

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

POSTSCRIPT

DURING the next few years I was recovering my nervous equilibrium, avoiding serious feminine entanglements, and eschewing religious and philosophical speculation. For occupation I taught history and commercial subjects. I was almost afraid to think, although I wrote several superficial newspaper and magazine articles.

It was a period of dissatisfaction, depression, and the emptiness of negation. I had convinced myself that Coincidence and overstrain were the only factors in my experience—that the breakdown had been merely pathological, though due to no inherited mental weakness or congenital abnormality. Our family stock was sound and sane, though zealously religious on the maternal side. Overwork had caused a nervous collapse, or mental fever, of no more permanence than an acute physical disease like typhoid or pneumonia. But the horror and the shame of what is popularly termed “insanity” had cut deep and undermined my confidence. For a while I feared recurrence.

I tried to put the experience out of my mind by varied activities—athletic coaching and social diversions out of school hours. Work, sports and amusement alike left me exhausted and depressed. I realized that I was getting nowhere. A futile protest against graft in handling our city school supplies decided me. I had saved some money and returned to College, after five years, to finish.

Again I developed intellectually in the academic atmosphere and was saved from introspection by the congenial group at the Club. My life was not so intense. I was out of training for intercollegiate athletics. Interclub baseball, football and tennis were merely healthful pastimes.

But, toward the end of my Senior year, as the inevitable result

of my renewed contact with ideas, there came a supplementary adjustment. One definite factor, in this second experience, was the resumption of friendly relations with my former "divinity". This dangerous lady, still unmarried, was now a teacher of biology and an ardent feminist, scornful of what she considered "the superstitions of religion". Her very skepticism was both a challenge and a check to my hereditary mysticism.

My second "awakening" occurred in the Spring of 1913, this time in a small preceptorial group in McCosh Hall. The subject was politics. Seven years had brought big changes in democracy. The radical liberalism of Lloyd George and the democratic idealism of Woodrow Wilson were now moving both England and America. The slogan "Votes for Women", almost unheard of in 1906, was in the air. The sane leadership of Anna Howard Shaw and the dramatic militancy of the Pankhursts crowded the newspapers with front page stories and propaganda, pro and anti.

Some reference in the preceptorial discussion started a train of thought in which Feminism emerged very definitely as a moral and spiritual force, despite extremists. We were sitting around the table. The back of my chair was tilted against the wall. The recollection of my former experience returned—similar emotions, but much less intense. This time I was more discriminating. . . . The idea was symbolism . . . not deification . . . I may have been right after all . . . yet terribly wrong. . . Hadn't known where to draw the line. . . It wasn't a personal apotheosis. . . The new name was just a symbol . . . Social salvation . . . Perhaps Feminism . . . No silly false idealization . . . But potential regeneration (God knows, lots of women needed it!) . . . Personal responsibility . . . Duties as well as rights . . . Women realizing their true power . . . Democratic self-reliance . . . Emancipation from superstition . . . No pagan goddess stuff . . . Individuals didn't matter . . . Still, the idea had come to *me* . . . Like Kipling's "Explorer" that Axson had recently read to us!

"Anybody might have found it, but His Whisper came to me" . . .

I tilted forward and the legs of the chair dropped to the floor. The realization was terrifying. I was afraid of myself. Was this the return of insanity?—another atavism? For a moment I felt faint and giddy with the weight of oppression, and the whirl of mystic forces hovering and battling in the room. I think a dog barked outside—or was it a hell-hound in my imagination? That

strange sense of experience duplicated—memories repeated! The tension was almost unbearable,—the air stifling. As before, a Force seemed to urge me up and out. Yet professor Ford's expository voice droned on and on. I vaguely remember something about Wilson's "Constitutional Government"—probably his pet theory of the representative nature of the Presidency. . . . I gripped the arms of the chair, hard. And instead of rushing out of the room, I pulled my wits together and resisted the urge. Quietly I took part in the discussion. and when we left at the end of the hour, no one present knew that I had passed a crisis.

Never again did I lose control, or even feel that terrible gripping fear, described by Stevenson, that is more agonizing than madness itself after all restraint has been thrown off. Never again did I "tune in" on an unseen world. One experience of that kind was sufficient.

For a long time I discussed my ideas with no one. Not even with my new roommate who prodded me with his agnosticism. One experience had convinced me that new and vital ideas were unsafe for an undergraduate, either in college or life.

"Only dead men can tell the truth in this world," said Mark Twain when he held back his "War Prayer".

