



Prof. SELMAN ABRAHAM WAKSMAN

Obituary

August 16, 1973, Prof. SELMAN ABRAHAM WAKSMAN returned to the soil.

He was born in Priluka, near Kiev, Russia on July 22, 1888. After attending a school in Odessa, he left for the United States and entered Rutgers College of the State of New Jersey in 1911. A B. Sc. degree was given him in 1915 and Dr. J. G. LIPMAN appointed him as a Research Assistant at the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station until he obtained his M. Sc. degree in 1916. He received a Ph. D. in 1918 at the University of California where he served as a Research Fellow in biochemistry. In the same year, Dr. LIPMAN invited him back as a microbiologist at the Experiment Station and a Lecturer in soil microbiology at the College. In 1925, he became an Associate Professor and in 1930 a Professor. In 1931, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts State invited him to organize a Division of Marine Bacteriology and he retained this position until 1942 at the same time holding his positions at Rutgers. In 1940, Rutgers organized Department of Microbiology and he became Professor of Microbiology and its Chairman of the Department, where his famous streptomycin was discovered in 1944. The Trustees of Rutgers University voted to establish the Institute of Microbiology, as major position whose funds was derived from the royalty of streptomycin, and he became the first Director of the Institute retiring in 1958.

He was a highly versatile scientist with a broad scope of interests. His initial work was in soil microbiology, including microbial population in soil, microbiological oxidation of sulfur, nature and formation of humus or manure with reference to decomposition of plant or animal residues, and extended to marine microbes in the sea. It was particularly focused on antibiotics and actinomycetes with special reference to taxonomy, physiology and biochemistry.

The results of his work have been highly esteemed and he was honored with a Nobel Prize in 1952 for his contribution to the conquest of tuberculosis. He received more than 60 prizes, awards and medals, and more than 20 honorary degrees. His books of the Actinomycetes are indispensable for scientists working in the field of antibiotics and soil microbiology. His autobiography *My Life with the Microbe*, was translated in Japanese, Yugoslav and French.

He loved nature, human beings and young scientists. He contributed a considerable amount of funds to promote the Foundation for Microbiology in the United States, Europe and Japan, particularly to support research and publications by young microbiologists, and to establish scholarships for immigrant students. He will be missed a great deal.

(Y. OKAMI)