

## Mr. Ford's Page

**I**T HAS become common and almost boresome to say that we are on the threshold of a new era. It ought to be one of the most startling announcements that anyone could make or hear. But it has always been true that great changes have come over the human race, never to be noticed until, a century after, some observing soul has said, "That was a great period back there one hundred years ago." We understand gunshots and wars and industrial failures and depression, but the real changes of which these are the passing signs, go mostly over our heads.

The trouble is we don't realize that the "new era" is going to mean something to us—something different than we have supposed. We think everything is going to be lovely and that the world is to be humored along in its old ways.

In short, when it is said that we are entering a new era it is accepted as meaning that now, at last, things are going to be very nearly what we lazily wanted them to be.

We have been using the phrase for comfort, when really it is challenge.

If it were said that tomorrow we are to wake up on another continent to make our lives over again, it would not be regarded as a very soothing sort of statement. We should find it hard to lie back in our chairs and say, "Well, times are going to be all right again." The knowledge that we were to begin anew, under unknown conditions, would keep us awake and alert.

You remember how it was when you went to school. It was great to be promoted, but the "next grade" was never viewed with ease of mind. That "next grade" loomed up before you with its unknown tests and tasks, and your mind was set to grapple with something bigger than you had yet encountered.

Well, something like that should be our feeling when we contemplate the fact that we are entering upon a "new era." It is the next grade. We are not going back to retravel familiar ground, we are entering upon a new continent with new tests and new tasks. The past is past in a double sense now; not only is the Time that made it, gone; but the temper and principles out of which it was built are gone too.

All the mature generations of today have grown up in the era of their own fathers. There were improvements upon their fathers' times, of course, but the general period was the same. Sires and sons were in the same "grade," so to speak, one nearer the beginning of the "term," the other nearer the end. The sons have now come to the end of the "term." The road ahead is untraveled. The conditions to be passed are new.

Just why this comes about as it does, no one knows. It would be useless to guess. Something has been switched off, and something else has been switched on. The time that was, is not; the time that is to be, begins. One course of lessons has been finished, the doors of the next "grade" open.

There seems to be a difference, however. In school, there is an examination. The standard you maintain in your examination determines your fitness to leave the lower grade. In the present change that is reversed; examinations will determine whether we are fit to enter the higher grade—the new era. It is quite possible that in matters of character a man stays on the lower plane until he is ready to enter the higher plane; but when the new era is fully arrived there will not be vestiges of the old era left—all the people will be New Era People who have shown themselves fit to be promoted. The others will have vanished as worn-out and unprogressive races have always vanished.

You see, therefore, that it is more than an eloquent flourish of words to say that "we are on the threshold of a new era." It is as startling to the individual as was the announcement of the new conscription law in 1917. The question for every individual is,

What will it mean to me? Am I fit to be one of the New Era People? Am I going to pass the examination requirements into the new time?

The test is going to be made all down the line, but it is going to begin at what we call the "top." There will always be leaders. Even in anarchic Russia they have leaders—very hard leaders, too. Leaders are necessary and have a special part to play and bear an extra degree of responsibility. We say leaders are at the "top," presumably because they ought to be found at the head of the column. And that is where the testing and weeding out is to commence.

It is in process now. We are not speaking of something that will begin next year; we are speaking of what has silently overshadowed the world for several years. It is a Day of Judgment for the leaders of the old era. If they cannot pass their examinations, if their faces are not toward the future, if their hearts are not more devoted to righteousness than to the preservation of some old and respected iniquity, they fail. They disappear. New leaders take their places.

Look where you will—in railroading, in banking, in manufacturing, in commerce, in teaching or preaching, in making newspapers, in farming—everywhere the New Era is crowding in and is crowding out those who are against its coming. It is not merely a matter of new and better ways of doing things, but a new and better spirit and purpose in doing them. There have been New Era People in the world for some time, but they have been rated as "fools"; now their day is come.

This is news worth while for the young fellow. It is genuine news. He has been hearing for a long time past that opportunity was pretty well sewed up. Indeed, certain labor leaders have written and preached that no one has any right to expect to improve his condition in the world, that "the laboring class" constituted an iron-bound caste out of which it was practically impossible for anyone to break.

Of course, no one ever breaks out of "the laboring class" unless he turns gambler or some other sort of financial criminal. Honest men stay in "the laboring class" all their lives. But this is what the false teachers mean: that a man need not hope to rise to his own level of ambition and ability in the laboring class, and that is false. This is the New Era, and New Era People are in demand to fill the places of old era leaders who failed in their examinations; and the present time is the most glorious period to be young

and ambitious. There wasn't much chance during the last years of the old era, that is why it closed so quickly. But it is morning again and a new day is full of opportunity.

The only "hold overs" from the old era are the qualities which gave it its worth. They are the old-fashioned virtues of honesty, industry and courage. They are just as necessary now as in the first year after the Independence of the United States or the first year after the Civil War. In fact, they are never out of date. Many people seem to think that the New Era is merely another chance for them to work their old games, cheating the laws of value, the laws of work, and every other good law. Not at all. The old era died of these old games, and died in discreditable circumstances, too.

Rewards will not be less but greater in the New Era. New Era People are going to produce as much or more, but they are going to have a larger share in it, they will live broader lives. The world is going to continue practical—always practical—even more practical than before, because the world was not practical while it tried to break the laws of value, and work, and justice. Some people had the notion that in the New Era we were to sit down under the trees and spin beautiful theories. No; we are going to spin beautiful realities on the loom of more and better work.

***IF THEY knew all that the New Era meant, some people would not talk about it so glibly. We say "the New Era is here" as if it were a comfort; it is a challenge. Only New Era People will be permitted to enter the new time. The next grade is open only to those who pass the examination. The combing out process will begin—has begun—with the leaders. It is going all the way down the line. New Era People are going to move up into the leaders' places. The old era was one of beautiful theories; the New Era will be one of beautiful realities.***

***The last bad years of the old era bred the lie—"no chance for an honest man; every decent opportunity is sewed up." The New Era has ripped off the bars and thrown open the doors.***