

GENERAL SCIENCE

# Scientists for Tomorrow

By ALAN T. WATERMAN

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*Excerpts from speech at Seventh National Science Fair Awards Banquet, Oklahoma City, Okla., May 11.*

► WHAT IS being done in Oklahoma for science, and what is being accomplished for science by the National Science Fair, typify what in my judgment must be done in cities and towns throughout the United States. \* \* \*

Busy as most of you are, now that final examinations for the year are creeping up on you, increasing numbers of you have still found the time to pursue your keen interest in science, to work up experiments, and to prepare exhibits at local Science Fairs.

You cannot begin to appreciate how reassuring this is to those of us in Washington who sense the importance of the work to be done and the need for capable people to do it. As its director, I am very pleased that the National Science Foundation, through a modest grant, is able to support Science Clubs, many of whose members are represented here.

My amiable and able friend, Watson Davis, director of SCIENCE SERVICE, tells me that 213 finalists of Regional Science Fairs are here tonight, 77 more than were present at the National Fair last year. You have come from 110 Regional Fairs, half again as many as were represented a year ago.

Here, indeed, is assertive and tremendously reassuring evidence of an increasing enthusiasm for science among youth. For their splendid support of Regional Science Fairs, we are deeply appreciative of the cooperation of local sponsors, numbering scores of civic, professional, education and industrial groups, and many of the great newspapers of our Nation. \* \* \*

Do you know, young ladies and gentlemen, that you are numbered among a highly select minority of your associates? One of the very baffling problems posed for us who are concerned with the quality of professional manpower in the United States is

the fact that about half of the top 20 percent of our ablest students fail to continue their education beyond high school.

What is more surprising is that nearly two-thirds of the top two percent do not go on to college. You will observe, then, that if the statistics I have just given are accurate, most of you may probably count yourselves among the top one percent of the Nation's secondary school students. \* \* \*

I would like to have a chance to talk to you about attitudes, too. As I look across this room, I see none who corresponds to the stereotype, "brain," "long-hair" or "egg-head." The lack of interest in a college career which I have mentioned has been interpreted by many as evidence of a wave of anti-intellectualism, but it is not here with us this evening at any rate.

I am not so sure, either, but that the tide is turning and we are now building at least a small beachhead of pro-intellectualism. If not, how do we account for ever-increasing enrollments in our colleges and universities, ever-growing numbers of Regional Science Fairs?

Precise times of changing attitudes are not easy to discern when we observe total society or total economy, but from my own observations in recent months, across wide geographic areas of the Nation, I think adherents to anti-intellectualism may be whistling past the graveyard to keep up the courage of their own diminishing company. \* \* \*

You may be assured that from dedication, from such persistence, from such achievement, will arise the quantity and, more importantly, the quality of scientists and engineers which our Nation requires. I would venture a word of admonition—don't permit yourself to become too one-sided.

I need not tell this group that science is as deeply embedded in our culture as the

humanities. In fact, its early name was natural philosophy. I hope, however, that you will somehow find time to enrich your lives with a knowledge of history, of literature, of art, of music.

Those of you who go on to the doctoral degree in one of the disciplines of science, or advanced degrees in engineering will find your time so thoroughly absorbed that there may be little left for the humanities. Take it, however limited it may be.

Happily, you are not living in a country where freedom to choose one's own career is unknown. No one will expect you to know everything, but scientists, I believe, have as much obligation to reach out toward an understanding of the humanities as humanists must understand the great contribution that science has made to the cultural life of mankind.

In fact it will take the teamwork of both to solve many of the problems of the future. \* \* \*

It is . . . important that you who have a keen interest in science give thought to academic careers.

While such a career will probably never command the high salaries of industry, it has its rewards in the joy of creative work in the search for truth for its own sake, the company of scholars in many disciplines of knowledge, and the satisfaction of having a hand in guiding future young scientists along the paths of knowledge. \* \* \*

I congratulate each of you for the stout-hearted race you have run down to the finish line of the Seventh National Science Fair. You are all very splendid young ladies and gentlemen and your country is proud of you. Keep your eyes on your goal—let none deter you from your aspiration to a career in science or engineering. Opportunities beyond your young imaginations await you in industry, in education, in government—opportunities to serve well the economy, the welfare, the defense of the United States, and the cause of science and human knowledge.

Science News Letter, May 26, 1956

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