SOME GENERAL ASPECTS OF MODERN GEOMETRY.*

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It is a great honor and an exceptional privilege to be asked to address such a distinguished audience as is assembled here upon this occasion.   And so my first duty is the simple and elementary one of expressing to the officers of the societies, meeting in joint session, my gratitude for having selected me for such a task.   But the task itself is not a simple one. Unwelcome as it may be, the fact remains that the workers in the fields of mathematics, physics, and astronomy, intimate associates in former times, have become comparative strangers.   So widely have their various dialects diverged from the common mother tongue, that they find it possible to follow each other's speech only when great care is taken to articulate distinctly, and even then only at the expense of most intense and rigid attention.   But while we may find it difficult to understand each other, after all, these sister sciences have much in common.   The love and respect which they bear each other are still alive.   They appreciate fully how great are the services which they can render each other, and how fruitful are those domains of thought in which these various subjects are made to intermingle.   It is well that we should specialize, for only by intense application of intellectual forces to specific problems can real progress in science be made.   But, unless we preserve a broad interest in a larger field, we run into the danger of losing a proper sense of balance and perspective.   It is not true, even in science, that all things are of equal value, and it is better for science that we should study important problems rather than unimportant ones.   But which problems *are* important, and which are not?   Here is a question which is worth some thought.   We know that it cannot be answered from the utilitarian point of view, at least not in an adequate and permanent fashion.   We also know that any attempt to impose upon each other our *individual* criterion of value can only