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QUAESTIONES ENTOMOLOGICAE

A periodical record of entomological investigations, published at the Department of Entomology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Volume 1

Number 1

2 January 1965

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Editorial - Words, words, words

The first edition of the World List of Scientific Periodicals, published in 1921, listed 25,000 titles. The second edition in 1934 listed more than 36,000; the third edition in 1952 listed more than 50,000. The fourth edition now appearing lists over 60,000, despite the fact that "some 10,000 titles included in the third edition have been left out as being of social or commercial rather than scientific interest". Most periodicals have recently waxed fat, so that one may estimate 25 years as the time in which the flow of scientific literature doubles itself.

By comparison with science as a whole, the growth of entomological literature seems somewhat pedestrian; the Insecta portion of the Zoological Record listed 1970 titles of papers in 1921 and 4024 in 1953. The applied literature, as represented by the Review of Applied Entomology has been, somewhat surprisingly, growing more slowly than this, so that one may estimate 35 years for the entomological literature to double itself. Even so the 25,229 entomological articles listed in Horn and Schenkling as published from the beginning of history until the end of 1863, at current rates would be produced in about four years, and the total number of scientific papers now published in the field of entomology must exceed a quarter of a million. One may suspect, however, a shrinkage in the mean length of papers under the joint influence of mounting page charges and the philosophy of "publish or perish" coupled with the waning ability of administrators to judge publications by anything beyond their number.

Some may say that in this situation a new periodical should be offered with an apology - if at all. But if we would slow down the march of science, we must stop research before it has begun, not lose the results of it when it is all but finished. Certainly we must see to it

that we do not produce new facts faster than we can assimilate them into generalizations, although this process calls for that very breadth of outlook which the literature flood makes it difficult for us to achieve. If we can no longer achieve individual breadth, we must provide for composite breadth by facilitating diversity of training and the unusual combination of subjects.

If we stagger under the impact of a swelling literature, before we call for a slow down in research we should remind ourselves that a quarter of a million entomological papers only represents less than one per described species of beetle, and that more than half the species of insects remain to be found and described.

If then, this growth of the literature must go on, what can we do to keep abreast of it? A great many things: fight the trend to shorter papers, which has now reached the ridiculous stage when an index card for a paper may be larger than the content of the paper itself. It costs more in time, money, and effort, to produce, file, store, retrieve, and read ten one page papers than one ten page paper. Publish in the most appropriate periodical from the subject viewpoint; publish promptly; index and abstract everything diversely; and make full use of modern techniques such as microforms, punch cards, and even computers. It may seem redundant to say that material should be published once only, yet how often do we find it difficult to avoid duplicate publication of material from the proceedings of a meeting, and how often is this due to inappropriate publication in the first place? A marriage between microcards and punch cards is long overdue; if sufficiently prolific, the hybrid offspring would be of inestimable value to the bibliographer.

There are signs that things are beginning to move in this direction; perhaps this periodical is one of them. But one may question whether the move is fast enough to get us out of chaos: movable type, despite its name, is conservative stuff.

Despite our concern for the future, we should be both remiss and churlish to enter 1965 without a backward glance to 1865 and the beginning of the Zoological Record. Let us pay both dollars and respect to our venerable abstracting and indexing services - in no other field of endeavour is continuity more important. I wonder whether any other branch of science is as fortunate as entomology with its Hagen, Horn and Schenkling, and Zoological Record. Many complain of the increasing delay in publication of successive volumes of Zoological Record, but how many of the complainants have ever attempted a similar task? And whose fault is this? As Günther pointed out in his preface to volume one in August 1865, many journals of learned societies which would carry the date 1864 on their title pages, had still not appeared; but here we are treading on dangerous ground. We regard it as a most fortunate and propitious honour, to commence publication in the year in which the Zoological Record celebrates its centenary.