During these five war years science has proclaimed and demonstrated its role as Hercules. It has employed as its loudspeaker the bursting bomb, and as its courier the swift vehicle. Its blows have been instantly lethal.

Next, science has shown its skill as the fabricator of useable goods. And, lastly the giant has revealed some of its mild and even compassionate moods as the binder of man’s mortal wounds and the healer of his fevers and mental aberrations.

All these exploits of science have been made known to the world as “news.”

In this kind of journalism this country has excelled all other countries. The American people, better than any other people, have been provided with intelligent, interesting and trustworthy war science news.

This has been due in no small measure to the fact that in the interval between the two world wars there had grown up in the United States a new branch of journalism—science news reporting and interpretation.

It will be remembered that the meeting of the American Association For The Advancement Of Science in Dallas, Tex., was held under a somber pall of post-Pearl Harbor forebodings. Among us science newsmen there was a feeling that the light of science might go off the printed pages, as long as the conflict raged.

If the war-time developments of science—rockets, new fuels, synthetic rubbers and plastics, radars, electron microscopes, polaroids, antibiotic and germicidal drugs, shock treatments—continued to be given out as news it was because the science newsmen were on the job—both in the offices of the government and in the editorial offices.

Men of science might feel gratified that the American journalist has done his share in beating the tom-toms of science and its technology. But, if the proper function and the potentialities of the news as the agency of making a “Science Of The People, For The People and By The People” are to be understood, a clear conception of the nature of news must be maintained.

Some day the prehistorian will reveal how the journalists of thousands of years ago spread the news of impending danger—such as the attack by a hostile tribe or pack of man-eating beasts—by sounds and gestures and pictorial markings left on bones, stones and the cave-walls.

* Presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Science” Meeting, Sept. 13, 1944, Cleveland, O.
Anyway the communication of information which might be of vital importance to his fellow human beings has always been the core of the newsman’s function.

It is the very essence of such communication that it be “timely”—“better be slightly ahead of an event than be behind it.” Such is the 4th dimension of news—the “newsiness, the newness” of any legitimate news.

When the tendency of the journalist to be futuristic becomes contaminated by some egotism or dogmatism, not warranted by objectivity, his assertions and predictions can do plenty of harm to the people.

Walter Lippmann, the famous journalist, in his book, “A Preface to Morals,” published in 1929—only three to four years before Hitler took hold of Germany and Japan started the conquest of China—wrote this:

“It is no accident that fascism or bolshevism took root in Italy and Spain, but not in Germany and England . . . in Russia but not in Scandinavia, in China but not in Japan.” And, “Bolshevism and fascism are, as we say, un-American. They are no less un-Belgian, un-German, un-English. For they are un-industrial” (pages 253–254).

This, of course, was the interpretation of current and near future history by a noted journalist, not strict reporting.

How startling it sounds today to be told that “fascism is un-German and un-Japanese.”

I wonder if such prophecies and affirmations were a factor in that negligence which has brought about the greatest war in history.

And, I feel dismayed to think of what might be in store for us in the future if such predictions continue to shape the course of history.

If there were more of the spirit and method of science in journalism, and in the great affairs of mankind, there would be less waste of man’s energies, and less sacrifice of his life and happiness.

But, let us analyze the substance of news a little further. In addition to “timeliness,” the core news must have something of “power.”

An “Atom of News” is short-lived and rhythmic in time—daily or weekly and so on—and it radiates some kind of power.

The historian and the sociologist can think of power—in the social sense—as some thing which enables one person to influence the attitudes and actions of some other person or persons. If you can make me do what you want me to do, then you have power—which may be of military, civil official authority, money, learning, religion, propaganda, even art, and surely science.

If any news is not forward-looking in time, it is “old stuff, stale”: if it lacks potentialities of power, it is weak. Even news of playful reactions and activities have to do with power transactions of human beings.

Now, the concept of power, I believe, is at the basis of the concept of freedom. Any form of freedom implies the possibility of action, according to one’s own choice—spontaneously made.

The greater the range of choice in action, the greater the degrees of freedom in that particular energy field. The absence of power leaves us in a minus state of freedom.
Ideally speaking, then, the “Atom of News” is packed with potentialities of power and hence of freedom.

