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This I Believe:

THE LIVING PHILOSOPHIES
OF ONE HUNDRED THOUGHTFUL
MEN AND WOMEN IN ALL WALKS
OF LIFE — AS WRITTEN FOR
AND WITH A FOREWORD BY
EDWARD R. MURROW

Edited by EDWARD P. MORGAN



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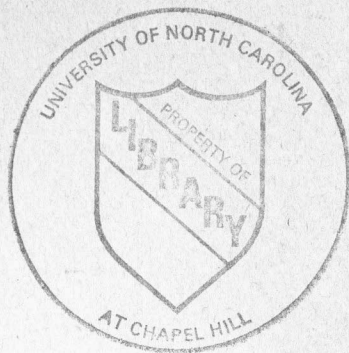
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To

MARGOT TREVOR WHEELOCK

who was responsible for *This I Believe*.

She chose Joseph Fort Newton's creed as hers,
and lived it.



"We must take time, take pains, have a plan, form spiritual habits, if we are to keep our souls alive; and now is the time to begin. A man to whom religion is a reality, and who knows what is meant by 'the practice of salvation,' keeps his balance, because the living center of his life is spiritual. He cannot be upset, nor shaken. The same hard knocks come to him as to others, but he reacts to them by the central law of his life. He suffers deeply, but he does not sour. He knows frustration, but he goes right on in his kindness and faith. He sees his own shortcomings but he does not give up, because a power rises up from his spiritual center and urges him to the best."

