

Chapter Eleven

HAVELOCK ELLIS

*"He who ascends to mountain-tops shall find
Their loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow,
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
Contending tempests on his naked head."*

LORD BYRON



AS Christmas approached, my loneliness for the children increased. This was their particular time. I had messages from and about them, but these could not give the small, intimate details, the Atlantic was a broad span, seeming more vast to letter writers. I missed their voices, their caresses, even their little quarrels. I almost wondered whether solitary confinement in prison were not preferable to my present isolation.

In the midst of this stark yearning to be with them and share their tree I received a cordial note from Havelock Ellis asking me to come to tea. With kindly foresight he had given me explicit directions how to reach Fourteen Dover Mansions in Brixton across the Thames. I boarded a crowded bus at Oxford Circus. Though it was a miserable day near the dark end of 1914, the spirit of Christmas was in the air and everyone was laden with beribboned bundles and bright packages.

Looking askance at the police station which occupied the lower floor I climbed up the stairs, and, with the shyness of an adolescent, full of fears and uncertainties, lifted the huge brass knocker. The figure of Ellis himself appeared in the door. He seemed a giant in stature, a lovely, simple man in loose-fitting clothes, with powerful head and wonderful smile. He was fifty-five then, but that head will never change—the shock of white hair, the venerable beard, shaggy

though well-kept, the wide, expressive mouth and deep-set eyes, sad even in spite of the humorous twinkle always latent

I was conscious immediately that I was in the presence of a great man, yet I was startled at first by his voice as he welcomed me in. It was typically English, high and thin. I once talked to a prisoner at Sing Sing who had been in the death house for three years and could speak only in whispers thereafter. Ellis had been a hermit for twenty-five. He had lived in the Bush in Australia, and later secluded himself in his study. Nevertheless, the importance of what he had to say much more than made up for the instrument which conveyed it.

He led me to the living room through which the cheerless twilight of a winter afternoon in London barely penetrated, and seated me before a little gas fire. Some rooms impress you as ghastly cold even when hot. This one, though lacking central heating, had the warmth of many books. He lit two candles on the mantel, which flickered softly over his features, giving him the aspect of a seer.

We sat down and quiet fell. I tried a few aimless remarks but I stuttered with embarrassment. Ellis was still. Small talk was not possible with him, you had to utter only the deepest truths within you. No other human being could be so silent and remain so poised and calm in silence.

While Ellis was preparing tea in the kitchen he left me to look over his library and the most recent news from America. He had laid out and marked certain pertinent items which he thought might not have come to my attention. This, I later found, was one of his most endearing characteristics. He always entered into the life of the other person in little details, never forgetting even the kind of bread or olives, fruits or wines, you preferred. His detachment was not incompatible with sympathy.

Soon appeared a large tray, laden with tea, cakes, and bread and butter, and we sat down before the humming flame and talked and talked, and as we talked we wove into our lives an intangible web of mutual interests. I began to realize then that the men who are truly great are the easiest to meet and understand. After those first few moments I was at peace, and content as I had never been before. Entirely unaware of the reverence he aroused, Ellis pasted no labels

on himself, had no poses, made no effort to impress. He was simply, quite un-selfconsciously, what he was.

When he asked me to describe the details of how I had locked horns with the law, I spoke glowingly of the heartening approval which the Drysdales had just given me. He did not show the same enthusiasm, in fact he was rather concerned, and not so ready with praise for my lack of respect for the established order, believing so strongly in my case that he wanted me to avoid mistakes. I think his influence was always more or less subduing and moderating, he tried to get me, too, to take the middle road. Though he occasionally alluded to some of the more amusing phases of the trial of his own work, he had pushed it into the back of his mind.

This monumental study intended for doctors and psychologists had been projected when Ellis was a medical student of nineteen. But his short practice of medicine, his editing of the *Mermaid Series of Old British Dramatists*, and the preparation of several sociological treatises, had intervened before, in 1898, *Sexual Inversion*, the first volume, had appeared. George Bedborough, printer, had been arrested for selling a copy, and charged with "publishing an obscene libel with the intention of corrupting the laws of Her Majesty's subjects." Ellis, the scholar, preferred to ignore controversy, the martyr's crown would not have coincided favorably with calm and dispassionate research. Judging it merely stupid of the British Government to have pushed the case to trial, he suspended the sale of the volume immediately, so disappointed that his own countrymen did not understand his motives that he stated then and there he would not have his other volumes published in England, and he never has.

He, beyond any other person, has been able to clarify the question of sex, and free it from the smudginess connected with it from the beginning of Christianity, raise it from the dark cellar, set it on a higher plane. That has been his great contribution. Like an alchemist, he transmuted the psychic disturbance which had followed my reading of his books into a spiritual essence.

We had many things to discuss, but suddenly it dawned upon me that I must have outstayed my time. Seven o'clock struck before I realized how late it was. It had seemed so short to me.

I was not excited as I went back through the heavy fog to my own dull little room. My emotion was too deep for that. I felt as though I had been exalted into a hitherto undreamed-of world.

Some of my new friends, Guy Aldred, Henry Sara, and Rose Witcop, invited me to tea with them Christmas Eve. Rose was deliberate in her movements, tall and dark, with straight black hair falling low over her forehead and caught at the nape of the neck. She and Guy were both ardent pacifists. A few days earlier I had overheard them reproving their son, aged six, for suggesting that Santa Claus bring him some lead soldiers. He had seen uniforms in every street and toy replicas in every shop window, all little boys were having them. I had not been able to send many presents to my children, and before leaving the house slipped into his room. He was sound asleep and his clothes were stretched out neatly at the foot of his bed. Outraging my own principles I tucked a box of soldiers under the blanket so that he might see this martial array the first thing in the morning.

Rose and Guy were thoroughly disgusted with me.

Much that evening combined to stir me. Carol singers paraded Torrington Square, group after group lifting plaintive voices in *Good King Wenceslas* and *We Three Kings of Orient Are*. I was head-achy but I went out and strolled about the streets to see Merrie England at Yuletide. I had on so much clothing that I could scarcely walk, and still I was icy cold. It was just about a year since I had left France with the children, never to be reunited with Bill.

Since I am slow in my decisions and cannot separate myself from past emotions quickly, all breaches must come gradually. A measure of frustration is an inevitable accompaniment to endeavor. My marriage had not been unhappy, I had not let it be. It had not failed because of lack of love, romance, wealth, respect, or any of those qualities which were supposed to cause marital rifts, but because the interests of each had widened beyond those of the other. Development had proceeded so fast that our lives had diverged, due to that very growth which we had sought for each other. I could not live with a human being conscious that my necessities were thwarting or dwarfing his progress.

It had been a crowded year, encompassing the heights and depths

of feeling Christmas Eve was too much for me I went back again and sat, wondering whether the children were well and contented The next morning came a cable from them, flowers from Bill, and a nice note from Havelock Ellis

Thereafter Havelock aided me immensely in my studies by guiding my reading Tuesdays and Fridays were his days at the British Museum, and he often left little messages at my seat, listing helpful articles or offering suggestions as to books which might assist me in the particular aspect I was then engaged upon

If when traveling about with him on the tram, going to a concert, shopping for coffee and cigarettes outside the Museum, a thought came to him, he would pull out a bit of paper and jot down notes That was how he compiled his material for books, gathering it piecemeal and storing it away in envelopes Anything on the dance went into the dance envelope, music into music, and so on As soon as any one became full enough to attract his attention, he took it out and started to make something of it

Sometimes we dined together at a Soho restaurant, occasionally I had tea at his flat In his combined kitchen and dining room, warmed by a coal stove, he did his work, and there also he cooked meals for which he marketed himself He was proud of being able to lay a fire with fewer sticks and less paper than an expert charwoman, and once said he would rather win praise for the creation of a salad than of an essay

One of the four rooms was set aside for the use of his wife, Edith She preferred the country and lived on her farm in Cornwall, whereas Havelock loved to be in the city, though he was not a part of it, he liked to hear it going on about him Whenever she came to town she found all her books and possessions inviolate, whenever he went to Cornwall he found everything ready for him Either of them could, on impulse, board a train without baggage and in a few hours be at home

Edith was short and stocky, high-colored, curly-haired, with mystical blue eyes but accompanying them a strain of practicality She could run the farm, look after the livestock, and dispose of her products Her vitality was so great that it sought other outlets in writing fiction

Bernard Shaw was once trying to find his way to the Ellis farm and stopped at a cottage to inquire whether he was on the right road. The goodwife could not tell him.

"But I know Mr and Mrs Ellis live near here"

She kept protesting nobody of that name was in the neighborhood until Shaw pointed to a house which appeared as though it might be the one "Who lives there?"

"Two strangers"

"What do they do?"

"Oh, the man he writes out of other folks' books, but she writes out of her head"

The person who saw most of Havelock was Olive Schreiner, a long-standing friend of his and of Edith. I was delighted at the chance of meeting the author of *Woman and Labor* and of another favorite, *The Story of an African Farm*. She had just come to England for the first time in twenty-five years and been caught in the War.

Knowing Havelock to be a philosopher, I had expected him to be an elderly man, but, despite his white hair, had found him young, physically and mentally. Olive Schreiner's writings were so alive that I had visualized a young woman. Instead, although her hair was black, her square and stout Dutch body was old and spread. She had, perhaps, been partly aged by the frightful asthma from which she had suffered for so many years. The effect was enhanced by the dark surroundings of the shabby hotel in which I first saw her.

