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BOOK REVIEW

The Chemistry of Optically Active Sulfur Compounds, by Abraham Nudelman. Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, New York-London-Montreux-Paris-Tokyo. 1984. IX + 253 pp. $58.00.

Anyone who has lived through a good deal of the history of optically active sulfur compounds is likely to lapse into a somewhat nostalgic mood on leafing through Dr. Nudelman's recently published volume: here one witnesses the growth of a well-defined species, termed 'the optically active sulfur compound', from its seedling state to that of an impressive, yet still youthful tree, engendered by a group of 'gardeners', acting in unison to bring about the transformation. Most of these will undoubtedly recognize the first four parts of the volume as reprints of previously published reviews, together covering the period 1929–1977; the fifth, and last, part represents a supplement, summarizing the development during 1978–1979. Future updated coverage of the literature is foreshadowed in the Introduction.

The present format, however convenient for the user, is not *a priori* above reproach. Generally, duplicate publication, notably, as here, in the form of a monograph close to the economic reach of most individual scientists, is hardly to be encouraged and one may wonder whether Dr. Nudelman's laudable initiative has found its optimal and ultimate, future form.

This said, there can be no doubt that the present volume constitutes a handy, useful, and reliable source of information regarding chiral sulfur compounds displaying optical activity solely because of their contents of configurationally stable tri- and tetra-coordinated sulfur atoms. The various types of such compounds are discussed under separate headings, prefaced in each part by brief but useful lists of contents. The resolutions of chiral sulfonium salts in the year 1900, independently announced by Smiles, and Pope & Peachey, mark the beginning of the era of optically active sulfur compounds. About 25 years later, J. Kenyon and his pupils produced the first optically active sulfoxides, *N*-toluenesulfonylsulfimides, and sulfinates. Together, these contributions form the backdrop for the present volume reviews, dealing with the 40-year period, 1929–1969, on altogether 36 pages. The scope of the subsequent 2- og 3-years periods: 1970–1, 26 p.; 1971–3, 43 p.; 1974–7, 78 p.; and 1978–9, 54 p., tellingly attests to the rapid development within this area. Qualitatively, in the sense that well-nigh 40 individual classes of optically active sulfur compounds are on record today; quantitatively, through a more penetrating and detailed insight into their structural parameters, energy states, and chemistry. The number of pages needed to cover the penicillin sulfoxides, and related compounds, is truly astounding, but, in fact, represents just another illustration of the pre-eminent rôle played by optically active sulfur compounds in modern synthetic chemistry.

Throughout the volume the text is abundantly accompanied by structural formulae, in itself a helpful device, but also, alas, a source of irritation, because of the totally non-consistent, in many places almost undecipherable, typography. If a lower limit

exists as to what a reader of organic-chemical formulae should be prepared to accept, we are here, I am afraid, perilously near to it.

For the many organic chemists, interested in optically active sulfur compounds, the present volume can be recommended as a reliable and handy source of information covering the 'formative' 50-year period 1929–1979. The same readership is eagerly awaiting a continued coverage of the same topic, if possible in a somewhat different and aesthetically more pleasing garb.

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