I wanted no further paternalistic complications. I wanted to graduate without well-meaning interference. So I kept quiet, determined to live my beliefs instead of talking about them. That, after all, was the pragmatic test. And it worked. All doubts vanished. I veiled my reaffirmation of faith in the Class Ode, which was to prove strangely prophetic:

"Spirit of Princeton, hovering o'er us
 Dreaming inscrutable, brooding at rest,
 Show us the Future that widens before us—
 Grant us the Vision—the end of our Quest.

Founded by princes, your wisdom has taught us
 Transient the power of prelates and kings:
 Our of their symbols the Present has wrought us
 Freedom for men, with the Faith that it brings.

Seeking a part in America's story—
 Goal of the prophets and bards of the Past:
 Joining the sons who would share in her glory,
 Equals with equals, the first with the last.

Spirit of Princeton, hovering o'er us,
 Mighty in battle, enduring till death,
 Guide in the Future that widens before us:
 Strengthen our courage with quickening breath."

I had no conscious premonition of war, but a year later came Armageddon. And as you know the names of nine of those fine, high-spirited American boys—our own clubmates alone—are now inscribed on the memorial tablet over the fireplace because the death of a mere Austrian Archduke made a causal sequence in the world of the Mysterious Stranger.

One other incident may deserve mention. The summer after my graduation I visited Carl Adams in Atlantic City. His family were devout Methodists and there was a bible on the bureau in the guest room. Up to this time I had left the Apocalypse alone, but was no longer afraid of it. I had accepted its social symbolism, applying to the Many through any names that might fit. That was settled. The occasion being propitious I began to reread the texts that had formerly been so devastating. I read on past the "white stone" and the "new name" of Rev. ii. 17. In iii. 7 my attention was caught by the words:

"And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write . . . I know thy works, behold I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

I reflected. By this time I knew something of the Praeterist, Historical and Futurist interpretations of prophecy. By the Praeterist theory, of course, Philadelphia was one of the cities of the Decapolis, but the Historical and Futurist chronology both suggested that with a "new name" there might be a "new Philadelphia"—and new churches or denominations, under the symbols of the old congregations in Syria and Asia Minor. To me the "open door" symbolized a new way of faith. But I also realized that no one took prophecies seriously excepting those who awaited literally the wildest extravagances of oriental imagery.

I came to iii. 12—"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: AND I WILL WRITE UPON HIM THE NAME OF MY GOD, AND THE NAME OF THE CITY OF MY GOD . . . AND I WILL WRITE UPON HIM MY NEW NAME."

As before, with the "new name" and "Christine," ideas flashed together. But this time I took them as calmly as the rolls I had eaten for breakfast.

Further evidence? Mere coincidence or mystic confirmation? It was a fact, as definite and demonstrable as breakfast rolls, that my given name meant "King", and my middle name (a place-name traced back in my mother's family from times immemorial) was traditionally derived from the Rock City of Arabia—the Biblical Sela,—that strange, most mystically beautiful "rose-red city half as old as Time"—doomed to desolation by the Old Testament prophets—Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel, Obadiah—and subsequently abandoned and lost to the world for more than fifteen hundred years. Men have called that place the "strangest city in the world." . . . I knew a'l this, and my acceptance of what I considered a symbolic interpretation of the Divine Cryptogram, left me unshaken. What of it? A book couldn't hurt me! . . . I felt no excitement, but rather the solemnity of a deep and abiding consecration. . . Any oracle must mean *me* (or you) individually or it means nothing *to* me (and you) collectively.

There it was—a matter of fact, or record: . . . God—a King! The mystic city, keeping "the watch that God hath set," of which a glorious future was also prophesied.¹ "The Rock in El Ghor"—the Stone! . . . and the "new name" to be added to the others. . . .

Like a vision of Time and Space, the cosmic sweep of the ages carried me through what I knew of our ancestral history and traditions. Ancient Arabia and Rome, mediæval Italy, the German-Bohemia of the Renaissance; and in modern times, French Alsace-Lorraine, Germany, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden and England—the lines of heredity gradually converging to a new Philadelphia. An array of names and dates that covered the entire Christian era. I had come by my mysticism honestly. Our roots were deep-down to the ultimate Rock—a refuge for men before the dawn of History. But how improbable that two should meet! . . .

So I thought, realizing that the superficial rational odds were tremendous against such inferences from Coincidence. But I found myself arguing that there are always exceptions in cases of so-called "megalomania" or "monomania", or there would be few new inventions, no revolutionary discoveries, no cosmic consciousness, no

¹See E. A. Poe's "Review of Stephens 'Arabia Petraea'"; also Whittier's "Rock in El Ghor".

