

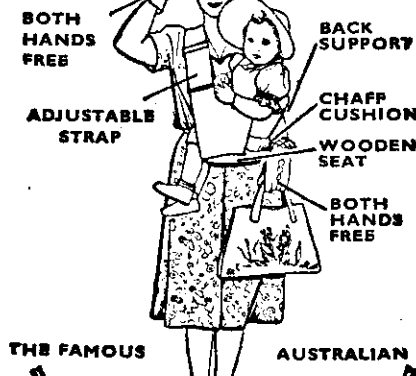
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## Science Knows No Frontiers

Professor **ERIC ASHBY**, who gave the talk which we reprint below on the ABC network recently, has been Professor of Botany at the University of Sydney since 1938 and during 1945-46 was Scientific Attaché at the Australian Legation in Moscow.

**I**F I had to pick out the most exciting day in my experience it would be the first day I spent in a foreign country. The foreign country was Germany and I arrived by ship, before dawn, in Hamburg. Even in the dark it was all strange. The motor car horns sounded different from ours; even the shunting railway engines made a different noise. And when the ship tied up I heard for the first time the staccato voices of German officials of the wharf; the grammar book had come to life.

As it grew light I saw the notices and advertisements in pointed German letters, the steeper roofs of the houses, the rows of flower pots in the windowsills. Every noise and smell and shape and colour was unfamiliar and unlike its English equivalent. Little children could talk German without effort. Even the dogs understood German.

Many of you have had this experience; and you know that the magic of landing in your first foreign country can never be recaptured.

It is a long time since that morning in Hamburg, and I have been in many foreign countries since then, some vastly stranger than Germany; but they all feel flat beside that first dawn in Hamburg. What impresses me now about foreign countries is their similarity to my own. Differences in language and customs do not go very deep, and often when you get beneath the skin of a foreign country, as it were, you find yourself unexpectedly at home.

Sit down to play a game of chess in Moscow or in Rome, and all the differences of nationality vanish. Perhaps you cannot speak a word of your opponent's language. It doesn't make any difference. Chess, we might say, knows no frontiers. Indeed, the Russians played the Americans over the radio last year.

It is the same with music. Once the conductor's baton is raised to begin a Beethoven symphony, the orchestra might be in Vienna or Melbourne. Whether the audience are Australians or Austrians, you are at one with them. For music, too, knows no frontiers.

### Science and World Order

**I** HAVE been asked to explain how science, like chess and music, knows no frontiers, and to suggest how we might use our scientists in this game of international affairs—a game in which we are perhaps entering on the last round between civilisation and destruction.

Scientists work in the same sort of laboratories and with the same sort of equipment the world over. I am a botanist, and if I go into a botanical laboratory, in Geneva or in Cairo, in Chicago or in Leningrad, I am immediately in completely familiar surroundings. The apparatus is the same. The journals and books in the library are very much the same. I have only to glance at the paraphernalia on the bench, and I know what sort of work is being done. Even the smell is the same—the faint smell of clove oil which every botanical laboratory has.

So even if the botanist wears an embroidered cap (as he does in Tashkent), or a tarboosh (as he does in Cairo), or corduroy trousers (as he does in Cambridge), or a high stiff collar and a starched white coat (as he does, or did, in Munich) his laboratory might be my own in Sydney.

These are only superficial comparisons; but the internationalism of science reaches far deeper than this.

Not only do scientists of all nations work in the same surroundings; they even think in the same way and have a common background of knowledge. For each particular science is built from the results of research by any reputable scientist in any country in the world. (Holland, with a population only just bigger than ours; Sweden, with a smaller population than we have; Denmark, with half our population; all these countries are world-centres for research in some sciences.)

Any student who does his work and publishes his results according to certain unwritten rules will have his work accepted and built into the structure of world-science.

### Joint Effort

**F**OR instance, the radio is made possible by the work of a great many scientists. Even if we go back only 130 years we find at least six nations involved. Early in the last century a Frenchman, Ampère, thought out mathematically the effect of one electric current on another. A little later Faraday, an Englishman, described to the Royal Society of London an experiment which is at the foundation of nearly all our uses of electricity, including the radio. Thirty years later, Clerk Maxwell, a Scot (they like to be considered a different race from the English), described how electric waves might be transmitted through space. Sixty years ago Hertz,

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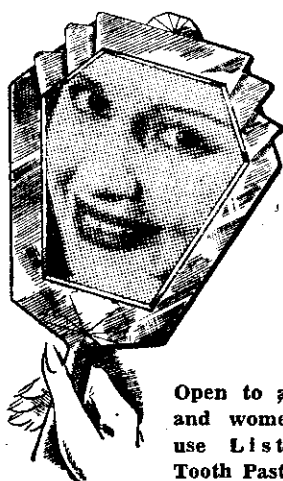
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