Many years ago, in the early 60’s, when I was about 11 years old, my classmate and I went to a far-away pharmacy after school. I no longer remember what took us there: perhaps we were planning to do chemical experiments, that required manganese and ammonia.
to England and was forced to establish a scientific laboratory in Moscow. After months of negotiations between the Soviet government on one hand and Rutherford and the Royal Society on the other, the cryogenic equipment of Kapitsa’s laboratory was transferred from England to Moscow. This is how the Institute for Physical Problems was created. Kapitsa became its head and continued his research in cryogenics. His family moved from England to Moscow and they begin a new life in the Soviet Union. Soon, Kapitsa set up production of liquid oxygen. He saw and corresponded with highest officials of the country. Kapitsa worked successfully until 1945, when the attention of the world, and especially that of physicists, turned to the problem of the atomic bomb. In the Soviet Union, the atomic project was supervised by the head of the KGB Lavrentiy Beria. Beria brought together the most prominent scientists and invited Kapitsa too. But Beria knew nothing about physics, and Kapitsa refused to work under him. The payback followed right away: Kapitsa was removed from all of his positions. Perhaps, he was lucky to have survived at all (it’s important to say, that in the Soviet reality “invited” meant “forced to” while “to refuse” meant virtually “to commit suicide”. So, the fact that Kapitsa and his family survived was a kind of miracle). For the third time, all he has achieved was destroyed. And, for the third time, Kapitsa managed to survive the blow, start from scratch and succeed again. Kapitsa spent eight years in disgrace. Most of the time he lived at his dacha outside Moscow. There, in a shack, he set up a laboratory and kept working. After a while, his closest aide joined him, and his sons too were helping their father.

Upon the end of Stalin’s era, Kapitsa returned to his institute. From then until his death in 1984, he lived in the mansion deep in the park, where I began my story. The Institute of Physical Problems was again an oasis in the minds of students. His home saw not only scientists of all stripes and colors, but artists, poets, musicians too were frequent guests in the mansion. How could one have a mansion in Moscow in the sixties? It was exceptional. It was Kapitsa’s caliber that made it possible. After Piotr Leonidovich passed away, the Academy of Sciences decided to preserve his study as a memorial museum. Kapitsa’s widow, Anna Alexeevna did a lot to help. She managed to create the effect of presence – it seems as if he has just stepped out and is about to be back. Yet, the exhibit shows the entire life of the scientist, both his moments of his international fame and his dark days of scary prospects, when some of his friends would cross the street to avoid him. The museum contains the pieces of scientific equipment which Kapitsa was working with for many years. Part of it came here from Cambridge, another part was created with Kapitsa’s own hands. He was not only scientist, but a practical engineer, and was fond of designing things. Among the museum masterpieces there is a wooden table that never staggers. In the museum, one can see instruments and devices, both those from Cambridge, and those made later in Moscow. Among them are unique delicately made glass pieces with which superfluidity of liquid helium was discovered and studied. Outstanding experimentalist, Kapitsa was handy and loved making all that might be needed, whether devices or furniture. One of his hobbies was repairing antique clocks. Therefore, the exhibit takes shows a lathe and, by it, a little clock lathe. Also there, is a specially designed wooden table that does not wobble, no matter how uneven the floor, that he made at his dacha in 1948.
Physics. This song is by Headstones and appears on the album Smile And Wave (1996). You rock and ruin Your odds were thin It's so hard to gauge With something left in. I know there's no sorry There's no time to cry The thoughts that remain I have rewired (have been rewired). What could it have possibly meant I'm left here with questions And the sudden descent And all the injustice. Calculate the damage Divvy up my dirty share Take away the promises And the complicated stares.