

# 101ST ANNUAL MEETING

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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The Institute has completed the formal program arranged to celebrate its centennial year. The planning of this program started in earnest about a year ago; at that time we were quite unable to draw up an elaborate and detailed schedule of events as we had only about \$600 to spend and even this was more than we could afford. If a rich man plans to travel around the world he can choose any itinerary he likes, arrange to be at a certain point at a certain time, and if events and people prove uncooperative he can draw and aim his cheque book. Not being rich we could not emulate the well-heeled globe trotter - however our resources were ample to carry us to our destination by hitch hiking. Now hitch hiking is dangerous and nerve wracking but it is also exciting especially if one gets good "lifts", that is if one gets amiable and stimulating company going in the same direction as oneself. We did get good company, and stimulating. Dr. Newcombe's address engaged the particular interests of that large section of our Institute concerned with the biological sciences, and he possessed the unique gift of being able to communicate his ideas with precision and clarity, to all in his audience (which included a large number of students and people from the city). His address was repeated at Acadia, under the auspices of the Valley Chapter, to an equally large and enthusiastic audience. Sir Bernard Lovell's subject, Radio Astronomy, drew a crowd of about six or eight hundred people. On this occasion we were privileged to hear an interesting lecture delivered by an artist in words. You will recall that he spoke without notes and yet without hesitation or rambling, that his use of the English language was that of a master, the apt word always available, and the style varied and engaging. In addition to these special lectures we had a large number of extraordinary meetings which were well received. In arranging this varied program your Council did not, like the rich traveller, make elaborate long range plans; rather like the hitch hiker we adopted an attitude of alert passivity. The thumb was perpetually in the traditional position but the head was shaken to several offers of a "lift". I would recommend this attitude of alert passivity to future Councils of the Institute. It will provide one or two excellent public

lectures a year and this is perhaps the most useful extra thing we can do.

In enumerating the activities of the year we must not omit the part taken by Dr. Bruce Fergusson who was the speaker at our family dinner. On that occasion he gave us an account of the early history of the Institute. Since then he has completed the survey of our hundred years of active existence and his manuscript is in the hands of our Editor, Professor Heaps. In due time it will be published in the Journal along with other pertinent and interesting facts about the Institute.

It is natural on a birthday to look to the future. Some planning for the future is essential in all endeavours but it is a great mistake to make plans that are too elaborate and detailed. It is not right to plan for everything that it may seem necessary to do; it is wiser to plan to do everything that is necessary as it arises. This leaves a person or an organization in a state of perpetual readiness to take advantage of whatever means are available to meet his or its immediate needs. To this end it is helpful to be flexible in attitude, every ready to respond to the necessity for change. This is one aspect of the true scientific spirit and we should bring this spirit to our Council meetings.

Just as science has a goal so must our Institute have a goal. The goal of science is to understand and make sense of human experience. Science best achieves this goal when it acts in an essentially selfish manner; that is when it resolutely turns its back on all allurements to take part in any other activities and the allurements are many. There is for example the allurements of wealth to be gained by turning aside to exploit known truth; there is the allurements of power to be executed by turning aside to exploit known terror. Science must never forget that the surest way to wealth, power, prestige, etc. (if these are desirable) is to pursue its single aim (the intellectual understanding of nature and its ways) with selfish and complete devotion. This is an example of the principle "Seek ye first the Kingdom of Truth and all these things shall be added unto you".

In this there is a lesson for our Institute; but first we have to seek clearly what our goal is before we can pursue it with selfish devotion. We must discover our essential self, lay it

bare, and then foster it delicately and with loving care. The fact that our Institute has an essential self, and that this self has in some measure been well served, is indicated by observing that we have survived for one hundred years. No institution that fails to meet a need will last this long. It is not too easy to cut away cant and pomposity and see the true basis on which our permanence lies. Sometimes we claim that we are fostering this, promoting that, pursuing the other thing, and such meaningless phrases; however I suspect that what really keeps us going is that we enjoy each other's company, we respect each other's ability, we are proud of each other's success, and that we value the chance to talk to each other about our work, to have it criticized and discussed in a friendly spirit. This is a perfectly sound basis for a successful society provided the topics discussed are important and relevant to a certain number of those present at each meeting.

If we accept the thesis that our central purpose is to hold meetings as we do at present then several things follow, mostly of a negative nature. The first is that we should be very cautious about changing the form of the Institute. It works very well as it is. In particular it would seem to me unwise to respond to the pressure to split into two or three sections. Apart from the question of whether or not our numbers warrant this there remains the possibility that our diversity of interests may be one source of our strength. Any act which cuts us off from our true source of vitality is bound to be disastrous.

Another question we have to settle is this: Do we conceive education to be a part of our role? Would it be wise for us to adopt a more aggressive policy in making the ideas and discoveries of science more widely known to the people of Halifax and in particular to the students in High School. My own view is that we perform this function when fate gives us an opportunity but that it should always be regarded as a peripheral interest. There are other organizations that administer to this need and most of us are members of these other organizations. There are many good things to be done and we all see things that need doing but our society has a restricted and narrow path to tread and it should restrict its roaming on broader roads if it is to have a central sense of purpose.

A problem of real concern to the Society is the status of its Journal. We have never had a very clear cut idea about the

role it should fill. It has been used recently for recording rather long detailed studies of local flora and fauna, studies that would probably not be received elsewhere because of their length and limited interest. This is a very useful thing to do and a real purpose has been served; articles of this sort should be published in the future in ever increasing numbers. But the time may be upon us when we should widen the scope of our acceptances. Perhaps we should become very systematic, publish accurately on time, accept a number of shorter articles for each issue, encourage the local Institutes and Universities to submit a larger fraction of their research output and give them a generous supply of reprints at a nominal cost. This should be a serious consideration of future Councils if we manage to solve our financial problems.