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Inspiration & Life.

An Address

*Given to the Croydon Ethical and Religious Fellowship,
on Whit Sunday, May 17th, 1891.*

By W. J. JUPP.

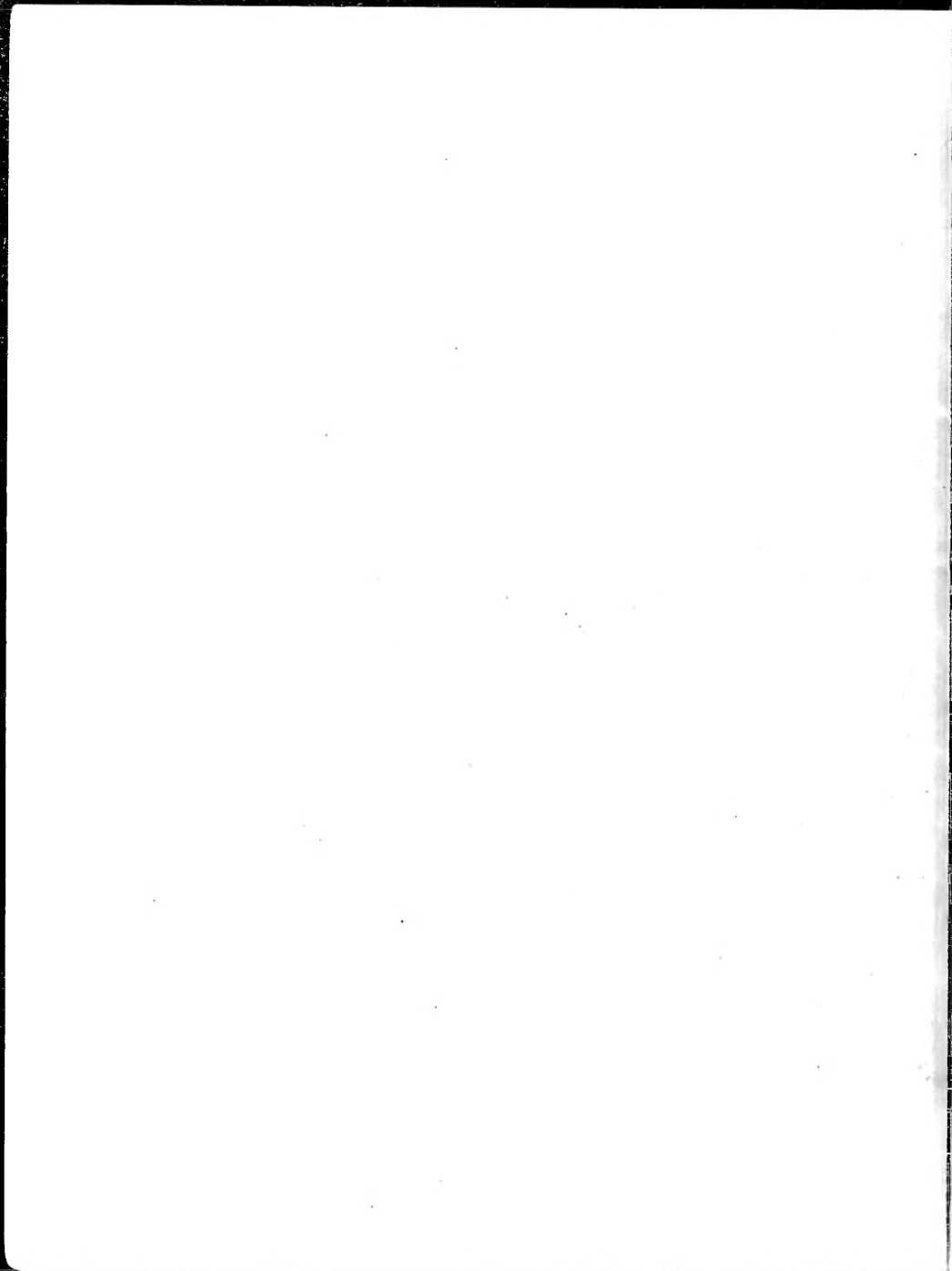


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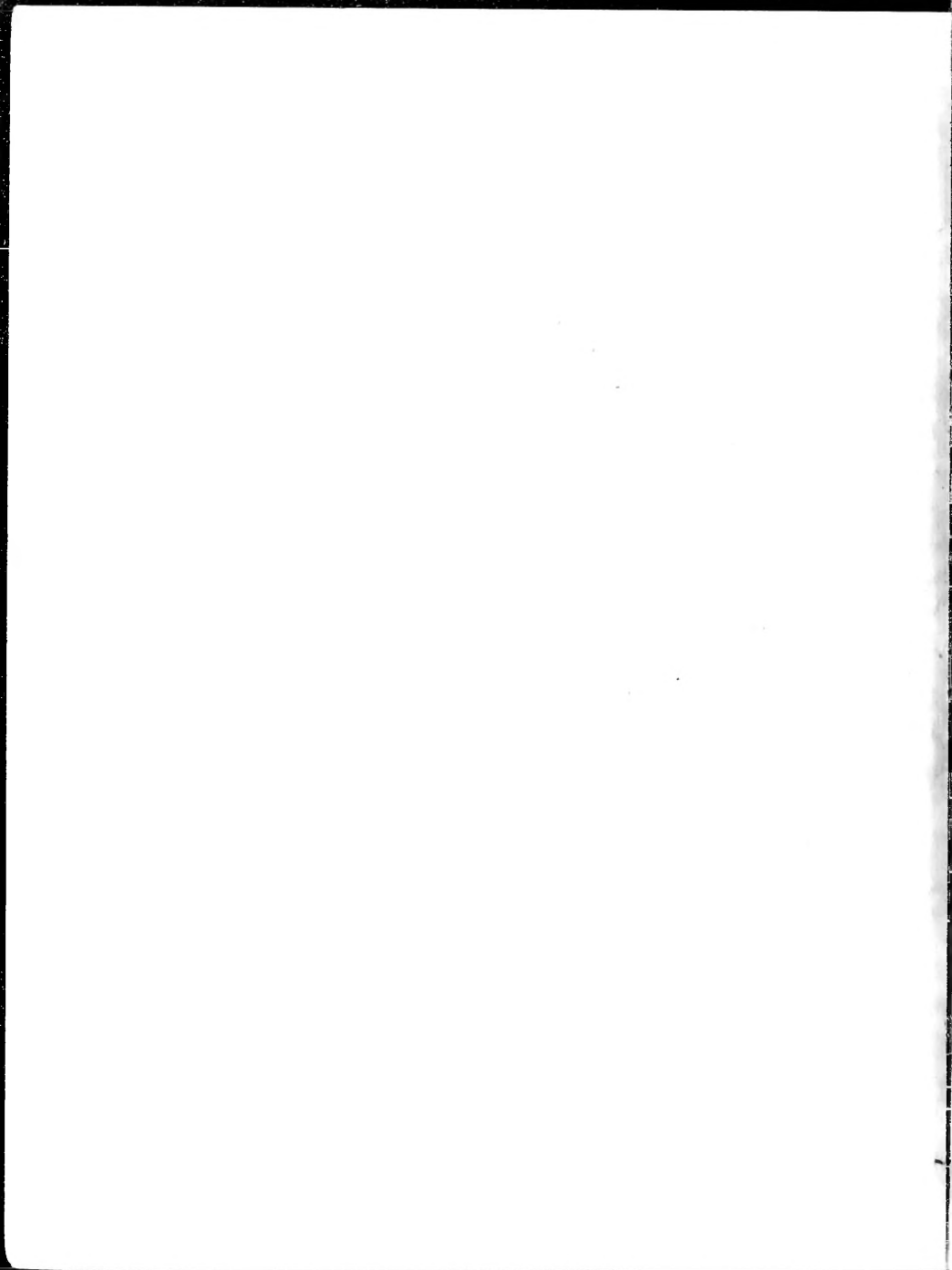


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J. F. Oakeshott

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WHITSUNTIDE is a festival of the Christian Church; it commemorates a great movement and a great occasion; it is a witness to the doctrine of inspiration, to the coming upon men of old time of some powerful and most effective impulse of spirit. Its purpose, it would seem, was to put great stress on one formula of what is so curiously named the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Ghost." If to many it means only, that once and long ago men felt the inspirations of heaven, and that then the final revelations of truth and good were made to the human race, it need not therefore mean that or nothing to every one. It may serve to remind us not only of what has been, but of what, under new forms,

may be again. Inspiration is not of the past only. The world is alive still. "The morning wind for ever blows. There is more day to dawn." Life is ever open to fresh enthusiasm and the impulse of new hopes. It is well, therefore, to keep this festival of Whitsuntide, and to say with others, even though the words should bear not quite the same interpretation, "We also believe in the Holy Ghost."

