

INTER-STATE PRIZE ORATION.

Frank Fetter, of the State University, Bloomington, Indiana, Wins First Honors.

THE HEIR APPARENT.

The question, "What are we here for?" spoken in a great Chicago convention, once made the question notorious. Asked, with the spoilsman's reply in thought, that query degraded the ideal of politics; yet its words well express the problem of philosophy. To this life inquiry each must frame an answer—each for himself, and then for all. "What are we here for?" The question comes like a wail from toilers in dismal mines, from the factory's pale-faced workers, from crowded garrets of want. If we cannot find a meaning in man's life and a promise in the future, there is nothing to brighten the shadow of modern pessimism. Increasing education and awakening thought arouse dangerous passions in those who have no hope of sharing in the world's advancement. But there is every cause for hope: those who have thought, and prayed, and toiled, and died, to make the world a better place to live in, have left a priceless heritage. Many wrongs in society are yet to be righted, but more and more clearly it appears that the common man is to be the heir of all the blessings of progress.

Glancing at the past, we see in primeval caves, strewn with the rudely chipped flint, the embryo from all the arts. Later, we see rising in the valley of the Nile a mighty civilization. But that progress was for the ruling classes only, and was almost without meaning in the degraded lives of the toiling millions. That is the lesson—checkered light and darkness, a prophecy of hope, a story of man's despair—down to the Renaissance.

It was in this wonderful era that America was discovered. The awakening thought and energy of man found greatest room for growth on the western continent. All things here tended to form a keen and self-reliant national character. A language to fall like native accents from the tongue must be learned in childhood. An infant nation here first lisped another language of political principles. Here at last the joy of life would be for all, not for the few. With the humble many would be shared the heritage of progress. These were the hopes at the beginning of the four centuries now drawing to a close. Have they been justified? We have ceased to wonder at ourselves. The mightiest marvels have grown familiar. Free thought, the heresy of the past, is to-day the axiom on which orthodoxy bases her argument. Precepts of politics, which merely to whisper was treason once, are now the daily utterance of every young American. Already have sunk to the commonplace the wonders of lightning and imprisoned steam. Who dares assert that anything is impossible to man, when he has won the spirit of the clouds and chained the geni of earth's caverns? The freer thought, the more widely diffused intelligence, the higher average of material and spiritual conditions, proclaim that here and now has been most nearly solved the problem of man's earthly destiny.

Would that with these words all had been told? But what to Africa is the light of civilization? Its beams do not penetrate her jungles. What to Asia's millions are these wonderful inventions? Their toil is not lightened by them. What joy to Russia's despot ridden people does our free constitution bring? They die in exile if they but whisper "Liberty." In our own land the sunken face of hunger, the daily chronicle of crime, the crowded prisons, the savagery of city slums, tell us that even we, the advance guard of progress, are tending many camp fires for the great millenium. How can such things be, with luxury increasing and wealth accumulating at a rate unequalled in history? This is the question that repeats itself

day and night to many thoughtful minds. In them, thus pondering, and in the masses brooding over injustice, has grown a profound discontent. Let those who will bemoan the fact. Let us rejoice the common man is thinking. He is thinking, and there can be no happy solution to the dark enigma of the "was" and "is" of human society until the humblest are granted the earnings of their toil and a share in the heritage of humanity. Then will the common man come to his own. Is he not worthy? He has been patient, toiling, faithful. Upon his shoulders has rested every empire whose rulers history records to fame, while he is nameless. His arm won all the battles for which conquerors were accorded the glory of triumph, and in chariots bedecked with flowers, while he tramped in the dust behind them. He mined the gold that was fashioned into crowns; he wove the robe of royalty, pressed the wine for luxury's feast, and reared the gorgeous palaces where wealth reclines. Why has he walked in rags, and gnawed a crust and slumbered in a hovel? Nature has not left portionless her child. Far back in geological ages fire and flood and sun had hidden untold minerals in the mountain's depth for him, stored exhaustless fuel for his use, and raised the continent to be his home. Whence came the title of those who, holding nature's gifts, have claimed as tribute the life-long labor of the common man? The great, the fortunate of the earth, have enjoyed his heritage and kept him from his own.

In this great republic, do we yet declaim for equal rights? Alas, to the humble man a voice in government does not, as he had thought, give an equal share in the blessings of society. The colonial fathers thought that the revolution, the political influence of which had shaken every throne, ensured also a social regeneration. They did not see that it was the new conditions of an unappropriated continent that had lulled to rest for a time the great social evils of the old world. They could not see the immigration surging to these shores, the great inventions soon to revolutionize the methods of production, the magic growth of cities, the widening gap between wealth and poverty—all bringing new complications to problems which they thought were solved.

These problems confront us to-day. Dare prophets of evil picture the crimes of wealth, denouncing existing institutions, vaguely hint at bloody revolution. But the American spirit, which never yet has been daunted, though recognizing the evils, fears not that "a crisis is at hand." To clamor at capital and society will not settle the questions requiring the united energies of heart and brain. Love, not hate, is the inspiration of the true reformer. He is never hopeless. He is a pessimist as to conditions, but an optimist as to possibilities. Even now these questions are being grappled with. We are thrilled with faith in the "increasing purpose" that runs through the ages as we look upon the forces that are battling for the world's redemption.

First are those which direct their efforts to the reform of the individual. Christianity, with agencies organized for effective work as never before, is carrying the message of charity in to the richest homes, and piercing with a ray of hope the slums of "Darkest England." Education of many kinds, training schools of art and skill, homes to reclaim the vicious and the drunkard—but why enumerate these influences? They are many, active, tireless, growing. Even with the social organization as it is, much can be done for the world's improvement, by arousing in the individual habits of thrift and sentiments of honor. Regeneration must come from within. Merit, ever rising from among its fellows, grumbling at their unjust fates, teaches over and over the lesson:

"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings."