

EDITORIAL

Missionary Zeal

One hears a great deal about the 'mission' of an Institute or organization these days and to someone like myself, coming from a non-conformist background, 'mission' conjures up a picture of someone dressed in tropical clothing and a solar topee going out to convert the 'heathen'. 'Mission' to me definitely implies the concept of a journey or movement from some central starting point to less familiar, and frequently hostile, environments. At the meetings of the Editorial Board and the Council, earlier in the year, the discussions of the future development of the Society's publications included some consideration of what we thought that the 'mission' of them should be.

When one considers the 'mission' of nutritional science I have the feeling that possibly we are expected to go out and convert members of other scientific disciplines to the study of nutrition. This is not such a far-fetched idea, because if nutrition is 'the meeting point' of a number of sciences we should expect the growth areas to lie at the interfaces of these disciplines, where the techniques or concepts developed in them could be imported into a nutritional framework to address some outstanding gaps in our understanding of the responses of the organism to diet and its components. One can think of several examples where substantial advances have been made in the nutritional sciences by just this type of import: the use of mass spectrometric techniques for the measurement of stable isotopes in the study of energy, nitrogen and mineral nutrition; the application of multivariate statistical techniques, originally developed for sensory studies, which are now beginning to establish dietary patterns; and the use of molecular biological techniques to understand the basis of cellular responses and the reasons for the differences between the responses of different individuals to diet, for example.

If one considers the 'mission' of a scientific journal such as the *British Journal of Nutrition* it clearly has to develop with the science of nutrition and respond to the themes and topics with which nutritional researchers are currently concerned. This means that the papers it receives and publishes will increasingly tend to be those which are expanding into these novel, interface areas. The content of the journal will, therefore, change as the science it supports develops and changes. In time the changes in the range of papers published may change the journal so fundamentally that a new journal has *de facto* emerged. In some cases the more recent developments may alter the journal so much that a new journal has to be started to cover the interests that the journal originally was founded to promote.

Continually growing-out from the centre has a potential disadvantage in that the core areas may still be productive and may still have a great deal of research of comparable scientific quality to be done.

As far as the *British Journal of Nutrition* is concerned I believe that although the newer interface areas are exciting, a great deal of basic core nutritional scientific work is still being done and I would not like to see this excluded just because the newer areas are more fashionable or exciting.

This leads me to a topic which I have mentioned before and which has caused some concern within the Society. It concerns the feeling that the journal is not receiving, or publishing, some of the more important current work on the nutrition of large (farm) animals for which the journal in the past was the journal-of-choice for the authors in this field.

As I have said before, there is only one bias that the Editor and the Editorial Board could be accused of when they decide whether or not a paper submitted to the Journal is acceptable or not, and that is towards papers of the highest scientific quality that advance our knowledge of nutritional concepts.

I, personally, was brought up in a Department where the fundamental importance of comparative nutritional studies was not only recognized, it was part of the dogma of the Department. My early nutritional training was inspired by Dr Joseph Needham's lectures on Comparative Biochemistry and I would like to see nutritional studies on as many species as possible published in the Journal because I believe we can all gain insight by analysing the differences and similarities. It is also important to recognize the major contributions that studies on farm animals have brought to nutrition science as a whole, for example the fundamental bases for the analysis of energy metabolism of the whole animal and the quantitative basis for the measurement of mineral and trace nutrient requirements in terms of the growth and physiological responses of the animal.

Many of you will recall the valuable exchanges between the 'animal' and 'human' researchers that took place in the working groups that contributed to the Neuberger Report which many of us, at that time, hoped would lead to a more integrated view of research on food and nutrition. I think, therefore, that it is important to think of ourselves as nutritionists and to recognize that we should be able to gain in scientific knowledge by a wider reading of the literature. I suspect that, for example, if the 'human' nutritionists had read more of the rumen fermentation literature when the 'dietary fibre' hypothesis was first postulated that more rapid progress would have been made in understanding the role of dietary fibre in the large intestine!

I hope that our position is clear; we welcome papers on the nutrition of 'large' animals that contribute to the development of nutritional concepts, as they have done so successfully in the past. As a final point, please note the paper on the Minke whale; I am certain that this is one of the largest animals ever to be the subject of a paper in the BJN.

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