

HUMAN MIND RESISTS
NEW IDEAS

How a new idea must fight for existence like an unwelcome intruder was described in a paper by Dr. Edwin E. Sloss^on, director of Science Service, read at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science by Dr. Vernon Kollogg, secretary of the National Research Council. "To symbolize knowledge by light, and ignorance by darkness is as old as scienceitself" Dr. Slosson said, "but the metaphor is essentially misleading, for darkness is negative and offers no resistance to the diffusion of light. But ignorance is not inert but actively opposes expansion of knowledge.

"No cranium contains a vacuum. It is always filled with something, and, in the case of certain individuals, filled with matter which is impenetrable or at least difficult to make an impression upon.

"In actual life," Dr. Slosson continued, "ignorance is allied to conservatism and the combination is a strong one. In order to introduce a new idea into the mind of man, it is generally necessary to eject an old one.

"When a new idea is born in the mind of one man, it starts out in the world with a majority of 1,600,000,000 against it. If the question of whether the earth is round or flat or revolving or stationary were put to a popular referendum of the entire world at the present time and compulsory voting were required, the Copernican theory of the universe would be repealed by an overwhelming majority."

In speaking of the instinctive reaction of people against new ideas, Dr. Slosson said:

"The education of adults is more difficult than the education of children because the brains of elders are all cluttered up with ideas that have to be cast out or moved about to make room for new notions. We have looseleaf ledgers and encyclopedias nowadays, and we need loose-leaf brains so that we can keep our mental store of knowledge uptodate."

"One can lay contradictory ideas up in one's brain side by side like books on a shelf," Dr. Slosson said. But you can only do that when the ideas are dead. Live ones brought into contact quarrel with each other and get knocked about.

"Each advance in religion, as well as in science, meets the same instinctive reaction of opposition. It is as noticeable in the most trivial deviations from conventional customs as it is in changes in our fundamental conceptions of the universe.

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"In our day, the transatlantic liner which recently adopted the Diesel engine as a substitute for the steam engine, was obliged to erect two huge and useless smoke stacks in order to resemble the steamers of competing lines, because passengers refused to patronize a vessel which did not have these familiar and visible signs of its engine power."

"And all through the history of science" said Dr. Slosson, "we find that new ideas have to force their way into the common mind in disguise, as though they were burglars instead of benefactors of the race."