

Giddy Change

by Desmond Ford

It is possible to be having such a happy time swimming that one does not notice what is happening on land. Even more importantly one may not notice that one is being carried out by a drift tide, an underwater current to the ocean beyond a place of ^{not by} danger. This has happened to me and no doubt to many of ^{our} ~~his~~ readers. Being a citizen of the modern world is something like that.

It is hard for us now to imagine what things were like a little more than a century ago. For example, most people could not read nor write. While many boys did scrape up some sort of schooling, girls rarely did. Money was hardly used in most communities, and most of the inhabitants of a village had never traveled more than twenty miles away. Communication was slow—it took days for the news of the outcome of the battle of Waterloo to reach London. And there was no real middle class.

Until about the last third of the nineteenth century, the world consisted chiefly of peasants and aristocrats. Remember slavery was not abolished in Europe till 1848 and in America nearly twenty years later. The people who read and wrote were the ones making history ^{and their} ~~or~~ their servants who recorded their deeds or needs.

It was in the 1880's that schooling became universal in Europe, and compulsory and free. A modern industrial state demanded literacy, and now that men (note men only) were being given the vote, it was necessary for them to be able to read in order to understand legislation and politics and know for what they were voting.

Since this introduction of general schooling the world has changed far more than it had from the time of the Roman Empire till the late nineteenth century. But carefully observe this fact: **in our day we often change more in a single year than the world did a century from Christ's time till the ^{end} last portion of last century.**

As an example consider the computer. The first significant modern computer was produced during World War II in the hope of being able to break the German code. It occupied the space of two garages and weighed thirty tons and had 18,000 vacuum tubes (one of which blew every seven minutes). With the microchip, the computers (as with radios and other electronic gadgets) have contracted to appropriate micro size. Now we can do our computing on our laps in the tourist section of a plane 30,000 feet above the world.

Abraham Lincoln's world was not drastically different from that of Abraham of Ur of the Chaldees. But were Lincoln to awaken today, he might well desire to retreat to his dusty bed out of the modern melée of sound and speed. Travel has changed from the speed of riding on horseback to the speed of sound; communication has changed from the speed of a courier to

instantaneous awareness of what is happening on the other side of the world; our capacity to kill has accelerated from dealing death to individuals to doing it to millions with a nuclear blow.

The knowledge explosion is the chief revolution of modern times. By the time a student graduates from high school the amount of knowledge in the world has multiplied four times. By the time that student is fifty, knowledge ^{has} multiplied ~~thirty~~ thirty times. By his death, more knowledge has accumulated in his lifetime than in all of history prior to his birth. But mind you we are talking of knowledge, not of wisdom.

We live in an age of revolution indeed. We are witnessing a knowledge revolution, a communication revolution, an economic revolution, a racial revolution, a youth revolution, a sexual revolution and a technological revolution.. No wonder that transience is perhaps the best word to characterize all human associations. Nothing now seems to endure.

It is possible to buy clothes that can be thrown away rather than washed. Houses can be put up overnight and demolished as quickly. The average American family shifts about seven times in their lifetime. Families are no longer extended as in former ages with grandparents, parents, and children living in the same town if not the same house.

Marriages, too, are transient, and too often in an age of crime and war—life itself is transient. We see a rapidly passing phantasmagoria of events and institutions and people. Fame is short lived, and so often is wealth. Fads come and go. In every field the majority of theories has a short life. For decades the average life of a new theological breeze has been ten years. Philosophies change at a similar pace. Logical positivism so pervasive in the fifties is now practically dead as surely as the Death of God controversy.

An excellent book that deals with ^{these} realities is Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*. We quote him:

... a growing body of reputable opinion asserts that the present movement represents nothing less than the second great divide in human history, comparable in magnitude only with that first great break in historic continuity, the shift from barbarism to civilization. (source?)

