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## Editor and Advisory Board

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## SCIENCE BULLETIN

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### WHY BIOLOGY?

#### EDITORIAL

Recently, a young woman of strong antivivisectionist convictions entered the office of a professor of biology and asked if she might buy some cats which he was keeping for dissection. Upon his refusal of her request—for cats have a way of becoming scarce when wanted for anatomical purposes—she said caustically: "You biologists are regular butchers. Unless one is going to be a doctor or a teacher of biology, what good can it possibly do to know the insides of a cat?"

The biologist explained mildly that dissection of an animal similar in structure to the human animal was supposed to give the student a better knowledge of his own internal workings, and thereby to dispel the fog of native ignorance, but upon this she departed, wrathful and unconvinced, and her going left him pondering.

"Biologists are butchers!" A hard saying, and with some truth! "Unless one is going to be a doctor or a teacher of biology, what good can it do to know the insides of a cat?" Or of any other animal, for that matter. The young woman had asked a sharp question. What good, indeed?

Before his inner eye there flashed that countless host of frogs, guinea pigs, dogs, cats, and rabbits that are sacrificed every year to teach the principles of biology to an ever increasing horde. Butchers? Yes, unless such slaughter could be justified by knowledge gained. But could it? Did not the majority of his students forget most of the first half of a term's work before the second half was completed? He tried to think of one of his former students who

might now, after an absence of a year or two, be able to give the complete details of the circulation of a frog. Or, having forgotten it, was the student any better off for having known it in the first place?

He had repeatedly demonstrated the appendix of various animals to his classes, but how many of them now could tell whether the human appendix was attached to the stomach or to the caecum? What difference did it make anyhow? In case of trouble, the surgeon would find it, and the patient's chance for recovery would not be lessened by his ignorance of the latitude and longitude of the offending organ.

He had explained the principles of heredity to many students, but he knew that in spite of Mendel and his disciples, sentiment, and not chromosomes, would continue to be Cupid's most dependable ammunition. He had explained the mysteries of sex, but well he knew that such knowledge did not make for morality—that instead, it led rather to contraception and prophylaxis. He had taught that understanding of life dispersed fear—knowing full well meanwhile that a smattering of half-digested biological facts often induced morbid symptom-chasing, and a fearful, uncritical examination of every wave of physical change. And as he thought over these things he was troubled.

Then suddenly his mental machinery shifted and he saw the other side of the matter. Perhaps his students didn't retain more than five per cent of what he taught them. Perhaps the majority of them were not qualified to be biologists in the first place. But were there not a few who, having had biology, now saw life in a way they had never seen it before? Would not these same few now stop to look at an earthworm with interest and understanding, whereas before they had avoided it in fear and disgust? Would not these same few also be trying to tell others of the enjoyment to be had from knowing the living creatures about them?

Yet a bolder thought came to him. Might not one of his students inspired by the subject go further into it by far than his instructor had ever done—go on into it until he had un-