

MS P.1396a & b: correspondence of Nov. 1958

Eric Zhao

December 17, 2024*

MS P.1396a: letter to Henry Anders

Dr Anders

I trust that you are well and as always busy with the patients in Salaway. Please give my warmest regards to Corinne.

In reluctance I must admit that I write with some urgency this early in the morning, for a dream — or perhaps it was multiple — from which I have just awoken has seized my mind, and I cannot put it away. Whether it has been taken captive by a joy or a fear or some other thing, I do not know. Perhaps some coffee will dispel it, and I will take a walk. But supposing that you may find it of interest, I have tried to record it as well as I may.

In the first part I was in a kind of bar, or a club, and it was very dim and very crowded. The whole place was sorely bare, with plain stone — and very smooth — floors and barren walls. There was great din of flashing lights and rowdy music. It seemed altogether the kind of place in which I perhaps ought not to have been. Strangely, my brother whom you know was also there, and at one point he began dancing by mimicking another fellow, and all around turned to watch in amazement. The climax of the music — though I cannot recall how it was — came and it ended, and everyone cheered, with some others gibing. Then all of a sudden came in two tall men, one of whom came and stood in front of two women who were nearby and looked upon them with faces terrible to behold. The women bowed their heads, ashamed, and

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followed after out after him. The other one came to my brother and stood in front of him, neither smiling nor frowning, but with a face of brotherly compassion. Then Glenn said in a quiet voice, scarcely audible, 'Have you come to admonish me?' The man nodded, and they went out together. He beckoned me also to follow.

In a hurry I went out after them through the chamber which resembled a lobby, which was also very dark and bare, and up a narrow flight of stone stairs. At the top came a radiant light, for it was the door of the place, and we emerged into the sun. It was a quaint rural village. The building under which hid the bar or club was a small wooden house with a roof of thatch. There was a small patch of weeds by it, and a short fence about the place, with no gate upon the dirt path that led out to the rest of the village. The houses around looked much the same. A river ran by some strides away. Indeed it was much like Salaway. And I began to follow Glenn and the man, whom I thought to be his brother in the church, perhaps, when realized that I had left my socks and shoes in the lobby chamber. Therefore I returned inside and retrieved them, then came out again. By then they had disappeared somewhere, and I hadn't any sense of how to orient myself. After a little while I worked out that they must have gone southward, which was the other side of the house, so I made for that way and entered something of a shoddy village square, then further south past some houses and saw my brother and the man, sitting by a field of crop under the cloudless blue sky. They were waiting for me.

But then I remember being in a large chamber with a series of pools, and many young people were gathered there, and it was as though we were there to try ourselves in some examination for an organization centered around obstacle courses atop pools of water. And one of the men was demonstrating the course which who those wished to join must complete in less than twenty minutes. There were several moving floats atop the water, pushed around by some other members swimming therein, and other fixed platforms of varying heights. I thought that these associates to be very incompetent, since they were not moving them very often; the man could do little but stand and wait. He nearly ran out of time because of this, and I began to berate their performance to another fellow of the organization sitting by me. He did not like to hear his chaps abused yet could only acquiesce to truth of my remarks. In the end, the man finished in around eighteen minutes or so.

Then it was time for those who wished to join to try at the course themselves, and I was not sure if I really wished to do so. But afterwards the list of results were produced, and I found that I had finished in exactly eighteen minutes, which was slightly faster than many, on average. But one man had finished in three and a half minutes. I began to exit from the pool area through the door back to a dark lobby that was much like the underground lobby of the club, and I gathered my shoes and my socks which were stowed in the same corner, and also a blunted wooden blade, the sort with which I suppose the knights' pages of the past would have learned to spar. I began to climb the same steps up to the surface. But half way up to the bright doorway, another young man came up behind me and tapped my shoulder, saying, 'It sounds like there was a message for you.' In much confusion I went back down, and went back to the pool chamber where the head of the organization stood near the doorway. And he had two slips of paper in his hand, and he was reading them aloud to no one in particular. Then he saw me and smiled, and said that it seems like a message had come for me, and he began to walk toward me. I inquired about the contents, but his answer was indistinct. I thought to turn away, but when I blinked I felt his hand suddenly on my shoulder, and his voice was very near, saying, 'Come on now.' I shirked back and found that he stood right by me. Then I blinked again and he had a black top hat. Then I blinked again and he had a white one. Then I knew him to be some demon, or a demon had entered him.

I scrambled backwards and struck him with the sword, but it was only wood. He so much as hardly flinched but only advanced slowly, rather unbothered. I struck him again with the blade, thrashing at his stomach and at his arms and his face, but it was all to no avail. He continued to speak as he advanced, and I withdrew unceasingly backwards in the wide underground room. No one else was present. And there were great pillars holding up the ceiling, so I was careful so as to avoid cornering myself into a pillar or a wall.

This went on for some time, until the sword at last began to have some use. Or indeed so I had thought. I smote at his face, and the point sank into his skin, which became deformed but not broken. I pushed the blade in more, but still whilst retreating since he persisted in his advancement, unhindered. When I withdrew it, some of his flesh poured out slowly, like melted iron that has cooled much. Then I struck again to a similar effect. But he was unfazed, and he continued to speak, but I could not make out or remember his words

in my terror.

Then he said, 'Perhaps if your blade was of steel, it would do better.' When I next slashed, it cut off his torso from his legs. They fell to the ground. Yet he came on still, a spectre of flesh. I dismembered his right hand, and it crumpled to the ground several paces away. There was no blood. But when I blinked he had a new hand, and new legs. Then when I struck once more, the blade had returned to mere wood. It was then that I awoke.

I am startled by all of this, though I suppose that you may not be. I wonder if I should write also to Glenn, who would doubtless have something to say of these matters. My anxiety is somewhat settled now that it is all on paper, and will be altogether freshened, I think, when it is mailed off.

I hope I shall hear from you soon. It is always a deep comfort to know that you within letter's reach.

Yours truly,

Jon

13.11

MS P.1396b: letter to Jon

Dear Jon

I thank you for your letters, and I am most sorry that it has taken so long to respond. My dear Corinne is most well, and we both are very hopeful that we may visit you again when it has become altogether warmer. Salaway has seen a bitter December, and the whole north, as I am sure you know, is covered in snowfall.

As for your dreams, I do wonder at them as much as you do yourself. For are not dreams, like all good gifts, come from God? Indeed, He comes to us in many ways, even in dreams; surely you remember Gen. 15, or the tales of Joseph. It is, of course, a danger to give our dreams more stock than they properly deserve, to give them life, so to speak, of their own. Never may it usurp the authority of Scripture which is wholly sufficient; then, one has gone very wrong.

Nonetheless I wonder if you have met God. (I will write straightly, because I know you will not receive it wrongly.) Were not the men who came to your brother and you perhaps messengers sent from God, even angels of

the Lord? You yourself wrote that the bar, or the club, or whatever sort of den it was, was altogether the sort of place in which you thought you ought not to have been. (I have your letter beside me as I write.) Your brother has been a Christian for many years, has he not? I cannot help but understand that God has mercifully led him out of the caverns of sin, into the light of the day—indeed, a lost member of the flock attended to greener pastures—and you are to follow him in time.

Yet one is prone to recall those things that seem rather needful: who will walk a long journey in the dirt without his socks, or without his shoes? Surely the blisters and the cuts would be fierce upon the soft flesh of our soles. So thinking, we turn away to seek these things, even returning—entirely willingly, no less!—into the darkness. Yet they are but distractions. ‘Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.’ So Christ assures us in St Matthew’s gospel. How merciful is God who even in our wayward blunders remains steadfast. Jon, He waits with your brother for you on the edge of the fields to the south.

As for he whom you have called a demon, or a man demon-possessed, I would readily count your hypothesis correct. Plainly, the Devil has gotten you all in a deep confusion, playing you all at absurd competition and meaningless races; so you completed the course in shorter time than many. Do not forget that he is the master of the game and has had much practice (since Adam, mind you) to decipher and manipulate the human heart. I need not go on; you have read Mr Lewis’s book on the very subject.

The Devil baits us with, among many things, the lure of revelation, with sweet words of promise to money, and power and leisure. It is a lie, yet he cannot afford to have that fact revealed, for then his entire act would be shown empty, and his purposes would fail. Why cannot we trust our unchanging Creator in his promises of provision—he has set down and lifted up his own Son as a surety—but turn to a slanderer?

It is no wonder that your battle with him was altogether fruitless. Can a slave rebel against his master and not be put down? In our utter depravity we cannot lift a hand against the chains by which we are bound to sin; our flailing does nought but flounder. The Devil is crafty; he would have us believe that we may resist him, if only the blade with which we resisted his attacks were of some sharper and hardier substance. But God has shown us that it is futile

for unregenerate man whose attempts to justify himself are met with only frustration.

I pray earnestly for you very often, Jon. Though I am sure you already know that. I know that you have tasted the goodness of the Lord, and you cannot know how glad I am to hear of your continued involvement at the church. It is a great encouragement to us both. In time I hope you shall know the Lord, and anyways I do not think you shall get away.

Warmly,
Henry Anders