1939 Daly Avenue, N.Y.C., 13 July 1920

Wondrous Pal!

‘Twas such a happy surprise to have another long letter from you so soon. Although you wrote it only nine days after the one from Marseilles it reached me three weeks after that letter because you’ve been sailing further and further away from me. I should think by this time it would be shorter for mail to reach me by going the other way – that is across the Pacific, but probably that slower and more expensive. It took your Aden letter nearly a month to come to me.

I’m beginning to be convinced that is isn’t in the scheme of things that I should stop writing to you. For the last two weeks I have been writing to you nearly every evening, just one long letter. I had a reason for not finishing it off and mailing it. Last night I ended it and said I wasn’t going to write anymore. I was prepared to abide by my resolve, but just as though the Fates had heard of my resolution they brought me your letter this morning. And so here I am tonight writing to you again just as I have been doing every night for a long time past. This weaning business is getting to be a farce. While you were in London I stopped for over a month, but along came your Marseilles letter and I found myself overjoyed at having an excuse to start up again. You keep asking me to write and I think you wouldn’t be unkind enough to do that if you didn’t really want to hear from me. So if you want me to write and I like to do so then I think I’ll stop making myself miserable every so often by the unnecessary martyrdom of a temporary weaning. Wherefore you may expect in the future to have your mail box, wherever you may be, stuffed brim-full with letters from me, and if the time comes when you are bored to extinction remember you will have only yourself to thank because you asked for the letters. For once it’s Old Adam who has tempted Eve and she has succumbed completely. You’ll never again have to say “write often” – more likely you’ll want to say “let up, for pity’s sake!”

The long letter which I concluded last night I cannot mail to you just at present and so in the meanwhile I shall send this one because I haven’t mailed you a letter in over two weeks and I think that when you’re far away it must be pleasant to get letters from home often. So I write this. I’m sorry to be a little mysterious about the letter which I am not mailing. Don’t get alarmed about it; the letter does not contain an account of how I eloped, or an announcement of my engagement, or a statement of any newly committed sins. So far as I’m aware I haven’t committed any grievous sins lately and my life is running along quite uneventfully. When you receive the other letter you’ll understand why I had to delay mailing it a little while.

Dear Pal I did so enjoy your account of your trip through the Mediterranean, for I had been wondering just what route you followed. How I wish I could have been with you, both because I would have loved that particular trip above all others and because it would have been pleasant to take it with you – I think we would have liked the same things.

Two or three years ago I read the “Count of Monte Cristo” and it held me spell bound. I sat up night after night till two or three o’clock in the morning until I finished it. That’s the way with me – I can’t do anything slowly, not even reading for pleasure – I must go like a streak. From an ethical standpoint I could not approve of the Count, for what does it avail anyone to devote an entire lifetime to revenge? – but I couldn’t help admiring his cleverness, persistence, and success. The book is a pure romance, utterly impossible but deliciously thrilling. As a piece of literature it is nothing! It has no style, no coherence, no beauty, little philosophy. Dumas started out with a young man who had been wronged by society and he built up a perfect plan of revenge; Victor Hugo started from the same situation and developed one of the strongest, most beautiful and Christ-like character in all literature – Jean Valjean. How much better to have been the author of “Les Misérables” than the author of “Monte Cristo.” But for all that I’d have been jolly well pleased to see the grim walls of Château d'If.

Stromboli has been quaintly called “the lighthouse of the Mediterranean” because of its flashes at irregular intervals. Is it not strange how people will always return to the flanks of volcanos to live? Are they careless of life or is it the homing instinct which they cannot overcome? I suppose if it is one’s misfortune to be born on a volcano then one must always think of that volcano as one’s native land; it is home and one would rather die there than live elsewhere.

I agree with you about Napoleon: one can’t help censuring him, but my! wasn’t he great. Greatness always carries with it certain weaknesses, but how much better to be great and possessed of weaknesses, than to be so insignificant that one has the potentialities neither for greatness nor weakness. How I despise mediocrity! Great men, strong men, always have many mistakes, even sins, in their lives, for it is by these that they progress and learn and pass on to better things and fine achievements. It is only the weakling who does not progress, he stands still because he has not the courage to attempt the unknown. He is afraid he will fail or that others will criticize him; he lacks confidence in himself so how can others have confidence in him? I admire Napoleon because he had the courage to attempt things which everyone considered impossible, because of his will power, his strong individuality and his perseverance. A woman could love a man like that though he were steeped in sin; he would at least be interesting, novel, unexpected; he would always be doing something new and wonderful. Can you imagine anything more deadening than to be married to a mediocre man, a man of circumscribed potentialities, limited vision, a man who can never rise above a certain dead level of accomplishment! Give me a Napoleon though he be the chief of sinners, in preference to a John Jones who is an angel and nothing more. I once was bored by having a mediocre man try to make love to me and I can assure you that there is nothing more tedious, exasperating and wearying. I like men of action, creators, original thinkers, men who plan and achieve, and so I admire Napoleon.

