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Atheistic Diagnoses of the Coming Age

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glauben. Indem der Glaube da ist, ist der Heilige Geist da und anders nicht. Der Heilige Geist ist nicht ein Besitz, der durch innere Wahrnehmung kann gefunden werden. Auch an den Besitz des Glaubens müssen wir glauben, gemäß dem Wort . . .: „Ich glaube, Herr; hilf meinem Unglauben!“ Vom Heiligen Geist sind wir dann und nur dann erfüllt, wenn wir aufhören, in uns zu schauen, und einfach dem Christus außer uns glauben.“ Dies ist wohl stark philosophisch und zuweilen etwas paradox geredet, stimmt aber sonst im großen und ganzen. Diese Objektivität gab eben der Glaubensstellung Luthers in diesen Jahren das Gepräge. Seine Lehrstellung mag damals noch nicht in allen Punkten richtig gewesen sein, aber seine persönliche Glaubens- und zum Teil auch seine Bekenntnisstellung, soweit seine Erkenntnis damals reichte, stand jedenfalls durchaus im Einklang mit Gottes Wort.

P. E. Kreßmann.

Atheistic Diagnoses of the Coming Age.¹⁾

There is an undefined fear working on the minds of good Christian people throughout the world in our day. The North American Republic has achieved notable successes in a political way and has unquestionably decided the fortunes of the great World War. It has become a dominant factor in the world of industry, commerce, and finance. It is no longer a quasi-hermit nation on the Western Continent, separated by two great oceans from the rest of the world, but is to-day a world-power of the first magnitude, perhaps the determinant world-power, and her doings are warily watched, her counsels eagerly sought, her cooperation solicitously desired, by other nations.

For a brief spell there was unbounded rejoicing "when the boys came home," those that were left from the slaughter and carnage on foreign battle-fields. But there did not seem to be genuine joy in the jubilation, and it soon subsided, leaving men in a rather somber and reflective state of mind, as after a senseless orgy.

The great epidemic that was ravaging the nation at the same time when the news of our great achievements abroad were flashed to us no doubt checked the exuberance of spirits to a great extent. But that was not the only damper put on our elation. People were becoming perplexed how to interpret correctly what had happened. Had we really "made the world safe for democracy," when Socialism, Communism, Bolshevism, were spreading apace and constitutional

1) The bulk of this paper as here given was read about ten years ago before the St. Louis *Eintagskonferenz*, at Concordia Theological Seminary. Discernible trends and developments since then only add emphasis to the review here attempted.—D.

governments were being exchanged for dictatorships? There was continuing in the industries working by the famous American principle of mass production the feverishness that would not permit them to descend from their abnormal war-time to normal peace-time levels. Rapacious interests were felt to be at work in vast schemes of exploitation. Huge ground-swells in the area of finance were shaking confidence in the old order of things. But, worst of all, there were ominous mutterings of a moral and religious revolution, emanating from the highest seats of learning and culture, that plainly asserted a complete overthrow of cherished beliefs and modes of living.

The news service of the world has become notoriously bad and unreliable; it has been vitiated for purposes of selfish propaganda. Readers of the great dailies are told chiefly what some one wants them to know and believe.

Hints that the world has not really arrived at a just and satisfactory settlement of its troubles and that great, mysterious changes are impending have produced a nameless terror which haunts the minds of men and looks out, ghostlike, from between the lines of much of our periodical and book literature.

A recent writer in one of the foremost religious monthlies of America takes evident delight in serving us the following intelligence: "The curtain begins to rise upon a new world, as different from that of Washington and Lincoln as theirs was different from that of the Objibways and Iroquois. The agriculture-handicraft stage is ended; the machine-manufacture stage has arrived. But the accompanying social changes are only just begun. They will be as numerous, revolutionary, and far-reaching as the social changes which accompanied the shift from hunting to agriculture. All our institutions—government, the family, international relations, religion, the moral customs, property, law, art, and the technical environment—will be profoundly modified. Indeed, we stand upon the threshold of a new world. The future is pregnant with a new and higher civilization, as different from ours and as unpicturable to our imagination as ours would have been to the cave-men. The Great War is the birth-pangs; in its more fundamental aspects it is the struggle between the old order and the new. Social revolutions are sure to follow with a sweep and a rush and to assume proportions almost apocalyptic. Out of these convulsions will be born a new social order in which 'man to man, the world o'er, shall brothers be for a' that.' *The kingdom of God is indeed at hand; readjust your minds and receive the good news.*"²⁾

