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THE DECAY OF DEMOCRACY

Being the Samuel Robertson Memorial Lecture, delivered at Prince of Wales College, Charlottetown, P.E.I., on Friday, April 22, 1955, by Her Worship, Dr. Charlotte Whitton, C.B.E., (Mayor of Ottawa)

“SAMMY”, Dr. Robertson, whose memory this lecture-ship honours, served The Island, and the much broader constituency of The Maritimes and classicists everywhere, in the rich ripe scholarship of his living; and, dying, he bequeathed them the memory of a strong upright character, proving how great can be the impact upon a whole community and generation of even one life, grounded in the service of honour and of truth.

“Rejoice ye dead, rejoice where'er your spirits dwell,
Rejoice that yet on earth your fame is bright
And that your names, remember'd day and night
Dwell on the lips of those who love ye well.

Now ye are starry names above the sun ye climb
To light the gloom of time with deathless flames.”¹

Lord Tweedsmuir said of Dr. Robertson, “He is a man whose likes and dislikes I think I would share.”

Dr. Robertson was a classicist and, as early as the heyday of the late nineteen twenties, he was repelled, as was his mellow Upper Canadian contemporary, Dr. Maurice Hutton, by the obsession of the Canadian people with the superficial values of that giddy decade,

“O cives, cives, quaerenda pecunia primum
est; virtus post nummos.”

Principal Hutton quoted,² paraphrasing Horace to read:

“Get on”, the world says, “first of all get on,
And then get honor if it comes your way;
And, last, when life and strength are gone,
Get honest also when you've had your day.”

¹ Robert Bridges—Ode to Music.

² Reflections of a Professor of Greek—An Address to the University Women's Club, Ottawa, Nov. 4, 1929.

Sir William Osler, who, in his mastery in both science and letters, was probably one of the most typical of Canadian Aristotelian classicists, a generation earlier had protested the dizzy drifting of this continent to a crass materialism:

"The natural man has only two primal passions, to get and beget,—to get the means of sustenance (and to-day a little more) and to beget his kind. . . ."

"Immortality and all that it may mean is a dead issue in the great movements of the world. In the social and political forces what account is taken by practical men of any eternal significance in life? Does it ever enter into the consideration of those controlling the destinies of their fellow-creatures that this life is only a preparation for another. . . .?"

"Without a peradventure it may be said that a living faith in a future existence has not the slightest influence in the settlement of the grave social and national problems which confront the race today."³

Now, almost supernatural powers have been given into human hands and to the use of peoples and governments by the discoveries in nuclear energy. Our generation stands

"Watching mankind the proud,
formed half of God's own breath,
half of the stubborn dust
that returns to its own at death.
Man who once crept and groped
out of earth's formless slime,
armed now with the thunderbolt
stands at the height of time."⁴

Scholars of the ancient world, such as were too, these, our modern classicists, knew that our civilization could endure only as it developed conscience,—conscience firmly rooted in fundamental moral values and informed with wisdom, wisdom grown of the knowledge of man's long sojourn and struggle on this earth.

These men, looking dispassionately upon the story of the rise and fall of races and of nations, noted that, while victory might seem to have rested most surely with the arms of the mighty, there was usually, also, another factor in defeat. This was a decay that had weakened, from within, the sense of faith in enduring values, and with it the will to resist and the courage of sacrifice, even to the death, for those things that were beyond defining in the here and now. These, where firmly held though arms were weak, fired hearts again to bravery and gave to the vanquished the firm determination and strength to rise again to victory.

³ Science and Immortality—The Ingersoll Memorial Lecture, Howard University, 1904.

⁴ An unidentified poem—"Glory to God in the Highest."

That this deadly deterioration in values, with its attendant danger of disintegrating decay from within, is far upon its way in our western civilization is now the grave conviction of many thoughtful citizens of our modern democracy whose doubts have joined those of these later classicists as to whether the great mass of the people can be roused to interest and responsibility in those social values upon which the salvaging of this system of free government will depend.

Democracy—A Philosophic Concept

Democratic government, thought of as a thing and mechanism of voters' lists, polls, elections, and legislative and administrative procedures, has a profoundly philosophical concept and base,—nothing less than the capacity for absolute goodness of the mind and spirit of the human being. Because that has been forgotten too long by too many and in too many places, the great structures of Democracy are everywhere shaken and weakening, quite as much from the deterioration and disintegration in moral principles, strength of character and courage of those—leaders and led alike—who give it but lip service as from the insidious inroads and dynamic drive of Communism, whose disciples offer, in the misty twilight of our complacency softened convictions and calculating compromise, clear-cut opposing principles, the practical appeal of definite destinations and a terrible ruthlessness and singleness of purpose in realizing them.

The defence of Democracy is to be encompassed by overthrowing the enemies within no less than by repulsing those who threaten to breach its enclosing walls.

The task will be long, painful and tiring, and exact a discipline widely and long discounted, if not despised. But there is little hope other than in this self-examination of how Democracy came to be, whereon it was built and how its shaken pillars are to be strengthened, its structure restored.

And we wish to save it for, as Churchill so shrewdly writes, "democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

The Principles of Democracy

The principles of Democracy are simple in statement, complex in practice.

There is an innate value and right of each individual being to the freedom of his own life and soul, which carries with it the responsibility of self-discipline.

Acceptance of this principle leads to a second—that there is, therefore, inherent in the people collectively, by reason of their judgment as a whole, this same inalienable right to govern themselves, directly or by those to whom they choose to entrust such rule and whom they will hold accountable for the exercise of this power.

Democracy can thus be the best or the worst form of government man could devise since its goodness must depend upon the goodness of the individual men and women who create and direct it.

If Democracy is to be a good form of government, then it must be built upon not only the belief but the practice that each one of us has his or her own special 'virtue' or quality of gift to make to the life of the whole; that it is our moral and just duty to bring that fullness of our own powers to the community itself; and that in so doing we shall find the highest health and happiness of the spirit (I suppose what the modern psychiatrist calls "sublimation").

Democracy and the Grecian Philosophers

To a system of government, founded on such belief in the innate good, and self-nurture of that good by the people who form it, goodness itself, Plato taught, is as the sun to the system of visible things.

Hence comes Plato's insistence on absolute loyalty to right and morality in the individual life, and their strengthening by education, the process by which a man or woman becomes all that he or she is capable of becoming. *Wisdom* comes of clear knowledge of the good; *courage* from following the good without fear; *temperance* from resisting what are known to be the baser appetites, and a *sense of justice* from developing judgment and balance in these different forces and duties.

In other words, if there is to be government by the people, the people must be trained and qualified to discharge the duties of government.

"Whereas, in simpler matters—like shoemaking," Plato declaimed, "we think only a specially trained person will serve our purpose, in politics we presume that everyone who knows how to get votes knows how to administer a city or a state. When we are ill we call for a trained physician whose degree is a guarantee of specific preparation and technical competence—We do not ask for the handsomest physician or the most eloquent one: well, then, when the whole state is ill, should we not look for the service and guidance of the wisest and the best."

Plato, therefore, saw the best form of government in an "aristocracy", a selection from "the best", qualified not by birth or riches, but by training for government in that if no effort were made to relate qualifications to the assumption and exercise of power, democracy—government by the people—could become one of the worst forms of all government.

Aristotle mistrusted rule, centered in a monarchy, no matter how benevolent, and held comparable misgivings as to the aristocratic system, which Greece had seen deteriorate in the autocracy of the Areopagus or Supreme Council which had controlled all admissions to the gens, to members of which the franchise was restricted.

Democracy Aristotle doubted most of all, unless practised among a race of gods, since he questioned humanity's capacity to attain to the good and to serve only the general good.

Pericles had sought a middle way, described as democracy, but restricted in the sense of our democracy of to-day. He widened participation in the government of Athens by introducing the principle of payment from public funds for public service in the juries, but restricted the right to vote and to serve on such juries to citizens of Athenian parentage both on the paternal and maternal side. No slaves nor mercenaries could vote. Thus the Periclean democracy was limited to rule by free and equal citizens of Athens, of whom there were but 50,000.

The struggle to widen the basis of the franchise and so to share power, directly or indirectly by electing representatives, became identified with the attainment and exercise of freedom itself. The Periclean Athens—or indeed any of the small Greek city states—could have full democracy. They were small communities, of common interests and beliefs; they excluded slaves and non-citizens or admitted them to the franchise only on specific qualifications, which they themselves set out.

Indeed, everywhere, the town or city community—as with the town meetings of the New England States and of Prince Edward Island to this very century—offers itself as a natural area for the full play of democratic government in the sense of direct rule by all the people.

(Indeed the quality of "smallness" permits the fine quality of the hand-turned product whether it be this Province of The Island or this City of Charlottetown, or the graduates of small but distinguished Prince of Wales.)

Democracy in Rome—and After

As Grecian strength waned and the Roman Republic be-

came its successor, the struggle for power intensified between the patrician Roman Senate and the enlarging plebian population until, in the expansion and wealth of the Empire itself, such tensions eased in the prosperity and luxury made possible by the arbitrary rule of the conquered, to whom no vestige of self-government extended. The barbarian invasions called for such centralization of authority and power in defence and the fight for survival that the less practical niceties of the principles of individual freedom and self-government were engulfed and lost in the collapse of the Roman Empire itself.

The conquering hordes of the Goths and Huns knew no rule but that of their own leaders and of the primitive tribal laws of sharing in the battle and the spoils, under chieftains of proven strength and ruthless courage. Thus there evolved, as against the ideal of democracy, the theory of the Divine Right of Kings, blessed with Charlemagne's coronation on Christmas Day, 800 A.D. This was to be the dominating theory in the government of Western Europe until shaken by the execution of Charles I in 1649 and finally repudiated by the Bill of Rights in 1689, insofar as the evolution of free and constitutional government in British practice is concerned.

But, steadily, while the practices and policy of the Christian Church upheld the theory of Divine Right, the permeation of Christian teaching daily denied such fallacy, as had Christ Himself, of whose Evangel it was that the Spirit informing blind Bartemeus, or the beggar or the leper, the noble or the rich young man, the fisher, the sailmaker, or the Emperor, was the same, in inherent worth and dignity, because it was of God, the indwelling spirit in man.

The Christian teaching, carried westward, led to the practice of fellowship and charity, the raising and succour of the needy, and more and more widely to the freeing of the serfs, sometimes by grace, sometimes by purchase from the feudal lords.

Democracy and the City States

About the markets and trading centres grew the people of the towns, who, especially in the need of their overlords and rulers for money for the crusades, bargained for charters to govern their own affairs, or, indeed, as they grew stronger, often wrested such rights by force.

The towns and cities, once again, as in ancient days, became the truest practitioners of free self-government but within them the struggle renewed as between the rulers and the masses

—the merchants and wealthy burghers resisting the thrust to power of the population, crowding in from the countryside and the seaports. As trade and commerce replaced military conflict, money became a counter of exchange as valuable as land and the merchants turned bankers,—loans, investment and interest becoming as potent weapons of power as ever the sword and the franchise.

Democracy and Nationalism

Upon this restless, inquiring, ever-thrusting western world, other forces were already breaking. The adventurous voyaging of travellers by land and sea was to bring knowledge of the cultures of Asia and the Far East and to open the riches of South America, the vastness of North America, to the European and Mediterranean peoples, and, practically simultaneously, to see the quick emergence of the national states, in a world in which the city state could be no longer a potent force unto itself.

And the invention of printing meant, at once, the growth of reading, the diffusion of knowledge, the spur of facts to deeper thinking, the seeping of thought into ever broader strata of the people.

Western civilization seethed in ferment. As the towns had long sought control over their own destinies, so now whole states sought to throw off overriding power binding them from without, or the destruction of privilege throttling their liberties from within.

It would be close to four centuries before the turmoil was to run its course from the uprising of the Dutch against Spain in 1570-80, through the Cromwellian Revolution, the Restoration and the Bill of Rights in Britain; the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, and the independence of the South American Republics to the European, Russian and Far Eastern struggles which continue to this very decade.

In such strife, the cause of freedom became hopelessly confused, indentifying a republican with a democratic form of government. (A republic can be more autocratic than a monarchy in that there is no ultimate arbiter of disputing powers as is afforded in all but the most absolute of monarchies.)

The "Good" State

What men were really seeking was the destruction or control of the exercise, of power by privilege. But privilege can seek, and exercise power in any form of government—a monarchy, an obligarchy, an aristocracy, an autocracy, a republic and a

democracy. "Almost any system will serve if worked by good men: any system will fail if worked by self-seekers." So declared the Vice-Principal of Queen's (that scholarly Islander, Dr. W. E. McNeill) in an address to Convocation upon his laureation LL.D. honoris causa in 1947.

"What must people have to make a brave new world?" Dr. McNeill went on to answer, "Paul had a good answer: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report'."

These, fundamentally,—the individual good merged to the good of the whole, a good community of good people—were the ideals of the Grecian scholars, of Christ, of the generations of our modern world, who latterly sought their realization by the universal extension of the right to vote to all the people in the illusion that the right to a vote would mean a vote for the right,—and therefore just and good and decent and honourable things for the good of all.

The Breakdown of Democracy

Instead, what has come about has been too largely and widely just a transfer of power to an increasingly diffuse and indifferent and uninformed body,—the people. And ignorance and error have been rampant, since, as John Morley says: "It is an idea that error somehow in certain stages, where there is enough of it, actually does good, like vaccination."

And so we have come full circle. This "democratic way of life," that we have so glorified—have we not held *vox populi, vox dei*—the voice of the people is the voice of God?—and which was designed to assure the exercise of their direct power over their own lives by the people themselves, has become so diffused over great masses with anything but common interests, so blurred in outline, so much a form of speech indeed rather than a way of life, that it threatens "in bogs and sands" to perish, and "to evil and to good be lost forever."

Loss of Responsibility

The first and greatest corroding force in this internal decay of Democracy is the lessening or loss of any deep sense of responsibility on the part of elector and elected alike. There is little thought of serious study, of honest searching to know and espouse what is the cause of the common good, of seeking good for itself, of a regard for freedom in and of itself, with all that such a precious right implies.

Sheer Inertia

Related and allied to the lack of much sense of responsibility for their government is the sheer indifference and inertia of the great mass of free electors, less than one out of two of whom on the average, trouble even to vote. It is not an age of interest or concern with ideas, (and Democracy is a concept of the mind) but with material things.

Educational "Sloppiness"

This evil preference is bred in part in our educational tenets. One school of so-called educationalists argues that the pupil should be taught "not to learn facts but to think."

"O thinking"—exclaims my old professor of English (the same Dr. McNeill)—"What intellectual crimes are committed in thy name! How can a man think if he doesn't know? . . . You cannot think with hopes and fears and ignorance, but only with a well-trained and a well-filled mind."

Mass "Thinking"

It is so easy to swim with the tide and the tide is afloat with so many swimming the same way, swept along by the pleasant ways of press and radio and television, easy commentators and a vast conformity in the colorful propaganda that has us all living so uniformly the same way, eating so many different brands of almost the same foods, (and saving their cereal tops for contests), wearing clothes styled to standards, changing just enough to stimulate profitable competition but not too great departure from a common norm; indulging in the same recreations, driving cars of the year's prescribed models; shifting to the hair-do's, cosmetics, sport shirts, fishing tackle, or what have you—even to the diapers and baby formulae—of changing mass dictates.

In a material discontent we are off with the old, just because it is the old, not because it is worn or useless, and on with the new, whether it be new garments, or gadgets, or manners, or morals, a new wife, a new husband, or a new faith,—change merely for change's sake, as publicity and propaganda call the tune, and never with satisfaction, never with rest to body, mind or spirit.

Leisure, so long sought, for the recreation of mind and body, has become "waste time" to the greater number of the people, to be used in commercial entertainment, "sports" instead of

games, passive exposure to amusements, organized and marketed for whiling away the hours, or capitalizing the love of risk in the affairs "of skill and chance" that in this blend make legitimate an otherwise illegitimate undertaking.

Though, to be just, there is, too, widely evident an anxious desire to be of value and service in their day in the unprecedented extent of fraternal, religious, charitable, service and general community enterprises in which so much of humane, individual endeavour is generously outpoured. But, to greater and greater degree, mass organization, routine procedure, mass "marketing," and mass publicity tend to obscure and to absorb much of the original spontaneity and individual service of the citizen in the publicized "cause."

The Press and Democracy

The anaesthesia of indifference and irresponsibility evident in so large a portion of the electorate is, in part, reflected in—as well as indeed, in part, a reflection of—the attitude of a great section of the press.

There remain journals, both large and small, courageous and certain champions of freedom, truth, honour, forthrightness in the functioning of our governments, but the number grows of those who make licence of their freedom, and with whom a sensational headline is more than a citation for decency and devotion to duty, who would rather provoke controversy, for the sake of circulation, than advance co-operation for the sake of good citizenship and good government.

An informed, reliable truthful press is to the conscience of democracy as a whole what the voice of conscience is to the honourable citizen in the free and democratic state; in the lack of either democracy is impaired; in the lack of both it is doomed.

The "Pollster"

But, lest an editor here, an individualist there, play other than the People's Pied Piper tunes, and so lead to dangerous deviation in ideas or even rouse a hunger for speculation or for thought, *there is the newest by-product of our declining Democracy—"the pollster".*

The pollster will quickly let you know whether you are wandering from the mass assembly line of public opinion and make clear the way to that feeling of safety again,—the safety of being "right" because you are with the majority.

That is deadly dangerous, in a Democracy, that feeling

that you are one with power, part of a great dominant group, in numbers strong enough to impose your will on others by any means. Minority opinion is ignored and, brooding, it generates the very same bitterness and resentment against the power of democracy that first brought the germ of democracy itself to life.

In such settings *courageous leadership goes under discount* to this evil of superficial mass opinion—which goes by the name of thought. This “what the people want”, so recorded, can then be exploited and fed by too many of those who should resist and destroy it,—those who appeal to the people for their vote.

The “Politician”

Those with their ears thus to the keyhole of the public opinion poll are deemed to have been far-sighted when indeed “Nothing doth more harm in a state than that cunning men pass for wise.”⁵

Someone has said somewhere that the politician thinks of the next election, the statesman of the next generation.⁶ He or she who would be an honourable trustee of our freedoms must think not only of the present in these future terms but of past generations as well, of the painful progress through which these precious possessions of liberty have been bought and bequeathed to us and of the comparably courageous and, if not painful, certainly similarly unpopular leadership, requisite to preserving and transmitting them unimpaired and, if possible, enriched.

The Price of Leadership

The responsibility of leadership must surely be the responsibility of truth, not compromise; of courage, not concession.

Edmund Burke,⁷ saving his own honour and self-respect at the cost of his constituency of the City of Bristol, said finely what every honourable candidate for public office might have printed on his nomination papers to this day:

“It ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinion high respect; their business unremitting attention. It is his duty. . . .

⁵ Sir Francis Bacon.

⁶ James Freeman Clarke.

⁷ “On Being Elected for Bristol, 1774.”

above all, ever and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own. But his unbiassed opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure: no, nor from the law and the constitution. They are a trust from Providence for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

The high and difficult task of leadership, of attempting to inform and persuade and direct the mind and conscience of the elector to serious study, to honest search, to earnest inquiry of what is the public good—and, so, in the end, the only real good for himself—is foregone in the easy expediency of "interpreting the wish of the electors" instead of so interpreting right, justice, good, decency, honour, freedom that they shall become not only the wish but the ideal of this free man who wants to remain free in a free society.

"A free man," wrote Lord Tweedsmuir, "is not one who is permitted to do as he likes. He is one who willingly accepts a discipline and makes it his own because he understands its value."

Responsible leaders of an enduring democracy must enjoin discipline upon those who support them because without discipline there cannot long be an ordered society. The democracy which cannot assure self-discipline so disintegrates that the external discipline of dictatorship swiftly ensues.

Advance of Administrative Power

The power of Democracy is dwindling further by the inertia of the elected representatives in the face of growth of power and competency in the administrative arm.

The people entrust power to those elected in the exercise of the franchise, and presumably seek to contain it within limits by the requirement of appeals for its renewal within a stated maximum period of time. There thus arises the problem of assuring permanency, and continuity, in the ongoing life of the state and of bringing in, as well, the play of change in new ideas, new and creative forces as the minority party of to-day becomes the majority party of tomorrow within the same existing administrative mechanisms.

This assurance of continuity with change has been centered in a permanent civil service, presumably impartial, interested only in the effective application of the policies, devised by the elected arm and delegated to this administrative arm for execu-

tion. *Policy and planning belong to those directly responsible to the people: performance to those retained to carry them out.*

Here, however, modern Democracy is being impaired in that, more and more, the appointed public servant is being involved in the development of planning and policy, for the simple reason that government is becoming so technical and involved that the concept and application of many of its problems cannot be easily encompassed by the semi- or uninformed.

Two things are happening—both destructive of the democratic system itself.

The elected representative is reflecting not his own, nor necessarily the electorate's, wishes but rather becoming the medium of carrying out the policies of the permanent service.

Or, the permanent civil servant, desiring to see what he believes in put into practice, is identifying himself with the policy of the government (which he is supposed only to serve) to the point of directing, and implementing and, even at times, actually entering the field of political candidature to further his designs.

Thus Democracy becomes bureaucracy and the exercise of the power of the people becomes the privilege either of the party or the permanent civil servant in office without full and free discussion and debate.

Here, again, this vitiation of the democratic process is not the work of external forces. Its remedy lies at hand in the election to the increasingly complicated and difficult task of modern democratic government of persons properly qualified for the discharge of the duties which a free society seeks to have discharged by freely elected, and as freely changed, representatives.

Delegation of Power

This deflection of direct responsibility from the elected arm may take other forms—the entrusting of more and more of the duties and decisions that should be government's—if government is to remain responsible to the people—to administrative bodies, to whom policy and expenditure are both accorded with an "unget-at-ability", and "unaccountability" which would not be tolerated on the part of the government itself. Such a trend entrenches Bureaucracy in separate and fortified dwellings beyond the reach of Parliament or people.

Another instance of this removal from the elected authority of direct power—and so final responsibility for its actions—is the development of compulsory arbitration in labour disputes of a public body—governmental or subsidiary—with its employees.

One consequent result is to remove control over the rates of public expenditure and, so, of taxation from the constituted government authority, and to have it exercised by a temporary and appointed body, again with no direct relationship or accountability to the electorate.

This is a denial of the fundamental controls in the Bill of Rights of 1689 and certainly destructive of one of the fundamental safeguards of a *Democracy*.

Powers Within the Power of the State

On another flank, this characteristic of Democracy—the direct exercise of power by the people or elected representatives directly responsible to them—is atrophying.

Through the long centuries of establishment of this right, King and Emperor, feudal lords and industrial barons were, in turn, displaced from the exercise of privilege to assure to the people themselves enjoyment of these powers deemed essential to their liberty.

But, from time to time, there has sprung up within the free state, and beside its constituted government, organized strength which, by its influence or weight of votes, exerts a power on policy and administration quite unwarranted by any legal provisions and fettering, and so weakening the full play of free and constituted authority.

However representative, however responsibly led, such developments can end in but one of two ways in modern Democracy—in a "Corporationist" state, such as Italian Fascism, in its early and better stages, or in Communism.

It is wise, if perhaps not politically sagacious or discreet, to examine whether, on this continent, the strength and power of certain militant and organized labour movements and certain of their leaders do not so threaten the full and free operation of pure democracy to quite different degree from the United Kingdom where Labour leadership is "get-at-able" from its direct participation in political life.

Labour is the great capital of the modern industrial democracy; the hours and rates of labour are the greatest single factor in its national economy. Yet these are not under the effective control of the constituted authority of the people, nor under as direct representative control of as broadly elected an authority within their own area as are the competent governing bodies of the nation.

Within a democracy, the powers of the executive (whether

the Crown, the Executive or the Cabinet) are strictly limited, and for all matters of major policy and vital concern decision may be taken only within the whole representative assembly of the people.

But tremendous power (which can involve industrial and consequent economic paralysis of the nation) is now entrusted to comparably small executive bodies of the "authority within the public authority" that our powerful organized labour groups have become.

The cost of production, and so of living, and, through their inter-play, ultimately of taxation; control over the assured continuous operation of the life of the nation, its systems of communication—such vital factors of the public weal—are now as effectively (if not in actual legal fact) in the determination of the discretion, sanity and sense of responsibility of a few most highly placed "labour leader lords" of to-day as they are of the duly constituted government, and as similar powers, in other times, were exercised by the military, the feudal, the industrial "lords" of those days.

'Social' Security

But what price essential liberty or freedom now? Life has become so concerned with the standards of material living that these have become greater ends in themselves. Han Suyin, coming to us from the certainty of her Eastern philosophy, saw materialism shrivelling the life and spirit of the West.⁸

"Everyone wanted security, security no longer a word but a duty, a life-demanding god. . . . I found people smaller and meaner, shrunk in a fixed search for security. Deep-buried in this word lay the talent of the slothful servant unadventured on the dangerous seas of life. For this strange end men planned with single-hearted passion, pensions and retirement at 20 dreaming of 65, in youth aspiring to safe senility. For the security of death they forsook living. Security armed and re-armed the nations growing under armaments and yet devising ever more efficient ways of killing their own kind."

What she has said thus Arnold Toynbee has said another way,—that in our technology the West has created a material society with a spiritual vacuum which must be again filled or such a society, founded on the values of the spirit, will collapse.

Democracy and Fatalism in the Nuclear Age

These, then, are some of the seams and breaks running through the structure of Democracy, weakening it, internally,

⁸ "A Many-Splendoured Thing."—p. 254

as now, after more than 2000 years of conscious struggle for mastery over his own way of life, man stands, armed indeed with the thunderbolt of his own destruction or the power to release the living of life to new and unimagined freedoms and equality.

Is the danger of external annihilation so great that the Democratic World should accept fatalistically this dwindling away of its powers as of a force that is sped?

Arnold Toynbee⁹ traces for us the story of 21 civilizations, all of which have gone, save ours, most of them in the change and decay of their own luxury and leisure.

Sir Francis Bacon recorded, rather than enunciated, that "Temperance is the virtue of prosperity and fortitude the virtue of adversity and of these fortitude is the greater virtue in that prosperity doth best discover vice but adversity doth best discover virtue."

In this adversity of softening in our own prosperity it may be well to recall, as Toynbee does for us, that in this world suddenly shrunken so small in the rapidity of communications and the common time and space of radio and television, two-thirds of the people are neither democratic nor totalitarian but seething in the indecision of their own self-determination; and that none of them—Russia, Asia, the Far East, Africa, the native populations of the Americas and Australasia—have any reason to be particularly drawn to us or our ways of life. Their adoption of Western technology has been forced upon them in self survival; their resistance to our social philosophies enjoined by the "works" and ways in which so much of our "faiths" have been made manifest to them.

In India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma—where long and, on the whole, humane administration sought to prepare these countries for the exercise of democratic self-government—the leaders who have taken over power have sought to govern by such principles.

As against their convictions and these developments, there is, within these and other lands in which only the materialistic impact of the West has been felt, the extremity of need between the teeming millions of the poor and the comparative comfort and well-being of the few comfortable and the rich.

The Challenge of Communism

To such states and people in such plight comes the evangel of Marx, made manifest in Communism—the seizure and exer-

⁹ The Study of History

cise not only of the power of government, of the rules whereby mankind will live and work, by all the people but of all the means and power of production itself, in farm, field, fishery, factory, everywhere, and the equitable sharing of its fruits by all.

This new creed is offered with the fervour of a religion—its promise, not fear or war towards the democracies, but a better way of life, of a materialistic life to people who are hungry, ill-clad, cold and unsheltered in their wretched villages or squalid slums.

Against that, the argument of all power becoming absolute in the hands of those who seize and exercise it is a far-off, vague fear of little meaning beside their present need. What potency has the mere argument of an ideal freedom, intangible in the pressure of this present poverty beside the West's lush and listless prosperity that preaches no fervent gospel and confuses continuously the standard of living with a standard of life?

Perhaps here an interpolation may be justified of what can hardly be surpassed as a fantastic confusion of the value of material goods with the indefinable enduring material of good itself. The vice-president of the American Finance Conference—the euphonious disguise of the gatherings of all the geniuses of all the small loans and “down payment plans” of this continent—had this to say of that peculiar device of this inventive age—instalment buying and unsecured credit (which has bred this new “virtue” of thriftlessness, making a regrettable vice of that foresight and thrift upon which the character and stability of this land were so firmly founded). With blithe disregard of the distinction between resources and credit, between promises to pay and payment, a series of fallacious attributes closes thus:

“It (i.e. instalment buying) is the only sound, permanent and effective means whereby the wealth of the nation may be so rapidly increased and so fairly distributed to an ever-increasing number of citizens—thus approaching the elimination of the have-nots.

“All of these effects are in the highest tradition of the North American idea that individual initiative, dignity, and responsibility, together with mutual respect with our neighbours, are essential ingredients in the ability of our people to bring about peace, prosperity, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Oh! Thomas Jefferson! thou should'st be living at this hour, Thy land hath need of thee!

The Reaffirmation of the Spiritual

The West, Democracy, must rouse and save itself in the

re-affirmation and living of a life that has significance, because it is not of the here and now, but enduring before and beyond this day of material labour and material reward. Only as democracy can re-affirm its own essentially spiritual values, proclaim and live them in the daily ordering of its own life and peoples, can it survive itself, much less succeed in bringing the succour of spiritual strength and security to other lands and peoples.

The permeation of the Spirit of God (as the Roman Catholic Church, venerable with age but vigorous with youth, is so clearly contending in its individual onslaught on the materialism of Communism) is the one dynamic power which can wrest and rescue human life on the face of the globe to-day from the devastation of a nuclear war among the nations.

This force of the spirit is not, however, the prerogative of any one faith, even of the Christian, though as Churchill has said for those of us who hold thereby, "The flame of Christian ethics is still our highest guide. To guard and cherish it is our first interest, both spiritually and materially."

John Watson, my old professor at Queen's, over half a century ago, taught that "the philosophy of religion" would be the hope of a world in which "the appeal to external authority in any form does not in our day carry conviction even to those who make it."

The central principle of all religion, Watson summed up, "God is Spirit"; and its practical counterpart in Christ's "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect." This enjoined, so Watson held, conscious effort to identify the individual life with the will of God, as studied and known in the knowledge and experience of life; possibly what Churchill has told us in other words:

"History with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past trying to reconstruct its scenes to revive its echoes and kindle with pale gleams the passions of former days. What is the worth of all this?"

"The only guide to a man is his conscience;—the only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. . . with this shield, however the fates may play, we march always in the ranks of honour."

Conscience is the voice of the Spirit of God in man.

That rule of the Spirit imposes partnership with "the spirit of goodness in all forms of social organization", and the religion that is thus individual brings all together in social progress because of faith in the ultimate triumph of goodness itself.

And so, in 1912, Dr. Watson appealed in the Gifford Lectures:¹⁰

"Religion is the spirit which must more and more subdue all things to itself informing science and art, and realizing itself in the higher organization of the family, the civic community, the state and ultimately the world, gradually filling the mind and heart of every individual with the love of God and the enthusiasm of humanity."

Life is real and life is personal and that state and that form of society will endure which give to man faith and hope in this life and, after he has striven, peace at the last.

"Go out into the darkness", came the message from our good and dying King, "and put your hand in the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than the known way."

I would have you hear the end of the whole matter.

There can be no permanency to the structure of any society designed, as is Democracy, to allow freedom of thought, of speech and of action to all, and equal sharing by all of opportunity, of power and of responsibility unless it is reared upon the cornerstone of character. And character has but one sound footing—Conscience—whose rule of justice curbs alike the unbridled will of the individual on the one hand and of undisciplined masses on the other and recognizes no values but those of honour, goodness and truth.

¹⁰ Published as "The Interpretation of Religious Experience."