

Representative Opinions

Sir William Bragg, O.M., K.B.E., P.R.S.

IF we assume the truth of the statement at the head of the editorial discussion of the social relations of science, we must conclude that the proposal to form a society for the study of those relations is entirely reasonable; and the statement is obviously true. The rapid and persistent growth of natural knowledge is something new in the history of the world. Its effects are very great, and there is, as yet, no organized attempt to correlate them. Attention is directed, now here, now there, to some remarkable consequence of the movement, sometimes with pride or gratitude, sometimes in fear. Both pride and fear are often mistaken. There is, in fact, much to be studied, and a society that sets about the task will probably arrive at results that will be interesting, and will be well worth the trouble taken to obtain them.

Sir F. Gowland Hopkins, O.M., F.R.S.

SCIENCE workers are often bidden just now to remember the complexities which science and its applications are adding to the world's problems, and to realize that it is their duty to help in shouldering the responsibilities involved. To-day, the situation must be considered no less from another point of view. Science itself is face to face with efforts, unfortunately only too successful, to impose on nations an artificial social structure of a kind which is definitely antagonistic to the progress of science, and in the long run, as history suggests, may even lead to its arrest.

I have often wondered, when laboratory workers, as such, are asked to take action, what precisely they can do beyond performing their duties as good citizens. It is clear that individuals can do little, and that experimental scientific workers immersed in research are ill qualified, when unaided, to take effective action of any kind. If solutions are to be found, the problems call for close study and careful analysis, and I venture to think that the effect of totalitarian policy upon scientific output should be continuously scrutinized and brought to notice.

It would seem that such tasks could be well undertaken by a society such as that proposed. It must, of course, establish international relations, and I think it would need the help of an information bureau. Its membership must certainly not be confined to the working men of science

Sociology and Economics

H. G. Wells

THE essential difficulty in working out any special social functions for scientific men lies in the fact that, so far as the great majority of sciences go, the individual worker has no special aptitude for social organization. His time, his mental energy he owes to his

special work. But this is less true of certain sciences than of others. It is less true, for example, of biology than of astronomy. It is less true of anthropology and psychology than of invertebrate anatomy. In the case of human ecology and social psychology, the man of science works in a field whose generalizations are almost immediately applicable to social organization. Every science insists upon integrity, explicitness and devotion to the extent of entire disinterestedness, and so the study and teaching of any science tends to brace the character and sweeten the social atmosphere. But it is through the pushing of the boundaries of science out into that field of rash generalizations and mischievous traditions known as human history, that the practical hope of mankind in science lies.

The S.R.S. claims the attention and frank criticism of every type of scientific mind, but if it is to operate efficiently it will have to create opportunities and support for an increasing number of social biologists and social psychologists. There is little advantage to be found in the distinguished experimentalist in physical science dissipating his time and genius in amateurish contributions to political and social theory. There is everything to be gained by a S.R.S. that will keep him in touch and co-operation with social scientific work and thought as intensive as his own.

Prof. John L. Myres, O.B.E., F.B.A.

Is the proposed Society for the Study of the Social Relations of Science to be yet another 'learned' society, or something else?

In the natural sciences, physical and biological alike, there is no limit to the applicability of discoveries to human ends, economic and social, "transforming the physical and mental environment of men". Such applications are the concern primarily of individuals competent to supply admitted needs of their fellows, and eager to stimulate fresh needs; next, of specific associations for the promotion of such enterprises, in medicine, engineering, various industries, and the like; and ultimately of the citizens at large, and their organs of administration and policy, competent to use, abuse, or disuse. Philosophers, kings and totalitarian dictators presumably provide for inclusive survey of all applied science 'in the interest of the governed'. Like the centurion, they "say unto this man 'go' and he goeth"; unlike him they are not "under authority" and nothing printed in NATURE need affect their doings. In a 'free' country, what form does "King Solomon's House" assume?

Clearly 'social relations' are not the business of the 'learned' societies. The less these are concerned with 'practical applications' or with practical restrictions, the better. For all these involve judgments of values—considerations political or moral, not scientific at all.