

WHAT THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR.

BY HAR DAYAL.

WE live in an age of unrest and transition. The old order is changing in all countries and among all nations, but the new is not yet born. The time-spirit is in travail, but the Ideal, which shall be a Messiah unto humanity, has not yet been ushered into light. We are all looking for some great spiritual force, which should rescue us from the slough of despond and sensuality in which civilization seems to be perishing. And civilization knows it. Like the bird that is drawn into the serpent's mouth, the advanced nations of the world feel that they are helplessly driven to death and disintegration by the strange, irresistible power of luxury and selfish materialism. But they cannot remedy the evil. Their wisest men and women deplore the moral and social anarchy that prevails around them. They sing Jeremiads or burst into Carlylean fits of anger and vituperation. But how can mere petulant fury stem the tide of mammon-worship, race-hatred, love of ease and rank, and the other fatal forces that are working havoc in our midst? Whither are we drifting? Will all this sweet and beautiful fabric of civilization fall to pieces again? Will history only repeat itself? Will liberty and justice, science and toleration, equality and law, all be wrested from us by the ruthless hand of time, that breeds corruption everywhere, in the corpse, in the fallen tree, in the painfully-reared, slowly-evolved institutions of the human race? So all lovers of humanity are asking to-day, in sad and mournful accents: "What can save us? Lo! conscience is being palsied; idealism is dying by inches; poverty is becoming a sin and a crime. All the old sanctions of morality are giving away beneath the strain of reason and industrialism. Everywhere one sees decay, indifference, moral atrophy. The times are out of joint. And who will set them right?"

And the lamentations of the world's prophets are not without

a basis of truth. It is true that the idealist is always dissatisfied with his generation, and every age has been branded as an epoch of infamy and disaster by its representative thinkers, from Juvenal to Max Nordau. But we are to-day actually in the midst of a crisis, and we must face it. The problems that confront us grow in number and complexity from day to day.

a. The vast majority of educated men and women have no definite philosophy of life. The churches have lost their power on account of their absurd dogmas, their intolerance, their worldliness and the dependence of the ministers on the rich for support. The churches of Europe and America are only fashionable clubs, and violin solos are being added to the time-honored organ performances in order to make "religion" attractive. The pastors always hear a "call" from a richer congregation, whenever it happens to come. Young men and women have thus lost all respect for their spiritual teachers, and the spiritual life is regarded as a dream of the evangelists' imagination. The higher criticism, the rational modes of thought produced by science, the study of Oriental religions, and the diffusion of education have contributed to the destruction of the old simple faith in the catechism and the Lord's prayer. In the Mohammedan world, too, very few educated men believe in Islam. Those who have received their degrees at the colleges of Paris and Berlin cannot revere the Koran as the holiest book in creation. The same religious unrest is noticeable in Japan and India. The new wine of science and comparative religion has burst the old bottles of established religions.

b. Along with this intellectual advance, a moral set-back is clearly discernible. Periods of culture and refinement are not always noted for moral progress and social purity. One aspect of the Italian Renaissance is mirrored for us in Boccaccio's Decameron. Even so it is at present. Men are growing wiser, but more avaricious, and immoral. It is sad to see young men and women in Paris and elsewhere questioning the very possibility of the higher life of renunciation and selfcontrol. They live under the pernicious influence of such false guides as Spencer, Nietzsche, and Omar Khayyam. A morbid craving for excitement dominates their waking and sleeping hours. Passion is to them a deity. St. Francis, St. Bernard and other spiritual heroes are objects of derision, simply because they were Catholics and wore dirty clothes. Even Bernard Shaw, who is very sane in some respects, sneers at St. Francis for his love of poverty and at St. Anthony for his love of the animal creation. A false gospel of individualism, enjoyment, and philistinism is per-

verting the minds of our young men and women. It is bad indeed when practice falls short of the ideal. But it is infinitely worse when theory itself betrays its trust, and panders to our lower nature. Idealism, with its great message of poverty and suffering, has fallen among the thieves and robbers of "evolution," "socialism," and the rest. The truths of evolution and the inspiring economic program of socialism are mixed up with spurious generalizations about ethics, which are swallowed with avidity by our impressionable youths. Asceticism is in disgrace, and is regarded as incompatible with "civilization." Woe unto such a civilization!

