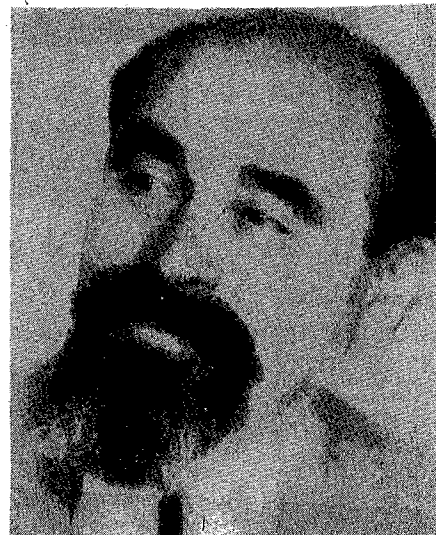


A DOCTOR'S APPRENTICESHIP

(Autobiographical Sketches)

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definitely about either God or the Devil, came to ask me what they were. Then he answered Victor: "I like the Devil more because everything he does is fun." Of course, he had distorted my reply.

7.

As Rosefine had—and even today, in her old age, still has—a splendid soprano voice, she sang to Amour from the wealth of songs that she knew and there was one in which a bird broke its wing ("*se cassa l'aile*"), and which had a particularly tragic ending. In spite of the fact that it made him cry bitterly, he begged her to repeat it every day for weeks.

The most difficult thing to explain to this child was the past. When told about the Romans, he remarked: "They existed before I was born, didn't they?" And when I thought I had clarified the matter, he still questioned me: "Then, you were not born in their time?"

He understood Buffalo Bill with his Indians and cowboys and Pawnee Bill with his Far East. But when told about the antipodes, he demurred. He would say: "It smells the antipodes," meaning a cellar. To him both were deep in the soil.

8.

At a given moment, he was the happiest child. We became members of the Single Tax colony, "Free Acres," founded by the then famous lawyer and author, Bolton Hall. We had a bungalow and a tent and we were part and parcel of the woods, the fields stretching out before us, the tall trees, the birds' nests, the insects, the frogs, the lizards, the snakes, the turtles, the mushrooms, the wild flowers. Now the boy was busy from early morning until bedtime. He worked, he studied, he cultivated, he planted, he transplanted. His eyes were full of dreams and contemplation.

Besides living in our world, he lived in another of his own creation. One would be incomplete without the other. His own mythology was as good as the one about which he had heard. And so he had the Nightches and the Yellow-winged

beings, whose "wings were yellow and more beautiful than gold." They, and others whose names I have forgotten, were unceasingly going and undoing things in the woods, making the rain, and the winds and stopping them. But they depended on Amour, who was, as he claimed, "the strongest man in the world." And when a lady neighbor asked him, "Why do you want to be so strong?" he replied. "Whether I want it or not, I cannot help it, I am."

He liked the fable of the oak tree that breaks and the reed that bends, and when asked which of the two was stronger, he said: "The wind."

Both he and his cousin Rions, who often lived with us, wanted me to play with them, and tried to interfere with my commuting to the city. So they invented various schemes to make my presence necessary at the colony, or trickeries to cause me to be late for the train.

Once Amour was sure that I would miss the train. True, I was fooled about the time, the clock had been fixed by them to indicate the wrong hour. But I still thought I could make the train.

It was raining hard, and my raincoat did not prevent me from getting wet. I hung my shoes over my shoulders, and carried my professional bag and ran. Amour and his dog accompanied me. It was almost two miles from where we lived to the station. I asked the boy to go back, to save him from getting wet. He said no; he must see whether I caught the train. Rions remained at home, being neither as curious nor as brave as Amour. But our boy was sorely disappointed when he saw me arrive at precisely the moment the train stopped, and I set foot on the car step just as the engine was about to pull out.

Five days later, when I returned from New York loaded with things I had brought and was about to walk up the hill to our bungalow, or "gunglalow," as the children of the colony called it, I found Amour waiting, who said: "All I want to know is what comes after twenty."

"You could have asked Rosefine, couldn't you?"

"No, I am sure she is wrong. She said thirty, then forty, then fifty, I know it is different."

"Do you mean twenty-one?"

"Oh yes!" And he clapped his hands and ran home ahead of me.

Here are some examples of lies told by our boy to his friends who believed his every word:

There was a plant that no one could touch except Amour. It was poisoned and one died as soon as one came in contact with it. He showed its leaves.

