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Maria Skłodowska-Curie – scientist, friend, manager

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Great names in science represent an inexhaustible source and richness of inspiration, satisfaction and consolation, a moving and victorious force. Throughout her exemplifying life, Maria Skłodowska remained modest but with a keen sense of humor, of an outstanding style, a mine of knowledge and experience, of innovative ideas and a rich inner life. Full of love, of passion to give and to share, of natural optimism, mixed with a light melancholy, so typical for sages. She vehemently defended the love of scientific research, of the spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship and fought for international culture, for the protection of personality and talent. Maria Skłodowska left her passion to science, her dedication to work including education and training of young people, her passionate adherence to her family, her belief in her friends, her pure and profound humanity and warmth!

The paper should be a homage to her, an appreciation of her work over the years, but not less a correspondence, a conversation with her! On the other hand, the present solemn occasion resuscitates the personalities of Maria and Pierre Curie and their work, in particular of Maria Skłodowska in her own native land! In this manner, it truly contributes to her immortality!

Key words: Maria Skłodowska-Curie, science, humanity, legacy.

Life is short, and the art – long,
 The occasion – instant,
 Experiment – perilous,
 Decision – difficult!

Harvard Medical School
Vanderbilt Hall

Progress is like art: it does not represent a process of repetition nor restoration: the product comes out from those who are first, who are leading – all others are following them, they are continuators, they come in as the *arriere-garde*! In any case, however, they are late! Nowadays, the processes in every field of life are steadily accelerated. Based on that fact, the criterion emerges about the capacity for an adequate and dynamic development in today's ever changing society.

The creative process consists of tradition and transformation: the good and always enriched tradition, the common habit to have an outbelching enthusiasm and a creative inspiration for a permanent advancement! However, to that end, one needs mental and moral intrepidity, intellectual courage, creative daring, willingness to self-sacrifice.

Individuals, who preserve and continuously develop traditions and refract them in the light of the new time, persons who draw bridges between 'classical' invariants and attractive moderns and from that, filter the fertile and resistant and sustainable seeds; with their continuity will remain *avantgardists*!

The audience felt and saw the 'sister' of Prometheus as the great Sarah Bernhardt once read the *Ode to Madame Curie*.

Labor omnia vincit improbus

Great names in science remind us of crossings, where individuals meet, who until that moment were foreign and unknown to each other. Their souls, however, contain some mutual affinity! These voyagers along life's journey come close to each other and join by immediate friendship which will persist unambiguous through time and space. This probability is the latent and invincible power of humanity! Notwithstanding, science doesn't know any borders, doesn't need a visa; it still represents an inexhaustible source and richness of inspiration, satisfaction and consolation, a moving and victorious force. It could be property of the whole world, of each of our communities. Loaded with

audacious will and initiative, of intense community, Maria and Pierre wished and stated: *«The forces carrying the progress are the forces of science. Everybody, man or woman, whom we are instructing in the spirit of science and whom we are preparing for science, are votary of science!»* The work of both researchers was exciting – a symbol of positive activity and open-mindedness, their findings fascinating. Maria Skłodowska vehemently defended the love of scientific research, of the spirit of adventure and entrepreneurship. She fought for international culture, which respects diverse national cultures, for the protection of personality and talent – a herald, a forerunner of the European Union with its scientific and cultural policies.

«Only those, who, from probe to probe, step by step, could see and realize the unceasing merciless struggle for every detail of perfection!... Only those could imagine the price of that perfection... It is a sacral torture, an apostolic service, ...it is rather an ever lasting beginning, a creative necessity!» These words remind of science and Madame Curie, even more of her total devotion to her work and education and, at the same time a lesson how to balance between work and recreation! Endowed by nature with cultural and humanitarian foresight, she wanted to know and to master each situation – perfect organizer, excellent manager, who steadily cared for every detail, for the collective efforts to turn ideals into reality!

