

Rike Majima

PROFESSOR RIKO MAJIMA.

On November 13th, 1934, Prof. Majima completed his sixtieth year and a feast in honour of him was given in Tokyo by his pupils, and in congratulation of this memorable day in his long life, a sum of contributions gathered among his pupils was presented to him, together with a souvenir of the occasion. On receiving it, he was good enough to give some part of it to the Chemical Society of Japan for the fund of a prize. Accordingly the Majima Prize was established, and from the year 1936 at every Annual Meeting of the Society, it shall be awarded to any person who has done an excellent work in organic chemistry or biochemistry. The papers collected in the present number of this Bulletin, all of which are the recent works of his pupils, are dedicated to Prof. Majima, and the expenses for publishing them are drawn from the same source.

Prof. Rikō Majima was born in Kyoto on the thirteenth day of November in 1874, as the eldest son of Toshitami Majima, a noted physician. His primary and middle school days were spent under his parents in this old city. Without finishing the middle school course, he came to Tokyo in order to prepare himself for the entrance examination of the First Higher School, which he passed successfully in 1890. Although in the middle school days he was rather a weak boy, he could now enjoy perfect health, for the restoration of which he tried every sports in his power: he was indeed once a member of the First Higher School Crew. It is evident that the health and the discipline given him by the sports enabled him to achieve the valuable works in later days. When he entered the Higher School he intended at first to make geology his life-work; but, advised by one of his seniors that his short-sightedness would be inconvenient for his study, he changed his course; and when he was admitted to the Tokyo Imperial University in 1896, he became a student in the Chemical Department of the Faculty of Science.

In the three years of the university life he studied inorganic chemistry under the late Prof. Edward Divers, physical chemistry and analytical chemistry under Prof. Kikunae Ikeda, and organic chemistry and part of physical chemistry under Prof. Joji Sakurai. He received also valuable instructions for the laboratory works from the late Prof. Tamemasa Haga, who had returned from Germany in 1898.

Immediately after his graduation in 1899, he was appointed Assistant and began to work under Prof. Sakurai. In 1903 he was promoted to the position of Assistant Professor. Thus Prof. Majima's research life was commenced, which, for convenience' sake, will be divided into three periods: the Tokyo period, the Sendai period, and the Osaka period.

One of his principal research objects in his Tokyo period was *urushiol*, the main constituent of Japan-lacquer.

In January 1907 he was ordered abroad for the study of inorganic chemistry, against his own interest in the organic branch. He was obedient to the order and his scheme was first to visit Prof. A. Werner, the brilliant initiator of the Co-ordination Theory. When he arrived in Europe, however, a telegram from the Japanese Government commanded him to take organic chemistry as his subject. This unexpected but agreeable change drove him immediately for Kiel from Zürich. It was quite natural that he should have done so, because at the Kiel University there was Prof. Harries, inventor of ozonolysis, probably the best method for the exploration of the constitution of urushiol.

At Kiel he was working hard upon terpene and partly upon urushiol. But unfortunately in the following year he suffered from influenza which brought pneumonia. Soon after recovery he was again infected with erysipelas which was followed by nephritis. Thus he was forced twice to lie in bed in the Kiel University Hospital. Then he had to stay at the noted spa Wildungen to ensure complete recovery. It was only after one complete summer semester had passed that he could return to the laboratory. His research work there was kept on again from the beginning of the winter semester of the year 1908 until the end of the summer in 1909.

From the winter semester of the year 1909 until the end of the summer in 1910, he stayed at Zürich under Prof. R. Willstätter, with whom he worked on some oxidation mechanism of aniline.

Then he went over to England to inspect the state of things in the study of chemistry and spent some time at the Davy-Faraday Research Laboratory of the Royal Institution in London. Then passing through the United States of America, he returned to Japan on March 3rd in the year 1911.

Just at that time the Faculty of Science of the Tōhoku Imperial University was newly founded at Sendai. ("Tōhoku" means north-east. This university is so called as Sendai is situated in the north-eastern part of Japan proper). The Faculty was ready to receive him in 1911 as one of the professors. Prof. Majima's Sendai period was thus begun and it was in this period that the works upon *urushiol* were published. For this research, in 1913 he was honoured with the Sakurai Prize from the Tokyo Chemical Society and then in 1917 with the Imperial Academy Prize from the Imperial Academy of Japan.

His research field, however, was not confined only to *urushiol*; he also found a new synthetical method for obtaining *indole* by a pyrogenetic reaction of *aniline* and *acetylene*. His endeavour was then naturally directed to the synthetical works upon various *indole* derivatives.

