

TOPICS OF THE DAY

NO NEW THING: AN UGLY SPOT: "GOD IN HIS HEAVEN": WHAT HISTORY TELLS: THE ECONOMIC SITUATION.

THE thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; that which is done is that which shall be done. So wrote "the wisest of the wise" nearly three thousand years ago. Solomon's personal experience, upon which his "wisdom" was founded, would appear to have been extensive and varied enough, however little it seems to have profited either himself or those who were to come after him. His conclusion of the whole matter was not perceptibly over-wise, when he wrote: "For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow". It should be unnecessary to say that Solomon had not in mind material things, but things social. He was speaking of men and their doings, not of their products, or of the physical changes of Nature. He might have summed up his whole contention in four words, *Human nature is invariable*.

We have proof of this on every page of history, from his time to ours. And, so far as man can be traced through a period earlier than that of Solomon, he continues the same. There is no "missing link" in the chain of his moral or intellectual descent. Evolution has done no more for his mind than for his body, since he first appears as true man. The most outstanding and unchanging of our characteristics is the fixed determination to glorify the past, to vilify the present, and to stultify the future. All through the Ages men have looked back to a golden past, while they have seen the world in which they lived speeding rapidly and inevitably to folly and ruin. In truth, as evolution teaches and history confirms, society has been pursuing quite the opposite course. It has been steadily improving, as those who believe either in evolution or in God should know without direct proof. There may have been backward-seeming turns in the current of progress, where temporary obstacles were encountered; but the stream turns only to secure greater freedom of advance. In the Assiniboine River, although it flows through open prairie lands, there are constant twistings and turnings. At one point, called "the big bend", the river-boats go eighteen miles around, while passengers descend, and in a few minutes walk across the connecting "neck" of land to rejoin their craft, when it reaches them, several hours later. Yet, who

doubts the steady onward sweep of the Assiniboine from Brandon to Winnipeg? There have been few such comparatively long moral "bends" as this in human history; but there have been obstructions and "ugly spots". Things usually look ugly, when seen too close, and particularly if one is detained in face of them for too long when impatient to advance. That may be why we are so prone to regard the present with disfavour, look back longingly to the past—the homeland of our elders—and peer forward with suspicion and repulsion to a future which we can judge only from the present.

THE world is undoubtedly at one of its "ugly spots" just now. There can be no denying that present cheer is to be found only in a backward glance. But let us not forget, whatever else the superficial appearances may suggest, that the "present" is invariably and inevitably "fatal daughter of the past". The seeds of ugliness were being feverishly sown before the war. They are merely flowering now, in a soil specially enriched by war's putrescence. The upheaval of 1914 was produced by "lust of gain in the spirit of Cain", "each hand lusting for all that was not its own". We are reaping the crop which we sowed. But the future, as undeniably as the present, is daughter of the past. It was among the good seeds of the past that "an enemy" sowed the pre-war tares which are now reaching maturity. We cannot, we dare not uproot them immediately. They must flourish side by side with the wholesome plants, until the harvest time of Nature comes when they may safely be separated. Present social conditions and supposed tendencies are "no new thing under the sun". They are as old, possibly, as the sun, and in all probability will cease recurring only when the sun himself shall die. In the meantime, it is not joyous but grievous to behold the tares overtopping and apparently smothering the good wheat. It is repulsive to see sex antagonising sex, instead of co-operating naturally for the common good. It is distressing to observe the young casting off discipline and despising the experience of their elders. It is abhorrent to witness the introduction of the "music" and practices of the bagnio or the savage orgy into our drawing-rooms, or of the manners and tricks of the Ghetto into commercial life and intercourse. It is ludicrous to behold the ill-directed attempts of unpractical reformers to cure any or all of the evils of the Age by empirical legislation directed against mere social symptoms rather than against actual disease. But, what would one? All this has been before, in more vicious forms, and probably will be again, let

us hope in a guise less repulsive. Society like the weather, moves in cycles; like the weather too, it is not to be controlled, although it may be more or less directed. Prototypes of all the fashions and freaks of the young that we condemn to-day were in vogue not merely among our grandparents or great-grandparents, but in the most remote historic times. Probably the elders of the cave-dwellers held up their hands in conventional horror over similar manifestations. We are told in Scripture how "the daughters of Zion" used to dress and act in the streets; and the daughters of Zion were not of the rabble, but of the royal household. We know how the youth of Rome contributed to the final downfall of the Roman Empire. The wild dissipations of France after the Terror are historic. There is no need, therefore, of despair or of gloom over present social conditions and manifestations. The age-old springtime course of moral "sulphur and molasses"—usually known as poverty—is awaiting mankind. People may make wry faces, but they will have to swallow it. Mankind never could stand continued material prosperity. When made mentally or morally ill by it, they have found their only known cure in a prolonged period of fasting. This cure is now within sight. If we are wise, we shall regard it as a blessing, for it will bring out all that is best in us. It leads to higher things and to more enduring pleasures. The sweets of material joy may be hard to give up, but there are mental and spiritual compensations which far more than atone for the loss. It is during so-called "hard times" that men make real progress.

ROBERT BROWNING had not the least thought of embodying any deliberate opinion or belief of his own in the usually misquoted and habitually misconstrued lines,

God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world.

The poet merely put these words in the mouth of an irresponsible imaginary girl, as part of her expression of feeling of physical springtime joy. They come from the poetic drama, *Pippa Passes*,—the same which concluded with these fatalistic and hateful lines from the lips of another character:

All service ranks the same with God—
With God, whose puppets—best and worst—
Are we: there is no last or first.

God, "in His heaven", is far too remote from the world's passions and activities to have much influence upon them. Unless and until men fetch God from His heaven into their lives, all is likely to be anything but right with the world,—if by "the world" we mean the world's people. It is the banishment of God to His heaven which has much to do with our present discontents. The planner cannot be excluded, even temporarily, from his plan, except at the risk of untoward consequences. One may ask cynically, as did Pilate with regard to Truth, "Who is God?" The answer is simple. He is the spirit of the quick, not of the dead. There has been a long succession of gods, from savagery up to what we regard as civilization. Each, in turn and in place, was the attempted embodiment of the dominant ideas or ideals of those who worshipped him. Not merely the thoughts of men are widened, but their souls are expanded with the process of the suns. What civilized person to-day could find acceptable as his deity the tribal God of the Hebrews of two or three thousand years ago,—a deity modelled in part on still older Egyptian or Eastern conceptions? Yet, in so far as they were moral in conception and delineation, the gods of old fulfilled useful functions, and did good in their time. They served as stepping-stones on which men could mount to higher things, because they were suited to the stage of development of those whom they influenced. They pointed gradually higher and higher. They ultimately led up to the unformulated God revealed by Jesus of Nazareth as the Spirit of parental love. That was the final and supreme revelation, because it was not formulated but suggested, and is therefore capable of infinite variation and adaptation according to the needs and thought of all succeeding Ages.

To exclude that God from men's hearts and minds by confining Him to "His heaven" is to invoke perpetual darkness. All the worthy gods of the past have had ascribed to them definite attributes which tended to arouse the admiration and incite the emulation of their worshippers, and so prepare them for the scaling of loftier heights. Fundamental among these has been reverence. Without reverence man cannot rise, but is doomed to sink. With it, all things are possible. On it are based order, morality, harmony, and all that flows from these or is made possible by them. Rudimentary and fundamental as it is to civilization, it is now apparently in peril of being lost or destroyed. Is not the chief menace to it coming from insistence—as suitable to this generation—on a theological God, in whom one who runs can read the graven lineaments of a deity of Ages past, absolutely out of consonance with the Christ ideal and revelation? Is not the continued portrayal of

such a deity an invitation to scoff? And is not to scoff the same as to cast aside reverence? If one were to search for a single word wherewith to characterize the present generation, could a word more apt and accurate than "scoffing" be found? This foretells perhaps the longest "backward-streaming curve" in the course of human history. It threatens the foundations not merely of government but of society. Laws can neither check nor restrain it. It is mental, not physical. It is a condition of soul, rather than a state of mind. Its cure must be spiritual, not material. There is nothing too sacred not to be scorned and befouled by it. That there is a remedy, and that it will be found, no one can doubt who believes either in rational evolution or—which is the same thing—in a God-governed universe.

