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The Holy City—A Twentieth Century "Vision"

By J. S. Woodsworth, Director, Bureau of Social Research

"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."—Rev. 21-10.

It was in Montreal. Thruout the evening I had been thinking and writing about the needs and possibilities of the city. Weary of "statistics" and "problems" and tired of sitting, I laid down my pen, put on my coat and hat and went out into the streets. Almost instinctively I took my way toward the mountain. The drives were now deserted and quiet. I was alone with the night. I began to climb the long dark steps. Up and up—there is an exhilaration simply in climbing and one is always rewarded at the top.

At last the great city lay below me. Its myriads of lights stretched away into the indistinctness of the enveloping night. The clouds had obscured the stars above me, but below was an inverted sky. In it the street lights shone thru the slightly illuminated mist, like the brighter stars in the midst of the milky way. To make the illusion complete, the light of an occasional motor car flashing past a street corner disappeared as a falling star.

Who could not dream? In Tennyson's phrase, "I dipped into the future." I saw Montreal a vast city, the metropolis of a country as populous as the United States. The city was ten times its present size—a second London, stretching north and south and east and west, covering the island and stretching beyond the rivers.

The haunting music of "The Holy City" was in my ears. Then came back to me a sacred evening hour when from the Mount of Olives I had looked across to old Jerusalem. It was doubtless near the very spot from which Jesus had beheld the city and wept over it. Two thousand years had passed—two thousand years of Christian teaching and effort and still the people of Jerusalem were living in poverty and ignorance and vice. Had the work of Jesus then been a failure? I remembered the questionings of that hour and the message of that hour. His work a failure? No! His work had to be repeated by each of his disciples. His work had to be carried a step further—a step nearer completion—by each generation.

My thoughts came back from Palestine to my own land. I strained my eyes to see Montreal as the Holy City. The great domes and towers, the warehouses and office buildings were concealed in the darkness, but everywhere gleamed the tiny pin-points that betokened ten thousand homes.

Yes, the Holy City would be a vast city of homes. There would not be tens of thousands of vacant lots held from the use of the people. Every family might own a home of its own. In our Father's house are many mansions!

Then into my mind there came crawling the pictures of the poor homes in the city which I had visited a few days before. There was a poor Italian home in a tenement, the rooms dark and ill-smelling, the window kept closed to keep out the stench of the street. The father had been unemployed for months, the mother was well-nigh discouraged, the children were surrounded by unwholesome influences. The little bambino in its wrappings had seemed the one ray of brightness, suggesting as it did the Christ child of one of the Italian masters. There was the Jewish home where the mother was tubercular. The Irish home where the father was shiftless. The Russian home—street after street of wretchedness.

I thought of the homeless men at the City Refuge—the old emaciated wrecks of humanity glad to find any shelter at the close of the day. Poor fellows, life had been too much for them. "Happy home life"—the phrase was for them a bit of mockery.

I remembered a bedraggled looking woman whom the other evening I had noticed standing in a dusky doorway.

As I passed she had spoken to me cautiously one word—"Dear." "Dear"—on her lips a terrible word—yet the pathos of it! For as I had hurried on along the dark streets I had thought of a happy home where that word carries a wealth of pure and unselfish love.

I had thought of a little boy who puts on a manly stride and boasts, "I am a father too," and of his younger brother who echoes the boast, "I'm a father too." And I thought of two little girls in white, tucked in their beds and awaiting a good night kiss. How poverty-stricken this poor creature of the street that she should stand in the cold night offering to the passing stranger the drags of her womanhood.

In this city of homes I thought I could discern the indistinct outlines of the work-places of the future. To these men and women went forth in the morning, not like "dumb driven cattle," but eagerly as the artist to his studio or the child to its play. They worked thruout the day, not as masters and slaves, not as jealous rivals, but as partners in a common enterprise. They co-operated freely and unselfishly under normal conditions as men now co-operate in times of intense excitement and crisis. They returned in the evening each having contributed according to his ability to the welfare of the community; each as a matter of course enjoying his full share of the opportunities which the community offered.

There were great buildings with domes and steeples that looked something like churches and yet all the people seemed to frequent them for all sorts of purposes. They were the common meeting places. The earlier distinction between sacred and secular seemed to have no meaning. Formal "services" conducted by rival institutions were replaced by the gathering together of congenial groups to discuss the further development and beautification of the city. "I saw no temple therein." The city itself was one vast temple.

The vision faded. The night wind was cold. As I descended the dark steps my view of the city became obscured. Soon I was walking along the pavement between the long rows of stone buildings. I had come down again to the lower levels and to ordinary life.

But still the vision lingers. In the midst of "statistics" and "problems" it sometimes presents itself and gives value to the statistics or throws light upon the problems. For our supreme task is to make our dreams come true, to transform our city into the Holy City, to make this land, in reality, "God's own country."

KITCHENER

(By Robert J. C. Stead.)

Weep, waves of England! Nobler clay Was ne'er to nobler grave consigned; The wild waves weep with us today. Who mourn a nation's master-mind.

We hoped an honored age for him, And ashes laid with England's great; And rapturous music, and the dim Deep hush that veils our Tomb of State.

But this is better. Let him sleep Where sleep the men who made us free, For England's heart is in the deep, And England's glory is the sea.

One only vow above his bier, One only oath beside his bed; We swear our flag shall shield him here Until the sea gives up its dead!

Leap, waves of England! Boastful be, And fling defiance in the blast, For earth is envious of the sea, Which shelters England's dead at last.

Sharp—"I punctuated my tyre the other day."

Friend—"Punctuated! You mean punctured, I suppose."

Sharp—"P'raps I do; but, anyway, I came to a full stop."



J. S. WOODSWORTH

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