Is the World Growing Better or Worse?

REV. J. A. FORD.

A newspaper reporter is said to have interviewed a number of Chicago ministers with the design of ascertaining why the churches were losing their hold upon the people." A number of unsuspecting clergymen undertook to explain. One, however, met the reporter's inquiry with the question: "Is it a fact? *Are* the churches losing their grip of the people? This, the reporter declined to answer, and departed to pursue his investigations elsewhere.

This reporter has a large connection. Very many excellent people have drifted into similarly hasty conclusions from insufficient, if not totally false premises. A great many people are indifferent, if not hostile to the churches, but "a great many people *always* were, and a great many people will likely continue to be." There were people in Solomon's day who believed things were going to the bad, but Solomon rebuked them and intimated that their conclusions were incorrect, and that a little closer study and wider observation would result in less gloomy views. "Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these, for thou inquirest not wisely concerning this." (Ecc. 7:10.) There will always be somebody to deify the old and disparage the new, forgetful of the very obvious fact that old things were once new and in their day had to submit to the "hurtling cross-fire of adverse criticism," and endure unfavorable comparison with still more archaic times and things. If society is deteriorating, there should be some means of ascertaining it. The whole question, we think, comes within the range of practical investigation, and, is demonstrable by a just comparison of acknowledged facts and reliable figures. We propose to examine some of the data available, to determine, if possible, whether there is any real ground for alarm.

It must be admitted at the out set that is is difficult to estimate correctly the actual value of moral forces. There are factors in the problem of religious progress that cannot be pressed within the limits of arithmetical calculation, but there are also those which we can examine and compare, and from which a reasonably correct result may be obtained. No violence is done the question if it be presented in another form, viz.: Is the sum total of moral good in the world at the present time, greater than at any other period in its history? To this question, after weighing the evidence for and against, there would seem to be no sufficient reason for withholding an affirmative answer. While taking this stand, there is no intention to ignore the existence of evil forces of a menacing and appalling character. Granting that an advance has been made along certain lines by the Prince of Darkness and that Christian influences have waned in other directions, there is still the best of ground for believing that the world is morally in advance of any previous period in its history; that Christianity, so far from being smitten with decay, is more positive and aggressive as a force, more representative and pure as a moral factor, that it is possessed of a more intense and dominant energy, a more hopeful and permanent spirituality, and a more distinct and vital spirit of oneness. Her purifying and elevating influence has touched and refined social relations, it has given man a more kindly interest in his fellow, has evoked the spirit of gentleness and benevolence, and frowned upon injustice and cruelty.

Whatever may be said of the moral status of the world to-day, we incline to the view that it is an improvement on the condition of things at the beginning of the century. The most ardent admirer of the "good old times" would hardly be willing to exchange the nineteenth century for the eighteenth, or the society of to-day for the times of Napoleon I. and Aaron Burr. But if this contrast is not sufficiently sharp, we might point him to the pre-Lutheran period, and compare a world divided between Roman Catholics, Jews and Mahomedans with the world to-day, everywhere permeated with the quickening forces of evangelical Christianity; or, if still unconvinced, we might ask him to compare the present age with the time when darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people," when paganism and Judaism, the one a mass of corruption, the other a mass of formalism, divided the earth between them, and surely there can be but one conclusion—that the present age embodies in a larger degree the principles and spirit of the gospel than any of its predecessors.

"Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay."

Granted that society has not yet reached its ideal, still history and sociology must have been studied in vain if we claim that it improves as we go back. It is not saying much for the effectiveness of the machinery set in motion by the pierced hand of the Nazarine, if we argue that the world which He came to uplift and save has been gradually sinking into a moral sepulchre.

Taking our stand then, at the close of the present century, and sweeping the world's horizon, we are prepared to affirm that the shadows have lifted, and that the sheen of a brighter day flecks the mountain tops and floods the valleys with gold. There is seen on all sides an encouraging advance in distinctly Christian forces, either as aggressive agencies or indirect modifying factors. In support of this view we urge the following points:—

First—*There is less avowed infidelity.* At the beginning of the eighteenth century when Butler wrote his "Analogy," he refers to the religious condition of the period in these words: "It is come to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject for inquiry, but has at length been found to be fictitious." Montague, speaking of the period says, "There is no religion in England. If the subject is mentioned it excites nothing but laughter." Many of the clergy, says Leslie Stephens, taught little that might not be taught by Socrates and Confucius. In the United States the picture was equally dark. Chancellor Kent, the distinguished jurist, says: "In my younger days there were few professional men that were not infidels." Bishop Mead, referring to the conditions of things in Virginia about the opening of the present century, declares that in every educated young man he met he expected to find an avowed infidel. Dr. Dwight says: "From France, from Germany and Great Britain the dregs of infidelity were vomited on us; all the leading universities were hot beds of infidelity." Dr. Dorchester, referring to the prevalence of infidel opinions in the early part of the century, says: "The current of prevailing thought was so adverse to evangelical religion that to raise one's voice in its defence was to hazard one's reputation among respectable people." About the year 1800, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church put on record the following startling words: A dissolution of Christian society seems to be threatened. The profligacy and corruption of public morals have advanced with a progress proportional to our declension in religion. Profaneness, pride, luxury, injustice, intemperance, lewdness, and every species of debauchery, greatly abound. On the continent matters were even worse. In thirteen years nearly six million volumes of Voltaire and Rosseau were distributed. Germany was a hot bed of rationalism and atheism, and France was a sink of the grossest infidelity. To such an extent did purely atheistic thought abound in that country that a notorious prostitute received public homage as the goddess of reason, and Voltaire vauntingly predicted that before the beginning of the nineteenth century Christianity would have disappeared from the earth. The nineteenth century has come and almost gone without witnessing so great a calamity. So far from it, that during the nineteenth century Christianity has achieved her greatest triumphs. She has been assailed on all sides, but conflict has only aroused her spirit. She has tightened her grip upon the minds and hearts of men. She has foiled infidelity at every point, either by forcing it entirely from the field or by compelling it to change its base and adopt other methods of attack. The infidelity of one hundred years ago was an organized and daringly aggressive force, championed by such men as Hume, Gibbon and Voltaire, while the infidelity of to-day is a comparatively weak and uncertain thing, supported by but few representative names, and scourged into comparative disfavor by the dominance of Christian thought. While educated young men one hundred years ago were, in most cases avowed infidels, and colleges were little, better than nurseries of the rankest unbelief, we have to-day the significant and cheering spectacle of hundreds of college graduates, both in Europe and America, enlisting for service in the foreign mission field. One hundred years ago an avowed infidel was too common an object to elicit remark; to-day such a character is regarded as something of an anomaly, and treated with distrust. Infidelity of the covert and incipient form may still claim a numerous following, but the organized and aggresive type which once flaunted its blasphemy with shocking parade before the world, is now comparatively unknown. The foremost thinkers of the day are avowedly Christian thinkers. Modern thought, in the main, is not away from, but in the direction of belief. Infidelity, in so far as it can be said to be a philosophy, is simply destructive. It takes away much and yields nothing. It is a doctrine of blanks. It ministers to incompleteness. It has failed to adjust itself to the deepest needs of men. The soul is formed with longings that unbelief has never been able to satisfy. Infidelity flourished in a congenial age, but its teaching are distrusted, and its power broken under the healthful influence of evangelical thought.

