On Archer Martin at Age Seventy

For those of us who have worked in certain of the disciplines of Science over the years, a very special event is destined to occur on March 1, 1980. On that day, Professor A. J. P. Martin, a most extraordinary scholar whose very presence continues to loom large in our every-day lives, celebrates his seventieth birthday. Lest the new generation of young scientists forget, it was he, some four decades ago, who led his erstwhile English colleagues to the development of partition chromatography and soon thereafter to that incredible offshoot – gas chromatography. Indeed, in two years, we shall celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of his Nobel Prize in Chemistry – received together with R. L. M. Synge – for these achievements.

Gold watches and testimonial dinners *ad infinitum* could not begin to chip away at the debt of gratitude, that we, his colleagues owe to this remarkable scientist. The legacy that he has given us to build upon is almost legion. Dare we even speculate what certain aspects of Chemistry, Biology, and Physics would be like today, *without* gas chromatography and its highly sophisticated column and detection systems, *without* its combination with mass spectrometry, *without* modern-day high-performance liquid chromatography – to name but a few?

Those who know Archer Martin personally are a privileged lot, indeed! The highlight of such a relationship must surely be the long quiet conversations. Often wide ranging, be they philosophical or scientific, they certainly have to be considered some of the most exhilarating, intensive, and exhausting of exercises – an “intellectual encounter of the highest order”, if you will – that one can experience.

Now, with the passage of that Time when most yearn for the quiet aspects of life – the leisure years – spent in travel, in the garden, in companionship, in good books accompanied by a sip of fine sherry and a little Beethoven or Brahms, Professor Martin, haunted by the demons that plague the souls of most unusual men, still seeks to vigorously pursue those relentless forces involved in a basic understanding of the Laws of Nature.

Toward this end, in the Spring of this Year, he may yet begin another chapter in his remarkable odyssey. This time, as professor of chemistry at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale in delightful Lausanne, Switzerland. Archer, on behalf of your many friends both near and afar, we again Hail thee, we bid thee Good Fortune, and Godspeed on your new journey across the sea.

Til next we meet, Happy Birthday, take care and all the best – old friend!

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