Editor of "Nature" Dies

Lionel John Farnham (Jack) Brimble, joint editor of *Nature* from 1938 to 1961 and sole editor since 1961, died in his London home on 15 November.

Born 16 January 1904 in Radstock, Somerset, Brimble studied biology at the University of Reading and was a lecturer in botany for a year at the University of Glasgow and for 4 years at the University of Manchester before becoming assistant editor of *Nature* in 1931. He was appointed in part on the strength of his review, published in *Nature* in 1930, of Sir Jagadis Chunder Bose's book *Growth and Tropic Movements of Plants.*

Author of 19 books on biology and other topics, Brimble was a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Society of Arts, and the Linnean Society.

Nature, an international journal published by Macmillan, has had only four editors in its 96-year history. The founding editor, Sir Norman Lockyer, an astrophysicist, served from 1869 until his retirement in 1919. Lockyer's successor, Sir Richard Gregory, who appointed Brimble assistant editor, retired in 1938 in favor of A. J. V. Gale and Brimble as joint editors. Gale retired in 1961.

At the end of Brimble's editorship, *Nature* was publishing research communications and letters to the editor at the rate of about 3,500 a year. In 1964 the communications and letters came from 65 countries. About one-third of these came from the United Kingdom, another third from the United States. It was not Brimble's practice to send many of these out for review. He felt that the responsibility for selecting the letters and communications was one of his own chief tasks.

Temporarily assuming Brimble's duties is R. J. Fifield, assistant editor since 1959.—VICTOR K. MCELHENY

According to a spokesman for Cornell, their policy is clearcut—to publish all scientific reports. "Where we find significant differences between manufacturers," he told *Science,* "we publish those too. In general, however, it is fair to assume that we either don't find significant differences or that that's not what we're looking for." In this regard, the problem facing the Cornell researchers is in some measure technical: it is evidently fairly easy to discover differences in the case of mechanical parts such as door latches, where manufacturers tend to use standardized items in all models, but the complexity and variety of designs and objects on instrument panels, for example, limit the size of the sample and make statistical evaluation difficult. Lack of statistical data, however, does not keep Cornell from filing with its sponsors specific case materials on accidents involving the company's products. Every quarter, Ford gets details on accidents involving Fords, Chrysler on Chryslers, and so forth. Furthermore, whenever Cornell discovers an unusual case of structural collapse or injury, the manufacturer is notified even if the case is unique.

The difficulty here is not that Cornell shares its data with the manufacturers—if something is going wrong, surely they need to know it and they need to know it fast. The problem is that the data are given only to the manufacturers. The material is denied to the individuals involved in the accidents that are the subject of the reports, lest Cornell become involved in subsequent litigation, and it has even been denied to various public agencies, such as a pioneering committee of the New York state legislature which was attempting to investigate the need for design safety standards. "We give our case data only to sponsors," the Cornell spokesman said last week, and while this category theoretically includes the Public Health Service, in fact the PHS has never requested the information. "What would we do with it?" one PHS official is reported to have replied to Nader's questioning. What they should do with it, in Nader's opinion, is immediately release it to the public, which might be happy to make its choices about cars on something less than the statistically perfect evidence which is necessary for the Cornell researchers' formal scientific efforts. "If single cases are worth reporting to Detroit," Nader commented in a recent interview, "they are worth reporting to the public."

One difficulty underlying the Cornell situation appears to be an inappropriate funding mechanism. The book points out that the Cornell research is financed under the same premise that characterizes most government support for basic research in this country—that the responsibility of the government agency ends with evaluating the merit of the proposal. The result of what Nader described in an interview as an "uncritical transfer of grants policy" has been to encourage the Public Health Service in the timidity with which it characteristically approaches all controversial areas of environmental health. The PHS views its job as supporting worthy research, not as promoting safer cars. The Cornell project is in large part a public one. Sixty percent of its funds come from the federal government, and in addition it relies heavily on data supplied freely by a large array of police and public health officers. In this situation, the book's argument that the Cornell information "should be considered a national data bank to be used for the benefit of the public generally" has a good deal of persuasiveness.

The problem is by no means limited to Cornell. Nader does not question the value of the research. What he does question is the public policy, typified by Cornell, that permits a mixture of public and private support on terms that leave the industry in a privileged position. Even if the industry were perfect, or were doing all it could, someone besides the industry itself should tell us so. But at present there is no antidote to the inevitable self-interest of Detroit. "Whenever an independent research capacity seems likely to develop," Nader commented recently, "the industry always steps in and offers aid. The Bureau of Public Roads, for instance, recently gave a large grant to the Franklin Institute for research on how force is transferred through metal. Right away American Motors offered to supply the cars." Nader believes that, despite some recent improvements, the industry does not have a well-developed in-house capacity for safety research, and that it is not anxious to see an independent capacity develop elsewhere. And he also believes that financial dependence on industry undermines the independence of the researchers. In a West Coast project,