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Know It Now

A new television series about science, called "Conquest," will have its debut on Sunday afternoon, 1 December 1957, 5 to 6 E.S.T., on the CBS network. Sponsored by the Monsanto Chemical Company, the series is being developed by the Public Affairs Department of the Columbia Broadcasting System with the assistance of representatives of the AAAS and of the National Academy of Sciences. "Conquest" will attempt to give a general audience the beginning of an understanding of today's achievements in biology, physics, and the other branches of science.

Presenting scientific knowledge to a nonscientific audience has its own special pitfalls. Something in the way of a come-on is necessary, and one place to go wrong is to choose a come-on, which, for the very reason that it has a broad appeal, has little to do with the prime purpose of the show. At its extreme, this kind of error is like the old burlesque routine in which a "Professor" plays the xylophone at the front of the stage, while at the back, unknown to him, an energetic young lady does a strip-tease. The laughs develop because the "Professor" thinks, as he obliges with encore after encore, that the ever-mounting applause is meant for him. But it is not the concert for which the audience came, and it is not the concert that the audience will remember.

As far as we can judge from advance reports, "Conquest" has found a way to let public interest in the series develop from elements intrinsic to science. The show will be in the straight-from-life genre; it will report directly from laboratories, field stations, and testing grounds. This approach is promising for two reasons. First, people at leisure always like to watch people at work. Second, the chronicle of science in the making—its suspense, its failures, its successes—should make for effective drama.

The contents of the first hour—three more shows are scheduled for the early part of next year—are as follows: opening statement by the president of Monsanto; introductory remarks by Eric Sevareid, the host for the series; "Edge of Life," a special film about microbiology, which concludes with some interpretive comments by W. M. Stanley; a photographic account of oceanographic research as conducted by Maurice Ewing and his associates from the Lamont Geological Observatory; exclusive films of Major David Simons' recent record-breaking balloon ascent of 20 miles; and, finally, an interview on the state of science with Detlev W. Bronk, Laurence H. Snyder, and Alan T. Waterman. The hello's and goodbye's, commercials, and other odds and ends make up the rest of the hour.

Participation in "Conquest" by representatives of the AAAS is one of the several ways in which the Association is expanding its public information services. Whatever faults and virtues the first show in the series turns out to possess, the chances are good that it will not make the mistake of offering so much by way of inducement that there is no seeing the science for the television.—J.T.