By no study of the New Testament can we discover what actually happened in the days that followed the death of Jesus. But by a study of the history of eighteen centuries, nay, by a knowledge of the merest outline of that history, we may know that an impulse came then upon a few men great enough to inaugurate a religious movement such as no opposition could overcome and no obstacles finally restrain. It was as if, the ministry of Christ having prepared men for it, a fresh inflow of life from its original sources caught them in its powerful current and carried them forward. It would be well if we could understand this, and give a more rational account of it than

is usually given ; but it would be better still if we could have some experience of it, and know what it is to be thus wrought on and lifted to higher levels of thought and hope. For not then only, at the advent of Christianity, but in times before and after that, men have known the impulsions of the Spirit, the stir of forces hard to account for in ordinary ways.

It is very strange, this doctrine of inspiration ; strange, and hardly credible when confined to one book however sacred, and to one age however favoured ; but strange and profoundly significant when applied to life and to the great movements of human thought and development.

In some cases, where a certain course of thought and certain tendencies of human events seem to lead up to and necessitate great changes, the swift revival, the quick revolutionary fervour, lends itself to quite rational explanation. But some movements, and more especially some *men*, have a way of defying analysis and transcending the logic of consecutive ideas. The courses of Jewish thought and Jewish history, for instance,

may account for John the Baptist and for the ardent though short-lived enthusiasm which he evoked. But they do not account for Jesus of Nazareth and for the religion which has carried His name and influence into such wide regions and through such long periods of time. The power which turned fishermen like Peter and John into enthusiasts for an ideal, and raised them into heroes and martyrs for its sake, is not a matter easy to account for and reduce to very simple terms. The vision which changed the bigoted Saul of Tarsus into Paul the "apostle of the Gentiles" does not lend itself readily to criticism or intellectual analysis. And it is so with some later revivals of religious faith.

That widespread movement in Europe which brought the revival of learning and a great passion for reform may account for such men as Erasmus and Colet and Sir Thomas More ; but when you come to Luther it is different. These influences do not explain him. A force is there which astonishes and confounds.

The same is true in other departments of man's

spiritual activity. The stir and tumult of ideas, kindling the imagination and the whole intellectual life of England in the sixteenth century, make us almost look for such poets and dramatists as, with one exception, the Elizabethan period affords; Spenser and Jonson and Marlowe are natural, so to speak, though of course they are men of genius too. But Shakespeare takes our breath. We stand in awe and wonder. We cannot account for him; he is so vast and great, so commanding and consummate.

“Others abide our questions,—Thou art free.
We ask and ask,—Thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge.”

So the revolutionary movement of the latter half of the eighteenth century accounts largely for the English writers of its closing years, its thinkers and its poets. But for such as Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley it does not account. Blake, with heart of a child and the eye of a seer, singing with the freshness and joy of Chaucer himself, and yet beholding the Unseen with steadfast gaze

and uttering prophecies which mingle heaven and earth in one, and unfold to us again the age of innocence and gladness that is yet to be ; it is hard to find his place among the natural tendencies of the age. And Wordsworth, the sage, calm, joyous one—poet at once of lowliest things on homely earth and of highest spiritual dreams, coming there as if direct “from God, who is our home,” and seeing all the world with other eyes—the world of beauty and of joy it might be for all men if they would but take it right : who is to explain him ? He is of no age. The voices of nature herself speak in his solemn yet exultant verse. And Shelley, with that fearful range of vision, soaring into vast and trackless realms of thought and passion, how baffling and defiant is he ; something which eludes and yet dismays us crosses the world’s wide stage when such a soul is here.

And in our own day, Browning and Tennyson and Arnold write for their age, interpret different phases of the thought by which nearly all who think seriously are affected and constrained. But

such as Emerson, Whitman, and Edward Carpenter speak from another plane. To them the higher vision comes and an insight into deeper and more perfect life. We must recognise, I think, the difference between the *gifted* and the *inspired* man.

And yet we have no need to fall back on what is called the miraculous, the supernatural, in order to believe in these things; nor, if we do, is there any real help or explanation to be come at so. We do but confuse ourselves with words; we hide the difficulty (if it be one) behind some theory of magical or extraneous interference with the sacred order of the world. It is simpler and equally reverent to say that these inspirations which surprise us so are movements on a higher level of spiritual action than that on which our reason can, as yet, master the process or note the connection between effect and cause. In truth, the connection between spiritual impulse or will, and material result, in the most ordinary affairs, is not by any means absolutely clear to us. How one man's thought can influence another's deed,

or even his own, is, in its last analysis, a mystery still. So that from one point of view all is miracle, as Carlyle and Whitman have said; from another all is natural and according to changeless and universal laws; from yet another, and one which covers both these, all is *spiritual*—the unseen works through, and realises itself in the visible, and man is everywhere the incarnation of God.