In the history of no other country is this seen more clearly than of America. A couple of years ago, Philip Guedella, the British historian, stated at the Royal Institution of Great Britain: “Through all New World history a single motive runs like a refrain: Man Will Be Free.”

Franklin, Jefferson, and Paine were not only among the famous architects of republican freedom, but also scientific philosophers and able pamphleteers—the journalists of their day.

As is well known, it always makes good news when it is associated with some great man’s or woman’s name. In weighing the power for freedom of any news the trained journalist never forgets the importance of personality.

Why? Because a trustworthy and honorable person’s name inspires credence. What good is news emanating from a liar or a fraud?

Scientific news, then, has to be timely, significant for history charged with some power capable of safe-guarding and increasing some form of human freedom, and carrying the impress of as trustworthy personal authority as possible.

When the substance of science comes in such a form that its energy significance is obscure, it is poor stuff for turning into news.

Obscurity in the statement of facts and in the enunciation of desirable human goals has been the mark of every system calculated to hold human beings in slavery, weakness and ignorance. It is a characteristic of the mediaeval, the opposite of the modern, pattern.

When those who know are incapable of, or unwilling to, communicate truth to the people, the latter seek information from any source which seems accessible, often quackery.

The end of the first world war was a time when there was a new and tremendous upsurge of democracy. Everywhere men and women, who until then hardly had any power, acquired influence and prestige.

But these new ruling groups did not receive the light of science and the guidance in public affairs which they sorely needed. They were allowed to fall into the hands of charlatans. Thus, during the last quarter century this world was plunged into a new mediaevalism—the Middle Ages of the Machine.

In England the brilliant writer, E. M. Forster bewailed: “Science, which ought to have ruled, plays the subservient pimp.”

He failed to perceive that, under the new condition, mainly created by scientific technology itself, “science could rule” only if it became the possession of the common man.

Let me call your attention to the fact that the “Atlantic Charter” does not list science among the several freedoms for which we are supposed to have been waging this war.

Don’t you agree with me that, as long as freedoms were being promised, the “Fifth Freedom Of Science For All The People Of The World “should also have been included in the Atlantic Charter?

It goes to show how weak the science movement of the world has been. To-
day, even in this country it is not yet quite a movement of the people, hence its "secondary place" in the hierarchy which the powers that be are building up.

Science news is the connecting link between science and democracy. It is one of the great synthesizers of a Scientific Democracy, and of a Democratic Science. These are not precise terms, but I hope they convey my purport.

Can you tell me any other agency so closely related to the people as is American journalism?

Here and there are papers and periodicals which ape the "court gazettes" of moth-eaten monarchic and other such prehistoric social systems. But, on the whole the American Press has been a marvelous power for democratic freedom.

So far American journalism has shown great deference to scientists. And, when the "boys come back home" from the fighting fronts, where they have handled and lived with the weapons science has given them to win the war, the American newspapers will be all the more inclined to give science a play.

Science, like other assets of civilization, has suffered in this war, not in its technical skill but in its spontaneity, its self-motivated creative activity. But also there are new gleams of a broader culture of science.

It is true that Europe, from Paris to Warsaw, has been so ravaged that science has practically been smothered there.

But, in Russia, India, China and other of the United Nations, which were sluggish in science and technology, powerful new forces of science, pure and applied, have risen.

The achievements of Russian science, not only of the old masters like Pavlov, but also of the new leaders like Kapitzka, are beginning to be known to us. Science news writers have done their share in making the work of these Russian luminaries known to the American people.

India's science has been a leader of Asian science, and after the collapse of Japan will be more so than ever before.

Under the Bombay Plan, worked out by the Indian industrialists, ten to thirty billion dollars will be spent towards the industrialization of India, which would include the extension of scientific research, education and culture.

The American scientists, pure and technical, with the collaboration of the American and other freedom loving newspapers and periodicals, can attempt the rebirth of world civilization with a new hope of success, emanating from the powers of science. They can rally around them, and fully cooperate with the scientific forces of not only Britain, Russia and China, but also India, Latin American and other countries, especially of the United Nations.

As the process of scientific civilization and culture building goes forward, science news too will grow in importance and usefulness.

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