

THE INNER LIFE

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The inner life by Rufus M. Jones

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INTRODUCTION

THERE is no inner life that is not also an outer life. To withdraw from the stress and strain of practical action and from the complication of problems into the quiet call of the inner life in order to build its domain undisturbed is the sure way to lose the inner life. The finest of all the mystical writers of the fourteenth century — the author of *Theologia Germanica* — knew this as fully as we of this psychologically trained generation know it. He intensely desired a rich inner life, but he saw that to be beautiful within he must live a radiant and effective life in the world of men and events. "I would fain be," he says, "to the eternal God what a man's hand is to a man" — *i.e.* he seeks, with all the eagerness of his glow-

ing nature, to be an efficient instrument of God in the world. In the *practice* of the presence of God, the presence itself becomes more sure and indubitable. Religion does not consist of inward thrills and private enjoyment of God; it does not terminate in beatific vision. It is rather the joyous business of carrying the Life of God into the lives of men — of being to the eternal God what a man's hand is to a man.

There is no one exclusive "way" either to the supreme realities or to the loftiest experiences of life. The "way" which we individuals select and proclaim as the only highway of the soul back to its true home turns out to be a revelation of our own private selves fully as much as it is a revelation of a *via sacra* to the one goal of all human striving. Life is a very rich and complex affair and it forever floods over and inundates any feature which we pick out as essential or as pivotal to its consummation. God so completely overarches all that is and He is so genuinely

the fulfillment of all which appears incomplete and potential that we cannot conceivably insist that there shall be only one way of approach from the multiplicity of the life which we know to the infinite Being whom we seek.

Most persons are strangely prone to use the "principle of parsimony." They appear to have a kind of fascination for the dilemma of *either-or* alternatives. "Faith" or "works" is one of these great historic alternatives. But this cleavage is too artificial for full-rounded reality. Each of these "halves" cries for its other, and there cannot be any great salvation until we rise from the poverty of either half to the richness of the united whole which includes both "ways."

So, too, we have had the alternative of "outer" or "inner" way forced upon us. We are told that the only efficacious way is the way of the cross, treated as an outer historical transaction; and we have, again, been told that there is no

way except the inner way of direct experience and inner revelation. There are those who say, with one of George Chapman's characters :

"I'll build all inward — not a light shall ope
The common out-way.
I'll therefore live in dark; and all my light
Like ancient temples, let in at my top."

Over against the mystic who glories in the infinite depths of his own soul, the evangelical, with excessive humility, allows not even a spark of native grandeur to the soul and denies that the inner way leads to anything but will-o'-the-wisps. This is a very inept and unnecessary halving of what should be a whole. It spoils religious life, somewhat as the execution of Solomon's proposal would have spoiled for both mothers the living child that was to be divided. Twenty-five hundred years ago Heraclitus of Ephesus declared that there is "a way up and a way down and both are one." So, too, there is an outer way and an

inner way and both are one. It takes both diverse aspects to express the rich and complete reality, which we mar and mangle when we dichotomize it and glorify our amputated half. There is a fine saying of a medieval mystic: "He who can see the inward in the outward is more spiritual than he who can only see the inward in the inward."

This little book on the "Inner Life" does not assume to deal with the whole of the religious life. It recognizes that the outer in the long run is just as essential as the inner. This one inner aspect is selected for emphasis, without any intention of slighting the importance of the other side of the shining shield. Men to-day are so overwhelmingly occupied with objective tasks; they are so busy with the field of outer action, that it is a peculiarly opportune time to speak of the interior world where the issues of life are settled and the tissues of destiny are woven. There will certainly be some readers who will be glad to turn from