



Dr. Hugo Münsterberg

The Great Need of Our Time

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ASKED what the really great things are which mankind has won in the last thousands of years, the imagination rushes to all kinds of technical wonders. Steamships and the railways are pictured and further back the gunpowder and the printing press; we admire the great cities which men have built and the canals which they have dug; and there seems no end to the glorious achievements. But when we begin to think seriously and pierce a little deeper, we soon discover that all these outer things are, after all, less important and less decisive than some of the inner great changes which have come to mankind. The message of love which religion brought, the gospel of freedom, the spirit of culture, the belief in the blessing of work, the awaking of the social conscience, have all changed the world more than any of the outer wonders. Every great revolution has come from the human heart.

It is not different when we think: what is the really great need of today? What ought to be changed to make our life more worth living and to raise our nation to unprecedented heights? Of course, much might be improved in our surroundings. Many inventions might serve us; many measures might help us: and yet the greatest must still come from within. We need again a great new message to stir the soul of the nation. We have the spirit of freedom and of love and of work and of good will. Yet there is something deeply wrong with our time, and a better tomorrow can be hoped for only if a great change comes to our inner world.

The thousand social ailments of our day can be cured only by one remedy: our generation needs more self-control, more discipline. It is easy to draw an absurd caricature of discipline, as if it meant a kind of old-fashioned tyranny, which forces the will of one man on another. There is a nobler kind of discipline: a man is to become his own master, instead of being a slave to the tyranny of his low and cheap desires.

IT was different in the past. American life of earlier periods was modest, hard and under the authority of the church. The puritanic spirit held the masses in firm control, and the simplicity of the rigid pioneer life checked the frivolous mind. But the world has moved on. The country has become abundantly rich; a love of luxury has overflowed the nation. Gigantic cities have swollen up, and the craving for pleasure has spread from the white ways of the big towns to the smallest village. The church has lost much of its hold, the old faith has crumbled, and the nation has replaced it by the one great creed of efficiency, of success, of worldliness.

The new fashioned scheme begins in the school days—nay, even in the nursery. The child no longer learns to submit to a stern command, but is welcome to do as he pleases. He is sometimes begged to change his mind, some-

times persuaded, and sometimes bribed; but he has seldom a chance to learn obedience. And yet he who has not learned to be obedient can never really master himself. The kindergarten method of play is creeping into school life; our youngsters follow only the path of least resistance. They learn a thousand pretty things in the school, and not the chief thing which makes life worth living; to do their duty. Is it surprising that this go-as-you-please feeling streams into all channels of our public life?

The nation sees with terror the waste of its natural resources. The riches of forests and rivers and mines are shamelessly wasted. The timber is burned and not replanted; millions of tons of coal are ruined in the mines. If there were more self-discipline in the spirit of the country, such selfish destruction would be checked. The duty to the coming generations would call a halt. The whole nation denounces corruption and graft. The police is ineffective; the street cleaning is wretched; the municipal life everywhere is riddled, not by real viciousness, but simply by this thoughtless, careless public feeling, which shrinks from any stern demand and lets things go as selfishness shapes them. The mud in our streets and the mud in our politics cry for the broom of discipline. If youth does not learn self-control and discipline and the spirit of obedience to authority, it can be no surprise that there are twenty times more murder cases to the million of population in our country than in western Europe, and a hundred times more railway accidents than over there.

In one complaint all layers of our nation agree: the cost of living is too high. But no tariff can eradicate the fundamental evil.

IF the lesson of self-discipline had been learned, no one would crave the new-fashioned gowns which adds much to the cost of living, when last season's gown might just as well be used. But we pay not alone with our purse: we have to pay with our health and our nerves, with our conscience and our morality, because this lack of self-discipline makes all the selfish, frivolous and lascivious desires grow rankly. The auto, the kino and the tango have become the symbols of our amusement craving time. All kinds of little remedies are prescribed. Sexual education is to help us: and yet no more learning about sexual life can help a community which does not find in its own sense of duty and discipline the energy to suppress the immoral impulse. The time of the little remedies for the national waste, for living beyond our means for corruption and graft, for vice and crime, has passed; and the muckrakers do not help either. Only one thing can help us: a serious appeal to the conscience of the nation to believe again in discipline and self-control. And this belief must be planted in the heart of every American boy and girl.

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