

THE EDUCATION OF SCIENCE WRITERS

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This discussion is based upon the premise that it is desirable to popularize science; the assumption of an informed public as a necessity for an intelligent democracy carries with it the corollary that the public at large must be informed of the findings of science.

Science is used here to mean all those fields of inquiry into truth about life and the factors which make it. Because it is so all-inclusive, there is need for informing the lay public about trends and findings in fields so extensive and detailed that a natural scientist often has difficulty keeping up with a social scientist, and vice versa.

It is not sufficient merely to report findings. The complexity of science today demands that the significance of the findings also be reported for the lay audience. Newspapers and magazines are turning more and more to science as a source of news, but there still exists a great deal of criticism from scientists and newspapermen on the type of science news being written.

Obviously, the manner in which material is presented depends, even in cases of popularized science, upon the mind and method of the man presenting the material. It is for this reason that this inquiry was made into the education of certain successful writers of popularized science; it was thought that the experience of these writers with their educations would be something of a yardstick for the subsequent training of students interested in the field of popularized science writing.

The writers studied were all college graduates, but in no other way similar. None were graduates of schools of journalism. Three of the writers were liberal arts majors in college; all of the others were science majors in college, with a slight majority favoring chemistry. Two, however, were first agronomists, one a bacteriologist, another an agricultural chemist, and another a patent attorney.

The necessary conclusion from these findings is that if a man has the natural ability to tell people about things—to give them information—he will sooner or later utilize his ability to write. The writers queried in this study were divided in their feelings regarding their educations. Some felt that the study of science was a first requisite for a writer for the lay press; others felt that such scientific study was a handicap.

Dr. Firman E. Bear, national authority on chemistry in his own right, confessed that he felt scientific training was a handicap to the writer, since it would perhaps keep the writer from asking the questions the lay audience would like to have answered. W. C. Lassetter of *Progressive Farmer*, George Thiem of the *Chicago Daily News*, and Dr. Morris Fishbein of *Hygeia*, all agreed that having a basic understanding of the audience for which one was writing was a necessity. Waldemar Kaempffert of the *New York Times* believed that a good general background is a necessity for the writer, while J. Sidney Cates of *Country Gentleman*, W. W. Waymack of the *Des Moines Register-Tribune*, and Watson Davis of *Science Service* felt some scientific training desirable. The training of the writer in techniques of writing was felt by all to be necessary either before or after training in science in order to understand correctly science's work.