

With love
from G.C.

LETTER 14

Olcott, Wheaton, Illinois
October- November, 1947

My dear Ones:

I am now about to set out upon the road once more, after having stayed at Olcott for the whole of a very hot summer. I fear my correspondence has suffered, for I spent most of that time writing a new book, an account of all the interesting things I have seen and the interesting people I have met during a long life of continual change and travel. I have called the book So Rich a Life and I hope to get it printed before very long. Now I am setting out upon lecturing work again, and by the end of this second year in the American Section I think I shall really have covered all the ground. It has been a very wonderful experience, and a very happy time for me. I have found again every single one of the friends I knew here many years ago. During this coming year I shall visit Canada and Cuba, but I shall not be here for the next Convention. My permit expires in May next, and I expect to leave America sometime in April or May. I am not yet sure where I shall go; either straight back to South Africa or via a few months in England. By this time you will have all heard about the extraordinarily happy Convention we had here this last July. I called it the "laughing Convention," because we had so many hearty laughs, and all the way through there was never one tiny ripple of discontent or disharmony.

This letter I want to talk about criticism. We are most of us rather critical, some of us very much so. The tendency of the world is all in that direction, so it is not surprising that it affects us also. The world is super-critical for two reasons. One is that man is now developing the lower concrete mind, the faculty that flourishes on perceiving differences. It loves to compare, to set one thing against another in comparison. And in doing this the second reason becomes apparent. It wishes to compare to the detriment of others and to the aggrandizement of itself. This is because mankind is not yet very spiritually evolved, and man acquires a certain sense of security and pleasure from feeling that in some way he is superior.

Mrs. Besant told us that we should be trying to evolve the higher mind which thrives on seeing likenesses, not so many differences. The intuitional mind it is sometimes called, which can discern great underlying principles and to whom surface differences do not seem so much to matter. It will help us to think over the Greek root of the word criticism. It comes from the word krinein, which really means to appraise, to judge. In old English, to judge was sometimes rendered "to deem" and to this day the chief judge in the Isle of Man is called the "Deemster." That does not necessarily connote blame. Yet in the vast majority of cases, criticism does so indicate. "My life's cold critic bent on blame," wrote Robert Browning. H. P. B. tells us that continual meditation upon the One Life will enable us to see that there is no sin in the universe, only lack of growth. Then we can criticize without praise or blame.

Is not the habit of blaming a very prevalent one? Why? Because, as I said, men wish to feel secure in superiority, to uphold their own insecure egos. It is natural and easily to be understood in the ordinary man. That is why it helps to generously praise and appreciate. It is a little cruel to withhold such meed of self-appreciation from the ordinary man. But surely we none of us need to aid our own sense of well-being by looking down on our fellow-men! The habit of criticism in a blameworthy sense is so common in this world that it has become an everyday trick of speech. The Master K. H. calls public opinion "the most flippant and cruel of all tribunals." Without knowing it, many of us have acquired a similar habit. It really comes, as I have said, from a bad inferiority complex. If this habit gains too great hold on us we shall destroy not only our sense of true judgment, but also our own happiness.

Let us remember the words of the poet, Wordsworth:

"We live by admiration, hope and love,
And even as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend."

We all desire to be loved, but we must love. We all desire to be appreciated, but we must appreciate. Without hope, life would have lost its savour. Therefore do not let us destroy hope in the breast of another. So many of us have such a negative frame of mind. Many people tell me that they have no friends, that no one loves them. But that is because they wait to be loved, sought out, and appreciated. Now if we went out boldly to truly learn to love and appreciate we should soon find a glorious return. For the world more or less gives back to us what we give it.

And the habit of continual criticism prohibits this. Is there anything in the world so wonderful as a friend? Yet how many beautiful friendships are lost because we have too quickly criticized, too easily taken offense. I remember a woman telling me that she had never married because she had never found anyone to come up to her ideals. I felt like saying: "My dear woman, why ever should anyone come up to your ideals? It is enough if they try to reach their own." The highest form of love, says the Thibetan Scriptures, is so to love our friend that we desire only his highest good and in his own terms.

The habit of continual criticism does two things. First of all, it darkens the world for ourselves. This is the way the Master puts it: "Evil thought is a crime. For in everyone and in everything there is good and in everything there is evil. Either of these we can strengthen by thinking of it, and in this way we can help or hinder evolution; if we think of the evil we are filling the neighborhood with evil thought instead of good thought, and so we are adding to the sorrow of the world. If there is in that man the evil which we think, we are strengthening it, and we hinder our own growth."

Let us kill the spirit of criticism in our hearts or we shall lay up for ourselves such sorrow in the future. To be always setting people straight will cause karmic problems with them in future lives. That does not mean that we must be blind to faults and failings, but to be charitable to them and not to talk about them. Even when someone has really injured us, to forgive such a one is to make him a friend. It is really a reversal of polarization in his emotional nature.

Especially do not let us criticize, even to ourselves, someone to whom we owe a spiritual debt, someone who has helped us. For thereby we cut ourselves off from him, it may be forever, unless we strive to regain by service and contrite love the lost ground. Mrs. Besant used to talk to us about this. She quoted the saying that no man is a hero to his valet. This is not the hero's fault, she said, but because the soul of the valet cannot see aught but the petty things in his hero. And she warned us that if we had once seen the light through anyone, to hold fast to that, and not to fix our eyes upon other things, or we should lose our vision into heaven.

There is a very old manuscript. No one knows who wrote it. It is called Your Friend. Here are its words:

"Remember that friendship is a privilege, not a right. Beware of saying to your friend, 'Where do you go and for how long? with whom and to what purpose?' Beware of advising him as to the length of his apartment, or the adornment of his person. Seek not to encage the winged one within the confines of your judgment. Know the values that are his breath, and the freedom that is his orbit. Or you shall find in your heart but the long silence, and the bright plumage of a memory. But he, the splendid, will have flown."

Your affectionate friend,

Clara Codd