

E D I T O R I A L

Festschriften

It has been an old European custom to honor a scientist on some noteworthy occasion of his life by issuing a "Festschrift." A number of colleagues and former pupils of the great man are asked to contribute original articles to be printed in a dedicatory issue of a journal. We have occasionally published such issues in the past. However, we strongly oppose the use of our journals for this purpose, and we wish to make known the reasons for our objection.

To begin with, the quality of the papers is often not such as to do much honor to the celebrity. They have to be accepted without refereeing or editorial interference. It is most unlikely that the contributors have something that is both significant and unpublished at hand at the right moment. With few exceptions, the contributed papers are at best rewrites, sometimes improved, of old articles; older associates may write historical or philosophical papers. In any case, hardly any of these articles would normally have been published in the journal involved, if at all. Already in the nineteen-twenties, Festschriften were often described as the outlet for second-class papers by first-class authors.

We note that when the *Reviews of Modern Physics* published such special numbers in the past, it was, with one or two exceptions, to honor men of European educational background. Apparently the tradition has not yet taken hold among American physicists. It is also noteworthy that those honored have almost exclusively been theorists. The reason is probably that their colleagues are always able to think up

some barely publishable new idea, while an experimenter does not keep a stock of unpublished observations in his desk drawer for use as birthday presents. Just imagine the day when twenty-four of the twenty-five authors of some paper on a high-energy experiment are asked each to contribute an article to honor their senior colleague on his sixtieth birthday.

It is obvious that with the present publication explosion, this means of congratulating the distinguished researcher is wholly unwarranted. The enormous increase in the number of physicists will soon produce so many deserving of honor that every issue of The Physical Review would have to become a Festschrift.

There must be far better ways to honor our distinguished colleagues. For example, publishing a portrait and a commendatory article in a suitable journal seems more appropriate than the old Festschrift. In some cases it may be possible for his close associates to describe in detail the career of the celebrant. Such an article could be of great value for the history of science.

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