

Saturday July 1 12:30 a.m.

[1916]

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My dearest Ruth, A few hours ago I wrote you a hurried note which must have seemed almost a grouse about your last letter - & here when I returned were two beautiful letters - I'm at your best and loveliest & full of all I love you for. They were both written in Westbrooke garden before breakfast. I would like to answer fully all you say - especially when you tell me that by talking things over with things come right - I am glad of that dearest; you too help me to see things in their true perspective; but writing is very different from talking alas!

What I want particularly to answer is all you say about religion. It is very difficult to get it clear. It shocks me to think that you should have become slack about your religious life since we married; it has been in the back of my mind as being all wrong for sometime & I said so to you once. Also it has always seemed the one part of your thoughts which I don't share; it very often occurs to me when I see you saying your prayers that I want to know more about all that. But is it after all your religious life that is in question or merely religious observance?

And that brings me to your other point - about class. We have indeed to face a problem sooner or later

in case I should be killed I must try & put down as best I can the thoughts that seem to struggle forth about her religious education - because in that event you would be able to have me in mind whenever you questioned yourself about it: - you would question other people too of course, David as Clara's godfather & Mr Chubb as Brock too, I hope, because he's the wisest man I know.

Firstly, what is religion? The expression in thought and action of a philosophy of life - so it appears to me. Every religion provides an explanation of life; and you might go on to say that according as those explanations differ so do religious observances and acts in general of religious people: but behind observances & what I should call academic action - proceeding from a dogma or narrow theory which has been made not to fit life but to fit life into - barring in a word stupidity, all religion it is clear to me has broadly speaking the same philosophy of life. They may furnish a thousand and one different answers to the questions 'why should I do good?' and 'why don't I live?' but behind all of ^{religions} them is the broader recognition of the same supreme values in life. Life, says religion, the only life that has meaning, is of the spirit; the concern of life is spiritual experience. The question 'why live?' is answered

by this belief, without which life is unintelligible. The²
question, 'why choose the Good?' is answered by an
appeal to the same ^{order of} experiences. That choice together
with the ~~whole choice~~ of supreme estimate of the
'things of the spirit' is an ultimate belief - we
can't go further back than that. For men as one
meets them to see God is to know that one ought to
choose it in preference to evil. Religions ^{for their sanction} appeal to
nothing more remote than the primary spiritual
experiences of men, and their business is to arrange
life to promote those experiences.

You will see that this explanation leaves out much
that religions are fond of talking about - more
particularly the answer to, 'How ~~is~~ ^{was} this Why ~~it~~
were ^{we} planted in the world with these experiences?

But no answers to this question seem to me to be of the
essence of religion - happily so, for they are so far from
satisfying that the basis of religion would be a very
frail foundation if it depended upon them. ~~But~~ And
the point I want to emphasise ^{religion as I understand it} is that, ^{which} includes me
& many others, who feel as ignorant as I feel about
the great mysteries of existence ~~and~~ hold no creed,
as potentially religious men.

Now starting with this general conception of religion
what does a child need? The first conclusion seems
to be that a child, like a man, may be religious
without knowing God by that name & without ever

having heard of Jesus Christ — & will be so pro-
vided this philosophy of the spirit has become & is
becoming the basis of life. That ought to be a very comfort-
ing reflection for you my dear wife & mother of Clare;
you will find much less cause for anxiety about the
purely Christian side of her education — you will al-
ways have this to fall back on if, as may turn out,
that very difficult Christian matter seems to be a
failure; — that she may still be truly religious. And
you may easily discern that; — the philosophy of the
spirit has the same essence for everyone & a child's
life may be concerned with beauty and truth and
righteousness; if Clare seemed to care ~~for~~ sufficiently
for these you would have much to be happy about;
and the fruits of the spirit are as we know them.
The paramount value of spiritual things & the
superiority of everything for them will grow upon the
understanding.

It will appear at once from this — that the great
part of religious education — of all that training which
must precede the mature development of religion —
is just a part of the normal relations between
parents & children; spiritual values & interest
in things of the spirit will ~~not~~ be absorbed almost
unconsciously. If we regard religious education in
any other way we shall be making that fatal & common
blunder of compartmenting religion or driving it into

a channel running parallel with life instead of 3
enticing it to irrigate life, so to speak, with many
streams. This mistake comes, I believe, very largely
through the desire to see results, and is by no means
limited to the stupidest folk. My parents I suppose
imagined that all was well with me because I had
received Bible instruction, could repeat the catechism & certain
colleets. Sang hymns with eagerness, said my prayers
regularly & brushed my hair. And many wiser folk I indulge
a desire that these should be something definite which
they can point to in their children & say "There is religion,
that's all right". There may indeed be marks by which you
may know religion in a child - as I have indicated already
& I feel sure you will understand my meaning & agree with
it; but they are subtle distinctions & one has to look rather
for a seedling than a blossoming plant & the odor of sanctity
rather than the smoke of incense. Now I am
working metaphysical - or it's not a style I like - any
more than I like the repetition of the shorter catechism
or the reverent hearing of poor sermons as a substitute
in a child's life for the philosophy of the spirit.

