

## DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

## RELATIVITY

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Like many others, I commonly read whatever, from books to mere notes, by Dr. Edwin E. Slosson, comes to my notice. Generally I am well pleased, but an exception has just occurred. I very much dislike that pleasantly written article on Relativity in the *Scientific Monthly* for November, 1922. I dislike it because, giving the words used the only meanings recognized by layman and scientist alike, save a few specialists, several of the assertions are sheer nonsense. Certainly no system of equations, however clever, can prove to one of common sense, the existence of a real fourth dimension; that time and space are not wholly independent; that just because we and the Martians may be unable to synchronize our clocks there is no "now"; that time is "curved"; that a phenomenon may be seen before it happens; that the mere inclusion of gravitation in a more comprehensive expression eliminates it from nature; and so forth, and so on, through a long list of absurdities—absurd, that is, if their customary meanings be given to the words used.

Such expressions catch the attention, because they seem to declare the truth of amazing paradoxes, but they are, after all, mighty poor paradoxes, for their whole secret is nothing but the assigning of strange meanings to familiar words; a sort of cryptic writing. Naturally, all such "crazy" expressions, crazy so long as unexplained, inevitably breed contempt for science and the scientist.

Let us, then, in popularizing the thoughts of specialists, first understand clearly just what those thoughts are, and then put them in the words and circumlocutions of the other fellow. The real relativist is not playing hob with our understanding of nature, however different his descriptions of certain phenomena may seem; but if the language of his average popularizer is to be taken literally, and no hint, as a rule, is given of any other meaning, more topsyturvy indeed than the Land of Alice is this finite, limitless universe that simultaneously will be, was, and is.

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## TINGITIDÆ OR TINGIDÆ

IN connection with this subject there are some other points which I think should be mentioned. The Ionic genitive Τίγγι<sup>ο</sup>ς and the Attic genitive -εωζ show without a doubt that the word Τίγγις is an i-stem. In Latin it would be an i-stem, Tingi, and the genitive Tingis.

That there is a Latin word Tinge of which the stem is Tingit does not concern us for Fabricius did not use it. He could easily have done so had he wished. While these words have the same root they have different stems. The International Rules instruct us to add -idæ to the stem of the name of the type genus. They do not expect us to worry about other words based on the same root. Fabricius was a Greek purist and he based his name on the word Τίγγις, -ιοζ (Ionic, -εωζ (Attic). In writing this word in Latin he did so correctly using Tingis in the genitive. The stem of the name of the type genus is, therefore, Tingi. The family name correctly should be Tingiidæ.

It is unfortunate that Westwood omitted one i in writing the family name but before the days of the International Commission this was sometimes done. We often write Mantidæ for example based on Mantis, genitive -ιοζ (Ionic), -εωζ (Attic). If we follow the International Rules we must insert the other i and write Tingiidæ. And most of us agree that the rules should be followed.

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## A CHEMICAL SPELLING MATCH

IN SCIENCE for October 20, Dr. L. O. Howard comments in rather facetious vein upon a chemical spelling match described in the number for September 29. He mentions his struggles with chemical names during the twenty years he was permanent secretary of the A. A. S. and rather approvingly drags in a quotation from Forel, who seemed to think that no true scientist uses long words. Dr. Howard is more specific and applies this to chemistry. He arouses not the resentment but the sympathy of the chemist because of the suspicion that he is envious of a body of knowledge (call it science