

May 10, 1965

Dr. Harriet L. Hardy
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

Dear Harriet:

I would not take the time now to reply to your nice letter, but for your reference to Dr. Clair Patterson, and your urging me to write to him. I'm afraid you are not aware of the realities of the situation as it exists between him and myself.

When his first papers on the lead in oceanic waters came out I was interested in his findings and in his ideas concerning them, and having received a mimeographed communication which he dispatched to a number of people, I wrote to him suggesting that we find some opportunity to meet each other. (Mine was a personal letter directed to him.) I received no reply. Instead, I received word from several sources (which I checked directly) that he was quite certain that I was the creature of the "lead industries", and that he wished not to have anything whatever to do with me. In his first draft of a long report, he reviewed our work with particularly venomous bias and utter intemperance, not to say with carelessness in handling certain assumptions, and incompetence (in matters of physiology). He has since been toned down a bit in his writing, it seems (by what means, I know not), and has prepared an article which, I hope, will be published in the AMA Archives of Environmental Health. Between ourselves, Katharine Boucot feared that I might take violent exception to its publication, and sent it (in final form, I believe) to me, whereupon I recommended it for publication because of certain geochemical ideas which deserve examination. The paper is atrocious, biologically speaking, but since the ideas have been distributed around, they need to be cut in the open for a thorough look at them. I shall review them in some detail, in a letter to the editor, which I shall prepare with care to be both courteous and just. The facts in the matter are devastating to his thesis.

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Dr. Hardy (2) May 10, 1965

Now this situation is not a good basis for a satisfactory relationship, and if Dr. Patterson has regarded me with a jaundiced eye up till now, he will probably think me the enemy of society - or at least, of his society. It is obvious that I cannot correspond with him, nor talk to him, unless he makes it possible. This, I shall say, is hardly likely. I am sorry, and I shall, of course, make it easy for him if he shows any sign of willingness.

I gather from every one that has been close to him, and even measureably sympathetic, that he is a sincere, even dedicated person. I'm afraid that this is not a sufficient basis for the career of a scientist, or even for that of a non-specific (as to methodology) search for the truth. I hope, for his sake since he seems to look toward a brilliant career, that this is the brashness and enthusiasm of youth, and not the blindness of a seemingly modest but utterly vain man. But what can one think of a young man with "disciplined" mind, who moves into a scientific field in which he is an utter novice, and speaks with authority. I have no doubt, from what you and others say, that he is interesting and attractive. I suspect that, because of these qualities, you think him able. This, I believe, remains to be seen, and I am deeply skeptical.

Sincerely,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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