The part of your voyage I would have liked best is that which carried you near Greece and her many isles.

“The isles of Greece! The isles of Greece!

Where burning Sappho loved and sung,

Where grew the arts of war and peace,

Where Delos rose and Phoebus sprung!

Eternal summer gilds them yet,

But all, except their sun, is set.”

There was a period in my life when I learned Byron by the yard – he was so melancholy! But really Byron isn’t so bad when he confines himself to apostrophizing the muses and the gods of Greece. He loved Greece and some of his most beautiful poetry was written about that land whose fame and glory are things of the past. Have you read “Don Juan”? It’s unmoral, immoral and improper, but it contains many exquisite gems glorifying the ancient gods and heroes.

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We are so boastful of our civilization, our progress, our great deeds and yet have we anything so fine as the glory that was Greece? Their architecture, literature, philosophy, government – we have nothing to surpass them. And for beauty and perfect physique – have we anything to equal what Greece produced? The progress of nations is very much the same all the way back through history. Some small, sturdy nation rises up against the ruling powers and overthrows them; it advances, spreading its culture, ideals and customs; it grows powerful, attains its acme of physical and mental development, and then it begins to weaken. Politics and personal morals become corrupt; the youth of the nation become weak, the women fall prey to luxury and ease; money is spent lavishly for things of no lasting value, and at length, the nation, grown arrogant and sure of itself, reclining at ease on its laurels, is suddenly overwhelmed by some new nation, small but vigorous. And once again, a minority over-rules a majority and continues flourishing until it in turn becomes a majority. It has been ever thus throughout the ages since the world began.

Civilization began in the East and step by step it has marched westward. We believe that the height of civilization has been leaped across the Atlantic, that we in America have the most altruistic ideals, the best blood, the strongest manhood, the keenest brains. That’s quite likely true. Now civilization needs to take just one more leap, that is across the Pacific, and it will be back in Asia where it started – the circle will be complete; and things can start in all over again.

Human history but follows the natural laws which are so much more clearly demonstrated when one studies palaeontology. The rise and fall of dynasties and empires but parallels the rise and fall of phyla. No matter how great the perfection attained by any group of organisms, no matter how perfectly adapted it may be to its environment, it is always doomed to extinction. It makes one feel a little uncomfortable to think that all of the things one spends one’s life on, all that one strives to be and to attain, will eventually be forgotten and lost in the final extinction. One wonders what it’s all about, what it’s worth. What difference does it make to us or to the world whether a particular dinosaur lived happily with his wife or not, whether he fought with his neighbors or was law-abiding? And what will anything that we do or don’t do matter to anyone a hundred million years from now when, in all probability, men will be quite as irrevocably extinct as your friends the dinosaurs? It’s all sort of funny when you come to thinking of things in terms of millions of years instead of in weeks and months!

Human beings are on the whole more altruistic than they are willing to admit. Every individual is normally law-abiding, hard-working, and fairly good. He tries to lead a good life, to forge ahead in some field – intellectual, commercial, or political – he tries to give his children better advantages than he had in his own youth, in other words, the average individual is always thinking of the future be it his own or that of his children or that of his children’s children. He is, when you come right down to it, thinking of the future of the race and he is endeavoring to make a positive contribution to it, knowing that his identity will be lost but that what he stands for, what he had done, will live. When you think of things from the viewpoint every smallest act of every individual is a matter of moment – it counts in the heritage of the ages.

It is very common to hear people in discussing the advisability of standing by ideals state that it is futile for one person to try to do anything alone. But it is single individuals, abiding unflinchingly by their ideals, who have ever risen to be leaders of thought and action. They who blindly follow the majority, submerging their ideals because they think it is useless to stand by them, are inevitably lost in the majority and they accomplish nothing. He who shouts with the multitude is not heard because of the din, it is the wee small voice in the wilderness that attracts attention. Carlyle says that history may be considered the biography of a few great men. I would go further and say that all intellectual and moral development may be recorded in the lives of a few individuals, a few men of vision, wisdom, intellect or some form of genius. It is individuals who have made history, science, religion, literature, and the arts. The great religions of the world have been given to us by individuals – Confucius, Buddha, Christ, Mahomet – men who were not afraid to be themselves and to abide by their beliefs. To me it seems tremendously important that each person should stand by his ideals and convictions no matter what it costs him because he never knows when the decision may be a momentous one not only for himself but for the community at large.