This should be sought at once diligently, and—if need be—with tears. God must somehow be brought down from "His heaven", and introduced to His world. There must be a revival of real faith,—faith in that within us which indicates something corresponding beyond and yet surrounding and enfolding us. There is urgently needed, not so much a "re-statement of religion", of which we now hear so often, as the statement of a reformed religion, with Jesus of Nazareth as its prophet and the innate God of His conception as its centre and moving spirit. There is no reason why swelling scepticism as to old religious formularies and archaic concepts of deity should prejudice our minds or harden our hearts against the acceptance of the teachings of our own consciousness that our present lives are but one phase of enduring existence, that there is a Spirit without corresponding to the spirit within, to which if we do not pay reverence we must live in perpetual self-abasement and end in utter self-contempt.

IT is not only in the moral, social, and religious spheres that the world is inclined to be despondent just now. There is the more prosaic despondence about economics. Can we bear our burdens and pay our debts? Shall we ever become prosperous and contented again? These are the questions in most minds and on many tongues. The answer is, again, a cheering one, based on the old ground that there is nothing new under the sun. What is, has been and has been surmounted. It will be surmounted again. Let us recall the nearest precedent in history,—the world after the Napoleonic wars. We might make instructive and profitable study of the world—or a considerable portion of it—after even

comparatively small wars. So limited a struggle as that in South Africa over twenty years ago had economic consequences felt at a great distance from its scene. There are those still living who remember the close of the war of the southern rebellion in the United States, with its effect upon general trade and finance. Prophecies were then heard that the American government would never be able to carry on and pay off its "overwhelming" debt of between three and four billion dollars,—a mere bagatelle as compared with certain national debts of to-day, but a relatively colossal sum at that time. The Americans not only paid their debt, but grew fabulously rich in doing so, although they voluntarily assumed in connection with it pension undertakings which dwarfed their contractual obligations. The Maritime part at least of what is now Canada suffered far more serious depression for a number of years after peace was restored in the United States than it has yet felt since the end of the Great War. Every misfortune now pressing upon Europe had its counterpart after the fall of Napoleon. The same cries of dismay and hopelessness were heard then. The newspapers of that time teemed with wails and forebodings like those of to-day. The national debt and high taxation, then as now, were the monsters whose shadows darkened all the future. But, under changed financial conditions, the debt dwindled to a trifle, and the high taxation melted away with it. There were, at first, the identical difficulties with the poor and the unemployed that are being encountered now. There were labour troubles more startling than any that have yet arisen since the Great War. "The labourer", said *The Times* of September 25th, 1821, "gets inadequate wages because the farmer is unable to pay his rent. . . . The manufacturer has lost the custom of the farmer, because the farmer is unable to pay his rent."

This might quite as truthfully have been written a hundred years later, on September 25th, 1921. And *The Times* might have added that farmer, manufacturer and labourer were all reduced to straitened circumstances because the would-be consumers—owing to artificial restrictions—were unable to purchase freely. But the British farmers and farm-labourers, the British manufacturers and their employees, as well as the British consuming public, survived their trials and attained new and undreamed of prosperity. So they will do again. So will all the world. A single cloudy day appreciably dampens human spirits. Could it be expected, even with history to cheer us, that there would not be depression, bordering at times and in places on despair, under the rolling war-clouds which so recently enveloped the world?

Those clouds have not even yet been dispelled, but on the contrary have threatened to gather anew after each temporary break of sunshine. But there is no need to abandon hope. What has been done will be repeated. Nothing more is required than a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together. Men are as likely now as ever to achieve this, and the world—including us—will be back not only where it was before the war, but ready and eager to advance far beyond that,—ready to laugh at the doubts and fears of to-day just as we of to-day smile at the lack of confidence shown by our forefathers of a century ago.

