THE PLACE OF PHYSICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

The subject on which I am to speak is without doubt a very appropriate one for this occasion. It has the one drawback that I can not hope to say anything upon it that will be new to this audience. Under these circumstances I could wish myself to be a word artist, having powers to clothe familiar figures in a new imagery. As it is, I shall have to content myself with passing before you in parade some old facts, bare and unadorned.

We are living at a time when science has won for itself a prominent place on the stage of human interests. The great benefits conferred upon the world by scientific discovery are generally recognized. The applications of science touch our lives at every point and at every turn. It is not too much to say that science has not only transformed the manner in which we live but has changed also in good measure the very subject of our daily thoughts.

The last fifty years are without precedent in physics as regards the number of far-reaching discoveries which have been made and as regards the new insight gained into the processes of nature. These years are unequalled in the number and importance of the applications of science which have been perfected.

One not conversant with the situation might well ask, "Can this expansion go on indefinitely, and are we not now approaching the end?" The same question could have been asked with even greater force thirty years ago. No one can look far into the future. Our answer to the question must be read in the fact that never before in all time has science invaded the realms of the unknown at so great a pace as it is now doing. There are no limits in sight. So rapidly does advance follow on advance that new achievements are proclaimed daily by the press. A special science service has been organized to interpret the significance of new findings to the people. Moreover, industry has never before leaned so heavily on what science has to tell.

It is not my purpose to allot credit for what has been accomplished, among the different sciences, or as between science and its applications. The different

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1 An address given November 30, 1928, at the dedication of the new physics laboratory of the University of Minnesota.
Editor's Summary

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