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ACCEPTANCE OF THE ROEBLING MEDAL OF THE
MINERALOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA FOR 1969

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Julian:

It was January 1, of this year, when I saw on my desk in the Institut a letter, sent by the MSA. My first reaction—having always a bad conscience—was: “Hell, what a beginning for the New Year”, because I thought, it would be a second reminder for something I had not paid for in the last year. But when I opened the letter and read, that the MSA had decided to award me the Roebbling Medal—and the only thing, I would have to do, would be to declare that I would accept it, the whole world changed, and I felt a wonderful beginning of the New Year.

I may here state, that this letter was a very great surprise for me, because I could think immediately of many persons, who would deserve this honor more than I.

Thus, if I had been honest, I would have refused to accept. But I was not honest—and accepted—thinking thankfully of all those men, who tried hard to make a mineralogist out of me.

Before I mention some of these, I might tell you in short, how I got interested in minerals at all. My oldest brother collected butterflies, and the other brother beetles. And when I came into the age, when boys want to collect something: butterflies and beetles were out for me, and I had to look for something else. At first I decided to collect spiders. But soon I decided to collect something more beautiful, and I turned to stones. Pretty soon, at the age of about 12, I had quite a collection—but I did not know all the names. Among this collection there was one piece, especially beautiful, and therefore I went to the Mineralogical Institute of the University of Göttingen for help. The doorman told me: you have to see Herrn Geheimrat Mügge! I trembled somewhat, but I went to him.

Mügge was very friendly and said: “Dies ist ein Feldspat”—and when I wanted to know more about it, he said: it is monoclinic and has the chemical composition $KAlSi_3O_8$. Although this sounded very enigmatic to me, I learned it by heart and I never forgot it. After finishing high school, I intended to study mineralogy, but my father opposed, and said, “I disapprove, because, as a mineralogist you will never be able to earn your living, unless you become a professor, but that sounds out of reach.”

So I had to study "geology"—on the other hand, the lectures of Mügge fascinated me so much, that I managed to persuade my father, to agree that I might study mineralogy as the main subject. But at this time, Mügge became Emeritus and advised me that it would be better for me to look for another university. So I decided on Zurich where Paul Niggli was teaching. I went to Zurich with the intention of specializing in petrology. But Niggli's crystallography pleased me more, and so I specialised in crystallography.

After my Ph.D. Niggli offered me a Research Assistantship. But not being Swiss, he could guarantee me this post only for a limited time.

In the meantime, Mügge was succeeded by Viktor Moritz Goldschmidt who offered me a permanent assistantship in Göttingen. So I went back to Göttingen, feeling very fortunate, because I had with Niggli a training in theoretical crystallography and with Goldschmidt a training in experimental crystallography. At that time I got interested in the crystal chemistry of metallic compounds, and I worked with such materials nearly exclusively for about 15 years, till I got the opportunity to come to Chicago in 1948.

Having met in the metals work several interesting kinds of disorder, I thought microcline should show such too: and thus, my first x-ray photograph in Chicago was one of a crosshatched twinned microcline crystal. I thought this would be my first and last microcline photograph, but this was my first mistake in the feldspar work, as thousands of photographs had to follow, to clarify some doubtful points, and other mistakes followed too.

If the mistakes were kept to a minimum, it was due to the so very fruitful collaboration and friendship with Julian R. Goldsmith, and I doubt that I had continued with feldspar work if he would not have been in Chicago.

It is therefore, for me a special pleasure that he presented me today to you.

I accept the Roebling Medal with my most cordial thanks to the MSA. Thank you.