating from the high school at Izmail, he was repatriated to Poland and started his chemistry studies at John Kazimir University in Lvov. He had to earn his living; already in the second year of study, in 1923, was employed as a demonstrator by Prof. Stanislaw Tolloczko and then as assistant at the Department of Inorganic Chemistry. In 1927 he obtained his Ph. D. degree for investigations on the effect of ultraviolet radiation on aliphatic hydrocarbons. His early work mainly concerned photochemistry. In 1929 he started his postdoctoral studies in the laboratories of Prof. Weigert and Prof. Debye (Leipzig) and Prof. Heyrovsky (Prague). Especially the latter visit had a profound effect on his further scientific interests. In 1932 he presented his habilitation thesis on the overpotential of Hg(II). Electrochemistry became his main field of interest to the end of his life.

In 1936 he was appointed an associate professor of physical chemistry at John Kazimir University and effective October 1, 1939, he was supposed to become a full professor and the head of the Department of Inorganic Chemistry at Warsaw University. However, because, of the start of the

Second World War and the subsequent events, he could start his appointment only in 1945. During the War most of his coworkers perished.

His first task in Warsaw was to reconstruct the badly damaged Chemistry Building and then to organize the scientific research and teaching at the Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry which was headed by him as the Dean in the years 1947 to 1950. His duties became still more extensive in the years 1956–1959 when he was elected Deputy Rector for scientific problems of Warsaw University. From 1955 to his death he also held a parallel post as the chairman of the Department of Physico-chemical Analytical Methods at the Institute of Physical Chemistry of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

His scientific strategy was characterized by close link of analytical applications and basic physico-chemical investigations, combined with diversity of experimental techniques.

In 1956 Prof. Kemula published his first papers on cyclic voltammetry with the use of a hanging mercury drop electrode which became widely known and applied in numerous laboratories all over the world.

Still earlier, in 1952, he published his first papers on "chromatopolarography", a combination of chromatographic separation and electrochemical detection. In those years recorded chromatograms were still very rare. His polarographic detectors were much later adapted to high-performance liquid chromatographs, and thus can be considered as the precursors of the very popular electrochemical detectors. In his work he used reversed-phase columns, paying, as usual, attention to the physico-chemical basis of chromatographic separations, e.g., the effect of ionization equilibria. Later, he extended his attention to the very selective clathrate sorbents. These investigations are continued by his coworkers at the Institute of Physical Chemistry of the Polish Academy of Sciences, including new types of electrochemical detectors and chiral-selective cyclodextrine systems.

The effect of his long and intensive scientific activity on the development of chemistry in Poland is very profound. He founded a scientific school with a wide range of fields of interest. Scores of his coworkers became professors or associate professors. As the editor of the *Polish Journal of Chemistry* and of *Chemia Analityczna* (Warsaw), he paid

great attention to the dissimulation of modern concepts and methods. He was a member of the editorial boards of several national and international journals.

His publications (over 400) gained him also recognition abroad. He was an honorary member of the Société de Chimie Industrielle, Czechoslovak Chemical Society, Royal Chemical Society, London, Japanese Chemical Society, and the Chemical Society of the German Democratic Republic. He was also the honorary President of the Polish Chemical Society. He was active in I.U.P.A.C., being a member of the Commission of Electrochemical Data and has served as the president of the Analytical Chemistry Division.

Professor Kemula was not only a scientist but also a good teacher taking care of his students; the untimely loss of his post at the Warsaw University in 1968 was the evidence of his attitude.

His devotion to science and outstanding achievements were recognized by numerous awards, among others, the Order of the Banner of Labour, the Commander Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta with a Star and the State Prize (twice).

He was a great lover of classical music.

Biernat de Lublin, a poet living 500 years ago, wrote that "Wise men do not die as the fools may think; but they live after their death, giving us their wisdom". This statement may well be applied to Professor Wiktor Kemula and is a consolation in our sorrow.

*Uochemski*

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