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Thoughts About Professor Paul Scherrer

By C. G. SUITS, General Electric Company, Schenectady, N.Y., USA

In Professor SCHERRER's outstanding career in science, one can identify many sources of greatness. For example, his own researches have covered a tremendous range of physical phenomena, and have been the source of outstanding research contributions by him and his students and collaborators over a long and continuing fruitful career. Basic to his accomplishments in science have been his outstanding natural endowments of a keen analytical mind, and a 'physical insight' and understanding which allows him to rapidly grasp the meaning, significance, and order in research observations. Similarly, his effective leadership of his country's policies and postures in science and technology, including its significant programs in the development of atomic energy, would justify a lengthy and laudatory account. But for the present purpose, I would like to forego the temptation to extol his public greatness, in favor of his personal greatness. For SCHERRER's personal warmth, friendliness and intense human qualities comprise the natural endowment which has been appreciated above all by the many people who have been privileged to work with him as students and scholars.

His outgoing personality has truly been the key to his exceptional skill as a teacher. His ability to counsel and guide research students through a new realm of physical phenomena is, however, never so striking as when done en masse, in SCHERRER's famous physics lectures. My own student days in the Physikalisches Institut took place before the fine large modern lecture hall, which is now in use, had been built. At that time there was no lecture room in the building at all adequate to accommodate his student audience. Typically, his lecture room began to fill long before the scheduled hour, and by the time the lecture began most of the aisle space was occupied by students and auditors. Certainly no more palatable form of learning could be imagined than one of SCHERRER's lectures. His demonstrations were always beautifully contrived and executed, and they endowed his equations with indelible form and substance. After three decades, some of these lecture demonstrations still stand out in my mind as vividly as if they had taken place yesterday.

When I was last in Zurich, a couple of years ago, Professor SCHERRER showed me his new large lecture auditorium and he performed for me a

number of new lecture demonstrations that were then being developed. His enthusiasm was infectious, and one could not escape the conclusion that he was as excited about his lecture in preparation, as his students would be when it was delivered. Although the seating capacity of this large amphitheatre looked adequate, I can easily imagine a standing-room-only crowd and the rapt expression of the audience at one of his striking lectures there.

Fortunate indeed the students who have been privileged to study under this great physicist and teacher. We must all acknowledge a debt of gratitude and a humble appreciation for our experience.