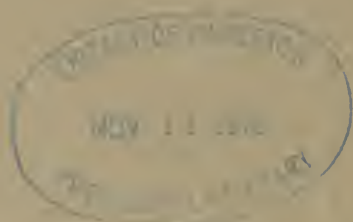


John Kelman

Your Sons and your Daughters
shall Propesy...Your Young Men
shall See Visions

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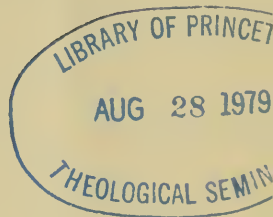
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JOHN KELMAN
D.D.

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A SERMON

Delivered in the
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church
New York City
Sunday, January 11, 1920

By the Pastor, the
REV. JOHN ^VKELMAN
D.D.

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By REV. JOHN KELMAN, D.D.

Your Sons and your Daughters shall Prophecy . . . Your Young Men shall See Visions.—Joel 3:28.

MY message this morning is for the young men and women of the congregation and for any of their friends who would care, along with them, to join in the class in preparation for the coming communion which we are about to start. I wish to invite to that class, not only those who have already made up their mind as to taking this step, but everyone who has been or is in the least degree interested in it. It is a great thing to be a Christian, and it is a great thing to profess to be one. Whether we are prepared to take that momentous step or not, it is at least important that we should know what it means and what the refusal of it means. So I invite you all to meet me these coming Sundays that we may talk with the utmost frankness about Christ and the Christian life. You will be abundantly welcome, and your coming will involve no obligation either for the present or for future occasions.

1. *The prophecy of youth.* The gift of prophecy has been in many minds associated with the idea of old age. We think of the aged bard in *The Lady of the Lake*, and of other prophetic minstrels fa-

mous in story and in song, until we have conceived of this as an elderly accomplishment, a gift of the spirit bestowed upon those who have no longer much stake in the vivid game of life. Consequent upon this perhaps is the further idea that prophecy goes with a sense of sadness. The last and hardest thing for man to learn upon the earth is foresight. Foresight is simply a calculation based upon experience. The aged prophet's message can never quite disentangle itself from its sources in his memory. He has lived through many things and outlived the surprises of life. Each new situation reminds him of something in the past, and will probably lead on to events somewhat similar to those which have happened before. Thus, along with any inspiration that there may be in such prophecy, there is a good deal that is quite definitely calculated. The sage remembers too many things, and experience dilutes his prophecy and keeps it from spontaneousness. It has been well said of experience that it is like the stern lights of a ship, revealing the track only after one has passed over it, but leaving the future dark and undistinguishable. This is of course only partially true, and the gift of foresight founded upon wise years of experience is one of the most useful elements in life. At the same time such foresight is an art rather than a gift, and it is difficult for the aged and experienced prophet to regain or to hold the unsophisticated freshness of his vision.

The prophecy of youth is different. You are not troubled by entangling experiences, for you have not had them. You are not interested in what has been,

but in what is going to be. There is all the difference between your prophecy and the aged bard's that there is between a man toiling to the top of a hill, with a horizon sweeping out further and further as he climbs, and the sudden flash of landscape seen by a young athlete in the act of leaping over a wall. You see, as it were in the brilliant light of instinctive vision, the glories and splendors of the world. Thus yours is a wilder and surer thing than theirs, and the real prophets are the young.

A recent writer has told us that

*There is more poetry in being young
Than in the finest song that Shakespeare sung.*

And the same might be said with equal truth of prophecy. Our sons and our daughters do indeed prophesy. Our young men and women see visions every day. Not only do they prophesy and see visions: they themselves are the supreme prophecy of our time. A young life has in it the undeveloped and undisclosed future. Upon what they are and what they think today, depends what we all shall be and think tomorrow. They stand at the opening of the gates of time, and set for history its course as it passes through. You who would read the course of future events and understand the evolution of the human race, study the young. The new ideas, that will one day become commonplace and dominate the thought of men, are already looking out upon you from their eyes. What they are thinking today, we all must think perforce, or at least we must face it and know why we

refuse it, before the year is out. In them the future is latent, and even the crudest of their dreams is but the seed-form of something which in its maturity may be wise and potent. It is not too much to say that not only shall our sons and our daughters prophesy; they actually *are* the one great prophecy which still lingers upon the earth.

How then may we interpret this prophecy? In other words, what is the meaning of youth? What is it you would say to us who are older? What is it that we see when we search those eyes of yours that look so freshly on the living world?

Well, frankly, we do not find much pity nor much patience there. You are the most merciless of critics. Our attempts at argument seem garrulous to you. You leap at your conclusions and utter final criticisms upon men and things with all the authority of the Oracle of Delphi. That is precisely as it should be. You have not seen much sorrow yet, nor have you been so often defeated as we have been. Much is waiting for you that will tone down the absoluteness of your judgment: but may God keep you from it all before its time! It takes a good while to teach any of us really to understand the heart of the under dog: and may it be long before you know anything about it!

On the other hand you have boundless faith in life, and for the sake of that superb gift we shall be willing to bear the thorns of your pitilessness and the briars of your impatience. Faith in life is the thing which is wanted most of all in a time like this. We older people believe any quantity of

creed—sometimes a great deal more than is good for us—but we do not sufficiently believe in life itself. We find it easy enough to believe in future life, and we simply have to believe in past life: but you believe in life here and now, and that is the real triumph of faith. Your imagination is unwearied with disillusion. Your confidence is undulled by experience. This is the time of life “when anything seems possible to the brave and faithful, and when facts and examples count for nothing unless they favor your own views.” God bless you for that. How we thank Him for your headstrong confidence! You are indeed prophets, and yours is the faith that overcometh the world.

Another of your gifts is that of unwearied courage and energy which can never be content with mere vision as a spectacle. You are on tiptoe to accomplish the fulfillment of your own prophecies, and to turn your visions into experiment and practice. Where the eye has seen the foot will follow. What you see today you set yourselves to realize tomorrow.

Once again, you are determined in this generation to be yourselves. Long ago it was otherwise, and for many generations in olden times the young were merely stereotyped copies of those who preceded them. Those stereotype plates are all broken now, and each generation has to set up its type for itself. We know very well that you are not going to copy us. Heaven forbid that you should. You make it abundantly evident that you are not going to do things just because other people do them, but

that you feel the responsibility of your own captaincy and command. When we crowd the bridge and hinder your steering there, you tell us in no doubtful tones that you are the captain of this ship of yours, and that there is no room for so many large persons on your bridge.

Well, this is all right. Far be it from us to check the liberties of youth, far less to insist upon its reproducing those patterns of ours whose faultiness we know too well. There is only one thing to remember, and you will excuse us if we entreat you to consider it. It is a great thing to be determined to be oneself. But the question must sooner or later arise, Which self are you going to be? For human nature is composite, and the phrase may cover many varieties of character. We are told of a young Oxford idealist who boasted to his preceptor that his reason for coming to Oxford was that he might be free to be himself, and received the laconic answer, "Couldn't you try for something better than that?" It is never a safe rule of life for old or young to follow the bidding of their present selves, and to obey the impulses of their will and desire as these stand. There is in each of us a spirit far beyond that to which we have yet attained, and a large reserve of powers as yet undeveloped. Do not set it up as your aim in life to realize your actual present selves, and to insist upon continuing to be just as you now are. Demand room for growth in your own ideals, and for progress in your own character, both in thought and action. Aim at being your best possible selves,

the men and women you have it in you to be, and not upon forcing the stamp of your own present will upon every possible choice which may occur.

So we salute you, sons and daughters of America. We thank God as we see you boldly marching through the stormy world of today with torches blown flat but blazing still. We believe that your adventurous spirit is safer and more full of promise than cautious experience of any kind would be. We believe in you and in your daring faith. We count that you yourselves are our most heartening prophecy, and we read the future in your eyes. Remember this, brothers and sisters, and in the days of temptation that will surely come upon you let our trust be a shield that will preserve you.

I would like to sum up all that I have said to you in the beautiful and rather wonderful words of O'Shaughnessy :—

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shapers
Of the world forever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory.
One man with a dream, at pleasure
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing
And Babel itself with our mirth,
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old, of the new world's worth:
For each age is a dream that is dying
Or one that is coming to birth.

2. *The message of your prophecy.* We do not only want to hear your prophecy. We want, so far as that may be, to understand what it means. Give us the interpretation of your visions. What is in your mind at the back of them—tell us, if you will. What will you be thinking when you are our age, and what will you have made of the world by then? We shall be gone by that time, and the memory of us will be fast fading away. The future will be all in your hands—up to you to make what you will of it. Of course everyone can see many of the practical aspects of your new world. The League of Nations, say what you will of it, is the inescapable ideal for all unjaundiced minds today. Those of you especially who have fought and who know what war is, must surely include the end of war in your prophecy; and everyone of you who has heard even an echo of the bitter cry of the world must include those better days of justice and of brotherhood whose vision has created the social conscience of our time. These and other ideals which for a moment blazed out, familiar as they were splendid, when you went forth to war, are the essential stuff of your prophecy. But the question now is, what

are you going to do with this vision splendid of mortal life which you have seen? Three things I would urge upon you especially.

