

# Smoler, Ivan

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## Wiktor Kemula in Prague

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



Ivan Smoler\*  
(Praha)

## WIKTOR KEMULA IN PRAGUE

I would like to remind the first visit of Prof. Kemula, then a young scientist, to Pague. So far I remember, it was in 1929. One day, Prof. Heyrovský received a letter from Prof. Tołłoczko from Lwów, announcing the arrival of his pupil, Mr Kemula, to the Institute of Physical Chemistry of the Charles' University in Prague. Prof. Heyrovský read this letter, written in Polish, at the regular five-o'clock-tea held in the Institute. It was a custom of Prof. Heyrovský to discuss all news with his co-workers over the cup of tea. In his letter, Prof. Tołłoczko wrote that a young man of science – I remember the original sentence: „*młody mąż, żądny wiedzy*” – will come to Heyrovský's Institute to study polarography.

Indeed, this *young man of science* appeared soon in our Institute. At once he gained the hearts of all colleagues by his open, cheerful, optimistic mode, with a characteristic smile in his twitching eyes.

Soon, he entered into the life of our Institute, and we felt him as one of our team. After a short time he could speak Czech. The slavonic languages show, however, many treacherous similarities and pitfalls. Once Mr. Kemula told us about the visit of Marshall Piłsudski in their laboratory. To the end of the visit all stood in line, while Piłsudski walked along and shook hands with everyone. Here Mr Kemula made a pause. One of us impatiently asked: „and then – what?”

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\* Dr Ivan Smoler (1901\$1990), was a close co-worker of Prof. Jaroslav Heyrovský in Prague, then research worker in the J. Heyrovský Institute of Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry. This is his talk at the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of Prof. Wiktor Kemula, held in Gdańsk, 1983).

Mr Kemula answered: „*co potem? Potem poszedł...*” In Polish this meant: he departed – but we burst in laugh; in Czech namely, *pošel* – means perished, died (as an animal)\*. Soon, however, Mr Kemula mastered fluently Czech, and we lost the matter for fun.

Mr Kemula worked in Heyrovský's laboratory with much skill and – what should be especially emphasized – with much enthusiasm, which was very characteristic of him. Soon he got interesting results. To study the reversibility of electrode processes, he constructed an apparatus for automatic alternation of the poles of the polarographic circuit. This idea was later used by Kalousek – also a pupil of Prof. Heyrovský – for construction of the well known Kalousek's alternator, and for ample studies of reversible processes. Still later, Barker in England used the same idea for his square-wave polarograph which greatly increased the sensitivity of the method.

Further, Mr Kemula studied the maxima in mercury salts solutions, and contributed to the problem of polarographic maxima. Later he found an exaltation of polarographic currents in solutions with no supporting electrolyte. All these results were referred to on the regular polarographic colloquia, and then published in the *Collection of Czechoslovak Chemical Communications* – the journal newly founded by Prof. Heyrovský and Prof. Votoček for publishing Czech and Slovak chemical papers in English or French.

Mr Kemula, later professor at the Warsaw University, visited Prague many times, before and after the war. He took part in trips, organised by Prof. Heyrovský in Czechoslovakia and abroad, and also in many polarographic congresses and symposia. Also our scientists found always a friendly reception in Warsaw at Prof. Kemula's Institute.

Prof. Kemula never abandoned the field of polarography. He introduced a new method – the chromato-polarography, which found wide applications. He constructed an arrangement for the study on a hanging mercury drop electrode, a method which proved to be very productive nowadays.

Mr Kemula never lost contacts with the Polarographic Institute in Prague. We had many visitors from all corners of the World: from most European countries, from America, Australia, Africa; but only Prof. Kemula was always treated as a member of the Polarographic Institute. The early pupils of Prof. Heyrovský: Brdička, Ilkovič, Herasymenko, Gosman, Varasova and others – all have gone, nothing is left from the first 10 years of polarography. But the new and newest generation of polarographic workers know well and highly esteem Prof. Kemula, who up to these days shows a steady interest in polarography, and remains on the top of this branch of science.

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\* In Polish it would be „*zdechł*”...