

Address by Henry R. Luce
Kit-Kat Club, Columbus, Ohio
May 15, 1962

"WE ARE SUCH STUFF . . ."

One is invited to make a speech to a distinguished audience -- or, rarely, as in this case, to an audience of charm and elegance. One is flattered, honored. One accepts. And then time marches on and suddenly one discovers that in order to make a speech, it is necessary to have something of some sort to say. Panic sets in and one regrets the whole thing.

But tonight it's different. At least I thought it would be. For John Vorys gave me to understand that at the Kit-Kat Club it doesn't matter in the slightest what the speaker says. Nor even how he says it. Thus, I gather that one of your fondest memories is of George Harvey getting drunk on the Kit-Kat platform.

Don't think for a minute that John painted a disrespectful, much less a disreputable picture of this Club. Quite the contrary. My indoctrination is that the Kit-Kat Club is a very exclusive society of superior souls -- so superior that they can afford to meet every now and again for no weighty purpose at all and that they can allow even the speaker to share in this happy hour of irresponsibility.

Irresponsibility! That was the lure that fetched me here. The chance to be irresponsible -- that at least was the lure which, as an editor deep in the murky waters of the world's events, I read into the glittering trout fly which, months ago, John dangled on the bright surface of the future.

I am -- as you know, if you have been paying attention -- an editor, a journalist. We editors stand for the Free Press. That was enough in Jefferson's day -- and even in Hearst's. But, in my time, all journalists feel compelled to announce themselves as the Free and Responsible Press. We would no more go around without our cloak of Responsibility than a lady would be caught without her mink. It is not my purpose tonight to attempt a strip-tease act -- being, in a number of ways, disqualified. I am not even going to bore you with the secrets of my trade.

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May 12, 1962

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It is not my purpose tonight to attempt a strip-tease act -- being, in a number of
ways, disqualified. I am not even going to pose you with the secrets of my trade,

There aren't any. But I do propose to indulge in irresponsibility.

The general corpus of my remarks must necessarily be the State of the World. A journalist, as I'm sure you have been told, is one who knows a little about everything and practically nothing about anything. That reduces us to experts on the World Situation. So I can't give you, as you had recently, a learned lecture on avant garde theatre. Nor even on atomic physics or on chemistry.

Did you hear the story about the soda jerk who yearned to achieve the status of a prescription clerk? At last he got his promotion and there he was, that first morning, resplendent in white apron. The telephone rang; he picked up the receiver, and, full of confidence, said "Hello!" It was a lady customer who said: "Have you any disulphasodiumdioxide this morning?" The clerk coughed and stuttered until the lady, impatient, said: "Do you know what I mean -- disulpha-sodiumdioxide?"

"Lady," said the clerk, "when I told you Hello, I told you all I know."

Well, all I know is the State of the World -- and not only from Huntley and Brinkley and from my daily anabasis and katabasis through the long parasangs of the New York Times, but also from my own vast, brilliant, fearless -- and, I hope, well-advertised, corps of correspondents -- and from our Columbus stringer, a patient fellow waiting for the moment when such catastrophic devastation hits Columbus that you will be a national story.

Naturally you know all the proper things to say about the State of the World. Or, as Franklin Roosevelt would have said: "You and I know. . ."

You and I know that the proper, responsible thing to say is that the world is in a terrible jam and going to hell in a handbasket. And not, mind you, simply because of the Hydrogen Bomb. No, there are deeper reasons -- moral decadence, creeping socialism and the population explosion of bugs and other night life. These are the challenges we must meet. These are the things that must be said, boldly and clearly.

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Tonight I want to say something else -- almost the exact opposite. I want to say -- and, by Kit-Kat!, I am going to say it -- that the world situation overall, is good and is likely to continue to be good for a good long while. This is what I say, having left that heavy cloak of Responsibility back on the other side of the Alleghenies. Does that mean you should not take me seriously, that I do not intend to be sincere? There's a natural confusion here which I must quickly clear up. From now on, I shall be meaning, very sincerely, what I say. It is simply that I shall be indulging myself in the freedom of your hospitality to say, in a free manner, what I think. In vino veritas. So also it can be that in a friendly atmosphere of irresponsibility one's truth comes to the surface. And, if what I say here tonight seems to make a certain amount of sense -- after I have said it -- then I may have the courage to say it in public.

