

Cambridge, March 3, 1950

Dear Margaret,

This afternoon I ran away from botany lab. again. It was very childish, but morally it was also very refreshing. I had decided that I could waste no more time looking at tropical fruits and eating various kinds of nuts and drinking coffee, for those activities comprised the assignment, but that I should go back to Lakeview Avenue and try to finish my Zwingli paper. I started with page 13 and finished with page 21, and now I need write only five more pages, a matter of four or five hours at most. I had planned to do some more Aeschylus in addition, but I decided my time would be more efficiently spent in a letter to you than in a tired translation which tomorrow morning I could do in half the time.

I went downstairs to put away the dishes and to enjoy the space and the silence. The moon is a very pure, - almost a bluish white, and casts its metallic glow into the cold night. For diversion I picked up the paper, - I so seldom read it now, and found a badly written article by a man who proposes to move mountains with St. Mark, 11:17. Even the tastelessness of the article cannot destroy the beauty of the verse . . . "whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he says shall come to pass; ~~he~~ shall have whatsoever he saith."

"...and shall not doubt in his heart," Could any condition be more impossible to fulfill? Could any presumption be greater than that which proposed to have such faith? It would be easier by far to carry the mountain on one's shoulders and gently immerse it in the sea than to believe that it will come to pass. There is a deep knowledge of human nature in this verse, a deep knowledge of the impossibility of human nature. ~~XXXX K XX~~ I can do nothing without ~~XXXX~~ believing that I can do it, but I cannot believe that I can do anything without having done it. Therefore I can neither do nor believe anything..

I can be only what I believe, but I cannot believe that I am without actually being something. I am nothing, therefore I can believe nothing; I believe nothing, therefore I can be nothing. "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he has." If I am nothing and if I believe nothing and if that which I have not shall be taken away from me, surely then God cannot punish me for ~~being~~ nothing or for having nothing or for believing nothing. But it is a contradiction too painful for words to exist and to believe nothing, to exist and to be nothing, to exist and to do nothing. The contradiction itself is the punishment. I wish it would find its resolution.

Yet I cannot understand him who can conceive of any other relationship to God than to be punished by Him. Life itself is the symbol of man's punishment. How could it be anything else? since it is nothing but the revelation of man's imperfection. What do we know of God, except that He is beyond us and that we suffer with-

out him. What can we say of him, except that He is all, and that we are nothing? If we could have faith in Him, we would be like Him, but we cannot have faith in him because we are nothing. Because we are nothing we can have faith only in nothing, we can have faith only in ourselves, so that in this way nothing can deceive itself about nothing. When we have faith in ourselves instead of faith in God we who are nothing having faith in nothing are less than nothing. "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

What do you think of my theology? Don't let it frighten you. I had no intention of writing in this way, and if it had not been so late, if I had not been so tired, and if the fool in the Globe had not given me a text, I should never have written in this way. "Who would have thought there was so much blood in him?" Besides I have been growing terribly tired of the functional prose that has rattled through my typewriter for so long now. I wanted to write something purposeless, words for words' sake in other words.

Why do you not write me? I worry about you and about how you are getting your work done. Still I would not have you take any inconvenience to write me. It would mean so much and so little. It would only mold my worries not allay them. I think of you very often, but I still think mostly about myself. I wish I could help you in some way, but I know I cannot help myself. My faith would not move an ant hill, but specks of dust are known to float about for hours, and one of them might fall into the sea.

Dein

John