

## What is a Physicist?

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## What is a Physicist?

RECENTLY, at a meeting of responsible Army, Navy and business officers to consider problems of national defense, the need for physicists to help in these problems was discussed. Several of those present spoke in no uncertain terms indicating that they had no need for men who dabbled only in atoms and who gave no thought to concrete problems whose immediate solution was required for the adequate defense of the country. This incident is mentioned since it illustrates very well the reputation which physicists have acquired in the minds of many of the leaders of our country.

The rather general belief that physicists are interested only in atoms probably has arisen because the progress in atomic and nuclear physics is so spectacular that newspapers print news in this field to the almost complete exclusion of news of any other work of the physicist. As a result, the painstaking care which the physicist has used in the establishment of precise standards of temperature, in the analysis of internal friction in vibrating rods, in the exact specification of color, in the development of optical instruments, in the design of electrical measuring instruments and in innumerable other projects of the greatest immediate importance has escaped the attention of those who are not directly concerned with the progress in physics.

This situation is unfortunate and is distinctly harmful to the development of physics as a profession. It often leads to the hiring of others to do the work that the physicist has been especially trained to do. One doesn't call in a dentist to treat pneumonia just because he has the title of doctor. Yet many an industrialist will call in any kind of technical man except the physicist to measure accurately the coefficient of expansion or to interpret an x-ray diffraction pattern or to carry out a spectroscopic analysis—jobs for which the physicist has more specific training than does the physician for the treatment of pneumonia.

What is the physicist to do about this? First of all, he must realize that no one else will do anything unless he makes the first move. It has been suggested that the first move is to formulate a comprehensive definition of the work of the physicist and then to make a concerted effort to bring this definition to the attention of the right people. To define the

work of the physicist is not easy. Your editor will be pleased to receive suggestions for a concise but accurate definition of the physicist's work. Perhaps there are better ways to emphasize the broad nature of a physicist's interests. Further suggestions will be most welcome.

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