

CHAPTER XXI

The Camp Farthest Out



AT ALL these camps there was Light, but at some it was as fitful and sputtering as a faulty kerosene lamp; at others it was as brilliant and glorious as a cluster of electric light bulbs. What was the reason for this variation? Invariably the difference in intensity went back to one thing: the harmony or lack of harmony among the leaders. One year I found great jealousy among the leaders as to who would have the most platform speeches. That year the light was short-circuited as completely as if a hand had turned off the switch. Another year a professional psychologist present considered a professional evangelist a hopeless old fogey and the evangelist regarded the psychologist as antichrist himself. Instead of a spiritual powerhouse, the camp became a shambles.

At such camps every fiber in my being yearned to rush forth and start a camp of my own based upon Jesus' promise that "where two or three *agree* together I shall be in the midst of you." That word "agree" comes from the same Greek word that "symphony" comes from. How wonderful it would be to turn all these jarring notes into a symphony of the soul!

Another lack I found at these camps was the great emphasis they gave to lectures and discussions and the little emphasis they gave to prayer. All the leaders believed in prayer as a routine part of

religious practice. A meal should begin with prayer and a church service should close with a benediction, but as to believing that prayer would actually accomplish things, that was ridiculous!

Since my particular function at these camps was to lead the group that wished to specialize in prayer, I frequently found the atmosphere I was trying to build up torn down by the different emphasis created by social action speakers who believed letters to congressmen the *only* way to reach the Government and by orthodox religionists who believed praying for the sick smacked of cultism. At such times another yearning pulled at all the fibers of my being to start a camp where *all* the leaders believed that prayer was the mightiest force in the world.

Another feature of the camps was the time taken up by many committees and discussion groups over matters pertaining to the peculiar needs of running an *organization*—the raising of money, the increasing of membership—time that I should like to have seen spent in training folks how to put God into their homes and classrooms, into their work and play. In short, I yearned to see a camp where people ceased merely talking *of* and *about* God and the Kingdom—prepositions that too often implied separation—and started immersing themselves in God and the Kingdom, in every area of their lives.

These student camps might be serving their purpose well but I wanted to go further. How did Edison lift us out of the era of candles and kerosene lamps into the “age of light”? It was by building a laboratory where he could experiment for years emptying all the air out of bulbs of glass so completely that the metal filaments were able to stand the heat generated by the mighty energy. Laboratory work was the secret. I must establish a laboratory and what would be a finer laboratory than a camp in God’s beautiful outdoors—where folks could meet and learn how to empty themselves of self, and learn how to love God with all their strength, with all their mind, with all their heart and with all their soul?

This laboratory must not be merely a laboratory of ritual and doc-

trine, nor should it be a mere forum for debate. Not only must the mind and soul be rendered incandescent, but the heart and body also if we would obey Jesus' Great Commandment.

And so one year I started on a journey—a journey down through the heart of America—to find the laboratory, the seekers and the method by which we might help to usher in the Age of Light for this dark and weary world.

My first stopping place was Lake Geneva, where students from eight Midwestern states were gathering in an open air conference for building personality around the pattern of Christ. My task was to stress the need of making one's entire soul empty and incandescent and completely surrendered to God. I talked about spiritual orchestration. When I wasn't speaking I listened to other speakers on similar themes. But one afternoon I stumbled upon a little gathering in which Miss Ruth Raymond, a teacher of art appreciation, was leading a rather unusual group of young people in a rather unusual way.

"Erase your faces," she said. "Wipe out all your old preconceived actions and ideas and make your mind incandescent. Now tune in to Beauty, Love and Joy." And as the hour went on, I realized that here was what I had been seeking for. One day she had them work out dramatic poses to illustrate different emotions. The next day, she took up color and told them to feel themselves as vapor drawn about by the colors of the rainbow while she explained the significance of the colors: red, signifying blood and excitement; blue, remoteness and loyalty, and so on through the spectrum. One day she had them read original poems or poems of others which were particular favorites of theirs and therefore, "belonged to them."

And then one day I drew her aside and told her of my dream of establishing an open air laboratory to help bring to pass the Age of Light. "In my spiritual orchestration hour," I said, "I am telling people about the divine laws of life as stated by Jesus, and how one can use them as shafts to tune right in to the infinite power of God. As one attains oneness with God, he turns on the Light in his own

soul, and brings light to all who are in the house. Now I find you doing with art what I was trying to do in terms of religion."

