

12-12-49
5:30 PM.

Dear John,

My letter must be at least begun now; though I cannot really hope to finish it this evening. Your letter only adds the last drop to the brimful bucket.

I am very glad that you are so happy about your encounter with Enge. I do not know exactly what it means - to you or objectively (if there is such a realm). In many ways I do not think of him as typical of my friends; and yet in other ways he is. At any rate, I am glad for your happiness, and even more for the warmth of your letter.

I have thought of you often this weekend. I have been very much among my friends, mostly as a quiet observer, cooking, washing dishes, and looking kind and sympathetic. Dorry and Joy are somewhere up town now having a conference about their triangle. The whole thing is very much complicated by their mutual affection and respect. Everyone tries so hard not to hurt each other's feelings - so much so that I fear that they cannot see into their own hearts. Yesterday afternoon we had that terrible party. Leo and Dorry did most of the talking; I observed; it was interesting but the only reason that I really wanted to be there was that I knew that Dorry, Joy, and Marty all regarded me as a rock and refuge. I remembered quite vividly that it is this that my friends have meant to me as much as anything - that I could help them simply because they believed in me - my goodness, or stability, or wisdom - myths which they need. ~~Does not~~ Do I not owe something to the myth which I seem, more or less accidentally, to be wearing.

To be believed in ~~in~~ this way is to a certain extent to be given the courage and the strength to be true myths. I know that neither they nor I should depend solely on this make-believe for our strength - but rather on God. And yet I do not believe that God would have me search in the abstract for His goodness. Nor do I believe he would have me search solely in non-human beauties and shavings, flowers, water, hills. It is a dangerous strength, this being believed in. I feel something like it in my teaching role as well. Today I spent 40 minutes alone with a strange and beautiful child, one of my eighth-graders. We talked about her test (she does not yet know a complete sentence) and spelling, the Norman Conquest, and philosophy of history. She asked ~~me~~ me what history meant; did people do the same thing again and again? Could we learn to do the right thing by looking at the mistakes? Another teacher had told her this. I could not say that I agreed so I read her a little Trevelyan on the poetry of history. She thought it was beautiful; it did not answer her question but she is wise enough to know that some of the most important questions are not to be answered, one must only learn to ask them better.

What have my friends meant to me? This giving of sympathy and this being believed in, but also ~~most~~ some (I do not know how much) receiving. Engle has given to me. And yet to receive from him is to give him what he most needs, a person to whom he can be kind. The relationship is so paradoxical that it becomes

absurd when analysed. Perhaps most relationships do. And what he has given me has not helped me terribly much. But how can I refuse his gifts without hurting him and pretending a self-sufficiency which is not real or good - and which might turn into pride. One owes something to the people by whom one is loved.

I hardly dare reread this for fear I myself will see the lack of logic or honesty. Yet I do believe I am honest with myself. I see very clearly what is worse than sin - the shallowness of much of my living and feeling. Sometimes I taste the dust of this dryness and I look and hope but cannot find the source. I wonder then if it is lack of determination and will. Then I think, and I think this very often, that I will not find a ~~the~~ fountain until something very terrible, much more scorching than what I have known, has happened to me. I think of this with a superstitious dread.

The happiness of your letter has such a complex, self-contradictory effect upon me. I am happy because of it, and my happiness is made poignant by fear, again superstitious. I cannot believe or trust myself to happiness. I must grow beyond this superstition. It is a terrible and unChristian thing, worse, I think, than the refusal to understand that life is necessarily full of sorrow and pain. The latter is only a matter of understanding, but my error is one of faith.

Presently I must make supper, dress, and go back to school for the day's last ordeal. I have been through so many today that I have a feeling of gay readiness for the challenge. Tonight there is a ~~parent~~ parent-teacher meeting. My appearance must inspire confidence - that I am neither young and foolish, nor young and cleverly subversive. You may frown crossly at this, but do you know that if I appeared without lipstick I would the more easily be thought subversive? Better that my dangerousness be hid. I must tell you when I see you about one of the day's ordeals. My two seventh-grade current events classes attempted a put-your-heads-on-the-desks-and-sleep strike. I think I dealt successfully with both incidents though there may be repercussions. What a strange thing it is when one will triumphs over, or at least holds in check, twenty-five, united wills. Now! supper and armor for the battle!

12-13-49

6:15 AM.

I must finish this and dispatch it hastily since I have tests to correct and tests to write and an afternoon meeting with the Board of Trustees. I do not like to write my letters to you at the same place at which I work.

One of the things I like best in your letter is this: "It is not necessary that everything be said, but it is necessary that everything could be said." Remember that there are things you would like me to read. Give them to me to read or read them to me. We must have something to talk about besides our selves.

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There must be more than an explanation to the other of things the other has not seen - and which the explainer may only glimpse in a dim and distorted way; you know that I do not well understand the things I have been or done; I have too many theories to account for them.

You say in your letter that Alex will be driving down ~~the~~ Wednesday night; Alex's letter says Thursday. It makes no difference to me when I get home - except to let Mother know. I shall leave here on Friday, probably on the three o'clock. It would probably be better if I saw you Saturday (or Sunday if Saturday is inconvenient for you). On Friday I shall go straight to the Cunninghams house (90 F. Cunningham, 35 Ash Street, Cambridge 38, Kirkland 7-7080) and stay there ~~the~~ until Sunday - longer, if Aunt Priscilla has other guests. I will write to Aunt Priscilla this morning.

Please do not work too hard and fast. I do not expect you to devote large chunks of time to me. Besides I have various people some of whom I really must see, others whom I would like to see for various reasons. And I would like to get my vacation studying more than half done.

Margaret