



Shall the Public be Served?

NO SCIENTIST worthy of the name believes that we have reached the stage of research proficiency where all answers are absolute. This is particularly true where living things are concerned—emphatically so with human beings. But does the public, which has a vested interest in human beings, understand this?

Perhaps there was a time when scientific study could be entirely isolated from nonscientific activities. The possibilities and ethics of such isolation today have been kicked about with soul-searching sincerity and spellbinding wind-baggery over the matter of social responsibility for the atomic bomb. There are matters more within our sphere and the limits of our page which are concerned with related principles.

In this issue (page 560), McHenry points out, in effect, that a little knowledge should make us realize our ignorance. For example, from two such reputable sources as the Food and Nutrition Board of the U. S. National Research Council and British medical authorities, we have widely differing recommendations for the minimum amount of vitamin C needed for a satisfactory diet. Other illustrations are plentiful. The basic reason for such discrepancies is that scientific experiment does not always lead immediately to an exact and absolute answer.

Occasionally we see indications that a scientist has lapsed into the dream that a conclusion from scientific experiment is the full, final, and absolute answer. Association with first-rate scientific colleagues usually brings an awakening.

The general public is another and much more extensive problem. During the past decade, respect for the abilities, powers, and knowledge of the scientist has assumed important proportions. Convincing evidence of the importance in which public estimate of science is held is shown in a recent statement from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. That journal decries the careless or misleading use, in advertising, of claims credited to scientists or of the accoutrements of the medical profession—we agree. This is a suggestion of the danger that lies in a public attitude of immense faith in its scientists on the basis of little understanding of their basic principles, practices, or problems, to say nothing of the reservations scientists attach to the interpretations of their findings. Such a condition makes a fertile bed for the hacks, quacks, and pitch men. The effects are felt by all whose work relates to the production of food, from the manufacturers of fertilizers, insecticides, and other agricultural chemicals through the fabricators of packages for processed foods.

The dangers of misunderstanding on the part of the public stood out during the legal gavotte over the bread hearings. Krehl and Cowgill (p. 546 this issue) asked the recent meeting of the Institute of Food Technologists—is it any wonder that the general public is suspicious over the questions of additives when it took several years, with

endless argument in which scientists could not agree, to define a loaf of bread?

It would appear that already problems and embarrassment have arisen, but with the rapidly rising influence of technology, the possibilities have been only faintly seen. Science and industry would do well to move ahead of the situation by doing some careful thinking and effective acting.

This is a complex problem to which there is no simple answer. But it seems clear that (1) if scientists and scientific findings are to maintain the respect of the public, the public needs and deserves more of a basis for understanding; (2) any company that allows the misleading use of “scientists” or “scientific” data, findings, or statements in its advertising, direct or indirect, is committing a reprehensible act.

WALTER J. MURPHY, Editor

Scientific and Technical Manuscripts

FREQUENTLY we are asked whether one must be a member of the AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY in order to submit a scientific or technical manuscript to the JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD CHEMISTRY.

The answer, of course, is no. Less frequently we are asked, “Must a paper be presented before a national meeting of the Society before it can be considered for publication?” Again, the answer is no.

The editors of AG AND FOOD will give careful consideration to every manuscript submitted. We are particularly interested in manuscripts reporting on original research and new technological developments in the fields of biochemical engineering, fermentation, food processing, nutrition, pesticides, and plant nutrients and regulators. All manuscripts will be subjected to rigorous review—a practice followed by other ACS publications in order to maintain the highest possible standards of scientific and technical excellence.

And while we are commenting on AG AND FOOD, we are happy to include the information that, in three months, the paid circulation has passed the 6000 mark; that approximately 30% of those who have subscribed have done so for two or three years.

We are deeply appreciative of this strong vote of confidence. Our goal now is a paid circulation of 10,000 by the end of this year.