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MEN IN
HISTORY

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Young men in history

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Young Men in History

BY
Frank W. Gunsaulus, D.D.



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Young Men in History

Nothing is more certain than that the Bible is the young man's book, and its greatest story is the story of a young man. The scene in that story which would most affect young men, if they were to read the Bible as they would read Homer or Virgil, and especially if they were to read the Bible as they read any history of a great nation, such as was Israel, is the baptism of Jesus of Nazareth by his young friend and cousin, John.

A life so organic and influential as that of Jesus of Galilee is sure to have the center of its forcefulness at

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such an epoch-making point as this. At that baptism scene the heavens truly opened upon the spirit and life of Christ. At that time, in His mighty growth, the dove descended from out the bosom of eternity. That dignity which in earlier days had said with innocent grandeur, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" now realized itself, and became conscious through the objective responses of infinity unto Him as He received His baptism, saw the open heavens, and felt the footfalls of a divine destiny upon His uncovered head.

So while every human being has a profound interest in this episode in Jesus' life, because His conscious

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life-center seemed to have been first touched at that point, every young man must realize that there lies the most sublime scene unto him in all the picture gallery of the mighty past, a scene of such special significance in the history of our Master as to have invested every young man's life with an undreamed grandeur and an unforeseen dignity. It must and shall stand as the most characteristic scene which has been left us as the heritage of young men of all time. For whatever else Jesus was, and there were altitudes and latitudes of being in Him of which we have only the feeblest apprehension, He stands here as the typical young man. No speculation or

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denial can take Him from our own ranks, my brothers. No heresies have been so profound, no literalism of any orthodoxy has been so heartless, as to dethrone our hero and our saint. We claim Him to-day as our champion and our representative, even though, by being so near, He is also our Savior and our propitiation. To students and professors of didactics we say: "Exalt Him! Crown Him Lord of all! Cover Him with names that we cannot understand! Add all the metaphysical lore you have dreamed unto all the research you have made, and decorate it with nomenclature so perplexing as to distance all the past! Nevertheless, Jesus is still the young man's own

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brother and the most splendid and greatest name on God's roll call of young men."

When the roll call which men have written is read, it will be found that the young men have ruled the world. The oldest literatures have this record. The patriarchs unfolded the careers of boys into the conquests of old age. Kingdom and empire rode upon shoulders of young men, and their voices of enthusiasm and hope have sounded through many a black-breasted midnight and trumpeted the dawn through skies of thickest darkness. To causes that drooped they have come and added the raptures of hope; to enterprises that were sickening and faint, they

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have brought the bounding power of new enthusiasm. To the dead they have brought life. Everything from the foundation of the world has been crying for "young blood," and the armies of the advance have gained the day at the arrival of "recruits," whose hope and earnestness have never been defeated. Age and experience put themselves upon dying pillows made by young hands; into young palms and upon young ears falls the meaning of all the past; and thus God has written the natural dignity of the young man's life in the eternal statute book of the universe. It makes the young evermore the custodian of the old, and grants discharges to the old that the

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young may seize their fallen muskets and push on to universal triumph.

The reins of the future have been caught and held by young hands. At fifteen, Victor Hugo presented a poem to the academy; at sixteen, Bossuet dazzled all who heard him by his eloquence, and Leigh Hunt was a prolific writer of verses. At seventeen, Michael Angelo had room in the palace of Lorenzo de Medici, Mozart had entranced the courts of Germany, Chateaubriand had a commission, Alexander Hamilton commanded the attention of his country, Washington Irving delighted the readers of the *Morning Chronicle*. At eighteen Charles Spurgeon was pastor of a congregation; Zwingli had

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read the New Testament so well as to doubt the authority of the church; Grotius had published an edition of "Marcianus Capella." At nineteen Bach was organist at Armstadt; George Washington was a major; Webster had understood Espinasse; Bryant had written "Thanatopsis;" George Stephenson was carrying in his brain an improved steam engine; Galileo was awake to the secret of the vibrations of the bronze lamp of Pisa cathedral. At twenty Robert Hall had an enthusiastic audience; Alexander mounted the throne; Weber was producing symphonies; Schelling had grappled with the philosophy of Kant; Wallace had made assault against the arbitrary domi-

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nance of Edward I. At twenty-one Beethoven had added a great name to music; Kirke White had left his tremulous lyre; William Wilberforce was in Parliament; Mazzini was a prisoner in the citadel of Savona. At twenty-two Alfred began one of the most magnificent reigns which England has ever seen; his commander had made Wallenstein captain of the conquered fortress of Grau; Hampden was in Parliament; Savonarola was robed with a splendid name; Algernon Sydney had antagonized Cromwell; Rossini had excited an enthusiasm unequalled in the world of music; Schiller's "Robbers" had been written; Richelieu was a Bishop; Sir Phillip Sydney had

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been sent to complete the alliance of Protestantism.

