THE RELATION OF E. W. SCRIPPS TO SCIENCE[1]

EDWARD W. SCRIPPS was born on a farm near Rushville, Illinois, June 18, 1854, and died at sea on his yacht *Ohio* off the west coast of Africa, March 12, 1926.

Although far from being a scientist in the accepted meaning of that term, Scripps had views about science, an attitude toward it, and did things for it which strongly recommend his career to the attention of scientists.

His curiosity touching everything and everybody round about him was insatiable. His native ability for assimilating facts and principles was astonishing, and the objectiveness of his thinking was naive almost to childishness. I doubt whether any kind or measure of training could have begot in his mind either a trace of doubt as to the reality of sensory experience or of surmise that he ever had experiences which did not contain sensory elements. In that sense metaphysics simply could not exist for him. Add to these characteristics of him the fact that of formal schooling he had almost none, and that by natural bent he was humanistic to the core, and you have the background of his views as to what science is. For him science embraced everything that man knows for a certainty or holds an opinion on supported by the best evidence available. So far as concerns humans as objects of knowledge, it always seemed to me that for Scripps human beings were no more separate from the rest of nature than are stars, mountains and horses. The chiefly distinguishing thing about men was that they were the most curious, most perplexing and most useful of all natural objects. Hence it was that for him the humanistic sciences differed from the other sciences chiefly by their special interest, special importance and special difficulty. His reiterated query, "This damned human animal, what is he?" I have quoted many times to illustrate his peculiar way of recognizing man as a natural being that is especially difficult to investigate.

A phase of his identification of man with nature and his concomitant assumption that man, like the rest of nature, is a subject for scientific study and treatment, was his own common practice of treating human problems quantitatively. While he was very far from being a mathematician in a formal sense, it appeared to be second nature for him to want a quantitative expression for all problems of human relations.

This came out particularly in questions of the growth and support of population, problems in which he latterly became very anxiously interested.

This general quantitative tendency of his was perhaps partly due to the necessity he was constantly under as a business man, of thinking his practical problems in quantities. His calculations were typically of the roughest sort, hardly better than second or third approximations. But they served the purpose of bringing his problems into broad and general, but, in so far, entirely trustworthy view. When greater accuracy became necessary for the practical working out of the problems, somebody could be called in who had more learning, more skill, more time and more patience, for such details.

One consequence of these ideas of his about man and nature and science was his enormous belief in science as an instrument for human welfare. I have often said that I never knew a professional scientist whose faith of this sort was more alive and confiding than was that of Mr. Scripps. "Why, of course everything anybody can learn by investigating the ocean and the organisms that live in it will be useful to somebody in some way at some time." Thus he reasoned while contributing money and thought to the up-building of what is now the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. And so on as to knowledge by all realms of nature.

But always true to his learning toward the problems of man, those included under the captions economics and sociology became for him more and more vividly real and urgent as time went on.

In his late years he had great misgivings about the future of mankind, and about our own country especially. At times he seemed to see forces in our industrial, economic and social life that were driving more strongly toward final catastrophe than any counter-forces that could be mustered. But if such counter-forces there be, they must lie, he felt certain, chiefly in the realms of science. Philosophy? O yes; unrestrictedly generalized and abstract thinking may play a useful part. And religion? Undoubtedly a mighty force for possible good.

But the sciences, particularly those of inanimate nature with their handmaiden, invention, have been the chief means by which man, while securing for himself immeasurable benefits, have also brought upon him problems of the gravest, most perplexing kind.

In Scripps's view there is no alternative to the proposition that the means by which man has gained for himself such vast benefits, but in doing this has

[1] Some aspects of Mr. Scripps's life and work in relation to science are treated more adequately than here in "*Science Service* as *One Expression of E. W. Scripps's Philosophy of Life*," published as a pamphlet by Science Service. Copies of this may be had on application to Science Service, 21st and B Sts., Washington, D. C.

unwittingly involved himself in certain difficulties of great seriousness, must be his chief means for delivering himself from these difficulties.

The problem which finally came to harass him most of all was that of the growth, distribution and support of world population. It seemed to him that for our own country at least, the most urgent aspect of this problem was that of effecting an adjustment between the rural population chiefly engaged in satisfying man's primary needs and desires, and the urban population chiefly engaged in satisfying his secondary needs and desires. The Scripps Foundation for Research in Problems of Population at Miami University is the most obvious expression of his interest in this problem.

Without doubt the most definite manifestation of his conception of and belief in science is Science Service, an institution having operative headquarters in Washington, D. C. The purpose of this is the dissemination of the fruits of scientific research among the people generally. For the carrying out of this purpose any available means may be employed except formal school work. But the means chiefly relied upon is the printing press, especially that of the daily newspaper. Science Service is an institution for the education of everybody in science. But at the same time that it is an educational institution it is a business institution—business in the sense that it earns its own living. Although it has a considerable invested capital, the income from this is not used primarily for carrying on its work but for extending its work into new fields and in new ways. The operative theory on which the institute rests is that all service and everything else received shall be paid for, and all service rendered *shall* be charged for. A cardinal dictum of its founder was that "the two worst economic sins are trying to get something for nothing and willingly giving something for nothing."

While the science-disseminating office of Science Service is clear evidence of Scripps's faith in science as an agency for human good, he conceived another function for it which though less obvious is in a sense more indicative of his faith. The office referred to is that of getting more of the spirit and method of science into the management and work of newspapers themselves. He would have the institution not only disseminate to the public scientific knowledge of the world through the newspapers, but he would have it influence the newspapers to become more scientific in all their purposes and efforts. Although he did not express his aim in just this way, I am sure what was in the back of his mind in founding the institution was that it should contribute toward making journalism an applied science. This conclusion I deduce partly from various things he used to say in our conversations, the full import of which he appeared not to see and I surely did not at the time. One of these was to the effect that he was about as much interested in the influence such work as the institution would do, would have, or editors and editorial offices, as he was in disseminating scientific knowledge. He wanted to educate editors and managers as well as the public. Such statements I now couple, as I could not at the time, with his declaration made at the very beginning of his responsible journalistic career in 1878, that "the newspaper should simply present all the facts the editor is capable of obtaining, concerning men and measures, before the bar of the public, and then, after having discharged its duty as a witness, be satisfied to leave the jury in the case—the public—to find the verdicts."

This conception of the news-gathering and news-presenting function of newspapers (which he regarded as the only real reason for their existence) he appeared to be convinced was not fundamentally different from scientific research and publication. His contention that newspapers should be self-contained, *i.e.*, should have no outside political or business connection or interest he held to be one of the main aids, even though a negative one, to treating news thus. But he also recognized the great difficulties involved in the requirement about "all the facts the editor is capable of obtaining."

The long and short of the matter is, as I now see it, Mr. Scripps decided at last that his forty years of journalism had proved that although the newspaper business can be made immensely profitable so far as money is concerned, it can not be brought up to the level of truth and usefulness he had conceived for it throughout his career without bringing to its aid some medium or agency more intrinsically and deeply devoted to truth and usefulness than the papers are, or by their own nature can be. Hence we have Science Service, organized and operated in accordance with its founder's conviction that it may be made an educational instrument of great benefit to the public and likewise a genuine business success, but that this can be done only by keeping its organization and operation chiefly in the hands of scientists.

WM. E. RITTER,
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SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

THE ANTI-EVOLUTION BILLS

THE present year has brought forth a plentiful crop of bills to suppress the teaching of evolution in state supported institutions of learning. Thus far, none of them has passed. In Missouri, where some apprehension was felt that the anti-evolution bill might be successful, the measure was defeated in the house by a