

The dispute between Dr. Key and the editors of the *Quarterly Review of Biology* points up what seems to me the worst feature of certain editors of biological journals. I do not have personal experience with these particular editors, but I have had experience with numerous referees and editors, as well as experience as a member of editorial boards and as actual editor of two journals.

The aim of using a referee system is to improve publishable papers primarily by providing the author with the advantage of outside criticism. This criticism presumably operates on the scientific level only, not the literary level—unless one classes ambiguous statements as “literary” rather than “scientific.” Most referees confine themselves to the science. A goodly percentage of editors confine themselves to the content of scientific import, to serving as intermediary between referee and author, and to the necessary dealings with the printer. Sometimes there are additional legitimate editorial questions.

Most editors of biological journals are amateurs who perform the task either from a sense of duty or for the prestige resulting. Several of these have impressed me as being very good (an amateur can, of course, be an expert). A few lax editors do little more than act as intermediary between author and printer. But a few of the conscientious editors feel that they are called upon to “polish up” the manuscripts. This usually means rewriting the way the editor would have written had he been the author. When I have disagreed and been sufficiently annoyed to have such changes checked, the outside verdict has been that the change was unnecessary or that the change was inferior because it introduced a discordant style. Sometimes the change actually introduces error, that is the editor changes the wording to make the author say what the editor thinks the author ought to

say! Such habits are not merely undesirable, they ought to be intolerable.

In publishing a book recently I found that the University of Minnesota Press had many editorial rules and was more concerned about adherence to textbook-type grammar than I. They queried numerous sentences and even insisted that a few be rewritten, but *they did not presume to rewrite them for me*. Herein lies good editing. A scientific manuscript, like a literary manuscript, is the author's baby; an editor is privileged to accept it or not, to insist on certain rules being followed, and to make suggestions, but he is not privileged to make it into the editor's baby.

On the other hand, many biologists, (at least in the U. S. A.) have not been effectively trained in the art of writing. Commonly an editor has the problem of what to do with a manuscript that seems to represent a good piece of research but is poorly prepared for publication. Even when a manuscript is acceptable, improvement is usually possible and most authors appreciate improvement, as the editors of *Q. R. B.* point out. I suspect this is usually true both when the changes are “correct corrections” and when they are just recognizable improvements. Certainly I feel that my own papers have been made better by both true corrections and improvements in wording suggested by editors, reviewers and other critics. But these desirable changes have been outnumbered by unnecessary changes to another's mode of expression and by “incorrect corrections.” Editors have real headaches and are usually pressed for time but even so they should remember that they are editors, not ghost writers.

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Scientific Book Register

Progress in the Chemistry of Organic Natural Products, Vol. IX. L. Zechmeister, Ed. Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 1952. 535 pp. Illus. \$18.80; clothbound \$19.60.

The Mathematical Theory of Relativity. Reissue. A. S. Eddington. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952. 270 pp. \$6.00.

Traité Élémentaire de Physiologie Humaine. 3rd ed. Henri Fredericq. Liège: Vaillant-Carmanne; Paris: Masson, 1952. 812 pp. Illus.

The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology. F. A. Hayek. Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952. 209 pp. \$5.00.

Saudi Arabia: With an Account of the Development of Its Natural Resources. 2nd ed. K. S. Twitchell with collab. of Edward J. Jurji. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953. 231 pp. + plates. \$5.00.

1953 Medical Progress: A Review of Medical Advances During 1952. Morris Fishbein, Ed. New York-Toronto: Blakiston, 1953. 301 pp. \$5.00.

Physiology of Seeds: An Introduction to the Experimental Study of Seed and Germination Problems. William Crocker and Lela V. Barton. Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica; New York: Stechert-Hafner, 1953. 267 pp. Illus. \$6.50.

Food-Borne Infections and Intoxications. 2nd ed. Fred W. Tanner and Louise P. Tanner. Champaign, Ill.: Garrard Press, 1953. 769 pp. \$12.00.

Textbook of Virology: For Students and Practitioners of Medicine. 2nd ed. A. J. Rhodes and C. E. van Rooyen. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1953. 561 pp. Illus. \$8.00.

L. Farkas Memorial Volume. Research Council of Israel, Special Pub. No. 1, 1952. Adalbert Farkas and Eugene P. Wigner, Eds. (Distributed by Interscience, New York, and North Holland Pub., Amsterdam.) 309 pp. Illus. \$6.00.

Mechanics of Materials. Seibert Fairman and Chester S. Cutshall. New York: Wiley; London: Chapman & Hall, 1953. 420 pp. Illus. \$5.75.