Certainly another contributing factor was her despondence over the War. Although her mother was English, her father Dutch, and she a British subject, her Germanic name was causing her the most harrowing complications. Fellow hotel guests of her own sex, when they spied her name on the register or heard her paged, insisted to the manager that either she should be removed or they were going to seek quarters elsewhere. She was literally being hounded from place to place.

Possibly Olive felt the tragedy of the War more than any other person I met in London at this time. She had never believed that "the boys would be out of the trenches by Christmas," or that business as

usual could continue much longer. Already she had seen the horrors of armed conflict in South Africa, it seemed to begin lightly, but it did not end that way. She feared the whole world might be trapped in this one, that internationalism and the peace movement were practically finished, and that a whole new generation had to be born before we could recover what we had lost. She appeared to me then unduly disheartened, it was only later when her words came true that I comprehended how accurate were her prophecies.

Better than any living being Olive understood Havelock. I realized this during a conversation between herself and Edith. The latter had been in the United States lecturing on three writers—her husband, James Hinton, whom he admired tremendously, and Edward Carpenter. Her reception had convinced her the name of Ellis had gone beyond the borders of England, and she wanted him to return with her the following year to reap some of the reward of the respect thousands of Americans had for him.

Havelock was terror-stricken, first at the idea of coming to a new country, and second at the mere mention of speaking in public. He could imagine no tortures worse than these. But in order to please Edith, whom he loved dearly, and also because her persistency and determination were so great that he found it hard to oppose her, he agreed to leave it to the three of us.

Edith and I had called on Olive to talk it over. She, as usual, had just recently moved. This time she was more cheerful, and after tea we took up the momentous question of the destiny of another individual. Edith, with her customary fire and fervor, started in to persuade Olive, Havelock's lifelong friend, and me, his new friend, that going to America would be a crowning glory for him. She entreated our aid in making him decide to do so.

Olive characteristically listened with rapt attention until Edith had finished. Then she turned to me. "What do you think Havelock should do?"

I, knowing how much Americans expected of a speaker in the way of voice, personality, and gift of oratory, and also how easily they could be disappointed unless gestures and external appearance fulfilled their anticipations, concluded he would not find this crown

of glory or this universal acclaim, and that he would probably return disillusioned after the first fanfare of publicity I said, without giving my reasons, "I don't think he should go"

"Have either of you asked Havelock what he wants to do?" Olive questioned

"I have," said Edith, "and he doesn't want to"

"Then that settles the matter entirely," replied Olive "Nobody has the authority to make another do what he doesn't want to, no matter how good you or I or any of us think it might be for him I myself will never take a step that my instinct or intuition tells me not to I am guided wholly by that instinct, and if I should awaken tomorrow morning and my inner voice told me to go to the top of the Himalayas, I would pack up and go"

This brief speech determined the question for Havelock, his right to stay snugly in London, and to give up all the adventure Edith had planned for him

Olive, in her commonly dark mood, was encouraged more by the work being done for women in birth control than by anything else She herself, who had had but one child, which had died, realized its significance The last time I saw her she put both arms around me and said, "We may never meet again, but your endeavor is the bright star shining through the black clouds of war"

She was not able to go back to South Africa until the War was over One morning, not long afterwards, she was found dead in her bed According to her instructions, her little child and beloved dog were removed from their old resting places and Kaffirs carried the three of them to the peak of a mountain outside Queenstown, where they have since reposed on their high eminence

Ellis has been called the greatest living English gentleman But England alone cannot claim him, he belongs to all mankind I define him as one who radiates truth, energy, and beauty I see him in a realm above and beyond the shouting and the tumult Captains and kings come and go Lilliputian warriors strut their hour, and boundary lines between nations are made and unmade Although he takes no active share in this external trafficking, he does not dwell apart in an ivory tower of his own construction

This Olympian seems to be aloof from the pain of the world, yet

he has penetrated profoundly into the persistent problems of the race. Nothing human is alien to his sympathy. His knowledge is broad and deep, his wisdom even deeper. He makes no strident, blatant effort to cry aloud his message, but gradually and in ever-increasing numbers, men and women pause to listen to his serene voice.

Here is a phenomenon more amazing than the achievements of radio-activity. Despite all the obstacles and obstructions that have hindered his expression, his truth has filtered through to minds ready to receive it. His philosophy, if it can be reduced to an essence, is that of life more abundant—attained through a more complete understanding of ourselves and an unruffled charity to all.

To Havelock Ellis we owe our concept of that Kingdom of God within us, that inner world which hides all our inherent potentialities for joy as well as suffering. Thanks to him we realize that happiness must be the fruit of an attitude towards life, that it is in no way dependent upon the rewards or the gifts of fortune. Like St. Francis of Assisi, he teaches the beauty of nature, of his brother the sun and his sister the moon, of birds and fish and animals, and all the pageantry of the passing seasons.

I have never felt about any other person as I do about Havelock Ellis. To know him has been a bounteous privilege, to claim him friend my greatest honor.