

**97th ANNUAL MEETING**  
**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

J. R. Dingle

September 28, 1959

The Council decided to call the annual Business Meeting one month earlier than has been traditional, in the hope that our season may have a fair start before Christmas is upon us, but also with the hope that a corresponding advance in the closing meeting will not be necessary next spring.

During the past year, the Institute had to mourn the loss by death of only one member, but that one was Mr. F. W. W. Doane of Halifax, until that time our member of longest standing. He was a link with the early years of the Institute, for he was elected to membership on November 3rd, 1886, when he was City Engineer, and the original Nova Scotian Institute of Natural Science was only twenty-four years old. Besides remaining a member for so many years, he was also active in its affairs, and indeed was elected to the first Council of the modern Institute after its incorporation by Act of the Legislature in 1890.

Besides the annual Business Meeting, the Institute held two extraordinary meetings and seven ordinary meetings, including a joint one with the Valley Chapter at Wolfville. A total of eighteen papers was delivered at the ordinary meetings and the average attendance was thirty-five, with a maximum of fifty at the combined session at Wolfville. The extraordinary meetings were addressed by Dr. Eugene Hayden, Plant Pathologist of the Rust Prevention Association of Minneapolis, and by Dr. Tage Astrup, of the Biological Institute of the Carlsberg Foundation, Copenhagen, and world renowned for his studies in the field of blood coagulation.

By a vote of members at the last regular meeting, the elective offices of Corresponding Secretary and Librarian were abolished. Hereafter, their duties will be assumed by a Librarian who will be appointed by the Council.

The new venture of an Essay contest was launched this year, rather tardily. Only five essays were received, all in the field of Biological sciences. The prize of \$50.00 was won by David Michael Maxwell, then in his first year at St. Mary's

University. Mr. Maxwell is now in Europe and I am happy to say has reported that the prize money was invested to fullest advantage in books purchased at a well-known establishment in London.

Our membership has remained approximately steady at just under three hundred as it has since 1952. This is not unexpected, because since that time there has not been any great increase in our scientific community, and it has not been our policy to make a concerted drive for new members just for the sake of a large membership. Rather we acquaint newcomers to the region with the existence of the Institute and hope that they will feel it advantageous to participate as members. But our Institute cannot be of advantage to anyone unless some are willing to contribute to its functions, and the greater the number of contributors the greater the mutual advantage.

The numbers I have already mentioned carry an implied warning, which becomes clearer when they are compared with statistics for previous years. In the last year, there was a marked decline in attendance at regular meetings. Since 1953, the average was closer to fifty, with a high of ninety and a low of thirty-four. In addition to this, the number of papers contributed was down somewhat, but even more seriously, there was considerable difficulty in scraping up many of those that were given. The Secretary will vouch for this, because the task fell largely upon him. There were times when your Council was uncertain whether it would be possible to call the next regular meeting, and it was left dependent on whether the Secretary could find another paper to make a satisfactory program. This situation does not compare well with earlier years. In 1889-90, for example, the President reported that from a total of only fifty-seven ordinary members sixteen papers were contributed. Moreover, most of these were true research papers, of the type acceptable for present day meetings.

This state of affairs has been a cause of discouragement and considerable concern to those who have been entrusted with the affairs of the Institute. Why this rather sudden decline in interest on the part of members? A criticism often heard is that the Institute is no longer a suitable forum for the presentation of research papers because its membership is too heterogeneous. The author cannot get the proper appreciation

or criticism of his work that he seeks, and his audience retaliates by saying they can't understand his language. Are not both expecting too much of such an Institute as ours in an age when it is becoming difficult for biologists to consult with physicists, and physicists tend to speak only with God? Of course the Institute is not the equivalent of an international Congress on Biochemistry, nor was it even intended to be anything of the kind from the beginning. I think, rather, that it should be regarded as a means of acquainting each of us with what is going on in the several institutions in our city, and which we so seldom take the opportunity to visit. Besides satisfying a natural curiosity, I know from my own experience that our meetings can even be the source of new ideas from time to time. In a similar vein, President J. G. MacGregor in 1890 said: "The number of our scientific workers in all departments is but small, and it cannot but be beneficial that we should be banded together and be enabled thereby to secure the stimulus which springs from a sympathetic, even though not a wholly intelligent interest". Take that as you will!

If this purpose of the Institute be granted, then it follows that each speaker should couch his remarks in plain language so that those most removed from his subject will at least know where and why he started in his work, and what the conclusions are. This is surely evident to all of us — and we have some outstanding members who are masters at this art — but still there are some who do not follow such advice in practice. I trust that all of you present, who by your very presence give proof of a more than average interest in your Institute, will persistently spread this advice among your associates, while at the same time urging them to open some of the secrets of their work to their fellow scientists.

There is another criticism allied to that just discussed. Some say many of our papers are not worthy of presentation, but those that are most often heard in this way do not themselves contribute, or are not members at all. Your Council earnestly wishes that such individuals would help raise our standards, but with the proviso that the rule of plain language be adhered to.

It may be also that an increasing number of activities non-scientific in nature — are demanding more of our member's

times. If so, there is probably little that can be done, but this is not likely the case in view of the rather sudden onset of the symptoms. It may also be that most of us are in the middle of problems, and that results will appear more or less simultaneously. If so, we can still hope that this will be reflected in a more thriving Institute very soon.

Those who are wise in the affairs of organizations say that they tend to move in cycles of activity. This may well apply to our Institute, for even in 1865, when the old Nova Scotian Institute of Natural Science held summer Field Meetings, the President reported: "The Chief Commissioner of Railways had very kindly offered free passage over the lines to members attending Field Meetings, and every inducement was therefore offered to those who desired to participate in such meetings; but he was very sorry to say that but a very small proportion of the members took part in these excursions". Yet the Institute has certainly grown and flourished since then, and with the proper spirit in members, will, I am sure, do so again. Our one hundredth year will begin in the Fall of 1961, and our one hundredth birthday will occur three years from now. Let us not, as one member feared, celebrate it with our demise.

There are, no doubt, several considerations and factors I have not dealt with, but I am sure that the incoming Council will welcome any suggestions and advice from members. I hope however, you will not leave it all to the Council, but that each will do a little towards rejuvenating the Institute.

Gentlemen, it has been an honour to serve as your President during the past year, and I wish sincerely to thank all the members of the Council who made it so easy to do so.