

# Letters

## Commitment to Sound Nutrition

"We do not know the extent of malnutrition anywhere in the United States . . . it hasn't been anyone's job," the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service stated to the Senate Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower and Poverty in 1967. However, at that time, the federal government had already financed nutrition surveys in developing countries and had a clear idea of the extent and severity of malnutrition in many other countries.

We know that cardiovascular disease is the nation's number one health problem and that a direct causal link exists between heart conditions and a high saturated fat diet. Yet, despite this knowledge, little has been done to lower the high fat content of the average American's diet and the mortality from cardiovascular disease continues to climb. As a nation, we spend nearly a billion dollars per year for vitamin and mineral supplements and foods promoted by food faddists. Yet, sound nutrition is seldom taught in the primary and secondary schools and most Americans do not know what constitutes an adequate diet.

Today we are producing more food than ever before and vast surpluses of many foods exist. But despite this agricultural abundance, the majority of our elementary schools do not have a school lunch program, and many of our poor receive no food assistance. In the same light, human needs for calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals can be quantitatively described. We also know what constitutes a good diet, but we have been unable to translate these needs into the provision of food and an adequate diet for all Americans.

Why do these disparities exist? The explanation that America's national priorities have been for other matters—military prowess, space, the production of consumer goods for the middle and upper class—seems too facile for such tragic contrasts. Yet, I believe there is a large measure of truth in it.

On 2–4 December 1969, the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition

and Health will be held in Washington. For the first time in the history of this country, representatives from all segments of the population will come together and will be given the opportunity to map a reasoned strategy to solve this problem of hunger and malnutrition. Participants at the conference and the entire country must then commit themselves to the implementation of the recommendations of the conference.

Our last national commitment placed two men on the moon. As Colonel Aldrin said, "What this [the lunar landing] means is that many other problems perhaps can be solved in the same way, by making a commitment to solve them in a long-range fashion. I think we were timely in accepting this mission of going to the moon. It might be timely, now, to think in many other areas of other missions that could be accomplished." Let's make our next national priority the commitment to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in America.

JEAN MAYER

*The White House,  
Washington, D.C. 20500*

## Nature's Chief Masterpiece Is Writing Well

What occasioned Wilson's article: "Better written journal papers—Who wants them?" (5 Sept., p. 986)? He asks us: "Do researchers want to write clear literate papers, instantly crystal clear to all readers?" And he answers for all: "They do not." How does he know that? Did his computer tell him? This is scientific?

Why'n't he ask me? I want to write—and read—better-written journal papers.

What's bugging Wilson? Too bad if he's "a little tired of better technical writing being proclaimed the panacea for most scientific ills." Maybe it's on account of how he himself can't write so good. So maybe he should try a pep-quill.

MORRIS LEIDER

*New York University School of  
Medicine, New York 10016*

Poor Wilson! Thinking that nobody really cares, he got discouraged and wrote a tract. Wrong too. He seems to believe that all members of a fraternity of specialists can figure out the writing of the others. He's also wrong in seeming to believe that some protean force keeps writing from sinking below a decent lower limit of clarity. Then, on these erroneous premises he frames the indefensible theorem that slipshod writing really is good enough for the reader who imperatively needs the good news.

In rebuttal I'll tell a true story: During a discussion of the clarity of journal articles an eminent pioneer brain surgeon told of an article that seemed to promise an explanation and a cure for a certain disconcerting episode that marred a small fraction of his brain operations. All is going well when inexplicably the patient suddenly dies. The article, which was by another brain surgeon, gave the impression that he too had patients die in the same inexplicable way and that he had figured out the cause and the cure. But the teller of the story said that the article was so badly written that he never was certain of what it was getting at despite reading it many times. Asked why he didn't just write or phone the author instead of reading and rereading the article, he replied, "Oh I did. I did immediately. But he had died."

The lesson to be learned is in one of the "literate books" Wilson recommended to others. On page 39 of *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, Graves and Hodge (not "Hodges" as cited in the article) wrote: "The writing of good English is thus a moral matter, as the Romans held that the writing of good Latin was."

DAVID M. KINSLER

*Industrial Publishing Company,  
614 Superior Avenue West,  
Cleveland, Ohio 44113*

I am afraid that Wilson misunderstands the nature of good scientific writing. In the field of technical exposition, good writing does *not* mean graceful prose. It *does* mean explanations which are as easy to follow as the intrinsic difficulty of the subject will permit.

It is not easy to describe the nature of clear exposition. However, in my editorial capacity I have had ample opportunity to observe the most common breaches. It may be useful to describe a few.

1) No common failure is more dis-