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<i>The American Association for the Advancement of Science:</i>		
<i>Science, Common Sense and Decency:</i> DR. IRVING LANGMUIR	1	
<i>The American Ethnological Society:</i> The late DR. FRANZ BOAS	7	
<i>Obituary:</i>		
<i>John Franklin Daniel:</i> DR. RICHARD M. EAKIN. <i>Recent Deaths</i>	8	
<i>Scientific Events:</i>		
<i>The Tercentenary of the Birth of Isaac Newton; Election of the President and Other Officers of the American Chemical Society; Award of the Edison Medal to Dr. Armstrong</i>	10	
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	12	
<i>Discussion:</i>		
<i>Severity of Narcissus Basal Rot Increased by the Use of Synthetic Hormones and Nitrogen Bases:</i> DR. NEIL W. STUART and W. D. McCLELLAN. <i>What Is a Generic Name?:</i> DR. H. W. RICKETT. <i>A New General Term for Mineral Industries Studies:</i> DR. ROBERT E. DENGLER	15	
<i>Special Correspondence:</i>		
<i>Suggestions from the Office of Scientific Personnel of the National Research Council:</i> DR. HOMER L. DODGE	16	
<i>Scientific Books:</i>		
<i>Advances in Enzymology:</i> DR. E. S. GUZMAN BAR-		
RON. <i>Biological Symposia:</i> DR. C. H. BEST. <i>Hurricanes:</i> DR. W. J. HUMPHREYS	17	
<i>Special Articles:</i>		
<i>Complement Fixation in Rickettsial Diseases:</i> COLONEL HARRY PLOTZ. <i>A Study of Crystalline Beef Liver Catalase Dried in the Frozen State:</i> DR. ALEXANDER L. DOUNCE and JOE W. HOWLAND. <i>The Energy Cost of Standing in Horses:</i> DR. C. F. WINCHESTER	20	
<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:</i>		
<i>Simplified Photomicrography with a Hand Camera:</i> R. P. LOVELAND	24	
<i>Science News</i>	8	

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THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE SCIENCE, COMMON SENSE AND DECENCY¹

By Dr. IRVING LANGMUIR

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UP to the beginning of the present century one of the main goals of science was to discover natural laws. This was usually accomplished by making experiments under carefully controlled conditions and observing the results. Most experiments when repeated under identical conditions gave the same results.

The scientist, through his own experiments or from previous knowledge based on the work of others, usually developed some theory or explanation of the

results of his experiments. In the beginning this might be a mere guess or hypothesis which he would proceed to test by new types of experiments. If a satisfactory theory is obtained which seems in accord with all the data and with other known facts, the solution or goal of the investigation was considered to have been reached.

A satisfactory theory should make possible the predictions of new relationships or the forecasting of the results of new experiments under different conditions. The usefulness of the theory lies just in its ability to predict the results of future experiments. The extraordinary accomplishments of the great mathematical physicists in applying Newton's Laws to the

¹ Address of the retiring president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Owing to the postponement of the New York meeting, at the request of the Office of Defense Transportation, the address was broadcast by Science Service over the Columbia Broadcasting System on December 26, 1942.

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