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*Lecture delivered in America, October  
and November, 1937*

**F**OR HALF A CENTURY I have resisted temptations to lecture in America-if for no other reason than the insufficiency of my voice. But the microphone is a great leveller and here I am at last on terms of practical equality with your most audible speakers and very glad indeed of this belated opportunity of talking to you. I want to talk to you about an idea which seems to me to be a very important one indeed. I want to interest you in it, and if possible find out what you think of it. I call that idea for reasons I shall try to make clear as I proceed, ***The New Encyclopaedism***, and the gist of it is that the time is ripe for a very extensive revision and modernization of the intellectual organization of the world. Can I put it more plainly than that? Perhaps I can.

Our world is changing and it is changing with an

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ever-increasing violence. An old world dies about us. A new world struggles into existence. But it is not developing the brain and the sensitiveness and delicacy necessary for its new life. That is the essence of what I have to say.

To put my argument squarely on its feet I must begin by telling you things that you know quite as well or better than I do. I will just remind you of them. It is, so to speak, a matter of current observation that in the past century and a half there has been an enormous increase in the speed and facility of communications between men in every part of the world. Two hundred years ago Oliver Goldsmith said that if every time a man fired a gun in England, someone was killed in China, we should never hear of it and no one would bother very much about it. All that is changed. We should hear about that murdered **Chinaman** almost at once. Today we can go all round the world in the time that it 'took a man to travel from New York to Washington in 1800, we can speak to any one anywhere so soon as the proper connections have been made and in a little while we shall be able to look one another in the face from the ends of the earth. In a very few years now we shall be able to fly in the stratosphere across the Atlantic in a few hours with a cargo of passengers, or bombs or other commodities. There has in

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fact been a **complete** revolution in our relation to distances. And the practical consequences of these immense approximations are only beginning to be realized. Everybody knows these facts now, but round about 1900 we were only beginning to take notice of this abolition of distance.. Even in 1919 the good gentlemen who settled the world for ever at Versailles had not observed this strange new thing in human affairs. They had not observed that it was no longer possible to live in little horse-and-foot communities because of this change of scale. We know better now. Now the consequences of this change of scale force themselves upon our attention everywhere. Often in the rudest fashion.

Our interests and our activities interpenetrate more and more. We are **all** consciously or **unconsciously** adapting ourselves to a single common world. For a time North America and the great sprawl of Russia and Siberia are for obvious reasons feeling less restriction than let us say Japan or Germany, but, as my glancing allusion to the stratosphere was intended to remind you, this relative isolation of yours is also a diminishing isolation. The Abolition of Distance is making novel political and economic arrangements more and more imperative if the populations of the earth are not to grind against each other to their mutual destruction.

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That imperative expansion of the scale of the community in which we have to live is the first truism I want to recall to you and bring into the foreground of our discussion. The second truism is the immense increase in our available power that has been going on. I do not know if any precise estimate of the physical energy at the disposal of mankind now and at any previous age, has ever been made, but the disproportion between what we have and what our great-grandparents had, is stupendous and continually increasing. I am told that two or three power stations in the United States are today pouring out more energy night and day than could be produced by the sustained muscular effort of the entire United States population, and that the Roman empire at its mightiest could not-even by one vast unanimous thrust, not a single soul doing anything but push and push-have kept the street and road transport of New York State moving as it moves today. You are almost sick of being told it, in this form or that, over and over again. But we all know about this sort of thing. Man was slower and feebler beyond comparison a century or so ago than he is today. He has become a new animal incredibly swift and strong-except in his head. We all know-in theory at least-how this increase of power affects the nature of war. None of our new powers in this world

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of increasing power, have been so rapidly applied as our powers of mutual injury. A child of five with a bomb no bigger than my hand, can kill as many men in a moment as any paladin of antiquity hacking and hewing and bashing through a long and tiring battle. Both these two realities, these two portentous realities, the change of scale in human affairs and the monstrous increase of destructive power, haunt every intelligent mind today. One needs an exceptional stupidity even to question the urgency we are under to establish some effective World Pax, before gathering disaster overwhelms us. The problem of reshaping human affairs on a world-scale, this World Problem, is drawing together an ever-increasing multitude of minds. It is becoming the common solicitude of all sane and civilized men. We must do it-or knock ourselves to pieces.