2. *There is relatively less Crime.* This point may be challenged, but not disproved. Those who claim that crime is on the increase, ignore facts that materially affect the case. (a) It should be remembered that by purifying public sentiment Christianity has elevated the standard of virtue, hence many of the crimes of to-day punishable by law, were but trifling misdemeanors a century ago, with which the law had nothing to do. When we sweep the moral horizon of the nineteenth century we stand upon higher ground and employ a set of lenses made more true and sensitive by the advanced spiritual processes of the times. Christianity has thus put us into possession of advantages which are often unjustly turned against herself. (b) Again, the improvement in steam and telegraphic communication, as well as the existence of the almost ubiquitous newspaper reporter will explain much of the alleged increase. Crimes, for example, which could be known only within a limited range, one hundred years ago, are now the table talk of four or five continents. But apart from these modifying considerations, there has been a large decrease in criminal convictions within the present century. From 1840 to 1880 crime decreased in Great Britain from one conviction for every 720 inhabitants to one for every 2,000; this, too, with rapidly growing population. In the United States the figures do not encourage so hopeful a view; but there are elements in operation in that country which, for a time at least, will interfere with correct statistics. Among the disturbing factors may be mentioned: (1) A vicious and turbulent foreign population is constantly pouring into the country, carrying with them the atrocious principles and habits begotten in the slums of old world cities; (2) The wide extent of the country, and the facility with which criminals can secure an asylum in the sparsely settled prairies or among the lawless bands in the ranch or mining camp, and (3) The revival of temperance sentiment and the increased stringency of temperance legislation, together with the vigorous prosecution of offenders against the liquor laws. Of the 28,000 criminal convictions in Massachusetts in 1879, 17,000, or over 60 per cent., were rum convictions. These bald figures in the criminal records would seem to indicate an increase in crime, whereas it only shows an increased determination to suppress crime, as the result of a healthy moral sentiment.

3. *Slavery has practically disappeared.* At the opening of the century slavery existed to a greater or less extent in every country in the world. One hundred years ago a large proportion of the population of Russia existed in the most abject servitude; one hundred years ago human beings were bought and sold with the sanction of the British and United States governments. Powerful religious establishments on both sides of the Atlantic gave the slave traffic their countenance, and eloquent divines were its friends and apologist. Attempts were even made to bolster the system by claiming for it divine sanction. Now, all this is changed: slavery is practically an extinct system; or if it lives at all, it is only to struggle for a precarious existence under the shadow of barbarism.

4. *Intemperance is decreasing.* Although this is still the most prevalent of all social evils, it is not what it once was. One hundred years ago tippling was the common practice among all grades and classes. Liquor of some kind was regarded as essential to the success of all public gatherings, social, political and religious; weddings, births and christenings were all celebrated by tippling on the part of interested friends of both sexes. Funerals were seasons for excessive drinking. Clergymen tippled when they made their pastoral calls and parishioners won their pastor's goodwill by adding to his stock of choice wines. Rum sellers and rum-drinkers sat together at the communion table, while brewers and distillers distributed the sacred emblems. All this would be next to impossible to day in any evangelical church. Everywhere respectable public sentiment is growing more and more hostile to the liquor traffic. Christian bodies, both Catholic and Protestant, with remarkable unanimity lift up their voices against it. Total abstinence for the individual and constitutional prohibition for the nation have become important social and political questions, represented by millions of the best citizens in Great Britian and America. There are to-day 4,000,000 total abstainers in Great Britian. Such an element is a factor in social improvement which the reformer of one hundred years ago would have sought for in vain.

5. *The general tone of society has improved.* At the opening of the present century profane swearing was the constant practice of both men and women. "Society," says Dorchester, "clothed itself with cursing as with a garment. Ladies of the highest rank flavored their conversation with expressions grossly indelicate." "All men agree," says a writer in 1734, "that atheism and profaneness never got such a high ascendant as at the present day." Lady Mary Montague writing in 1723 says: "Honor, virtue, reputation, are as much laid aside as crumpled ribbons." Bad as our age is acknowledged to be, language, such as the above, if applied to it would be regarded as grossly out of harmony with the facts.

It is said that the writings of an age are the surest index of popular taste. If this be granted then the popular taste in the days of DeFoe, Fielding and Smollet was foul to the last degree. Compared with the literary filth of that time, the most objectionable publications of the present day would be regarded as models of literary propriety. Many a literary work that was eagerly read by a delighted public one hundred years ago, if issued to day would be placed under the ban or committed to the flames as unfit for circulation. This then is another landmark on the highway of reform.

6. *There is more positive faith.*

In 1800 the United States had a population of 5½ millions. Out of that number 365,000 were communicants in evangelical churches, or one communicant for every 15 of the population. In 1880 the population was a little over 50,000,000, while the number of evangelical communicants had increased to over 10,000,000, or one communicant for every four of the population; and this in the face of a large foreign immigration.

