

THE CHEMIST AS A PROFESSIONAL MAN*

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CHEMISTRY AS a profession has come of age. It has, however only recently reached this stature. The best evidence that this is so is in the fact that this talk is being given at all. Does one find such a title on the program of the American Medical Association or of the American Bar Association? We are concerned about our professional status since it is of such recent growth. Not all of our colleagues appreciate it; not all of our neighbors understand it; not all of our employers recognize it. American engineers seem concerned regarding their cultural attainments; American chemists are concerned about their professional status. The older "learned professions" do not seem to worry about either. Their cultural attainments and their professional status are of long standing and are given wide public recognition.

This relatively recent awareness of the professional status of chemists is the outstanding event of recent years in our profession. The rumblings in the local sections of the American Chemical Society; the

emergence of the small but extremely vigorous American Institute of Chemists; the many panel discussions about "professionalism," about "mandatory" versus "permissive licensing" of chemists, and about "national certification" of chemists all bear out my thesis. *Our unusual concern about professional status shows that we now have it and that we are not entirely clear what we should do with it!*

Forty years ago some of the chemistry students at a few universities of the middle west wrote a ritual for Alpha Chi Sigma. I presume that most chemists know that Alpha Chi Sigma is now the largest of several so-called "professional" fraternities in chemistry. In one of the less juvenile sections of the ritual, one finds "chemistry both as a science and as a profession." I do not believe that major students today would write the same words if faced with the necessity of writing a similar ritual. They would, or so it seems to me, assume that any one in college wishing to enter the profession would need to master the science in order to be an "entered apprentice" in the profession. More

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and more young men, and their parents, draw the parallel with the profession of medicine. This they do both as regards the character of the profession and the length of training required. They even seem surprised to learn that it is still possible to earn a living (if that be the right word) after only four years of university training. It was not so when I went to the university! It seems to me that this too tells us that professional status has caught older chemists almost unaware. The question now is, *what shall we do with professional status now that we have it?*

Men in this room have been among those who have helped to bring about the present situation. Those of us who are between 40 and 60 can now say: "All of it I saw, part of it I was." The many thriving although specialized organizations among chemists have aided greatly in the attainment of professional status. The Society of Cosmetic Chemists is, I know, making a considerable contribution to this end.

The growing tendency to sort out professional workers in industry from operatives and technicians is in my opinion highly commendatory and should be urged upon management wherever and whenever possible. Management has a real responsibility here to establish separate and very different procedures for the discussions of wages and working conditions with the two groups. When management neglects this it is headed for trouble; for

real trouble! Here, too, the older members of the profession, often in positions where management will listen, have a real responsibility and a genuine opportunity for advancement of the profession. Lawyers and medical men have no trouble protecting the professional rights of their younger men in industry. Why not? Because the older men make a point in their dealings with management to stress the professional character of the services rendered by younger men. The medical doctor is never classed with the medical technician; why should the professional chemist be grouped with the chemical technician or the chemical engineer with the chemical operative? We have it in our power to prevent such foolish classifications. As groups of chemists we can do much: as individuals we can do a great deal more! We must now consolidate our gains as a relatively new profession but one whose prestige has mounted much faster than any of us really appreciate.

Then, too, in our lives as citizens we can measure up to what is expected of members of learned professions! We should serve on local school boards along with the other professional men of our communities. Who can better aid in systematic introduction of youth to modern culture and civilization than the scientist whose fellows have done so much to improve the materials of the modern world and to ease the burdens of sickness? Why do we not serve more often on village committees and commissions? Who

could do it better? Why do we not sit on hospital boards? Are there any professional men better qualified? What hospital board would be without a physician? Why should they not reason in the same fashion about a chemist?

Personally, I do not see much need for new organizations of scientists to deal with non-scientific matters (save perhaps in grave emergencies). I am, however, entirely willing to defend the right of other scientists to organize such groups, if they wish!

My own view would be that we should use existing political organizations for political ends. The chemist who joins the local Republican Club in New Jersey or the local

Democratic Club in Brooklyn will soon be able to wield political power where it counts; at the local level.

Chemists now have the admiration and respect of their neighbors, their associates, and their employers. The profession of chemistry has come of age! We can pass on to the younger chemists a better professional status if as individual chemists and as groups of chemists we establish even more clearer than ever before that chemists are really concerned about the public interest and about the welfare of society. We must prove this by our deeds. We must even convince ourselves that these intentions should be openly stated and proudly demonstrated.