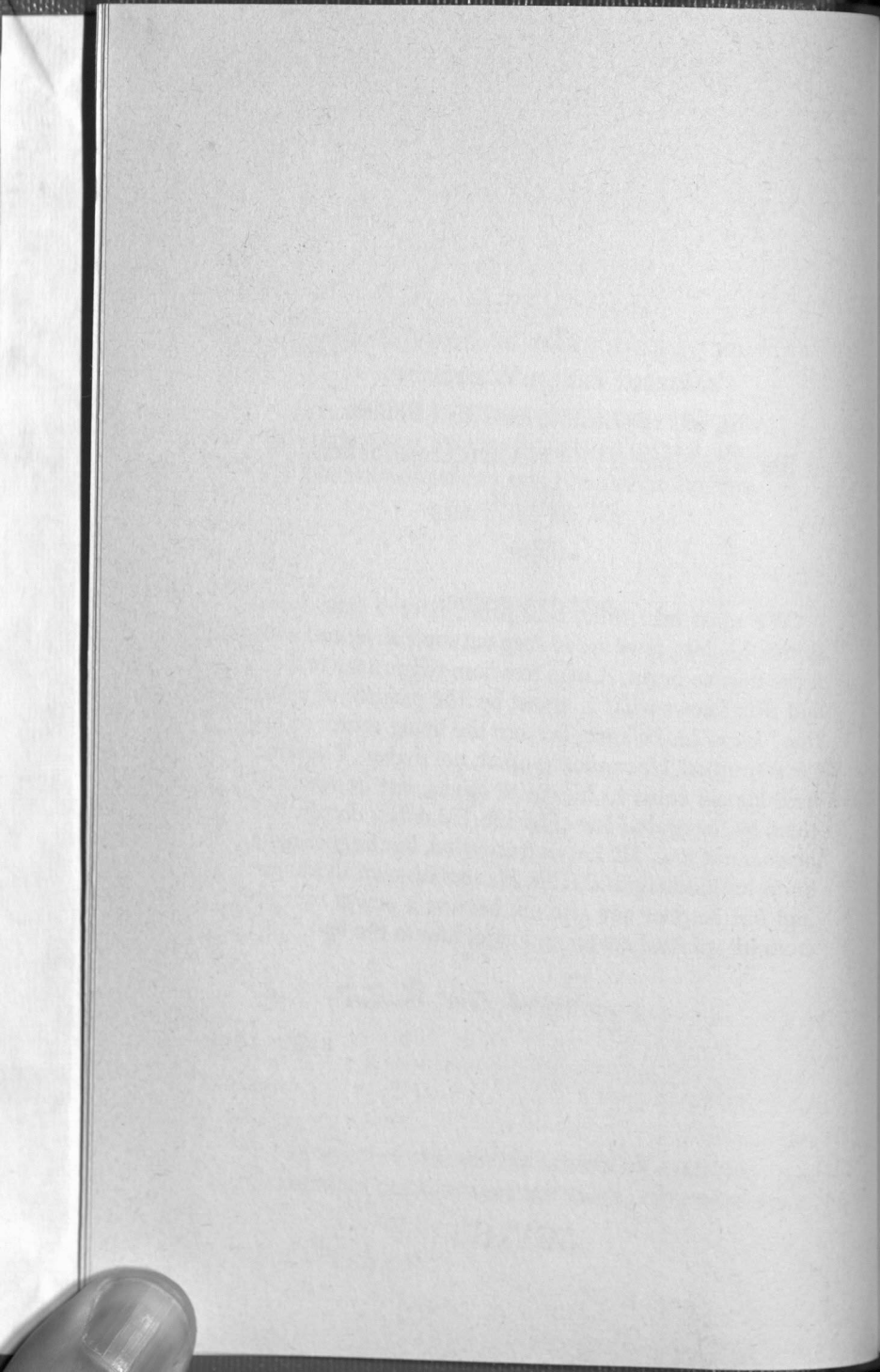
Joseph Fort Newton

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Foreword

IN THE AUTUMN of 1940, when Britain stood alone, when the bombers came at dusk each evening and went away at dawn, I observed a sign on a church just off the East India Dock Road; it was crudely lettered and it read: "If your knees knock, kneel on them." I quoted that sign in a broadcast to America that night, but did not fully understand it. For even in those dark days I could observe no more kneeling or knocking knees than at the time of the Anschluss or Munich. The imminence of disaster brought no spiritual revival. And yet, at a time when most men save Englishmen despaired of England's life, there was a steadiness, a confidence and determination that must have been based on something other than a lack of imagination.

As the months wore on, and the nights lengthened, and the casualty lists mounted, I became more concerned to try to understand what sustained this island people: what belief or what mythology caused them to stand so steady in their shoes. In part, it was ignorance of their own weakness; in part, it was a reluctance to appear obvious by expressing doubt as to the ultimate outcome. But at bottom this calm confidence stemmed from a belief that what they were defending was good; that Englishmen had devised a system of regulating the relationship between the individual and the state which was superior to all others, and which would survive even though cold military calculations concluded that the state was doomed.

There was little logic in this British belief. Unconsciously, they dug deep into their history and felt that Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher, Hawkins, Cromwell and all the rest were looking down at them, and they were obliged to appear worthy in the eyes of their ancestors. But above everything else, they believed. They believed not only in themselves but that they were fighting against evil things and the fight was worth while.

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No democracy has been nearer the fire and survived than was Britain in that long winter. And one reason for survival was that the nation did not betray the things in which it believed. After Italy entered the war, one of the few murder cases to reach the Law Lords on appeal was decided. An Italian citizen, long resident in Britain, had been convicted by the lower courts of killing a British seaman in Soho. The high court reversed the verdict, set the Italian free, and in the pubs, and in Parliament, on the buses, and in newspaper offices this was regarded as the normal functioning of British justice.

At a time when German bombers were coming through in the daylight over London, when the Germans were expected on the beaches the first foggy morning, the House of Commons, which might have been destroyed with all its members by one well-placed enemy bomb, devoted two days to discussing the conditions under which enemy aliens were being held on the Isle of Man. For the House of Commons was determined that, though the Island fell, there would be nothing resembling concentration camps in Britain, and the rights under law of enemy aliens would not be abused. That is what the British collectively believed.

No man can measure or transmit the degree or detail of another man's belief. But it is possible on occasion to report it. The night after the Munich agreement was signed, I sat with Jan Masaryk, the Czechoslovak Ambassador, in his London embassy. It was the anniversary of his father's death. We had finished a broadcast to America at four in the morning; we both felt that the Munich agreement meant that war was inevitable. But Jan believed that somehow, some way, the forces of evil would be defeated. Speaking of Hitler and Mussolini, he said: "I assure you, God will not let two such heathens control Europe." His belief, at that time, was greater than my own.

