

LUIGI SACCONI

*(From the speech of Prof. E. Ferroni, past Rector of the University of Florence and professor of Physical Chemistry, presented at the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno on April 24, 1981; translated by the Editor)*

Luigi Sacconi is well known in the international scientific community of chemists, particularly among inorganic chemists. Those who have known him, either personally or through his papers, have appreciated the quality of his results obtained through rigorous method, thorough research, and concise presentation. These qualities clearly also appear in his teaching where he has been heavily engaged.

Luigi Sacconi was born on 28 February, 1911, in a village (S. Croce sull'Arno) between Florence and Pisa. He has been assistant professor at the Universities of Parma, Turin, and finally Florence since 1944, when I met him as a student. But those were hard times for the country and Sacconi was deeply involved in the fight for the liberation of Florence. He was co-director of the *Nazione del Popolo*, the newspaper of central Italy, from 1944 to 1947. After this experience, Sacconi switched to full time research, not just because of the facilities provided by the Institute of Chemistry but for, I believe, two other reasons. One is based on the nature of science: the essential goal of science is the search for truth; science is a good, worthy of being loved since through knowledge, man seeks perfection. The second reason is that he was attracted, like most of us, by a subtle but captivating force present in classrooms and laboratories, a force which stimulates and exalts; this force derives from the attention paid by the students. Their disposition and will to learn, stimulate us to improve, to overcome any difficulty. I am certain therefore that in contrast to the lack of material things, the most precious was there: the human element.

At that time, I was a volunteer assistant. I remember his first work on indirect colorimetry (1948) and the notes on inorganic chromatographic absorption; notes which were published in the *Gazzetta Chimica Italiana* in Italian, which was usual at that time. In 1949 his first note on coordination chemistry appeared in the *Rend. Acad. Lincei*: Magnetic Researches on Some Complexes of Uranium(IV) with coordination number eight. In 1949 the results of his research on the mechanism of chromatographic absorption of inorganic compounds on alumina were accepted for presentation at the Symposium organized by the Faraday Society. His research on molybdenum blue, published in *J. Chem. Phys.*, received the deserved attention of the

experts, since the diamagnetism was accounted for in terms of Mo(V)–Mo(V) bonds, each molybdenum having an unpaired electron. This mechanism was later confirmed in an extensive study of the system by H.B. Gray.

In 1954 the Faculty of Science of the University of Palermo called Luigi Sacconi, who had won a national competition for full-professorship positions, to the chair of General and Inorganic Chemistry, which had been held by S. Cannizzaro. In 1960 he accepted a chair in Florence at the Faculty of Science and founded the Istituto di Chimica Generale ed Inorganica. At the same time he started building up a CNR Lab which was formally recognised as a CNR Institution in 1968.

Luigi Sacconi has directed both the CNR Lab and the University Institute, letting them develop in a synergistic symbiosis. Numerous are the postdoctorals from throughout the world who came to Florence to work under his guidance, as well as many professors who spent their sabbatical leaves in his laboratory.

Numerous also are the awards he has received: the award "The President of the Republic" (1977), which is the highest recognition in Italy, the award G. Paternò of the Italian Chemical Society (1974), the golden medal of the Ministry for Public Education, the Tchugaev Diploma of the Academy of Science of U.S.S.R., the Dwyer medal of the University of New South Wales, Australia, etc. He is a member of the Accademia dei Lincei, and of other Accademies, among which are "Le Arti del Disegno" and "La Colombaria". Thirteen pupils of his are now full Professors in Italy, and many others are in high positions in industry.

In conclusion, the development of science and its propagation owe much to Luigi Sacconi. Also, the City of Florence maintains a feeling of gratitude to Luigi Sacconi as a fighter for freedom. Indeed, freedom and culture are inseparable concepts or, better, they are synonymous with the dignity of Man and his ambitions.