In any case, and in whatever terms we express the eternal fact, let us not break up life into fragments and sever into arbitrary sections the progressive and unfolding unity of the world.

That is a luminous and suggestive saying in the Fourth Gospel: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." How happy and how true is the analogy there. This movement in the air which we call the wind, so fitful, inconstant, uncertain, coming upon us unexpectedly, we know not whence, now as a gentle breeze that dies away in a few moments,

now as a fierce gale that sweeps on for hours, now as a black north-easter that can blight for weeks the promise of spring—this wind (the very symbol of inconstancy and fickleness) we know to be governed by the same law as that which determines the fall of a stone or the outspreading of a leaf; only its operation is so much more difficult to bring into the range of human calculation. It works in a wider sphere, and in what seems to us a less regular course. It is only now, in these late years of science, that men are able to determine a little what is the force and what will be the probable direction of the wind at any particular place at a given time. Seems it not somewhat thus with the great movements of the spiritual order? The same reasonable law is there as in the simplest working of the human mind; but the range of its purpose is more vast; the play of its influence on human life is too complex and involved for us, as yet, to determine and to comprehend. If we wish for a rational and, in any sense, satisfying account of *any* movement, we must look for it, I think, in the conception that life as a whole

is a manifestation of spirit, that the world is a process or evolution of God, that *things* are the forms or expressions of *thought*. One purpose, one law, one will pervades and prevails through all time and space. But to some persons and to some periods of human history this purpose has been more manifest, this law more clearly known, this will more passionately loved. The Eternal thought has cleared itself to the lonely soul or to the few who have stood together in its solemn light; and then it is that you have a new religious impulse. And whether it issue in a great revival of poetry and art, or of philosophy and science, or of ethical and social regeneration, the impulse is still religious, and the movement is inspired; it is a day of pentecost, and men are "filled with the Holy Ghost," and speak as with other tongues.

Two things are invariably significant of this inspired movement in the life of man.

(1) It is always *creative*. It begets fresh ideas and new forms of activity and life. It may be destructive; it may break down or push out of its

way old things. But that is only a side issue ; its tendency is creative. It does not, indeed, so much make new things as re-combine the old and fuse them with a new spirit. What Browning claims in his "Abt Vogler" for the musician is not less true of the inspired worker in any sphere of life and thought. In that poem the painter and singer are spoken of as artists who work in "obedience to laws," while the musician is free to create, to be one with God in his work.

The "palace of sound" which the composer has just built up while extemporizing on his new musical instrument, the orchestrion, has passed away, gone into the silence from which he called it forth, and he soliloquises thus :

"What never has been, was now ; what was, as it shall be
anon ;
And what is—shall I say, matched both ? for I was made
perfect too.

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of
my soul,
All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly
forth,

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All through music and me! For think, had I painted the  
whole,  
Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-  
worth.  
Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect proceeds  
from cause,  
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is  
told;  
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,  
Painter and poet are proud, in the artist-list enrolled!

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that  
can,  
Existent behind all laws: that made them, and, lo! they  
are!  
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to  
man,  
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound,  
but a star.  
Consider it well; each tone of our scale in itself is  
nought;  
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is  
said;  
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought,  
And, there! Ye have heard and seen; consider and bow  
the head!"

Not here alone surely, but in all realms of the  
life of man's spirit this constructive power may

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discover itself and work for highest ends. The "finger of God" is in painter's and poet's work as well as in musician's, and he with them, at his highest, must still obey, nor think to free himself from law.

We can discern these creative forces at work in the days of Christ and His early followers, though the age is so distant and the facts so difficult to determine. As He taught, many of the old things fell away because of the new formative energy that was at work in the sphere of man's ethical life. Narrow Jewish ideas and worn-out forms of religion dropt out of view, not so much from any direct attack upon them as from the fresh living thought which was springing up in the midst of them. Many of these forms were neither dismissed nor ignored by Jesus Himself; some, such as prayer, the Sabbath, even fasting, would seem to have been retained by Him. Many of His greatest sayings, too, were the old ones which prophets and rabbis had uttered before. But all is changed by the new purpose and the new ideal which His ministry shapes and embodies.

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Hence was it that the Church which grew out of his thought was hated, as a new departure, by none so much as by the religious community in which he himself was nurtured. Early Christians found their greatest foes among Jews, and this fact is an effective witness to the presence of strong creative forces at work, such as conservative human nature always dreads and resists. The sacred writings of this young society were justly named, by a later age, "The *New Testament*."

