Seventy-Five Years of Chemistry

THE seventy-fifth anniversary of the American Chemical Society commemorates something more than a landmark in the life of a professional society—it is a milestone in the history of American chemistry itself, as a science and as a technology.

When the society was founded, there was already such a thing as American chemistry. In the scientific field it was just beginning to expand the wide boundaries of its European scientific parent, though still distinctly in the extreme dependency of the infantile stage. Technologically it was still in embryo. A successful sulfuric acid industry and proficiency in the making of explosives were the principal applications through the period of the Civil War. The growth of the modern chemical industry has, however, been coincident with the history of the society, whose development has been all but indistinguishable from the advancement of American chemistry in both the scientific and technical fields.

The present-day society, some 66,000 strong, has come a long way since that day in 1876 when 35 chemists met and gave it its name. Until 1890 it might almost have been called the New York Chemical Society, for that is about what it was in fact. Yet, when it launched the first of its publications, it reached out to every chemist who read the chemical information that the *Journal of the American Chemical Society* contained. The society met only in New York until it was 14 years old, but through the *Journal* its horizon and its influence soon became national in scope.

There is some irony in the fact that, in the Diamond Jubilee year of the society, it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line between chemists and scientists or technologists who, nominally at least, belong in other disciplines. Who can say precisely whether a scientist doing a given piece of research is a nuclear physicist or a nuclear chemist? And among chemists who are recognizable as such, there has been such a countertrend in the direction of specialization that a biological chemist and a paint-and-varnish chemist scarcely speak a common language. So we see at the same time a dimming of divisional lines between major disciplines and a sharpening of the boundaries between specialists.

Problems such as these have confronted ACS with a never-ending series of challenges, which it has met with flexibility of organization and constant expansion of its services as new needs have arisen. Today it must have 20 divisions to accommodate all the specializations. There are 138 local sections in 47 states, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. It has accommodated itself to the geographical dispersion of American chemistry and has thereby advanced it.

Equally paradoxical has been the world situation confronting the society. From dependence, American chemistry has progressed to interdependence, combined with a high degree of self-sufficiency. But increasing self-sufficiency has not led to isolation. On the contrary, it is characteristic of the world outlook of the society that, in celebrating its Diamond Jubilee, it also merges itself in the World Chemical Conclave, where international barriers are leveled, as they must be in the world of science.

It would be idle to argue whether the society has shaped the course of chemical development, or whether the course that chemistry has taken has fashioned the society as it is. But it can be said with confidence that the history of ACS, from that prenatal pilgrimage in 1874 to Priestley's grave, where it was conceived, to the World Chemical Conclave of September 1951, where it has matured, gives promise that American chemistry will contribute its full share to a future in which growth is the most certain element.

WALTER J. MURPHY

American Chemical Society
Washington, D. C.

SCIENCE, founded in 1880, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at the Business Press, 10 McGovern Ave., Lancaster, Pa. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Lancaster, Pa., January 13, 1948, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Acceptance for mailing at the special rate postage provided for in the Act of February 28, 1925, embodied in Paragraph (d-2) Section 34.40 P. L. & R. of 1948.

All correspondence should be sent to SCIENCE, 1515 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington 5, D. C. The AAAS assumes no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts or for the opinions expressed by contributors. Four weeks' notice is required for change of address, and an address stencil label from a recent issue must be furnished. Claims for a missing number will be allowed only if received within 60 days from date of issue.

Annual subscriptions, $7.50; single copies, $.25; foreign postage, outside the Pan-American Union, $1.00; Canadian postage, $.50. Special rates to members of the AAAS.

The AAAS also publishes THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY. Subscription and advertising rates on request.