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BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH STRATEGY AND PUBLICATION POLICY¹

By Professor PAUL WEISS

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE difficulties in the field of biological publication, which we are to discuss at this conference, are only partly of a technical and administrative nature and therefore can only partly be overcome by technical and organizational measures. The roots of the problem lie much deeper and concern the whole future of biology.

As publication is merely crystallized research, publication ills are largely an outcome of defective research, and bad research, in turn, may be blamed on bad training for research. The publication problem thus appears as just one aspect of a much broader problem; namely, that of teaching and research in biology in general.

If the volume of publication threatens to surpass what is technically and economically manageable, we

¹Address before the Conference on Publication Problems in Biology, held at the Cleveland meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science on September 11, 1944.

must decide on how to meet the threat without hampering scientific progress. Our capacity to process, finance, store and utilize scientific literature is certainly not unlimited. Yet, in the past we have often behaved as if it were. We now realize that we are approaching the critical limit at an ominous pace, and we want to be prepared.

Logically, there are several ways of keeping the volume of publication within reasonable bounds. We might reduce the volume of research production, or we might continue to produce at full capacity but publish only part of it; above all, we might increase the efficiency of both production and publication; that is, the yield, per unit of time, of scientifically useful results, and the yield, per printed page, of scientifically useful statements. In deciding just what course to follow in practice, the long-range interests of biological science as a whole should prevail. However, since biology lacks unity of purpose and has never

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