Soon after young Markus’ birth in Basel, on June 6th 1912, his father was appointed professor of organic chemistry at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, the Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich.

And ever since it seems that all the life of Markus E. Fierz has revolved around this town, the largest of Switzerland. However far Markus Fierz’s academic duties or likings took him, a universal attraction appeared to draw him back to the place where he first saw his father teaching.

When he entered Göttingen University in the winter of 1931, M. Fierz first turned to biology, hoping to achieve biophysical studies. But, prior to 1933, Göttingen was also a sort of Mecca for mathematicians and theoretical physics and unquestionably this condition helped shape his future. With the Nazi purges starting in the spring of 1933, valuable minds began to leave Germany. Away from Göttingen came such men as Max Born and Herman Weyl; back to Zurich came Markus Fierz.

Continuing his studies in physics, mathematics and philosophy at the University of Zurich, he had the opportunity to attend Professor Carl G. Jung’s seminars on psychology. Also in Zurich, under the influence of Professor G. Wentzel, he decided to become a theoretical physicist. February 1936 saw Markus Fierz finish his formal education with a doctorate thesis on “The artificial transformation of a proton into a neutron”.

He returned then to Germany to attend seminars on theoretical physics at the University of Leipzig. This is the period which witnessed great academic debates between Heisenberg and Nordstiek and Bloch on the “infrared catastrophe”, a problem already raised by Fierz in his doctorate thesis.

From Leipzig, Markus Fierz went to Copenhagen to attend one of the then famous conferences on theoretical physics at Bohr’s Institute. There he met again with Wolfgang Pauli, professor of theoretical physics at the Zurich Federal Institute of Technology.

Before this, Pauli and Fierz’s relations had been the usual ones between professor and student. Now Pauli asked him to become his assistant. Somewhat apprehensive, Markus Fierz however decided to accept and for three years starting in the winter of 1936, he was scientific collaborator of the discoverer of the exclusion principle.

Together with him he published a paper on the “H Theorem” relating to the quanta theory. During this period, M. Fierz also published scientific papers on “A relativistic theory for particles with arbitrary spin” and another on “The form of beta spectrum for a general interaction”. This paper made Markus Fierz best known among experimental physicists because in it were deduced the so-called “Fierz terms”, parameters which, their author insists with some humour, “do not exist”.

Married in the spring of 1940, M. Fierz left Pauli in the summer of the same year. He was, however, to keep in close touch with the then Nobel prizewinner to be. In point of fact, they were to exchange a large scientific and philosophic correspondence, until Pauli’s death in December 1958.

Markus Fierz became privat-docent and assistant at the Physics Institute, University of Basel, where he was to teach for about 20 years. Extraordinary professor in 1943, ordinary professor in 1945, he was then to participate to the extensive interchange of professors going on in the world after World War II. He was guest at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton, in 1950-51 and in 1955, a visiting professor at College Park, Maryland University.

Among the papers published by Professor Fierz during his teaching years, are articles on “Multipolar radiation”, “Meson theory”, “Statistical mechanics” and “General relativity”. Also remarkable is a “Historical essay on Newton’s conception of the space-time relation” which betrays one of Professor Fierz’s hobbies: history.

On April 1st, 1959, Professor M. Fierz joined CERN as head of the Theoretical Studies Division.

Next year on April 1st, Zurich’s lasting influence on Markus Fierz will be fully established. Professor Fierz will then return to his favourite city for a most exciting purpose. He and Professor Rea Jost have been appointed successors to Pauli, to teach theoretical physics at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich.