

## A Word With You

By ROBERT CLANCY

The other day I came across a curiosity in a second-hand bookstore—"Prophetic Voices Concerning America" (1874) by Charles Sumner. Most of the prophecies quoted were from the time of the Revolution and early Republic, and there was much glory-telling.

Many voices were proclaiming a free empire stretching from ocean to ocean and teeming with an industrious population of "millions added to millions" (predicted in a happier tone than Dr. Malthus might have). That interesting prophet, Alexis De Tocqueville, was foretelling a population of 150 millions, "equal together." And Bishop Jonathan Shipley looked to the New World for an eventual discovery of "some means to correct the extreme inequalities of condition between the rich and the poor."

That was the spirit of the times—straining eyes through the mist, looking forward to—to just about the state of growth America has reached today. Visions are usually brighter than their fulfillment, but in the main, the general anticipations have come to pass. Only, instead of basking in the ecstatic atmosphere of a Golden Age, our prophesied era is weighted with tension and foreboding . . .

Around Christmas time, when the shops were gleaming, there was an unusual display in the window of the I. B. M. store, not far from my second-hand bookstore. It was—not an exhibit of such marvels as might have been envisioned by our 18th century prophets—but a reconstruction of a family scene in Colonial days, complete with authentic spinning-wheel, fireplace, and life-size costumed figures. The family were enjoying their Christmas in severely simple style, but I could not help thinking that something was represented in that scene

that was missing from the surrounding glitter. It expressed a sturdy independence, a self-reliance, a sense of security far more reassuring than the counterfeit bandied about today. Imagination could paint the free land surrounding that rude house, imparting that breath of freedom.

Prophets might well wax eloquent, multiplying such a scene fifty-million fold. Perhaps if that free land had not been lost, strayed or stolen along the way, I would not have had to look at the I. B. M. scene with nostalgia.