For months alarming statements, some even more drastic than

2) Ross L. Finney, Ph. D., Professor of Education in the State Normal School of North Dakota, in *Biblical World*, November, 1918, p. 228. Italics ours.

the one just quoted, have abounded in our reading-matter. Most of us, I think, when perusing these pronouncements, are struck by two observations: on the one hand, the great personal assurance with which the writers fling their utterances into the public; and on the other hand, the extreme indistinction, I might almost say the studied vagueness, with which they deliver their cock-sure prognostications. Any responsible person who writes or speaks like the author whom I quoted will be assumed to be a person who knows whereof he is speaking, a man well informed, who has observed the signs of the times and the trend of events more accurately than the average person. As a rule, we like such a person. But a feeling of disgust steals upon us when we make an attempt to grasp concrete facts that seemed to be embodied in what we read or heard. We perceive that our interesting author is not as informing as we thought he was; he has "darkened counsel by words," Job 38, 2. We find ourselves hugging shadows and feel duped. To the simple person who has not yet grasped the journalistic situation of the day; who still reads papers, magazines, books, for the old-fashioned purpose of informing himself on topics of the times in order that in his humbler station he may think fairly correct thoughts and act his little part in the drama of life with some degree of intelligence,—to such a person this ceaseless din about new age, new Church, new religion, new life, reconstruction, readjustment, becomes actually tantalizing. He desires to know at what particular point or points he is to witness the vast changes to which he is to adjust himself; and when he fails in this and remembers the terrible, ominous ring in the predictions which he has read or heard, he says to himself: Maybe the man is afraid to speak his mind fully because he himself dreads the thing which he foresees, or he fears to rouse too much antagonism if he makes himself too plain.

Still, we must try to get as close to facts as we can. Suppose, now, the changes that are coming should be very much greater than those that came with the invention of machinery or with the arrival of the white man on this continent, what can they affect? They can affect the essentials of human life as little as did those in the past. Births and deaths, health and disease, labor and rest, have remained the same since the white race took from the redskin the hunting-grounds of his homeland. At its two terminal points human life has retained its old stereotype forms. Twentieth-century babes are not exhaled from lilies and roses, spite of modern eugenics; they are born flesh of flesh, morally tainted and impotent, as of yore. Nor does the modern man in his death hour evaporate into the vast cerulean; he dies as Adam did and goes to face his Maker and Judge. The needs of human life, food and shelter, have remained the same regardless of the coming of the Cavaliers to Virginia, of the Puri-

tans to Cape Cod Bay, and of the Dutchmen to the valley of the Hudson. These needs have had to be supplied from the same old source, this earth, on which God's sun shines and His rain falls impartially to serve all. Nor will this arrangement ever change. The Voice that said: "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease," Gen. 8, 22, has decreed that the basic conditions under which human life is to exist on our globe shall remain unaltered and hopelessly old-fashioned. The men who announce the great changes that are supposed to be just around the corner know this, too. They urge us to work. That is old-fashioned. Some, not many, ask us to pray. That's old-fashioned. We are told that we must be economical and save. Again old-fashioned! Looking back to 1620 and comparing conditions then with conditions now, we find that only details in the forms and methods of living and procuring our livelihood have changed, but not a single essential. Forms may change again, but again no change will reach down to the rock-bottom, basic conditions of man's life. If all that we shall be called upon to adapt ourselves to is only accidental changes in our mode of living, that will be easy. Fact is, we have been doing that very thing with the advent of every new invention. If that is all that is meant, there would be no need to talk so ominously about our mysterious future.

Nor can anything that is going to happen alter the old moral difference among men which is expressed by the primeval terms of good and bad, or sin and righteousness. This line of division will also continue to run through the life of each individual person because there will always be an individual human conscience. The inner life of men will bring on the old battles with selfishness, concupiscence, and carnal-mindedness. No psychology, biology, and metaphysics will change that. They may only make the battles fiercer because the old adversary has become more wily, being a graduate scholar and expert of every modern science. If a readjustment is demanded at this point, that, too, will be accomplished without our jumping out of our skins.

