

## LETTER TO DORA RUSSELL

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*[The embargo that Russell included in his contract with McMaster University expired, in the case of his correspondence with Dora Russell, his second wife, on 31 May 1991. Nearly 300 letters from him to her survive, and 500 from her to him. Hers cover the whole period of their relationship, but his do not begin until 1922. It is a great pity that Russell's early letters to Dora have vanished without a trace. His responses on the issues of feminism, politics, family, and personal aspiration that united and that divided the pair can only be guessed at from her letters. However, many excellent letters survive from later years. The following letter is one of them.]*

*To set the letter in context: Russell had arrived in America on 25 September, so he was near the half-way point in his lecture tour. He was to leave San Francisco for Salt Lake City on 3 November, going on to Denver and thence south to Dallas, sailing for Britain on 14 December. The purpose of the tour was to earn money to support Beacon Hill School. On the day after the letter was written, the stock market crashed. Yet there is no reference to it in the next several letters to Dora, except perhaps the question, "Why do Americans never make safe investments?"<sup>1</sup>—Ed.<sup>2</sup>]*

<sup>1</sup> This letter (13 Nov. 1929) has another instance of Russellian exaggeration. He tells Dora that Texas "is full of people who have read all three vols. of *Principia Mathematica*." Later in life this became a more realistic three (see *MPD*, p. 86).

<sup>2</sup> Thanks for assistance on the notes from Harry Ruja and Sheila Turcon.



CALIFORNIAN HOTEL, INC., LESBEE  
H. WINGATE LAKE, PRESIDENT & MANAGER

THE  
HOTEL CALIFORNIAN

FRESNO-CALIFORNIA

Oct. 28, 1929.

My Darling Love - your letter of Oct. 11 reached me the day before yesterday at San Diego, on the borders of Mexico. I was glad to get it. Soon and shall be turning eastward, & then I shall get letters oftener. — Good news about John's teeth! But bad about your leg. I hope it is not arthritis. Glad Jason is nice. They must have handled him badly, as they seem to have found him troublesome. — I agree with you about Grethe & Zora being better than less educated women; you will never get our point of view really understood by women who are not well educated. — I wrote earlier saying I agree to Betty & José being raised to £95. — Good about your mother's eye. Bravo for your speech to the Chinks!

Two days ago, being Sunday, I found myself near Mexico with 2 hours to spare, so I took a taxi & went over the border. The whole 14 miles the road was thick with cars containing Yanks going for a drink or returning from one. As soon as you cross the border, both sides of the road are lined with a street of bars, dancing halls, gambling dens, brothels, with Yanks, male & female, so thick there is no standing room, all drunk, all amatory (even respectable matrons of 45), all losing money at roulette, all happy. On the American

ON THE GOLDEN STATE HIGHWAY

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Your letter of Oct. 11 reached me the day before yesterday at San Diego, on the borders of Mexico. I was glad to get it. Soon I shall be turning eastward, & then I shall get letters oftener.<sup>3</sup> — Good news about John's teeth!<sup>4</sup> But bad about your leg. I hope it is not arthritis.<sup>5</sup> Glad Jason<sup>6</sup> is nice. They must have handled him badly, as they seem to have found him troublesome.—I agree with you about Grethe<sup>7</sup> & Zora<sup>8</sup> being better than less educated women; you will never get our point of view really understood by women who are not well educated.—I wrote earlier saying I agree to Betty & José being raised to £95.<sup>9</sup>—Good about your mother's eye. Bravo for your speech to the Chinks!<sup>10</sup>

Two days ago, being Sunday, I found myself near Mexico with 2 hours to spare, so I took a taxi & went over the border.<sup>11</sup> The whole 14 miles the road was thick with cars containing Yanks going for a drink or returning from one. As soon as you cross the border, both sides of the road are lined with a street of bars, dancing halls, gambling dens, brothels, with Yanks, male & female, so thick there is no standing room, all drunk, all amatory (even respectable matrons of

<sup>3</sup> The letter he received survives (RA2 710.104039). The envelope was readdressed c/o Dr. Howard Bard, 3372 Front St., San Diego, Calif.

