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<i>The Explanation of the Colloidal Behavior of Proteins</i> : DR. JACQUES LOEB.....	731
<i>The Award of the Henry Draper Medal</i>	741
<i>Appeal on behalf of the League of Nations for Aid to Austrian Intellectual Workers</i>	743
Scientific Events:	
<i>London Bird Sanctuaries; The American Electrochemical Society; Professor Max Weber; Officers of the American Chemical Society; The Hayden Award of the Philadelphia Academy</i>	744
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	747
<i>University and Educational Notes</i>	750
Discussion and Correspondence:	
<i>Research in Marine Biology</i> : PROFESSOR W. J. CROZIER. <i>On Translating Einstein</i> : DR. E. E. SLOSSON. <i>On the Formation of Family Names like Tingide</i> : DR. H. M. PARSHLEY. <i>The Beginnings of American Geology</i> : DR. MARCUS BENJAMIN.....	751
Quotations:	
<i>The Federal Budget; The Appreciation of Science</i>	755
Scientific Books:	
<i>Glover's United States Life Tables</i> : PROFESSOR RAYMOND PEARL.....	756
Special Articles:	
<i>X-ray Crystallography; X-ray Wave Lengths; Space-lattice Dimensions and Atomic Masses</i> : DR. L. W. MCKEEHAN. <i>Peripheral Migration of a Centriole Derivative in the Spermatogenesis of <i>Ecanthus</i></i> : DR. H. H. JOHNSON.....	757

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THE EXPLANATION OF THE COLLOIDAL BEHAVIOR OF PROTEINS¹

I

THIS year's Pasteur lecture coincides with the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of Pasteur's birth. The application of Pasteur's ideas and discoveries has benefited humanity to such an extent that they have become part of the consciousness of civilized mankind. What is, perhaps, less widely understood is the fact that Pasteur changed the method of medical research. In the study of infectious diseases Pasteur substituted for the method of hit or miss (with the chances infinitely in favor of missing) the method of a definitely oriented search which never fails to give results when properly applied. Thousands of physicians had studied infectious diseases before Pasteur, but they tried to solve their problem by starting from observations of the symptoms of some special disease. This led to no result for the simple reason that without knowing beforehand for what to look—or, in other words, without knowing the general cause of infectious diseases—it was impossible to discover the cause of any special infectious process. Pasteur reversed this method by his discovery of the action and omnipresence of microorganisms, leaving it to the medical men to look for the special agency in the individual cases.

There is little doubt that the old empiricism, still in vogue in some other fields of medicine and in the physiological sciences, must be replaced by the more rationalistic method of Pasteur of knowing the general fundamental principles before attempting to explain the more special phenomena, since, unless we follow this method, we never know which of

¹ Pasteur Lecture delivered before the Institute of Medicine of Chicago on November 24, 1922.

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