

Chapter 1

DOES LIFE LEAD TO A “DEAD END”?

Across from me sat Ralph Winthrop, his hands toying with an ivory letter opener on his mahogany desk. Ralph, the manager of a western wholesale radio company at the age of twenty-eight, had been recounting his rapid advancement with the firm. He had started as an assistant in the shipping room while he was attending high school; his summers during college vacation had given him promotion; and after graduation he had advanced to a successful managership.

“Life seems to have treated you pretty well,” I casually suggested.

“I really haven’t anything to complain about as far as business is concerned. I have a home, and it’s happy enough; but I’m not satisfied.”

“I don’t quite understand, Ralph.”

“It’s hard to explain. I really don’t know what is the matter with me. After high-school days I attended a Christian college, and made good grades. I was a leader in student affairs. I played on the football team; but I was indifferent to religion. When anyone approached me on this subject I would shrug my shoulders and say, ‘Religion and business don’t mix well for success, and I’m going for business.’”

“Urn! I see, Ralph. You were obsessed with the thought that money was everything. Well, you’re not the only young person with such ideas. Just the other day I read in the newspaper that 80 per cent of the freshmen of the state university with twelve thousand students had declared that their chief reason for desiring an advanced education was to be better trained to make money.”

“I don’t doubt it. It’s the modern mania. But now that I have money, leisure time, and friends, I find I’m not happy. You see, my leisure time bores me, my friends fail me when I need them, and money can’t buy happiness. I hate to think of all the time ahead of me if I live to be an old man.”

Winthrop’s puzzled brow was turned toward the light of the window. He had evidently unlocked the secret of his heart.

“Have you tried to think it all through, Ralph?”

“Think! Man, I hate to think! To tell you the truth, I’m afraid of my thoughts. When I think, I begin to realize I haven’t anything! I’m a sham. I’m a selfish oyster living totally for my personal interests. What

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will I have to show for my life? I've awakened to the truth that I'm facing a blind alley. It seems blank ahead.”

Ralph is one of many twentieth-century young men and women with gifted talents, ambitions for an education, for business success, and for a home of their own who are wrestling with the fear that their present career leads down a street marked “Dead End.” He is not the only one who is longing for happiness, success, and security, yet finding himself in a mental fog.

What happens to men and women who scoff at a religious life? Such an authority as the famous psychiatrist, Dr. C. G. Jung, has recorded his observations of those who choose such a course, in his book, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*: “During the past thirty years people from all the civilized countries of the earth have consulted me. Among all my patients in the second half of life - that is to say, over thirty-five - there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life, ... and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.”¹ (Note. - The bibliographical references are found after the last chapter in the book.)

Physical stamina, as well as the mental powers of humanity, is cracking under the strain of humanly-faced problems. Nervous, irritable, melancholy women and men bring a whirl of troubles upon themselves because they refuse to balance their bread-and-butter existence with religion.

The early settlers of America never attempted to face their problems in a New World without depending upon the guidance of Providence. The Pilgrim leaders settled where pestilence and savage red men depleted their sturdy band; yet they praised God through all their trials. These United States could not have become the nation it is if the founders had not been men possessed with a religious drive.

The spirit of Mary Rowlandson epitomizes the hardships of the pioneer mother. In 1676 she was forced to flee with her young daughter, both captives of Indians, after she had seen her home burned and her relatives murdered. On the twelve-day march her daughter died. But in spite of her many sufferings she wrote that God was “a very present help in trouble.” and she adds: “God was with me in a wonderful manner, carrying me along, and bearing up my spirit.”³ What would be the diary of a modern young man or woman under similar circumstances if he or she faced the hardship and struggle without spiritual power?

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Such faith was demanded when puny man fought almost singlehanded against the savage wilderness. Today the frontier has gone, and with it have passed many of the hardships which challenged the pioneers. Edgar Lee Masters, describing a frontier mother who has lived to be ninety-six years of age, puts these words in her mouth for the younger generation:

“What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent, and drooping hopes ?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you -
It takes life to love Life.”⁸

To love life one must have a vision, a spiritual quest, which is not swayed by the petty problems or crushed under the major crises. He must see beyond the fog of doubt where the eternal stars of faith still shine.

