Letters to the Editor

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Language Distribution of Scientific Periodicals

THE recently issued second edition of the "World List of Scientific Periodicals" (see NATURE, Sept. 22, 1934) provides a census of the current scientific periodicals throughout the world. The detailed thoroughness of the work, executed under the editorship of Mr. W. A. Smith, of the British Museum, with an expert staff, the advantage taken by them in regard to comprehensiveness of entry, from experience gained in the first edition now nine years ago, and the very magnitude of the list arrived at, extending to more than 36,000 individual titles, allow the supposition that in this conspectus we have the total current output of scientific periodicals of the world represented with something like exhaustive completeness.

To-day periodicals constitute the main bulk of scientific literature. They furnish the main channel for publication of new scientific discoveries and inventions. They form a chief medium for the exchange and discussion of new views. They can be accepted therefore as constituting in large measure an index to scientific activity. For obtaining a view of the contributions to scientific activity furnished from different parts of the world, an interest attaches therefore to the quota, toward the general output of such periodicals, traceable severally to some of the main contributory groups throughout the world. To assess this the number of titles belonging to a given language as recorded by the "World List" may be taken as some guide. The "World List" itself covers eighteen different languages. Without carrying the inquiry further than the five languages English, French, German, Italian and Russian, the results come out, following them in reverse order to the above, as follows:

Russian . . .	1,833	scientific periodicals.
Italian . . .	1,667	" "
German . . .	6,186	" "
French . . .	5,013	" "
English . . .	13,494	" "

Relatively one to another, the numerical sizes of these groups may be accepted as carrying some indication as to how scientific activity bulks relatively under these several linguistic headings. Scientific production will obviously be a part of the scientific activity thus indexed. An inference also allowable, within limits, will be as to the relative size of that fraction of the world-public which is reached by science through the medium of each of the several languages. The results cited above make evident the special responsibility resting on those contributors to science whose language is English to spare no pains to write it worthily of the great rôle entrusted to it as a medium of scientific thought to-day.

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Wine Makers and Bottle Makers: a Parable

A CERTAIN country was noted for its wonderful native wines, both sparkling and mellow. Grapes were grown by small individual owners, and each specialist was proud of his product and of its distinct taste. For fermentation and ageing, wine was poured into various casks, skins, bottles, jugs, etc., as the case might be. From time to time there was some talk about the containers being not always satisfactory and certainly not uniform. Gradually the makers of bottles and jugs organised an association to improve and to standardise their products, so as to provide the wine makers with better containers and thereby to assist them both in the production and marketing of the wines.

It so happened that while it was easy for the bottle makers to become organised (their product being standard and comparatively easy to manufacture), the wine makers continued their individual production, at least for the choicest vintages, where intimate individual knowledge, skill and professional pride were important factors. As time went on, there was more and more talk about excellent bottles and less and less talk about the wines themselves, because the organised bottle makers had better publicity channels. In some cases fancy mass-production bottles began to be used for mediocre wines, thus discouraging the best vinticulturists.

To make the situation worse, the bottle makers conducted their activities as part of the wine making industry, and the wine makers were only invited from time to time as a favour to sit with them in their discussions. To make the camouflage complete, the bottle makers adopted for themselves the honorary degrees which the wine makers originally used to bestow upon their own distinguished confreres, such as Master of Fizz and Doctor of Fermentation, although the recipients from among the bottle makers did not even understand the meaning of the words. Every time an intricate technical problem in wine making arose, the bottle makers appointed an elaborate committee of their own men, with the final result that a bottle of a somewhat different shape was recommended as a remedy, even though the difficulty may have been of chemical or bacteriological nature.

The bottle makers' association grew and prospered. Not satisfied with bottles for wine, the association appointed representatives to sit on joint committees with makers of other kinds of containers, such as bath-tubs and garbage cans, it being assumed that they had much in common. In the meantime, less and less of exquisite rare wines began to be produced, and more and more of 'vin ordinaire' of uniformly sour taste, sold in various fancy bottles. Finally, the more discerning consumers from abroad ceased buying wine from this particular country, and warehouses became filled with empty bottles of all kinds of fancy shapes. Some of the wine growers went into other pursuits, some continued outside the association, and some began forming small professional circles of their own, very simple in external form, and devoted exclusively to real improvements in the quality of wines and general theory of grape culture and fermentation. Full membership was restricted to actual grape growers and wine makers; anyone interested as an amateur could become an associate member, but bottle makers were strictly excluded. In some circles, to be admitted one even