But it is not really along these lines that we are to look for the coming reconstruction. Among the nine objects which our author names as things that are going to be revolutionized he has slipped in the term "religion." It seems that here is to come the one really great change which he anticipates; for he singles religion out for a special remark afterwards, when he says: "A magazine writer declared a few years ago that we are standing at the death-bed of a great religion. Many of the old dogmas and incentives are dead. In that sense it was true. But the old religion is dead only as a seed is dead when it germinates in the ground. The germ of the

old faith is bursting into a new and larger life. As a matter of fact we are witnessing the birth of a new religion more truly Christian than any the world has ever known. And if it grows promptly into a vigorous maturity, it will give us a new and Christian world."

And now this author becomes really intelligible when he proceeds: "The new religion must shift its appeal from the individualistic to the social, group-preserving instincts. The old Christianity appealed directly to the instinct of self-preservation. The Pauline theology provided a plan of personal salvation for the individual—altruism was a by-product of the act of faith. But Jesus placed the religious life on a different basis altogether. He offered the kingdom of God as a glorious cause, in self-forgetful service of which the disciple may lose himself. Personal salvation was an incidental by-product of such discipleship. He thus appealed directly, explicitly, and overtly to the altruistic, social, group-preserving impulses in human nature. The new Christianity must revert unequivocally from Paul to Jesus. *This is the core of the new reformation.*"³⁾

This we can understand. This author expects a new Christianity to arise which will be minus the so-called Pauline theology. That is, it will dispense with the teaching of the total depravity of all men and their natural unfitness for serving God and their fellow-men; with the teaching of their alienation from, and their innate enmity against, God; with the teaching of the atonement and expiation of man's guilt by the vicarious living and dying of Christ, the sinners' ransom; with the teaching of justification by a pure act of the free grace of God, based on the satisfaction which Christ rendered to the holy Law of God, which the sinner had broken and was ever breaking; of the teaching of regeneration into a new spiritual life for the sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, by repentance over sins and faith in the pardoning mercy of God. All these teachings were not invented by Paul, but taken over from the teachings of Jesus, expanded, and applied. The new non-Pauline Christianity will not require that the doer of any good deed, acceptable to God and his fellow-men, must first be made good himself by a divine act of regenerating and converting grace, but will assume that he is naturally good and can do good as he is. The new non-Pauline theology will reap without having sown and gather figs and grapes from thorns and thistles. Furthermore, this new theology will frown on the concern of the individual Christian for his own soul and his final salvation; it will deprecate the spirit of other-worldliness, the "conversation in heaven" of men still walking on earth, heaven, and "that blessed hope" which is yearning in Christians for the consummation of their faith and the perfection in glory. It is going to make

3) *Ibidem*, p. 231. Italics ours.

this world a better place to live in, and let it go at that. As to the world to come, everybody will hope for the best for everybody.

This new Christianity will be able to dispense with the entire Old Testament and its hideous God of wrath and vengeance. It can also afford to do without the last half of the New Testament entirely and reduce the first half, the four gospels, to the limits of the knowledge of natural religion. We know this new social Christianity with its altruistic emphasis sufficiently to anticipate that the reconstruction which it will begin for us will eliminate the God-man Redeemer and the Triune God of our Creed, possibly also the idea of a personal God altogether. It may retain a certain amount of Christian verbiage and hide behind the veil of Christian forms and ceremonies, but it will be antichristian at the core.

But the tendency of the new age is portrayed to us with still greater clearness by others who have less regard for old Christian sentiments. One of these is Roy Wood Sellars in his book *The Next Step in Religion: An Essay toward the Coming Renaissance*. The author maintains that there are no spiritual values in men and their lives; for he denies that there is spirit within them. They are merely animate matter. He calls himself a humanist, but should really be called a dehumanist, because by his materialistic presuppositions he has dehumanized men. He is very much interested in what he calls the rights and interests of men and wishes to secure their happiness. But that happiness is to be completed here in time, within the existing world order. He speaks of Jesus in an apologetic sort of way and winds up his account of Him with the remark that he hopes to be forgiven for his "relatively conservative" position, which he has assumed by admitting that "such a person as Jesus ever lived."

Professor James, up to his death the leading representative of the psychologists in religion in America, has said: "At present psychology is on the materialistic tack and ought in the interest of ultimate success to be allowed full headway even by those who are certain she will never fetch port without putting down the helm once more." Again: "As there seems to be no elementary religious emotion, . . . so there might conceivably also prove to be no specific and essential kind of religious object."⁴) This is the twentieth-century way of a cultured gentleman for saying the same thing which Tom Paine and Bob Ingersoll told the masses more plainly and drastically. For this movement we are to make room, even when we see it rushing under full canvas into the maelstrom.

