

Where Are We Heading?

A thought-provoking article tracing the profound influence the growth of science has had on modern civilisations.

Delivered as a talk from 2YA by
Professor P. W. ROBERTSON

Zealand civilisation may be regarded in a sense as a tattered replica of the civilisation of our Victorian grandfathers.

To attempt to simplify life too much, to deny that life has its problems, is to deny life itself; to contrive that in the end we think only in terms of stereotyped formulae is a kind of mental and racial suicide. But much conspires against us, even for those who are inherently seekers. We recall with a sudden start what a limited range of opinion is generally permitted to us, is accessible even; how uniform for example is our Press.

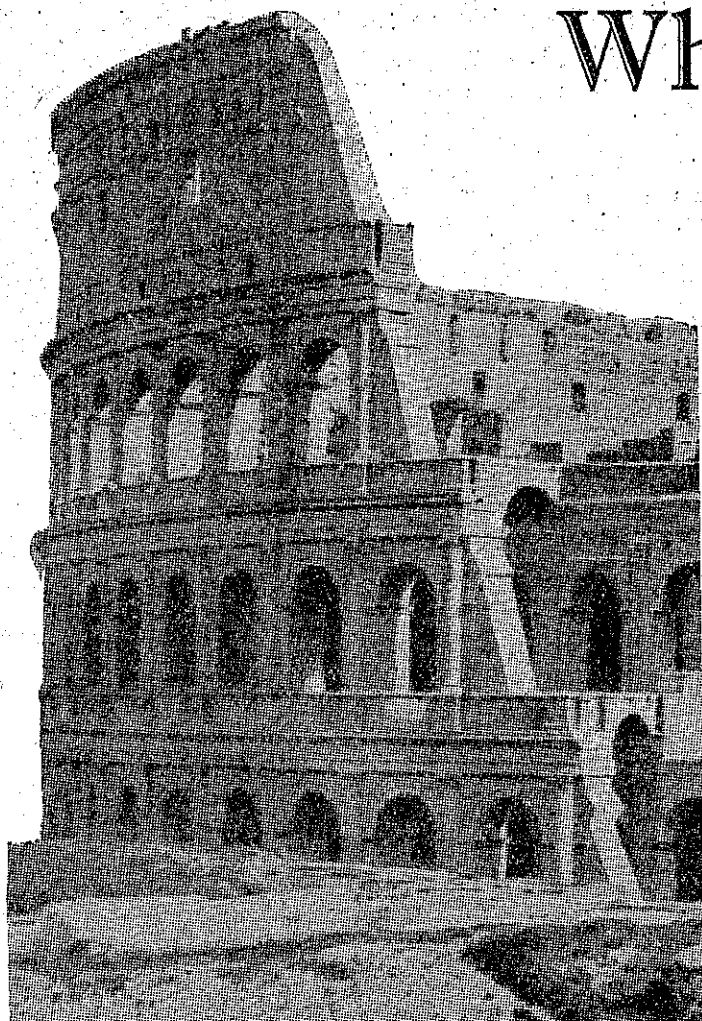
We have a need at all events to hear in some way or other opinions about things, to be allowed to think more for ourselves. We believe a scheme has been suggested to have the recorded transmission of some of the B.B.C. talks for the New Zealand stations. It is to be hoped that such a scheme may come into being.

The subject of my talk is science and civilisation, and I have already indicated, by making reference to the possible influence of wireless transmission on our lives, one such relationship between the discoveries of science and the progress of civilisation. It would not be difficult to make a catalogue of such relationships; I shall not do this, however. In a later talk I shall give you certain special illustrations, but before that I would discuss with you what is implied by civilisation and what is meant by science.

If we turn our thoughts to the past, we can make without much effort a vague mental picture of civilisations that appeared and disappeared; like living organisms they have grown and reached maturity, faded and died. We think, for example, of ancient Egypt; we have a rich evidence of its greatness in its monuments and works of art. We think of fifth century Greece, the Greece of Pericles and the great dramatists, who have been equalled only in the course of history by our English Shakespeare. We note incidentally in passing that a civilisation at its blossoming period projects a portion of its life in the form of works of art, and thus gains an existence independent of itself.

AFTER Greece, Rome. The Roman genius was practical and excelled in the arts of government and war; thus an empire was founded, which in its turn decayed and vanished. In the late Middle Ages, Spain expressed its civilisation likewise in the foundation of an empire, the relics of which we can still trace in portions of North and South America.

When we come now to examine our modern civilisations we find that they are ultimately bound up with the progress of science. Let us take our British civilisation, which showed a remarkable development at the beginning of what is called the machine-age, that is during the last half of the nineteenth century. In (*Continued on page 9*)



A monument to a decayed civilisation—ruins of the Colosseum, Rome.

IT is freely admitted that one of the most unexpected things about broadcasting in England is the popularity of the educational talks. This in no small measure is due to the fact that it has been found possible to make instruction entertaining. And this also, I take it, is the aim of the director of the Workers' Educational Association, who organises these talks from 2YA, namely, to combine information with entertainment. This is, of course, an ideal toward which one may merely strive; but it is an ideal which may be approached at all events in a negative way. Too much or too continuous information savours of pedantry, and is clearly not entertaining. Yet on the other hand, information which is suggestive, which sets one pondering, perhaps to open up some new vista of thought, that may well have entertainment value.

Civilisation, we might say, is very closely related to the power of organised and constructive thinking. Examining ourselves, let us ask: Can we in New Zealand note even the beginning of an individual civilisation? Our isolated position at the end of the world's trade routes, our general physical environment, might make us indeed susceptible to the creation of such a civilisation in the centuries to come. We ask further: Have we shown ourselves in any way conscious of this possibility? And the answer is that we have not. Our New

