

Scientist of the World

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I met Grigorii Valentinovich when, full of enthusiasm but almost without any experience, I started going along the path of science. For me, up to then, he had been only a name on the covers of the books I studied from, a scientist of world reputation who had often heard of. He seemed to me as a legend. I imagined him to be an aloof and whimsical scientist who spent his time alone or with a narrow circle of his closest collaborators. He proved to be very down-to-earth with a great appreciation for humanity. I was astonished with the way he received me for the first time in Kiev – simply as a colleague equal to himself. We chatted as friends as he gave me ideas of what may interest me and direction on how to proceed further. As known, only great men can be unobtrusive with their knowledge.

He was a person who seemed to accept no barriers, no matter the challenge. He worked long and hard, somehow defying Nature itself.

I recall how vividly he discussed the chance existence of life on Earth during his last stay in Herceg-Novi in 1975. The causes of the battle between progress and entropy, inevitably extending in the world and encircling us directly, and on the life defying the flow of ever increasing entropy. It seems to me now he fully understood that only a man aware of the coming end of his physical existence can comprehend the evidence of life. However, a volcano of optimism went boiling in him. Intellectual pessimism, so characteristic for us, Slavs, was alien to him. His love for science was passionate. He believed that science should not be a kind of property of narrow circle of people anxious to fulfil their wishes for personal intellectual delight, self-satisfaction and ambitions, but it should be applicable to practice, serving mankind. He was the great advocate of the «technolization of science». During our discussing the last version of the monograph «Activated sintering», he said: «Well, well, everything is OK. Yet we should add a final chapter dealing with practical aspects of activated sintering in order to make everyone understand for what the monograph was written, and this should be the crown of everything».

Samsonov was an excellent lecturer. As we often met each other at scientific conferences, I can evidence how

he succeeded in turning dry texts, written according to the strict criteria of science, into interesting and fruitful passages of sprinkling ideas. With his witty remarks he could freshen up tired listeners; with his deep thoughts he revealed the secrets of the most difficult problems; with his futuristic prognoses he aroused the imagination of both of those just started going along the path of science and of scientists of world reputation. President of the Serbian Academy of Science and Art Professor P. Savich said after Samsonov's lecture delivered in Belgrade in summer 1975: «I cannot say this is the best lecture I have ever heard. The best does not exist. But believe me that update I haven't heard any better and more interesting than this one». It is therefore no wonder that his reports were compared with poetry.

Sometimes it seems to me that he was closely familiar with every field of science and technology. He was always willing to go on discussing things outside the conference hall, in a garden or in a bar. He never made any difference between people of high scientific reputation or fresh researchers. To talk with the latter seemed to give him greater pleasure. He had subtle tact and was ready to listen to silly ideas of junior researchers-enthusiasts without any superior ironical smile.

In his free hours, after long tiring reports and discussions, he ceased to be a scientist and turned into a wonderful talker, a witty and, above all, interesting person ready to sing and dance. He was an excellent imitator, as he was a deeply observant man. I remember his toast to all Yugoslavian colleagues-lecturers at the summer school «Materials in Electronics» (1975) accompanied with imitating the characteristic movements and traits of each of them. There was lot of «teasing» in that, but nothing malicious.

Samsonov was an enthusiast for science, which he appreciated as much as life itself. He loved his Motherland deeply and truly, and part of his love was given to Yugoslavia. He loved honest, intelligent and diligent people, no matter what part of the globe they belonged to. He was a citizen of the world. And as such, he will remain in my memory.