Prof. Irving King pushes the claim of Professor James still further by saying: "The highest concept, that of the Deity, is an

4) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 28.

expression of some sort of personal attitude rather than a statement of an existence of some sort which may reveal itself by visions interpolated within the material order of the universe."5) In this statement there is no "perhaps" or "conceivably" or "maybe." This professor says: There is no God except in your view, and what you can ascertain of Him you must find in your almanac statements regarding the planets and the seasons.

Professor Ames has ceased bothering about denying God; he is done with that and passes on to positive constructive work. "Social religion," he says, "has a long and possibly great career awaiting it. . . . No longer a paid ally of the policeman, no longer a pillar of social order, it will take its unquestioned place with art and science and wisdom as one of the free manifestations of the higher human spirit."6)

Professor Leuba has observed that "college students believe less in Christianity when they come out of college than when they enter." Need we wonder at this when in a book of this professor we read the following: "I cannot persuade myself that divine personal beings, be they primitive gods or the Christian Father, have more than a subjective existence."7)

President G. Stanley Hall shows us how the new religion deals with our Lord. "The Jesus of history," he says, "is crassly real. The Jesus of genetic psychology is the most precious and real thing ever made out of mind-stuff. If unconscious man-soul evolved him in the travail of ages, he becomes in a new sense 'the son of man, a *Doppelgaenger* of our inner, deeper, better nature. The believer's insight and conviction are small and faint representatives of the same power that created this masterpiece of the race-soul, and faith in him is a flaming up in us of the age-long and many-voiced collectivity and consensus that made it all. Whether we regard Jesus as myth or history, we all need him alike. If I hold him a better and purer psychological being than any other, although made warp and woof of human wishes and needs and ideals, I insist that on this basis I ought to be called an orthodox Christian, because thus he remains to me the highest, best, and most helpful of all who ever lived, whether that life be in Judea or in the soul of man."8)

Now let us ask ourselves, What becomes of the incarnation? What sort of "son of man" is this Jesus? Answer: He is simply my own so-called "better nature."

John Fiske, in his *The Ideal of God*, p. 42 f., writes: "As there are those who live in perpetual dread of the time when science shall

5) *The Development of Religion*, p. 12.

6) *The Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. 4.

7) *A Psychological Study of Religion*, p. 10.

8) *Jesus the Christ in the Light of Psychology*, p. 33 f.

banish God from the world, so, on the other hand, there are those who look forward with longing to such a time and in their impatience are continually starting up and proclaiming that at last it has come. There are those who have indeed learned a lesson from Mephistopheles, the 'spirit that forever denies.' These are they that say in their hearts, 'There is no God,' and congratulate themselves that they die like beasts. Rushing into the holiest arcana of philosophy, even where angels fear to tread, they lay hold of each new discovery in science that modifies our view of the universe and herald it as a crowning victory for the materialists—a victory which is ushering in the happy day when atheism is to be the creed of all men."

Lastly there is H. G. Wells's *God the Invisible King*, a book that has been sold in America in hundreds of thousands of copies. The author justifies his atheism thus: "I, who write, was so set against God, thus rendered [namely, as portrayed to him by his Christian teacher]. He and His hell were the nightmare of my childhood; I hated Him while I still believed in Him; and who could help but hate? I thought of Him as a fantastic monster, perpetually spying, perpetually listening, perpetually waiting to condemn and 'strike me dead'; His flames as ready as a grill-room fire. . . . When I was still a child only of thirteen, by the grace of the true God in me, I flung this lie out of my mind and for many years, until I came to see that God Himself had done this thing for me, the name of God meant nothing to me but a hideous scar in my heart where a fearful demon had been."⁹)

When the new *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* was published, a curious difference was observed, amongst others, between this work and the *Protestantische Realenzyklopaedie fuer Theologie und Kirche*, whose place it was to take in the English Protestant world. It contained an article on "Atheism," written by Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield of Princeton, while the German publication had none. Dr. Warfield winds up his review of the atheistic movements of the last two hundred years with these words: "Probably in no period of Christianity has positive atheism been proclaimed with more confidence or accepted more widely."

Looking back upon the era that began with English Deism, down to the collapse of Russia under the onrush of nihilism generated by apostate Jews, one is compelled to agree with the foregoing writer. We seem to see an ocean of infidelity rising. First small ripples are showing themselves in the distance. But they keep coming in greater volume and strike with increasing violence. They are destroying time-honored institutions at a prodigious rate. There is

9) Quoted in *Biblical Review*, January, 1919, p. 85.

nothing sacred to the assailants. They are out for a fight to the finish. What has happened, and is happening, in Moscow is merely a link in a long chain. But the present wave has assumed enormous proportions and threatens to sweep everything before it.

