Letters

George Darwin's Father

It's fantastic! It's unbelievable! It's out of sight! I'm talking about the state of California science textbooks for the elementary grades. The textbooks on science, on life, and on heredity do not mention, not even once anywhere in the text, the vocabulary, or the index, the word "evolution or any form of the word "evolve."

It was the finding of the fossilized bones of the horse in its various stages of evolution that convinced all thinking people of the fact of evolution. How is this handled in California? In the fifth-grade book (*1*), the evolution of the horse is illustrated, but how did he get that way? By "changing" (*1*, p. 312). In the texts for grades 6 and 7, he is still changing, not evoluting.

They tell about and show pictures of many great scientists. But how about Charles Darwin, the man who gave us our modern, rational explanation of life? No picture. Only in grade 5 is he mentioned and in this back-handed way: "George Darwin, son of the famous English scientist, Charles Darwin . . ." (*1*, p. 119). But for what is Charles Darwin famous? You won't find it in the California elementary science textbooks. As an extra class activity, text 5 suggests: *"On Your Own.* 1. Who was George Darwin's father, and for what famous work is he known?" (*1*, p. 124).

So all of you elementary school children in our great Ronald Reaganland, if you want to know what Charles Darwin is famous for, *You Are On Your Own.*

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Reference

1. P. F. Brandwein, E. K. Cooper, P. E. Blackwood, E. B. Hone, *California State Series. Concepts in Science 5* (California State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1967).

Marketing the Metric System

William H. Calhoun (Letters, 28 Sept., p. 1201) stresses that the metric system, like a foreign language, is best learned by using it. Most readers of *Science* are in a position to increase their usage of the metric system in their professional role and in their role as a consumer.

Any person who purchases equipment or materials can use metric units when placing orders. In some cases it may be necessary to mention traditional units as well: although an item such as sheet metal can be ordered in metric units, a sheet a standard fraction of an inch thick will be delivered.

Those who are involved with the manufacture of technical equipment or consumer goods can use metric units on labels, in advertising, and in catalogs. Many products such as photographic film are manufactured in metric sizes. Those companies who see retooling to metric units as an expensive long-range process should at least use equivalent metric units in printed material such as price lists.

Tactics that are traditional in marketing consumer goods can be exploited in the effort to acquaint the public with the metric system. Goods sold by length can be offered at the same price per yard or per meter. Free measuring spoons, "cups," and tape measures could be offered as premiums. Metric kitchen and bathroom scales can be promoted as status items or featured as prizes in contests.

Drivers' licenses, insurance forms, employment forms, and employee badges should indicate weight and height in kilograms and centimeters.

This letter has been written on paper 21.59 centimeters by 27.94 centimeters.

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Persecution of Soviet Scientists

John J. Griggs and Gerald P. Bodey (Letters, 3 Aug., p. 391) complain about the omission of information regarding persecuted Soviet scientists who are not Jews. I do not think that this omission is willful, but that it exists only because current information about all Soviet scientists is not supplied to the scientific press. Scientists of Jewish background appear to be the only ones who take the trouble of informing the scientific and lay press of the misfortunes of their Soviet counterparts, whereas those of other nationalities are content to bemoan the fate of their counterparts in their own, usually isolated, circles.

The apparent division of persecuted scientists according to nationality is unreal. First, the Soviet authorities persecute equally, regardless of national origin. Second, among the persecuted there appears to be no division. For example, Leonid Plyushch, a Ukrainian cyberneticist, was sentenced to life in an insane asylum for defending Alexander Ginsburg, a Jewish writer. Nina Strokata, a Ukranian microbiologist, was imprisoned for not divorcing her husband, a writer. One of the first persons who came to her defense, and was arrested himself, was Pyotr Yakir, a Jewish historian. If the scientists in the Soviet Union do not mind crossing religious and nationality boundaries to help one another, why are we so touchy as to whose plight is described? Does it matter to those imprisoned which nationality is currently Number One in the Scientific Persecution Poll? What does matter is what the scientific community is doing about the situation.

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Identification of Commercial Sources

After a recent publication of mine appeared, I received a letter from a major animal breeding company inquiring whether the rats used in my work were of that company's strain. "If this be the case," the letter stated, "it would be most helpful if you could identify our strain of animals . . . in your future publications, thus enabling other investigators to repeat this work. . . ." The rats were not, in fact, purchased from this company, but the

letter raises the general question of whether to identify commercial sources in a scientific publication.

The pitfall of inter-, and even intra-strain, differences is well-known and is one example of the variation between products that can influence reproduction of experimental results. While open to persuasion, I am presently of the view that specifying the commercial source of any product is inappropriate unless the product is uniquely successful for a particular application. Scientists are creatures of habit, and there is often no other reason for the use of a particular brand or source of supply. Requests for commercial endorsement that are thinly veiled as appeals for experimental reproducibility do a disservice to the generally amicable working relationship between scientists and those who supply them with the tools of their trade.

Science has thus far escaped the plight of the medical profession, where brand names have nearly universally replaced generic names to the detriment of both the practitioner and the patient. Editorial guidance from many journals about the identification of sources of supply is often lacking, and scientists should be cautious in their references to products by company or brand name lest they unwittingly offer endorsements which, in other spheres, would bring due remuneration. The propriety of such a practice in scientific publications is open to question.

Happily, communication between investigators is not entirely defunct, and specific information can readily be obtained by direct inquiry.

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Health Records

About this time of year, Cornell University Health Services, like other college and university health services, begin to receive request forms for medical and mental health records for present or past Cornell students who are applying for places in various graduate school programs. Such request forms are always accompanied by a permission form signed by the applicant authorizing release of such information.