What is the nature of the scientific attitude, the attitude of the man or woman who studies and applies physics, biology, chemistry, geology, engineering, medicine or any other science?

We all know that science plays an important role in the societies in which we live. Many people believe, however, that our progress depends on two different aspects of science. The first of these is the application of the machines, products and systems of applied knowledge that scientists and technologists develop. Through technology, science improves the structure of society and helps man to gain increasing control over his environment. New fibres and drugs, farter and safer means of transport,' new systems of applied knowledge (psychiatry, operational research, etc.) are some examples of this aspect of science.

The second aspect is the application by all members of society, from the government official to the ordinary citizen, of the special methods of thought and action that scientists use in their work.

What are these special methods of thinking and acting? First of all, it seems that a successful scientist is full of curiosity—he wants to find out how and why the universe works. He usually directs his attention towards problems winch he notices have no satisfactory explanation, and his curiosity makes him look for underlying relationships even if the data available seem to be unconnected. Moreover, he thinks he can improve the existing conditions, whether of pure or applied knowledge, and enjoys trying to solve the problems which this involves.

He is a good observer, accurate, patient and objective and applies persistent and logical thought to the observations he makes. He utilizes the facts he observes to the fullest extent. For example, trained observers obtain a very large amount of in­formation about a star (e.g. distance, mass, velocity, size, etc.) mainly from the accurate analysis of the simple fines that appear in a spectrum.

He is sceptical—he does not accept statements which are not based on the most complete evidence available—and therefore rejects authority as the sole basis for truth. Scientists always check statements and make experiments carefully and objectively to verify them.

Furthermore, he is not only critical of the work of others, but also of his own, since he knows that man is the least reliable of scientific instruments and that a number of factors tend to dis­turb impartial and objective investigation.

Lastly, he is highly imaginative since he often has to look for relationships in data which are not only complex but also frequently incomplete. Furthermore, he needs imagination if he wants to make hypotheses of how processes work and how events take place.

These seem to be some of the ways in which a successful scientist or technologist thinks and acts.

1. Name some sciences.
2. Name two ways in which science can help society to develop.
3. Give some examples of the ways in which science influences everyday life.
4. What elements of science can the ordinary citizen use in order to help his society to develop?
5. How can you describe a person who wants to find out how and why the universe works?
6. What is the role of curiosity in the work of a scientist?
7. Name some of the qualities of a good observer.