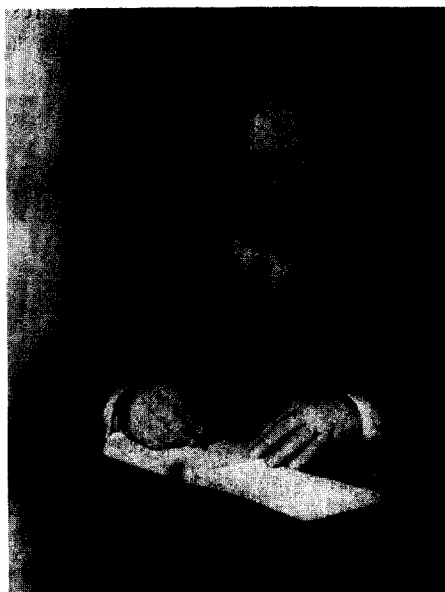


OBITUARY



LÉON VELLUZ 1904-1981

Born in Bourg in 1904 of stock from the Savoy, Léon Velluz studied pharmacy at Lyon. Attracted at the same time by both Organic Chemistry and Biology, Velluz prepared his doctorate Thesis under the direction of the famous Victor Grignard.

In 1931, at the age of 27 years, he was appointed Professor at the "Ecole Militaire de Santé du Val de Grâce".

Whilst discharging efficiently his teaching duties, Léon Velluz undertook also research at the Collège de France as a member of the team directed by the late Professor C. Dufraisse. The subject of the work was the study of the photooxides of rubrene and other anthracene derivatives.

In 1941 Dr. Gaston Roussel invited Professor Velluz to become Scientific Director of his Company, the "Usines Chimiques des Laboratoires Français (UCLAF)". It is in this role that Velluz created from nothing what became the research centre of Roussel-Uclaf, nowadays giving employment to nearly a thousand.

Léon Velluz, aware that industrial progress could only result from efficient scientific research, attracted to the Centre many skillful and gifted collaborators, who made fundamental contributions to Science at the same time as they developed industrial processes.

In the 1940s Velluz and his collaborators prepared the sexual hormones from cholesterol and then, in 1950, obtained cortisone starting with cholic acid from bile. It is a tribute to Velluz and his team that this synthesis, three decades later, is still a practical and economic one.

At the same time Velluz initiated an industrial total synthesis of chloramphenicol, made possible by an original method of resolution introduced for this purpose.

In 1948, he recognised for the first time the existence of precalciferol, the key intermediate in the photochemical transformation of ergosterol into calciferol (Vitamin D₂). The isolation and characterisation of precalciferol permitted Velluz to modify the Windaus scheme for the interrelationship of the isomers of Vitamin D, which had been universally accepted in the preceding decade.

Under the inspiring direction of Léon Velluz the research teams at Roussel-Uclaf succeeded in total syntheses on an industrial scale of 10-methoxydeserpidine (a hypotensive agent), of 19-norsteroids (especially derivatives with increasing biological activity) and of biodegradable pyrethrinoids.

Conscious of the importance of physical methods of analysis in Synthetic Organic Chemistry, Léon Velluz ordered the construction of the Dichrograph, the first efficient instrument for the measurement of circular dichroism.

All the collaborators of Velluz at Roussel-Uclaf were encouraged to publish the results of their work, an unusual policy for an industrial Company. This tradition survived the departure of Velluz in 1968 and has continued to the present day.

Léon Velluz was Membre de l'Académie des Sciences and President d'Honneur de la Société Chimique de France. He received "la grande Médaille d'Or de la Société d'Encouragement de l'Industrie Nationale".

JEAN MATHIEU