At twenty-three Servetus had found the intolerance of fanaticism; Spinoza was excommunicated; Rubens had "compounded from the splendor of Paul Veronese and the glory of Tinteretto, that florid system of mannered magnificence which is the element of his art and the principle of his school;" Browning had written "Paracelsus;" Sir Henry Vane had filled Boston with enthusiasm; Richard Wagner carried with him the music of "Lohengrin;" Whitefield was preaching in the Tower Chapel at London; Bailey had written "Festus;" Emmet had thrilled Ireland with pathetic patriotism;

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Arthur Hallam had furnished Tennyson with his greatest poem ; Hume had composed his treatise on " Human Nature." At twenty-four Bismarck was captain of King's Cavalry ; Alexander had taken Thebes and had crossed the Hellespont ; Ariosto had made his muse support a family ; Dante was a distinguished soldier and poet ; Ruskin had written " Modern Painters ;" Santa Ana had expelled the Royalist from Vera Cruz ; Rutledge was the orator for the colonies ; Scipio had commanded the armies of Rome ; Sheridan had written " The Rivals ;" Rienzi had come forth as the second Brutus ; Richter had charmed Herder. At twenty-five Bernard had changed

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“The Valley of Wormwood” into Clairvaux; Æschylus was the greatest tragic poet of Greece; Xavier lectured on Aristotle; Coleridge had written “The Ancient Mariner;” Huss had become a flaming herald for truth; Southey had burned more verses than he published during life. At twenty-six Robespierre defended the work of Franklin against ignorance; Franklin, himself, wrote the wisdom of “Poor Richard;” Roger Williams had aroused all the intolerance of New England; Turner was a member of the Royal Academy; Mark Antony was the hero of Rome. At twenty-seven Oberlin had a parish of 9,000 acres of rocky soil; Daniel O’Connell had begun his

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career as an agitator; Correggio had the commission to execute the frescoes on the cupola of San Giovanni in Parma.

At twenty-eight, Wordsworth was joint author with Coleridge; Warwick was a distinguished soldier on the Scottish border; Hannibal took Saguntum while Rome deliberated on its rescue; Bacon was counsel extraordinary for the Queen; Napoleon had revolutionized Europe. At twenty-nine Robert South's eloquence had moved British royalty; Lord John Russell was a reformer in Parliament; Milton was the author of "Comus;" Arminius had liberated Germany; Cromwell had begun his work. At thirty, Rey-

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nolds was the greatest portrait painter in England; Da Vinci had said: "I will undertake any work in sculpture, in marble, in bronze, or in terracotta—likewise in painting I can do as well as any man, be he who he may."

All these, with the thousands of others, are only some of the young men who have ruled the world. Their life work had been begun and its inspiration had been gained. John Keats, Pitt, Summerfield, and Macaulay are only some of our fair names. Yet, my brothers, no one of these can stand as our perfect representative. No scene in any life I have mentioned can be called a characteristic scene for that ideal young man

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of which we dream. There, at the banks of Jordan stand the ages to look, beyond all heroism and all conquest, upon that face rising out of that hour of consecration with the youth of his career all aglow with the splendor of God—the young Jesus beginning His mighty manhood with God.

Jesus avoided no law of growth, no statute of the world, or order of nature, no sacrament of society or of God. He came upon the unspoken tendencies of the past, to speak them properly and truly. He came upon the bosom of the unfulfilled to fulfill it. To do that, He walked through our life. He came not to break it and to say: "It is nothing." He

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came to complete it, and to say: "It is everything, because divine." So human life was reconstituted, because reorganized, by His having passed through it divinely. And the old law was again illustrated—a man leaves himself in what he does or touches truly. Human existence has been larger since Jesus took it up, kissed it in His life, and laid it down, lovingly in His death. It is a greater thing to have been a lawyer since Puffendorf, Selden, Otis, and Cockburn. They have enlarged the definition of lawyer. It is much more to be a good or great preacher since Robertson, Brooks, Beecher. They have added dignity to the work. It is more to be an artist since Meis-

sonier and Corot; more to be a singer since Jenny Lind; more to be a hero since Havelock and Gordon; more to be a man since any true soul has enlarged and enriched the idea of manhood, in himself. This, in a divine way, is the effect of Jesus' career upon all human life. And this enlarging of its significance, the improving of its dignity, is what Jesus did with the consecrating of His life to righteousness and duty in that glorious baptismal scene.

