

MEMORANDUM:

TO: ROGER CROFTS, PH.D.

FROM: ROBERT A. KEHOE, M.D.

DATE: JANUARY 17, 1961

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Dear Roger:

I have been compelled to write to you (rather than to telephone or visit you), in order to get down on paper to you my reaction to a statement in your letter to Maurice Levine, which stopped me cold in the further examination of your and his exchange of letters, and shocked me immeasurably. I say this not in indignation or resentment, but in deep chagrin that you, above almost anyone else in this Medical School, should find it possible to believe that "the type of research done at these institutions (which include The Kettering Laboratory) is applied in nature, often involves patents, frequently is classified, and does not enhance the reputation of the University." It is almost equally shocking to me, but not so fraught with a personal reaction that, "Some thought that these ----- should not be allowed in the University."

I don't know enough about the inside working and thinking of the other two units to discuss them, and it is not up to me to leap to their defense, but these words of yours, as applied to this Laboratory and its work, are far removed from the truth. Since you do not know that they are untrue, I must accept part of the blame for your not knowing better. Moreover, I must acknowledge (to myself) the reasonable likelihood, almost a certainty, that other senior members of the Medical Faculty, as well as the larger group on the main campus, think likewise. Accordingly, I intend to prepare a memorandum for the heads of departments of the Medical School, (and for such circulation within their departments as they may choose) stating the case and inviting further inquiry. My stumbling on this after asking you for the correspondence is the most humiliating thing that has happened to me in the entire period of my membership in this faculty (1921 - 1961), and while I do not flare up in resentment at you, in a personal manner, - I yet cannot quite fathom how you could believe as you do, and not have an utter contempt for me and for my efforts to play an honorable, intelligent and productive part in the affairs of this University. I am prepared to disagree with you, and I cannot doubt your honesty, but I don't understand you.

I shall deal with the facts of the matter in the memo which I intend to issue (with the approval, or at least not with the disapproval, of Dean Dorst), but I think I must say something in support of my statement that your view of our activities is entirely incorrect.

It is true that our work, generally, is in the field of applied research. Is that bad? I think not. Most of the best research in medical fields is applied, in the sense that it is devoted to the solution or the avoidance of problems of human health and disease, through an understanding of their characteristics or their origin. Would you hold that our work on the metabolism of lead and fluoride (to mention only two large pieces of our work) have contributed little or nothing to the basic biochemical and physiological knowledge of our time? Would you deny that these researches have brought prestige to the University of Cincinnati? Name three products of research, which in the history of this medical school, have

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been better known and have brought more credit to the Medical School. Our work does not and never has involved patents. (Incidentally I wrote the patent policy of the University of Cincinnati, which is as tough in the ethical sense as that in any University I know anything about.) Our investigations have no commercial significance except through the removal or surmounting of hygienic obstacles. We have done less work, proportionally, in this Laboratory, under governmental grants, than several of the major departments in the Medical School; we have been hampered hardly at all in our publications of books and articles by governmental or security restrictions; we have never suppressed publications of our work because of the wishes or rights of industry, and we have always protected (by agreement), our right to publish where and when we choose. We are sometimes slow in publishing, but not because of any such restrictions as these.

As I said above, it may be my fault, in part, that you are not more familiar with the products (publications) of our research. I have never circulated them, and not many of them relate to your fields of interest. However, if they are of negligible importance, then my professional and scientific life has been unimportant and unproductive. This, I hope, is clearly and emphatically untrue, even if I must make this claim for myself.

It is my belief and my thesis, as to the policies and accomplishments of this Laboratory, that they are as soundly grounded in professional and intellectual ethics as any other activities of this University. The actual results, in terms of their ultimate scientific importance, may be modest, but they are not negligible and they have contributed materially to the performance of the function of the medical investigator - that of contributing to the solution of certain important medical problems of our time. At the same time, they have, as I said above, furnished a very considerable output of basic physiological and toxicological information. Does their usefulness discredit them? I don't believe you are such a purist as to think so.

It is unfortunate, I believe, that the objectives, activities and products of this Laboratory are so slightly understood in this University, and even in the Medical College. On the other hand, it is nothing short of remarkable, in my view, that I should be regarded with respect (or am I mistaken?) within this faculty, while the products of my hands and brain are considered to be trivial, if not objectionable. I find it difficult to bring myself to realize this or to accept it. I am acquainted with other paradoxes in human attitudes, however, and therefore, I cannot muster up the indignation that would enable me to react vigorously and directly, and so to purge my internal dissatisfaction. I know that good friends in the faculty, regardless of their view of this matter, would seek in various ways to excuse my apparent "gun-barrel" vision. This does not salve my feelings, and so I shall try to point out their error, even if, in doing so, I gain their disapproval for not ignoring this issue.

This may be but poor recompense to you for your courtesy in supplying me with this revealing correspondence, but I trust you will accept it in the spirit of its transmission as being worthy of further consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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