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REFLECTIONS OF A CHEMIST¹

CONTENTS

<i>Reflections of a Chemist: DR. GEORGE D. ROSEN- GARTEN</i>	287
<i>Does the Net Energy Value of Food depend upon the Purpose for which it is used in the Body? DR. H. H. MITCHELL</i>	298
<i>Ralph Gordon Lusk: PROFESSOR KIRTLEY F. MATHER</i>	292
<i>Professor Albrecht Kossel: PROFESSOR ALBERT P. MATHEWS</i>	293
<i>Scientific Events:</i>	
<i>The Imperial Agricultural Research Conference; The Biochemical Institute for the Middlesex Hospital; The Journal of Paleontology; The Row- son-MacMillan Arctic Expedition of the Field Museum; Research in Mining and Metallurgy</i>	293
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	297
<i>University and Educational Notes</i>	299
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:</i>	
<i>Arsine from Fused Glass: DR. H. M. ELSEY. In- dications of the Transmission of an Acquired Char- acter in Flax: PROFESSOR HENRY L. BOLLEY. Mechanism of Buffer Action in Soils: PHILIP B. MYERS and GERALD M. GILLIGAN</i>	300
<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:</i>	
<i>A Method for obtaining Infective Nematode Larvae from Cultures: G. F. WHITE</i>	302
<i>Special Articles:</i>	
<i>Transmission of Potato Witches' Broom to Toma- toes and Potatoes: DR. P. A. YOUNG. Studies on the Golgi Apparatus of the Mammary Gland: H. W. BEAMS</i>	304
<i>Science News</i>	x

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ANTHROPOLOGISTS divide the era of human existence into ages according to the material of the implements used during a given period—the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Far be it from my thoughts to dispute the correctness of this classification, but it does seem a misrepresentation or a wrong characterization to continue the present, or even the preceding, century in the iron age. With the advent of the twentieth century, at the latest, the count of a new age begins. What shall be the name of this age? Your reply may well be anticipated—chemistry. Not your partiality or mine prompts this reply. It is the verdict of facts, for the advances from the stone to the bronze and from the bronze to the iron age are really the results of the progress of the art of chemistry.

The rôle chemistry is playing in the world affairs is too well known to require elaboration. In its broadest embrace—colloidal, catalytic, biological, therapeutic and what not—chemistry is the moving principle of this world of ours. It is nothing less than life and death! We all know the wonders chemistry has accomplished within the short space of time it has been given a systematic unprejudiced trial. These accomplishments and the potentialities of chemical science have also been well advertised, perhaps a little too much. The chemically untutored will expect too much and too soon, with resulting disappointment and reflection on the science and its followers.

IMPORTANCE OF PURE SCIENCE

A far more important problem and one requiring our immediate and undivided attention is so-called "pure chemistry." I should rather like to call it "science of chemistry" in contradistinction to the practical application of chemistry which would be more correctly designated as the "art of chemistry."

Pure science is the protoplasm of applied science. It is the brick and mortar of our sky-scraping buildings of industry and commerce. Our civilization of which we are so proud, the comforts of life we are enjoying, are wholly built on discoveries emanating from the search for scientific truths, from the pursuit of science for the sake of the science itself. As Secretary Hoover has very tersely put it, "It is in the soil

¹ Presidential address delivered at the seventy-fourth meeting of the American Chemical Society, Detroit, Mich., September 5 to 10, 1927.

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