

ORPHANS IN WONDERLAND

by

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I must apologize for addressing you gentlemen a third time, but I must say that I have seldom had as much pleasure in any one week as I have this week in meeting with you who are forming a "new" organization. The few remarks that I want to make at this time were generated at the breakfast table this morning, and the title that was announced occurred to me as we were talking about it at the start of this session. The phrase "Orphans in Wonderland," applies to what may be a bit on the personal side - my own personal side.

I recall that about 30 years ago when I was getting started in this general field of radiation work, I had had a couple of years of graduate work in physics, and I thought I was a physicist. I aspired to be one in any case, and took a job with the National Bureau of Standards expecting to do some work in X-ray spectroscopy, a field in which I had developed an interest while a graduate student. I was to work with a man who I thought had worked in the field for a number of years. However, it turned out that this person had never worked in the field; and within a day of the time that I reported for duty, I found that it was not really X-ray spectroscopy, but radiation-dosage work applied to medicine to which I had been assigned. I shuddered and began to think about some of the other job offers that I had turned down. Within about a week or two of the time that I reported to the Bureau, the man with whom I was assigned was offered a job at about twice his present salary; he accepted of course and departed -- leaving me absolutely alone. Hence my use of the word "orphan"; if anybody in the world ever felt like an orphan at that stage of his life, I was certainly that person.

This same thought has come to my mind while talking with quite a number of the younger people attending these meetings. As a matter of fact a number of the young people have talked to me in a vein that leads me to suspect they are having some doubts as to just where they are heading. They are trained as physicists and

getting into a field that is called Health Physics; this involves physics, of course, but also runs into borderline areas in all directions -- in the fields of dentistry, hygiene, radiology, and so on. From the questions that were asked of me I sense that some of these people are really a little bit concerned about the direction of their professional careers.

But to go back again 30 years and to go back to this business of being an orphan, I think at the time I got started in this work, you could count on the fingers of one hand the people trained as physicists who were working in what was then called the radiological physics field. We found out very quickly that we were neither fish nor fowl. We were all members of the American Physical Society, but we were not deeply concerned with the things that were being discussed at the Physical Society meetings at that time. Our work associations brought us into contact with radiologists; and we found that this made a fairly comfortable meeting ground for us, but not completely so. The Radiological Societies are owned and operated, as it were, by radiologists, and in order to be a full member of one of these societies you have to be an M.D.; no if's, and's, or but's. After a few years, the number of these orphans grew to perhaps a dozen, and first one of the societies and then the other set up associate memberships for us. However, these few people are still not full members of any one organization that is really representative of their life's work. This hasn't been too serious, however, and it has worried some people more than it has worried others. I feel that we are now at a time when we needn't worry about this nearly as much as in the past.

I think you people are extremely fortunate in having been able, as a result of this meeting, to develop some sort of organization in which all of you can find a common interest. I feel that this is extremely important, and you are to be congratulated. Dr. Morgan is also to be congratulated, for the efforts that have culminated in the organization of this new Health Physics Society. This sort of organization is particularly important to those of you who will be working pretty much alone and on your own.

As you younger people pick your jobs from here on out, some of you will go into large organizations where

you will have somebody to lean on --- somebody providing a certain amount of guidance and advice. There will be a fair number of others, however, who will go as single individuals to other organizations such as universities, hospitals, or maybe industrial operations to carry out your professional work as health physicists. I am sure that those of you who go alone will be, at first, very lonesome in your new work, and I think that this loneliness will be alleviated very substantially by your having an organization where you can meet and discuss your problems at least once a year. I think that you are vastly more fortunate than the small group of people who started in this work in close association with the radiological profession a good many years ago. Those of us who are older have sort of become accustomed to the fact that we don't really belong anywhere, but I am sure that radiological physics, as such, would be much further ahead of where it is today had there been some comfortable home such as you people are now providing for yourselves.

I should like to make one point, particularly for those individuals who are going out as lone wolves. I should like to impress upon these people that they are singularly fortunate in being able to go into jobs of this sort. There seems to be a tendency among many people in the last 10 years -- the post-war years -- to feel they have to be a part of a fairly substantial organization, that they have to have some people around on whose shoulders they can weep a bit and against whom they can lean a bit. This is nice up to a point, but I feel very strongly that if a person has ambition and enterprise, as well as imagination, the real opportunity for him is in a place where he has to make his own way. I think that those of you who are contemplating doing this, and who are a little worried, should stop worrying, and instead put those efforts into some constructive thinking and planning about your work.

Those of you with imagination and enterprise can make this field of health physics a real wonderland. There are many problems waiting to be solved -- they can be made interesting, they can be made exciting, according to the degree that your imaginations are allowed to run wild with the problems.

Again, I want to express my feeling that within this health physics organization, I believe you as a group have an unparalleled opportunity to grow and develop and become an important part of our whole radiation physics program in this country. Thank you very much.