

Mr. Ford's Page



YOU cannot have failed to notice the change which has come over the prophets since the end of the war. They began by assuring us that we were on the eve of one of the most magnificent developments of good-will and prosperity which the world had ever seen. Everybody was scanning the horizon to see the sunrise of the Good Time Coming. But gradually the tone of forecast changed. Disappointment and disillusionment seized upon all the people. A poisonous unrest crept in everywhere. It seemed that actual disintegration was about to take apart all that mankind had built up, until, at the present time, the tone of the prophets is distinctly one of gloomy foreboding.

Can we interpret all this? Can we find its meaning? Can we cast off our dependence on the prophets and see the signs of the times for ourselves?

We may dismiss the prophets very easily. In fact, they were not prophets at all. They were merely reporters of the mood of the hour in which they spoke. They did not really foresee what was about to come, they merely saw what the mood of the hour was and they saw to what high achievements it would lead if it were made continuous and productive. In their rosy outlooks at the end of the war they were right this far—what they foresaw *could* have taken place if the people had wished it. All the good things foretold *might have been realized* if the people had known their opportunity and grasped it. The new time was not impossible; it was right on the threshold waiting to come in; but we did not open the door to it. What the prophets saw was *there* undoubtedly, but we did not take it.

And why? Well, we were not big enough nor civilized enough. We have just the kind of world we are big enough to have, and it is quite possible that some additional discipline is necessary to enlarge our minds and our inner natures to the dimensions which shall be ample enough to let a new era come in.

Is it not amazing, when you stop to think of it, that at the height of the war when the energies of the world were harnessed to the task of killing, the people of this and every nation, and the nations themselves, were more united than they now are in time of peace?

Is it not a serious indictment of human nature in the mass that we can be amalgamated for works of violence, and yet cannot be held together for works of construction, prosperity and peace? Is it not strange, when you consider it steadily, that you could get millions of men to fight, where hardly hundreds would enlist in the equally patriotic work of building up again what was destroyed?

Yet so it is, and it would be out of all harmony with the laws of cause and effect if a world which has rejected so great an opportunity should not be required to pay for it in some fashion.

THERE are men who tell us that we may expect hard times within a comparatively few months. They say that a panic is surely coming. The Jeremiahs have completely ousted the Isaiahs from the prophetic seat.

And what are we to think of these foretellings of doom? Exactly what we think about the former prophecies of a good time coming: if we want the panic, we can have it; just as we might have had the new era far on its way by this time, if the people had taken their opportunity.

Let this be very clear in your mind: nothing will come, either good or bad, unless we want it. We have to make the conditions first; they do not come, they are created.

The only good that one can see in these prophecies of gloom is that they might stir up the people to a sense of their economic responsibility. People who would not make the sacrifices and the compromises necessary for the opening up of the new era, may perhaps be induced to take the precautions which shall prevent the coming of economic distress. One need not say that distress is coming; one must, however, say that *changes* are coming of whose

nature we are not wholly aware. And whether these changes are to weigh down upon us heavily, or are to be a side-path toward a better condition, is absolutely for ourselves to determine. We can have it either way we wish. If the people could only root out of their minds the superstition that governments regulate these matters, if they could only rid themselves of the false idea that some new and magical ideas are necessary, we should then have a clear ground for action. Governments are only the legislative clerks of the people, and as far as miraculous ideas are concerned, the only sound ideas are those which have existed since the beginning of society, and which are as plain as A B C—so plain, in fact, that the people have overlooked their supreme importance.

If you knew that famine was coming, what would you do? You would work hard so that you would have enough food to tide yourself and family over the period of want. You would advise everyone to produce the things that were needed to live. You would seek to make up in advance the lacks which the needy time would bring.

And what would be the result? Why, when the lean year came, it would be a lean year in name only, because man's foresight and industry had discounted its worst qualities. That is exactly what we are to do now. New laws will not do it. New governments will not do it. *Nothing but old-fashioned work and thrift will do it.* If changes are coming, we ought to be ready for them. If we have the necessities of life on hand in abundance, we can pass safely through every change. Those who have enough for themselves should produce for others. The common stock must be made ample, and then we can survive without acute distress whatever may come.

WHY is it that men will disregard these simple, true and sure ways of protecting themselves, and seek new and fantastic ways which look better in oratory than they do in operation? What is this obstinate quality in human nature which blinds it to its best good?

The value of this course is that if we enter upon it earnestly, the changes we foresee will be robbed of their sting and will turn into beneficent changes. It is the distress, the destruction they can cause that makes changes good or bad. When they cannot cause distress, they turn out usually to be good changes.

The world has lost one opportunity to remake itself; let it not lose the present opportunity to save itself greater confusion than the war brought. No doubt one day in the future we shall regain our lost opportunity to make the world a league of peace and mutual help, but

before that we shall probably have to pass through an intermediate time of testing, the results of which will rest solely on our willingness to work and be thrifty.

There is not any distinct willingness to work now; there is not any general tendency to thrift. We are caught in eddies of side issues, none of which will feed us or sustain us if a slump should hit the world. There is no excuse whatever for the United States suffering. It cannot overproduce in a world that needs all it can make; if it suffers at all, it will be from under-production, and this can mean only idleness and luxurious living.

Some men say, "If we produce, it is only for the capitalists!" Wholly wrong. If we produce now, and times become dark, what we have produced will constitute a common stock. If we have no stock in the country, what will it matter that the "capitalists" have none, if the workers have none either?

Any way you look at it, our duty is to keep on working at the production of useful things—food and all that goes to the work of raising food, as well as all that goes to the sustenance of life, and those things which make for human happiness.

It isn't a duty for this or that large aggregation—it is the duty of every individual. Every man in his place—every man on his job—every man producing for today's necessities, and a little extra against tomorrow's possible need.

ARE we going to have hard times? Some prophets say we are. Not long ago the prophets told us we were going to have a better world after the war. It is not a better world, but it might have been. The prophets saw what could have transpired if the people had wanted it. And the same is true of their vision of bad times—we can have them if we want them; we are not compelled to have economic distress unless we want it. The United States can hardly suffer need if it will produce what it needs to live on.