



Philosophical Review

Words of Professor Royce at the Walton Hotel at Philadelphia, December 29, 1915

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Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May, 1916), pp. 507-514

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2178279>

Accessed: 09-09-2018 16:55 UTC

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JOSIAH ROYCE

1876

(Act. 20)

WORDS OF PROFESSOR ROYCE AT THE WALTON
HOTEL AT PHILADELPHIA, DECEMBER 29, 1915.¹

I WAS born in 1855 in California. My native town was a mining town in the Sierra Nevada,—a place five or six years older than myself. My earliest recollections include a very frequent wonder as to what my elders meant when they said that this was a new community. I frequently looked at the vestiges left by the former diggings of miners, saw that many pine logs were rotten, and that a miner's grave was to be found in a lonely place not far from my own house. Plainly men had lived and died thereabouts. I dimly reflected that this sort of life had apparently been going on ever since men dwelt thereabouts. The logs and the grave looked old. The sunsets were beautiful. The wide prospects when one looked across the Sacramento Valley were impressive, and had long interested the people of whose love for my country I heard much. What was there then in this place that ought to be called new, or for that matter, crude? I wondered, and gradually came to feel that part of my life's business was to find out what all this wonder meant. My earliest teachers in philosophy were my mother, whose private school, held for some years in our own house, I attended, and my sisters, who were all older than myself, and one of whom taught me to read. In my home I heard the Bible very frequently read, and very greatly enjoyed my mother's reading of Bible stories, although, so far as I remember, I was very generally dissatisfied with the requirements of observance of Sundays, which stand out somewhat prominently in my memory. Our home training in these respects was not, as I now think, at all excessively strict. But without being aware of the fact, I was a

¹ After the dinner at the Walton Hotel, Professor Royce, in acknowledgment of the kindness of his friends, made a brief statement, largely autobiographical in its character. The following is a summary of this statement, and is founded upon some notes which friends present amongst the guests have kindly supplied, to aid the speaker to remind his friends of the spirit of what he tried to express.

born non-conformist. The Bible stories fascinated me. The observance of Sunday aroused from an early time a certain more or less passive resistance, which was stubborn, although seldom, I think, openly rebellious.

The earliest connected story that I independently read was the Apocalypse, from a large print New Testament, which I found on the table in our living room. The Apocalypse did not tend to teach me early to acquire very clear ideas. On the other hand, I did early receive a great deal of training in dialectics, from the sister nearest to me in age. She was three years my senior. She was very patiently persistent in showing me the truth. I was nearly as persistent in maintaining my own views. Since she was patient, I believe that we seldom quarrelled in any violent way. But on occasion, as I remember, our dear mother used, when the wrangling grew too philosophical, to set me the task of keeping still for an hour. The training was needed, but it was never wholly effective in suppressing for any great length of time the dialectical insistence.

I was not a very active boy. I had no physical skill or agility. I was timid and ineffective, but seem to have been, on the whole, prevailingly cheerful, and not extremely irritable, although I was certainly more or less given to petty mischief, in so far as my sisters did not succeed in keeping me under their kindly watch.

Since I grew during the time of the civil war, heard a good deal about it from people near me, but saw nothing of the consequences of the war through any closer inspection, I remained as vague about this matter as about most other life problems,—vague but often enthusiastic. My earliest great patriotic experience came at the end of the civil war, when the news of the assassination of Lincoln reached us. Thenceforth, as I believe, I had a country as well as a religious interest. Both of these were ineffective interests, except in so far as they were attached to the already mentioned enthusiasms, and were clarified and directed by the influence of my mother and sisters. Of boys outside the household I so far knew comparatively little, but had a considerable tendency, as I remember, to preach down to what

I supposed to be the level of these other boys,—a predisposition which did not prepare me for social success in the place in which I was destined to pass the next stage of my development, namely San Francisco.

When we went to live in San Francisco, I for the first time saw, first San Francisco Bay, and then the Ocean itself, which fascinated me, but which for a long time taught me little.