She responded at once. "I believe that the arts may be our avenue for losing our self-consciousness in a sense of oneness with God. When we yield ourselves to the spell of the great artist, we 'lose ourselves' through our imagination in his creation; we are swept along with the movement of the music; we find repose in the spacious ease of the seated 'Fates' of the Parthenon, or draw deep breaths of courage with the 'Victory of Samothrace.' If the piece of beauty we contemplate is great art, it has elements of the Universal in it; through it we push out our horizons. It manifests Unity; through it we experience peace. For the moment of our contemplation we have lost that self-consciousness which insulates us from God. I believe through art we can turn our attention from our self-axis to our wider orbit, and through art link ourselves into the source of radiant energy and creative power, bringing ourselves into true relationship with the universe in which we live."

"Would you be willing to come to a camp next summer and put your philosophy into practice with a specially chosen group of people who are willing to give all they have to the releasing of themselves to your teachings and opening themselves up to God?"

"There is nothing in the world I would rather do. I would go to the ends of the earth to find such a group," she said.

My next stopping place was New York City, where I was to be the guest for several weeks of an efficiency expert, Oliver Lyford, whose family, by the way, brought Coué to America. The first thing I found awaiting me when I went to my guest room in their home was a letter from Gerald Stanley Lee, a gentleman I had met only once before in my life.

"Come out to my island as my guest for a week," he wrote, "and let me demonstrate my wonderful new discovery. I have found a way of making the body an instrument of prayer."

I accepted his invitation and there on the Island Farthest Out, off the coast of Maine, I studied this man who tried to make people

as relaxed as the sea. And as I watched the great ocean move in its irresistible and ever relaxed way, I captured a little of the tremendous spirit of the sea in my own soul and knew from whence he had derived his secret. One day I asked him to put into words what he was doing.

"If you were to ask me to say in a single sentence what I am doing," he replied, "I would say I am teaching people how to pray—teaching a definite technique which a man can depend upon and use for praying with his body, a technique by which man makes himself sensitive, radiolike, to the Unseen, by which he opens himself soul and body to God.

"Prayer in its fullness as a sense of communion has a technique for connecting a man with God which is as definite, to put it in a homely way, as turning on the light by putting the plug in its socket. Prayer in its fullest sense is the act of fitting one's soul into one's body, of lighting up one's body with God.

"I believe that until we provide people with a definite technique for praying with their bodies as well as with their souls, we are not going to be able to bring the world singing and crowding into our churches."

"Could you come to a camp next summer and teach a group of serious seekers how to do this?" I asked.

"I myself am fastened to this island," he replied, "part and parcel of this island as much as that old lighthouse is a part of it. But suppose you select one of your group, one of your finest seekers, to spend a month or two with me and my wife and learn my method and let him pass the technique on to the others."

Some time later when I returned to the home of the efficiency expert, he said, "Do you know I have been practicing your philosophy in my business and I find it works. Your idea is that if a thing is put into perfect balance it will work itself, the kinks and errors will fall off of their own weight, so to speak, isn't that it?"

"Something like that," I smiled.

"Well, when a great business fails and I am called in to put it

on its feet, I invariably find that somewhere or other things are out of balance. And I find that the philosophy of looking for spiritual unbalance first is a good thing. Therefore, the first thing I look for is a man in the establishment who is what you would call 'in tune'; that is to say a man who is humble yet efficient and willing to do his best without regard for recompense or glory, but for the good of all. Sometimes this man is one of the undermanagers or a subforeman, but even if he were the office boy or janitor I think I would take him. This man I pick out and appoint as the head of the firm until conditions begin to improve. I tell the rest that he is the 'king' and they are to do exactly as he says."

That comment suggested another idea to carry to the camp: how a man can put his business into balance while he is putting his soul, mind and body into balance. So I decided then and there that we must have an open forum hour for businessmen and others to discuss spiritual life from this practical point of view. How glorious it is to think that one can become an office boy or janitor or undermanager for the Lord! Sometimes I wonder if all the really successful men are not merely God's janitors and office boys in disguise! Daily it was growing clearer and clearer to me that this taking religion into all the affairs of life was not demeaning heaven to base ends, but rather was a lifting of the sodden affairs of earth heavenward. At this camp we must learn to put every phase of our life under the leadership and under the control of Christ. More and more I became thrilled with the conception of the wholeness of the spiritual life.

Years ago I had taken football teams down to a camp on the Mississippi River two weeks before college opened, for special training in the fundamentals of football. These camps were always thrilling affairs but not nearly so thrilling as this new kind of camp I was contemplating, a camp for training athletes of the spirit.

Then a set of problems began to arise.

These football camps were financed by an athletic board. How

was this new kind of camp to be financed? We wanted to keep expense per person as low as possible. But there was going to be some expense that would not be small. For instance, we knew of no one in the Middle West who understood this new philosophy of physical co-ordination, so there remained nothing for us to do but send someone east to study for several weeks or months the system which had so intrigued me on my journey of discovery. Better omit the physical side, some of my friends said. Instantly I said, "No." Our camp must provide an adventure into the *wholeness* of the spiritual life or it would be nothing. Unless we could make an all-out attempt we would not even start. Otherwise ours would be just one more camp. So I selected one of the most spiritual young persons I knew, Vivian Combacker, and sent her east. We never regretted that investment. It has certainly borne fruit a hundredfold.

Then suddenly out of the blue sky without my soliciting it, twelve men in my Plymouth Bible Class came forward and offered to underwrite the camp to the extent of five hundred dollars. Moreover they paid the money down. I am glad to report that when the camp was over we were able to return to them two-thirds of what they had advanced.

Another thing to give concern—at least it gave my wife considerable concern—was the preparation of the messages for such an extended study of prayer as this one would be. "Do you realize that this is a three weeks' camp, and you are scheduled to speak morning and evening? I don't remember ever seeing you write down a speech in your life. Are you sure you could give forty-two talks?" Of course, this was the most sensible sort of advice. Fortunately, I was going to Lake Geneva again to give a series of nine or ten talks and I promised to take special pains in preparing them. But, alas, when I returned and with some elation started to produce my notebook with a dozen talks outlined to show my wife, I discovered that I had left the notebook on the train never to be seen again. I accepted the loss as God's leading that in this camp we must trust *all* to Him,

and that He would say what should be said, through me or through others at the right time and in the right way. And God never failed us.

There remained one serious problem, now that the time for the first camp was rapidly drawing nigh. Would the right persons come to it? In fact, would any persons come to it?

The first letter of acceptance came from a young woman we had never heard of before—a Miss Sparrow. If the robin is the first forerunner of summer, that Sparrow was harbinger and forerunner of the Camp Farthest Out. For she wrote, "I am so thrilled with this idea of making ourselves complete channels for the Christ to work through us, that I am going to Lake Koronis two weeks before the camp begins, and be quiet there with God, and walk beside the still waters and look at the woods and hills and prepare my soul for the Divine Spirit to come down and bless us all."

"If they all come with her spirit," my wife said, "the camp will be a success."

And they did come with that spirit, from east and west, from north and south, until nineteen states were represented—seventy self-chosen souls, or perhaps I should say God-chosen souls, for no one who ever came to these camps seemed directed from any other source than God.

But how amalgamate and blend together easily and quickly all of these people, from every walk of life, representing practically every profession, as well as all ages of men, women and children? How could we gather together the threads of these lives, the deep hidden consciousness of all these people, nearly all strangers to one another, and blend them together and make them one?

That question was answered the first night. Glenn Harding arose and led us in song. Strange we had not thought of having a song leader present! And Glenn was a revelation to us of what a true song leader "born of the spirit" could be. Of all the forms of spiritual and aesthetic co-ordination, this most wonderful means of all, the method of song, had been left out of the picture. The word "picture"

fits well here because anyone who has ever seen Glenn lead singing at Koronis or the other camps, will never forget the picture of the way he leads and blends and sweeps us into that glorious oneness where soul meets soul while voice blends with voice out in the starlit night.

When calls began coming from other states begging me to start a Camp Farthest Out in their neighborhood I was surprised, for I considered myself the world's worst orator. When people explained that they didn't come for oratory, they came for manna, I began to comb the country over for men who could bring them manna in a better form than I. George Washington Carver and Rufus Jones were too old to embark upon a new adventure of this kind. Stanley Jones was busy with his own *ashrams*. Then one day I picked up a copy of *Love Can Open Prison Doors*. Here was the story of a man who after spending twenty-five years in the underworld had an experience of Christ comparable to the experience of Saul on the Damascus Road. I wrote him. He came to a camp. I looked into his face with the scars of suffering upon it, scars that vanished like shadows at midday when a beautiful smile spread over his face as he spoke of redemptive love. At last I had found a man who believed that the day of miracles was not over. This man was Starr Daily.

Then one day Frank Laubach on his way from the Philippines dropped into a camp and we begged him to tell of his game with minutes. Here was a modern Brother Lawrence practicing daily the Presence of God. Thus one by one the leadership of the camp grew.

A typical day at a camp begins with a meditation at seven o'clock led by Glenn Harding with inspirational readings strung like beautiful beads on a string of meditations and prayers. As we move from the chapel to the breakfast hall, Alice Kraft in ringing accents commands all to empty the trash out of their lungs and systems and with uplifted arms welcome the day in all its newness and freshness.

At nine o'clock Starr Daily addresses the group in accents reminiscent of Lincoln. "If you would have me give you a character

analysis, a personality reading, I should ask but one question, 'What is it you adore?' Should you answer that question honestly, truthfully, I could then give you a general history of your life, past, present and future. If we adore gossip we shall, in all our characteristics, become like gossip. The timbre of our voice will betray us, the cast of our eyes, the set of our features, the tilt of our heads, our mannerisms, gestures, the way we sit, and the way we walk—all will proclaim to the world, 'Behold, the gossip!'

"We may choose what we wish to become in our hearts and minds. The difference between suffering and happiness, defeat and victory, resides in the self-advanced inquiry, 'What is it I adore?'"

And then for an hour he holds us transfixed as he talks of the Redemptive Love of Jesus.

Then, under the trees, follows an hour of worship led by Alice Kraft spreading blessings to the right and left and kneeling in reverence before the altars of God.

In the creative writing hour which follows, the teacher tells the group that each one there has access to the same three sources of originality that Wordsworth, Dickens and Shakespeare had access to: our reminiscences, prejudices and convictions. Be true to your own personality, dip into these three reservoirs honestly and sincerely, and you can't help being original. "All you need then is to point your words and put rhythm into your sentences and you will have something worth while." The writing hour is one of the most inspiring hours at the camp.

In the afternoon after a rest and quiet time the class in art meets. Here Claire Boyer says, "When God created the earth, that was architecture. When He shaped its valleys and mountains, that was sculpture. When He tinted it with grass and flowers, that was painting. When He started the wind and the waves and the birds singing, that was music. When He hid infinite meanings in His nature-forms, that was poetry. When humanity began to react to nature, that was drama. When man moved in harmony with God's great eternal laws, that was the art of the dance! Thus the art world was created,

good and true and beautiful and whole! Diversity in Unity, related and purposeful! That is the reason that art can integrate man—it calls to his spirit and spirit always responds in all its original wholeness.”

After that the entire group is divided into a series of prayer sections meeting separately in different parts of the grounds. These groups remain intact for the duration of the camp, but the leaders rotate, thus spreading both contagion and technique for forming similar prayer groups when individuals return home. Many churches all over the nation have been revived by folks who derived new inspiration from such groups.

Sometimes we have passed around an open Bible and asked each to lay his hand with his particular burden upon the great promises in this precious Book. Great answers have come. Sometimes we use petitionary prayer, sometimes a Quaker silence, and sometimes we broadcast the Love of God to all the world.

After supper we gather for the half hour of song before the Galilean Hour. People who have never sung before find music pouring from their throats.

“If you can’t sing,” cries Glenn Harding with the radiance that seems always shining from him, “just open your mouth and feel the music of the rest vibrating upon your vocal chords. When two pianos are in the same room all you need to do is play upon one and the corresponding chords in the other hum in response. Open your mouths and let the breath of God flow through, and all our aeolian harps will blend in one grand harmony.”

Some songs preach and some songs teach, some songs pray. Glenn in his joyous, loving way makes every song period a complete religious experience in itself.

Then Frank Laubach rises to speak—the man who has been teaching the silent billion to read, and whose compassion goes out to all the benighted ones of the earth. It is an experience to hear this great man. Tonight it is half speech and half prayer.

Leaning intimately across the pulpit with hands folded, he speaks

softly . . . "I've been hungry for the last few days to get with a small group like this that believes in prayer. Our Lord has so few to follow His thoughts through with Him. If we become more like Him, then the circle will reach around the world. The greatest failure of the Christian Church is that 'we try to save our own souls at all costs.' The further out the needs of Humanity are the less concerned we are! Make us bigger"—his discourse becomes prayer—"in the circle of our praying, love, interest and thought." Then he turns back to the listeners. "We have an ever-growing confidence through experience because prayer—when we are honest and willing to be used—is the mightiest power in the world. . . . If we follow through prayer with our lives, we are then irresistible. If we open up to Him, open the center of ourselves out to Him and if we open ourselves down and out to the world, then we let Him flow through. Then and then only do we become channels. Otherwise we are mere trickles of power of service."

It is good to be praying with a man like this. We watch him use the back of his large hand to wipe away his tears surreptitiously. He tries to talk; finds it laborious and just quits and begins to pray again. He makes this point that gives us pause for thinking—that if in prayer we ask for anything lower than God's Will, it will not be answered. If we ask up to His Will, then our prayer will be answered above what we ask.

And as the days go by, each one filling the cup of inspiration a little higher than the day before, we sometimes reach a saturation point where one drop more would cause an overflow. When that time comes we turn one entire evening over to lightsomeness and mirth—a "stunt night" where the students alternately lampoon the leaders or glorify their teachings in beautiful allegory and parable.

The relaxation and relief that only joy and pure fun can awaken in one prepare the group for the following night when is held an inspired broadcast of love and prayer to all the world, followed by an all-night of prayer, the climax and high point of the entire period.