(1) Keep yourselves in the line of vision. It is a great thing and not a little thing that you have done, a wise thing and not a foolish, when you have seen the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. Do not allow yourselves to be shamed out of it, nor to be laughed out of it, nor to be tempted out of it, nor to be bullied out of it. There is a breed of young men who exchange the visions of their early youth for what they please to call smartness. God save us from the smart young man! He is cautious before his time, and proud of a certain cheap cynicism whose main components are a professed disbelief in the honor of men and the virtue of women. His spirit is dulled and vulgarized by selfishness, self-indulgence and sensuality. May God save us from the smart young man! But still more may He save us from the smart young woman! Beside her the smart young man is the merest child. The girl of today holds the man's immortal soul in her hands, as her mother did before her. She either tells him to reverence his own ideals or to scorn them. She kindles vision and inspires prophecy, or else she quenches them to pamper her vanity and feed her passion for power. When she does this may God forgive her, for the man whom she made her victim will never forgive her when he has found her out.

(2) Hold on to your ideals through your lifetime. Too often these are but morning splendors

which pass into a rather dull and quiet noonday. But there is no need for this. We pass on to you our own dreams, and they are the most precious things we have to give you. Some of us have believed in them more and more passionately as the years have increased, and we would fain pray that that may be your case also. There is nothing better for the eyes of men to see in this world than a spirit, now no longer young, who still reverences the dreams of his youth, and who unflinchingly follows them to the end. Ah, set your lives at a sovereign price, and guard them from shame with a body-guard of those ideals which shine like knights of God. Keep in your own souls the higher values of human life paramount. Believe in its beauty and its joy and its love, as things not to be weighed against any material treasure. Scorn and pillory all mean ways and base ends of living. Pursue and hunt them down, and hold them up for contempt before the eyes of men. Despise, and glory in despising, all sordid estimates of life, and all success won at the price of honor. See what can be made of this earth of yours in the direction of pure character and high disinterested service; and, at whatever cost, follow that course, wherever it may lead you.

(3) Finally, let all this idealism of yours run on beyond earth altogether. There have been times when the thought even of the most intellectual was earth-bound, and when all hope and realization of immortality had been dropped. Such times, debased, earthly, and sensual, spent their strength

upon the passing hour, and their best hope was for extinction,—a hope indeed far too good for the life they led. But you are born into a better time and a nobler heritage. The things that you believe in for the earth are things worthy to endure beyond it. You know this, because God has set eternity in your hearts. Philosophers have always had their arguments for immortality, and many have very wistfully hoped that these arguments might turn out to be true. Yet few of them have been convinced by argument, or have attained to anything like an absolutely satisfying faith. With you it is different. You believe in heaven, not upon the word of an ancient hope, nor upon the argument of a wise philosopher. You believe in heaven because you have been there. When you prayed beside your mother's knee—afterwards, when love first revealed itself in all its wonder to your heart, and since then in high moments now and then—you have reached such heights of life that every vitality and beauty convinced you that in them you had touched an abiding reality. To you we say, Create your heaven here, and you shall certainly dwell in it forever. Cultivate the heights of purity, of honor, of love, and of open-hearted gladness, and you will know that these are among the things that abide. Houses that are made with hands soon crumble and decay, but the house that you shall build with visions is an everlasting home. There never was a day in all the past more hospitable to such thinking and living than the present is. We stand awe-struck upon the threshold of a new world from which the

crude evils of the old shall, by God's grace, be banished.

Good was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven.

So, in this ardent and inspiring time, eternity claims you by your visions, and it is for you to see to it that you shall never allow your thoughts of life to descend and grovel on the earth. It is for you to live and die in the light of the highest you have seen. Oh, sons and daughters of our homes, you shall indeed live forever; therefore, while you are upon the earth, live high, think high, and remain upon the heights until the end.

Some of you may very reasonably be asking what all this has to do with joining the membership of the church. I think I may take it for granted that in the main you are one with me in the aspiration after lofty heights of living and of thought, but some of you feel the church a rather frowzy old place, misty with tradition, the enemy of gaiety and the condemner of life's young dream. Well, frankly, I never found it so. If it were so I would hate it. Instead of that I have found it the fostering place of visions, the power-house of human energies, and the place where all that is most delightful and fascinating in life takes on its noblest character and its most enduring form. For the church is just the home of Christ, and Christ is forever young. That young Christ is not only the Christ crucified, but the Christ beautiful also. He is the dreamer of dreams. He is the lover of life. All that is keen-