Nearly six years later, when we entered that foul concentration camp of Buchenwald with bodies still stacked in the courtyard, I discovered that the hatred of Czech for Czech, Pole for Pole, was much greater than their hatred for their German captors and butchers. For they believed, these miserable, emaciated Czechs and Poles, in different things; their faith in the future of their country walked down different roads. It was the hatred of Communist for non-Communist, and there was no room for compromise. They believed

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in different things, and even the imminence of death and the ties of common citizenship could not break that difference in belief. I saw that same thing later in the first summer of the war in Korea when South Korean troops refused to obey the orders of American commanders to withdraw, although both their flanks were exposed. They believed in the cause for which they were fighting; and they fought and believed until they were overrun and killed. It was a difference in belief in the things regarded as worth being killed for that divided the Czechs and Poles in the concentration camps, that divided the North and South Koreans.

I would suppose that men believe what they believe as a result of inheritance, indoctrination, the number of calories they are able to consume, the climate in which they live, the ideas they acquire from others. No route map can be drawn showing how an individual has reached the beliefs he now holds. No man can draw a chart for another which will lead that other to tranquil and tenable beliefs. Conversely, there is no road block that cannot be surmounted or by-passed by the active mind determined to follow the truth wherever it may lead him. And there is as yet no law preventing a man from defending what he believes, although civilized social intercourse requires that he respect the beliefs of those who disagree with him.

I have been a reporter for much of my adult life, using the instruments of radio and television. But these are mass media where the speaker is remote from his audience. It is rather like putting letters in a rusty mail box and never being sure that anyone comes to collect them. The job of a reporter who can never see the eyes of his listeners is to provide information upon which opinion and belief can be based. The only way of discovering what people believe is to ask them. We have discovered in preparing this series of statements that most people have never attempted to reduce to writing what they believe and why. Almost without exception they have told us that this is the most difficult piece of composition they have undertaken—to say, in a few hundred words, what they believe to be the important and permanent landmarks they have found in their journey so far upon this minor planet.

There was a time in this and other countries when sermons by

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great preachers and editorials by distinguished editors were the subject of prolonged and considered discussion in social gatherings. There was also a time when the writing of letters was an art so well developed that some of the letters were worth keeping and later being published between covers. But the speed of modern communication has largely turned conversation into assertion, and letter-writing into telegrams. The reporter and the listener, or the reader, are overrun and smothered, trampled down by the newest event before they can gain perspective on the one that just passed by. It has become a cliché to say that modern man has been debased and materialized by the circumstances of his daily life.

We do, it is true, live in a society that is materialistic and mechanistic, where most of the goods we use are mass produced. We employ the same phrases, buy nationally advertised products, wear nationally branded hats and suits; the majority of newspaper editors have abdicated to the syndicated columns. The voice of one broadcaster is heard from one end of the country to the other. There exists a real danger that the right of dissent, the right to be wrong, may be swamped because the instruments of communication are too closely held. We face the risk of forgetting that today's minority may become tomorrow's majority, and that every majority in a free society today was not so long ago a minority.

The matter of what men believe became of great importance to me when I first discovered that a friend of mine had been killed, not because of what he had done, but because he insisted upon retaining and agitating for his beliefs. I have known many men who have traveled many roads that brought them to beliefs ranging from Catholicism to Communism. I have never yet heard a man express what he believed in a fashion that failed to interest me. Most of the contributions in this book reflect an abiding belief in the importance and the inviolability of the individual spirit; they reflect a belief in the dignity of the individual and the conviction that any belief worthy of an individual must be hammered out by that individual on the anvil of experience and cannot be packaged and delivered by print, radio, or television.

Occasionally in recent times there has occurred something which has underlined and re-emphasized the independence of the indi-

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vidual and the mystery of what he believes and how he reaches that belief. It happened in England in the late war; it happened with many people with faith enough to regard their beliefs as more important than their lives.

This volume is no publishers' effort to tell you what you should believe. It is rather a compilation of experience and incident which may help you to recognize some of the signposts that have been meaningful to others.

