

Goodbye! Some  
w best wishes to  
you always, C.C.

LETTER 17

Wheaton, Illinois  
April-May, 1948

My dear Friends:

This is the last letter that I will write you from the hospitable shores of the United States, for on April 29th I shall set sail on the "Queen Elizabeth" for England. I have not seen my native country for more than ten years. During the war I was all the time in South Africa. It will be interesting to see the tight little island, whose people have such grit and endurance, again. I would like to see Europe too, but perhaps that will not be possible. I know something of what the peoples of Europe have been through, for I have relations in Hungary and Germany, and over here we can hardly realize the truly terrible conditions of war-wracked Europe. To my mind it is clear that war does not pay. It does no more for the victors than for the vanquished. Sometimes people over here ask me why Europe does not buck up and get on its feet again. But picture all communications ruined, rolling stock destroyed, cattle and all farm implements taken away, and man-power diminished by thousands of unreturned prisoners of war. One can hardly expect more than they are doing under these circumstances.

After five months in England I am returning to South Africa, leaving England in October next. So as I write this I feel I am saying goodbye for the time to my very dear friends in the United States. I have received so much kindness and warm affection here that there are no words to express what I feel about it. Never shall I be able to forget the love and goodwill of the American members. They will remain in my heart forever.

In Letter 16 I asked you to let me know if there were any particular subjects you would like me to write about, and I have received several suggestions. I have one glorious subject that has been in my mind for sometime, but I will discuss that one in the June-July Letter. This time I will take the suggestion of an American member who wishes me to talk about "failure." He writes: "It seems a common problem to those who endeavour to live a spiritual life; so often the personality gains the upper hand momentarily, causing much pain and sorrow; then there comes the sense of failure to deepen the abyss of despair." The writer had been trying to help a friend who was suffering like this, and he writes: "I was wondering what to say to him when the following thoughts came to me: 'There is no failure in the process of self-discovery except the failure to aspire. Failure is simply a word, a concept, based on time and comparative evaluations of people who do not know, who do not understand. When we aspire, we succeed, whatever the outer consequences or results. With every aspiration we draw closer to the Eternal, whether we are aware of it or not. So never despair. Never look at the result. Keep looking upward, upward, till one day when we are least expecting it, we will see life from above, and come to realize that the ascent was achieved by all the thousands of noble thoughts and little longings for the good, the true, the beautiful, that were ours over the myriads of lives we have known.'

He also states that "Of course, one's aspiration must be impersonal and detached, deeply rooted in the spiritual nature. For is it not true that the petty 'I' can also aspire within the confines of its self-contained web of illusion, and thus bring forth greater conflict?"

This is very like a saying of Dr. Annie Besant, often quoted: "There is no failure except in ceasing to strive." And she used to tell us that what a person longed for and idealized mattered far more than what they were. On the walls of the lovely Theosophical Hall in Auckland, New Zealand, are printed in gold her words: "No soul that aspires can ever fail to reach; no heart that loves can ever be abandoned." I wonder if we might interpret the words of the Christ when He told us that

we should forgive those who injured us until seventy times seven as also the injunction to forgive ourselves too? Despair is listed in Roman Catholic teaching as a deadly sin. The Voice of the Silence says: "Beware of fear that spreadeth, like the black and soundless wings of midnight bat, between the moonlight of the Soul and the great goal that loometh in the distance far away. Fear, O disciple, kills the will and stays all action." And Frederick Myers wrote: "God shall forgive thee all but thy despair."

Let us look into despair and self-depreciation a little. What lies at its roots? The ordinary world looks upon remorse as rather meritorious. But extreme remorse, and also undue anxiety, are both of them rooted in excessive self-interest. There is a saying in the ancient scriptures of India: "Regret nothing; never be sorry; but cut all doubts with the sword of knowledge." We must make mistakes again and again, that is certain, for we are not yet perfect in knowledge and experience. But our mistakes are our best teachers. If we had not made them we would be that much short of wisdom. How philosophical we are about other people's mistakes. Why cannot we be just as philosophical about our own?

A Master of the Wisdom once told Mr. Judge that tears and remorse belong to the personal self and should not hinder the progress of the Immortal Self. "Do not be led into anxiety and remorse," He wrote, "have patience. Endurance is one of the characteristics of the Ego. The Ego persists, knowing itself immortal. The personality becomes discouraged, knowing that time is short. Happiness is based upon confidence in the God within, a just appreciation of time, and a forgetfulness of self." The Voice of the Silence says almost the same: "Have patience, candidate, as one who doth forevermore endure." I think it was the Master K. H. who once said: "The only repentance which is worth while is the resolve not to do it again." But supposing we find ourselves still doing it again, and finally gain a hearty contempt for the weak thing which is ourselves? What then? There is no other way, but to try once more. And perhaps it is best not to rely too much upon our own strength alone. Call upon the Divine Power. Rest in Him. Sweet and sane old Brother Lawrence writes that he told God that he could not do anything of himself. "Thou must help me, or I shall fail again and again."

Now I do not think that just to become more perfect or a better character ourselves is an inspiring motive. I have never been able to really care what sort of person I was. But if we remember that winning the battle we are saving humanity a little of their sorrow and pain, then we have the finest and most inspiring motive in the world. We will conquer ourselves that we may not betray them, that we may not betray the Master who deigns to ask our aid with men. The saints had a method of doing deeds on behalf of men. Why not? Give it to them. And then we shall never despair.

H. P. B. has some very wise words on this in one of her articles. She says that over-anxiety and a too excessive desire to grow produces excrescences in us which must be removed by pain. True growth is like that of a child, she writes, all over, imperceptibly. Tennyson wrote that "men may rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things." But in order to use a dead past as a stepping stone we must really let it be dead. Looking ahead, what do we see? The Ideal, the Christ within, beckoning to us ever. Meanwhile let us be a little patient with ourselves. We cannot take life too seriously, but we can take ourselves too seriously. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux once said to a novice: "If you are willing to bear peacefully the trial of not being pleased with yourself, you will give an acceptable shelter to Jesus."

Goodbye again, my friends in America. We shall not really part, for I am very conscious that this Group is extraordinarily real and now I shall never be able to forget one of you. The Letters will now be sent out by Mrs. Mary Patterson and Mrs. Donna Sherry at Olcott. Sometimes some of you have been so kind as to send me stamps or money for stamps. Please occasionally do that to Mrs. Patterson. And to those new members who would like past Letters, if you will write to Mrs. Helen Wycherley, 1010 Loyola Ave., Chicago 26, Illinois, she will in time let you have all of them.

Ever your affectionate friend,

Clara Codd.