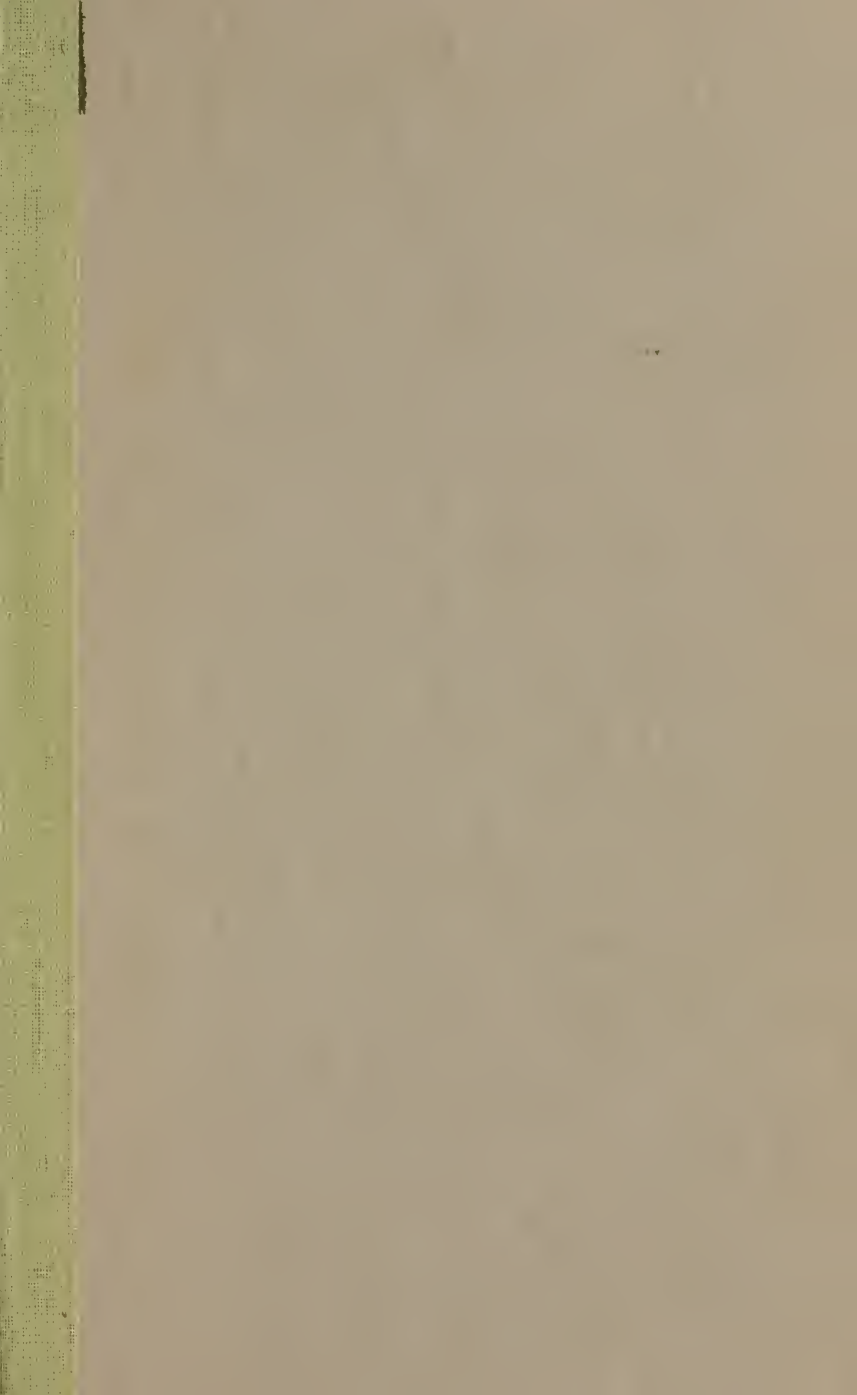
est and sweetest and most alluring in your vision of life is His gift to you. When you look upon Him you will indeed see beauty that you should desire Him, if you look aright. I know that the sadness of His cross and the majesty of His glory have been apt sometimes to eclipse man's sense of His beauty. Yet that beauty indeed remains. The Cross has only shown the power it has to conquer sin and death. Still and forever He stands for all that we count most fair. In art and science, in nature and in home, all that is dearest and most attractive to us has its dwelling-place in Him. All lovers of the earth whose love is pure will find Him delightful. Let them bring their delights to Him and be thankful, knowing that Christ is smiling whenever man rejoices. We ask you to commit yourselves to Him, not that you may surrender the flashing splendors of the dawn, and exchange them for the dull routine of a cloudy mid-day: but that you may see your youth in all its glory, and delight in it to the depths of your heart, and have Him mould mighty dreams in you and commit you now and forever to the best and most beautiful visions of your lives.

This is that Christ of Whom we shall speak together in the classes which are just being formed for the sacrament. I want to try to show Him to you until you see Him and feel the spell of Him come upon you; until you recognize in Him your own noblest self and all its aspirations: until you simply cannot resist Him, and so shall feel yourselves constrained to join His band.

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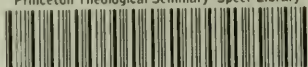
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