A pathetic feature of the situation is the atheistic propaganda vigorously launched at colleges and universities. Investigations on this subject for *The World's Work* were published by Homer Croy early in 1927. He reported that Freeman Hopwood, secretary of the "Four A's" (American Association for the Advancement of Atheism), had said to him: "The beauty of it is that we have so many atheists in the college faculties in America. . . . They can't say much about it, as they would be thrown out, . . . but they encourage the students all they can." "Colleges are a fruitful field for us. You see, it's where they begin to think, and that's where we get them. Of course, we have more students in the colleges than we can claim, for the reason that they don't dare to express themselves." "Atheists believe there is only one life, and so we live to get all there is out of it, instead of being 'soft-soaped' along on the hope that there is another one off in the skies some place where everything will be perfect."

The method by which students are turned into atheists was described for the *Independent* by Miss Harriet Lyon, "just a season away from a large Eastern women's college." To quote from a *résumé* of her account in the *Literary Digest*, July 2, 1927, Miss Lyons "takes the ground that there is encouragement given to heresy—not heresy against any established Church, but 'a general and far more dangerous heresy against the past,' and goes on to say that the majority of students reach college 'with a certain amount of inconvenient baggage in the way of tradition, religious doctrine, and a casual philosophy that is unexpressed and accept life as it appears to be.' The student, who is very young, 'is set to study philosophy, to attack the Bible with a doubt for every word, to dissect the New Testament with a keen eye for biological probabilities.' He 'learns in the course of four years that the whale didn't swallow Jonah, that the Bible is a record of questionable value, and that God Himself can be argued away with an ease that renders refutation ridiculous.' These things are taught him, not directly, but insidiously. The story of the Resurrection, for instance, is not denied, 'but so many plausible explanations are given which ignore the miraculous that the student who clings to the bare word is looked upon by fellow-students as narrow and rather superstitious. The materialistic conception of the universe is not taught alone; it is sandwiched in between two theistic systems that complete the effect of the first by making such a halting piece of work in trying to arrive at a reasonable explanation of God that the simplicity of

denial is infinitely more convincing.' The writer hastens to assure us that college instructors do not try deliberately to instil germs of atheism. 'The difficulty lies in the fact that the instructor is often too prone to state opinion for truth, to destroy an ancient dogma with a remark just as dogmatic and not quite so old. The argument is offered that, if the student has any convictions to begin with, he or she will support them against such attacks and force the instructor to retract or explain. This is a hopeful theory, but does not compliment the understanding of the theorist. What eighteen-year-old-student—I speak not of the few who have been brought up to think, but of the mass who have not—is prepared with such a concrete and concise case as the instructor? Religion, for instance, is largely a matter of growth and inheritance. It would be almost as reasonable to expect a freshman or sophomore to explain why he is a blond instead of a brunet as why he is a Congregationalist rather than a Presbyterian. And yet the faith under which he has grown up may not be utterly useless to him. He should be given a fair chance to uphold his end of the argument, and it is the duty of the instructor to show him how. It is easy to disprove the virgin birth of Christ by biological data against an adversary to whom the Virgin Birth has been simply an article of faith. It is easy to prove the absurdity of the story of Jonah and the whale to a student whose chief evidence to the contrary lies in the now so carefully disproved and explained words of the Bible. Modern research, scientific fact—these are the great watchwords, the keys that unlock the gates of wisdom, the explanation to everything. To everything, that is, except the past.' So the young student learns to sneer at the past. His knowledge is incomplete. 'He admires the smart, destructive criticism of such men as Mencken and takes them as his models in mocking everything he does not understand. He is too young to let his human sympathies help him. His God is a myth.'"

Two publications may serve as fair samples to any one desiring to make a study of the chances the Christian faith of young students has of surviving his college experiences. One is *The Nature of the World and of Man*, by sixteen members of the faculty of the university of Chicago, published at necessary intervals in revised editions, to keep abreast of the results of scientific investigations. The other is *The Fields and Methods of Knowledge*, by Professors Raymond F. Piper and Paul W. Ward of Syracuse University. Both books are designed to serve as text-books for orientation courses of freshmen. The former publication is free from all direct references to religion and religious subjects. There is no attack on the Bible or Bible facts. These matters are passed over with silence, ignored, as foreign to the scientific interest of a trained mind. The other publication touches upon religious subjects and Biblical facts purposely, but either in a critical or in an apologetic way.

