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SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC PRESS¹

By SIR RICHARD GREGORY, Bart., F.R.S.

EDITOR OF NATURE

THREE separate factors—science, the public and the press—are involved in the consideration of the subject of this address. Whatever science has to say, and whatever facilities are afforded by the press for saying it, the decision whether to read or pass over what is offered rests with the public. Knowing that its verdict is final, the policy in most newspaper offices is to publish matter which will be acceptable to as large a section of the community as possible. From a business point of view, this is the only sound principle to be followed, especially as the advertising revenue is largely determined by the number of the net sales. Among the readers of all newspapers, however, are many types of mind and a variety of interests; and a wise editor endeavors to appeal to most of them. He can secure distinction for his journal

¹ Presidential address delivered on September 21, 1934, at the eleventh annual conference of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, at Oxford.

by being ahead of some of his readers in the attention given to particular subjects, but he must not be too much ahead in most of the subjects for most of his readers if the journal is to survive and its circulation be maintained or increased. This is true of all periodicals, and should be borne in mind in discussions of the relations of science to the press or of the press to science.

The function of a daily or weekly newspaper is to provide reading and readable matter for a general or particular public—the main part being intended for all who care to read and the special columns for those whose interests are in particular fields of thought, work or sport. Usually the matter is presented in the form of (1) news items dealing with occurrences or opinions factually treated; (2) articles of a more extended character, or essays, dealing with their subjects in a less summary fashion and more informative

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