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“Letters” in *Science*

With this issue we are reinstating a section that, under various titles, was a feature of *Science* from the first issue on 9 February 1883 till 24 June 1955. The section began under the title “Letters to the Editor,” but even in the first issue it included a note that might better have been described as a technical paper. The section continued to include short technical papers when, a few years later, its title was changed to “Discussion and Correspondence.” In 1903 technical papers were put in a new section, “Shorter Articles,” thus achieving a nominal separation of letters and technical papers. This last section has at various subsequent times been called “Special Articles” and “Technical Papers.” It is represented in recent issues by “Reports” in the “Reports and Letters” section. The various editors have exercised similar semantic ingenuity in titling the letters section. It has appeared not only under the two titles already mentioned but also as “Discussion,” “Comments by Readers,” “Comments and Communications,” and “Communications.”

A sampling of the section devoted to comments, under whatever title, shows that short technical papers were regularly included and indeed, before the recent fusion of the two sections, short technical papers were published rapidly in this section, while longer papers were published somewhat more slowly as “Technical Papers.”

A rough and ready analysis of the 105 notes (or articles or letters) included in the last volume in which they were separated from technical papers shows that letters (that is, opinion and comment) totaled only 32, the remaining 73 being technical papers and descriptions of methods or apparatus.

It was doubtless the blurring of the distinction between the two sections that led to their fusion in July 1955. Our proposal to set up a letters section again stems from our view that a forum for the expression of comment and opinion will make a desirable addition to the journal and from our hope that the distinction between letters and reports can be more sharply drawn than in the past. Technical papers and technical letters commenting upon them will be published as “Reports.” Letters that comment on something that has appeared in other sections of *Science* and expression of opinion—including critical opinion—will be published as “Letters.”

We propose the following ground rules for “Letters.” Letters will be neither acknowledged nor returned; authors will receive neither proof nor an opportunity to obtain reprints; anonymous letters will be disregarded; the editors will reserve the right to make deletions; letters of not more than 250 words will be preferred; the editors’ decision about whether or not to publish letters will be final and not subject to continuing correspondence; an author should indicate whether or not his letter is intended for publication; letters should be typed doubled spaced and submitted in duplicate; as is usual in a section of this kind, the editors will take no responsibility for the accuracy or soundness of the letters published.

So much for the rules, except to add that experience will doubtless teach us that some should be modified and that others, not at present contemplated, will have to be devised, if the section is to play the part we hope it will in making *Science* more useful, more interesting, and more informative.—G. DuS.