About June 1866, I began to attend a large Grammar School in San Francisco. I was one of about a thousand boys. The ways of training were new to me. My comrades very generally found me disagreeably striking in my appearance, by reason of the fact that I was redheaded, freckled, countrified, quaint, and unable to play boys' games. The boys in question gave me my first introduction to the 'majesty of the community.' The introduction was impressively disciplinary and persistent. On the whole it seemed to me 'not joyous but grievous.' In the end it probably proved to be for my good. Many years later, in a lecture contained in the first volume of my *Problem of Christianity*, I summarized what I remember of the lesson of the training which my schoolmates very frequently gave me, in what I there have to say about the meaning which lies behind the Pauline doctrine of original sin, as set forth in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

Yet my mates were not wholly unkind, and I remember lifelong friendships which I formed in that Grammar School, and which I still can enjoy whenever I meet certain of my dear California friends.

In the year 1871, I began to attend the University of California, where I received my first degree in 1875.

The principal philosophical influences of my undergraduate years were: 1. The really very great and deep effect produced upon me by the teaching of Professor Joseph LeConte,—himself a former pupil of Agassiz, a geologist, a comparatively early defender and exponent of the Darwinian theory, and a great light in the firmament of the University of California of those days; 2. The personal influence of Edward Rowland Sill, who was my teacher in English, during the last two years of my

undergraduate life; 3. The literary influence of John Stuart Mill and of Herbert Spencer, both of whom I read during those years. There was, at that time, no regular undergraduate course at the University of California.

After graduation I studied in Germany, and later at the Johns Hopkins University, still later returning a while to the University of California from 1878 to 1882. Since 1882 I have been working at Harvard. In Germany I heard Lotze at Göttingen, and was for a while strongly under his influence. The reading of Schopenhauer was another strong influence during my life as a student in Germany. I long paid a great deal of attention to the philosophy of Kant. But during the years before 1890, I never supposed myself to be very strongly under the influence of Hegel, nor yet of Green, nor of either of the Cairds. I should confess to the charge of having been, during my German period of study, a good deal under the influence of the Romantic School, whose philosophy of poetry I read and expounded with a good deal of diligence. But I early cherished a strong interest in logic, and long desired to get a fair knowledge of mathematics.

When I review this whole process, I strongly feel that my deepest motives and problems have centered about the Idea of the Community, although this idea has only come gradually to my clear consciousness. This was what I was intensely feeling, in the days when my sisters and I looked across the Sacramento Valley, and wondered about the great world beyond our mountains. This was what I failed to understand when my mates taught me those instructive lessons in San Francisco. This was that which I tried to understand when I went to Germany. I have been unpractical,—always socially ineffective as regards genuine 'team play,' ignorant of politics, an ineffective member of committees, and a poor helper of concrete social enterprises. Meanwhile I have always been, as in my childhood; a good deal of a non-conformist, and disposed to a certain rebellion. An English cousin of mine not long since told me that, according to a family tradition current in his community, a common ancestor of ours was one of the guards who stood about the scaffold of Charles the First. I can easily mention the Monarch in

modern Europe, in the guard about whose scaffold I should most cheerfully stand, if he had any scaffold. So much of the spirit that opposes the community I have and have always had in me, simply, elementally, deeply. Over against this natural ineffectiveness in serving the community, and over against this rebellion, there has always stood the interest which has taught me what I nowadays try to express by teaching that we are saved through the community.

The resulting doctrine of life and of the nature of truth and of reality which I have tried to work out, to connect with logical and metaphysical issues, and to teach to my classes, now seems to me not so much romanticism, as a fondness for defining, for articulating, and for expounding the perfectly real, concrete, and literal life of what we idealists call the 'spirit,' in a sense which is indeed Pauline, but not merely mystical, super-individual; not merely romantic, difficult to understand, but perfectly capable of exact and logical statement.

