

# **THE SECRET OF LIVING**

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The secret of living by J. Brierley

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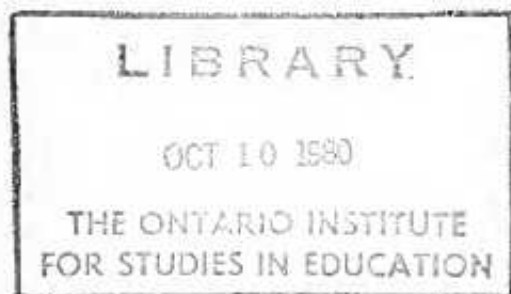
# THE SECRET OF LIVING

BY

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"LIFE AND THE IDEAL," "ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL," "SIDELIGHTS  
ON RELIGION," "OURSELVES AND THE UNIVERSE," ETC.



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## PREFACE

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THE secret of living, of living at least in the twentieth century, cannot be treated as though it were a single problem, open to one solution. Life offers itself to us in an infinity of aspects, each proposing its own question. In the vast variety of experiences comprised in even an average human career, the danger is to regard a success in one department as a success over the whole. But we may win a battle and lose a campaign. We may, like Rupert at Marston Moor, carry all before us in one part of the field, and wind up the day with a total defeat. Accordingly, in treating the various subjects which appear in this volume; in treating of work, of time, of money, of social life, of religious beliefs; of the thirty odd themes in fine which are here discussed, we have gone on the supposition that, while each side of life carries its own enigma, which it is for us to solve, the secret of living as a whole is to be sought deeper down. It lies not in any sectional skills or acquisitions, valuable as these are in themselves, but in an attitude of the soul. In the final result the secret of living is to be found in the soul's mastery of itself and of its world.

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# I

## WORK

THE world's evil is the world's riddle ; *das qual-voll uralte Räthsel*, as Heine calls it. To get to the bottom of it, philosophers, scientists, theologians, from their several starting-points, have performed miracles of excavation ; digging, delving, and boring, to lose themselves one after another in the process. There are no signs yet of reaching the bottom. Why is the world so imperfect ; why such impediments between us and our desires ; why, with such infinite possibilities, such small capacities ; why, with a world so rich and strong, could not the Creator have gone a step further and made us all rich and strong ? We get no complete answers to these questions. We read Plato's solution, that man's creation represents a fall into matter from a height above it ; and that of Leibnitz, that in the conditions of finitude this is the best of possible worlds ; and all else that has been said—and still we are not satisfied. We never shall be, perhaps for the reason that man cannot afford to be satisfied ; that dissatisfaction is one of his assets, part of his working capital. But there is no reason why he should not keep working at the solution, though his movement may be as an asymptote to a curve, which ever

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approaches but never finally reaches. Yet there is one view of this matter which has hardly had the attention it deserves, either from philosophy or religion; which, while by no means clearing up our problem, yet, properly grasped and used, carries us a long way; helps us at least to catch a glimpse at the secret of living. It is the simple statement that life means work. Our being's end, its true happiness, lies there. We have no perfection, because it is not perfection but the striving for it, the reaching after something yet beyond, that fits us best. To arrive at a point where we had to stop because there was nothing more to be done, imagine that as a destiny! It is too horrible to think of. The nethermost hell, with a chance of working our way out of it, would be vastly better.

This, to some ears, may sound strange, but let us think a little. Suppose yourself placed in the most enchanting paradise the imagination can conceive; a city whose streets are gold and whose gates are pearl. A country where eternal summer reigns, where every want is met; no poverty, no hunger, no death, no burden. And you are there with nothing to do! You sit, because there is no end to be achieved by walking. You are still, because all the ends for activity have been accomplished. You are to sit there for eternity! A good hour of that would bore most of us to extinction. No, that is not our happiness, in this or any world we can conceive. Put your children into the most gorgeous of palaces and tell them it is theirs, but they are not to move. How they would long for a coal-cellar with something to do in it! Well, our earth is