"Benoît has opened a person's head and showed me how the brain worked. Then he cut up the whole body and I saw the skeleton, the blood vessels, the heart, the nerves and the muscles. Then he put them all back and made the body alive again."

"I saw a golden statue that pours out gold when you insert a penny into it.

"My grandma bought me a balloon with which I went up to the moon and the stars and even higher.

"I have a machine with which I can cut liquids. This is the way it works," etc.

"I have made a voyage in Asia and I have seen lots of people there. Of course, they talk Asian. This is how: Carapasilawokrakulimato—palasomartificialpudralica."

And here is a trait which shows how a freely brought up child, who had never been taught politeness, understood things: He was sent to a Mrs. Murray, an elderly colonist, with a package to be handed to her. After she received it, the boy exclaimed: "Thank you!" He was all flushed with excitement and happiness at the idea that she was nice enough to accept the object.

And another instance of how a naturally brought up child reacts when he feels guilty: He broke a beautiful cup which we all liked and he began to cry. He came to his mother and accused himself. No one else blamed him for his involuntary mischief. He was so unhappy that he had to be consoled and kissed. Is there a need for any punishment?

Once he became interested in washing clothes. Of course, his work was messy. But no one interfered with it, because it meant another step toward the development of his character and of his sense of duty.

And at another time he discovered commerce. He loaned a neighbor his little carriage used for hauling small stones, and received ten cents. Since then, he began to try to sell whatever he could: For instance, the tomatoes grown in our garden.

He never felt offended when he was called "little pig." Indeed, that was what he wanted to be. He loved all the animals. Also the plants—and he dissected leaves and petals and rootlets and examined them with the magnifying glass

9.

Finally, he reached his sixth year. At that time, he wanted to learn to play the piano. It so happened that I, in spite of our poverty, had bought, on the installment plan, a good Knabe for Rosefine, and the boy was attracted to it.

For years, I had been impressed by Rosefine's voice. She, however, was not as ambitious as I; on the contrary, she belittled herself. But, when I took her to an honest and capable expert, my opinion was confirmed. Then she did submit to my exhortation and began to study singing, which she continued until the death of her brother in the first World War, as a soldier of the French army, in 1915. That terrible incident blocked her desire to improve her voice, and since then she rarely sang. Her voice had a Galli-Curci quality, and she even appeared in public a few times, quite successfully.

For practicing, she needed a piano, and Amour thought he too could accomplish something with it. I procured a good teacher for him, and later he was a pupil at the Damrosch school. But this was to no avail. He discontinued studying when he himself no longer was interested, and he never went back to it.

10.

Another important event occurred about that time, or when the boy was only five years old. The Ferrer school opened in New York, and I, who had been one of its founders, enrolled him there. Yes, he was the first to be registered and the first child who presented himself there. The person most responsible for its opening, the well-known Socialist-Anarchist writer, Leonard D. Abbott, was at hand to receive us and his first words to the child were: "Isn't it great, Amour?"

Our initial difficulty was that after two or three days the boy decided that he would go to school by himself, not having need of anyone to accompany him. There were several busy avenues to cross, having heavy traffic, and we of course were afraid, so we tried to deceive him by having an adult, his grandmother, follow him at a distance. But as soon as he discovered her presence, he quickly turned back home. From then on, he went alone, and no grown-up could be more careful than he.

While I am on the subject of caution, I may mention the fact that one of the few outdoor near-accidents that occurred to him during his childhood was when, under his mother's guidance, he was crossing Astor Place just as a huge fire engine drawn by four or six enormous horses came along at high speed from Third Avenue. The child, fascinated by the loud clanging, by the shining vehicle, and the wonderful animals, fell in front of them. Had it been a machine, he would have been killed, but the horse over him rose on his forelegs as high as he could, so that a man in the street had a chance within that split second to pick up the boy.

Also, this is the occasion to say that the first time he traveled by himself to our country place at the Free Acres colony, he was seven years old. He had assured us that he could do it, and it was true. He had to walk a great deal until he got to the street car that would take him to the Christopher Street Ferry, to buy his ticket, to cross the Hudson River. Then he had to get the Lackawanna train at

Hoboken, to stop at Berkeley Heights and to trudge or, for all I knew, to run up to the top of the hill. And once he went, instead, through Plainfield, New Jersey, which was even more remote. Happily, we thought, he usually did not have to do this all alone, but he never worried about it.

