

The
Spiritual Significance
of the Hour

Being the substance of an Address
delivered in London on 5th March
1916

BY

WELLESLEY TUDOR-POLE

WITH FOREWORD BY

LADY PORTSMOUTH

1916

JOHN M. WATKINS

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THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUR

LADY PORTSMOUTH introduced Mr. W. Tudor-Pole by saying :

I think it was Ruskin who said that, while many people read, very few think, and fewer still can see. In a somewhat deeper sense than was intended by even that great re-creator of the spiritual beauty and significance of material things, it still is true that few there are who see, yet in these latter days there are an increasing number of whom it may be truly said that the eyes of their understanding are opened, their spiritual perceptions have been quickened, and some there are who unite with this spiritual insight the rarer faculty—not, perhaps, in itself so much to be desired—the faculty of psychic vision. It is this combination, I take it, that constitutes the true Seer—the combination of psychic gifts with spiritual under-

standing.—One of these modern Seers is Mr. Tudor-Pole, who has promised to speak to us to-day of what he deems to be—

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOUR.

MR. TUDOR-POLE :

Can there be any spiritual meaning connected with the present moment? Naturally this is the first question that we ask ourselves. When the nations of the Old World are engaged in mortal combat, when nearly the whole of the ancient world is in the midst of a death grapple, how can we speak of the spiritual significance of the hour?

You may remember how Jesus, on the Mount of Olives, when He was referring, as we believe, to the fall of the Roman Empire, speaking of wars and rumours of wars, of earthquakes and terrible disturbances, made use of a very significant phrase which has been translated in the Authorised Version of the Scriptures as follows: "All these are the beginning of sorrows." A more correct translation of this phrase would be: "All these events are the beginning of the pangs of a new birth." I think you will agree with me that these words have a strange and

poignant significance to-day, when we are again in the midst of tragedy and conflict.

In my opinion this phrase is in many ways a keynote to the present hour.

"All these events are the beginning of the pangs of a new birth."

If we were living, say, in the year 2500 A.D., looking back upon the history of the present time, just as we are now able to study the great historical crises of the past, we should naturally be in a position much more fully to realise its immense import and significance. We are so immersed in our work and in the events that immediately surround us that we find it almost impossible to raise our eyes and sweep the heavens for inspiration and spiritual guidance. There are some, however, who are able to rise above material conditions, and who perceive that in reality we are living in one of the most significant eras the world has ever known.

If it be a fact that we are indeed witnessing the birth of a new spiritual dispensation, it is of vital importance that we should rise above the everyday affairs of life and for a certain time each day, in silence, endeavour to realise the meaning of the stupendous events now taking place just beyond the range of human vision.

I was speaking recently to an officer who had just returned from the Front, a man who has given up an important position in this country and made great sacrifices in order to answer his country's call. He described the experiences that came to him on the night before his battalion first went into action. He told me that it was as if the material conditions and events, the ups and downs of his ordinary life, had fallen away from him. All that remained was the consciousness of the elemental facts of life. He seemed to have become again as a little child, and, as he expressed it, it was as if a purifying wind had flooded through his consciousness. After this experience there came a profound silence, in which the still small voice of the Comforter seemed to speak to him, filling him with such marvellous peace and joy that he was able to go through those awful experiences at Loos and elsewhere with a feeling he could only describe as absolute exaltation. I wonder whether it is necessary for us, if we would free ourselves from the minor stresses of everyday life, to go out into the trenches and to give up, as one has to give there, those outward things which seem to hamper our interior and spiritual life at home.

In thinking over this officer's experience—the idea of the rushing wind passing through his consciousness and simplifying his mental outlook—one is naturally reminded of the experiences of Elijah described in the first book of the Kings: The prophet had retired into the mountains to await God's inspiration when "a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks." This was followed, if you remember, by earthquake and fire, which may have had symbolic reference to events then transpiring in the world, similar to events taking place to-day. It was not until Elijah had experienced these terrors and difficulties that the still small voice was heard giving him a message that opened his inner vision.

Then our thought naturally turns to the disciples in that upper room, waiting for inspiration, and we remember how a rushing mighty wind filled the house, and was followed by tongues of flame. Notice the order—the wind comes first, sweeping across the consciousness of that band in the upper room, followed by tongues of purifying flame. It was not till then that the Holy Ghost descended upon them.

Now, in a symbolic manner, this is similar

to what is taking place to-day, not only in the national and racial mind, but also in the individual consciousness. We are each experiencing, to a greater or less extent, that rushing mighty wind which is overturning and upsetting our preconceived notions of life, and gradually through the earthquake of war we are being brought nearer and nearer to the wonderful experience of the coming in the stillness of the Holy Spirit within. Only when some such experience comes home to each one of us, will universal peace and brotherhood become possible.

You may remember how on one occasion the Knights of the Round Table were sitting in conclave describing the adventures through which they had passed, and how similar experiences are described. There came a rushing wind which filled the hall, followed by brilliant illumination. The vision of the Holy Grail was then manifested to the assembly,—a vision for which the whole world is now unconsciously seeking.

