ENTOMOLOGY—THE PROFESSION OF OPPORTUNITY

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A presidential address allows the speaker a good deal of latitude in choosing his subject. Over the almost half century of our Society’s existence we have had many excellent addresses from a succession of able Presidents ranging over the whole field of entomological endeavour. For example in a recent year we have had Milledge Murphey’s inspiring message emphasizing the importance of either an individual or an organization such as ours having a sense of purpose. In 1959, Bill Hunter gave us a stimulating talk on the role of imagination in entomology. Two of his examples were the pioneering work in the control of insects such as the screw worm by means of sterilization, and the development of other new concepts such as the use of microbial insecticides. These were topics of a somewhat general nature. Last year by contrast, Lewie Borner made a skillful presentation of some very careful scientific work in the specific field of insect behaviour.

I have attempted to make the theme and the keynote of this year and of this meeting the subject of opportunity in entomology and thus have chosen as my title “Entomology—The Profession of Opportunity”. I hope to emphasize the fact that entomology is truly a profession of opportunity. I use the word ‘opportunity’ in two senses. First our profession itself has had and continues to have opportunities to benefit man in every field of his endeavor and has risen magnificently to these opportunities. Secondly, in so doing, to those individuals electing to follow the profession of entomology it offers a multitude of opportunities for interesting and satisfying careers, for contributing to man’s health, enjoyment, comfort and economic well-being and progress, and for personal prestige, attainments, and financial rewards. These opportunities have been taken advantage of by approximately 4500 men and women in the United States who are now engaged in the profession of entomology, but they are not exhausted as there is a continuing need for qualified entomologists and will be for the foreseeable future.

This is our Society’s 46th Annual Meeting. About the time it was founded I was engaged in my first entomological activity. This consisted of dipping a whisk broom into a bucket of poison and flicking it over potato vines to kill Colorado potato beetles. This early and involuntary introduction to the problems of insect control as one phase of a boyhood spent close to the land may have influenced the voluntary decision a few years later to study entomology. I am inclined to think that it did. At any rate fewer youths now have this type of experience or the chance to have their interests stimulated in such aspects of Nature because fewer live on farms now than at any time in our history. In the past 20-odd years, for example, in spite of the astronomical increase in its total population Florida’s farm population has decreased by 40% from approximately 300,000 in 1940 to about 180,000 now. Therefore it is important that young people with any interest in the biological sciences or in Nature be made aware of the op-

1 Presidential address read at the 46th Annual Meeting of The Florida Entomological Society.
opportunities our profession offers, whenever and wherever possible and by each of us.

The importance of entomology in raising crops is, I suppose, recognized by any informed person. It is obvious that with greatly expanding populations, food requirements also expand and insects attacking our food crops must be controlled more and more effectively. An example of an opportunity our profession had to do this is offered by the sweet corn industry in Florida. This industry was virtually non-existent in Florida as recently as 18 years ago. By contrast in the 1959-60 season the value of the Florida sweet corn crop was $13.5 million dollars, being exceeded in dollar value by only three other vegetable crops. The creation of this important contribution to Florida's agricultural economy was directly due to agricultural, and particularly, entomological research.

Although entomological work on crops is critically important to the present health and living standards, and to the future survival, of man, this is only one field where entomology has great opportunities to benefit mankind and has risen to these opportunities. Another area, of course, in which entomology has made tremendous contributions is in the field of public health. It is now possible to travel widely and to reside in many tropical regions with no fear of, for example, yellow fever or malaria because of research on the part of medical entomologists. Medicine, like agriculture, has had a terrific assist from entomology.

It would perhaps be impossible to list all fields of human activity in which entomology is important and in which it offers satisfying careers. A partial list would include not only agriculture (embracing the production of food and fibre crops, ornamentals, and livestock), and medicine (embracing the role of insects in both human and animal diseases), but education, structural pest control, mosquito control, forestry, governmental regulatory work, research for either governmental or private organizations, the production, sale, and servicing of products designed to control harmful or annoying insects, and beekeeping. In other words a man or a woman can be an entomologist and also play an important part in, for example, the citrus industry, the cattle industry, the chemical industry, etc. Put another way, an entomologist can, in addition to being an entomologist, be an important and outstanding educator, governmental official, businessman, or a member of some other broad category. Our profession has room and need for all types of people from basic research workers to salesmen, from introverts to extroverts.

As our profession has broadened during the life of our Society, so has the field of possible careers. When I was taking entomology as an undergraduate, the acceptable and insofar as I can remember I think almost the only careers which were considered respectable for entomology majors were in state or governmental work or in teaching. In contrast, the brochure entitled “Opportunities in Professional Entomology”, published by the Entomological Society of America and last printed in 1962, states that of the estimated 4500 professional entomologists in the United States, about 25% work for the United States Department of Agriculture, 10% for other Federal agencies, and 15% for state institutions. This is a total of 50%, leaving 50% employed by non-governmental organizations, or self-employed. Some non-governmental employers, as listed in the same brochure, are in-
secticide manufacturers, pest control firms, privately endowed colleges, universities, and private research foundations.

It is apparent from this very superficial survey that the student choosing entomology has a wider choice of employers, industries, and institutions and of types of work than in many other fields that he might select. He also has the satisfaction of knowing that he is entering a profession dedicated to the task of improving the lot of mankind and that offers stimulating opportunities for personal recognition. Furthermore, financial rewards are comparable to those in most other scientific fields.

There is at times, I think, a tendency among those of us who were trained in or who are practicing entomology to feel that our profession is not sufficiently recognized. If there is any justification for this feeling perhaps one reason is that, generally speaking, entomologists are better scientists than public relations experts, and another reason might be the very diversity of entomological activities, as I have tried to point out. This diversity means that the science of entomology is diffused, so to speak, thru a good many other professions or activities which have little to do with each other, for example, medicine, agriculture, and forestry. Thus perhaps entomology as a distinct profession does not stand out sharply enough in the eyes of the public as a whole. Whatever the reason, and however long it takes to gain our profession greater recognition, which will surely come, let us be proud to be entomologists, and let us on every possible occasion emphasize that entomology is a true profession of opportunity. Thank you.