However, these new and more serious duties did not interfere with his humor and playfulness. For instance, he claimed that the moon belonged to him, that he was born in the lunar town called Tundguirigué. He often talked in a language of his own and when asked what it was, he said, "moonish."

He was so convincing that the children whose hero he always was, believed him implicitly.

He had learned to swim at a very early age and graduated as an extraordinary swimmer, leaving behind his teacher, that is his own father. By the way, I also taught him to ride a bicycle—a real, large one, while I, who had used this vehicle for some time, never became as proficient on it as he.

He told his little comrades that he swam in the ocean up to the horizon, where the water met the heavens and then continued swimming into the sky—only that was flying—and so he landed upon the moon.

He invented some animals. One of them was "gui—gui," with which he played a great deal, but which he was unable to sell to his friends, that is, they never believed in its existence.

He demonstrated to them—and to us—his handling of snakes. It was a fact that he was skillful in catching "garter" snakes and other harmless reptiles and carrying them by letting them slide from one of his hands and forearms to the other, so that they could not escape while he was running. To the children he said he was magic.

Once or twice he was slightly bitten, but he did not mind it.

In the early hours of an evening, he spied the shining planet Jupiter, and a crowd of boys and girls gathered around him. He lectured to them about this celestial object,

spoke about its moons and, when asked seriously whether he had been there, he said no, but he expected to visit it some time in the future. At that moment, the sympathetic secretary of the colony, Miss Hicks, appeared and asked: "Amour, what is that resplendent star?"—"A star? No, it is a planet! And since both of you have never met, let me introduce you to one another: Mister Jupiter, Miss Hicks."

She herself told us this story, and she repeated it to many in the years to come.

That was also the period when he invented various games. One of them was the opposite of racing for speed: "Let us see who could move slowest."

In his conversation with his group in those days, I overheard the question: "What's a hero?" and his answer: "A hero is one who dares." And he immediately illustrated it: There were two parties and he acted out both of them: "We are against the king!" "We are for the king!"—"But we are ten billion and you are only one billion!"

11.

We took him to the New Theatre, now long defunct, and he saw and heard Maeterlinck's play, "The Blue Bird."

The next time he met his friends, he acted out for them, "The Blue Bird." He did this too when he saw "Peter Pan" or Kitty Cheatham.

I used to visit Elizabeth Ferm's "school," located far downtown in New York. This splendid lady believed in full freedom for the children. She had, for the purpose of creating this school rented a store on an East Side street and transformed it into a school or kindergarten. (She would have objected to both these words.) The place was most interesting. But when I took Amour there, he did not like it and never returned.

Later, both the Fermes, the husband (Alexis) and wife, worked as teachers at the Ferrer School when it was located at Stelton, New Jersey, and they continued their jobs to the end of their lives. At least concerning her, I know that she died at the school at about the age of eighty-five. She left

behind a magnificent little book, *Freedom in Education*, a classic among its kind.

But Amour did not follow the Ferrer school when it moved out of town. In fact, he was its pupil for a few months only. He left it while Will Durant, who acquired fame later as an author, was still the teacher. Will used to compliment me regarding my way of rearing the child.

Amour hated the methods employed there, or at least they evoked no interest in him: "They only fight. Nothing else happens. I don't want to go there."

And he stopped attending the school, which brought back to me the problem of what course to follow concerning the boy's education.

He was critical of all the schools. About his Ethical Culture class, he said that its windows were open no more than a fraction of an inch, and illustrating this, he showed us the slit of a screw. At Ferrer, he objected to everything: the teacher, the teaching, the students.

But while I was still wondering what to do next, he was happy: he had brought back from the country a dog, a beagle, which he called, "*Croque-Callotte*" which is a sort of anti-clerical name, and when the animal was lost, he replaced it with a cat, also from the colony, "Winky Woolup."

12.

He and his young companions were forever interested in animals: one dog used to come to our camp, that is to Amour, as a guest for years—not for food either; it was a most platonic friendship. He was not hungry and the only things he accepted were walnuts, apparently because of the fun he had breaking them open and swallowing the contents, at which he was most efficient.

But once he came with at least one-third of his pelt ripped off, fur and all. This looked as if it had been the result of a fierce fight or a complicated accident that had happened when he walked through some cruel thorn-bushes or prickly bramble shrubs. A neighbor, who saw him, had his gun ready and said: "Let me free him from his misery."

