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WHAT SCIENCE REQUIRES OF THE NEW WORLD¹

By Professor ARTHUR H. COMPTON

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Fellow Americans:

PERMIT me to say a word first to the members and affiliates of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, whose number approaches a million.

Once more, because of the rigors of war, we have found it impossible to hold the annual meeting that has been our tradition for almost a century. My own colleagues, as typical members of our association, are this afternoon in their laboratories, engaged as devotedly as any member of the armed forces in the effort to preserve our country’s freedom. Yet the world comes to us as representatives of science with searching questions. We must pause to give a considered answer. “This is a war of science and technology,” they tell us. “Do the forces of freedom have the knowledge, skill and technical resources needed to bring victory?” “After the war is over how will science have changed our world?” The nation asks us, “What of the night, and what of the day that is to dawn?”

Unconditional answers to these questions can not be given. Yet it is possible to say something about the present balance of scientific power and to point the direction in which science makes it necessary for the world to move.

I have accordingly chosen as my subject for to-day, “What Science Requires of the New World.” For science is not only a servant; it also gives orders. There is a legend that Daedalus, the Greek hero who first learned how to work with steel, toiled long and hard with his forge and anvil to fashion a sword. This he presented to King Minas to replace his old one made of bronze. The citizens of Crete came to him in consternation. “This sword will not bring us happiness,” they complained, “it will bring us strife.”