Citing economist Kenneth Boulding he says:

as far as many statistical series related to mankind are concerned, the date that divides human history into two equal parts is well within living memory... I was born in the middle of human history, to date, roughly. Almost as much has happened since I was born as happened before.

Howard Snyder says, as he contemplates the few remaining years till the year 2000: "It will be as though all the political, scientific, industrial, social and religious revolutions of the past four thousand years were crowded into one short lifetime." *The Problem of Wineskins*, p 180

Another way of illustrating our theme is to consider that all the information once recorded in the famous library of ancient Alexandria will in our day be recorded chemically by a small series of apparent blobs which will replace our present microprinting system.

The current proverb that the world has become a neighborhood but not a brotherhood finds masses of support in the wave of technological change which affects everything in our world. So many things we now take for granted that until a little over a century ago were quite unknown. And many of these things are very intimately related to our way of life including our homes, diet, education, and attitude to government.

Take food. Till the last part of the nineteenth century, the masses in Europe ate a largely vegetarian diet—two thirds of which was often bread and potatoes. Meat was too expensive for most people to secure. Home for the majority was ^{or} primitive, ^{place} and living quarters were often shared with animals such as pigs or cows. During the industrial revolution in Europe families often shared the same room ^{a room} with a dirt floor. Some people even lived in pits and caves.

As for the relationship of the masses to government, it was mainly tangential—associated on rare occasions with such people as tax collectors. Some people living on the borders of countries such as France and Italy did not know to which government they belonged. Instead of a national language, most people spoke local dialects. Only when schools were introduced universally in Europe after 1880 did patriotism become a living reality, strong enough to render individuals willing to die for their country. Governments knew that if they were going to be able to fill armies with willing recruits, patriotism had to be inculcated from childhood in the new schools and so it was done.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a new breed appeared—the breed of consumers. Hard though it is for us to picture, shops as we know them did not exist a century ago. Plate glass is comparatively modern, and such shops as did exist ^{place} were often a hole in the wall behind which the shopkeeper and family lived. There were no sidewalks till modern times. Shopping as we ^{now} know it was not possible.

With the industrial revolution the wheel of change began to spin. It brought ultimately with it not only looms and farm machinery but trains, bicycles, motor bikes, and then ultimately cars and airplanes. With the multiplying of bicycles, the need for better roads arose. With the better roads came more hotels and eating places. The revolving bicycle wheel could well be a symbol of the giddy revolution in all things that was then beginning.

Today the average person is besieged by hundreds of advertisements a day—billboards, TV commercials, newspaper and radio ads. We are exposed to a whirl of options and indeed temptations. Our heads can become giddy contemplating the possibilities of life.

Snyder has a significant paragraph summing up the spirit of transience in our time.

(quote center par of page 181)

With our sophisticated age of change and transience, deception has multiplied. Most advertisements lie to a greater or lesser extent. Products rarely yield what is promised. But they all contribute to a fantasy world in which multitudes live. The impression is given that every problem has a speedy and available solution, that any plain Jane can look like a movie star, and every dull Harry like Robert Redford. Also observe that simultaneously with the forward rush comes a backward current for we are in this technological age also retreating to an oral and visual society—TV replaces books, and children rather than secure a dictionary wait for the movie edition on TV.

In an age where glitter and glamour mesmerize, Hollywood has become the greatest educator next to TV. Thus the values of Hollywood and TV become the values of most people and they are false values.

John Greenleaf Whittier in the 19th century (~~check~~) felt his world was one of amazing change and he wrote as follows:

Yet in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed stake my spirit clings,
I know that God is good.

But most people in our age would want to debate the word God. They agree about the maddening maze of things, but wish to make us see that religion is included in that maze. It is no longer simple, if it ever was.

Who is God? Is not that the great Me, the individual self of the New Age? Are not all things God? Such a view sunders any umbilical cord of value relationships with a Creator for there is none—no cord or Creator. All values are now subjective, and every man is a law unto himself, except insofar as governments can effectively legislate.

