

An Oxford Professor Views Modern Aspects of Progress

The First Series of Lectures Under the McGill Graduates' Lectureship.

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THE McGill Graduates' Lectureship has been founded by the Graduates' Society of McGill University from the revenue of the Graduates' Endowment Fund. The Society has taken this step to provide a series of lectures each year by men of outstanding scholarship in their own particular sphere and thus to enrich the life of the University. Not only students and graduates but many citizens of Montreal as well come into contact in this way with these outstanding lecturers. This year, during the months of March and April, the first series of these lectures was given.

The person chosen to open the lectureship was W. G. S. Adams, Gladstone Professor of Political Theory and Institutions, All Souls' College, Oxford. At a time when all are conscious of change and movement in the world about us, it was peculiarly fitting that Professor Adams should inaugurate this lectureship with eight lectures on "Aspects of Progress in the Twentieth Century." The unfolding of his views, his methodical and thoughtful discussion of the problems of the present day helped his hearers to think their way into these problems, to understand the essential characteristics of them, to see in the various movements we are conscious of a relation and an order we did not realize before. It was no part of Professor Adams' method to propose easy remedies for our difficulties nor to argue in favour of this or that solution. His contribution was rather that of revealing to his hearers his view of the nature of the problems confronting us, believing that in a deeper and wider understanding of these problems lay the path to eventual solution.

Professor Adams first dealt with the reality and the novelty of the idea of Progress. The conception of progress was a comparatively recent development and had come to replace such theories as the degeneracy of man and the view of history as a series of cycles. The new view is that the world is going ever forward. The idea of progress was growing and becoming more familiar and simple. It was seen in the greater devotion to well being, the greater sense of security, the greater opportunity for the individual and the more generally recognized sense of community development. Two evidences of this progress are the amazing growth of knowledge and the active desire for equality—not a dead uniformity but the equality of opportunity which allows the best in the community to develop.

The era in which we live is one of the greatest, if not the greatest in the whole story of history. The complexity bewilders us. There is evident economic progress and a social sense of well being, but despite this there is also something still greater. It is the growing feeling that it is necessary to get back to fundamentals, a recognition of the need for re-thinking the foundations of our belief. The more science reveals, the more mystery develops, a mystery that is one of the saving things in life. One is inclined to turn to a belief in God, in freedom and in immortality. It is because society is seeing that these are the things that have value that in this era lies possibility of great and continuing progress.

Professor Adams proceeded to outline his interpretation of the aspects of progress by reference to the multiplicity of relations which the individual experiences in life at the present day. He regarded the individual as moving in a number of more or less concentric spheres. He was living in relation to the immediate social group in its many-sided character—home, school, church, club, and so on. Then, too, he was definitely related to the larger unit of the province or the state. We in Canada are related, also, within the Empire. And in our modern life, the individual is becoming more and more concerned with the relationship which oversteps national and Empire bounds and embraces in its sphere mankind.

In the immediate community Dr. Adams felt that one of the most promising aspects of progress was the rise of voluntaryism and its effective work in social service. This voluntary effort was cooperating with the statutory provisions for social welfare. The lecturer felt that this growth of state and voluntary control of social service was equivalent in its field to the steps taken by England in the establishment of representative government. This phase of progress became much more prominent after the war. Men were fighting for a better England and when they came back from the War they wanted to see that the country became better. It was no longer a question of philanthropy. The village hall which has come to be the centre of community life in an increasing number of villages is no longer the gift of some wealthy patron but is established as a result of organized effort by the villagers themselves with some assistance from the government. So, too, arises the effort to preserve