

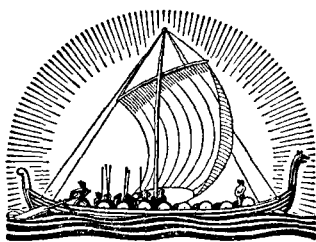
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Upton Sinclair



TWO WORLDS

Upton Sinclair



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“Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born.”

—MATTHEW ARNOLD

TO
my friends in England,
WHO ARE LIVING UNDER THE BOMBS;
AND ESPECIALLY TO MY ENGLISH PUBLISHER,
Mr. Werner Laurie,
WHO FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY
HAS UNFALTERINGLY PUBLISHED
EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE
SENT HIM.

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BOOK ONE

We Are the Music-Makers

Peace Be within Thy Walls

I

WHEN one has been away from home for more than two years, and has seen Paris and London and New York, one's house may be found to have grown strangely smaller, its glamour turned to dinginess. Lanny Budd walked around the outside, noting how the sky-blue paint on the shutters had faded and what the malicious sea air had done to the hinges. Inside, the upholstery was soiled, the curtains drooped drearily, the piano was out of tune—in short, the place would have to be done over. Only van Gogh's sunrise and Monet's lilypond had their glories undiminished—*ars* instead of *aes perennis*.

Lanny, still in his twentieth year, had full authority and a bank account replenished; so as he strolled he meditated upon the various styles he had observed in his travels. Would he care to dwell in the presence of French splendor, such as he had grown used to in the Hotel Crillon and the Foreign Office on the Quai d'Orsay: huge gilded chandeliers, heavy tapestries, stucco cupids on the ceiling, silk upholstery on spindly chairs? Or would he prefer the austere fashion of his father's home in Connecticut, the woodwork painted white and the old furniture cut in straight lines without ornament? Would van Gogh and Monet look well against a paneling of dark wood in the dignified English fashion? Or should he be jolly and modern, and turn the drawing-room into a child's nursery with primary colors, a frieze of wild animals chasing one another, and draperies of eccentric designs put on by batik? His thoughts moved from one to another of the villas along this Côte d'Azur; he had been in scores of them—but mostly when he was younger, and his mind wasn't on interior decoration.

Midsummer of the year 1919, and Lanny had just witnessed the closing of the Peace Conference of Paris. He had cherished a dream to help remake Europe, and for six months had worked hard, and had made a mess of it—so he believed, and his friends agreed. Now he had taken on a simpler job—to fix up his mother's home and add a studio for a new member of their family. That, at least, one ought to be able to do without bungling! Lanny's mind, in sharp reaction from world politics, was set upon mastering the techniques of architecture, carpentry, masonry, interior decoration, and landscape gardening.

II

In one corner of this estate was a small building of stone. It stood on the edge of a grove of trees, facing the west, looking out over the blue and gold Mediterranean. It had only a couple of windows and got most of its light from a skylight on the north side. The building was less than five years old, but already it was haunted, and Lanny after two years' absence had waited a while before summoning the courage to go near it. When he unlocked and opened the door he stood for a few moments looking in, as if he thought the very dust on the floor ought not to be disturbed.

Nothing had been touched since that tragic day, a little more than a year ago, when Marcel Detaze had laid down his palette and brush, written a note to his wife, and stolen away to throw himself into the hell of war. Lanny hadn't been here, and hadn't thought it wise to question his mother about it; better if she forgot it quickly. But Lanny himself wasn't going to forget his stepfather.

He came slowly into the room, looking about. The easel had something on it, covered with a cloth. The palette was on the table, face up, the colors hard and dry. The painter's little blue cap, worn and faded, lay near; also a newspaper, with headlines telling of the last German rush on Paris. A ghostly voice was saying to Lanny: "You see—I had to go." A quiet voice, for Marcel had never had to argue with his stepson.

He was gone, France was saved, and here was the studio, the

shutters closed and fastened, the shade pulled over the skylight, and a year's drifting of dust which the mistral had forced through cracks of windows and doors. Lanny opened one of the shutters, creaking on its rusty hinges, and let in the bright sunlight of the Midi. He saw that Marcel had been reading a book on military strategy—an odd subject for a painter, but of course he had been trying to understand what was happening to *la patrie* and whether she needed the life of one of her sons, already crippled in her service.

Lanny raised the cloth from the easel. There was a crayon sketch which clutched him like a hand. It was the face of a peasant, and the youth knew him at once—an old truckman for one of the flower-growers here on the Cap d'Antibes; he had taught Lanny to drive a car. Marcel had the gift of line: the slightest stroke of his pencil, and something lived and moved. In these crayon lines you saw what weather had done to the face of a man. In the wrinkles around the eyes was sly humor, in the bristling mustaches the spirit of those forefathers who had marched all the way to Paris, dragging their cannon and singing: "To arms, to arms, ye brave!" Lanny took the sketch to the light to study its fine points. Again he heard the ghostly voice: "You see—I have left something of myself!"

