

Illusions of Grandeur--and Other Disappointments

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Long ago I accepted the reality that I shall never receive a Nobel Prize. But lately I have been depressed by the fact that I have missed distinctions of much lesser note. For example, a recent advertisement of Dewar's Scotch whiskey features a stunning photograph of a certain Dr. X. Dr. X. is not an athlete, or a movie star, or a rock musician, or a television anchorman. He is a *scientist*. He writes *textbooks* and edits a journal on nuclear medicine.

Now, I have had articles published by such famous journals as *Science* and *Nature*, and my own photograph has graced the pages of *Current Contents* for many years. Still, neither of these facts grabs me the way that whiskey ad does. There is a feeling of envy and irritation whenever I come across it in wide-circulating magazines like the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, etc. My parents will never be able to say, like Dr. X's, "Our son, the Doctor, also 'consults' for a whiskey manufacturer."<sup>1</sup>

All this depresses me because there is even less chance of my making it as an endorser of fine Scotch than as a Nobel laureate. I don't drink alcohol, and I hate Scotch whiskey. To me Scotch tastes like medicine. If its sale required a doctor's prescription, it would of course be only fitting that a doctor should promote it.

The selection of Dr. X in this instance has prompted me in all sorts of devilish imaginings, in which my son's George Carlin records have helped a bit. Consider an ad in which some

eminent swinger of a Ph.D. pharmacologist or behavioralist, photographed by Bachrach or Avedon, is introduced to detail his varied interests as a means of endorsing a favored brand of hashish. (We may all live to see it; I hear continuous rumors that cigarette companies are stockpiling marijuana--have indeed even designed its packaging--against the day of decriminalization.)

Perhaps I should forego envy and irritation, throw off depression, and find encouragement in Dr. X's accomplishment. We scientists, perhaps, should see in it evidence that at last we have made it. We have joined the ranks of such as Mickey Mantle, Arnold Palmer, and Wilt Chamberlain, all those living legends whose costly approbation is the final guarantor of quality and status. There is, of course, a fetching subtlety in endorsement of whiskey by one who does drink socially but also prescribes drugs. The situation has endless potential. Surely somewhere there is a diabetic physician, editor of an appropriate journal, whose endorsement of the insulin he uses would add a new and almost unbeatable dimension to the brand/generic name controversy.

1. As a factual footnote, it is interesting to recall that our beloved Chauncey D. Leake, who once served as Dean of a medical school in Texas, has also served as consultant to the California Wine Growers Association.