

## EDITORIAL NOTES.

## The Present Decadence.

MAX NORDAU wrote "Degeneration" because its theme was in the atmosphere of the age. His mistake was in attributing the decadence to physical or physiological rather than to moral causes. The fact of an intellectual and moral decadence, of at least a temporary character, seems to be well-nigh indisputable. The great enterprises of the past generation—the anti-slavery conflict and the Civil War in this country, and the great European agitations and wars—seem to have left the world flaccid and inert, shorn of high aim, purpose, and activity. Mr. Austin Bierbower wrote in *The Independent*, not long since, as follows:

"Of late, however, there is a widespread feeling that we have nothing to do; and the people, like idlers, are devising specious tasks for themselves, mostly means of recreation. We are in a period of dilettantism. It is the age of bric-a-brac in art, of ceremonies and entertainments in religion, and of dress in society.

"Scholars gossip in clubs instead of debate in lyceums, and college students are known chiefly as football players. No new philosophies have been conceived in this age, no great poems have appeared or remarkable adventures. It is an age of mediocrity, in which many come forward in every department, but none are conspicuous. The whole world has been recently convulsed over a wedding. A superficial book on Bohemianism has made the greatest success in literature. The principal interest in politics is an easy way to pay debts. Socialism is as deep as the public can see into government. Claptrap interests men, and public officials are capitalists instead of statesmen.

"Is all this an evidence of decadence, or is it inseparable from a long career of peace? When the great questions are settled must the people turn to the small? If anything important interested us we might go to war, whereas now peace is maintained by having nothing to fight for. Such a languid feeling as the present could hardly be roused to war. We are not interested enough to dispute seriously, much less fight.

"We are making some progress, indeed, in the refinements of life; and perhaps advancing in a slow way by catching up with the great projects conceived when men were more vigorous. But when an age is refining, it is usually doing little else. The people are polishing what they forced in the last generation. This is a period of rhetoric, when men try to say nicely, instead of think greatly. It gives fewer thoughts to the world than it restates. By correcting and beautifying the more vigorous productions of other periods, it does its characteristic work.

"Life is not as serious as it was thirty years ago, when men lived for something. The question then was, How to do, whereas it is now, How to live. Instead of acting,

men are behaving; and the amenities of life are our chief interest. Trying chiefly to get rid of the attritions of society, we are learning how to use what we have, rather than getting anything for humanity. We are in a period of adjustment, and exercised over what to do with ourselves. The present problem is mainly to keep men good, or rather to keep them proper. Social life is about the highest problem we are considering.

"Men need to be recalled to the vigorous. The struggles of life must be entered to produce a strong people. There is need of some of the old Puritan earnestness. Life should be more serious, and lived on a larger scale. The pleasures take too prominent a place, as in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The ablest minds are largely engaged in amusing the people. The drama is the chief department that prospers; and the greatest thing now seen is an opera or pageant. We are celebrating great deeds instead of doing them.

"If we are to be much in the near future we must look around for greater undertakings. There is enough to be done to make heroes. Tho no new worlds can be discovered or races freed, there are lines of enterprise waiting to be pursued. Africa is yet to be settled and reduced to civilization; a new basis is to be found for social life; religion is to be conformed to science, and perhaps a new *Instauratio*, greater than Bacon's, is to be applied to interpret the world. The Nineteenth Century need not go out in a dwindling anticlimax."

## The Northfield Conference.

THE Bible is evidently not an obsolete book yet, notwithstanding all the small talk to that effect. It is being more discussed and more written about to-day than all other books together. The Northfield Conference—held every August under the guidance of Mr. Moody—is an illustration of the intense interest that centers in the Book of books. Commenting upon the recent Conference a reporter of the *New York Tribune* writes:

"There is no doubt that the good people here have a rapt expression which may be best described as the Bible face; but, what is far better, they have the Bible heart as well. Their profound religious earnestness and their passionate devotion to the Bible can not be questioned. When they walk about the grounds, even if only to get the air, they carry their Bibles with them. Such a book is more than literature; more, even, than divine revelation. It is the spiritual history of a soul—its hopes, its fears, its aspirations, its fierce conflicts with evil, and at last its final victory."

Is not the present a favorable time for establishing a wide and wise study of the Bible in the churches? We wish our readers would think and plan about it so that the way may be prepared for a concerted movement in this direction.