

## 5. FUTUROLOGY - THE NEW SCIENCE OF PROBABILITY?

### I

The phenomenal success that Toynbee's two books *A Study of History* and *Civilization on Trial* have been enjoying for many months throws a revealing light on the status and prospects of our civilization. Though the first three volumes of his *Study* were published as early as 1933, few but the most philosophically minded historians and sociologists paid much attention to his magnum opus until last year. Then, however, after the publication in this country of the abridged version of his great work, people suddenly began to look and to listen. Today Toynbee is well on the way to become to the New World what Spengler was to the Old after the first World War: a prophet of doom and hope.

Nobody will dare assume that the hundreds of thousands of readers of these "enduring best-sellers" have all of a sudden turned into "students of history" for history's sake. We suspect them to have as little interest in, let us say, the "palinogenesias" and "transfigurations" of Toynbee's twenty-one civilizations as the European reader of a generation ago could marshal for the "morphology" of Spengler's eight "High Cultures". And this not without reason. For inspite of some unique intuitions, Spengler's significance consists not so much in his oftentimes arbitrary constructions of the past as in his frequently ingenious insights into the future. Toynbee, too, though he is a somewhat more cautious interpreter of past history than Spengler, primarily appeals to the average reader for what he intimates about the future of Western civilization. Thus, inspite of their difference, the "Prussian Socialist" and the Anglo-Saxon Episcopalian are to be counted among the founding fathers of a new kind of human knowledge devoted to the crucial problem of the future.

### II

Man's concern with the destiny of his tribe, city, or nation is perhaps as old as his preoccupation with the future of his soul and body. Many primitive peoples were fully absorbed in the problem of death and after-life. Of the ancient Egyptians we know that they attempted to preserve the bodies of their rulers for eternity. The hope of the early Christians for the Millenium is no less known. However, as part of the secularization of Western thought the theological conception of human history as a brief chapter in the eternal book of God's creation, beginning with the Fall of Man and ending either with the Millenium or the Last Judgment, has long since been replaced by the this-wordly theory of progress. Divine perfection and human salvation were transplanted