Inspiration in all its higher forms is of necessity creative. Its impulse is constructive, and it labours to build up the new by fusion and recombination rather than by destruction of the old. The Power that *makes* becomes effective in human life; the originating and formative principle of the world stimulates to action in fresh and untried fields. It was so in the great days of Italian art. It was so in the time of awakening of profound speculative insight in Germany a hundred years ago. It was so when the spirit of English poetry broke with the old eighteenth century

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manners, and returned to nature for impulse and renewal. It may prove to be so with that movement of our own day which is demanding freedom, justice, and equality for men as these things have never been demanded before. If, as many believe, this great democratic hope for brotherhood and universal liberty is touched with the higher creative inspiration, then will it surely reconstruct our human world. It will not make haste to overthrow and destroy as in 1789. It will not be anxious to deny or to prove the past a mockery and a dream. It will work rather from within, and by the energies of thought and love. It will fuse and regenerate man's life with fresh ideals. Somewhat slowly perhaps, but with the more certainty, "old things will pass away, all things will become new."

(2) The other sign or accompaniment of a pentecostal age, and one closely allied to this of which I have spoken, is that the new vision of truth is followed by a strong *emotional* impulse. Thought kindles into feeling, and the nobler passions of men are stirred. This is true, of course,

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more especially, or at any rate, more obviously, when the movement is an ethical one. It may be so in all movements where great formative and original forces are at work. But where the inspiration works directly on conduct and on social life, emotion always comes into freer and more effective play.

The moral influence of the personality of Jesus is one of the supreme facts of human life. He has wrought on the *heart*, on the purest emotions of men as perhaps no other ever will. The like of this we shall hardly see achieved again.

We have often to remind ourselves that there are two ways of reaching truth and applying it to life. There is the logical process, the method of pure intellectual analysis and construction; and there is the method of insight—the intense gaze, the glance of the seer. The former is usually cold and calm; the latter is intense and passionate. Men who see things, to whom great moral and religious ideas stand out clear—they can hardly tell you why, only they are outlined to

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their vision as against the eternal skies of thought—these are men who feel strongly the things they see; and when they speak or act them, it is with their whole being tremulous with emotion. They become magnetic, and a great influence radiates from them. The inspired vision becomes an inspiring impulse; their purpose kindles upon others, and so, almost without knowing or intending it, a new church, a new moral and spiritual communion is established among men. The ideas which affect men in this way, and which are alive and effective in bringing them into new social relations, may have been thought of long before—spoken and written of in many ways. But it is the glance of intuition, and the passion of a great love and longing for their realisation that gives them a uniting and moulding power. When seen and felt they become organic, and men give in to them as to the will of heaven.

It has often seemed to me that we are waiting to-day for the man, or the men, who can see, with direct and unclouded insight, what many have

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already thought out and proved. The solidarity of the human race has been proved. The right to freedom, to justice, to equal opportunity for personal development, and equal access to the real necessities of life and joy (this is what we mean when we speak of equality) has been proved, if any moral principle can be proved. Every rational person, with any human heart in him, believes now in the "brotherhood of man"; he will agree that no one should be enslaved, or oppressed, or in any way deprived by his fellow of his birthright of good. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." These are the commonplaces of morality to-day; we all agree to them. And what these things involve in actual life, how they apply to business relations, to political affairs, to questions of national and international concern,—this too is being steadily and carefully worked out. We know pretty nearly what it all means and demands. But now let one come who *sees* all this, to whom mankind *is* a brotherhood, and in whom the vision thereof shines as a



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divine illumination, as an unfolding of the ideal to his spiritual gaze ; and let this one speak and act and move about among men ; will not that mean a new pentecost ? It will not indeed make the ideal to become suddenly actual and embodied ; it will not, by swift revolution, change the world into a paradise and human life into a perfect good. But it will do what perhaps is better than this. It will gather up the scattered and broken forces that are already at work, though feebly, because of disunion and distrust ; it will begin to form that Church of Man, which is also the Church of God, whose watchword is Liberty, whose rallying cry is Brotherhood, the weapons of whose warfare are Reason and Righteousness and Faith and Hope and Love.

And yet perhaps not to one alone or supremely, as in the olden days, but to many among men, this vision will be given and this emotional fervour granted. Indeed, it may be already given, and what is needed now, what the age is waiting for, is that they who see and feel thus should find each other out, should draw together and become

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a new and living fellowship of the Christ, that so upon them might come the full inspiration of the spirit of their age, that energy of life itself, by which the world shall be changed and a new era for humanity dawn in splendour and in solemn joy.



