

Chapter 1

Living in Two “Worlds”

For more than a quarter of a century youth has been tested and tortured by the topsy-turvy ways of our modern world. The lean years of depression followed close on the heels of World War I. During those dark days there were five men for every job, and youth - ambitious and educated though they were - saw thousands of doors closed in their faces.

Gradually the tension of those unhappy years was eased, and opportunities came to the new generation to win a place in world affairs. Then came war! Hopes and dreams were pushed aside; those long-sought and highly prized jobs became only memories as youth were called to arm for victory.

“How can I keep faith with life in these days?” asks an anxious youth, whose plans for a career, marriage, and a home have been blasted by bombs. “There doesn’t seem to be much beauty or romance left for us. Hate, hunger, death, and tyranny are on every side. How can I live in all this rottenness and not have my soul poisoned by it?”

If this were a new problem never faced by young people in any previous age, we might be fearful of the outcome. But the youth of every generation who lived valiantly, who kept the eternal flame in their hearts, and who maintained faith in their fellow men, have always been forced to live in two worlds. They were not hermits who sought refuge in the rocks or caves to avoid the temptations of sin. No, they were real human beings who brushed shoulders with their fellow men in the streets of a selfish, ugly, workaday world and went ahead making a living. At the same time, however, they dwelt in another realm where they were building a life upon the principles of honesty, integrity, honor, and faith. They loved beauty and truth, which are eternal; they could say, “My mind to me a kingdom is.”

We can live in two worlds today. It is our only hope when the tragic scenes of world revolution surround us and we feel the terrible power of evil. Within our hearts there is a citadel of strength which cannot be shattered by hatred, bloodshed, and terror. In this fortress are to be found the weapons of spiritual defense - our faith in the divine purpose, our love for the beautiful which the Creator has put

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within the hearts of men, our indomitable will to see beyond the darkness to that day when right shall triumph.

As we make this defense of the soul impregnable to the attacks of doubt, cynicism, and evil, we develop the strength that is necessary to face the world of the flesh. Youth who are determined to follow God find the severest attacks made against their conscience. In truth, we wrestle against spiritual foes who would conquer the citadel of the soul.

Paul, the adventurer for truth in a decadent Roman Empire, knew the tension, or pull, that came from living in two worlds. He traveled through the Roman Empire, - a pagan, cruel, dissolute realm, - but he was confident that right would triumph over evil. Facing execution at the hands of a cruel dictator did not cause this little apostle of Christianity to quake. Writing from his world of faith, although surrounded by another world, - the damp, cold walls of a Roman dungeon, - Paul could say, "I have kept the faith."

How have other men and women faced life when tragedy seemed ready to crush them? How have courageous Christians taken a firm grip on faith when the spirits of darkness encompassed them? There was William Wordsworth, for example, who had recently been graduated from college and was attempting to solve his problem of choosing a career, when the French Revolution broke over Europe. For a time his youthful ardor swept him into the world of struggle and set his hopes upon lasting peace and happiness in revolution. But disillusionment soon followed, and Wordsworth was discouraged and shaken in spirit.

In the darkness he turned to the beauty of nature and the love of the Creator for sweetness and light. He regained his trust in God and his love for his fellow men. He went forth into the haunts of nature and looked upon the mountains, lakes, and flowers. In the study of the Bible and the book of the out-of-doors he found courage to see beyond the dark days when the Napoleonic Wars struck terror to men's hearts. In the very year that the Little Corporal had his ships and barges on the French coast ready to invade England, Wordsworth could stand unafraid in the citadel of faith, and write his beautiful and enduring ode on the "Intimations of Immortality."

When did Beethoven compose his masterpiece, the Fifth Symphony, now called the Victory Symphony? This musician who loved beauty and knew that it would remain in the hearts of men when wars had ceased and tyrants could no longer hold sway, composed this symphony during the first year of the Peninsular War when Napoleon's

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shadow loomed over Europe as a specter of terror. He finished the Seventh Symphony when Napoleon was getting ready for his all-out drive against Russia. Beethoven might have despaired at any attempt to create enduring music in the chaos of that time, but his vision of the true and the beautiful could not be destroyed by the smoke of war.

Georg Handel surveyed defeat in his personal fortunes, and he could not escape the feeling of despair. But doubts and temptations did not overwhelm his fortress of faith. His biographer says of him: "His health and his fortunes had reached the lowest ebb. His right side had become paralyzed, and his money was all gone. His creditors seized him and threatened him with imprisonment. For a brief time he was tempted to give up the fight - but then he rebounded again to compose the greatest of his inspirations, the epic Messiah." The world of the spirit conquered the world of the flesh, and Handel stood victorious in the crisis of his life.

Youth must learn to carry on when humanity is sunk in the mire of death and destruction; in such an hour they must fulfill their responsibilities to their fellow men and to their nation. But they must not lose sight of the eternal verities while they grope through sorrow and suffering. The ugliness, the hatred, the bitterness, and the doubt which permeate the world of the flesh cannot break through the citadel of the heart that holds fast to eternal verities. Possessed by the vision of truth, youth does not doubt the final outcome of the struggle.

In the early centuries of the Christian church there lived a devout follower of Jesus in Smyrna in Asia Minor. Persecution was common, and the pagan ruler seized this stalwart man, Polycarp, and executed him in the Roman amphitheater in the town. Shortly after this, the church at Smyrna wrote an account of Polycarp's life and martyrdom. With faith in the promises of God's word, they ended their epistle with these words: "Staius Quadratus being proconsul, but Jesus Christ being King forever." Yes, the Roman tyrant held sway for a moment, but towering over the cruelty and injustice of sinful men is the King of kings whose truth shall triumph.

Through the centuries men have kept the flame of faith burning in the darkness. In hours of trial and persecution they recounted the triumphs of truth. They kept the citadel of their mind for God and His word; they knew how to stand up and take it. The writings of many English and American writers have stood the test of great literature, for they tell of sincere longings and hopes. From the peace, the beauty, the courage, and the faith which they found, we may gain inspiration for

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this perilous age. It is our task to “hold high the torch.” If we can learn how those before us lived in two worlds, yet kept their eyes fixed upon the Author of their faith, we shall be able to raise the torch higher to light the pathway, for the true home of the Christian soul is the realm of ideas.