

6. FORECASTING THE FUTURE

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On October 27, 1951 *Colliers* devoted an entire issue to a detailed preview of "the war we do not want", a war which was expected to break out exactly at 1:58 p.m. G.M.T., Saturday, May 10, 1952. If some readers were frightened by this prediction, they could find consolation in the reassuring words of two presidents. Already in the summer of 1951 President Conant of Harvard University had insisted that there would be no conflict since both camps would eventually realize that neither side could win such a war. Mr. Truman in a talk before high school students competing for Westinghouse Science Talent Search prizes on February 29, 1952, predicted that "we are going to have a peaceful world over the next century".

Statements of this kind, though contradictory, reflect our growing preoccupation with the future. Since tomorrow worries us, we have good reason to probe into it as deeply as possible. Immediately, we come to ask ourselves to what extent and in what ways the future can be foreseen. This leads us to examine the various forecasts already made. In what spheres of life have predictions been attempted? How correct did they prove to be? Supposing we can make forecasts, would the knowledge thus gained be likely to help us to act more intelligently, or would it lame our initiative and induce us to turn into fatalists?

In a more or less static society, change if acknowledged at all, is minimized because it is thought to be temporary and superficial. "There is no new thing under the sun" is the watchword applying not only to man and beast, but to culture and society as well. To people living at a time that "is out of joint", however, the future appears to be basically different from the past. It is in such historical moments that the present is felt to have little reality of its own, representing a turning-point between a dark yesterday and a bright tomorrow. At so crucial a juncture, the present overshadows the past and the future illuminates both the present and the past.

Today we are living in an unbelievably revolutionary age. Whatever may be in store for us, the status quo will not endure. Such is our fate - our dilemma and our privilege. Quite naturally then we display contradictory reactions and inconsistent attitudes towards the world of tomorrow. Toynbee's success could be interpreted as evidence of a readiness on our part to come to grips with the future. On the other hand, one can discern a strong desire to turn away from a serious occupation with the problems of tomorrow or even of today by seeking refuge either in the remote past or in pleasurable forgetfulness.