The other day I was reading Creasy’s description of the battle of Marathon. It might seem to you like a waste of time to read about a battle fought in 490 B.C. – there is so much contemporaneous history to read. True; but the lesson from the battle of Marathon stands out by the etching process of time, and I was in need of a lesson.

I had a little decision to make in my own life. I knew what my ideals were but circumstances frowned, my knees and courage weakened a little and I felt in need of inspiration. I didn’t pray or go to church of visit a New Thought Healer; I have little schemes all my own for bolstering up failing spirits and weary flesh. This time I turned to history; when I’m hungry I turn to poetry; when I’ve sinned I go to the Bible; I have a different place of refuge for every affliction.

In 490 B.C. Darius, King of the Persians, “the king of kings” as he called himself, was the monarch of the then-known world, claiming the allegiance of all nations from Egypt to India. He was the lord of all men from the rising sun to the setting sun, and no one dared to offer him opposition. His armies had but to appear before a city and the inhabitants surrendered. Those who resisted him were demolished and served not to deter his conquests but as examples of what he could do with fire and sword. The whole world was at his feet in terror. Italy was hardly on the map at the time, and Greece was an ununited group of states which quarreled inter se but which was so little heard of that Darius hadn’t thought it worthwhile to send his armies to conquer such an insignificant archipelago which seemed to him to lie on the outskirts of civilization far to the west of his world. It so happened that some Athenians got mixed up in one of the battles in Asia Minor and inflicted a galling wound on Darius’ army. He decided that the pestiferous hornets’ nest over in Greece should be punished and made to submit to Persia. So he sent the pick of his fleet under the leadership of his best general with orders to subjugate Greece. The Persians landed on the plains of Marathon, some twenty miles from Athens, and prepared for their great advance.

Ten Athenian generals hastily assembled in a war council to vote whether or not they should surrender. Five voted yea, five nay. The deciding vote rested with the chairman of the council. Then Miltiades, greatest of the Athenian generals, rose and asked that the deciding vote be cast for resistance not surrender. He visioned clearly what surrender would mean to Athens and to Greece and he also saw the glory that would come to Athens if she successfully resisted the tyrant Darius. Miltiades was a soldier, a man of action and not many words, but the picture which he drew won the deciding vote and Athens declared for resistance. ‘Twas the voice of Miltiades, the voice of a single man, which was raised against the Persian hordes and their all-conquering King. Greece was nothing; her army so small it seemed but a handful against the thousands upon thousands of Medes and Persians; Darius had the wealth and resources of all the eastern world at his command, while Greece was but in its infancy. Yet Miltiades dared to place an ideal above all this show of force and strength; he dared to rally the Athenians to fight for their liberty and freedom and he himself led them to the memorable victory at Marathon. ‘Twas a man with an ideal against a world of power, yet the lone man won and western civilization was saved. “Had Persia beaten Athens at Marathon, she could have found no obstacle to prevent Darius from advancing his sway over all the Western races of mankind. The infant energies of Europe would have been trodden out beneath universal conquest; and the history of the world, like the history of Asia, would have become a mere record of the rise and fall of despotic dynasties, of the incursions of barbarous hordes, and of the mental and political prostration of millions beneath the diadem, the sword and the tiara.”

And so by devious Marjorie Daw ways I found the inspiration I was in need of. I thought to myself “If Miltiades had the courage to brave the entire Persian Empire and Darius surely I can find enough courage to stick to one of my ideals when the odds are comparatively insignificant.” I do sometimes wander a long way for what I want but I always find it somewhere. I’d like to visit Marathon, wouldn’t you Boy Blue, and picture the landing of the Persian troops upon the plain and the descent of the Athenians from the mountains overlooking the plains.

Dear Pal don’t you know that it makes me home sick when you talk of returning to the land of monkeys? You needn’t expect to see any of my relatives hanging by their tales (or tails). Marmosets have tails for ornaments not for use. Indeed, marmosets are quite altogether different in every respect from ordinary monkeys – haven’t you found that out by observation? I wish that Marmo had hidden away in one of your coat pockets when you sailed; then she could have returned to the land of her ancestors. Would you have taken pity on her and given her some peanuts if you had found her playing stow-a-way? Little Boy lend me your ear a minute that I may chatter in it. Do you remember what happens to marmosets when they are neglected? They die, suddenly. A man doesn’t deserve to have a nice little affectionate marmoset for his own special pet if he goes away and leaves it for six months at a time. It’s quite likely to pine away and die of loneliness.

Well, so long dear keeper. I’m going to Dreamland. I go there most every night to get a fresh supply of monkeyshines for the following day. Your timid and affectionate Marmo.