

## EDITORIAL

As one whose world revolves around carbohydrates and whose view of DNA and RNA is of uninteresting sugar phosphate polymers containing a limited variation of prosthetic groups, it was with considerable trepidation that I attended the recent FEBS Meeting in West Berlin. Happy with my sugar-coated world, my forays abroad have almost exclusively consisted of attending International Glycoconjugate and Carbohydrate Symposia, Meetings on Inborn Errors of (Carbohydrate) Metabolism and sessions of the British Biochemical Society (Carbohydrate Group). It was therefore a great cultural shock to be confronted by about 3000 biochemists and a programme of 26 Symposia in a total of 71 sessions, of which only one Symposium (Glycoproteins; three sessions) was directly concerned with carbohydrates.

The Glycoprotein Symposium dealt almost exclusively with the metabolism and function of glycoproteins, and clearly showed that although the function of the carbohydrate moiety is known in some specific instances, the general underlying meaning is still as elusive as ever.

Our increased ability to elucidate carbohydrate structures has been one of the major developments during the last decade and we can now admire the ordered diversity that nature imposes on the carbohydrate moieties of glycoproteins. However, the fundamental question remains; Why give proteins a carbohydrate "mink coat"? Such luxury is beyond the requirements of evolution. Showing that substantial glycosylation is not in fact luxurious, but is instead a necessary part of molecular biology remains one of our major challenges.