Some method of consecration to life's great duties has made a place in all religions and in their ceremonies. And the various sacraments are a proof that, in all ages and places, within the consciousness of the race,

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there is a peculiar recognition of the special fitness of youth for the services of God and the offices of humanity. There is no more charming study than the following up through all kinds of literature of the evolution of the confessed dignity of a young man's life through these many forms. For, even before Jesus came, in every young Pericles, there pulsed the same distinctive elements which fit young men for the dignified business of opening new futures, and standing, in a sublime present, as the guardian of a hard-won past. These two, which we feel so keenly—a fullness of life which we call “enthusiasm,” and an affection for dreams of the future, which, roughly,

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we call "hope," are constitutional in young men; and, added to those common faculties which are the race's being, they make the young man what he is. So that, in and of himself, there is a peculiar dignity in every young man here to-day. The capital of the race has not been computed and rightly estimated, if there has not been put among the greatest the fact that in every one of us it finds that peculiar love for the new and striking, which has espoused enterprises and builded convoys unto it; that ardent admiration of heroism which has turned the defeats of a great cause into victories; that burning and abounding vitality which has rushed up the altar steps of the untried and

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the unknown and made its edifice beyond the clouds; that architectural passion which swung air castle after air castle into the void, rebuilt it again and again from fallen pieces and flat ruins, and builds yet, on foundations which no man saw, unto heights whereto no flood has swept. In these efforts alone do we see the eternal colors and forms which the buoyant soul of a young man takes on.

Surveying calmly what distinguishes a young man from one of riper years, we revolt as we look at that philosophy of a young man's life, born in the atmosphere of hopelessness and faithlessness, which proposes to keep a young man safe by "hold-

ing him down" until he gets "old enough to know better;" by repressing all his buoyancy and idealism until it grows sane and quiet; by fastening him to an old man's body of ideas until he shall be "broken in" to the serenity of a calmer life. That philosophy has been tried, and its ruins are everywhere. It is just about as sure to leave a man in ruins as all growth is to leave in ruins that which impedes it. If youth cannot air itself and go out in expression, it will explode and lay waste the premises. To avoid explosion, don't shut it up and drive nails into the doors, for the pounding will strike the explosive, and you will not live to look at the ruin. It is absurd; it

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always was wicked faithlessness to God to think that you must suppress and kill a boy to make anything out of him. If you hitch the body of some old man's theories to him, you will hear him crying: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And he will die or be delivered. Deliverance is better than death. For the ideal young of many of our Sunday-school books and some men's minds is a dead boy. He has not vitality enough to be tempted. He is a boy of no opinions. He is supposed to "be still while other people talk"—no difference what fool is talking, or how much more he may know. His value seems to lie in his being an echo, not a voice.

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Above all things, he must not do this and do that; and heaven only knows what he can and may do safely. Well, he is a dead weight and a stumbling block when he gets "of age." He is supposed to know nothing until he has been informed, and then he has information enough given to him to submerge a continent. Take a hundred such men and you can pile them up like stacks of sawdust or like rails. This is the result of the philosophy of repression.

Standing by this baptism scene, I discern the outlines of another philosophy of a young man's life. It is the philosophy of consecration and expression. Instead of repression, holding down, pushing into a corner

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all the tumultuous forces of life, Jesus would carry it to the stream of divine glory, bury it in its current, and lift it out, to be a new power in the world, sent out like an evangel, in the freedom of universal atmosphere, in the liberty of God's sky, to express this tumult in sweetest music, to body forth this, which, my brother, you and I have to express, or to kill, or to explode, into forms of philanthropy, devoted work for man and God. And that is why this scene is a part of our capital, one of the spots where a young man sees what he is, who he is, why he is so full of enthusiasm and hope, and what he is to do with it.