In back of the studio was a storeroom, and the youth unlocked the door. Along the walls were racks which Beauty, his mother, had had built, sparing no expense in her futile effort to keep a French husband at home when *la patrie* was in danger. On these racks were canvases, each tacked on its wooden frame and overlaid with dust. The work of Marcel Detaze was not bid for in auction rooms, its prices were not the subject of gossip in the newspapers, so it hadn't been worth anyone's while to break into the place.

Lanny didn't need to take any of the canvases down. He knew which shelves held the war paintings, and which the landscapes of the Cap, which the fiords of Norway, which the Isles of Greece and the shores of Africa. Standing in that dim and dusty room, he experienced a return of the strange feeling which had stolen over him amid the ruins of ancient temples, with his stepfather telling about the lives of those long-vanished lovers of beauty. Now Marcel had gone to join them: were they meeting in some Greek limbo,

sharing the secrets of their techniques of painting—or perhaps fighting their battles over again? Marcel, who had stood at the second battle of the Marne, could meet the heroes of Thermopylae on equal terms. In Lanny's mind were many sentences from the book of Greek epigrams which they had read amid the ruins. "In peace sons bury their fathers; in war fathers bury their sons." Twenty-two centuries had passed, and Lanny had seen it happening in France, England, and America.

III

Over at the villa was another souvenir of Marcel, one which Lanny was inspecting for the first time. Baby Marceline had about as many months as Lanny had years, and like him she was a child of the Midi; playing about in the patio, rolling on the grass in the hot sunshine, with only a breechclout, and the rest of her brown as a hazelnut. The old family dog had presented the household with a litter of puppies, and Marceline toddled, and these raced after her, falling over themselves and she falling over them. It made a charming picture, and how the father would have loved to sit and make sketches of it! Once more Lanny thought, what a strange thing is life—and how wasteful. Marcel had learned so much, and now he was gone, and his daughter had to begin at the beginning and learn to walk, picking herself up and starting again when she failed.

She had her mother's sweet and gentle features, and her mother's natural gaiety; also, apparently, her mother's impulse wherever she was to want to be somewhere else. Lanny found it interesting to have a half-sister and to engage in child study. Quickly he realized that Marceline perceived what he was doing, and enjoyed being the center of attention. Did she get that from her mother? Lanny decided to read a book and find out what was known about heredity. Marceline had her father's odd combination of blond eyebrows and darker hair; was she developing traces of his gentle melancholy? When the puppies fell asleep and the child sat gazing before her, what mysterious processes were going on in the budding soul?

Apparently she had no memory of the lovely blond being who

had brought her into the world and performed the feat, almost forgotten among fashionable ladies, of nourishing her at the breast. Six months had passed since Beauty had gone away, and what Baby Marceline depended on was a rosy peasant woman who was growing larger week by week and developing a soft brown mustache. It was Leese's firm faith that to be fat was the proper destiny of all female creatures. She fed the darling *petite* at all hours, and rocked her to sleep, and fondled and kissed her, and brought many relatives to do the same—all in violation of basic rules laid down by pediatricians. But it didn't worry Lanny, because he had had the same kind of upbringing, and the soft Provençal dialect had been as you might say his foster-mother tongue.

One thing troubled him, the fishpond with a little fountain which graced the center of the patio. Marceline would lie and watch the goldfish and try to catch them, and Leese insisted that she knew enough not to fall in—and, anyhow, the water wasn't deep. But Lanny would take no chance, and got a carpenter to make a little picket fence in sections hooked together; so the baby could watch the fish but not join them. The youth wrote his mother that all was well, and she might enjoy her third honeymoon with a good conscience. He smiled as he penned the words, for he had sojourned in New England and learned that people differed in matters of conscience; but he and Beauty had their private understandings.

IV

The mother wrote long letters. She and her lover had found a cottage on the rugged shore of the Bay of Biscay; a Basque woman came in to clean up for them, and they were living *la vie simple*, a charming adventure for complicated persons. For the first time, the mother had no interest in meeting the fashionable and important of the earth; there were reasons which were never mentioned in her carefully guarded letters. The war censorship of mail was supposed to be at an end, but you could never be sure.

For the third time in her life Mabel Blackless, alias Beauty Budd, alias Madame Detaze, *veuve*, had taken the difficult role of every-

thing in the world to a man. She was trying to be family, friends, country—plus the whole German army. She had to make her lover forget defeat and shame, poverty and ruin. In this role she was one among millions; for Europe was full of men whose lives had been shattered and disorganized, and of women trying to comfort them and help them back to normality. Don't scold them, don't nag them; don't be shocked by anything they do or say! Understand that they have been living in hell, their lungs are impregnated with fumes of that region—only be glad it isn't mustard or chlorine gas. Let them do anything they please with you and pretend that you like it; tell them anything they want to believe; sing them to sleep, and when they have nightmares wake them and soothe them like sick children. Feed them, play with them, and count it a triumph if now and then you get them to laugh.