The last sentence of the lead story in TIME of May 4 read as follows:

"As summer beckoned, the relaxation of tensions for once did not seem to be merely the calm before another storm. It almost seemed like calm."

I did not dictate that sentence. I was in Arizona when I read it on a Monday morning. By coincidence, the evening before, I had been saying the same thing to a friend -- only more. For with great hesitation, I had been saying that perhaps the "world" (as world) was in for a relatively long period (like 10 years) of relative calm. To make this kind of prediction is, of course, dangerous. For in the nature of human affairs (not just in the nature of the present situation) almost anything can happen any time. So that, for example, a stock market crash, not to mention anything worse, could happen while an optimistic prediction was still lying on the newsstands. Generally speaking it is safer to be pessimistic than optimistic -- because the pessimist can usually find something to point to -- if not nuclear war, then a "small war," a Cuba, a market crash, or at the very least an earthquake.

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But there's another real difficulty about taking the optimistic

view -- habit. For 30 years, good journalists have seen trouble ahead and while I know of some bad things that loomed but didn't happen -- most of the bad things did happen. And some regrettable things happened that were not predicted. Harry Truman in 1948.

For over 30 years, for nearly all the life of TIME and for longer than LIFE's lifetime, the world has been in a state of crisis. The Great Depression of the early 30's. The rise of Hitler. The Japanese attack on China in the early and mid-30's. World War II and its aftermath. The Atom Bomb. The danger and horror of Soviet Communism. The takeover of China. And the general revolutionary sweep of things culminating in Africa. Thus for 30 years the true picture of human affairs has been one of great crises together with innumerable "little crises," any one of which, it was thought, could trigger larger crises.

But this has not always been the condition of human affairs. To be sure there never was a time, never a year, when "news" did not happen -- and most headline news is news of conflict, usually involving violence and dangerous consequences. The Agadir incident of 1911 -- anyone here remember that? The wordage on that "incident" must have been enough to pay for the transatlantic cable. And in 1912, the Titanic! Plenty happened in the "Century of Peace" from 1815 to 1914. The American Civil War. Other wars. Revolutions -- three or four in France. Colonial conquests. And yet along about 1878, to take the date of the Congress of Berlin, it was felt, and more or less rightly felt, that the "world situation" was under control -- mostly under control of the European Concert of Powers. This international political stability plus amazing advances in science and technology, led to the generally optimistic view of human affairs which, in the 20th Century, has been so roundly condemned, theologically and otherwise. In the 19th Century, Nietzsche's "God is dead" proclaimed not a lost humanity but a triumphant Superman. And the effort in 1907 to establish Permanent Peace at The Hague, however naive it sounds to us now, was expressive of much of the temper of the times. Permanent Peace seemed both reasonable and possible.

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One of the things that was overlooked by many in the era of Victorian optimism was the seriousness of the "social problem" -- the rise of Socialism, the Labor Movement, Anarchism, and ultimately Communism. At the turn of the century it was not thought that the "social problem" would upset the world apple cart. And in fact, by itself it didn't. It had little to do with the outburst of World War I -- though a major consequence of World War I was the coming to power of Communism and Socialism.

One could go on endlessly recollecting or dreaming how things looked at various periods of "history." How did things look in the 8th Century in Europe -- or in 8th Century China? Toynbee tells a cosmic tale of more or less continuous "challenge and response." But one point Toynbee fails to make is that, over the centuries, men have had very different attitudes to "history." Most men, even most civilizations, have not been "history-minded" -- that is, not "challenge-minded." I read recently, to my surprise, that the classic Greeks were not "history-minded." In any case, history itself is a fairly new "science" -- and Western Man in the last 200 years has been much more history-minded than men in other times.

To return for a minute to the even newer phenomenon of "news" and news-communication, we might say that the reality of current happenings has been more existentially real than in past ages -- with every few exceptions, notably the case of the Old Testament Israelites. This existential reality of current happenings has been due to 1) the size and scale of events, 2) the communicability of them -- and also to an insistence by such people as ourselves that people owe it to themselves and to society to "keep informed" on current events. A revolution in Patagonia may affect your pocketbook! In any case, your status will be affected if you venture forth to a cocktail party without adequate briefing on Patagonia!

