

Would you mind telling us about your present experience?

‘Well, yes, I am! I remember being surprised that when Philip Hall retired, he stopped doing mathematics – he said he wanted to pursue his interests in history. In my case I have had no doubts that I want to go on doing mathematics, and being a part of the international mathematical scene, as long as possible.

Sometimes I am surprised that I am so busy in retirement. But I should not be surprised; this happens

because I wish it to be so. It is important to me to keep in contact with other mathematicians, and so I go to more meetings now than I did when I was teaching. I am still very interested in the development of mathematics.

I have read that Marcel Proust approved of the motto “Travaillez pendant que vous avez la lumière”. I have a wife who refuses to grow old. These are examples which I want to follow.’

## GALLERY

### José Sebastião e Silva

Sebastião e Silva was born in Mértola in the Alentejo on 12th December 1914. He was awarded a degree in Mathematical Sciences from the Faculty of Sciences in Lisbon in 1937, in which he gained high marks; nevertheless, it was only in 1942 that he was taken on as

first articles in the journal *Portugaliæ Mathematica* in 1940 and 1941 (thirty years later, some of these articles, on the solution of algebraic equations, became the starting-point for famous specialists in the area of Nu-



José Sebastião e Silva

Assistant Lecturer in that Faculty. A five-year delay at this very important period in the research career could have had serious consequences, but its effects were mitigated by the support he received from António Aniceto Monteiro, at that time Director of the Centre of Mathematical Studies in Lisbon. It was as a collaborator with this Centre that Sebastião e Silva published his

merical Analysis, and continued to be quoted in 1996 and 1997).

With a grant from the Instituto de Alta Cultura, he was able to work in Rome for four years (1943-46). Despite the war and Nazi occupation, Sebastião e Silva considered this to be a very important period of his life, in both scientific and human terms. He had the

opportunity to meet respected Italian mathematicians – F. Henriques, G. Castelnuovo, F. Severi, M. Picone, L. Fantappiè – and other great names of science, literature and the arts.

His research in Italy resulted in various articles, and two large-scale works of great depth and breadth, one in the area of Mathematical Logic, and the other in Functional Analysis. Both of these had originally been intended as a Doctorate Thesis. The former, *Towards a General Theory of Homomorphisms*, was only published posthumously, forty years after being written, but is, in the recent opinion of scholars, a work of great originality, containing a wealth of ideas, which continue to be of interest today. It was his second work, *Analytic Functions and Functional Analysis*, which was, for circumstantial reasons, eventually presented as a Doctorate Thesis at the Faculty of Sciences in Lisbon, in 1949. Published later in the *Portugaliæ Mathematica* in Portuguese, it aroused great interest and led to important work by G. Köthe, A. Grothendieck, and others.

He was appointed Full Professor of the Instituto Superior de Agronomia, where he remained for 10 years, teaching General Mathematics and Infinitesimal Calculus and Probabilities always with the interests of this institution at heart. This decade was a period of intense research, during which he gained international renown as an analyst, receiving many invitations from prestigious universities (Rome, Oxford, Heidelberg, Maryland, etc). His most significant contributions (which were in the theories of analytic functionals and distributions, and Symbolic Calculus) influenced the development of Functional Analysis during at least two decades, and some of his concepts (Silva spaces, ul-

tradistributions etc) have an established place in this branch of Mathematics. In the meantime, he had become director of the Centre for Mathematical Studies in Lisbon, where he trained many researchers. In 1960 he was appointed, by invitation, Full Professor of the Faculty of Sciences in Lisbon, where he remained until the end of his life, teaching the History of Mathematical Thought (a course that was much admired due to his vast culture and exceptional teaching abilities) and Higher Analysis. He revolutionized the syllabus, introducing new teaching methods and preparing texts that were considered exemplary in both content and form.

He also restructured the teaching of Mathematics during the final years of the pre-university course, which had great repercussions upon the public at large. Recognising the importance of this task on the national level, he devoted much effort to it in the last years of his life, with admirable results. However, unfortunately, the great advances he had made in this area were distorted by subsequent generations.

Sebastião e Silva died in the Portuguese Cancer Institute on 25th May 1972 at the age of 57. In the opinion of A. Aniceto Monteiro, he was the greatest Portuguese mathematician (cf. Ruy Luís Gomes, Boletim da S.P.M., n° 6). Those who were fortunate enough to be amongst his disciples were impressed not only by his rare professional stature, but also by his character, his generosity in helping and stimulating students at the beginning of his career, and the immense courage he revealed at the end of his life, working with enthusiasm despite suffering. Sebastião e Silva was truly a great man.

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