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SCIENCE AND ITS SERVICE TO MAN¹

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THE most striking feature of the world's history during the past hundred years is the extraordinary accession to man's knowledge of nature, the deepening of his insight into his own physical, intellectual and psychical characters and their correlations, and the recognition of the significance of environmental changes on his future earth-life. The twenty-three years of the present century show no sign of an abatement either in the rate of the extension of knowledge or in the significance of successive discoveries. The number of persons engaged on pure research, or on research into the possibilities of the application of scientific knowledge to human needs, was never greater than now. In many countries large sums have been devoted to reinforcing the means of carrying on these efforts, both as regards equipment and personnel. In not a few, men of wealth have vied with each other in creating and endowing great research laboratories, observatories and teaching institutions, and the financial means having been provided, personal devotion and qualification were not lacking.

One may well consider what this implies. The increase of human power through knowledge, the recognition of new resources in nature and of the means of utilizing them, and the enlarged ability to quicken and extend the boundaries of human relationships are such as disclose in some measure the peculiar significance of the past hundred years for future human life. The world has become indeed smaller, and touch between nation and nation speedier and greater. More clearly can it be seen that man has at his disposal very great, though practically unexplored resources; and he needs vision to see wherein opportunity lies. But increase of power carries also dangers which only fatuity can ignore. The Great War has revealed this unequivocally, and has signally shown that man's ability to wreck immensely transcends his power to ameliorate. So long as greed of wealth, national prejudices and readiness to misunderstand hold sway, so long will there be danger of this wreckage, and even upon a scale which more and more will greatly exceed the power of repair. The work of centuries may be destroyed in hours, of years in minutes. And it has, unfortunately, become more than ever a necessity to be prepared to destroy that one be not destroyed. To

¹From the presidential address to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science at the New Zealand meeting.

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