

PREFACE

Many years ago, in December of 1966, I first crossed the threshold one of the largest, most famous, and best research institutes of Russia. The official name of the Institute sounded most solemn and impressive: “The Leningrad Physical-Technical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, named after A. F. Ioffe, awarded the Medals of Lenin and the Red Banner”. In short — “PhysTech”. In the West this Institute is well known as “The Ioffe”.

I was fascinated by the atmosphere, by the way people interacted and by their attitude towards life, which I called “The Spirit of PhysTech”. Later, I was assured this surprising spirit is characteristic not only of the Ioffe but also of Science of Russia in general.

One could not help feeling it, and it was very difficult to define.

A lifetime has passed, and I still cannot find a definition for that wonderful spirit. Therefore, I decided to do what little I could, to illustrate the way it manifests itself, showing it by examples still retained in my memory. This book is a collection of such examples.

That spirit is passing away: new times are coming, and as has always been the case, new Gods are replacing the old ones. Why should I conceal that, I like the new ones far less, and I can only repeat the words of the poet:

People write, and time wipes out,
It wipes out everything they spell.
But tell me, — if the ear dies,
Must the sound die as well?

It gets quieter and lower,
I can decipher just a part,
And still I hear, not by ear,
But by my soul, by my heart.