TO perceive convincingly, otherwise than through historical indications, that the wish is not father to the thought, and that economic health must return before long, it is enough to scrutinize closely the actual post-war situation. War is frequently compared to fire, as a purely destructive agency. The comparison applies within limits. War is more like a localized "boom", in which to a large extent what one gains another loses. When the boom is over, the community is left very much as it was before, except for the interruption and disturbance of its business, and the consequent depression that it feels. The greater part of the world which did not directly participate in the war actually benefited by it—at least in the way of opportunity. Of those which did participate, only France, Belgium, Italy to a limited extent, and certain of the Balkan States sustained material damage through devastation of their territory. The others suffered loss of time, which looms large when stated in terms of money. Over five million men from Great Britain were engaged in military service, but they were never all on duty at any one time, and a considerable percentage had not previously been producers adding to the actual wealth of the community. Moreover, the places of workers withdrawn were taken largely by women, or by those who would otherwise have been non-producers. At the worst, there was the loss of the time of five million men for less than five years. There was also the loss of military materials, but that too should be set down to loss of time, their raw components being of small value. Great Britain suffered nothing worth mentioning in the way of wreckage, except in her mercantile marine, and this was largely compensated for by the handing over of German shipping after the war. To-day Great Britain is as supreme in shipping, and has as large a tonnage afloat as ever. Her banking and industrial systems and equipment are undisturbed. Debt is practically her

only reminder of the war, except her loss of manhood. What is true of Great Britain in this respect is true also of Canada.

For, when indebtedness is represented by domestic borrowings, it amounts merely to the transference of securities and liabilities from one hand to the other. A foreign debt, of course, represents an extra-national charge. And it is not the workers, but the capitalists, on whom its burden rests and who will ultimately have to liquidate it. Great Britain and Canada, therefore, find themselves practically as they were before the war, apart from their foreign borrowings. Their industrial appliances and machinery are intact. They are merely so much the poorer than they might have been if there had not been nearly four and a half years of lost time for so many of their men. None of their wealth was destroyed. Their fixed wealth was mortgaged, not wiped out. It can all be redeemed and restored. It is not on fixed wealth that a nation lives and prospers, but on labour and working capital. Both these are still abundantly available for all practical purposes. So we have only to set diligently to work to create and save new capital, if we would counteract the effects of our long period of wasteful idleness.

Europe is by no means in so hopeless a state as is often hastily assumed. Commercial conditions are quite upset for the time being, mainly because of inflation and lack of credit. France has inflated by home-borrowings since the war, for reparation purposes. Germany laid the foundations of future inflation during the war by enforced domestic borrowings, because she could not secure loans abroad. She has completed the process since the war by the unrestricted issue of virtually worthless paper money. She has *paid* her war debt with printed *promises to pay*, which she has by law made legal tender. In plain words, she has repudiated her debts, under form of law, thus robbing and ruining her domestic creditors. But there has been similar currency inflation before, without permanently bad effects on the economics of the world. On two historic occasions, once under the old régime on a limited scale, and afterwards under the Terror on relatively as great a scale as Germany's, France tried to pay her debts and enrich herself with paper money. On the second occasion, directed by Necker, no less than $47\frac{1}{2}$ milliards of francs was issued in six years in the form of *assignats* drawn on imaginary national securities. France has not forgotten the lesson she learned from the disasters which followed. For the time being, she ruined her business and robbed her people. But she made a speedy recovery after returning to honest economic courses. So will Germany recover, for she still

possesses unimpaired her means of legitimate industry and production, together with an abundance of excellent labour.

It is only a question of time, industry, thrift, and good judgment. National debts are reduced automatically as public finances improve. Great Britain's pressing obligations to the United States were almost cut in two by the funding which reduced interest from $5\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 per cent. She is now purchasing Liberty bonds at a discount of twenty per cent., which she will be able to tender at par in payment of her indebtedness. As confidence returns, money will become cheaper and more plentiful. It will be possible then to borrow at home, at a still lower rate, sufficient to pay off the whole American indebtedness and refund it in England, thus retaining for domestic use all interest payments. In the same way the burden of present domestic indebtedness will be lightened as time goes on, just as indebtedness after the Napoleonic wars was scaled down until it almost ceased to be felt. A similar thing will happen in Canada as outstanding loans fall due and are refunded. So, without dishonesty or confiscation, we shall get rid of our war burdens, thus regaining the permanent high road of material prosperity and progress.

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