Spain had got rich out of the war, and her leisure classes were flocking to their northern coast; it was like winter on the Riviera in old days. There were many Germans, both traders and officials, and any one of them might recognize Kurt Meissner. Beauty referred to this possibility, using her code which Lanny understood. Kurt was "our friend," and the Germans were "his old associates." A censor would have thought it was a burglar she was trying to reform, or at least a drunkard. "I want our friend to break off permanently. Help me to persuade him that he has done his full duty, and should forget the past."

Lanny, eager to oblige, would compose joyous letters about the life of art, and his friend's genius, and the happiness they were all going to enjoy. Originally it had been the younger man's idea to build a new studio as a surprise for both his mother and her lover; some day they would drive up to the gate of *Bienvenu*, and Lanny would take them to the new building, and hear their cries of pleasure. But now he decided that this was risky. Kurt might make up his mind to return to his own land, to help rebuild it, or to get ready for another war—who could guess what impulse might seize a Prussian artillery officer, one month after the treaty of Versailles had been rammed down his country's throat?

So the subtle Lanny Budd revealed what he was doing; a de-

lightful adventure, constructing a studio for the composing of music that was to bring back the days of Bach and Brahms and restore the prestige of the Teutonic race in the noblest field of human activity. The masons were laying the firm foundation, and Lanny gave a sketch of the groundplan. The work was being done by those relatives of Leese who hadn't been killed or crippled in the war, and Lanny told whimsical stories about workmen of the Midi, class-conscious and inclined to be suspicious, but opening up like flowers when you chatted with them, and especially when you tried to help on the job and let them laugh at your blunders. The artist in them was touched when it was revealed that a musician was to live here and compose; a Swiss gentleman, he was being called.

Lanny knew that Kurt was among the millions of unemployed men; for the German army had been cut to almost nothing, and Kurt's family couldn't have saved much from the ruins of war. So Lanny expounded his dream of being a young Lorenzo dei Medici and gathering around him a noble company of worthy artists. "My father gives me some money," he wrote. "I haven't earned it—and maybe he hasn't either!" Since Lanny had been meeting Socialists and other unorthodox persons at the Peace Conference, his mind was full of their dangerous phrases. "What better use can I make of money than to help men who have the gifts that I lack? My father wants me to spend it to make myself happy, and if it makes me happy to help my friends, and my mother's friends, why shouldn't I have that pleasure?"

Be careful of every word, Lanny! Kurt Meissner, in spite of his notion that he is a modern man and artist, has the instincts of a German aristocrat, and how can he face the thought of being supported by a woman, especially by the one he loves? The English have a name for a man like that, and Kurt has no mind to carry it. When Kurt writes this, Lanny has to be deeply hurt, and to argue for his mother's right to be happy too. Lanny's money is his, not his mother's, and it may be a loan if Kurt insists—every franc of it carefully recorded, so that a great musician can repay it out of the proceeds of future performances, or royalties, or salary as a con-

ductor, whatever it may be. There is precedent enough in the lives of musicians—for the borrowing if not for the repaying!

V

The painters came and started on the outside trim of the villa. The paperhangers were working inside the drawing-room. The upholsterers took away the furniture, to do it over with soft brown cloth that would wear. The background was to be a wallpaper of cream color with an unobtrusive pattern, Lanny having decided that this would be in keeping with the austere spirit of his friend and the domestic intentions of his reformed mother.

A man came and tuned the piano; and Lanny lived again in that music to which his fancy had turned during the past couple of years, whenever life had become too complicated. A translator-secretary at a peace conference had been powerless to restrain Italians from seizing Yugoslav territory, or Turks from slaughtering Armenians; but when he sat down at the piano he was his own master, and if he didn't like the way a composer achieved his modulations he could change them. Lanny's fingers had lost some of their speed while preparing reports on the distribution of Europe's populations; but when fingers are not yet twenty years old they limber up quickly, and Lanny soon had the freedom of that garden of delights in which he planned to spend the rest of his days.

At the driveway entrance of *Bienvenu* were a pair of heavy gates which you could lock if you wished. At the entrance to the footpath was a light wooden door with a tall aloe, now in blossom, on either side, and a bell which you had to ring. Inside were palms and bananas, a cascade of purple bougainvillea, the scent of narcissus and the murmur of bees; there were beauty and peace, and Lanny meant that there should be friendship and love. Good-by, proud world, I'm going home! So he had said, the day the unsatisfactory treaty had been signed. Every month Robbie Budd sent Beauty a check for a thousand dollars, and from now on Lanny was to have three hundred. Besides that, he had a thousand which he had earned his very self, and of which he was unduly proud. It was mixed