

(October 29, 1934)

## A Look at the World we are Living in

BY REV. GEORGE A. DICKSON, B.TH., D.D.

PRESIDENT JAMES:—It is a pleasure today to present to you one of our own citizens, the Rev. Dr. George A. Dickson, Pastor of Metropolitan Church. Although but recently coming to Toronto, his induction at the Metropolitan taking place as recently as August, he has, in that two and a half or three months, made a name for himself with the work he is doing throughout the length and breadth of this city. Born in or near Glasgow, he came to this country at an early age—the exact age the speaker himself refuses to reveal. He tells me he is very much afraid the board of the church might not have the same confidence in his judgment. Before coming here he went to the University of Manitoba from which he graduated. His first work was in Winnipeg. That field, apparently, was not wide enough for his ambitions. He went on circuit throughout Manitoba and while thus engaged he received and accepted a call to Knox Church, Calgary. There his real work began. Dr. Dickson was at Knox Church for ten and a half consecutive years. While there he made a foremost reputation as a church organizer and preacher that was the envy, I think, of most of those in the West. Real recognition for his work came at the end of his tenth year when he was elected President of the Alberta Conference.

I have heard, sir, that some of your remarks are not altogether what the ordinary lay mind expects. I say to you here, and I think the members of this Club will back me up, that if there is one place that should be regarded as the Open Forum, it is the Canadian Club of Toronto.

I have much pleasure in presenting Rev. Dr. George A. Dickson, whose subject will be, "A Look at the World We Are Living In."

REV. DR. DICKSON:—Mr. President and gentlemen, may I take a moment of your time in expressing to you the pleasure I have in meeting with you at this luncheon and discussing with you the subject that has been more or less put at my disposal. It is a pleasure to me to meet with business men and incidentally to get this free meal. That gives my nationality away at once. But that is not meanness; that is good business.

I think I ought to say to you that I have been rather ambitious in the selection of a subject and from the viewpoint of scope I could not go much further, could I, than, "A Look at the World in Which We Are Living?" I am reminded of an experience which a certain Irishman had who got a little more liquor than was good for him and began to boast of the fact that he could lick any Irishman he had ever met. And he got away with it. But unfortunately he made the same remark concerning a Scotsman and he woke up in the hospital, and the first thing he said after regaining consciousness was, "I am afraid I covered too much territory."

I almost hesitate to come before you and address you upon the subject that has been announced for the reason that perhaps I am not the man to deal with the world, and to be perfectly frank I have more than enough to deal with in the Metropolitan Church. I have a suspicion, too, rightly or wrongly, that one of the things from which the world is suffering today is an overdose of advice from inexperienced people, and some of those, I am afraid, represent my own profession. Nevertheless, we are here, and I shall proceed with the speech, and the first thing I should like to say is that when we are looking at the world in which we are living our opinion regarding it is apt to be colored by our temperament, and by the circumstances in which we are living. For example, if we have the assurance of three square meals a day, are fairly secure of our position, and have a fairly optimistic outlook in life, I suppose we can agree with Browning when he said that

"since God's in his Heaven, all must be right with the world"; or again with the philosophy of Pope who said that "whatever is, is right." On the other hand, gentlemen, if we are without our bread and butter and with a measure of doubt in our minds as to when our stomachs will be filled, are out of a position and more or less of a pessimistic nature, aggravated by the depression through which we are passing, then, I fancy, it will be comparatively easy for anyone of that school to become so pessimistic and fatalistic in his outlook that he will embrace the philosophy of Tess of the D'Urbervilles that we are living on a blighted star, or we will agree with the famous Dr. Johnson, who on a certain occasion said; "This world is a place where there is much to be endured and very little to be enjoyed."

Now gentlemen, so far as I can observe, (and I think a preacher ought to be an observant man), I am observing you today; I see a good many of you are members of my church; I am glad you are still in Toronto. You are very slow, aren't you? So far as I can observe, as I look at the world, I see there are probably more people with a pessimistic attitude than with the cheerful outlook. On every side we see signs of disaster. We are being told about the imminent catastrophe that is about to befall our civilization. We are told that we are nearing the edge of the abyss and that chaos is just around the corner.

Now frankly speaking, I do not think the most fatalistic among us believe what the newspapers tell us about this, nor what the magazines tell us about this. If we did we should be afraid to go to bed at night. Undoubtedly, however, gentlemen, there is no use in our closing our eyes to facts, and the facts are these, that as we look at the racial and class hatred, as we see suffering that characterizes the world today, if we are sensitive at all, we cannot help becoming more or less depressed and discouraged. "Careless seems the great avenger history's pages to regard: one death grapple in the darkness 'twixt all systems and the world; truth forever on the scaffold; wrong forever on the throne."

