America Goes Back to Church

War-worried mankind finds comfort in the faith of our fathers

You could hear the singing from a long way off. The words, filtering through the green summer foliage, were blurred, but you could recognize the stirring chords of the great old hymn.

"O, God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home."

It took you back to the country churches of your childhood, to the smell of pine benches and straw-stuffed cushions and laurel flowering outside.

As you approached the camp ground, you saw the singers in a clearing beneath the oaks. A great splash of morning sunlight illuminated their faces, strong American faces in which you saw hope and confidence, faith in God and faith in the power of religion to bring righteousness into a troubled world.

And suddenly you recognized the truth of what so many clergymen are saying today. America, in its hour of grave trial, is turning to the faith of its fathers for comfort and strength. Two years ago most churches were considered fortunate if forty-five people attended the morning service; today devout worshippers fill the pews morning and night. In Sunday schools, in formal church services, in old-fashioned camp meetings, men and women are, in the words of Paul, "taking the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit."

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And so you are on the grounds of the Freeport, Long Island, interdenominational camp meeting, with the echoes of William Croft's hymn dying away and the sunlight striking down through the oak leaves. You learn this is a Holiness group—which is to say that the members believe in old-fashioned, fundamental religion. There is no allegorical interpretation for these believers; every word of the Bible, from the story of Adam and Eve to the Revelations, is true in a literal sense. The spirit of this camp meeting is evangelical; the campers hope to find salvation and sanctification at the altar rail in the big pine tabernacle. They are aware of the beauty of nature, feel they are nearer God when they worship outdoors. It is this strong instinct which has made the camp meeting an important part of religious life in America.

Even this quiet glade has been touched by the war: blue dim-out bulbs hang beneath the trees. But if you sit for a few moments on one of the crude benches you become aware of a force far greater than war—mankind's reverent faith in a greater Power.

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PRAYER AT THE CAMP MEETING IS LED BY REV. R. J. DIXON

. . . With reverent dependence upon, and faith in our destiny, let us meet in church and school, in cathedral and synagogue, in public hall and home, to purge our hearts of all intolerance and to build all our citizens in a common loyalty.

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