Before we grow proud over the achievements of science and invention, we must consider the words of Dr. Alexis Carrel, Nobel laureate in medicine and famed researcher. His verdict is: “We are unhappy. We degenerate morally and mentally. The groups and the nations in which industrial civilization has attained its highest development are precisely those which are becoming weaker, and whose return to barbarism is the most rapid. But they do not realize it. They are without protection against the hostile surroundings that science has built about them. In truth, our civilization, like those preceding it, has created certain conditions of existence which, for reasons still obscure, render life itself impossible.”⁴

Youth, then, faces physical degeneracy and mental instability. It is a part of the heritage given us by a disintegrating world. Are we foolish enough to attempt the impossible, to go ahead without religious faith? Or shall we follow the example of millions of men and women before us who found the solution to their problems through a belief in God?

Many a youth of one hundred years ago caught his first vision of God in the home. It was here that father and mother gathered the family to read the Bible and to kneel in prayer asking a heavenly Father’s guidance and support in facing life’s perplexities. Peace, love, beauty, and trust were created in the heart.

In such a Christian home John Greenleaf Whittier was reared, and his character developed strength and fortitude. Through spiritual communion he learned truth and justice. When an angry mob came to burn the newspaper office where he was editor, he could stand

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unflinchingly for what he believed was right. When death robbed him of his dearest loved ones, he could write in faith:

“I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

“I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.”⁶

With the advent of the machine age and the transition of American life from the rural home to city existence, life has grown bleak and cynical. Knowledge has been education's great aim; but there has been little thought as to how the character developed. Progress has been measured by the speed of wings and wheels, by the invention of radio, X ray, television, and a thousand other material miracles. We have forgotten that with the same machines, the hates, fears, and evil brutish forces have been let loose to annihilate millions of old men, helpless women and children, as well as the flower of youth. We have forgotten that a bleak outlook on life, a disbelief in a God, and a hatred for fellow men have developed in the heart as rapidly as inventions sprang out of civilization.

When youth faces the future with feeble prospects of securing a permanent job and independence; when he sees every profession crowded, he may think he is facing a blank wall. In such a time he will probably take one of the following viewpoints:

He may curse his fate and declare his work is not worth the effort. “I'll eat, drink, and be merry, for what does the morrow hold for me anyway?” He may reason that it is not fair to be born poor. He may growl cynically, turn radical, and perhaps end in a reckless career. This is one way to face life without God.

He may attempt to achieve material success at any price, as Ralph Winthrop did. The only god he worships is self, the only bible he reads is the stock market report. He attempts to achieve power with money; he finds it brings him prestige and self-glory. “What of the future?” he scornfully asks. “I'm lord and master here and now. That's enough!”

Let questioning youth con his problems: “Why am I here? Is there a supreme power to whom I owe allegiance? Where shall I go when it's all over?” If he is afraid to look at realities, he may attempt to stifle his thoughts in the study of science, the arts, or letters. I have seen scholars

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who were afraid to read the news of the day. As one young professor picked up my newspaper and scanned the headlines, he said, "I feel happier every day that I can study the life and thought of the sixteenth century. I'm scared of what I see in my own times. I wonder where we are going." Such men admit there are world issues which cannot be faced with human wisdom.

Life without the recognition of God may be the choice of thousands of young men and women today; but they must be made to realize that when the candle has burned down, it will have only lighted "the way to dusty death." And like the fame-seeking Macbeth, cornered in his blind alley because he has destroyed his conscience and broken the moral law, such a modern generation will say:

"Out, out brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."⁶

An age that can hurl a lightning bolt around the globe and make it speak to all men, a generation that has taken wings and flown to the uttermost parts of the earth, has not found a substitute for God. It is true that some men say they live by bread alone, but they deceive themselves. A professor of religion writes: "But plumb down in the crypt and abyss of every man's soul is a hunger, a craving for other food than this earthy stuff. A man wouldn't care what he had to give up if he knew he was working for something inestimably precious.... Light, light - that's what he wants; and the longer it's withheld, the lower he'll sink."⁷

The solution to life's problems of the twentieth century can be found in this statement: "The fact of the religious vision ... is our one ground for optimism. Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyment lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience."⁸ Disillusioned by a world which knows economic collapse, disappointed by lack of social reforms, embittered by hypocrisy, youth without God stands upon

"a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."⁹

Regain faith and see the "dead end" disappear from your pathway. Regain love for your fellow men and see the joy in giving your life in

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service for others. Regain love for God and watch the doubts and speculations vanish.