

October-November, 1953

Box 863, Johannesburg, S. Africa

My dear Friends:

I must tell you first of all about a very interesting account I have just heard from a member of this Letter Group who does a great deal of work for prisoners and among criminals. He told me of a fine young man who came out here and because he was lonely got into touch with a group of very evil men. He had an inferiority complex to start with because he was an illegitimate child. I think there should be no such children anywhere, for a child cannot be blamed for the acts of its parents. And social workers have more than once told me that "love-children" are often the finest and most beautiful because they are often the outcome of love. Perhaps because of that inferiority feeling the young man did not dare to protest at what he saw done. He drove a car for the criminals and one day got involved in a situation which ended in murder. He was arrested and condemned to death as an accessory after the fact. When many people tried to save him, as he was not really guilty, they were told that the new Government here did not dare to risk showing preference to a white man, for the real murderer was of Indian birth. At first, this young man was utterly overcome and prostrated. After some months in the condemned cell he was informed that he would be executed in four days, and was asked what he would like. He said he would like to see my friend, and they sent for him. To his great surprise he found the condemned man beautiful and radiant and full of peace, for at the last moment he had "found Christ" as he put it. He went to his death with the most wonderful dignity and sweetness, and the minister who saw him die, the Rev. Junod, who had seen many men hung, said he was the President of the Penal Reform League, not to save the condemned men who in most cases, "went straight to God" as he put it, but to save the men who bound them and hung them from the resulting degradation of character.

I cannot tell you this story in the vivid, striking way in which my friend put it. I was immensely impressed. Here was a young man born with everything against him, facing a dreadful death, and he could go with dignity and beauty because from the other side a wonderful and blessed Hand was held out to him. I feel that the Blessed Ones who personify God to us always reply to a supreme need. Why otherwise did the Christ say: "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden." And the great Avatar, Sri Krishna, in similar words: "Abandoning all duties come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins."

Another thought came to me, too. Is there enough love and feeling and compassion in our ranks? Do we sometimes tend to become too mental, too occupied with ideas instead of responding spontaneously to the call of life around us. Once a Master of the Wisdom wrote: "Ask him not what he believes." So much terrible cruelty has been committed in this world because of what a man has been supposed to "believe."

This friend of mine was so impressed by what he saw that he spent long hours in thought and finally in prayer. And then he found too what the young man had found. "Don't talk to me about yoga, Clara," he said, "I have found the real thing." I must tell you that in his youth he had been a Catholic monk until the war when he became a soldier. For years he had left all Christian thought. He was, of course, a little inclined to feel that the Christ was all in all. He told me of drunkards who had given up the drink in one moment and how the tears poured down their cheeks. But I told him of an Indian judge I once knew who showed a tiny ivory image of the baby Krishna which he carried with him. As he showed it to me the tears rained down his face. "You must excuse me," he said, "I love Him so much

that I cannot speak of Him without tears." It reminds me of a saying of the great Indian Saint, Ramakrishna: "Bow down and worship where others kneel; for where so many have been praying the tribute or adoration, the kind Lord must manifest Himself, as He is all mercy." It is the same Love of God which manifests Itself through whatever form the suppliant pictures. I remember a poem of Rudyard Kipling's which depicts an angel in the course of Heaven watching the prayers coming up from earth. Suddenly there came such a beautiful one. "I must go down to earth to see where that came from," exclaimed the angel, "It must have come from a very great saint." So God gave him permission and away he flew. When he arrived on earth he saw a poor, simple savage, praying before some image, some ju-ju. Simple of heart, selfless in thought, he had produced a pure and lovely prayer. Who can doubt that Heaven answered it without fail?

A similar story is told by the sainted curé of Ars in France. Coming back from work, workmen used to stop at his little church to pay homage to the reserved Host therein. Perfunctorily the majority saluted and passed on. But one man used to remain absorbed in thought without a word issuing from his lips. The other men joked him about it. "What do you do, such a long time, there, Jacques?" they asked, "saying nothing?" "I look at God," the man answered, "and He looks at me."

This newly converted friend of mine, whilst not in the least believing in the awful teachings of most very simple Christian churches, yet has a very tolerant view of their enthusiastic outpourings and frenzied actions. "We go to a football match," says he to me, "and scream ourselves crazy over football. Then why condemn the man who wants to shout his joy about what he has found in Christ?" I see that point, don't you?

Just look at it! I have been so long talking about all this that there is now no room to speak about The Voice of the Silence. Well, I really will do that in the next Letter. There is a verse of Ella Wheeler Wilcox coming into my head as I write, something about ways that wind and wind when all this sad world needs is the art of being kind. Being kind, and compassionate, and patient, and understanding, and tolerant. What a different world it might be! The Master K. H. wrote to Laura Holloway: "The greatest consolation in, and the foremost duty of life, child, is not to give pain, and avoid causing suffering to man or beast." What a thing to remember when one comes to die.

I hope all this does not sound like a primitive sermon! Perhaps some of you will wonder what has come over me. Have I "got religion?" This friend of mine, of course, goes about now trying to get other men into the same ecstatic state as himself. He does not ask of them, "Are you saved?" But he asks them to sit down and consider whether they are happy and content, and if not, why not? I told him I was always happy and content. "Then," he said, "you are on the right road for you." I truly think I am on the right road, because I do not mind a bit whether I am happy or unhappy, successful or unsuccessful, et cetera. What does it matter to us little midges when lovely, divine, simple Life is flowing through us, and we can, as the Master K. H. wrote to Mr. Judge, trust ourselves to life as a bird flies through the air, undoubtingly. I must close this Letter with similar words by Robert Browning:

"I go to prove my soul! I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive! What time, what circuit first, I ask not; but unless God
Send His hail of blinding fire-balls, sleet and stifling snow, In some time,
His good time, I shall arrive; He guides me and the bird, in His good time."

Your affectionate friend

CLARA CODD

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