

QUOTATIONS

ON RESEARCH ADDICTION¹

Few valid generalizations can be made about science and scientists. Even fewer can be made about all scholars in all fields. Their activities can be likened to an unsystematic conversation, one that has been going on for a very long time. Anyone who joins it, whether he is scholar or layman, joins it in the middle. You have to catch the fragments, decide what language is being spoken, and feel your way into what might have been said before you came in. It's rather like the babble at a very large international reception. Most of the participants are more or less intoxicated. (Research, for those doing it, is a very powerful stimulant; and it's habit forming.) They act like any bunch of drunks. Some are euphoric, some saturnine, some quarrelsome, and some inspired beyond their usual capacity. Whatever else happens, the conversation cannot proceed systematically or at the level of humdrum sobriety.

The participants in the conversation have sorted themselves into groups, subgroups, and sub-subgroups. Many of these fragments have languages all their own. Each is dominated by a few brilliant conversationalists who set the subject and tone. Some scholars wander from group to group, while others remain fixed. Some groups talk about similar things, and occasionally scraps of conversation pass from one group to another. (The chief purpose of a graduate school, incidentally, is to catch the student up on the conversation and show him the way to the bar.)

If things are really so chaotic as I have pictured them, what keeps the party going? Why don't the scholars just drift away? Well, for one thing, research is never exhausted. One thing understood always reveals an unsuspected dozen more not understood. The party never runs out of booze.

¹Blair Kinsman, On Scholarship, *The Johns Hopkins Magazine*, Winter, 1966, pp. 3-4. Reprinted with permission.