May I first express my warm appreciation of the invitation you have extended to me to spend this semester at Cornell as your non-resident lecturer. It is an invitation of long standing, for on two occasions circumstances have made it necessary to postpone my visit, and I am warmly grateful to Professor Dennis and Professor Papish for their kindness in keeping the invitation open for so long. This is my third visit to your country, and my experience of your hospitality tells me what a very delightful stay this will be. I am glad of the occasion which this introductory lecture affords to express my gratitude.

When a scientist comes out into the open, away from the safe retreat of his own special line of work, he puts himself in a very dangerous position. In his own line he has some claim to expert knowledge. He can at all events save himself from falling into pitfalls of crudeness and naiveté, which will be ready for him if he wanders off the track he knows. If I venture to talk about very general aspects of the physical sciences, I must try to disarm your criticism beforehand. I wish to show my appreciation of the invitation which you extend to your non-resident lecturers to talk to an audience with wide and varied interests. It would not be fair to ask you to take an interest in my own particular department of physics.

I want to talk about the development of the physical sciences, and review the general trend of the bewilderingly rapid advances of recent times. I must feel very deficient in proposing this as a subject, in view of the extent to which it has been treated by far more able exponents. On the other hand, it is of such interest and importance for us all that perhaps no ex-