In conclusion, to come back to our beginning, the observation of a foreign scholar who has kept his eye on the eternal verities while scanning the earthly horizons surrounding him may fitly round out this review. As far back as 1907 Dr. Ludwig Lemme wrote: "Our time is agitated by a trend of Julian the Apostate, who, being dissatisfied with the Christian doctrine, which he knew but imperfectly, due in part to the neglect of the Church, turned his back on Christianity and instead of a sound native religiousness cultivated a manufactured religion of romanticism of the type of epigones, which had to meet the fate of hothouse plants. The remark by which Felix Dahn characterizes and criticizes Julian: 'To believe in gods is childlike; to deny God is insanity; to seek God is everything,'—this dictum is a criterion of our time. Men have lost the God of the Biblical revelation. They cannot do without God, but they no longer have Him. They are engaged in a search for Him. There is a host of 'seekers after God,' and the revelations of these 'souls seeking after God,' who for the most part have nothing to reveal except the confusion of 'homeless sentiments,' are bursting with the self-complacency of the avid discoverer and the infatuation with the surging fogs of inner unrest. The oddest and most confused ideas are finding followers of childlike credulity. Alongside of an international veneration of humanity and a national cult of Wodan we behold a deification of Wagner and Nietzsche. Yea, hare-brained minds are coming forward with the proposal 'to found the new religion on atheism.'

"There are times conscious of their strength by clinging to a firm authority; and there are times which rejoice in discarding all authority. There is in our time a broad current of the latter type. However, what will seeking after God achieve in the field of religion when divorced from all authority? Born out of skepticism, can it lead to anything else than nihilism of fruitless endeavor? In his discourse at Athens, the genuineness of which is proved by the reliability of Luke's account, Paul strictured the pagans' aimless seeking after God, 'if happily they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us,' Acts 17, 27, and over against that advocated the absoluteness of the divine revelation from heaven concerning salvation. This contrast between paganism and Christianity remains the contrast between that state of being void of God when the mind is stretching and struggling upward, unable to form any clear aim and hence unable to achieve any reliable results, and that assurance concerning God which is bestowed from above and rests on this basic thought, that we can have knowledge of God only by and from God."¹⁰⁾

10) *Jesu Irrtumslosigkeit*, p. 1 f.

Much of this nightmarish crying for atheism strikes one as coming from pained and anguished consciences that have suffered self-inflicted violence. When Johnny had wilfully slipped away from his father and would not go back to him, he said, first to himself, then to others, "There is no father."

Berkeley, Cal., May 10, 1933.

W. H. T. DAU.

The Ministry of the Word in These Trying Times.

Periods of adversity in the life of the Church and the world always involve a special challenge to the ministry of the Word. The present era of spiritual, social, and economic distress is no exception. Within the memory of the generation now living there has never been a general situation demanding more earnest attention, single-hearted consecration, and enlightened action on the part of God's ambassadors on earth than that created by the developments of these trying times.

How are we leaders of the Church meeting the challenge of the present emergency? Are we really aware of the urgency of this challenge? Have we learned to rise to the opportunities it presents? Are we equal to the responsibilities it imposes? Do we appreciate the peculiar blessings issuing from it?

I.

The opportunities created by the tribulations of the present day are varied and unique. The average pastor found it difficult during the piping times of prosperity to bring about an attitude of sincere repentance among his people. True spirituality, Christlike humility, and other Christian virtues were alarmingly rare. Materialism, worldliness, selfishness, pride, even sensuality — the vices of a deteriorating world — had penetrated into, and were becoming prevalent everywhere in, the Church. But whenever attention was directed to these conditions and people were called on to mend their ways lest God should be moved to visit them with His chastisements, the reaction was often painfully disappointing. Many of our people remained entirely indifferent. There seemed to be a growing disposition among them to resent calls to repentance. Were things really as bad as preachers tried to make them believe? Why be alarmed about anything while shiploads of blessings were steadily coming in on the crest of an unprecedented and seemingly boundless tide of material prosperity?

The growing unconcern shown to the indictments of the divine Law was accompanied by a corresponding unresponsiveness to the gracious appeals of the saving Gospel. How difficult it seemed to be for many to seek the invisible, spiritual treasures of the kingdom of