

Kapitza in Cambridge and Moscow: Life and Letters of a Russian Physicist



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The unusual career of the famous Soviet physicist Peter Kapitza was divided between Cambridge and Moscow. In Cambridge he was a protegé of Rutherford and while studying there he opened up a new area of research in magnetism and low temperature physics. However, in 1934, during a summer visit to the Soviet Union, Kapitza was prevented from returning to Cambridge and remained in Moscow for the rest of his long life. In spite of many ups and downs and considerable difficulties in his relations with top political figures in the Kremlin, he continued to enhance his scientific reputation and late in life was awarded the Nobel Prize.

After an introductory biographical memoir, the greater part of the book consists of extracts from the numerous letters Kapitza wrote throughout his life, letters which are distinguished by their eloquence, the originality of his opinions and his forthrightness. His very interesting correspondence with Rutherford and above all his many letters to top political figures in the Soviet Union such as Molotov, Stalin and Khrushchev on questions of scientific and industrial policy are all included in this unique document. Together they provide a rounded picture of a remarkable personality who contributed so much to the scientific and cultural life of both England and the Soviet Union.

This fascinating book is illustrated with an impressive collection of historical photographs and should be of interest to science historians, to low temperature physicists and to `Sovietologists', but above all the book should appeal to the general reader for its human interest. Some of the letters reveal his emotional reactions to the major blows he had to suffer on several occasions, while others provide penetrating and often amusing comments on English life and institutions as seen by a Russian, and on Soviet life from the inside.

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