

Letters

Noise and Health

I am quite in agreement with Foote's lament (10 Jan., p. 101) over the exceedingly high noise level in modern housing. In addition to the damage done to privacy, something not held in very high regard in our present-day society, the increased noise, like all excessive sensory input, may have a deleterious effect on our bodies and minds. S. Rosen, the surgeon who developed the Stapes mobilization operation for otosclerotic deafness, observed while on a scientific safari that the Mabaans, a stone-age people in central Africa, live in an environment that roughly corresponds to a soundproof room; he found that they were generally very healthy people, and that the old persons in the tribe could hear as acutely as the young. In our civilization, the upper frequencies regularly drop out of the range of hearing with increasing age, and old-age deafness is very common. Whether or not noise and hearing impairment are causally related is not yet established; there is some research going on which may give us an answer in the not-too-distant future. We know that noise interferes with rest and relaxation and especially with sleep. While sleep, the complete withdrawal from the world around us, is an obvious necessity for physical and emotional health, less complete withdrawal into the quiet of our homes may also be necessary if we want to retain individual integrity and not become parrots conditioned by the mass media.

While visiting several mental hospitals, as a psychiatrist, in Europe last summer, I was surprised to find that the noise level in these institutions was much lower than in equivalent hospitals in this country. Everybody talked in a subdued voice, double doors were common, and paging was done by light rather than by loud-

speaker. It appeared to me that, as a result of this sedating atmosphere, patients were generally calmer.

Although we cannot hope nowadays for a quiet, idyllic life unless we take refuge in the mountains or deserts, it appears rational and feasible to take positive steps to reduce the sound level of our modern environment if enough people feel the need to do so.

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Science Fair Projects

I am quite concerned about the role of the junior and senior high schools in the direction of projects for science fairs. Since publication of the paperback *Research Problems in Biology—Series II* (for which I prepared one chapter), I have received a considerable number of letters from youngsters ranging from 11 to 17 years of age asking for one or another type of advice on their projects. It has become clear that many students are being encouraged to do potentially dangerous research without proper supervision. In addition, many of the schools are making entry of a project in the local fair a prerequisite for passing some science course. In other words, many students participate under duress. I am disturbed about this perversion of the creative aspects of science.

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"Multivolumed Rehashes"

Science—and especially biology—owes an enormous debt of gratitude to the publishing houses that during and after the last war introduced the

publication in this country of monographs, the annual "Advances" series, and comprehensive multivolume treatises. But the stream of such works has now become a flood—a flood that not only overtakes the capacity of the scientific reading public but also is an ever-increasing strain on the budgets of university and other libraries that form the captive market for these publishers. Moreover, the newly published works are increasingly repetitive and overlapping. There appears to be no difficulty in persuading publishers to print the papers of almost every conceivable symposium or scientific meeting, even though these may only be rehashes of the same subjects with papers presented by the same participants. In addition, growing numbers of multivolumed, encyclopedic treatises are appearing that not only are devoted to the actual material of a given discipline but that also attempt to include every ancillary and peripheral field.

This publishing situation has already reached an intolerable stage. Some restraint in the flood of publication is clearly necessary. Authors and publishers should take heed before they drown their market.

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Nonconformers Again

Journal editors as well as grant administrators encounter the contribution based on scientific reasoning that challenges established precepts or defies measurement by familiar criteria [see "Grants to nonconformers," *Science* **143**, 309 (24 Jan. 1964)]. In my tenure (1946–53) as managing editor of the American Chemical Society journal *Industrial & Engineering Chemistry*, our review mechanics for such manuscripts were similar to those for more conventional papers. However, our choice of reviewers and our charge to them differed significantly. We conserved for these unconventional papers our cherished claim on the services of the scientists most noted for their inventiveness, soundness, and intellectual adventurousness. Additionally, we requested a more sympathetic stance than for reviewing the normal paper—essentially, that the reviewer accept a much more explicit burden of proof