His interest was also directed to many natural colouring matters, e.g. shikonin, carthamin, and many other sorts of anthocyanins (studied partly with Miss C. Kuroda), mangostin and fukugetin (studied by M. Murakami); and also to synthetical pigments, e.g. some new classes of vat dyes (by M. Nakanishi) and various sorts of photographic sensitizers (by T. Ogata and S. Sakurai). They should specially be cited, as those studies were all executed in Prof. Majima's laboratory under his zealous encouragement.

In his endeavour to elucidate the constitution of aconitine, Prof. Majima showed a fair example of his character, or the spirit fighting against a difficult problem to explore the mystery wrapped in it.

Aconitine, the alkaloid of aconitum roots, has many hydroxyl-groups and, indeed, an unparallelled complex nature. Prof. Majima began the study in collaboration with T. Suginome, S. Morio, and H. Shimanuki, and is still continuing it step by step assisted by K. Tamura. Assuredly the difficulties of isolating the aconitine in pure state greatly puzzled him in his earlier experiments, but his strenuous efforts brought him a clear decisive result. He could isolate the four sorts of aconitines, i.e. aconitine, mesaconitine, hypaconitine, and jesaconitine, in pure forms, from about sixteen different species of aconitum plants.

In 1926 he was elected Member of the Imperial Academy of Japan, and although he was rather a man in the laboratory, he was compelled gradually to take up many administrative responsibilities with relation to the universities in Japan. He became, in 1926, the Director of the Faculty of Science of the Tōhoku Imperial University, which post he held until 1928. He was appointed, in 1927, head of the Organizing Committee of the Science Faculty of the Hokkaido Imperial University which was to be established at Sapporo, and he was, in 1930, appointed Director of that newly opened Faculty, in which post, however, he remained only for a year, as an additional one to the professorship at Sendai. Meanwhile he was also a member of the Organizing Committee of the Department of the Dyestuff-Chemistry of the Tokyo University of Engineering.

In 1931 he was again a member of the Organizing Committee, this time, of the Faculty of Science of the Osaka Imperial University, and was appointed Professor and Director of this new faculty since its foundation in 1932. In 1933, he and his family left Sendai, where they had lived twenty-two long years, and removed to Osaka. Thus his Osaka period was begun.

It is the present writer's happy duty to report that he is still assiduously engaged in his research works on *aconitines*, etc., in his new laboratory, with the same health and energy as were enjoyed in his Sendai period. He

may perhaps thus be making good for the time long lost in the administrative affairs in the various universities.

Outside the universities he has been also active since 1917 as a member of the research staff of the Institute of Physical and Chemical Research, Tokyo; since 1920 as a member of the National Research Council of Japan ("Gakujutu Kenkyu Kaigi"); and since 1933 as a member of a committee of the Foundation for the Promotion of Scientific and Industrial Research of Japan ("Nippon Gakujutu Sinko Kai"). In 1924 Prof. Majima was sent to the Fifth Conference of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry held at Copenhagen as the delegate of the National Research Council of Japan. In 1927 he was elected Honorary Member of the Chemical Society of Holland.

Prof. Majima's life is not complete if his literary work is left unmentioned. It is the compilation of the complete abstracts of Japanese chemical literatures. For this painstaking work he received donations from the "Keimei Kai" Foundation and was also given contributions from many supporters. Consequently he was able to found a society called "Nippon Kagaku Kenkyu Kai'' in 1926, with the sole purpose of continuing the work already commenced as early as 1918 and of publishing the materials thus accumulated. In the year 1927 the first product of his endeavours appeared in the form of a book entitled "Nippon Kagaku Sōran" Vol. I, which covers the period of 1877-1900. Since then Vol. II (1901-1908), Vol. III (1909-1913), Vol. IV (1914-1017) and Vol. V (1918-1921) have all been published. Besides these a monthly magazine with the same title has also been edited by him. It publishes the complete abstracts of the current Japanese chemical literatures, beginning with the year 1927. The gap between the year 1922 and 1926 will be filled with two more volumes of the "Nippon Kagaku Sōran" which are now ready in press. Needless to say, these publications were received with enthusiasm by the Japanese chemists as well as by the whole circles of the scientists in the country.

The green old age of Prof. Majima, who has played such an important rôle in promoting the scientific education and research in Japan and especially served in elevating his special domain of organic chemistry in this country up to the present state, should heartily be congratulated not only by his pupils but by all the Japanese chemists, wishing on their part for his further aid for the future advancement of chemistry in Japan.

Sin'iti KAWAI.

February, 1936.

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