

SAVANTS IN CLASH ON ATOMIC PERILS

Conference Here Is Accused of Concentrating Too Much on Physical Sciences

By MORRIS L. KAPLAN

Stung by the challenge of a magazine editor who told them a "thousand years" had passed since the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, scientists, philosophers and theologians attending the second days' sessions of the sixth annual Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion hastened yesterday to climb aboard the bandwagon of the Atomic Age.

Accepting the thesis that immediate action on control of atomic energies was vital, if humanity was to survive, poets, artists and natural and social scientists vied with each other to offer possible solution to man's "insoluble" difficulties. In the heated discussion that ensued, they ignored the formal papers they had prepared and indulged in old-fashioned, pre-atomic dialectics.

A few die-hards objected to the procedure and implied that perhaps a separate conference on the atomic bomb was in order. Most, however, acknowledged the urgency of the problem as presented by Norman Cousins, editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, whose paper on "The Obsolescence of Modern Man" touched off the fireworks.

Stress on Science Opposed

A full-fledged row threatened at one point to upset the seeming accord that had existed between natural and social scientists, when John Collier, former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, protested that social sciences and the humanities were not receiving due attention and that natural, or physical scientists, were hogging the show. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard Observatory, denied this in a discussion of the five bills before Congress, sponsored by Dr. Vannevar Bush, chief of the Office of Scientific Research.

If the opening session was marked by a complacency that considered human destruction as an age-old problem not to be attacked with fire and enthusiasm, yesterday's conference appeared tinged at times with a note of hysteria, or what modern scientists are wont to refer to as "crisis thinking."

More than 100 educators met in afternoon and night sessions at the Men's Faculty Club of Columbia University, 400 West 117th Street, to discuss cultural bridges in letters, art, music, natural and social sciences in their relation to the democratic way of life. But Lyman Bryson, director of education and post-war studies of the Columbia Broadcasting System, and chairman of the afternoon meeting, sounded the keynote with a confession that our culture may not bring to bear the influences of art and literature and "free thinking with sufficient impressiveness to prevent destruction of civilization."

"Ivory Tower" Decried

Referring to a paper offered by Milton C. Nahm of the Department of Philosophy of Bryn Mawr College, dealing with communication as a cultural bridge to understanding, Dr. Bryson questioned whether "compartmentalization" was valid, in view of recent happenings. Unless we can discuss what contributions art and letters can make to survival, "we are still in the ivory tower," he said.

Pointing out that we may be in even greater peril today than just after Pearl Harbor, he asked whether "we are wasting our time talking about philosophy."

Mr. Cousins responded that we must be concerned with basic phi-

losophy "to the end of human survival" and that he was not urging the conference to disband.

He urged his colleagues, instead, to do their utmost to inform the public that a new era has been brought about by the atomic discovery and that "man's survival on earth is now absolutely dependent on his ability to avoid a new war."

"With the Atomic Age," he said, "man now has it within his grasp to emancipate himself economically. If he wills it he will be in a position to refine his competitive impulses. He can take the step from competitive man to cooperative man. The same atomic and electrical energy that can destroy a city can also usher in an age of economic sufficiency."

The other alternatives, he declared, were the destruction of modern civilization and all progress, permitting man to revert to his condition in society in 10,000 B. C., or the invention of a "solvent" with which we might "equate" the atomic bomb.

Says New System Is Essential

Plans for international cooperation made at San Francisco are no longer valid, Mr. Cousins asserted. "We are building soapbubbles," he said, "if we expect this problem to be automatically solved by having America, Britain and Canada keep the atom bomb a secret to themselves. We must not forget that we were not the only horse in the atomic derby; we just happened to finish first. The others will be along in due time."

He suggested that the current newspaper date-line, 1945, was inaccurate and should read 2945, "because a thousand years have passed since the dropping of the atom bomb." Such is the urgency of the problem, he observed, that it is no longer possible to plan leisurely for world cooperation. Man has leaped centuries ahead without being ready to face the consequences, he insisted.

Calling for the establishment of a world government, he maintained that the political question was one of adjustment from "national man to world man." Humanity, he continued, must recognize the flat truth that the greatest obsolescence of all in the Atomic Age is national sovereignty.

Danger of New Wars Seen

Far from banishing war, the atomic bomb in itself will constitute a cause for war, he predicted. In the absence of world control as part of world government it will create universal fear and suspicion, he added, and "what a temptation for the blitzkriegers!"

Industry, he warned, will demand the right to carry on its own experiments with atomic energy. Why should not science and knowledge, he asked, be extended to other needs, principally humanity's health. "What a fantastic irony that organized science knows the secret of the atom but as yet knows not a fig about the common cold," he commented.

Supporting Mr. Cousins' concepts, Dr. Robert MacIver, chairman of the Department of Sociology at Columbia University, pointed out that world government does not depend on cooperation between capitalistic states alone but is a question of relationship between all countries.

A representative from the Department of State declared that "warproof relationships must be established among all the peoples of the world. Axis schools in Latin America, he pointed out, are still heavily financed and better equipped than any that come under American influence. In numbers, he added, the ratio is four to one against democratic institutions there. The pioneering instinct, latent in this hemisphere, he said, can be used as a cultural bridge.

Discussing the role of the artist in modern society, Dr. Douglas Bush, Professor of English at Harvard University, deplored the fact that the majority, after leaving college, are content with magazines and current best sellers and no longer read "great literature." He ascribed to the authors some

of the blame for the failure of modern literature to meet high standards.

"A large proportion of modern literature, especially poetry, is itself written by and for sophisticated highbrows," Dr. Bush said. "If the scientists nowadays have everything their own way and have suspended the poets as guides and oracles, it is hardly to be wondered at. Even the poets bow down to them."

William G. Constable, curator of the Department of Paintings of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, criticized the artist for remaining aloof and declared his work should have roots in the activities of the day.

Ad Copy as "Venal Poetry"

S. S. I. Hayakawa, Associate Professor of English at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, complained that most talented writers of today, who might have been good poets, are writing advertising copy. Describing the persuasive, skilfully written advertising copy as "venal poetry," he said that it occupies 130 out of 200 pages of each issue in "most class circulation magazines."

Advertisers invoke "all the symbols of the home, of mother, of the American way of life, of morality and of the Christian religion in order to sell a box of soap flakes," he remarked. As a result it is impossible for writers "to say anything with enthusiasm or joy or conviction." If they do, they run into the danger of "sounding as if they were trying to sell something," he said.

Stimulated by discussion of atomic energy, most of the artists present, including Walter Pach, author of books on painting, sought to interpret their specialized fields in terms of what each one should contribute broadly to humanity if civilization is to survive.

Those who disagreed at first with Mr. Cousins' thesis either acknowledged that they approved or remained silent. Discussions on similar themes will continue today.