To show that these wonderful experiences—in a less degree, perhaps—are possible to ordinary mortals, I will give you an experience of my own. About five years ago, having just returned from the East, from

places where the imminence of world war was known, the inevitability of the conflict and the apparent powerlessness of the leaders of the nations to avert it filled me with depression. In this mood I went out into the stillness of a beautiful starry night, to the solitude of a hill, when suddenly, as I was sitting in the silence, there seemed to surge up around me, as if from the four corners of the world, mighty winds. Yet, strange as it may seem, there was perfect silence. A sound as of thunder followed, so indescribable and so terrible that it seemed as if the world would be rent in pieces. The thunder passed, and the hill was bathed in quiet light, and I became aware of a mighty Presence standing beside me, full of strength and illumination.

This Presence made me comprehend the significance of many events that were to transpire and gave me help and comfort with regard to those things that had to be. It was made possible for me to understand that a fresh outpouring of God's love for His creation, a new spiritual wave, was even then pouring into human consciousness. This new power finds itself embedded and enclosed in crystallised forms, conditions and associations, and if the human race is to become truly awake, the

old forms of an outworn civilisation must inevitably pass away. It is the old story of new wine in old bottles. The old bottles must break if the new wine is to flood through the consciousness of the race. The more complete the passing away of the old barriers, the more certain may we be, for our comfort, that the spiritual power now descending into the world will find expression in the consciousness and in the life of the people.

Some years ago, I remember meeting an Arab Sheikh out in the Egyptian desert. We discussed the materialistic tendencies of Western civilisation and traditions. He asked me a straight question to which I found it hard to reply. He said: "You people of the West, with all your modern inventions, with your new scientific powers, arts, books and material luxuries, have you greater happiness, are you nearer the centre of Life itself than I am out here? I possess no worldly goods—the desert is my home—I have happiness, and I feel close to the consciousness of Life, to God Himself. As the result of all your activities and work in the Western world, are you nearer heaven than I am?"

"Let me give you warning. If the time

does not very soon come when the peoples of Europe and America begin to realise the importance of spiritual realities and the comparative unimportance of many of the material things that are considered of such vital moment in their daily lives—such a flame will pass over Europe and over the world that so-called modern civilisation will disappear in ruins.”

I will tell you a story of an event that is said to have taken place many years ago, but I intend to use it as if it were an allegory. Probably the majority of you have heard of the great Persian prophet of the last century, Baha'u'llah, who died in 1892, and who spent a large portion of his life as a Turkish prisoner in a Syrian fortress. When Baha'u'llah was an old man, he was allowed greater freedom, and spent much time receiving pilgrim visitors in a beautiful garden on the slopes of Mount Carmel. This garden was called the Rizwan, and pilgrims who came to him from all parts of the world brought plants and seeds of flowers, bushes and trees to plant in the Rizwan in order that this garden might become a symbol of unity. One day locusts descended upon the valley beyond Mount Carmel, devouring all

the vegetation in their path. The gardener of the Rizwan went into the pavilion where Baha'u'llah was writing and told him the locusts were coming towards the garden, but the prophet took no notice. He approached his master a second time, as they came nearer, but still the prophet continued his writing. Finally, when the locusts had reached the boundaries of the Rizwan, the gardener again besought Baha'u'llah to send them away, to which the prophet replied: "Why should the garden of the Rizwan be saved from the locusts when all our neighbours' gardens are being destroyed?" Then the gardener reminded Baha'u'llah of the many pilgrims who had lovingly brought plants and seeds from the ends of the earth, and how the locusts would destroy everything. The prophet then went out, and standing before the locusts he spoke to them, and the swarm divided and passed by on either side, leaving the garden untouched, not a plant having been destroyed.

Well, we stand now at a point in history where the locusts of war have descended upon the world, and there is no human being alive to-day with sufficient power to hold them up and to prevent them from devastating Europe.

Armageddon is not being fought out on European battlefields only, but also within our hearts and minds as individuals. It is our duty at this hour—whether we are combatants or non-combatants—to realise that we are being tested; all the material props we considered of importance are gradually being swept beyond our horizons and we must begin to depend, perhaps for the first time in our lives, upon the indwelling spiritual light against which the locusts of conflict cannot prevail.

We are all seeking for satisfaction in one form or another. Scientists are ever seeking to probe more deeply into the mystery of the origin of life. Physicists are peering behind the electron in the attempt to discover the ever elusive origin of matter. Great scientists are daring to say they believe that the universe can be best defined in terms of Consciousness, of God Himself. If we have reached a time in history when it is beginning to be realised, even from the standpoint of scientific research, that the whole universe is filled with the consciousness of God, then we can indeed face the future with confidence and without fear.

As I said a moment ago, we are all seeking for satisfaction, struggling toward the light. One goes back to the days of the prophet Isaiah, whose words still echo down the centuries: "*Before* they call, I will answer." Humanity is calling now, crying out in the midst of its sorrows. Let us remember that, before the anguished cry of humanity went forth, the answer, had we but known it, was already in our midst. The Divine response to our appeal for succour is already within the consciousness of the individual who is calling, as well as within the collective consciousness of the whole race.