I think it would be profitable if a group of history students were to trace how this World Problem has dawned upon the popular mind from, let us say, 1900 up to the present time. To begin with it was hardly felt to be important. Our apprehension of what it really amounts to has grown in breadth and subtlety during all these past seven-and-thirty years. We have been learning hard in the past third of a century. And particularly since 1919. In 1900 the general sense of the historical process, of what was going on

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in the world, was altogether shallower than ours today. People were extraordinarily ignorant of the operating causes of political events. It was quite possible then for them to agree that it was not at all a nice or desirable thing and that it ought to be put an end to, and to imagine that setting up a nice little international court at The Hague to which states could bring their grievances and get a decision without going to the trouble and expense of hostilities would end this obsolescent scandal. Then we should have peace for **ever**—and everything else would go on as before. But now even the boy picking cotton or working the elevator, knows that nothing will go as before. The fear of change has reached them.

You will remember that Mr. Andrew Carnegie set aside quite a respectable fraction of his savings to buy us world peace for ever and have done with it. The Great War was an enlightening disappointment to this earlier school of peacemakers, and it released a relatively immense flow of thought about the World Problem. But even at Versailles the people most immediately powerful, were still evidently under the impression that world peace was simply a legal and political business. They thought the Great War had happened, but they were busy politicians, and had not remarked that vastly greater things were happening. They did not realize even

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that elementary point about the unsuitable size of contemporary states to which I have recalled your attention—much less did they think about the new economic stresses that were revolutionizing every material circumstance of life. They saw the issue as a simple affair upon the lines of old-fashioned history. So far as their ideas went it was just Carthage and Rome over again. The Central Powers were naughty naughty nations and had to be punished. Their greatest novelty was the League of Nations, which indeed was all very well as a gesture and an experiment but which as an irremovable and irreplaceable reality in the path of world adjustment has proved anything but a blessing. It had been a brilliant idea in the reign of Francis I of France. Still we have to recognize that in **1919** the Geneva League was about as far as anyone's realization of the gravity of the World Problem had gone. It is our common quality to be wise after the event and still quite unprepared for the next change ahead. It is an almost universal human failing to believe that now we know everything, that nothing more than we know can be known about human relations, and that in our limitless wisdom we can fix up our descendants for evermore, by constitutions, treaties, boundaries and leagues. So my poor generation built this insufficient League. For a time a number of well-meaning

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people **did** consider that the League of Nations settled the World Problem for good and all, and that they need not bother their heads about it any more. There were, we felt, no further grounds for anxiety, and we all sat down within our nice little national boundaries to resume business according to the old ways, securing each of us the largest possible share of the good things the new Era of Peace and Prosperity was to bring—at least to the good countries to whom victory had been accorded. When later the history of our own times comes to be written, I imagine this period between 1919 and 1929 will be called the Fatuous Twenties.

We all know better now. Now that we are living in what no doubt the historian will some day call the Frightened Thirties. Versailles was no settlement. There is still no settlement. The World Problem still pursues us. And it seems now vastly nearer, uglier and more formidable than it ever did before. It emerges through all our settlements like a dangerous rhinoceros coming through a reed fence. Our mood changes now from one in which off-hand legal solutions were acceptable, to an almost feverish abundance of mental activity. From saying "There is the Hague Court and what more do you want?" or "There is the League of Nations, what more **can** you want?" Or "There is the British Peace Ballot

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and please don't bother me further," we are beginning to apprehend something of the full complexity and vastness of the situation that faces mankind, that is to say all of us, as a living species. Our minds are beginning to grasp the vastness of these grim imperatives. That change of scale, that enhancement of power has altered the fundamental conditions of human life-of all our lives. The traditions of the old world, the comparatively easy traditions in which we have grown up and in which we have shaped our lives, are bankrupt. They are outworn. They are outgrown. They are too decayed for much more patching. They are as untrustworthy and dangerous as a very old car whose engine has become explosive, which has lost its brake lining and has a loose steering-wheel. What I am saying now is gradually becoming as plain in men's minds as the roundness of the earth. New world or nothing. We have to make a new world for ourselves or we shall suffer and perish amidst the downfall of the decaying old. This is a business of fundamentals in which we are all called upon to take part, and through which the lives of all of us are bound to be changed essentially and irrevocably.

