Last month saw the death of Hideki Yukawa at the age of 74, after five years of grave illness bravely borne. In 1949 he became the first Japanese to receive a Nobel Prize. He graduated in physics from Kyoto in 1932 along with Sin-itiro Tomonaga, who went on to receive the Nobel award in 1965. His contributions to physics ranged over a wide field, covering atomic structure, beta decay, nuclear structure and field theory. However he is best known for his theory of nuclear forces, first presented in 1934, based on the exchange of particles predicted to be several hundred times heavier than the electron. These particles, the pions, were discovered in cosmic ray experiments in 1947, and the Yukawa model remained a cornerstone of nuclear theory for many years. In 1943 he received the Cultural Medal, the highest award in Japan, and six years later the Nobel Physics Prize.

To commemorate this Prize, the Institute for Fundamental Physics was set up at Kyoto University, and Yukawa remained as Director for many years. In 1946 he inaugurated the journal ‘Progress of Theoretical Physics’ which brought Japanese theoretical physics to world attention, and was its Editor until his death. A visit to CERN in the late 1950s impressed on him the importance of high energy accelerators, an influence which eventually led to the establishment of the Japanese KEK Laboratory. Throughout his life he was a great promoter of peace and was a leading figure in a movement to abolish nuclear weapons.