

## CLARITY VERSUS SPEED

The chief value of a congress such as the one to be held in New Delhi next November lies in an interchange of ideas, whether in private conversations, in group discussions, or in the reading and debating of papers.

Frequent complaints have followed previous congresses organized under the auspices of the International Leprosy Association, particularly those held in Havana and Madrid, that many of the papers were read so rapidly and indistinctly that they could not be followed by the audience. Even the expert interpreters who had been engaged for simultaneous translation, were at times compelled to give up in despair. Warnings from chairmen and secretaries had little effect on these would-be speed-record breakers. To quote Emerson: "In skating over thin ice, our safety is in our speed"; and perhaps the thinness of the material in some papers accounted for the speed with which they were delivered.

But even carefully prepared papers, detailing the results of much hard original work, may fail to get over to the audience if the delivery is faulty. The founder of the Christian religion rebuked those who thought their prayers would be heard "for their much speaking." The same rebuke may be applied to many authors who value their papers by the number of words they crowd within the allotted time. In many instances all that

reaches their fellow linguists is a babel of words; and as for the rest of the audience—the ear-phones are dumb.

The degree to which a writer is master of his subject may be judged in large part by the conciseness and brevity with which he is able to present it. When a large part of his audience has come at much expense of time and money from distant countries, largely to hear the papers read, and when many are dependent for their understanding on simultaneous translation, it is surely at the very least a matter of courtesy that they should not be disappointed.

This age is one of speed. Supersonic velocity in the air, record-breaking on the race track, and even celerity in stenography may be commended as examples of the ingenuity and abilities of man. But successful communication at a congress requires not speed but deliberate incisive language, with clarity of thought and expression. We trust that the papers at the New Delhi Congress in November will be delivered with this seemingly obvious, but often ignored, maxim in mind. If so, their authors will have merited the approval of their colleagues, and have helped to make the Congress a success.

—E. MUIR