

CORRESPONDENCE

Energy Crunch

SIR,—Your editorial remarks on “The Energy Crunch” (*Nature*, **243**, 485; 1973) is the latest of several attacks on the BBC’s present science output. I work closely with the BBC without being part of it, so may I comment?

Your opinions about the comparative prospects for fission, fusion and solar energy are the conventional ones among experts, and you are right to air them. With some hedging, I should place my private bets much as you do. But I would not gamble the wellbeing of mankind on the assumption that we are necessarily right. Certainly I would not impugn, as you do, the motives behind television programmes that offer somewhat different opinions on the subject.

Times have changed and experts are no longer regarded as infallible. That is just as well, because the public would be misled much more seriously by too deferential treatment of science and technology than it is by occasional programmes with which some of us happen to disagree.

As for “balance”, which seems to be the keyword in your editorial, what do you mean by it? Do you want equal broadcasting time for Freudians in psychology, for creationists in evolution studies, for anti-drifters in the earth sciences—much as the BBC in political programmes strives tediously to match a Labour man against a Tory? Presumably not, but that is because, looking around, you arrive at opinions about where the good science lies and which of the iconoclasts may turn out to be right.

The popularizer cannot avoid forming opinions either. Even just choosing a topic for a television programme is a value judgment. The quest for objectivity, in popularization as in research, is a subjective thing—a matter of an honest and inquiring disposition—rather than a ride down an asymptote towards some absolute truth.

Yours faithfully,

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USSR Jews

SIR,—I noticed lately in *Nature* (**243**, 313; **243**, 427; 1973) you shed some tears over the fate of Jewish scientists in USSR. Why Jews only?

Since the 1937 purges, intellectuals in USSR, specially in western republics, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Estonia, Karelia, Latvia, Lithuania, have been deported and executed on genocidal scale. Selective executions of “war criminals”, of course, still occur with sickening regularity. Yet *Nature*, and the whole Western press, is concerned with the persecution of Jews only, not of people as a whole. If Jews are selected as a special people by Anglo-Saxons, was then Hitler that much wrong after all? Or is it different?

Yours faithfully,

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Obituary

Arthur Knyvett Totton

ARTHUR KNYVETT TOTTON, the well-known coelenterate taxonomist who worked for many years at the British Museum, died on January 12, 1973.

He was born on January 6, 1892, at Wallington, in Surrey, and was educated at Berkhamsted School. Wishing to prepare himself for a vacancy in the Natural History Museum he went in 1910 to the Royal College of Science. At the beginning of 1914 he joined the museum staff, becoming an associate worker in 1953 and, until he finally retired in 1967, his contributions to zoology were interrupted only by the two world wars.

As a student he was interested in the breadth of zoology, and the thoroughness with which he gained a wide knowledge of the subject and his early ability as an investigator were both characteristic. He attended some of Sedgwick’s last classes, and his other teachers included E. J. Allen, W. T. Calman, A. D. Darbishire and C. Dobell. He

studied entomology under H. M. Lefroy and could have made it his career. The systematic study of vertebrates and invertebrates, and experimental embryology, he took under E. W. MacBride, and at the latter’s suggestion he began his first research, appropriately enough using material which the trustees of the museum had handed to the college for description. The resulting paper on the development of the vertebral column in a teleost fish (1914) is critical and mature in style. It is significant that in his later work problems of development and homology are often discussed with great insight, and with an indelible interest in evolution.

Captain Totton, as he is remembered by colleagues, served with distinction in the 1914–18 war, and was commissioned in 1915 in the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry. He went to France in 1914 with the 28th Battalion of the London Regiment. He served at Ypres, the Somme District and Arras, and in 1916 received the Military Cross. He was severely wounded in the Somme in

1916, and was invalided out in 1918. He never gave in to the trying after-effects of his injuries, and at the outbreak of World War II he joined the Army Officers’ Emergency Reserve, and took on the duties of ARP warden for the entire British Museum.

On returning to the museum in 1918 he was given sole charge of the coelenterate section. The broad range of his curatorial and other work is reflected in diverse publications extending from accounts of the *Antipatharia and Hydroids of the British “Terra Nova” Expedition* (1923, 1930) to notes on Australian corals (1952), and up to 1935 he contributed to *Zoological Record*. His major interest, however, lay with the siphonophores, among the most complex and exotic of organisms, and among the most challenging to the taxonomist. He set to work on them almost unaided and later said (1954) that it was the study of Bigelow’s Albatross Report (1911) which first lured him to examine these animals and to build up an enormous collection of