

SCIENCE

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THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT¹

CONTENTS

<i>The Scientific Spirit</i> : PROFESSOR MAYNARD M. METCALF	551
<i>Scientific Events:—</i>	
<i>International Cooperation in Medicine; The Total Eclipse of the Sun; Mapping from the Air; The National Exposition of Chemical Industries</i>	558
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	561
<i>University and Educational News</i>	563
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i>	
<i>Radium Production</i> : DR. R. B. MOORE	564
<i>Quotations:—</i>	
<i>The Future of Medicine</i>	566
<i>Scientific Books:—</i>	
<i>McAtee on the Natural History of the District of Columbia</i> : DR. HARRY C. OBERHOLSER	568
<i>Special Articles:—</i>	
<i>The Amphibioides</i> : CARL L. HUBBS	569
<i>The Buffalo Meeting of the American Chemical Society</i> : DR. CHARLES L. PARSONS	570

THE scientific spirit, while not easy to define, is a reality, differing from the artist spirit in some important elements and differing also from the usual spirit in philosophy. William James, to be sure, made philosophy almost an experimental science, and religion may be and is so treated by a few. Perhaps as good a concise statement of the scientific spirit as we have is from the pen of Paul of Tarsus, who wrote: "Prove all things and hold fast that which is good." I wish to discuss this injunction with you for a few minutes, to direct your attention to a number of conceptions and practises built into our present social system which do not successfully endure such scrutiny as Paul suggested, and finally we will refer briefly to the scientific spirit in relation to some deep issues of the war and some profound problems of the post-war period.

Science versus tradition, experiment versus conformity to convention, scrutiny versus blind faith, reason versus custom. We are all creatures of habit, mental and physical. Indeed custom lies at the root of our whole social system, and necessarily so. Community life is dependent upon the dominance of social custom. A group of individuals each of whom went his own independent and unpredictable way would not form a real community. The conservative tendency in men, the habit of thinking and doing as their fathers thought and did, is essential in enabling them to live and work together as a cooperating society rather than be a mass of contending rival units. And one of the chief services this conservatism renders to human society lies in the difficulty which it presents to the

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