Of course it is important and most desirable that as many people as possible should be as fully informed as possible. I, at least, could take no other position! But desirable or not, a state of relative well-informedness is the state of mankind today -- or anyway, of Americans

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This is already too much preamble to my main point: what is the proper evaluation of the present world situation? And the accent must be on the word, "world" -- with the U.S. interest being primarily in the world situation rather than in any particular part of the world in itself. Thus we are not deeply interested in Viet Nam for its own sake, but for the world's sake. There was a time when we were (considerably) interested in the Philippines for its own sake -- a special human obligation we had taken upon ourselves. And today, for obvious reasons, we can feel especially irritated about Cuba. But, generally speaking, our interest in any particular foreign country is not so much for its own sake as for the world's sake.

So, we come to our estimate of the global situation. And I would say that the global situation is good.

Some of the big and obvious good factors are as follows -- good from our point of view and I would say good for the world:

- 1) The strength of the U.S. militarily and otherwise.
- 2) The "success" of Europe.
- 3) The very great weakness of China.
- 4) The economic difficulties of Russia -- and, to whatever extent it exists, the "liberal" thaw.
- 5) The fact that the obvious trouble areas, considerable though they may be -- such as Africa or South America -- do not seriously threaten world dislocation. (I omit Berlin, because in this Point 5, I have in mind those large areas where the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. do not confront each other toe-to-toe.)

To these broad geographical categories, I would add some qualitative categories, viz.:

- 1) The idea and practice of constitutional government (generally "democratic") seems to be more widely and firmly established than in any previous epoch.
- 2) As a concomitant of constitutional government, the idea and practice

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To these broad geographical categories, I would add some qualitative

categories, viz.:

- 1) The idea and practice of constitutional government (generally "democratic") seems to be more widely and firmly established than in any previous epoch.
- 2) As a concomitant of constitutional government, the idea and practice

of "market" economy seems to be ditto. If someone wants to argue that at the height of the 19th Century, market economy dominated the world more than now, I might agree. But it was relatively only a very few people who actually lived in that economy. I would say that most continental Europeans did not live in a market economy -- to say nothing of Asians, Africans and South Americans. In any case, and most pertinent to the present, I would say that in the last few years our sort of market-conscious mixed-economy has gained notably in "prestige" over Socialist or Communist economics.

3) Thirdly, a word ought to be attempted on the subject of the moral (or spiritual) condition of mankind. If it is hazardous to attempt global evaluations of politics and economics, it is a kind of folly to attempt a moral or spiritual balance sheet. Nevertheless, it is a folly which must be attempted -- otherwise you have Hamlet without Hamlet. And I would say that while the doctrine of Original Sin has not been repealed and is not likely to be, the moral condition of mankind is relatively good. Several years ago, Toynbee wrote a piece about Japan, in which he noted how little attraction Christianity had for the Japanese. But, said Toynbee, what he observed in that dynamic country was an increasingly widespread acceptance of the Christian ethic. I would say that the moral condition of mankind is good because there is an intelligible worldwide dialogue on "right and wrong." Among the many items that could be cited, I will pick two -- one rather specific, one quite general. The specific one is the serious dialogue about social and economic reform which has been initiated by the Alliance for Progress. The general one is the feeling among scientists and other "non-religious" people that ethical standards are essential and that "religion" is on the whole a "good thing" because it contributes to the maintenance of ethical standards. All of this might be subsumed under the head of "democratic idealism" -- with its various slogans such as "dignity of man." From a seriously religious point of view, this ethical culturism may be deplored as standing in the way of truth -- but, for the moment, that may be called another matter. Syncretism may be bad for true religion, but is good, short-term

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at least, for the development of a worldwide "moral community."

I conclude this sketchy global evaluation by, inevitably, coming back to the danger of nuclear war and of the burdens of the Cold War. A year or two ago, I said that the greatest moment of danger of nuclear war might come when Russia felt that it was badly losing the Cold War. That danger is still ahead of us -- but we would rather have that possible danger than the actual danger of actually losing the Cold War. As to the Cold War, I would say we are winning and not only because this or that success has been achieved (notably the European "success") but, even more importantly, because we are engaged. Two notable examples of engagement: we are engaged militarily in Viet Nam; we are engaged dialectically and materially in South America.