What an enigma is a true young

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man to himself! He dreams more than Oriental dreams. He builds higher than Aladdin's palace. He wonders what to do with all his rush of life. People tell him to "be quiet." Nothing can convince him that he may attempt too much. To his mind, everything depends upon his getting to work now, and his working all the time. Put him under a quiet, somnolent sky, let him calmly think it over, and what a waste he is, in all the universe, if he has no special outlook into the eternal, no avenue for himself into the realms above him, around him, before him. This baptism scene is the brave and triumphant solution of the problem. It is the sketch, made in

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the far past, for all time to come, of young manhood consecrated. Behold, the heavens open, the dove descends, the temporal is lying like a babe in the lap of the eternal; the young man's heart is with God, while the drops, shot through and through with the life and light of Jehovah, fall tremulously from His forehead, and the ripples of His baptism die away along the newly fretted shore.

I therefore take the expression in all its simple grandeur, that, when this young Jew was thus consecrating Himself unto the service of God and man, by the hands of another, the heavens of the ideal God's purpose and plan opened — the illimit-

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able was seen overspanning all that had been limited; the infinitude of His hitherto finite life was made manifest, and the heavenwardness and Godwardness of consecrated human life were forever made evident. And that, my brother, is what is always happening to any of us who will not begin our life work until we feel that over us have rolled the waves of some sacred influence, and within us has been born the ideal life. We want the opening of the heavens; we want the descending dove. That scene in the life of Jesus was the discovery of life's importance.

We feel enough of the earthliness of life. It is not very hard to find

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out that a man has a body. Hunger will make that revelation. It takes no royal teacher to make us believe in our hands, and feet, and ears, and eyes. A little "cold snap" or a heavily loaded table will open up all these facts, and most people understand the importance of them. What we need is a revelation of the heavenliness of life. Thanks be unto God, to give our life in glad self surrender unto Him is to find heights in life that no kite of our thought ever could have discovered, and to bring to our notice great stars which we may civilize, which no telescope can reveal. The idea—nay, rather the *fact*—of an immortal destiny takes the iron mask from

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the eyes and forehead of any soul. There is no firmament above one, after that discovery in God's love, but the infinite.

This dome of bone, which we name our skull, at once becomes as large as the very heaven. Its edges touch the verge of all things. Its zenith strikes the high center of eternity. Under it move life currents which mirror back the stars of God. That is just the help of Christ's religion to every other young man. Nothing can be ordinary in its atmosphere. The heavens are opened above everything. No duty is small, because life itself is so great. Every *due* thing is due to God, who is all-loving, from man, whose possible

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destiny is so great. That makes duty. Nothing is so strange as that men should talk about making a young man moral without making him religious. Suppose that we do not believe religiously, affectionately, in a divine destiny for us. What heart would we have for the stern moralities that shall make men of us? Why, if we shall not be allowed to rise into lofty and loftier manhood forever, why shall we begin the business at all? It must end in failure. Above all such wearisome doubt, which the hope and enthusiasm of a young man heartily despise, there is a ruling idea of a great future under the great God who aims at the greatness of man

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and his consequent glory. Every line in life becomes sacred for the sake of the picture it helps to make; every string in the woof is dear for the sake of the dear figure it will hold when the Divine One is done weaving.

Nothing but such a sentiment as this can answer to all this abounding enthusiasm and burning hope in you and me. They are the mute and tumultuous activity of our powers to be men after the heart of God. They are the rumbling fires, which, when let out of the caves, shall smelt the ore of the world for anchors of civilization, for ironclads of progress; for iron orators to speak revolutions in flame and can-

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non balls, for fine strings in which reside celestial melodies, for threads of thought to tie up the world into unity, and fasten continent to continent under the seas.

Let none of us, my brothers, call our full and uncontrollable life a curse. This life, in vein and muscle, in nerve and bone, which you have to "keep down," is only your unused capital. It does not need repression, but consecration and expression. It must not be pressed down else it will become infernal. It must be lifted up, then it will become supernal. The more you have of it, the greater are your possibilities. It is capital, better than bank stock. It must be the

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elixir of life that you shall draw upon in old age. Gladstone and Bismarck drew from a youth they could once hardly control, and such people never get old nor fall behind the times.

And the theory of Jesus, so far as we may find it, is that the more earnestness and hope one has, the more need he has of finding fit avenues for its expression. This baptism is the discovery of these avenues. I point you to Jesus as our representative, not only in the right use of these forces, but in the fact that He possessed them also. Oh, what enthusiasm had He! It mounted beyond that of all others of the world's great men.