With this realization of the true immensity and penetration of the World Problem we are passing out of the period of panaceas-of simple solutions.

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As we grow wiser we realize more and more that the World Problem is not a thing like a locked door for which it is only necessary to find a single key. It is infinitely more complex. It is a battle all along the line and every man is a combatant or a deserter. Popular discussion is thick with competing simple remedies, these one-thing-needful proposals, each of which has its factor of truth and each of which in itself is entirely inadequate. Consider some of them. Arbitration, League of Nations, I have spoken of. World Socialism? The Socialist very rightly points out the evils and destructive stresses that arise from the free play of the acquisitive impulse in production and business affairs, but his solution, which is to take the control of things out of the hands of the acquisitive in order to put it into the hands of the inexperienced, plainly leaves the bulk of the world's troubles unsolved. The Communist and Fascist have theorized about and experimented with the seizure and concentration of power, but they produce no sound schemes for its beneficial use. Seizing power by itself is a gangster's game. You can do nothing with power except plunder and destroy-unless you know exactly what to do with it. People tell us that Christianity, the Spirit of Christianity, holds a key to all our difficulties. Christianity, they say, has never yet been tried. We have all heard

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*that.* The trouble is that Christianity in all its various forms never does try. Ask it to work out practical problems and it immediately floats off into other-worldliness. Plainly there is much that is wrong in our property-money arrangements, but there again prescriptions for a certain juggling with currency and credit, seem unlikely in themselves to solve the World Problem. A multitude of such suggestions are bandied about with increasing passion. In comparison with any preceding age, we are in a state of extreme mental fermentation. This is, I suggest, an inevitable phase in the development of our apprehension of the real magnitude and complexity of the World Problem which faces us. Except for the faddists and fanatics we all feel a sort of despairing inadequacy amidst this wild storm of suggestions and rash beginnings. We want to know more, we want digested facts to go upon. Our minds are not equipped for the job.

And shaking a finger at you to mark the point we have reached, I repeat, our minds are not equipped for the job.

We are ships in uncharted seas. We are big-game hunters without weapons of precision.

This present uproar of incomplete ideas was as inevitable as the Imperialist Optimism of 1900, the Futile Amazement of the Great War, and the self-

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complacency of the Fatuous Twenties. These were all phases, necessary phases, in the march of our race through disillusionment to understanding. After the phase of panaceas there comes now, I hope, a phase of intelligent co-ordination of creative movements, a balanced treatment of our complex difficulties. We are going to think again. We are all beginning to realize that the World Problem, the universal world problem of adapting our life to its new scale and its new powers, has to be approached on a broad front, along many paths and in many fashions.

In my opening remarks I stressed our spreading realization of the possibility of a great catastrophe in world affairs. One immediate consequence of our full realization of what this World Problem before us means is dismay. We lose heart. We feel that anyhow we cannot adjust that much. We throw up the sponge. We say, let us go on as long as possible anyhow, and after us, let what will happen. A considerable and a growing number of people are persuaded that a drift towards a monstrously destructive war cycle which may practically obliterate our present civilization is inevitable. I have, I suppose, puzzled over such possibilities rather more than most people. I do not agree with that inevitability of another great war. But I agree with its possi-

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bility. I think such a collapse so possible that I have played with it imaginatively in a book or so and a film. It is so much a possibility that it is wholesome to bear it constantly in mind. But all the same I do not believe that world disaster is unavoidable.

It is extraordinarily difficult to estimate the relative strength of the driving forces in human affairs today. We are not dealing with measurable quantities. We are easily the prey of our moods, and our latest vivid impression is sure to count for far too much. Values in my own mind, I find, shift about from hour to hour. I guess it is about the same with most of you. Just as in a battle, so here, our moods are factors in the situation. When *we* feel depressed, the world is going to the devil and we meet defeat half-way; when we are elated, the world is all right and we win. And I think that most of us are inclined to overestimate the menace of violence, the threats of nationalist aggression and the suppression of free discussion in many parts of the world at the present time. I admit the darkness and grimness on the face of things. Indisputably vehement *state-ism* now dominates affairs over large regions of the civilized world. Everywhere liberty is threatened or outraged. Here again, I merely repeat, what the whole intelligent world is saying.

Well. . . .