Now to recapitulate: The world is a huge and complex place -- it remains huge, even in the perspective of the space age. Never before have statesmen or news-minded citizens had the habit and obligation to keep the whole world in mind. Considering how vast and multi-millioned the world of man is, it seems to me that the world situation is good -- and being good has the prospect of continuing good for quite a few years. The advanced nations of the "free world" are doing well, politically and economically -- and even morally as evidenced not only in the dialogue referred to above, but also in such mighty deeds as rising standards of education, etc. The less advanced nations are struggling along -- and however outrageous their behavior may often be, they struggle, within a global dialogue, to become good societies in the sense at least of "democratic idealism" which might be translated ethical materialism.

Here, then, is my case for an optimistic appraisal of the present and foreseeable future -- an appraisal drawn largely from the data of journalism, from the march of events. But actually, of course, any view of man's fate must depend on an appraisal of the nature of man himself. "What is man" cries the Psalmist, "that thou art mindful of him?" And exuberantly he replies, "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and

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honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet."

Well, the Psalmist's view of man has by no means been typical of man's estimate of man over the ages. And certainly not in our time. Think of any serious novel or play -- to say nothing of the pornographic trash -- and what do you get? The philosopher-dramatist of France, Sartre, sums up man's life in single words -- ridiculous, absurd, nauseating. In Tennessee Williams, not only does no man or woman ever find redemption, but even the outside possibility of redemption barely seems to exist for anyone.

I referred a while back to the general optimism about human progress that, in the 19th Century, did in fact shape much of the thought and action of that fruitful century. But it is not to be supposed that even then a gloomy view of human affairs was lacking. The lady in the Victorian novel, horrified by some lapse in manners, was continually asking "What's the world coming to?" Christian hymns sighed about this vale of tears and notified the Lord that "change and decay in all around I see." Or take Mark Twain -- you might have expected that the creator of Huck Finn and the Yankee at King Arthur's Court would at least have been a cheerful cynic. But no -- he was a misanthrope and would characteristically say, "There are times when one would like to hang the whole human race, and finish the farce."

In our time, churchmen have made prolific use of the A-Bomb or H-Bomb to prove the perversity and moral turpitude of mankind. The Bomb has been a Godsend to preachers and frankly I feel they've overdone it. And so have the scientists. But it only goes to prove the persistent determination of man to think the worst of himself and his future. Ample evidence seems always available.

But centuries before the Bomb, the most bilious view of man had been expressed in the most brutal terms. Hobbes, the political philosopher who stands at the beginning of modern times, justified the Absolute State on the basis of human

honor. You must aim to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put
all things under his feet."

Well, the realist's view of man has by no means been typical of man's
estimate of man over the ages. And certainly not in our time. Think of any serious
novel or play -- to any nothing of the pornographic trash -- and what do you get?
The philosopher-dramatist of France, Sartre, sums up man's life in single words --
ridiculous, absurd, meaningless. In Tennessee Williams, not only does no man or
woman ever find redemption, but even the outside possibility of redemption partly
seems to exist for anyone.

I referred a while back to the general optimism about human progress
that, in the 19th Century, did in fact shape much of the thought and action of that
century. But it is not to be supposed that even then a gloomy view of human
affairs was lacking. The lady in the Victorian novel, horrified by some lapse in
manners, was continually asking "What's the world coming to?" Christian hymns
stayed about this vale of tears and notified the lord that "change and decay in
all around I see." Or take Mark Twain -- you might have expected that the creator
of Huck Finn and the Yankee at King Arthur's Court would at least have been a
cheerful cynic. But no -- he was a misanthrope and would characteristically say,
"There are times when one would like to hang the whole human race, and finish the
job."

In our time, churchmen have made prolific use of the A-Bomb or H-Bomb
to prove the perversity and moral stupidity of mankind. The Bomb has been a Godsend
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But centuries before the Bomb, the most gloomy view of man had been
expressed in the most brutal terms. Hobbes, the political philosopher who stands at
the beginning of modern times, justified the Absolute State on the basis of human

depravity and his description of human life seemed self-evident. He said that man's life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

The anthology of man's disgusted view of man is a fat one. Let's have just a little more fun with it.

Here is a saint, Saint Bernard, telling us that "man is nothing else than a sack of dung, the food of worms." And like unto the saint is Leonardo da Vinci, the artistic and scientific genius of the optimistic high Renaissance. "Man and the animals," says he "are merely a passage and channel for food, a tomb for other animals, . . . a coffer full of corruption."

