

**HARD TIMES; THE CAUSES WHICH
PRODUCE THEM; THE LESSONS THEY
TEACH; THE SPIRIT IN
WHICH TO BEAR THEM; HOW TO MAKE
THEM GOOD; WHEN WILL THEY COME
NO MORE?; PP. 3-57**

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Hard times; the causes which produce them; the lessons they teach; the spirit in which to bear them; how to make them good; when will they come no more?; pp. 3-57 by Jos. S. Van Dyke

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JOS. S. VAN DYKE

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BY

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HARD TIMES.

THE CAUSES WHICH PRODUCE THEM.

"They have done nothing of all that thou commandest them to do; therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them."—Jeremiah xxxii., 23.

If you should ever deliberately leap over Niagara, do not complain of what comes after. The nation which violates divine commands, ought not to murmur under divine judgments.

Capitalists loaning money at four per cent.! Farmers selling grain at less than the cost of production! Embarrassed manufacturers throwing calico on the market at three cents a yard! Mechanics without work, laborers without bread, widows sewing sixteen hours a day and receiving in return scarcely enough to maintain an enfeebled existence! What do these things mean? Hard Times, God's laws disregarded.

It requires no especial searching to discover persons now in penury who a few years ago were in affluence; no remarkable penetration to perceive that many have been financially ruined; that of even the prudent many are greatly embarrassed, economical people being without money and Christian men asking for an extension of credit. Bank buildings, farms, manufacturing establishments, private residences—humble cottages and palatial mansions—"Going, going, gone," at less than one-half the former estimated value. Sheriffs so crowded with business as to become intoxicated with excess—

or with something less honorable. Worse still, a pack of hungry wolves, who, after ravenously devouring wrecked fortunes, are lean, lank and hungry still, prowling about for more prey.

What's the explanation? Hard Times, divine commands violated and groaning thousands bearing the penalties. It certainly cannot be denied that it is extremely sad to see those penniless who were once rich; those deeming themselves fortunate in having a humble shelter from the pelting storm, who once dwelt in lordly mansions; the improvident almost on the verge of starvation; tramps on nearly every highway; and still more heartrending to observe that even the industrious and economical are in distressingly straitened circumstances; all classes, in greater or less measure, feeling the tightening grip of pecuniary embarrassment. Why this stringency? From nearly all comes back the response, "Hard Times; we have been disregarding immutable laws of Heaven."

None of us, however, desire to be understood as affirming that our Heavenly Father has withheld, or even diminished, the gifts of His bounty. The harvests have been abundant. There is enough for all, even for the wandering tramp, the desolate widow and the homeless orphan. Nor do we mean to affirm that our industries have been unproductive. Of manufactured articles our markets are full. Nor have the hidden treasures of the earth failed. Coal, iron, lead, silver and gold have been produced in large quantities. In the midst of unparalleled plenty how shall we explain the present excessive depression? The transparent fact that God has not stinted us renders it evident that the stringency is due to our own conduct. We have brought these evils upon ourselves. How? this is the question we shall endeavor to answer. We shall endeavor to convince you that we are simply suffering the consequences of our own acts; are merely eating the fruit of our own doings.

Manifestly, we should be guilty of no slight sin if we

imagined that God was the author of the evils we have brought upon ourselves. This would be an attempt to defend ourselves by slandering our Maker. Hushed forever be the thought that God is punishing us in any other way than by permitting us to punish ourselves! If we have deliberately violated those laws upon whose observance continued prosperity depends, let us not be guilty of the stupendous folly, nay, the atrocious sin, of charging our multiplied troubles upon the dealings of a benevolent God. To some, perhaps, it may seem quite pious to affirm, "God is visiting judgments upon us;" to most, however, it is more in accordance with genuine religion to acknowledge that we have erred, and are suffering the penalties.

Few, perhaps, may be disposed to affirm, as Jeremiah did of the Jews, that this nation has done "nothing of all that God commanded it to do;" nearly all, however, are ready to confess that we have violated divine injunctions. Some, no doubt, are reluctant to acknowledge that our embarrassments are in punishment of sins; but none, assuredly can deny that if God has simply declined to interfere—merely permitting us to reap as we have sown—we have no right to murmur. Environed by the consequences of our own acts, it is wisdom to inquire, "Wherein have we sinned?" Since God, when he punishes us, needs not to mete out judgments arbitrarily, but has simply to let us alone—our own transgressions bringing down punishment with unerring certainty—it is only in this qualified sense that we are at liberty to attribute our calamities to his agency. He has linked disastrous consequences with the violation of his immutable laws; consequently, we inevitably suffer the merited punishment of persistent disregard of divine commandments. And what else are God's judgments, either upon individuals or upon nations, either in this life or the next, than simply non-interference? The sinner, left to the result of his folly, is eternally undone. A nation, permitted to reap as it has sown, is certain to gather a large harvest of misery.