<sup>4</sup> John Conrad, 4th Earl Russell (1921–86). He was at last losing his front teeth.

<sup>5</sup> It proved not to be arthritis, as Dora's reply of 11 November 1929 explains.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Harvey, son of Dorothy Harvey, one of Helen Dudley's sisters, who attended Beacon Hill School for several years. See RA Rec. Acq. 370 (iii, iv, x).

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps Grethe Frehhammer, a Dane. Letters from her in 1934–35 survive.

<sup>8</sup> Zora Schupp, later Lasch. She made an academic study of Beacon Hill School, and published an article on it ("A School that Children Rule Described by Nebraska Woman", *World Herald*, Omaha, 2 Nov. 1930, p. 7), and left an autobiographical ms. with several pages on her acquaintance with Russell and experiences at Beacon Hill School (Rec. Acq. 1,007).

<sup>9</sup> Russell had written on 11 October. Elizabeth Cross, appointed to the teaching staff of Beacon Hill School in 1928. José (?) was a teacher at Beacon Hill School. He is referred to as simply José in Dora Russell, *The Tamarisk Tree 2: My School and the Years of the War* (London: Virago, 1980), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Dora had told Russell that she had gone to the Chinese lunch in his place and made a revolutionary speech. (In private communications, until old age, Russell several times used such referring expressions.)

<sup>11</sup> To Tijuana. It was during Prohibition.

45), all losing money at roulette, all happy. On the American side of the frontier is a huge notice saying "Driving a car when intoxicated is a gaol offence." My chauffeur, who came from Bristol & was a charming fellow, consented to drink one glass of beer with me, but no more. He says there are *no* respectable American women: he has driven a car 3 times from coast to coast, & he knows. From this scene I had to return post haste to preach in a Unitarian Church<sup>12</sup>—it felt queer. The chauffeur turned up at my lecture. I went partly in order to find out if Stella's palmistry<sup>13</sup> was sound.

Yesterday I met Millikan, the eminent physicist<sup>14</sup>—a pleasant fellow but an earnest Xtian. I was lecturing to students on the philosophy of physics.<sup>15</sup> Then I was entertained by Upton Sinclair: a dull man, just like his books. He talks on & on, in a flat voice, about scandals. His wife<sup>16</sup> is middle-aged, & agrees with Shaw in hating the body; she thinks pregnancy just awful, & food regrettable. She practises theosophy & leans towards Xtian science. A profitable day: \$700.

As for Watson<sup>17</sup>: I accused him of Puritanism; he said no, he would show people how to get any psychological result they wanted.

<sup>12</sup> Russell spoke under the auspices of the San Diego Open Forum on "Civilization and the Machine"—a lecture he gave often on this tour. It was reported as "English Prophet Summarizes Modern Machine Progress", *San Diego Union and Daily Bee*, 28 Oct. 1929, sec. 1, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Neither Stella nor what she read in Russell's palm is known.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Millikan, 1868–1953, then President of California Institute of Technology, Pasadena. According to the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, he was "perhaps the most famous American scientist of his day". As "a leading exponent of the reconcilability of science and religion in the 1920's", his conversation may have provided Russell with one more example of the sort of scientific religiosity he deplored in Chap. v of his next book but one, *The Scientific Outlook* (1931).

<sup>15</sup> At Caltech. Russell gave his lecture titled "The Philosophy of Physics". For a report see "Mind, Matter No Longer Duality?", *Pasadena Star News*, 28 Oct. 1928. The report tells us that Russell was to speak in the afternoon on "The Outlook for Civilization" at the lecture course at the Pasadena Community Playhouse.

<sup>16</sup> Upton and Mary Craig Sinclair lived in Pasadena. Russell often praised his books, especially for their political content.

<sup>17</sup> Russell had told Dora in his letter of 26 September of meeting John B. Watson (1878–1958), the behaviourist psychologist, on board ship. He had had "some simply marvellous talks with Watson, which should have gone straight into 'The Religion of the Machine Age'. If I get time I will write out what he said on sex: it was more like him than one could have expected." *The Religion of the Machine Age* was not published until 1983. It does not refer to the topics discussed with Watson.

He had taught white rats to be virtuous by giving them electric shocks whenever they attempted adultery; this in the end led them to love their wives exclusively, & the same procedure would work with Man. Then he got talking about "orgasms for women"—said 80% of American married women have never had an orgasm; talked of chemical methods of making them more susceptible or men slower; said most American men take only 30 seconds to get an emission. I said couldn't the matter be treated psychologically; he said it could, but obviously preferred physiological methods. Then he said he had no desire for any kind of friendship with men, & never got any pleasure in their company. Then he talked against "one-night stands" as he called them; said he could neither get nor give pleasure in one night with a woman, but needed a fortnight camping out in the woods. I disagreed; I said (thinking of Alice Crunden<sup>18</sup>) that one night could be the basis of a valuable friendship. At that he got very angry & very rude, accused me of sentimentality, & said the idea that friendship could have value was merely silly. All this time his eyes were sad, haunted, lonely, & frightened. Then he began to drink champagne, instantly became maudlin drunk, & lamented that he never hears from Prof. Angell,<sup>19</sup> though he was his assistant for many years. This failure of friendship moved him to the verge of tears. There was more but I have forgotten it; except an account of a Dr. friend of his who does abortions, 10 a day during the lunch-hour, & the victims (typists etc.) go back to work that same afternoon. Also he talked about Paris like the wild men in Dodsworth.<sup>20</sup> He could be civilized but isn't, so won't admit there is civilization & is wildly unhappy. He epitomizes America.

When I was in New York this time I took up with Alice Crunden again—she is so kind. She thinks of coming to London soon after Xmas; if so, I suppose I should visit her from time to time there. I don't think she would stay more than 2 or 3 months, & she wants to

<sup>18</sup> She was a benefactress of the School. Dora was very grateful in the letter Russell is answering for her gift of \$1,000. In his letter of 2 December he writes that Alice Crunden is going to give another \$1,000 in January.

<sup>19</sup> James Rowland Angell (1869–1949), Professor of Psychology at Chicago when Watson was a student and an instructor there. By 1929 Angell was President of Yale.

<sup>20</sup> Sinclair Lewis, *Dodsworth, a Novel* (1929). Russell had stayed with Lewis and his wife, Dorothy Thompson, at their home in Vermont, instead of speaking in Buffalo. Russell and Lewis had met in 1923, when Lewis campaigned for Russell in Chelsea.

know that you would not mind much. She wants to help the school in any way she can, & would have been willing to resume the plan of living at Battine House,<sup>21</sup> but I do not think that would work.

I am glad you have had Barry<sup>22</sup> to cheer you up. These separations are hateful; let us hope "Marriage & Morals" will sell,<sup>23</sup> & then I shan't have to come here again. This is the town from which "Sun-Maid Raisins" come;<sup>24</sup> I have just been talking<sup>25</sup> to people who grow them. Perhaps this will interest the children. It is interesting seeing what agriculture can be in a mechanical civilization.

Goodbye my Darling. Six weeks gone, & 7½ to come. I do long for home.

Your  
B.

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<sup>21</sup> A building, principally a dormitory for teachers, about 1.5 miles away from Telegraph House and near the village of N. Marden.

<sup>22</sup> Griffin Barry, father of Dora's next two children.

<sup>23</sup> *Marriage and Morals* had been published by Liveright early in the month. The sales, despite the Crash, amounted to 10,600 by 23 November (Rec. Acq. 52).

<sup>24</sup> I.e., Fresno. In his next letter he returns to Sun-Maid Raisins: "All Sun-maid raisins grow in a valley which 30 years ago was nothing but dust."

<sup>25</sup> Russell lectured this day on "Can Europe and America Understand Each Other?" in Fresno. For a report, see "America-England Pact Held Key to World Peace", *Fresno Bee*, 30 Oct. 1929, p. 6-A.

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