

CRISTOFOR SIMIONESCU – A MAN IN THE SERVICE OF HIS NATION

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*“I am demanding of myself and capable of sacrifice
for the progress of my nation's spirituality.”
Acad. Cristofor Simionescu*

Academician Cristofor Simionescu was destined to be born in a house of teachers, “teachers for the children of peasants”.

The parents – the “smart, hardworking and caring” mother was a graduate of the prestigious Normal School, and “the school man, stern but fair” father – were “hardworking and devoted missionaries to the school, full of energy, close to the peasants, serious and orderly.”

These would be the values in which the child Cristofor Simionescu was educated.

Prestigious schools, such as the “Ștefan cel Mare” High School in Suceava or the „National Lyceum” in Iași, which he attended, have left their mark on his personality.

Going back in time, remembering his teachers, but also his own long-life experience, he would say that “between teacher's and student's soul an invisible, immaterial cloth is woven, which takes shape in the deeds of schoolchildren when they become adults.”

As a young student, he has the chance of being close to great personalities, whom he always evoked with respect and gratitude, and whom he had as “good advisers”. This is how he chose Professor Gheorghe Alexa to be the supervisor of his dissertation work on “The action of alkaline hydroxides on cellulose fibers”, a subject initially approached by the Nobel laureate, polymer science father Hermann Standinge, the first study of this type approached in Romania.

Starting with the year 1943, he became an assistant at the Faculty of Chemistry of the Iași Polytechnic Institute and, after defending his doctoral thesis, coordinated by the same professor – Gheorghe Alexa – in 1945, he began to publish in Romania and scientific papers that promoted him to associate professor and director of studies, professional positions in which he stood out through creativity, talent, determination, organizational spirit and a huge ability to initiate and complete projects for education.

Understanding the importance of further scientific and applied developments, Professor Cristofor Simionescu launched the school of macromolecular compounds in Romania, whose creator he was and which he raised to the level of major performance.

Academician Cristofor Simionescu is the creator of the school of cellulose and paper, and also of scientific fields such as polysaccharide chemistry, polymer mechano-chemistry, plasma chemistry, synthesis and study of precursors of living matter, synthesis and valorification of vegetable proteins, complexing with metals to obtain semiconductor polymers, he developed the theory of conduction in organic compounds, the synthesis of polymers by electrochemical ionic methods, studies on copolymerization and synthesis of sequenced polymers, etc.

Equally, he had important achievements in the synthesis of bi- and polyfunctional initiators, in obtaining drugs with macromolecular structure, in the field of enzymes immobilized on macromolecular compounds.

He published, as single author or together with his collaborators, over 800 papers, for which he collected approximately 4,500 citations and a Hirsch index 29 in the Web of Science 13 years after his death, which highlights, once again, the relevance of the topics addressed.

Under the leadership of academician Cristofor Simionescu, the Institute of Chemistry of the Romanian Academy was transformed into the “Petru Poni” Institute of Macromolecular Chemistry of today, one of the best research institutes in Romania and beyond, his efforts being continued by the team led by academician Bogdan Simionescu.

Academician Cristofor Simionescu was a complete and complex personality. Head of department, director in the Ministry of Education led by academician Ilie Murgulescu, rector of the “Gheorghe Asachi” University of Technical Sciences for 23 years, coordinator of over 100 doctoral theses, elected member of numerous academies and international scientific forums are only some of the responsibilities he has honored.

He opened the internationalization of education and scientific research in Romania by participating to and organizing numerous scientific events abroad and in the country.

He has been an editor-in-charge and creator of scientific *journals* (*Cellulose Chemistry and Technology*, *Memoirs of the Scientific Sections of the Romanian Academy*) and member of many editorial boards of a series of prestigious national and international publications.

He was also a man of the citadel, with an admirable involvement through his vast culture, his exceptional scientific training, his sharp and penetrating spirit, his clear, reasoned formulation of some expected solutions.

The entire activity of academician Cristofor Simionescu was appreciated, recognized and distinguished with numerous awards, diplomas and medals in Romania and also in France, Slovakia, Cuba, Bulgaria, USA, etc.

I met academician Cristofor Simionescu as a member of the Engineering Commission II of the National Council for Academic Evaluation and Accreditation, at a time when higher education was in an excessive process of expansion and it was absolutely necessary to introduce rigor in compliance with the rules on quality assurance of the educational process.

I discovered not only the scientist I knew from his scientific work, but also the teacher concerned about the exigency that had to be imposed on those in charge with the training of young generations.

I had many things to learn from academician Cristofor Simionescu, because he was the right man at the right place and at the right time.

His experience with the principles and criteria to be followed was both useful and necessary for those who took on the huge responsibility of initiating curricula in higher education, especially for universities where one could not speak of tradition.

The activity of the scientist, the experience gained from the positions of head of department, director of studies, vice-rector and rector allowed him to formulate the most suitable solutions.

Those who stood around him always had to learn from the one who proved to us, on any intervention and situation, that he was a remarkable school builder.

In his turn, academician Cristofor Simionescu told how much admiration and respect he had for academician Ilie Murgulescu, one of the renowned ministers of education in Romania.

Academician Cristofor Simionescu put all his energy, skills and intelligence in the service of his nation, his whole life being registered in the gallery of great Romanian personalities, as a reference model and a landmark for all those who decided to put themselves in the service of Alma Mater.

If through education we pass from darkness to light, academician Cristofor Simionescu has made a major contribution to the transition to light of many generations of young people.

Academician Cristofor Simionescu dedicated his entire life to raising his people through education, as other great Romanians have contributed over the centuries. In their memory, we bow our heads respectfully.