I shall not cite figures from reports of commissions in this short article, as the pedantry of the statistician is out of place here. Juvenile crime is increasing. The number of men who desert their wives is growing. Divorce has become a subject for jest and light-hearted comment. Insanity is claiming more victims in every decade. The sexual morality of students of both sexes leaves much to be desired. The call for sacrifice falls on deaf ears. Every sermon has its price and no one is expected to deliver a lecture without "remuneration." Race-prejudice is gaining in intensity. The respect for individual rights is diminishing. Ante-natal infanticide is terribly common. The lust for wealth is seizing larger and larger circles of society every year. The strain on the nervous system of the average man in such an atmosphere has reached the breaking-point. Philosophy is becoming commonplace and trivial. Journalism is becoming more and more irresponsible and vulgar. All symptoms point to a general exhaustion of the vital force of a community—viz., its moral energy. He who runs can read these signs of the times. I will only quote the testimony of an American writer on one point. I had never believed, before I read it, that things had come to this pass in the land of the Pilgrim Fathers. Prof. William James says: "Among us English-speaking peoples especially do the praises of poverty need once more to be boldly sung. *We have grown literally afraid to be poor.* We despise any one who elects to be poor in order to simplify and save his inner life. *We have lost the power of even imagining what the ancient idealization of poverty could have meant;* the liberation from material attachments, the unbribed soul, the manlier indifference, the paying our way by what we are or do and not by what we have, the right to fling away our life at any moment irresponsibly,—the more athletic trim, in short, the moral fighting shape. . . . *It is certain that the prevalent fear of poverty among the educated classes is the worst moral disease from which our civilization suffers.*" (The italics are mine).

Here is an absolutely correct diagnosis of the malady that is sapping our vitality. What shall we do then? What is the pressing need of the times? Nothing but what has been hinted at by Professor James. Renunciation, and renunciation alone, will save humanity. All other devices will be efficacious only on condition that renunciation should first find her devotees. Poverty, the lovely bride of St. Francis, the saviour of nations, the guardian of liberty and science, must be enthroned on the pedestal from which the Reformation, the crude philosophy of the eighteenth century, the modern theory of "success in life" and the pseudo-ethics of the evolutionists have dragged her down. The worship of rags, dirt, penance, homelessness, and obscurity in the individual must be re-established if humanity is to get rid of poverty, disease, dirt, inequality and ignorance. Asceticism must be brought to the aid of science and politics, in order that this mighty edifice of civilization may be prevented from tottering to its fall in the twentieth century. Let us bring back the age of St. Francis and St. Bernard, adding to their purely spiritual zeal our knowledge of science, our experience of politics, our wisdom in dealing with social evils, our wider outlook upon life, and our keener appreciation of the solidarity of humanity beyond the bounds of creed. This is the work of the new Franciscans, whom I already see with my mind's eye, beautifying and glorifying and vivifying this our civilization with their moral fervor and their intellectual gifts.

Renunciation, applied to science and politics, will be the keynote of the new era. The older formula of renunciation had no content of reality, or it was made to include only a small number of human interests. But as superstition and its offspring, intolerance, false piety, are dead and buried, let us proclaim the union of rationalism in religion with practical renunciation in ethics. I already see the country dotted with monasteries devoted to scientific research and sociological studies, where men and women, living together in purity and spiritual love, will be trained as missionaries of liberty, equality, hygiene, racial fraternity, scientific knowledge, education, toleration, and the rights of oppressed nationalities. The old friars of the Middle Ages neglected science and politics, and thus lost touch with the realities of the world. They thought that love and prayer would be sufficient for all time. But we who have lost faith in prayer, substitute a more intelligible ideal for their half-earthly, half-heavenly reveries. Renunciation, based on human needs and practical genius, will convert our earth into a paradise. At present what is this earth of ours? A charnel-house, the sham-

bles—a hospital—a field of battle—a slave-market— a prison—a Vanity fair—alas! every one and all of these similes can be applied with perfect truth to the state of things that we see around us to-day.

Yes, the new orders of monks and nuns, correcting whatever was fantastic, unnatural, foolish and superstitious in the medieval ideals, will usher in the golden age of the future. Thus will the ideals of St. Francis, St. Rose, Rousseau, Voltaire, Marx, Bakunin, Mazzini, and Haeckel be united in one beautiful whole. And that is to be the Ideal—Messiah of the twentieth century. Our Messiah will be an ideal and not a person, for our ideal is so vast and grand that no one person can realize it in its entirety. Therefore we put the Ideal first, and then we shall have devoted servants of the Ideal as our prophets and seers.

From India, the land of living spirituality, comes this great message to the Western world. From the Middle Ages, the period of spiritual awakening in Europe, comes this voice borne on the wings of time. Thus the past and the present combine to make the future. To all my American sisters and brothers who are perplexed and doubt-tossed I say: "Touch science, politics and rationalism with the breath of life that renunciation alone can give, and the future is yours."