What then are the causes, the effects of which we are now enduring? what the divine laws we have been violating and whose penalties we have been paying? Before attempting to enumerate the causes, or to ascertain their connection with transgressions of inviolable mandates, it may be well to assure ourselves that Hard Times are a natural result of wide-spread immorality. They are an effect; immoral practices the cause. To-day is settlement day. We have danced to the music, and we must pay the piper. Our sins have found us out. The declaration, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," is as true in reference to nations as to individuals. The scriptural assertion, "Godliness has promise of the life that now is," is as applicable to national life as to our own. It is true that, inasmuch as the cause must precede the effect, it often happens that the generation sinning the most suffers less than some subsequent age. The fact that we are the sufferers does not necessarily prove that we have sinned more heinously than those who lived in the prosperous times of fifteen years ago.

And yet have we not merited punishment? We who were born to see things as they should be, have schooled ourselves to see things as people say they are. We have rendered ourselves hoarse in shouting, "The things that are, are the things that shall be. Reform! Why, we Americans are the purest, most intelligent, most moral, most civilized people on earth. Go, reform the poor heathen. Teach them the advantages of that form of Christian civilization which talks piously and practices villanously. As for us, we are heaven's favored people."

Thus, by submitting to the existing order of things and tutoring conscience to believe them as near right as they can be in this sinful world, and as good as God demands, we increase the volume and strength of those causes which are shaking the pillars of our material prosperity, even of our national permanency. Crash, crash, crash, the structure is tottering. Riches have taken to themselves wings and are

flying away. Unless new foundations are laid, and the rotten timbers are replaced by sound ones, the nations of the earth will be invited ere long, perhaps before a century rolls round, to attend the funeral of the Great Republic. Who will preach the sermon? "Old Time." What will be the text? "Thus always with those who violate Heaven's laws." Who will sing the funeral dirges? The weeping Goddess of Liberty. Where will they bury her? In eternal oblivion. What shall inherit her possessions? Some form of government that tramples individual liberty beneath her iron heel.

But the causes of Hard Times? Some tell us the present financial stringency is the result of heavy expenditures during the war. Nor are we disposed to deny that in great measure this is true. Unquestionably, it happens with a nation as with a business house, after borrowing heavily and expending the money in ways whence no returns are possible, pay day is accompanied with excessive embarrassment. To a great extent the money expended in the war was a waste similar to that of squandering riches to feed vanity or personal ambition. Whatever may have been its return in honor, in the maintenance of national unity and in the perpetuation of free institutions, it yielded no dividends in the means of liquidating debts. So far as our national prosperity was concerned it was so much wealth consumed. And to imagine that those were in reality prosperous times in which borrowed money was circulating freely, is to forget that true prosperity, both private and public, is measured by the balance left after all obligations are paid. In point of fact the nation was poorer than it is to-day. It mortgaged itself and spent the borrowed money in cannon, shot, shell, shoddy, bad whiskey and the wastes of war. If, instead of paying our sacred obligations, we should permit ourselves to be dragged into the infatuation of re-issuing paper currency or circulating millions of depreciated dollars, we might again have financial intoxication, to be succeeded by times still harder, if not indeed by national and

almost universal bankruptcy. If fits of intoxication follow each other too rapidly they inevitably produce death. Successive paroxysms of borrowing are certain to end in financial ruin. Engraved paper, whether in the merchant's safe or in the public treasury, is no increase of wealth. It is simply a promise to pay, in hands that must return it with interest, or be financially bankrupt. And if hard cash is not earned to meet the obligations as they mature, embarrassment ensues.

At present we are not concerned to ask whether these expenditures were not augmented by dishonesty. We desire to lay stress upon the simple fact that borrowing is followed by a demand for payment; and that settlement day, with those who have not earned even interest, is necessarily a trying time. Perceiving this, you perceive that war, which always necessitates borrowing, must be succeeded by Hard Times. It is the penalty God exacts for blood. The war being a gigantic crime, we cannot escape its consequences, impoverishment and suffering.

The war was a sin in which every section of the country participated. Consequently, all suffer. Its immediate cause was sectional rebellion. And was not this one of the greatest crimes of the nineteenth century? Since escape from the penalties of transgression is impossible so long as omnipotent justice occupies the throne, we are certainly not so foolish as to suppose that our crime could pass unpunished. But what produced the rebellion? Party strife and the spirit of lawlessness. Why expect these to escape punishment?

Some ask, "Why do the innocent suffer with the guilty?" It is sufficient to answer, "God deals with nations as nations." Are any innocent, however? Where are the voters who are free from the trammels of party? where the persons who have not aided in electing men whose public and private life disqualified them for office? where the ballots that have never been cast under the promptings of party spirit? Few indeed are the people—their residences are