IN MEMORIAM

Zoltán Gábor Szabó (1908-1995)

Professor Zoltán Gábor Szabó, Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, died on June 16, 1995. His death is a grievous loss for both the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the whole Hungarian scientific community.

He was born on May 30, 1908, in Debrecen, where he finished primary and secondary school. He was only 13 years old when his interest in chemistry was irrevocably captivated for good and all. He graduated in chemistry from Pázmány Péter University in Budapest. While he was a student, he started to do research in analytical chemistry. Having graduated, he continued his studies at the University of Szeged, where he made his Ph.D. thesis, which he defended at Pázmány Péter University in Budapest. With a postdoctoral fellowship he spent two years in Berlin and worked with Max Bodenstein. He studied the decomposition of chlorine monoxide (Cl_2O) and published a paper with Bodenstein, but the mechanism of this reaction was determined in his later studies. The two years he spent in Berlin were decisive in his scientific career because his interest turned to the field of chemical kinetics. Therefore, when he was appointed professor in 1940 at the University of Kolozsvár to the Department of Inorganic and Analytical Chemistry, he did research in analytical chemistry, but the majority of his activity was devoted to reaction kinetics. His professorship was short-lived in Kolozsvár. He had to move to Budapest in 1944, where he was working at the University until 1947, when he was invited by the University of Szeged to head the Department of Inorganic and Analytical Chemistry. He was working here until 1967, and served also as Dean of the Faculty of Science and Rector of the University of Szeged. Undoubtedly, the time between 1947-1967 was the most fruitful and productive period in his life. In 1967 he moved to Budapest and became Head of the Department of Inorganic and Analytical Chemistry of Eötvös Loránd University, from where he retired in 1979.

In spite of the fact that most of the time he had no favorable conditions for the realization of his ideas in research, still the results he achieved in research have been acknowledged and respected both in his country and internationally. He elaborated a number of ingenious methods and procedures in analytical chemistry but it was actually his activity in the field of reaction kinetics and heterogeneous catalysis that resulted in a series of outstanding and significant results. These have been published in a number of books and more than 300 papers. It has to be mentioned that he founded and headed the Working

Committee on Reaction Kinetics and Catalysis, which played an important role in the stimulation of research in this field. He was among the founders of this Journal, acting as Member of the Editorial Advisory Board.

His scientific activity deservedly received different national and international recognitions. He was awarded the Kossuth Prize in 1950 and 1957 and honorary doctorates at several national and foreign Universities. He was elected as honorary member of foreign Academies. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences awarded to him the Gold Medal of the Academy in 1984.

Professor Szabó was not only a productive and excellent scientist, but also an outstanding teacher, for whom it was a question of prestige to deliver his lectures at a high level and at the same time to expose clearly and in a comprehensive manner the modern concepts of chemistry to his students. By doing so, he was an indisputable professional authority, who attracted the most talented students. To prepare a thesis in his institute and to work with him as his coworker indicated in itself a special kind of ranking. Myself and several colleagues were very fortunate that under his guidance we could not only make the first steps in our research career but, working for several years with him, we could acquire from him the knowledge of all the ins and outs of research. He was a censorious but fair director, he demanded precise work from his coworkers and appreciated with pleasure the results. He always found as great a pleasure in the results of his disciples as we were delighted to hear his words of appreciation. Actually, the only merit he was willing to recognize was talent and successful work. If he observed these, he took good care to provide suitable conditions for further progress, including the opportunity for spending shorter or longer time in one of the leading foreign laboratories, carrying out research in a field similar to ours. For him it was essential and self-evident that we should have personal research experience in other laboratories of the world and also compare our results with those of other scientists. That was his outlook upon life, which we inherited from him and tried to implement later more or less effectively. Looking back upon the years we spent in his Institute, we believe that this period of time was a determinative and beautiful stage of our life. Therefore, the indelible memory of our Mentor will always stay with us, his disciples.

Prof. Ferenc Márta
Central Research Institute for Chemistry,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences