

Edwin Mallory's dream of improvement, of material advance, during the fifty years after 1869 was realized. Man made great progress, and by 1919 he had succeeded in harnessing many more of the forces of nature to his own comfort and convenience. But by 1919 man had also gone through the bloody holocaust of World War One. Satisfaction in our progress towards an easier and happier existence had been blotted out by the slaughter and sacrifice of those dreadful years from 1914 to 1918.

After that ordeal, man looked forward again. The work of discovery and development went on. Life moved swiftly, with more and more mechanical devices setting the dizzy pace. Standards of living improved. What had been luxuries for a few became comforts for many. What had been comforts for many became necessities for all. But again by 1939, material development had so far outstripped moral and social progress that we stumbled into World War II, with slaughter and destruction on a scale undreamed of in earlier years.

And, today, three years after the end of the second world war, we stand again, all too close to the edge of the abyss; more terrified than ever before because we cannot be sure that the advance of science in a world of moral and political anarchy is not as likely to lead to human annihilation than to human welfare; because it seems that never before has the gap between wisdom, real wisdom and mere knowledge been wider.

On this International Day, 1948, there will be many who look back with envy to the fatiguing but untroubled toil of 1869; who will question the value of material and scientific progress which is so apt to widen the area of death and destruction. What is the point of discovering how to release atomic energy if it is to be used to destroy us? I am too optimistic to believe that it will destroy us. But the central problem of our time is not the promotion of scientific and material progress, important though that is, but the finding of solutions for moral and social and political problems; above all for the fundamental problem of peace and security in a world of competing ideologies and clashing ambitions. Without such peace and security, progress may become merely an acceleration of the march to destruction.

What, then, has been the trouble with the world in these years since Edwin Mallory spoke? Why have we moved, not merely from the scythe to the combine, but also from the Charge of the Light Brigade to the furnaces of Belsen and the slave camps of Siberia?

It is very dangerous to overstate and it is dangerous too to over-simplify. But I suggest that there is one trend which signals more than any other the moral deterioration of our time; which has led straight to the mass slaughter of recent years and might lead to the destruction of civilization itself. It is the trend towards the division of humanity into two great camps, by a line which transcends and cuts across every national and political boundary. On the one side of that line are those whose religious and philosophical concepts of life cause them to respect the dignity and decency and freedom of the individual; who believe that government is justified only by the contribution it makes to the welfare of the individual; who insist that government must be founded on law, justice and morality. That, I think, is our side, the side of true Christian tradition, and the side of free, progressive democracy. On the other side of the line are those totalitarian tyrannies, of left and right, when power is the only test of morality in which the individual is a mere machine, existing for the service and constant aggrandizement of a ruthless and amoral state, whose dictates he must obey, and to whose whims he must conform or be crushed.

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