

The World of Fancy

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It was the burden of the message of the prophets that there would at some future time be an outpouring of God's spirit upon the world. "It shall come to pass that I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions¹" said the prophet Joel, as the mouthpiece of the God of Israel. It is now as it was in the days of old the burden of the message of every human being who lives, and responds to the spirit of this grand human life that we live. Despite the gloom which settles upon many a son of man as he faces the stern realities, there is an undercurrent of hope and faith that bursts forth in to a strong martial strain of triumph, even from amid the most impoverished of surroundings, just as the most beautiful orchid springs from the sordidness of the woodland swamp, unseen and unpraised except by the very Father himself. It stands a symbol and an incarnation of the eternal amid the most transient and fleeting of nature's surroundings. This boundless hope, this underlying faith in the outpourings of God's in the days to come, has been the polar star of all life and all progress in the history of man. That faith which speaks of a better day tomorrow, whatever may be the form of its utterance, is the same yesterday, today and forever. The hungry savage, lying down at night beneath the open sky, after a fruitless day's effort in search of food, falls to sleep having faith in the possibility of actually doing on the morning that which tonight is but a fleeting vision of his hungry body and mind.

A Booker Washington sleeps at night amid the {???) of an abused, degraded people. Beneath the outward crust of his despised and ignorant people there is being nourished the seed of a beautiful flower which is to break the hardened soil, grow to maturity, bear its fruits, and sow its seeds in a thousand directions. Such people, who estimate the

¹ Joel 2:28.

worth of life, and the richness of living, by the visions which are as yet unrealized, by the dreams as yet unfulfilled, who see the outline of some land flowing with milk and honey, and have the faith that God's spirit will be formed out upon all flesh, such are the ones who have broken the shackles of bondage, and lead the nations across the dessert that they might live in freedom and in the land of their own God.

But do not be deceived in incapacity of language to convey the idea of the prophet. God will pour out his spirit upon all flesh at some future time to be sure, but the very knowledge of that outpouring, the very faith in the certainty of its realization is in itself no less a present and a vital and living outpouring of its power in the young men who see visions, and the old men who dream dreams this very day. However much you and I may take delight in the outpourings of the spirit that shall come to pass in the days that are before us, however much we delight to live in that world of fancy in which all sorrow, all weeping, all sin and evil are unknown, the fact is that there is an outpouring of God's spirit this very day not less, but even greater than at any time in the past. Possibly less in intensity but no less in importance, and significance than any outpouring that may quench souls who may thirst often righteousness in the days to come. The outpouring of the future can never come until the outpouring of the present has filled the life and the soul has again become thirsty. This world of fancy in which we delight to feast our eyes, and drink our fill from the spring of the eternal spirit, is a world of the present, right here and now, or else it never has been, or never will be. Whoever is unable to see the spirit today has never seen it at any time, nor will hardly be able to feel its pulsating life when it pours itself forth tomorrow. If you cannot see God in the impoverished, sin-stained outcast of the street, who bears for us the burden of our sin, selfishness, and greed, you are no less able to see him in Jesus the Christ. If you cannot see God in the hungry ignorant, degraded human being whose tears of pain still stain the clothes that you and I wear as we come into the presence of God to worship him, you cannot see God in Jesus dying on the cross. If you cannot see God in the thousand and one souls that you pass by on the street each day that

you live, you are as dead and as lifeless as any decaying tree trunk that stands like a dismal sentinel alone upon the hilltop.

Now I do not in the least wish to lessen the hope, the eternal faith of man in the glory and the blessings of the future, be that future tomorrow or one thousand years or one hundred thousand years from today. I think that the spirit that was in the Pilgrim forefathers is still in our veins today. Like John Robinson², we look to see greater truths, greater deeds, revealed in the years to come than have ever made glorious and noble heroes and martyrs of history. The future is bright with the prospect of glorious life, and men in whom the ideals of humanity shall be incarnated in ever greater perfection than in the past.

In truth to make our faith in the expounding and deepening life of the future the more organic in our nature, to weave it into every fiber of our being and build a broad deep foundation of solid faith, we must look upon the life about with all its varying complexities, its imperfections, its shortcomings, its defeats and its stains of effort and sin, we must look upon all this and still say as the prophet has always said, but translating his future tense into the present tense, and his hope and faith into the voice of assurance, and victory. "It has come to pass that I am pouring out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters are prophesying, your old men are dreaming dreams, and your young men are seeing visions."

