



Mr. Ford's Page

THE perennial charm of the cradle and the child is three parts mystery. Not of the veiled "whence" nor of the far distant veiled "whither," but of the next 20 or 30 years. The child will live, will unfold its human qualities and out of the center of these will come an individuality which will act and be reacted on by circumstance, being changed a little perhaps, but being more causative of change—another mystery: the action of the world on man, and of man on the world.

Reduced to practical terms, as they relate to the individual's own welfare, his success and service in life, it comes to about this: that the child in the cradle, or the young man emerging from college, have not come into the kind of world that will be the arena of their mature activity, but are moving toward it. The world in which they shall work is yet to appear. Can they foresee what like it will be? Can they get themselves ready to be abreast the times when the "times" arrive?

Take a young man just entering upon life, or looking forward with the uncertainty and hesitancy of boyhood to a future career, or set on fire for some special line of work because his hero is in that line. Or take a young man just emerging from college and earnestly casting about for the best way to bestow his gifts on the world. What is the best view for such a one to take?

Usually the very one he does not take. It is the present world that engages most men, that is, the world of the present minute. One of the natural defects of our nature is that our first reaction to the world is to accept it as it is. We accept the world of affairs as we accept the sun and the stars: there they are—they are fixtures—we must just accept them—it never occurs to anyone that perhaps the solar system could be changed. In like manner young men accept the world.

And so they begin to lay their plans on the basis of the world as it is. Whether consciously or not, they assume that things are to remain pretty much the same—same kind of railroads, same methods of doing business, same kind of clothes, same kind of machinery, same methods of farming, and so on throughout the realm of human action.

Now that is just where the young man usually dooms himself to a place in the great army of the camp followers of progress. He places himself entirely at the mercy of the world of the present moment, quite regardless of the fact that the world of the present moment isn't going to last very long. There was a blacksmith up the road who saw a motor car one day, and his mind ran ahead ten years. He has a fine garage now and does an honest, prosperous business. He wasn't "driven out of business by the automobile" as some other men were. He put himself forward into the world of the future—"dipped into the future," as the poet says—and was ready for it.

If young men could receive into their minds this plain thought that the world they are living in now is not the world they will live in 10 or 20 years hence, they will thus receive an addition to their education that is worth while.

It is every young man's right to "dip into the future" as far as his eye can see, and he can do this only if he will cast a critical eye on the world that is.

The world of the present moment is very impressive, no doubt. It is specially impressive to the young man who stands looking at it as at an untried ocean. It overwhelms him. It challenges him. And if he is overawed by it all, he is its conquered man for a long time. But if he, by an act of his will, puts himself above the scheme of things as we long-time toilers have worked them out, and will challenge that scheme of things without waiting to be challenged by it, it will be far better for him.

Of course, he will receive some bumps. That is inevitable. A certain amount of bumptiousness seems to go with independence of vision, but that is soon smothered out—the bumps take it out. He will discover, as the result of his challenge, that some things are here to stay. And the things thus discovered are not man-made, they are inherent in the nature of things, which one learns afterward to respect.

But all man-made methods of doing the work of the world and supplying the needs of humanity and organizing our common life so that it may flow on naturally and prosperously for all, are fair targets for his challenge. Let him examine them and see if it is not possible they are already in flux and may present entirely different aspects 10 or 20 years hence.

A great many things are going to change. If horses disappear, we will not need to worry about inventing new ways to cut hay.

It would be entirely useless to spend valuable years inventing a new way to cut hay for a possibly hayless age. If cows are to disappear, the problems of pasturage and fertilizer and the handling of flesh-made milk need not long detain the searcher after a place to serve.

But there remain the three great arts—Agriculture, Transportation, Manufacture: are these to continue forever in the same old grooves? Very likely not. Here, then, is where the young man should constitute himself a listening critic, to see if he can hear whispering out of the future the things that are yet to be in these fields.

Railroading will change, beyond a doubt. Farming is already in process of change—there are no farmers now as we shall see them one or two or three decades hence. There is every reason to believe that our methods of education, worship and dissemination of news will undergo modifications.

There is no reason whatever why schools should go on in the way they now go, and a thousand reasons why they should not. Can you foresee how they shall go? There is nothing specially sacred about assembling at 10:30 in the morning and having a stated form of meeting. The time may come when the congregation may question the minister, and the meeting become a class or a consultation, with a much more direct aim at the needs of the persons assembled. There is no reason whatever why baseball, for example, should live or die because of the skill or weakness of professionally paid ball players: suppose that future baseball would consist of 5,000 teams in every city—a real sport actively indulged in by the lovers of it. Some have wondered whether it is accurate to call that a "sport" in which thousands of spectators sit on board seats while a few uniformed men earn their salaries.

And take newspapers: the dissemination of news will continue, beyond a doubt, but will the medium of news always be the newspaper? Possibly not. Suppose someone started a research organization of which you could become a member on payment of a fee, with the right to inquire: "Just what are the facts about this man, or that question, or this problem?"

Many things are going to be done differently and better than they have been done, and it is the wise young man who will take this into consideration. If he can get half a clue as to what kind of world he is really going to live in—which is not the world as it now carries on—he has an advantage which is better than any amount of money or power. He has a leverage on life.

Look at the world critically. Ask everything you see: "Are you the best that can be done? Are you but a stage in the development of some better thing, and if so, which way are you going? Are you actually filling a need, or only recognizing that a need exists?" When asked these questions, even inanimate things often disgorge a wealth of valuable information.

THE world of twenty or thirty years hence will be much different from the world of today, which makes it rather foolish for young men to lay their plans as if their world of action is to be the one they now see. The best exercise a young man can take is that of forward-looking. "Dip into the future" far as your eye can see. Instead of being imposed upon by the world of the present, challenge it, ask how it can be pruned, revised, discarded, made over. It is certain to change, and if you can foresee in what particulars, you are that much ahead. The future belongs to young men: they of all persons ought not to settle down into well-worn grooves as if the world were finished.