The best concrete instance of the life of a community with which I have had the privilege to become well acquainted, has been furnished to me by my own Seminary, one of whose meetings you have so kindly and graciously permitted me to attend as leader, on this to me so precious occasion.

. . . But why should you give so kind an attention to me at a moment when the deepest, the most vital, and the most practical interests of the whole community of mankind are indeed imperilled, when the spirit of mankind is overwhelmed with a cruel and undeserved sorrow, when the enemies of mankind often seem as if they were about to triumph?

Let me simply say in closing, how deeply the crisis of this moment impresses me, and how keenly I feel the bitterness of being unable to do anything for the Great Community except to thank you for your great kindness, and to hope that we and the Community shall see better times together. Certainly unless the enemies of mankind are duly rebuked by the results of this war, I, for one, do not wish to survive the crisis. Let me then venture, as I close, to quote to you certain words of the poet Swinburne. You will find them in his *Songs before Sunrise*. Let the poet

and prophet speak. He voices the spirit of that for which, in my poor way, I have always in my weakness been working.

A WATCH IN THE NIGHT.

BY A. C. SWINBURNE.

Watchman; what of the night?—
 Storm and thunder and rain,
 Lights that waver and wane,
 Leaving the watchfires unlit.
 Only the balefires are bright,
 And the flash of the lamps now and then
 From a palace where spoilers sit,
 Trampling the children of men.

Prophet, what of the night?—
 I stand by the verge of the sea,
 Banished, uncomforted, free,
 Hearing the noise of the waves
 And sudden flashes that smite
 Some man's tyrannous head,
 Thundering, heard among graves
 That hide the hosts of his dead.

Mourners, what of the night?—
 All night through without sleep
 We weep, and we weep, and we weep.
 Who shall give us our sons?
 Beaks of raven and kite,
 Mouths of wolf and of hound,
 Give us them back whom the guns
 Shot for you dead on the ground.

Dead men, what of the night?—
 Cannon and scaffold and sword,
 Horror of gibbet and cord,
 Mowed us as sheaves for the grave,
 Mowed us down for the right.
 We do not grudge or repent.
 Freely to freedom we gave
 Pledges, till life should be spent.

Statesman, what of the night?—
 The night will last me my time.
 The gold on a crown or a crime
 Looks well enough yet by the lamps.

Have we not fingers to write,
 Lips to swear at a need?
 Then, when danger decamps,
 Bury the word with the deed.

Exile, what of the night?—
 The tides and the hours run out,
 The seasons of death and of doubt,
 The night-watches bitter and sore.
 In the quicksands leftward and right
 My feet sink down under me;
 But I know the scents of the shore
 And the broad blown breaths of the sea.

Captives, what of the night?—
 It rains outside overhead
 Always, a rain that is red,
 And our faces are soiled with the rain.
 Here in the season's despite
 Day-time and night-time are one,
 Till the curse of the kings and the chain
 Break, and their toils be undone.

Princes, what of the night?—
 Night with pestilent breath
 Feeds us, children of death,
 Clothes us close with her gloom.
 Rapine and famine and fright
 Crouch at our feet and are fed.
 Earth where we pass is a tomb,
 Life where we triumph is dead.

Martyrs, what of the night?—
 Nay, is it night with you yet?
 We, for our part, we forget
 What night was, if it were.
 The loud red mouths of the fight
 Are silent and shut where we are.
 In our eyes the tempestuous air
 Shines as the face of a star.

Europe, what of the night?—
 Ask of heaven, and the sea,
 And my babes on the bosom of me,
 Nations of mine, but ungrown.

There is one who shall surely requite
All that endure or that err:
She can answer alone:
Ask not of me, but of her.

Liberty, what of the night?—
I feel not the red rains fall,
Hear not the tempest at all,
Nor thunder in heaven any more.
All the distance is white
With the soundless feet of the sun.
Night, with the woes that it wore,
Night is over and done.

May the light soon dawn. May the word of the poet and
prophet soon come true. This is my closing greeting to you.