

# AMERICA TOMORROW

An Oration

by  
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AMERICA TOMORROW  
An Oration

H. W. Prentis, Jr.

From an address delivered before the Economic Club of New York City, November 20, 1946. Permission granted by the author to the WETMORE DECLAMATION BUREAU, Sioux City, Iowa.

...America Tomorrow. What could stir one's imagination more? It has not surprised me, as I have considered what I might say that would perhaps prove pertinent and timely, I have found my mind reverting again and again to the gaunt, symbolic figure of Christopher Columbus which forms the apex of the massive monument to his memory that stands at the mouth of the Rio Tinto in southwestern Spain. It was from here on August 3, 1492, that the great discoverer put to sea in his three cockleshell ships. And there he stands now sculptured in rough granite--a hooded mariner braced against the stanchion of a ship gazing to the west over the waste of waters that he sailed to reach the New World. For seventy days he had little but his own unconquerable spirit to support him. In the face of a mutinous and superstitious crew, a failing supply of drinking water and food, day after day he recorded: "Monday we sailed due westward;" "Tuesday we sailed due westward;" until finally his determination was rewarded when a flickering light on Watling's Island was discerned at two o'clock on the morning of October 12th and a new world was opened to mankind. In these perilous days, it seems to me we need much of that same vision and indomitable spirit, if America tomorrow is to approach the ideal of our dreams.

As we stand at the opening of another chapter in the epic of America and try to pierce the fog of the future, we have, alas, no mental radar to reflect back to our eager eyes the shape of things to come. We do have, however, the century-old assurance of Thomas Campbell that "coming events cast their shadows before them" and Patrick Henry's confidence that there is "no way of judging of the future but by the past."

So let our imaginations sweep back over the past three hundred years. What do we see? Small determined groups of men actuated by a burning desire for political, economic and religious freedom, struggling for a foothold on the edge of a great continent; the coalescence of their colonies into an infant nation; the setting up of a new form of representative democracy with a written constitution; the march of pioneers to the placid waters of the Pacific; the fusing of the nation in the flaming forge of civil war; the prodigal exploitation of our teeming natural resources; a lusty age of steam and steel; the development of electric power and mass production; the lifting of the standard of living to a level never reached before in the history of civilization; the appalling destruction of material and moral values in the first World War; an ensuing period of national manic-depressive insanity accompanied by the crass selfishness that invariably characterized such mob madness; the search for shortcuts to prosperity; feverish zeal in setting up alleged remedies for accumulated social ills; the awakening of a quickened sense of social responsibility; the call to Armageddon on three continents and the seven seas in 1941; the birth of the atomic age at Alamogordo; the emergence of America as the most powerful nation the world has ever known; and finally the flashing of stop, look and listen signals by an aroused electorate eager to shake off the bonds of war-born regimentation and to get back to the task of building the America of tomorrow.

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