October 3-4, 1920

Continuation of previous letter, “4” at top.

Dear Mr. Curator, I hereby humbly, respectfully – shall I add impishly? – submit the following carefully prepared, that is to say, Doctored report on the first two weeks of my work. I feel that I have been neglected; no one has come around to count how many chips I have chipped; no one has spied on me to see if I was leaving 1 ½ minutes before five. Also, I asked for a drop light in your office and it appeared the very next day instead of three weeks later. Everyone, from the boy who sweeps up the floor after me, to the Curator pro tem is kind and helpful. I have further noted that all the preparators in the laboratory inquire two or three times a day about the health of the ammonites; they all want to see what’s coming out of the nodules. I’ve done the rough cleaning on nearly all the smaller nodules and am now tackling the big ones. The work is pretty heavy and I find my hands getting pretty sore from the constant rebound of the big chisels which I have to use. I’ll be qualified for a life job in Sing Sing breaking stones. My chief discomfort is the irritation from the chips of stone in my eyes. Usually I manage to scoop them out but the other day a chip got in under my upper eye-lid and stayed there all afternoon and all night. My eye closed up and I felt as uncomfortable as only a very small thing can make you feel. Finally, old chippie just came out of its own accord and I felt fine after another twenty-four hours had elapsed. I have cracked out some mighty good specimens and am getting an especially fine series of those flat, disk-shaped fellows (Ochetoceras) with the pointed keel finely denticulated at the edge. I cracked out a beauty the other day, complete on both sides and with splendid sutures. Funny thing was that it had been completely hidden in the nodule. I was chipping off apparently unfossiliferous pieces of shale to reach a certain ammonite and one of my blows sudden (sic) revealed this other beastie which had separated out as the pit from a free-stone peach does. But such finds are rare.

4 October, 1920

It is nearly time for me to go to bed. I’ve been working all evening and am very tired which is why I shall talk to you for a while. I love to spend the end of the day with you, for it rests my soul in the same way as does a glorious sunset or an exquisite strain on the violin or the delicate beauty of an orchid. I wonder how I could possibly get along without your companionship now, it has come to mean so much to me. Well, that’s a bridge I needn’t cross yet. You and I are both agreed that it’s very foolish to cross bridges till you come to them because like as not you’ll never have to cross the bridge at all – you’ll take the ferry or the tube or skim across the river in an aero-plane. (Now just look at this for a paragraph – I started out feeling very dreamy and poetic and I end up in a minute or two in an aero-plane. My thoughts do soar. I had no thought of effervescing so soon, for really I was feeling quite tired and serious. Pal of mine, being Marjorie Daw is certainly more fun than a three-ring circus. But you’ll think I’m never serious. I can be serious when it’s necessary but is it not lots more fun to laugh and be gay? One difficulty with me is that I pass so quickly from tears to laughter and back again like a jolly, bubbling brook which at times skips along gaily in the sunshine and then for a while glides silently through some dark and gloomy woodland deeps (sic) where the sun cannot penetrate. But it’s always the same brook in sunshine or in gloom and so, too, it’s always the same Marjorie Daw, your Pal).

I was speaking of how much your companionship had grown to mean to me. When I first started writing to you it was to be for just three weeks till your expected return from Pittsburgh at Christmas. It seemed to me that the opportunity to talk to you for a little while would be so soothing and restful; now, behold, I’ve been talking to you for two years and wish I never had to stop. I can better express myself in a parable. Have you not sometime had the experience of walking along a hot, dusty country road, foot-sore and weary, and of having some-one in horse and buggy drive up alongside saying: “Wouldn’t you like a lift just down to the turn in the road?” You’ve felt so grateful and have gladly accepted the offer. Then as you’ve sat in the buggy talking to the kindly stranger who has picked you up, you have found him wonderfully companionable, and you’ve wished that you might go jogging on forever in the buggy, talking to him, and that the road might have no turning.

Good-night, dear Pal.

Continuation of previous letter, “5” at top.