And yet gentlemen, while it is hard at times to face

facts and look them right in the face, to continue to brood over them leads to despair and defeatism, paralyzes action, and gives us a sense of futility in our attempt to right the inequalities of our civilization. Now there are two men in our civilization of today of whom I am afraid neither represents true leadership. The first is the man who says that everything is well with civilization. The other is the man who says that the world is going to the dogs. And so at the risk of being classified as a Pollyanna, I propose, with your permission, from the viewpoint of a preacher, to find if I can signs and rays of hope in the horizon for our encouragement and for our inspiration. For after all, gentlemen, I have had experience in the ministry sufficiently to say this, that when I find myself gadding about all week with nothing to say on Sunday, I generally feel God-guided to take a kick at our politicians, or send our business men to hell.

Now what are the signs of encouragement as we look at the world in which we are living? First of all, it is commonplace now to hear men say, while admiring the wonderful strides made in the scientific world, that the inventions of science have been the cause of much of our trouble and our distress today. Fifty years ago or thereabouts the United States Commissioner of Labor solemnly reported to his country "The nations of the world have overstocked themselves with machinery and manufacturing plants far in excess of production." He felt that the next fifty years would show little progress, and that no further inventions were needed nor would be forthcoming. Now, gentlemen, if he had been correct the horse would still be the swiftest method of highway travel. We should still be reading by coal-oil or gas lamps; no working people could afford a bath room or electric refrigerator or automobile or radio; nor could we have aeroplanes. Today we hear much the same talk—pessimistic about the signs of the world and the evils of the machine age. Even the distinguished economist and the aggressive economist, Stewart Chase, advocates a moratorium being placed upon inventions. Last year or so the technocrats had us almost insane. They had our heads whirling with their conclusions

as to how many bricks could be produced if all the brick yards were working full time, and how many shoes more were manufactured than they claimed could ever possibly be used if everybody built a house and wore out shoes at the most extravagant rate that could be imagined. They said we had reached the saturation point in many of our industries, owing to the marvellous machinery which had speeded up production at such a terrific rate. And they did not see how many of our factories could ever run full time again or some of them ever run at all!

Now of course gentlemen so far as I am concerned there is a good deal of truth in these findings of technocracy, so much so that it behooves us, in relation to invention, to look into this whole business of production. Still, we think that much of what we call overproduction, (and this is our own opinion), is simply a lack of proper distribution. Much of the surplus goods in this city of Toronto could be used by the Metropolitan Church if we could get them to clothe the poor and feed the hungry in our own territory. It would seem that if we were to give the average unemployed man, who is worthy of our confidence, say \$500 then we should really see how much surplus goods we had in this city. What we need, in our judgment, is to increase the buying power until the one time surplus has been used. For what? To raise the standard of living and improve the conditions of the average individual. That is why, with all due respect to President Roosevelt and admiration for much that he has done, that we do not think that the so-called surplus goods in his country are being met with in the proper spirit, that is, in burning or plowing or destroying, however you like, the surplus goods of that country. First of all, it is against sound economics. It is against true reason to destroy that which we have created at any time. We have through science, gentlemen, solved one of the greatest problems of civilization, that is for the first time in our history as a world, we have more or less solved the problem of actual famine and shortage. We have created the age of plenty. Half our problem is solved. We have created an age of plenty. And now the other half is to encourage the brains that

created the age of plenty to find a way and a means whereby that plenty will be equitably distributed throughout the world. Scientists are often compared with explorers, going into the dark, unknown portions of the earth and bringing knowledge of these places and the use of them to mankind. But the scientist has this advantage over the explorer. There must inevitably come a time in the life of the explorer when like Alexander he sits down and weeps because there are no more worlds to discover. The scientist goes on delving deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the universe. I was reading the other day of a certain lens that has been discovered in the astronomical world, or a new mirror rather, that could be put on the telescope and which makes it possible for mankind to look into the heavens and discover stars that were never dreamed of. I think, were I not a preacher, I should like to be a doctor. Meanwhile my job is to cover up a lot of their mistakes. In the realm of medicine the life-span of man is being increased until now the infant born may expect to live sixty years, whereas a century ago the expectation was only thirty-five years. And we are told by reliable medical scientific authority that within a comparatively short time the biblical prophecy will be fulfilled and man shall enjoy his three-score years and ten. Infectious diseases and plagues are being conquered one by one. By experiments with glands I am told that medical men are able to alter the size and shape of the human being. There is hope for some of us. Here again is another invention, gentlemen, the difficulty, as it is in economics, is taking these discoveries and distributing them, so that they shall not become the property of particular individuals but the property of the whole of mankind. The point that I am seeking to emphasize here can be best described by a statement made by the head of the department of health in Jugo-Slavia, who not so very long ago said that most of the findings in medicine were of a miraculous nature, and now the problem of medicine was to take these discoveries and pass them out to humankind. The point I am getting at in all this, and perhaps a little slowly, is that the mind has created an age of plenty, if we will give that mind time, if we

have confidence in the humanitarian motive of that mind, then the second part of our problem will immediately be solved and distribution will be overcome, I am sure of that.