There is a striking passage in Dr. Weymouth's translation of the 6th chapter of Mark (verses 48 to 51): "When Christ saw the disciples distressed with rowing (for the wind was against them), towards morning (that is, at the darkest hour before the dawn) He came towards them walking on the lake, as if intending to pass them."

That is just where we stand now. We are facing the tempest, we feel that Christ is walking on the lake, but we wonder whether humanity deserves a response to its agonised appeal. It is as if Christ intended to pass us by. . . .

“And the disciples cried out, for they were terrified. He immediately spoke to them, and said: ‘There is no danger; it is I, be not afraid.’ Then He went up to them on board the boat, and the wind lulled; and they were beside themselves with silent amazement.”

In this connection those arresting words of Origen come to mind: “Christ sleeps in the souls of men as He slept in the boat on the lake, and He awakes on hearing the cry of penitence to still the storm within.”

The storm that so many call Armageddon results from the world's opposition to the new spiritual wave that is breaking up our materialistic civilisation. It has come to turn us within ourselves, that we may awake and cry out in penitence, conscious of the mystery of a new Presence in our midst. Let us still our fears so that we may hear Christ calling to us: “It is I, be not afraid.”

May I put forward a few suggestions that have helped me at the present crisis to keep some sense of consolation and peace.

Above all things, we must cultivate within ourselves an optimistic outlook on life. There really is very little difference between

pessimism and atheism. If you believe in God, if you believe in a central Life, a power that is Infinite Love, you must be an optimist, because you will know that the time must come when humanity will recognise the infinity of Divine love as the central fact of the universe. This realisation, when it comes within the individual and enters the consciousness of the race, will create such a sense of pure optimism that all feelings of pessimism and despair will disappear.

(2) Further, let us constantly preserve within ourselves a spirit of thankfulness. It may seem strange, at the present juncture, to speak of thankfulness, but if you will look around, you will see in your surroundings the opportunities this time of stress is bringing you. Every difficulty is an opportunity to cultivate a fuller understanding and a wider vision. With thankfulness in our hearts, suffering will bring purification and will free us from our present bonds. We should be thankful for every experience that life brings. This statement contains a wonderful spiritual truth.

(3) It is above all things important that we learn to destroy fear, fear of the consequences of our actions, fear of death, fear of all those complex ups and downs that

seem to crush out the possibility of our becoming at one with the central spiritual Life. We know there is only one power that can cast out fear and utterly destroy it. We know that power to be ever present. It is in this room this afternoon, is ever available, is closer to us than our very breathing, and is waiting to be allowed to cast out fear and all discordant conditions, tapping at the door of our minds, waiting to be let in. If only we could become again as little children, as many of those who have gone out into this mortal conflict have been able to do, then the understanding of the power of the love that casts out fear would come home and abide with us.

The realisation of the illusion of death and the knowledge that life itself is absolutely indestructible is becoming more widely recognised as a direct result of this World War. This surely is a hopeful sign, and many soldiers tell us that they have lost all fear of death, that even when their comrades have been struck down at their side, it has been brought home to them by some interior instinct that life must be continuous and indestructible, that there is no power that can destroy it.

Christ told us to pray without ceasing.

This really means that we must continually hold in our consciousness the recognition of the infinity of Divine Life, the omnipotence of Divine Love, and use in our daily life the power that this knowledge brings.

The British Empire is faced with enormous tasks ahead. We in this country are only beginning to feel the war and its true significance. It is high time that we roused ourselves sufficiently to realise the spiritual import of events now transpiring.

We are told that we must exercise economy. We may well economise, for materially we are becoming poor. Material poverty may be for Britain a blessing in disguise. But we have only to realise the meaning of Infinite Love to be rich indeed, and the more abundantly we give of love, the more abundantly shall we receive. It is for us to keep alive in the world, at the present juncture, the spiritual vitality of the race for all—for those who are now against us as for those who are with us. By believing that we are surrounded by the marvellous power of an inexhaustible Love waiting for us to use and to give of its abundance, and by expressing that belief in our daily lives, we shall become possessed

of such riches that the wealth of the material world will have lost its power over us.

During the coming years, while the dawn of a new day is approaching, let us hold strongly, consciously, continually, the realisation of the presence of Infinite Love leading us ever onward towards the very gates of heaven. The real significance of the hour is a holy mystery. God is revealing Himself anew. The Holy Comforter is in our midst unseen. The Holy Spirit will never leave us until we are willing and ready to become a part of Itself. May the presence of love permeate our every thought and action until we become transformed, transfigured, regenerated!

“Christ sleeps in the souls of men as He slept in the boat on the lake, and He awakes on hearing the cry of penitence to still the storm within.”

Listen to these pregnant words of Sir Rabindranath Tagore from the “Oarsman”:

“Like a ripe pod, let the tempest break its heart into pieces, scattering thunders.

Stop your bluster of abuse and self-praise, my friends,

And with the calm of silent prayer on your brows sail forward to the shore of the new world.”

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