

Always Starting Something

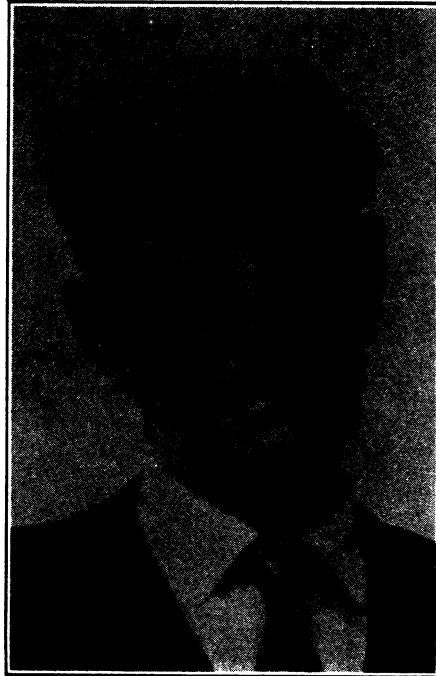
A habitual starter of scientific institutions and enterprises, would serve very well as an informal characterization of Doctor Ritter, who has just celebrated his seventieth birthday. He began his career of starting things thirty-five or forty years ago, when he left his native state of Wisconsin to study under the famous elder Le Conte at the then new University of California. Professor LeConte held the "settee" of natural history at the University, and Ritter, becoming interested in the biological end of that capacious piece of academic furniture, sawed it off and set it up as the first chair of zoology on the Pacific coast.

Ambitious attempts to start a marine biological station, mostly without funds, attracted the attention and interest of men outside his own field and indeed outside all formal science. Most notable among these was one of the most successful newspaper men in the world, E. W. Scripps. The two developed that most inseparable of all companionships, a mutual mind, and therefrom grew the first of their common undertakings, the Scripps Institution for Biological Research at La Jolla, now the Scripps Institution for Oceanography. Though Doctor Ritter had contemplated the change in emphasis and title of the institution, it was not made until he was ready to hand over its active charge to his successor, Dr. T. Wayland Vaughan.

Following the War, the restless mind of Mr. Scripps dwelt much on the necessity for informing the general public in authentic but assimilable science; and Doctor Ritter officiated at the birth of a third institution, Science Service. It will probably never be settled which of the two is entitled to priority in the Science Service idea, for to the day of his death Scripps insisted it was Ritter, and Ritter still insists it was Scripps.

Another problem that engaged the attention of this philosophical-executive team was the march of the Malthusian ghost, and the outcome has been the founding, at Miami University, of an institute for the study of population problems.

The fifth, and so far the final, major undertaking of Doctor Ritter is a nursery school back in the beloved State of his adoption, and under the immediate direction of Dr. Watson Bailey, one of his former students at the University of California. This is to be a "psycho-biological" institution, where not only the children will be



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taught by their teachers, but also the teachers will be taught by the children. For it is one of Doctor Ritter's observations that, with all the attention that has been paid to curriculum in schools of all grades, curiously little effort has been made to instruct ourselves in the nature of the small human organisms we are striving to stimulate. So this school will be an instrument for reciprocal learning.

However, the establishment of five scientific foundations has not been sufficient to take up all of Doctor Ritter's time. He has filled in chinks with occupations that might serve as *opera magna* for lesser men, such as putting a state academy of science on its feet and establishing and running a most scholarly series of university publications. Thereto must be added his indefatigable researches on the colonial tunicates of the Pacific littoral, his earlier heavy teaching schedule, and latterly his bio-philosophical writings.

The latter are an expression of a scientific and life outlook from which all his varied enterprises have taken form and color, and on which, as on a central cord, they have been unified and coordinated. When the high tide of mechanistic doctrine in biology went over the world, Doctor Ritter remained stiffnecked and unconverted, adhering to the old faith of a "natural history approach," and now he has the satisfaction of seeing many of the second generation of mechanists softening their dogmas, and in such pilgrims' disguises as "physiological ecologists" returning to the old shrines.

A Birthday Dinner

Dr. William E. Ritter, President of Science Service, former director of the Scripps Institution for Oceanography at La Jolla, California, and emeritus professor of zoology at the University of California, was, with Mrs. Ritter, set at the head of a table at the Cosmos Club in Washington a few days ago, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, while the members of Science Service staff, plus a few old-time friends, first fortified themselves with a festival dinner and then edified themselves with accounts and reminiscences of the life and works of their Chief.

Dr. Edwin E. Slosson, director of Science Service, acted as toastmaster, and called upon "charter members" of the biology group at the University of California who were present *in toto*, and also upon men whose association with Doctor Ritter has been more recent. An interesting feature of the evening was the reading of a series of tributes from Doctor Ritter's co-workers in the various enterprises in which he has been active. Prof. S. J. Holmes and Prof. C. A. Kofoid wrote concerning the foundation and development of the zoology department at the University of California; Dr. F. B. Summer about the Scripps Institution; President Hughes of Miami University about the institute for the study of population problems, and Dr. Edna Watson Bailey about the "Ritter Idea" nursery school in California. Dr. J. McKeen Cattell was present in person to speak of the development of Science Service, and Robert P. Scripps read a communication from H. L. Smithton which crowned the evening with an appreciation of the long friendship and cooperation between his father, E. W. Scripps, and Doctor Ritter.

The guests of the evening included Mr. and Mrs. Robert P. Scripps, Dr. and Mrs. T. S. Palmer, Dr. Vernon Kellogg, Dr. J. C. Merriam and Dr. J. McKeen Cattell, together with the entire personnel of Science Service staff and members of their immediate families.

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A great many present-day biologists have no patience at all for scientific methodology, but for those that have stomachs for such meat the philosophical works of Ritter offer opportunity for chewing, without exposing them to the danger of foundering on windy metaphysics.

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