I was reading the other day that the standard of living enjoyed by the average working man today — and I am out for the working man; I am one myself. I am the son of a working man; I may be a wee bit prejudiced. I am out for the underdog who is generally the preacher, but anyway I may be a wee bit prejudiced and not the man who should say this. I was reading the other day that the standard of living enjoyed by the ordinary man within the last decade has been so improved that he has a wider range of comfort and culture than did the barons or the kings of the middle ages. And so while I believe that part of our problem will be solved by distribution, I am also a believer in the fact that we have got to check up on extravagance that characterizes the human race today. I believe that the fruits of knowledge should continue to be used to the human benefit and that the scientists and industrial leaders and everybody else should put their shoulders behind changes in the progress of distribution so that the material benefits of mankind may be reached by everyone.

For a minute let us look at the international situation today. Is there any encouragement here? Well, so far as I can see, one of the deepest causes for pessimism in our civilization is what you already know, namely, the suspicion and distrust that apparently exists between races and between nations, and if we are honest with ourselves, gentlemen, we will not blink the fact that the situation as it appears on the surface of things today looks as if we were shaping up for another war. But do not make a snap judgment, please. The situation certainly bears an unwholesome resemblance to the condition of 1914. Here is the French statesman who in 1913 secured the three-year law for military training and education in France. That man is now the foreign minister. And this Summer he made a round of the various European capitals to see how France would stand in another war. And our own wonderful British Empire! The Chief of Staff is said to

have visited the battlefields of Europe, past and present, with forty officers accompanying him. The Germans are being fed the same vicious nonsense, that they were raised on previous to the cataclysm of 1914, of being told of the superiority of their own race over other races, and for the name of the Kaiser we might substitute the name of Hitler in his storm-troop uniform. Italy throbs with far more martial fervor than in 1914 and Mussolini recently told his admirers that war is to man what maternity is to woman. To which a distinguished returned soldier said, "Would to God that we could make Mussolini experience both."

Now, gentlemen, in South America, Bolivia and Paraguay are still doggedly fighting for a few miles of swamp, though officially they are not at war, while the members of the League, mark you, serve them with the munitions. In the Far East the God of War is waiting for a frenzied Japanese Nationalist or a fanatical Russian Communist to ignite the material of war. The members of the League have renounced war in pact after pact; yet we are told on good authority that the munition firms are doing a more flourishing business than ever. Now you ask me where is there any sign of hope or encouragement here? Well, there is. Here are the signs. The first one is a selfish one. It is the law of survival of the fittest. It is the law of save your own hide. If economic causes lie behind all wars, and we are told they do, capitalists of the various countries and capitalistic governments would do well to remember that the last catastrophe of 1914 smashed four Empires and created a Communistic state in Russia. Another war would give arms to the working classes, that is, if anybody is going to live. I am told nobody is going to live after the next war. But that is nonsense. Another war would give arms to the working classes and would mean to the vanquished and perhaps to the victors another social revolution, and that is the danger of our civilization at this moment—another war and another revolution. In that very vivid book "The Native's Return" the oppressed working classes were actually looking forward for another war. For what reason? That they may have a

chance to arm themselves so that they might turn around and slay their oppressors. The same is the attitude among many people in Germany. May I ask you this question and have you answer it for me? Would it be safe for Hitler to give arms to the millions of ex-Socialists or Communists, or even ex-storm troops in Germany? I doubt it very much.

Yet a more hopeful sign of peace on the horizon, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, is that which some people I am afraid under-estimate today. It is the agitation being carried on against war in our colleges, in our places of education, in our places of business—yes and even amongst the women. Take the much discussed resolution of Oxford that place where for centuries the sons of Oxford have bled and died for their kind and country. The resolution was a very definite expression of pacifism. Now I am not afraid that in the hour of Britain's need, when danger threatens, that the student of Oxford will not rise to defend her. But, gentlemen, not only fanatics, not only silly people, but the average hard-headed business man today is facing up to this question, when a nation asks us to fight again we will want a little more information as to why we should fight. Now I do not know whether I am spoiling an otherwise fairly good speech or not, but I say very respectfully that if our eyes are open the women are having a tremendous power in our civilization today and we have got to take into account their feelings in this matter of war. Why? Because they breed the children to feed the guns. After all if you wish to read their attitude read James' "No Time Like the Present," or Vera Britton's "Testament of Youth." After all there never was a time when peace and the desire for peace was more in the foundation of civilization than it is today, and war in the first instance is a matter of the mind, and the mind is gradually but slowly coming to the place where it refuses to fight.

