

Box 863
Johannesburg, South Africa
December 1950-January 1951

My dear Friends:

First I must wish everyone of you the happiest Christmas and New Year. I am sure we all hope that it will also be a happy new year for humanity in general. In spite of all that happens I never for one moment lose heart or hope. Such mighty changes as are on the way now must take a long time to eventuate, and there must be for a long time a period of misunderstanding and fear. Every now and then I read again that chapter in Man: Whence, How and Whither which describes the condition of the world a few hundred years hence. Doing that I can discern the underlying tendencies which are now apparent. Of one thing I am quite certain. There will be no third World War. The coming of the atomic bomb put an end to that, as the Master Hilarion prophesied to Mrs. Besant. And presently untold benefits will come to man through atomic discoveries, among them, perhaps, the cure of cancer. Not only is the end of war in sight, but also its invariable concomitant, poverty. Through a tremendous crucifixion humanity will soon begin to rise again to a future a thousand times happier and more prosperous for the vast generality of men than ever this planet has known before. In the words of an American statesman, it is the era of the "common man." The Master M. once told Mrs. Besant that the proletariat had been in the past slaves, but now their emancipation was near and the threat of poverty and insecurity doomed to pass by the decision of the Great Brotherhood. So am I not right in wishing you all a Christmas full of joy and hope?

This letter I want to tell you all of two wonderful books which have come my way. I recommend them heartily to all. The first is a book by Gerald Bullett called The English Mystics. It is an account of the lives and writings of some representative English Mystics, including poets as well as religious men of holy life. I am glad he included the beloved Lady Julian of Norwich, one of the sweetest and most sane of all mystics. If I remember her words rightly (she had interior locutions and talked to God) she one day, being very troubled about it, "asked God for sin," and He showed her that there was no sin, but that for every pain and sorrow suffered here we should have in heaven "added glories." This daring thought for a mediaeval thinker reminds one of H.P.B.'s saying that one result of the gaining of spiritual consciousness was the "perception in all embodied beings of limitation only." And also of Robert Browning's verse: "Evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound."

I like Mr. Bullett's first chapter: "The Subject defined." He writes: "It cannot be strictly defined, for the experience it treats of is beyond statement... The mystic bears testimony to something that seems to him both 'within' and 'beyond', something in which he both 'loses' and 'finds' himself, loses his small, isolated identity and finds himself 'at one' with the life of the universe.. It is obvious that the mystical experience is something that the great religions have in common, not the dogmas peculiar to any one of them." He warns us that "allowance must constantly be made for the local and personal bias that colors the language of mystics and determines their choice of image and metaphor." For "only poetry, or music, can say anything quite to the point, and they not directly but obliquely, in image and cadence, in sound and silence... To translate it into doctrine is to destroy the winged life." But "what is impressive, is that, wherever and whenever he turns up, whether in our Christian era and hemisphere or in the ancient civilizations of the East, and whatever his personal antecedents, he always tells us more or less the same thing--that he has enjoyed a sense of communion or "at-one-ment" with a reality infinitely transcending himself.

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The other book is written by a niece of Earl Baldwin, recently Prime Minister of England. She takes the motto of her family: I Leap Over the Wall for her title of her description of life in a Carmelite convent for 28 years, and her extraordinary reactions when once again she faces life outside its walls. Monica Baldwin gives the impression of being a very honest and humble person. I found her descriptions of conventual life in an enclosed Order and her lucid statements of her faith most interesting. She came out after 28 years because she was sure by then that she had no 'vocation.' She makes a candid confession of the wrong motive with which she entered. "I became obsessed with the idea of becoming a nun. It never occurred to me to ask myself whether or no my vocation were a genuine affair... Now, I have always found that to set one's heart stubbornly upon one's own sweet will is apt to blind one. For it was my plain duty, as things were, to remain at home, to shoulder my share of responsibilities which I dreaded and disliked... It now seems to me that my failure was largely the outcome of arrogance... Because I so wanted a thing which in itself seemed good to me, it must be right... It stands to reason that religious life, which is essentially a life of sacrifice, will never succeed if it is based on selfishness."

She has much to say about the great virtue of humility. She did not understand it for a long time, even years. "Then, suddenly, and for no apparent reason, it was made clear to me. I saw how each act of humility which one so laboriously and distastefully performed was, far from being an end in itself, simply a means by which one was able to hollow out within one's soul an ever-deepening capacity. And this capacity was immediately and unceasingly filled up to overflowing by a torrent of God's grace. So that the deeper the soul hollowed itself out by the self-slaying practice of humility, the greater became its capacity for receiving the graces and the gifts of God." This is, of course, the "self-noughting" of the saints. She says too, speaking of spiritual poverty: "There are several other names for spiritual poverty. One is self-abnegation; another, detachment; another freedom from desire. I think it is fairly accurate to say that what works out in the circumstances of one's daily life into it is simply the desire for nothing except God's Will as revealed in the daily circumstances... Those few words contain the essence of exalted sanctity." It took her a long time to get accustomed to the outlook of the ordinary world. "No one who has not had to attempt it can imagine how difficult it was for at least the first year after my exodus, to adjust my convent-trained outlook on earthly possessions to the point of view held by so many people in the world today. So accustomed was I to the religious outlook, that most of the people in the world today I met struck me as dreadfully selfish, possessive, go-getting, take-all-and-give-nothing; not only desiring, but grabbing everything that they could get. It depressed me. In fact, it depresses me still." Because the religious life, to use the words of St. Paul, is to "fill up what is wanting to the Passion of Christ," by sacrifice and the loving acceptance of all suffering.

I am sure you will all like these two books. And talking of books, tho' I do not wish to sound like advertising myself, a book I wrote when I was last in America, the story of my life, called So Rich a Life, will be off the South African Press by Christmas.

Your affectionate friend,

CLARA CODD

mp'.

Your Secretary also sends most cordial Christmas greetings and hearty good wishes to you all. May the New Year bring you true spiritual progress and peace.

Ever fraternally yours,

Mary G. Patterson