The most common form of blasphemy, the most cheapened and godless form of irreligion that one comes in contact with is the form which sees in the living present no signs of the outpouring of God's spirit upon our own times, and our own life. The most scathing criticism, the most cruel and hopeless conception of God and his relation to man is to be found, not in the scoffer nor the so-called irreligious, but in the very church itself. What ingenious son of sin and wickedness could conceive of a more selfish hideous

² John Robinson (1576-1625) was the pastor of the Pilgrims before they left on the Mayflower. Along with Robert Browne and Henry Barrow, John Robinson was one of the founders of the Congregational Church.

monster than the God which has figured in some of the historical forms of Christianity. How far is the God of some of the theologians from the God of whom Jesus spoke, and to whom he prayed, with whom he worked together in the Kingdom. It is but a mock piety, and a travesty upon human life, and the spirit of all things to fill the days and nights with hideous cries of complaint and bewailing over the lack of spiritual outpouring in our own times. The man, the church, the institutions who thus spend its time, but commits itself before the whole world as a failure in its duty. Right in the very face of the senseless and godless cry of the church for a revival of religious interest and spiritual fever, there is growing and developing a new form in which the outpourings of God's spirit is as real and vital and life-giving as the outpouring at the day of Pentecost. In spite of the {???) soulless standards by which we pass our judgement upon the soul that is thirsting after righteous, even amid the most arid deserts into which we have banished them, there is many an outcast who has yet to blaspheme the holy spirit and to be counted wanting in the moment when the demand to do the will of God is made upon them. People sing with feeling that would be almost pathetic were it not so humorous the song, "I think when I read the sweet story of old, when Jesus was here among men who he called little children as lambs to his fold. I wish that I could have been with him then." But they forget in singing that Jesus was an outcast, despised and rejected of men, a mere worthless vagabond as measured by the standards of economics, a heretic and a blasphemer of God as measured by the scribes and the Pharisees, a non-descript of the common people as measured by the standards of social formalities. Were that same Jesus to come among us today, he would doubtless have opportunity to watch the crowd of singers of that sentimental rhyme fade away into the distance as each one looked upon the outward life in which the spirit that was in Jesus manifested itself. The pious long-faced {???) of Jesus' day were still crying for the time to come to pass when God shall pour out his holy spirit upon all flesh, and the sons and daughters shall prophecy, and the old men shall dream dreams, and the young men shall see visions, while Jesus himself was walking about the country radiating into every dark and gloomy corner the spirit of the Father as it shown through his face and flowed from the tips of his fingers. Today he

would doubtless get a few followers among the poor and the outcasts, as he did in those days. If we but had the eyes to see, the inclination, the disposition to see the outpouring of the spirit wherever it may display itself, our gloom would disappear, our long vacant stare after some far-off tomorrow of perfection would give way to the intensity of interest and delight in the every glorious manifestation of the outpourings of the spirit in our own day and generation. I do not in the least minimize the awful reality of sin and moral evil. I do not care for a world of painless sin, or a world of painless sorrowless joy. The pains and the sorrows have been the chastening powers which have loosed the pure spirit from its sin of comfort, luxury and ease. That form of religious faith which looks for the outpourings of the spirit in the form of anesthetics that would shut oneself from the very apparent evils, pains and uncompleted, and imperfect specimens of life, has no place among healthy robust manly people. Not to avoid pain, but to absorb it, not to flee from it, but to face and transform it into the sunshine of the soul, that he who drinks each day the cup of pain may give forth each day the sunlight of happiness and faith. In the very face of sin, of wickedness, imperfections and incongruities such as the most {??} can bring before us today, it is still true that if ever God has poured forth his spirit upon all flesh in the past or ever will in the years yet to come, he is doing it this very day. Deep eternal revelations of the power of love, of truth goodness and beauty, are sending forth {??} of the spirit from every soul as the drop of rain upon the grass and trees are transformed into gems through which the light of the sun pours. But the background of history the light of the truth and goodness and beauty as it is diffused and [sic] in the thousands upon thousands of human lives, his {??} its reign born of idealism whose arch is more complete, where colors are more distinct than any bow of the past.

This outpouring of the spirit in our own times is through the agency of human beings. The man whose life is not given to fulfilling the function his life, knows not how to judge the degree of perfection with which his neighbor fulfills his function. The man whose life is given to fulfilling his task of revealing the spirit has not the time and the inclination to judge of others. I do not know your inner

thoughts. I take it for granted that they are as well {???

as any human being's, but this I do know that if you cannot see the outpouring of the spirit in the present, then you are not able to see it in the past, nor will you be able to see it in the future. You have swathed the lens of your soul in the fires of some focus of selfishness, and the view and the outlook of life is {???, distorted, not to say completely obscured by the {???

of your own {???