In 1700, dissenting Protestants formed only 4 per cent. of the whole population of Great Britain. In 1876 they formed 20 per cent. In 1840 the Roman Catholics of England, Wales and Ireland, constituted 28 per cent. of the population; in 1871 there were only 18 per cent. Leaving out Ireland the Roman Catholics of England and Wales were 33½ per cent. of the population in 1560; while in 1877 they had decreased to four and seven tenths of the population. These are simple facts and easily verified, yet they speak volumes with regard to religious progress.

By taking the *world-wide* view we will find our position equally well sustained. The whole population of the world at the present time is estimated at 1,425 millions. Out of this number there is a Christian population of 390 millions, including 30 millions of evangelical communicants. That is to say, there is one professing Christian for every 47, and one nominal Christian for every 4 of the entire population of the globe. Surely the most confirmed pessimist would hesitate to say that these figures represent a worse condition of things than existed four hundred years ago, when with the exception of a few Waldensian Christians, and other scattered bodies of kindred belief, there was not an evangelical Christian on earth. Surely the moral force represented by 30 millions of church communicants, scattered over the whole world is greater than if it did not exist. We contend that Christianity is better than heathenism—a contention sustained by comparing the results of both systems as seen in England and Scotland on the one hand, and China and Africa on the other. We contend that Protestantism is better than Catholicism, and point for our proof to the social and moral condition of those states where each system was permitted the largest freedom in working out its own peculiar ideas. Let Scotland and Holland be compared with Spain and Italy, and we have the result with sufficient emphasis. We contend further that modern Protestantism is purer in quality and more elevated in tone than the Protestantism of 100 years ago, as evinced in the better regulated lives of Christian people, in more wholesome views with regard to social morals, and in general benevolence and self-sacrificing labor for the good of others. Granted that there are 200 millions more heathens in the world than at the beginning of the century, this does not materially affect our position. Whatever enlargement has been made in the rank of heathenism is far more than offset by solid progress of evangelical thought in Christian lands as well as by the persistent sapping and mining process by which missionary enterprise is weakening the foundation of heathenism itself. Besides it cannot be denied that the heathenism of to-day is touched and uplifted by the spirit of Christian civilization. It is emphatically a better type of heathenism. It is less brutal and revolting. Many of its odious practices and nameless crimes have disappeared. Its cannibalism is practically dead. Its baby drowning is largely a thing of the past. The suttee no longer burns and juggernaut has ceased to roll his car over the bodies of his victims. Heathendom is studded with over 20,000 mission stations, while over 40,000 missionaries, lay and clerical, toil in this mine of souls, and half a million heathen children study the Bible in the missionary Sunday schools. Christian converts have multiplied in China in *thirty* years 2,000 fold and if it should continue at this rate for thirty years more China would have 26 millions Christian converts and a professedly Christian population of 100 millions. In Australia 100 years ago there was not a single civilized man; to day there is over two millions. In India the converts increase 80 per cent. every ten years, while whole population increases only 6 per cent. One hundred years ago the work of Bible translation had scarcely begun; to-day it conveys its sacred message to the Pagan world in three hundred different languages and dialects. And yet much of this work is but preparatory. Christianity has only been getting into position for the accomplishment of her purpose. She has been laying the foundation for the largest and broadest efforts in heathen lands. When Wellington, after twelve months' delay, completed the historic lines of *Torres Vedras*, the power of French arms on the Peninsula was virtually at an end, though scarcely a cannon was fired or a blow struck. The existence of those impregnable fortifications was the pledge of victory. It is even so with Christianity. For 100 years she has been establishing herself. She has been extending and strengthening her lines of attack and defence. She has been securing a base of operations and occupying vantage ground till to day heathenism though numerically stronger is virtually a conquered power. *Chunder Sen*, one of the most enlightened of modern heathens, bears testimony to the progressive power of Christianity in the following glowing words: "Is not a new and aggressive civilization winning its way day after day into the heart of the people? . . . Are not Christian ideas and institutions taking root on all sides in the soil of India. Our hearts have been subjected to a superior power. . . That power is Christ. India is unconsciously inviting the new civilization and yielding to its influence. Yes, the advancing surges of a mighty revolution are sweeping over the land, and in the name of Christ strange reforms are penetrating the core of India's heart."

For years Hell-gate rock was a menace and an obstruction to navigation in New York harbor. But under the direction of competent engineers, it was honeycombed with cells and chambers, in which were deposited large quantities of giant powder and dynamite. When the excavations were completed nothing could be seen but a single shaft rising above the surface of the water. The rock itself was apparantly unchanged, and yet within that rock there slumbered a power, which, at a given signal shivered it into fragments. Even so with heathenism. For ages it has planted itself, a grim and menacing obstruction in the pathway of Christian progress; but during recent years gospel engines have been at work, and to-day the huge mass is permeated with the cells of gospel mission stations, in which is stored that "gospel which is the power of God." The forces at work are the mightiest and bear the largest sway in history. Wider and wider is the scope of Christian thought; farther and farther extends the range of Christian effort. The voices that cry in the wilderness betoken the advance of a tide more potent than the ocean, and as resistless as the moving stars. The world growing worse! Perish a thought so dishonoring to Him who died to redeem it. Bad as it is, it is not what it once was. The progress is slow, but there is progress.

To sum up,—religion is better, sweeter, more Christ-like to-day than ever before. Infidelity is loosing a grip. Crime and intemperance are decreasing. Slavery is dead. The tone of society is more elevated, as seen in habits, speech and literature. Faith is more steady and positive. The whole question is condensed in the lines of Whittier:

O, backward looking son of time,
The new is old, the old is new,
The cycle of a change sublime
Still sweeping through.

Idly as thou, in that old day
Thou mournest, did thy sire repine;
So, in his time, thy child grown gray
Shall sigh for thine.

But life shall on and upward go,
The eternal steps of progress beat
To that great anthem calm and slow
Which God repeats.

And still the new transends the old
In signs and tokens manifold,
And step by step since time began,
I see the steady gain of man.

Sitting at the Feet of Jesus.

It was an Easter custom that the master or teacher should sit on a higher seat, and the scholars or pupils on a lower seat at his feet, when the latter were receiving instruction from the former. This difference of posture was intended to indicate the reverence and submission due from the learner to the teacher. The Bible contains allusions to this custom. Moses says of the people, to whom God gave the law at Mount Sinai: "They sat down at Thy feet." (Deut. 33: 3.) Isaiah, referring to Abraham, says that God "called him to His foot." (Isa. 42: 2.) Of Mary it is said that she "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." (Luke 10: 39.) Paul speaks of himself as having been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel," meaning to say that Gamaliel had been his teacher. (Acts 22: 3.)

Luke, in describing the miracle of Jesus in the healing of a demoniac near Gadara, tells us that the people of the city, hearing of the miracle, "went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus and found the man out of whom the devils [demons] were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind." (Luke 8: 35.) The description of this man, given by Mark and Luke, represents him as having been a maniac under the influence of demonical possession. Being restored by the miraculous power of Jesus, and also being aware that he was indebted to Him for his recovery, he, now "now in his right mind," sat "at the feet of Jesus," assuming the posture of an humble learner, and desirous to be taught by the great Benefactor.

We learn from both Mark and Luke that this man, while thus sitting at the feet of Jesus "besought him that he might be with Him," and that, although Jesus did not grant this particular request, he did say to him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath compassion on thee." Both Evangelists inform us that the man obeyed the direction. Mark says: "And he departed and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him; and all men did marvel." Luke says: "And he went his way and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him." (Mark 5: 18-20, and Luke 8: 38, 39.) That man, according to this record, being cured and restored to "his right mind," sat at the feet of this great Healer to learn from His lips; and, when he had received the instruction, though his own special request was not granted, he proceeded to do as directed. He even went beyond the letter of the instruction, since he published throughout the *whole city* how great things Jesus had done unto him." He told the story of his own cure, and presented himself to the people as a living witness to the facts. It is not at all surprising that "all men did marvel."