Incidentally, and I do not know whether they are very extreme either, there are men who are coming to the place in their thinking where they are saying you can never settle international questions by armaments. I believe the

time will come in our civilization when if we cannot settle this matter by armament that one nation, and it may be the British nation, will tell the whole world that we are through with this business of munitions and take the risk of the consequence. For after all there are men today who are multiplying themselves one hundred times over who are more willing to die for peace than to die for war.

Last of all, there is a sign of hope in our democracy of today. Many regard democracy as either dying or dead. It was in vain that the barons wrested the Magna Charta from bad old King John, that Parliament cut off the head of Charles I, that the Reform Bills and the Declaration of Rights set forth the privileges of British subjects. It was even in vain that Mrs. Pankhurst fought for the votes for women, for what use are votes if democracy is dead? We used to think of government by those who represented the majority of the nation as the best kind of government. We were proud of it as an English institution and looked forward to a day when the other nations of the world would adopt it. Where is democracy now? It has almost vanished, we are told, from the face of the earth. Dictatorships founded on oppression of freedom have taken its place. Russia, which many regard as the most advanced social system, sneers at the idea of democracy. She has ruled by dictatorship of the severest kind. Italy, Germany, even Turkey, apparently welcomes rule by dictatorship, while the United States, where one president defined their democracy as something that would last forever, within this great republic the people have submitted to benevolent dictatorship as a way out. Even in Great Britain at this moment democracy is attacked on every side by Communists who would establish a democracy of the cruellest kind, and by the Fascists under Mosley, who would set up a dictatorship modelled on Italy.

In spite of these, gentlemen, there is hope on the horizon and the hope is in Great Britain. Let Canada more and more reveal her sense by following the mature government of her Motherland. Britain and her Dominions remain the surviving stronghold of democracy. They may surrender the traditional party system of government but

never the parliamentary. The National government of Great Britain, in spite of criticisms that have been levelled at it by its opponents and by the press, represents in our opinion the most reliable democracy in the world. We have, of course, relinquished the narrow bonds of party dogma. They have thus been able to present a united front and strength to the world, whose object is not "party first" but the country, and, if you will allow me to say it as your honored guest, I still think in spite of notions to the contrary that the safest man to hold the reins of parliament in a democracy today is the premier of Great Britain.

Now the thing we shall have to get away from in democracy if it is to fulfil the purpose for which it came into existence is to avoid a government by a mere counting of heads. That is not democracy. This is the age of the expert. This is the age of expert leadership and a true democracy irrespective of party lines, and especially when it is facing national calamity, sees leadership whatever it is labelled and pushes it into places of prominence and powers of control so that leadership may take the place of party, even in democracy.

Then the average man is becoming more concerned about his country than ever. I am told we should hang the men who are trying to make fortunes out of our depression. Well, I do not think there are many men trying to make fortunes out of our depression. I find, and candidly I am afraid of no man when I say it, that sometimes in our moments of crisis we shoulder our responsibility on some popular name and send him to the devil. The average man is taking more concern in his country than ever before. Jan Smuts, who thirty years ago was our enemy, was recently made the rector of St. Andrews' University, Scotland, and in his address, among other things he had to say was this: the man who takes no interest in politics, who puts his work, his money, his family, or amusement before his country, is a traitor to his democracy.

I refuse, in the midst of the sorrow of the world, of the depression that is upon us, to attend a funeral of a

death that has not yet happened. The world is not or has not crashed yet. And old Britain will carry on in the same old way and she will solve the problems if we give her time. Last of all there is more of the spirit of humanitarianism in the world today than ever there was. There is more of the spirit of the Man of Galilee at the heart of the universe than ever there was. There was a time when we theologians told men to be good or they would be damned. Now men are being good for goodness' sake alone. You remember the story of the Witch of Alexandria and how she walked up and down the streets of her city with a torch in one hand and a pitcher of water in another, crying aloud "Oh that I might burn heaven with this torch and quench hell with this water, that men might serve God for God's Sake alone." Say not, gentlemen, "the struggle naught availeth." The struggle is presenting to the world dividends already. And remember our depression is only a passing one. I warn you against experimentation unduly by brains that are not capable of coping with our situation. On the other hand I urge you to put your trust into the hands of your leaders in whom you have confidence, and through progress and elimination you will have a reformation in society by evolution; and that day is never a day in itself; it is a part of a process, it is a part of a development. And in the truest spirit of citizenship, let us honor our nation, appreciate her problems, and lend a measure of sympathy to men who are handling problems that are of the making of everyone. I thank you.

PRESIDENT JAMES:—Dr. Dickson, may I on behalf of this audience express our most sincere appreciation for your extremely thoughtful and interesting address? May I also couple with them our best wishes for God speed in your work?