THE RELIGION OF DEMOCRACY

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The Religion of Democracy by Charles Ferguson

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CHARLES FERGUSON

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by CHARLES FERGUSON

Revised Edition



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MITCHELL KENNERLEY NEW YORK AND LONDON MCMXI

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THE CAPITOL

ON the way across the park that stretches its parterres between the Capitol and the new Congressional Library, one may stop and rest on a stone bench in front of the vast, pillared, porticoed, Græco-Roman building where Congress meets. Close by is the statue of Washington, in a toga, seated in a kind of curule chair, and pointing, with one finger, up to heaven. To the right and left, in flawless symmetry, stretch the classic wings of the Capitol, fit each for a Parthenon; and, over all, the pompous dome, Argus-eyed with serried little glimmering windows, broods and settles mightily down in obstinate immensity.

Seen thus, in the afternoon sun, the building grows into one's mind as a symbol of things that have been, but are passing away. The suggestions of the scene are reminiscent. This is the America of foreign and ancient tutelage, trailing the Old World; the nation that did not know the originality of its vocation, and did not venture to breathe deep. It is the America of the paper constitution, of orations on the classic model, of moralizing art,

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THE CAPITOL

and intolerant virtues; the land of Spartan seclusion from the world, yet of huge comfortableness; the land of the perfect plan that must not be spoiled; the sophomoric land that had not yet loved and suffered.

Over against this picture there is in my mind a vision of very different suggestion. There are nights when, looking from my window across huddling chimneys and the flat roofs of houses, I see the Capitol transfigured. The colossal dome, white and magnificent in the moonlight, swims in a luminous, electric mist that comes brimming up from the city. The glorious ghost of the Capitol, looming over sordid chimney-tops, seems like a symbol of the new age and the America that is in the making. Here is modernity, the age of electricity-and mystery. Here is the type of the longing of the people, the awe of science, the passion for the eternal, the cosmic fear, the victorious faith, the contradictions of life, the problems, the poverty, the tragic perplexity, the cry in the night; here steel-clad battleships and sudden war, the knight-errantry of the Republic, the pathos of Spain, the Philippines, Mexico, and China, immense expansion and contraction, the old ethnic hate, the effacement of boundaries, worldwide equality, fraternity, ecumenic democracy, unanimity.

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This shimmering dome in the moonlight, mystic, aerial, portentous, seems a wraith of revolution the prophetic, insurgent spirit of the nation.

I perceive how deep down in the infinite are the springs of history. And I am reassured that the future will be refreshed.

National Arts Club, Gramercy Park, New York. August 22, 1911.