The great spiritual power of science initiates and promotes the struggle for disarmament and peace, *«which struggle is a very heavy task and which must be served with many efforts and the readiness for self-sacrifice!»*. Madame Curie advocated the benefits of the discoveries, their human dimensions and values, how to achieve results across political, religious, ethnic and business divisions, to a greater wealth of society. She was conscious of the use and misuse of the scientific achievements: *«An intellectual worker has to be a unremitting defender of civilization and freedom of thinking.»* In this manner, somehow she placed the torch of truth in the hands of her son-in-law, Frederic J. Curie, and pioneered the road to Pugwash!

Throughout her life, Maria remained modest but with a keen sense of humor, of an outstanding style, a mine of knowledge and experience, of thought-driven goals and innovative ideas and a rich inner life. She was full of love, of passion to give and to share, of natural optimism, mixed with a light melancholy, so typical for sages. Madame Curie sticks in the minds unique with the integrity of her human and passionate nature. It certainly is the noble aureole around her name – the legend, which will never be extinguished as long as the human race needs purity and trust in itself! J. P. Sartre said:

“Freedom doesn't consist in doing what you want rather in doing what you can!” Maria Skłodowska in fact was a free person!

Vita sal amititia est

To write about a talent and something more, about a genius is a very prickly task, particularly difficult but extremely responsible! Somebody who passes beyond, who steps toward eternity, and who still had so many objectives, so many aims, so many intentions to be realized... Madame Curie recapitulated over her younger years: *«...of limited means and modest progress – we couldn't hope to establish a new world without improving the individuals. With this in mind, every one of us, should work for his own improvement and take over his responsibility in our common life. Our social duty is to help those, to whom we could be the most helpful.»* Giant of spirit, she imposed a unmatched spartan way of life, following the principle: *«never let one's self be beaten down by persons or by events.»*

On the one hand, humanity in action – she never tired to participate in the life of another, of her own family, of friends, of colleagues, she stayed true and reliable in joy and suffering! She always had a friendly advice, a helping hand, always ready to support and help honestly with no ulterior motives. All this presupposes sincerity and confidence, comprehension for mutual and efficient assistance. Commemorating her, Albert Einstein wrote once: *«Marie Curie is, of all celebrated beings, the one whom fame has not corrupted!»* On the other hand, it would be a homage to her, an appreciation of her work over the years, but not less a correspondence, a conversation with her!

Maria Skłodowska left her passion to science, her dedication to work including the education and training of young people, her passionate adherence to her family, her belief in her friends, her pure and profound humanity and warmth! “Une femme honorable”, qui vaut et va valoir ce qu'elle voulait! – after P.Valéry

Speech, words are given to express love. After this is done, they are superfluous; however, they aren't the only thing to last for ever. It is like in a museum: the exposition gives an impression about the age, time and landmark, a panorama of the events and subjects, a gallery of images, of witnesses of far-off days, but... the exhibits can not revive nor bring closer any soul, any atmosphere! Maria used to say to impudent reporters: *«In science we rather are interested in things and not in individuals!»* Travelling to USA was a vivid cautionary lesson to her: she learned that people and

nations even governments are interested in the things through the individuals. It only is the individual who could enliven the surroundings! One remains in the memory of relatives, friends, colleagues with the traces of the work, the example, the souvenirs, also of those who were lucky to live in the proximity or at least to know this person.

“Garden, flowers, smell, peace”: the whole country kept silent not to disturb the last hours and minutes of its estimable child. Without formal speeches, without processions and ceremonies, in absence of officials Madame Curie took her place in the house of the deceased, to undergo ascension into the Pantheon of immortals, devoted their life and work to humanity, into the sanctuary of mankind's memory – the first woman who has been laid to rest under the famous dome of the Pantheon in Paris for her own merits.

The present solemn occasion resuscitates the personalities of Marie and Pierre Curie and their work, in particular of Maria Skłodowska in her own native land! In this manner, it truly contributes to her immortality!

We live in a critical and tense time – a time of fundamental changes, economic, social and cultural mutations. What is remaining for us and the generations to come: to unite the scientific community, to join our hands and efforts in the struggle to surmount the barriers, to overcome the constraints which face our human interrelations, to meet and master the challenges of the 3rd Millennium!

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