

ALFRÉD RÉNYI, *IN MEMORIAM*

On their return from the United States at the end of June, 1969, Catherine and Alfréd Rényi visited me in Vienna, and we spent a beautiful evening together by the Danube-Oder canal. Kató Rényi told us that she thought her health was improving. But within weeks the news came of her death. On January 5, 1970, I received a letter from Alfréd Rényi in which he wrote of plans to visit Vienna again, and he incidentally added that he was not feeling well and had trouble with his glands. On February 2nd, Professor M. Csörgő of McGill University, who was then visiting at the Mathematic Institute of the University of Vienna, relayed the news that the Hungarian radio had announced that Alfréd Rényi had died the day before. Hungary, a country which had bred many mathematicians, had now lost one of its most remarkable.

Born on March 20, 1921 in Budapest, Alfréd Rényi had a heritage of learned men. His father had been an engineer and his maternal grandfather a professor of philosophy at the University of Budapest. When he married Catherine, he added another mathematician to his family.

When Rényi finished the gymnasium, the fascist administration of the Horthy regime did not grant him permission to enroll at the university. Thus, he went to work in a factory, and it was only after he won a prize in a mathematics contest that he was allowed to enter the University of Budapest, where he was allowed to study from 1939 to 1944. Rényi almost fell victim to the last rage of fascism. He was sent to a labor camp, but he managed to escape. The next year he obtained his doctorate at the University of Szeged. The year 1946 was of decisive significance for Rényi's career, for it was then that he obtained a post-graduate fellowship at the University of Leningrad and came in contact with Yu. V. Linnik. On Rényi's return to Budapest, he was made assistant professor at the University of Budapest for 1947-1948. In 1948, he became *privatdozent* at Budapest, and later that year he was nominated professor at the University of Debrecen for two years. From 1950 through 1970, he was director of the Mathematical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest. In 1952, he was nominated professor of mathematics at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, and head of the chair of probability theory. These two full time jobs with their heavy administrative responsibilities did not seem to hinder his productive scientific work. On the contrary, his scientific work expanded while he took care of numerous students. This feat was possible because Rényi worked frequently through the night enveloped in tobacco smoke and the odor of coffee.

His great intellectual capacity and his love for mathematics insured his enormous success. Besides his many books, he authored and coauthored some 200 scientific papers. Nevertheless, that was not the most demanding part of Rényi's activities. He also travelled frequently, attended countless meetings,