The attitude of this restored demoniac toward Jesus, when he sat at His feet as a learner, is precisely the one which all men need to assume. The truth is that, however wise and scholarly men may be in other things, and however much of the wisdom of this world they may have, they still greatly need that kind of instruction which Christ came to give. Jesus Christ, as Nicodemus correctly thought, is "a teacher come from God," and, as such, understanding the kingdom and purpose of God perfectly. When he was on earth he spake "the words of God." His words, though uttered by human lips, were divine in their certainty and authority. The gospel record of his ministry is the record of what God through him said to the age in which he lived, and of what by the record he says to all men having the knowledge thereof. The wisdom of God through Christ and in Him, thus conveyed to man, is the wisdom that teaches sinners how they can escape the damnation of Hell, and at last become participants in the joys and glories of Heaven. It is the wisdom which, if applied, will make them rich for immortality, and enrobe them with honor when all the gew gaws of this short life shall have passed away. We may on the basis of our own reason speculate as much or as little as we please; yet assured certainty and hope come to the soul only as Jesus in and through His Word is accepted, trusted and obeyed as the teacher and Saviour of that soul. Of Himself He said: "I am the light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8: 12.) He also said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away; but My words shall not pass away. (Matt. 24: 35.) To sit at His feet is to sit at the feet of supreme wisdom. Absolute confidence in him is the law of man's highest wisdom.

The conduct of the restored demoniac, who, having sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His words, then went and told others how great things the Lord had done for him, furnishes an example for imitation in all ages. One who, in the sense of sin pardoned and the new-born hopes of heaven, has "tasted that the Lord is gracious," ought to have something to say for his Lord, and ought to say it. He is the last man who should seal up his lips and pass silently through this world. What has occurred in his experience is too great a fact to be concealed and kept as a secret in his own bosom. We are told by Christ Himself that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" and if it be true that Christ dwells in the heart by faith, as "the hope of glory," then nothing can be more natural than that He should dwell on the lips by utterance, and in the life by practice. Witness bearing for Christ is not only the instinct of true love and faith, but has in all ages been the means of spiritual good to others. The Apostles to their latest breath bore their testimony to their Lord and Master, and every recipient of His grace is required to follow their example in this respect.

It is quite true that religion is essentially a matter of the heart, and not merely of the lips; yet a religion of the heart that does not reach and influence the lips, discredits itself by its own omission. Every Christian, however humble in his condition, can, in his way and in his circumstances, testify for Christ, and make himself an epistle known and read of all men who know him; and he should do so. That modesty which restrains one from telling others what the Lord has done for him is greatly misplaced. Christ's friends should show themselves in every circle, on every occasion, and in reference to all the interests of His kingdom. They have nothing to conceal but much to publish. Let them imitate the example of the restored demoniac, and tell others what a good friend they have found in Christ. In this way they will bear testimony to Him, make themselves useful to others, and promote their own growth and comfort in the gracious life.—*The Independent.*

—We seldom pass the daily bulletin of the signal service without pausing to study for a moment the strange and curious isotherms which to a previous generation would have been as undecipherable as Egyptian hieroglyphics. Above many a tower is flying the white flag which speaks of clear skies or the blue pennant that foretells a storm. It costs tens of thousands of dollars to thus prophesy the looked for calm or warn of the approaching tempest. But to the merchant upon the exchange or the sailor in the forecastle it means millions and life. Would that men might be as anxious to know the spiritual signs of the times, when the gospel has put up its signal proclaiming to them "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation."—*Interior.*

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Many so-called diseases are simply symptoms of Catarrh, such as headache, partial deafness, losing sense of smell, foul breath, hawking and spitting, nausea, general feeling of debility, etc. If you are troubled with any of these or kindred symptoms, you have Catarrh, and should lose no time in procuring a bottle of HAGYARD'S BALM. Be warned in time, neglected cold in head results in Catarrh, followed by consumption and death. NASAL BALM is sold by all druggists, or will be sent, post paid, on receipt of price (50 cents and $1.00) by addressing
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