

Signs of the Times.

THE chroniclers tell us that at the close of the first thousand years of the Christian era the end of the world was confidently expected. Wild legends of signs in the skies, terrible portents, were circulated among the peoples. Men's minds were troubled, and the result was that religious fervour was excited and the Crusades followed. In another century from now the second thousand years of the present era will have expired. Again the signs of the times are appealed to as evidence of the approaching end of all things. Supernatural appearances are not now admitted as among these signs. Among civilized races natural phenomena are now traced to their rational cause. The appearance of a comet no longer is said to foretell a war. A succession of blood red sunsets denotes the presence of volcanic dust in the air, it does not portend the impending murder of some king. To the modern philosopher a broken looking-glass means a broken looking-glass, and is not as it was a sign of approaching death.

But there are some social and psychological indications which certainly do make thinking men uneasy. To survey mankind from China to Peru is no easy task, but some characteristics stand out so prominently in the present condition of the world that they cannot be ignored. The first symptom that causes uneasiness is the chasm between wealth and poverty. Between Dives and Lazarus there is a great gulf fixed. The inequality is the more felt because the poorer classes are better educated and better able to understand what advantages wealth gives. In former times the lower orders as a rule, if not contented with their lot, were so hopeless of change that they did not attempt to strike. When they did it was like wild animals, not like human beings. The risings of the peasants in France in the middle ages called the *Jacquerie* and in England under Wat Tyler were examples. Up to a hundred years ago if a rising did take place it became a butchery and in the end it was crushed. But the successful result of the French Revolution furnished an object lesson. It lost part of its moral force when the ambition of the great Napoleon induced him to attempt to enslave all other nations. The result was, in the end, good. He awoke national sentiment, and we see to-day united Germany, united Italy—two great nations entirely reconstructed since his time. Spain preserved her individuality and remained intact. In these nations the poorer classes, finding that they have established their nationality as against foreigners are now turning their attention to domestic difficulties. The despotic rule of kaiser or king has ended. The arbitrary rule of aristocracy is rapidly closing. Were it not for the German patriotic fear of possible external attack the social system of that empire would soon be changed. But the map of Europe is by no means finally blotted out. The French still consider Alsace and Lorraine theirs. They will never be content until they get them back. That they will attempt to recover these Provinces is as sure as that to-morrow will succeed to-day. That hybrid production, the Austro-Hungarian empire, will not stand. The German Provinces of Austria will go back to Germany where they naturally belong. The east coast of the Adriatic is the cry of the *Italia irredenta* party. The Austrian Emperor will be once more the Emperor of the East. The Turks will be driven back out of Europe and the seat of the Eastern Empire transferred from Vienna to Constantinople. Before this settlement is made Russia will have something to say. For twenty years the Great Bear has been asleep. What will be his move when he wakes up? Will it be to find that the own children are tearing him, or will it be to find that the Prussian and Austrian eagles are picking him to pieces?

England, with her widely extended line of colonies and dependencies, has also her anxieties. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link and there are many weak links in the chain of England's strength. Her most secure possession would seem to be Australia. Her most doubtful, India. Her most vulnerable, Canada. Imperial statesmen have much to think of and guard against before they decide on a given line of action.

Considering all these political contingencies the cause for anxiety is very great.

On this continent the difficulties seem social not political. In Europe they are both social and political, and England also shares both kinds.

Social troubles arise from too great wealth as well as too little wealth. The corruption and vice among the wealthier classes in our age have had their parallel in earlier times. Most striking passages from Horace or Juvenal can be reproduced exactly depicting the immoralities of modern life. Lucretius describes the unrest and discontent which to-day accompany the possession of wealth. From the works of these men and from other authors we are able to judge very accurately of the state of society in the Roman Empire at its height. It would be hard to find two periods more alike in their characteristics than those days and our own.

On this continent, in the older settled parts of the United States and in some of the Western cities where great wealth has suddenly accumulated, discouraging symptoms of rottenness are but too evident. In such communities, wherever situate, the men appear to be largely thieves and the women chiefly prostitutes.

The poorer classes know of these things. They have been taught and they have the newspaper press. They know their power. Here is the cause of the terrible strikes which have occurred in the United States during the last few years. That there will be more of them nobody can doubt. The first time they were put down by police, then by special detective forces with rifles, then by infantry regiments of militia, and latterly by cavalry and artillery. That is sitting on the safety valve with a vengeance, and it will not stop the explosion.

Another bad sign is the selfishness of politicians—anything to make a point. The debates in the United States Senate and the delays in settling their fiscal policy are attributable more than anything else to the utter want of what may be called official morality in the members of American legislative bodies. This country is not without this taint, but it has not become here a matter of course.

Beyond and above all these causes for uneasiness come the increase of population, the competition, the desire to enjoy as necessities what but a few years ago were unknown luxuries. The rush to the cities and the desertion of the fields follow. Where is it all to end? The pessimist finds much to make him doubt. The optimist, especially if he is a true born Briton, has a happy-go-lucky confidence that it will come out all right in the end. But if ever there was a time for us in this country to set our house in order and try and keep our skirts clear, it is now. Happy are the people who have no history. If history means what seems likely to happen any day in Europe or across the line, may we Canadians have just as little of it in the future as in the past.

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The Revolt Against Decadence.

IT is a curious reflection that the pessimistic note of the latter day novel may in part be accounted for by the simple fact that human beings are born with ten fingers and ten toes. But, according to the evolutionist, it is owing to this provision of nature that we have adopted the decimal system of notation, and, as a result of this system, we reckon our time by centuries, and the nineteenth century is drawing to a close. Although the division is purely arbitrary it has given rise to a number of catch phrases, such as "fin de siècle," "dying century," and the like, all of which have had an influence—purely ephemeral, let us hope—on the tone of modern thought and modern literature. And, just as the phrases themselves cropped up somewhat prematurely, so the reaction has set in, and the twilight of a false dawn began to glimmer, a little before the time appointed by the almanacs for the commencement of a new era. The nineteenth century is dying, says the new school, and it is time that the false old creeds, the outworn old superstitions, should die too. Marriage is a blunder, virtue is a slavish adherence to conventionalism, the love of nature, of open air, of out-door life, is a retrogression to barbarism, in fact not only is Pan dead, but by this time he stinketh. The women we have worshipped, the women our mothers were, and our sisters are, are an artistic mistake; they are not the true type, so away with them, and set up in their place the real thing, the woman with a past, the Second Mrs. Tanqueray, Norah Helmer, the Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith!

It is a truism that if you only reiterate an assertion often and authoritatively enough, somebody will be found to