Job is more poetical: "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."

And finally, Homer in the heroic age when you might have thought it was a joy to be alive -- Homer says: "Of all the creatures that creep and breathe on earth there is none more wretched than man."

Well, it's time to sweep all this biliousness aside -- no matter how prestigious the owners of the upset stomachs were. As for da Vinci, Hobbes and a thousand others -- either I have unpardonably quoted them out of context, which I haven't entirely, or else even they, at times, should have had their mouths washed out with soap and been sent to bed without any supper. And the genius who can most quickly get all the bad taste out of our mouths is, of course, the supreme and immortal bard, Shakespeare.

It is not only that his Rosalind is so gay and his Juliet so tender and his Falstaff so irresistible, and his kings and warriors so brave and his statesmen so patriotic -- it is rather that all the pageantry of Shakespeare's humanity is so real that with eager pride all of us gladly claim to belong to Shakespeare's human race. And yet we must be cautious with old Will: he's a sly one. "What a piece of work is man!" Now watch it -- is Shakespeare kidding?

"What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in

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"What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason, how infinite in

faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel!
in apprehension how like a god!"

Yes, of course, Shakespeare is laying it on a bit thick there. Yet whether through deepest tragedy or highest comedy, Shakespeare sends us on our way with a throb of Elizabethan glory in our veins and a joy in our humanity. And -- one haunting doubt. Not any miserable doubt about the worth and savor of life -- but only a doubt as to whether it is of ultimate importance under the aspect of Infinity.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on" and

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."

Under the aspect of eternity. Sub specie aeternitas. "What is man that thou art mindful of him?"

How will you answer that question? Santayana, for all that he lived his life in the uplands of Reason and of Beauty, never quite found the answer. Wistfully he admires Columbus --

"Columbus found a world, and had no chart,
Save one that faith deciphered in the skies;
To trust the soul's invincible surmise
Was all his science and his only art."

Shall we, too, trust the soul's invincible surmise?

How will you answer that question? I, for my part, will make affirmation with the Psalmist -- that we are here and that we venture forth from day to day by the decree and by the intention and toward the faithful promise of the Eternal. And what I have said to you in reasonable hope about the present moment of history rests, ultimately, on that affirmation.

But for the resolution of your own doubts, whatever they may be, I give you a word spoken by a great artist to us in our time -- a word spoken by Thornton

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"Columbus found a world, and had no chart
Save one that faith had plotted in the skies,
To trust the soul's labyrinthic mazes
Was all his science and his only art."

Shall we too, create the soul's intricate mazes?

How will you answer that question? I, for my part, will make affirmation
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Wilder, whom John Vorys and I are proud to claim as a friend of our youth.

"The Skin of our Teeth" was produced in the bloodiest year of World War II. It was a strange allegory which had critics quite confused. Adam and Eve are mixed up with Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus of Excelsior, New Jersey. The ice age was coming -- had already shattered Boston, but on the other hand the wheel was just being invented, an invention announced by a Western Union boy. The New Jersey house harbored all sorts of odd characters including a dinosaur and a mammoth. All quite mixed up. Yet ordinary people loved the play and if you read it or see it today, it is all quite clear.

When the worst has providentially failed to happen and when, in New Jersey, all has returned to a sort of family normalcy, Mr. Antrobus and Mrs. Antrobus are sitting by the fire -- the fire that almost went out completely when times were bad -- and Mr. Antrobus makes to Mrs. Antrobus his big speech as follows:

"All I ask is the chance to build new worlds and God has always given us that. And has given us voices to guide us; and the memory of our mistakes to warn us. Maggie, you and I will remember in peacetime all the resolves that were so clear to us in the days of war. We've come a long ways. We've learned. We're learning. And the steps of our journey are marked for us here."

"All I ask is the chance to build new worlds. We, all of us, build new worlds every day. Without expecting any radical change in human nature, let us learn from the past. Without expecting to achieve the wisdom of angels, let us rejoice in the new knowledge and the new power that floods in us. The moment has come again, I think, for mighty deeds of human progress through the great globe entire. That is the view I express to you in this hour of freedom which you have granted me. And this vision will not be wholly extinguished when the magic doors of the Kit-Kat Club close for the night and we return, each of us, to the world of Responsibility.

Thank you -- and good night!

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