For my own part, I remain fascinated by the manner and method by which people reach their beliefs and, at the same time, gratified by the demonstrable fact that their beliefs are not predictable. Four years ago, in the 1948 Presidential campaign, many of us, reporters, readers and listeners alike, were enthralled by something that wasn't true. The pollsters told us what we would do. We almost came to believe that the hopes, the fears, the prejudices, the aspirations of the people who live on this great continent could be neatly measured and pigeonholed, figured out with a slide rule. As individuals we didn't count; we were just little dots on a graph. The pollsters turned out to be wrong; we were not predictable, and regardless of the political consequences, their error restored to each of us a little dignity and some mystery as to why we believe what we do. This experience re-emphasized the importance and the inscrutability of the individual. We are not predictable, we are not robots. The individual is unpredictable, and in the area of what he believes, he is still sovereign.

At a time when the tide runs toward a shore of conformity, when dissent is often confused with subversion, when a man's belief may be subject to investigation as well as his action, we have thought it useful to present these brief statements by people who have attempted to define what it is that they believe. ♣

EDWARD R. MURROW

Closer Than My Own Back Yard

BY WILLIAM B. SEARS

I REMEMBER once doing a television broadcast from a Philadelphia hospital. It featured a contest among the children who had been born there during the past several years. The winner was a three-year-old boy. As the gold cup was presented to him, we took a "close-up." He grasped the cup eagerly with both hands and raised it up to his lips to drink from it. Surprised he lowered it and tearfully cried out: "It's empty!"

It made me think how many times all of us have tilted proffered cups hoping for assurance only to find them empty, too. The more I talk with my fellow man, the more I realize that my hopes are their hopes. That, as eagerly as I, they search for sort of a "holy grail" whose contents can nourish all mankind.

I'm beginning to understand the wisdom of Bacon's words: "If we are to transform the world, we must begin first by transforming ourselves." At the same time I have come to realize that like the search for Maeterlinck's well-known bluebird, happiness is not a matter of geography. I think it is found even closer than my own back yard—within myself. It was a long struggle for me to understand that actually no one loved me. Not my father, mother, wife, or children. I believe that nobody loves you either. What I mean is that people love the qualities that you possess—kindness, understanding, justice. As you add these qualities to your life, their love for you increases; as you lose these qualities, their love for you falls away. What is true of individuals, I think, is true of nations. Respect, allegiance, and devotion are won by moral character. This character can be acquired by men or countries only through a fundamental belief in some great ruling force which can give purpose to their lives. It is no longer unpopular or unscientific to believe in God.

Anyone who lives in the sports world, for instance, recognizes the vital need for authority and an overseeing guidance. When this law

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of order and authority is traced back to its source, it leads finally and inevitably to a belief in God. To me, this is the only true basis for a peaceful and happy life.

True, this Supreme Being may be beyond my definition or description, yet this tremendous force which has been released to the world through all the great religions is a positive thing, I feel, and creates life.

Humbly, before this force, I believe in meditation and prayer. But I believe in active living, too. I believe that I owe it to myself to extract all the throbbing wonder, joy, and thrill out of life—from my profession, from music, the sciences, art, from all created things. In a wonderful, intimate way, the world is mine to fulfill the promise that lies within me. I need only remember one thing: nothing must come between me and my responsibilities to God and my fellow man.

Glory is not his who loves his country, his family, or himself alone; glory is his who loves his kind. This, I believe, has helped me to look upon each dawn as a new adventure, a day wherein I may find the cup that is not empty.



§ WILLIAM B. SEARS is a seventy-five-year-old philosopher every Sunday on the CBS television program *In the Park*, and a forty-one-year-old humorist the other six days of the week on his radio program over Station WCAU in Philadelphia. Mr. Sears ("Bill" to millions) maintains that his career has progressed in direct proportion to the disappearance of his hair. Through the years he has been a sportscaster, correspondent for the United Press, and radio director for an advertising agency.

When he is not writing his radio or television programs, he paints in water colors and in oils. The rest of his spare time is devoted to repairing the damage that two hundred years have done to his old frame farmhouse in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

As chairman of the National Radio Committee for the Bahai World Faith, Mr. Sears spends much time in writing and speaking for all groups on the vital need for a return to "spiritual values."