Letters

AAAS Meeting and the Press

I have covered AAAS meetings for many years—the first time in Cleveland, in 1930, when Howard Blakeslee and I shared in the coverage for the Associated Press. At that time most of the material came from such leading lights as Thomas Hunt Morgan, Robert Millikan, Harlow Shapley, Aleš Hrdlička, "Ajax" Carlson, George Washington Crile, Austin Clark. Most of the leading scientists at that meeting had a fair knowledge of everything of importance in their own fields that was to be reported. Consequently, good stories were not too hard to develop.

Today, millions of scientific reports later, the situation is bewildering. The programs, releases, press conferences, and individual interviews arranged by the AAAS press-room staff in Cleveland were highly satisfactory. But while I was attending a press conference a half dozen programs were going on that seemed promising—where there might have been not only good papers but also free discussions that might inspire stories or add much-needed information to a science writer's background. During this year's meeting I spent the equivalent of two full days attending programmed sessions. This was in addition to time spent attending press conferences, reading releases and speeches, and interviewing individuals. At about 10 o'clock every night I gave up and started writing my story, using whatever material I had. When, on returning home, I reread everything I had written (which, no doubt, was far too much), I found no mention in my stories of any very startling advancement of science. It was mostly commentary on the current state of science in general or on the relation of science to the public. I wondered how many shining nuggets of achievement I had missed. I may have missed many. This is a disturbing thought. More disturbing, however, is the thought that I may not have missed any.

At one of the sessions I attended, a scientist deplored the overabundance of isolated and fragmentary facts that swell the volume of current scientific literature—facts that are presented with no attempt at correlation. He deplored the eagerness of scientists to have their names in print. He wondered how much the volume would be reduced if all scientific reports had to be published anonymously.

At another session, attended by scientists in one specialty, the chairman said that what was being reported was highly significant and should be brought to the attention of scientists in other specialties and to the public as well. Year after year, he said, the men in this specialty merely "talk to themselves."

Putting these two observations together suggests the following question: Would it not be possible, say every other year, to have fewer individual sessions, with fewer fragmentary reports—sessions that are interdisciplinary so there can be more correlation of information?

Or might it be possible to have a conference some time before each AAAS meeting, similar to the Gordon Research Conferences, with no publicity of any kind, and let the conferees decide what is to be reported at the meeting? Of course this would be expensive. But it should not be overlooked that newspapers and other publications spend fairly large amounts of money in sending their writers to AAAS sessions and printing their material. An estimate of $1000 for each writer is probably not excessive, not to mention the extra time the writer contributes.

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Author(s)! Author(s)!

What is the meaning of multiple authorship in the "by-line" of a scientific paper?

Authorship implies not only participation in the investigations leading to a report, but also active participation in the preparation of the report. It implies knowledge of and agreement with the substance of the report by all those whose names appear as authors.

Coordinate research by two or more workers on different facets of a given problem, followed by conferences at which the report is assembled, is the most obvious implication of multiple authorship. In such a collaboration the contribution of each participant should be identified, but frequently this is not done. Departures from this ideal range to the ludicrous. Among the names that I have seen associaetd in "by-lines" are those of senior professors whose knowledge of a student's work is far from detailed, contributors of analyses or other routine information, and laboratory technicians. Four, five, or more names in the author list have become a commonplace phenomenon.

I submit that coauthorship should be confined to near-equal collaborations. The part of contributors of routine or even critical information, technical or editorial guidance, or laboratory assistance should be properly and graciously acknowledged in the body of the report, or in a suitable footnote.

This situation is part and parcel of the "titles race." Although this race may never be controlled by an International Authorship Control Commission (IACC), it can be kept within bounds by diplomatic multilateral agreements among scientists.

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In Defense of Scientist-Rotarians

Michael Amrine [*Science* **142**, 913 (1963)] pleads for freedom for scientists to live their own lives. But he finds it "ridiculous to imagine [a scientist such as Einstein] at a Rotary meeting wearing a button, 'Call me Al'." Thus he is himself by implication trying to restrict the behaviour of scientists. Scientists should be free to join Rotary or not, just as they please, without being ridiculed.

Einstein may not have been a Rotarian, but another famous "Al," Dr. Schweitzer, is or was a Rotarian. Of course, Schweitzer is a philosopher rather than a scientist, but he is certainly one of the "different ones." Among the "different ones" who call me "Bob" in our Rotary Club are a film producer who founded and organized one of the best educational institutions in this area, and the most widely read person I know; a scientist in the field of design engineering who is now on a technical visit to Russia; an income-tax officer