

## EDITORIAL

## On Time

It is unfortunate that the dates on many scientific journals belong in the realm of science fiction, except that they refer to the past instead of the future. We do not know why publishing delays seem to be a chronic ailment of these journals. That this is not necessary is evident from the examples of the weekly magazines such as Science and Nature.

We are proud of the record of our own journal: We have kept to a rigid time schedule for the twelve years of its existence. Every Thursday a ceremony takes place which we call "The Closing of the Book." Our editor George Trigg stands before a table on which the oversized typewritten pages, pasted on stiff paper, are displayed. He is surrounded by key members of our production staff. Each page is scrutinized to see if all corrections have been made, if all figures are properly placed, and whether anything has been overlooked. In the doorway the messenger of Palmer & Oliver, Inc., our printer, is waiting, ready to transport the package as soon as the last page has been approved by the editor. The performance has the appearance of a ritual which might continue for centuries after the journal has ceased to exist. In any case we get the journal out on time. The printer's schedule is equally as rigid as ours and the mailing house, Datatron Processing, Inc., has the journals ready for dispatch every Friday before the Monday date printed on the cover. On that Friday copies are flown to Amsterdam by KLM Royal Dutch Airlines for further distribution in Europe, and the domestic copies are mailed from New York City. Thus every subscriber should be able to expect his copy to arrive on the cover date or very shortly after.

Unfortunately, it is not always so. In addition to the vagaries of the mails, there is the fact that subscription handling is not under our control but is managed by the American Institute of Physics. Each week they supply printed address labels to the mailing house, and it sometimes happens that labels are missing. The reason for this is usually computer breakdown. We have not learned the right computer language to reprimand these ma-

chines when they are inefficient and incompetent. We understand, however, that these flaws can be and are being remedied.

There are still other causes for delay of an individual subscription. A serious problem, we are told, is that subscription agencies, used by most libraries and institutions, occasionally delay or even fail to place the orders with the appropriate publishers, meanwhile collecting bank interest on the money they have received. We doubt that this happens deliberately. Nevertheless, we urge every subscriber who does not receive his copies on time to investigate the cause of the delay and to let us know, as we expend a large amount of money and effort to keep a rigid schedule.

We sometimes wonder whether it is worth while. The average time between receipt and publication of a Letter is growing and has reached almost ten weeks. The reason is that the large rejection rate supposedly gives the published Letters prestige, so that many authors want their papers to appear in our journal regardless of how long it takes. When referees recommend submittal to another journal, our authors would rather fight than switch. We emphasize a statement we have made before: Many of the papers we turn down are just as deserving of speedy publication as many that we publish. The key fact is that those few papers that are obviously urgent can always be published in two to three weeks. That is enough to justify setting an express schedule and insisting that we be on time.

S. A. Goudsmit