Many are asking the question whether the pace of our world ^{can} accelerate indefinitely? All human experience suggests it cannot. Were we passengers on a jet airplane instead of a speeding world, we would know the answer for certain. There are finite limits to speed progression. Ultimately comes disintegration.

Arnold Toynbee in his book *Change and Habit* seems to hint at this:
(quote Snyder 183)

Because of the upheaval and pervading transience of our times multitudes now tend to live in their own fantasy world. While accepting reality as far as they are compelled to, for the rest they invent and invent and invent. Minds turn inward looking for God and truth and power. This is a form of spiritual madness which if prolonged becomes suicide. The victims can be dangerous. Denying objective values they may seek to compel others to join them in their fantasies.

As the wheel of change continues to revolve giddily, that which was once up becomes down and vice versa. We will continue to see more and more national and international change. The type of reversal we have witnessed so far in our century may become characteristic of every decade. For example, at the end of World War I, Europe was still supreme on the world scene. But not so USA. By the end of the next great war, the story was the opposite.

What if fundamentalist Islam countries such as Iran and or Pakistan should by their use of nuclear weapons one day be at the top? Remember that about twenty nations today, including many of the so-called "small" nations have the capability of using nuclear weapons. In no time the club may double. And the weapons may follow the course of the computer—retaining potency and ability but diminishing to micro size.

Mankind regularly betrays its insanity. War is but one regular symptom of our madness. Our gullibility as consumers is but another symptom. We have become accustomed to lies and to lying, and it pervades business and personal relationships. Is there then any hope that man shall extricate himself from his ever worsening dilemma? None.

Is there, therefore, any solution? Yes, there is.

Consider some aspects of "disorderly nations" demonstrated since 1939.
"quote Rev 11:15-18 with last verse in caps.)

In Germany during the latter years of World War II there were seven and a half million foreigners working in German industry. These came from a dozen countries and included two million prisoners of war. This was no novelty because the Russians had been seizing millions of their own people for a generation. They incarcerated them in Siberian labor camps and set them to work on industrial projects.

Stalin excused the practice thus:

Can we advance our socialized industry and accelerate its growth while having to rely on an agricultural base such as is provided by small peasant farming which is incapable of expanded production? We cannot. What then is the solution? The socialist way is to set up collective farms and state farms, the way which leads to the squeezing out of the capitalist elements from agriculture. That is why we have recently passed from the policy of restricting the exploiting proclivities of the kulaks to the policy of eliminating the kulaks as a class."

X After the War ended, millions more were set on the move in Russia, Eastern Europe, and both eastern and western Germany. Some were refugees, and others had been expelled from their homes when territories changed national owners. Never before had so many millions been set
X adrift. Mobility became a part of life for millions, and stability a dream

A chief characteristic of postwar life is accelerating change. Howard Snyder says that as a result :

We are increasingly predisposed to think in terms of temporaries, not permanence. Within a year or two much in our lives changes—not merely familiar products, but our car,

clothes, reading materials and (for an increasing percentage of people), even our homes, friends, jobs, association and ideas. Contrast this with the lives of most of our grandparents. (page 181)

The spiritual impact of this trend can be devastating for those unaware of the significance of this danger. If convictions, ideals, and "truths" become just as transitory ^{as} ~~in the~~ ^{half appears} life, then what we have is flitting shadows, not people. X

But now consider the adjective that is significantly applied to the gospel in Rev 14:6. It is called, "the everlasting gospel." There's nothing transitory about the good news! It is for always—the always of this world's existence. ↘

Unless the life is molded by that which possesses the element of permanence there can be no development of character nor anything worthwhile accomplished. Only the gospel of grace can answer

the folly of life's empty pleasures. So what will cleanse the giddy chase of ~~earthly~~ earth's lusts? There are many the world's gratifications — but then the world of God is the eternally begloring glory — a higher that will never know change or decay.

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see me for longer