This reasoning my dear Ruth is in part for I need
an answer to the main question - what is to be done for
the religious education of Clare? It insists upon ~~some~~ spiritual
interest, as it may be induced to spring naturally from the
surroundings between the child & her parents' questions -
to use the old phrase - that to be the main stream. It re-
lates what is commonly called "religious instruction" to a
secondary place & as I shall try to show in some measure
justifies it; - for religious instruction omits almost entirely

two of the three spiritual activities, the intellectual & the aesthetic (the latter particularly :- but it also limits the pursuit of Truth) & is apt to satisfy a young mind with more mental food than it can easily digest.

And now we come to what I ~~suppose~~ rather is the real core in your thoughts - how does Christianity & how does God come in? The important thing I believe is to preserve absolutely the distinction between the ethical teaching of Christ centred about his own life and the metaphysical doctrine to be found in NT & taught by the Church. ~~What~~ The first must be ^{learned as} the great part of morals, - separated from the general course of the Gospel stories for that purpose, & neglecting or postponing all that is deeply controversial - the miracles, the stories of the resurrection, reference to O.T etc - I see that this would involve huge practical difficulties.

The conception of God must be formed very gradually out of the child's own spiritual experiences - and not as a spirit, & not as an old man with a beard.

I don't see any reason for suggesting to a child's mind the idea of a God who disposes of fate & fortune - it so easily may become materialistic. The form of prayer suitable to Clare would be something like this; - O God who made me love the rose & its deep colour although it pricked my finger helps me to love all flowers & learn how they are beautiful; and please make me love little Diana with the fair hair as I did to-day when we crawled on the floor together & helps me to play with her kindly and without anger so that we are ~~both~~ happy together? (How many months hence?) You will

See that all spiritual effort according to my idea is 4
being referred to a supreme Spiritual Being, a God is
recognised as such. I see no reason why any
explanations of the universe should be attempted before
the child asks for them; nor ~~I~~ would I ever mention
Heaven & Hell until curiosity called for satisfaction, &
then very guardedly (1) as an obsolete superstition connected
with the materialistic idea of punishment & reward
(2) as embodying the most interesting idea & the most
likely perhaps of human speculation - that the soul
is immortal.

How soon I wonder would ~~an~~ a child of ordinary
intelligence ask the question, if left to itself - 'What
happens to us when we die? Six years or so? And
How soon does it start metaphysical ~~explanation~~
speculation? Surely it may reach 10 or 12 years
before wanting to know how the world was made -
And why not give to such questions an agnostic answer.
We can't tell; all that we feel certain about is -
the spiritual philosophy. I'm convinced that
no more is needed as a reason for being good. The
Common explanation - because God would be angry or
pained or Heaven be more difficult to attain is much
more complicated in reality besides being less true than
the plain statement that the object of our existence
is the pursuit of the Good - the great base of the

Spiritual philosophy which must broaden with the
mind & deepen with experience. I go back to this, that
truly to see Good is to know the necessity of choosing it;
this for a child too. Therefore if we succeed in making
Clare see good, we have given her all the metaphysics
she will require as a child - because the question, Why be
good? ^{with her} has its answer in her consciousness when she is
able to distinguish it clearly.

How much more I want to say about all this -
but primarily to discuss with you, & you aren't
here. Though I may produce much argument &
many words I feel that you really know about
Clare's needs on his head as on every other far
more than I.

I have reached the end of this spasm of thought
- for the moment I don't see clearly any
further & I shan't delay this letter while I
think it out more closely. We must always
bear in mind that all that we do must be
experimental - in this sense that any idea or
intention of ours must always be open to change
as we discover Clare's needs & spiritual & more
generally too.

These thoughts have been forged out roughly
in the din of battle - a battle of which we

See as it were only the sum of a seething cauldron.
Needless to say comparatively little was written
during the night of watching when I began it
- but circumstances gave me opportunities
during certain spaces of time when I was
'standing by' for orders in the map room.
Yesterday & now on Sunday morning all
seems quiet again for the moment. I dispatched
a hurried note yesterday. Of what has happened
altogether I have no true knowledge - the official
reports even give one little help. Things have
probably gone fairly well immediately to the south
of us, but badly here, and altogether very
disappointing. An exciting & very awful
time.

Great love to you dearest.

Your loving

George