Tuesday, 5 October, 1920

Boy Blue, I’m having an evening off, so of course I’m spending it with you. There is no work I really have to do although there’s much I might do, but I’m really too achingly tired to do anything. This has been the most tiring day since I returned to the Museum. I have spent three days on the largest nodule you collected, a monster from Constancia. Contrary to my expectations it revealed nothing that was any good. It was harder than the other concretions and what ammonites there were were weathered beyond recognition or, if inside, were almost completely destroyed by calcification. In the three days I had cleaned out only the surface specimens and I saw that it would take me a week to chip out the whole concretion at the rate so I decided to break it along the bedding planes and then break up each slab. Charlie Lang hunted up the biggest chisel and the heaviest hammer in the laboratory and I started in. I made up my mind to finish that concretion today so I worked on it for six hours and broke it to smithereens, but every muscle in my body aches. I had to make my blows so heavy in the big initial break I made to cut the concretion in half that I broke that heaviest of chisels sharp off an inch from the end. My right hand is blistered and calloused from the friction of the hammer handle and my thumb on my left hand feels like a piece of bruised pulp from the rebound of the big chisel. As for my right arm – it would like to go to sleep on a feather pillow for a week. Altogether, I feel as though someone had tied me up in a sack and started me rolling down a rocky hill. Tomorrow I shall tackle the next largest concretion – there are about half a dozen of these big ones. I make a most terrific racket which can be heard in every office in the Vert. Dept., but I can’t help it. I’m working at Mr. Thompson’s table and have the whole room to myself. The chips fly to every farthest corner of the room and also shower me liberally, getting into my hair and down my neck. But Pal dear, I’m so happy every minute of the day that I’m hardly conscious of the discomfitures.

Boy Blue, I am reading the reminiscences of Raphael Pumpelly – a great two-volume affair which is more fascinating than fiction, being charmingly and entertainingly written. There is one page that I want you to read sometime and that is Pumpelly’s tribute to his wife; it is so tender and beautiful. Their married life extended over a period of forty-six years being terminated by her death. She was a refined well-educated gentlewoman, a wise mother, a loving and devoted wife who was her husband’s inspiration and help-mate always. I love to read about that kind of a woman, for the types seems to be very rare today, and I love also to read a man’s tribute to a wife like that. In my library I have a number of biographies of really great men and I have read all of them. It is an interesting commentary that each of the men had truly wonderful wives. When you think of Cuvier do you ever think of Madame Cuvier? Yet she gave him a beautiful home environment, waiting on him, reading aloud to him and thinking always of his comfort. It was the same with Huxley, Agassiz, and others. Those splendid gentlewomen of the old school didn’t give much thought to their “rights”, they didn’t think that they had to vote and smoke and belong to clubs but they certainly made their husbands happy. Such women did not think that they had lost anything in dignity if they waited on their husbands, if they considered the tastes and happiness of their husbands as of great importance. And I wonder if any present-day wife who insists on her “rights” and independence, her freedom from cares, responsibilities, and duties can ever win the devotion and reverence which Pumpelly’s wife won. It seems to me that the vision of the modern woman is warped and stunted; she spends her life demanding things which do not bring her happiness and contentment when she attains them. So often her whole viewpoint is a selfish one – she thinks of what she can get, what she can have done for her, instead of thinking about what she has to give to her husband, what she can do for him. The idea of loving service gladly, cheerfully given seems hardly to enter into the marriage of today; the woman makes no sacrifices, she only takes and takes and takes. I have talked to many women from the working classes up through the intellectuals and it does not seem to me that they give the men a square deal now-a-days.

(Continued with p. 6)

The other day one of the talkies asked me if you were married yet. She was seeking advance information, hoping to get a real “scoop” in the gossip line. My answer to her was, I think, delicious. I’ll tell you when you come home. She asked me a number of questions about you of a personal nature and all of my answers were the essence of sweet and guileless innocence. But I wager she’ll never come to me again for inside information about somebody else’s private affairs. There are, to my knowledge, only two really dangerous gossips in the Museum and both of them at one time or another have tried to pump me about you. I have answered them so sweetly and in such an off-hand manner that I doubt if either of them realized how clearly I saw through her and what delight I took in throwing her off the scent. There is a story that the late king Edward, on being questioned about a lady of his acquaintance, “lied like a gentleman.” We might also add that Marjorie Daw, on being questioned about a gentleman of her acquaintance, lied like a lady, for she believes in giving to people the truth which belongs to them, and there isn’t a single fact about my Pal that belongs to a gossip.

The question about your marriage gave me a jolt, I must admit, though I gave no outward sign of what was going on inside. Somehow, Pal, I can’t picture you married again, for this reason: your marriage was so ideal, so perfect in every way that I should think you would be afraid to try again lest the second time be not so perfect as the first. If a man has been unhappily married then I can easily imagine his wanting to marry again, for he can think to himself: “Well, if my second marriage turns out unhappy also, it cannot be any worse than the first one.” He has a chance at gaining happiness and can at least be no worse off than he was the first time. Again, if a man has never been married and his wedded life turns out to be a failure he may reconcile himself to it; never having known what bliss there may be in a marriage he has no standard for comparison and so cannot realize quite how much he is missing. But if a man has been ideally married then I should think that he would hesitate a long, long time before embarking again. For could anything be much more tragic than to pick out the wrong mate the second time? To have the memories of a great happiness drowned in a reality of misery? Your wife, if I may judge from what you have told me, was a rare woman of fine character, a true companion and devoted mate. Pal, do not choose a less worthy successor. If you keep your wife in mind and use her as a standard by which to measure other women you cannot go far wrong. Dear Pal, don’t take anything less than the best, don’t take a make-shift. It is better to live out your days alone with your perfect memories than to enter into any less spiritual, ideal and happy a union. Do not be annoyed with me for speaking of these things – I do so reverently. As your Pal, as a trusted woman friend who has thought much about marriage, may I not advise you just as you have advised me? These thoughts came to me after that question was put to me the other day as to whether you were married yet, and I realized that sometime I would be receiving your wedding announcement. I do hope that if you ever do marry again you will make use of all your wisdom and sage precepts, that you will remember all the good counsel which you gave me about the sacredness of marriage, and that you will choose the right woman, someone like your wife. I want so much to see you happy, to see you getting the most out of life, to see you giving the best of yourself to life, and to see you returning to the ideals you had ten years ago. Your happiness means more to me than you can possibly imagine. Pal, you’ve fooled around a lot these past ten years and there isn’t much in it, is there? You’ve met lots of different women; if I may hazard a guess, you’ve made friends with women to whom you would not have been willing to introduce your wife, whom you would not have brought into your home as guests. You have done things which you wouldn’t want to tell your wife about, were she alive, things, which, indeed, you would not have done were she still living. It may be that I am offering you a (p. 7) counsel of perfection, but dear Pal could not the memory of your wife and your marriage hold you true to the ideals of that union? If marriage is primarily a spiritual rather than a physical union, then your wife’s death does not release you from the spiritual ties to her. You should reverence the things for which she stood just as much after as before her death. Pal, you can’t know how many times I’ve been hurt by hearing folks pay tribute to the splendid type of man you “were”, the wonderful husband and lover. It hurts me to hear you referred to in the past tense, for I know that at heart you are just the same splendid type of man that you were ten years ago and that you can at will cast off this superficial role you have been playing and be your real self again.

Pal, you are doing fine, big things now, working hard, accomplishing much. When you return to your home town don’t fall into any of the old ruts. If there are any companions who are not worthy of you, cut them out; if there are any temptations meet them and put them down. Life will seem more beautiful and worth while to you. Boy Blue you have so many rare and wonderful qualities that it’s a shame that they should be even a little dimmed by a few easily removed faults. I do not know what your faults are; I can surmise what some of them might be, but truly I don’t spend much time on such speculations – I like better to think of your fine qualities. But you yourself have spoken of sins and mistakes, using the age-old lame excuse that you are not wicked just “unmoral.” Fie for shame! To utter that word; you aren’t unmoral at all – you know perfectly well when you are doing something that you shouldn’t do, for you feel ashamed at the time, you have regrets afterwards and you wouldn’t for the world have folks know what you’ve done. Whenever you feel like that about any act you can be sure you shouldn’t have done it. Pal, will you do something for me? After this if you find yourself doing anything that you know to be wrong or unworthy of you, will you think twice about it and then not do it? I ask you to do this for me, but perhaps it’s too much a pal to ask. Do it then for someone else’s sake, for Frances1, or in memory of your wife. I would suggest that you do it for your own soul’s good, but a man is less likely to bring out the best that is in him just for an abstract principle than he is for someone for whom he cares. Pal, I suppose you never go to confession anymore, and I suppose, too, that there is no human being whom you would trust enough to confess to. I wish that you had someone who could be to you what you are to me, someone whom you could trust absolutely, to whom you could confess all your sins, knowing that no matter what they were you would be forgiven, someone on whose judgement you could rely and on whose sympathy and understanding you could always count. Perhaps you have such a person, but it you haven’t then confess to your own soul once in while and don’t just say “I have sinned and repented” but add “and will sin no more.” It’s easy to say “I’m a sinner” but that isn’t much good unless you see to it that you don’t commit the same sin again. Confession is a mighty good thing and I wish you could have the benefits of it. If there is some one person to whom you feel you must tell everything you do, you’ll certainly begin to rustle around and see to it that you don’t do anything very wicked. I know that I wouldn’t want to lose my Father Confessor for anything. If I see that I’m succumbing to any of the baser things in my character, I jack myself up right away because I always feel so ashamed when I have to confess mistakes and sins to you. I know that if I do something wrong my conscience will make me tell my Confessor, so I try to have as little as possible to tell him. If you know that you have to show the account book of your soul to someone you are mighty careful how you keep the accounts. That’s why I asked you if you would promise for my sake, or for someone’s sake to keep your accounts carefully so that you would not be ashamed to open the book of your soul at any time. Let the pages shine forth fair and clean as they used to. Live each to-day as though it were to be your last. Make each to-day beautiful and in this way every yesterday will become a golden memory and each tomorrow be full of new hope and bright expectations.

Good-night, dear Pal – God bless you!

1. Frances was Barnum Brown’s daughter by his first wife, Marian.
2. 

Portrait of Mrs. Raphael Pumpelly. By John Singer Sargent. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29676254>.