Walt Whitmans, no representative idealists. Later I found that the encyclopedias of rival religions used just such terms as megalomania and neurasthenia in explaining away exemplars of reform or revelation. Even the mystic, George Fox, and the good William Blake, had not escaped the rational label of pathological self-deception . . . I would have to test myself further in the ordinary affairs of life.

And I found myself pretty much an average sort of fellow. This was the pragmatic test, for my personal beliefs.

In dealing with others, however, I realized the truth of James' warning: "Faith, says Tolstoi, is that by which men live, and faith-state and mystic-state are practically convertible terms. But I now proceed to add that mystics have no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we ourselves are outsiders and feel no private call thereto. The utmost they can ever ask of us in this life is to admit that they establish a presumption. They form a consensus and have an unequivocal outcome; and it would be odd, mystics might say, if such a unanimous type of experience should prove altogether wrong." (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, Chapter on "Mysticism".)

Does this suggest the Inductive Method for Mysticism as Locke applied it in Psychology? At any rate, Reason must check the data—test the evidence. . . .

Let me relate a curious dream interlude. You'll have to take my word for its authenticity.

The devil met me in a dream. Although the familiar horns, tail and cloven hoofs were presumably hidden under hat, shoes and conventional tailored garb. I recognized him by unerring dream-perception. In his hand he held a knife—apparently a common or garden variety of clasp knife. With one tapering nail he opened the large shining steel blade. Quite an ordinary jack-knife! But by sudden deft manipulation he stretched the blade to fearful length. It was elastic as rubber or ductile as soft metal. He pushed it back and kneaded it like putty. It was malleable as modeling clay. His quick fingers stretched, twisted and moulded the blade into incredibly indecent and abhorrent forms. Yet it shone bright as quicksilver and the molecules slid over one another like the stuffing of a modern atom.

Then suddenly he frisked it back into its original shape and rigidity. And he cut—(I've forgotten what)—things like wood, paper, hair; I think, even metal and glass. The blade was now

sharp as a razor, hard as diamond-point, finely tempered as Damascus steel.

He held the Super-knife out to me. "There", he said temptingly, "Can your Master" (he uttered, of course, no Ineffable Name) make a thing like that?"

I was as much amazed as anyone can ever be by the preposterously logical impossibilities of a dream. In waking crises, as we all know, apt repartee often comes as an afterthought—too late. But I've always cherished the reply of my dreaming sub-conscious ego. I waved the miracle away. "No", I said. "And what's more, He wouldn't want to. Where in *Hell* did you get it?" . . .

I awoke chuckling at the devil's discomfiture. There's a moral to this, George, but I don't want to spoil a perfect dream by tacking it on. Read it aright and you'll get at the heart of my own problem—perhaps the modern religious conflict. I would merely point out that this dream episode seemer to indicate a new stability and self-possession in my sub-conscious processes.

For social symbolism had satisfied me—given me as Romain Rolland calls it, "the internal peace that endures amid the endless agitation of the soul".

Josiah Royce (or Lombroso) gave me further support: "We cannot dispose of man's intellectual rank, or of his doctrine, by merely observing that he was weighted with morbid tendencies of mind. Genius has often, though by no means always, a back-ground of a pathological sort; while on the other hand, the nervously burdened, whether geniuses or not, actually do a great part of the world's work and the world's thinking, and may be all the wiser by reason of the depth of their nervous experiences." (*Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, pp. 242 f.)

But if, like Walt Whitman, I seem to "celebrate myself and sing myself" I mean also that

"What I assume you shall assume

For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you".

So, before reading this "Letter", you all know me as a "normal" human being, perhaps above the average intelligence of the army tests, living a prosaic life, carrying on the work of my profession with a fair degree of efficiency (a much over-rated quality), and providing for a family that is the American statistical norm. I share with other human beings the usual democratic distinction that my name and the name of the woman I married are rather different

from other names. The John and Mary Smiths may be the exceptions that prove the rule).

For I forgot to mention, George, as you have guessed, that I married my elusive "divinity" twelve years after her apotheosis, and, as our children will testify, she has proved to be very human. The story of those years of separation, the gradual adjustment of apparently irreconcilable differences, the bigotry of her biology—of her strictly "scientific" training, the conscientious scruples that almost wrecked our lives, and the unusually dramatic circumstances of our marriage are to me more interesting than any psychological novel I have ever read. But, as Kipling might have said for Galsworthy, *that* is another part of the story.

Yours, as ever,