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The baptism came. His enthusiasm rose out of that consecration to bear on its mighty front the bleeding hearts of men, the sufferings of untold millions, the woes of the children of Adam, the cares of the ages, the defeats of all time. It rose to lead all the diversities of men, all the armies of humanity, all the devotion of mankind—it rose to lead them into the land of palms and laurels, whose vast territory is held in fee simple by redeemed humanity. His hope was the infinite dream of Plato enlarged into infinite proportions. It was the fancy sketch of the greatest made a fact and suffused with the life of the Son of God. That was what He became

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after His consecration—did He not feel in His divine way, what are so earthly and human in us?

In that baptism Jesus realized man's place in the plan of the universe. In our consecrated life we must realize our relations to God's life. You go out to-morrow into your clerkship, into your employer's bank, into your own business. I charge you, so give yourself in glad consecration to God to-day, that it shall seem as though the waves of the ideal life have touched you, and that wherever you stand, henceforth, you stand for the eternal God. Yonder in Galilee is our ideal, my brothers! He stands for God, wherever He is. He has the ellipse of God's

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life passing through His soul; and such is His calm of spirit and strength of feeling that He cries: "I and the Father are one." I adore His divinity, but I cannot fail to see that wherever a young man stands for justice, truth, honor, purity, and holds that corner of the universe against all intruders, he may say with a holy enthusiasm and a reverent ardor: "I and the Father are one;" one as to the importance of this great battle of principles, one in the thought of who shall succeed, one in the joy of the victory. Brothers, let us claim no other young man as our champion and ideal. I see Him breasting everything and conquering everything,

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because the heavens of His life had been opened at that baptism.

Under the open heavens, in the fact of life's heavenwardness, I discern also the rising consciousness of a young man's relation unto His race. Such a sky has His mind become that He sees the horizon-rim taking every man in. He feels that into His life pour the interests of His age.

Like a forester with a newly sharpened ax he walks on, over fallen trees, and feels as he goes on, and the chips fly: "Behind me is a race wanting to get through these thickets; I chop and chop away; I chop for them; I chop for everybody that ever shall walk this road; they are coming behind me, and I go

on and on." Like Arnold Winkelried he feels that it is not simply *his* getting through, but it is the principle which he champions which belongs to humanity; a single poor soldier, with the audacity of his principle, cries not, "Make way for Arnold Winkelried," but "Make way for liberty!" The open heavens are so vast that a man cannot be small. Under them he sees a race, and feels that when he conquers or himself at his best, he conquers also for humanity.

But the poorest young man cannot feel his own dignity until he realizes how all the past makes him its heir and custodian. The past is always dying. It is always saying—

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when it feels the great canopy of eternity over it —“ In the name of God, Amen,” and forthwith, in such sacred air as this, it is giving its treasures into our hands. We are born heirs of the years and ages, with their results. And upon us also is saddled the work of the executor of the will and the administrators of the estate. We ought to be wonderfully honest with past, present and future to do all this. And for my part, I see nothing but the consecration of our life to God, that shall make us fit to do this great work and fill this great office. “ Heir, executor of the last will and testament, and the administrator of the past.”

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That is our dignified business, to settle with the great future the business of the great beneficiary, to administer in truth and equity this great legacy. You carry it all with you; with it you succeed or fail. Will you dare to load it on your back without the dove upon your forehead and the heavens all open under the throne of Jehovah! It will break you down if you try to carry it alone.

Only in the waves of such a consecration as this can a young man have a safe and true idea of conduct. To the music of that baptism, what a wretched and devilish discord is sin. Under the heavens opened up, so that you may see who

God is and what our life ought to be, what an infernal thing it is to soil our manhood, crush our possibilities, and ruin our souls. Every smallest duty has an infinite scope.

All through the life that now is, flow out the land of the life to come rivers of Jordan, whose waters have divided the land which some Moses of the past had left, from that into which some Joshua had entered—great streams which have rolled between the real and the ideal. Into one of these Jesus went, saying: “Suffer it to be so now.” All the streams of the earth felt the break of Jordan’s current by His baptism. Onward to the sea and gathered into the clouds, this baptism went into

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the dew and rain, and at last fell again into the seas which refresh our planet. Its ripples still play along the coast as its significance has broken against the shores of eternity. It has revived the continents of mankind. It has passed through the shores into the center of the human soul. Its rhythm has come from coast to coast and begun a new music. Its flash, under God, has revealed new forces in light, and its broad ripple has become a wave which tells of the depth of the water of life. To-day, let us ask some John if he will help us to "fulfill all righteousness," and let us seek in this baptism the opened heavens and the descending dove.



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