

MY LIFE TO THE PRESENT

Psychology 108
April 15, 1931
Professor R.H. Paynter.

Jesse Colchamiro

My Life to the Present

As far as I know, the history of my ancestry would not be very different from the history of any ancestry. From conversations held with my parents and relatives, I have learned that my ancestors on my maternal and paternal side lived in Jerusalem, were brought up in the Jewish faith, and later migrated to the northwestern part of Greece in one of the centuries before Christ for purposes of trade and other reasons. As other immigrants from Jerusalem migrated to this land, there naturally developed a colony, in which the old Jewish religion was practiced and in which most of the inhabitants lived an peasant form of life. This group cared very little, and in fact, knew very little concerning the affairs of the state and allowed the power that had possession of the land--either the Turkish or Greek government, for it changed hands often--to rule them so long as they were not disturbed.

Both of my parents were born in Greece--in families of very limited means and still more limited education. Their parents lived very frugally, and worked very hard to make both ends meet. All the children of my grand-parents received very little education because they had to help support the family even from their early

youth--families which numbered on the average from ten to twelve children. Both my mother and father have been strong and healthy all their life mainly because they have worked hard from their early childhood and have come from hardy stock. I have noticed from a study of the character traits of my parents and relatives one dominant personality trait on my maternal side and one very dominant personality trait on my paternal side--both traits being exactly opposite. My mother and all her brothers and sisters are very kind, gentle, rather meek and simple, and have an outstanding submissive trait; whereas my father and all his relations possess exactly opposite character traits. They are aggressive, very intelligent, ambitious, not too kind, and have in general a very dominant personality. Unfortunately, all on my paternal side have a very violent temper.

At the age of seventeen my father left his family and came to America to seek his fortune. His entire family followed shortly--about the year 1905. My mother's family also came to America about this time. Both families had to live very economically in order to eek out a living. The courtship of my mother, Nancy Matza, which had begun in Greece was continued in New York City. About the year 1908, my parents were married, and became citizens shortly thereafter. As far as I know, they are very happily married for they have had no

serious quarrels; my mother always followed the will of my father. The relation and contact between father and children is the exact opposite ~~from~~ the relations of mother and children. My mother is very friendly to the children and the latter in turn have always confided in her and looked to her when in trouble, but the contact between father and children has always been cold and strained. Although I am the oldest child in the family, I can truthfully say that never once can I remember the time that my father ever played with or spoke in a friendly way to me. This coldness on the part of my father may be due to the fact that he is almost entirely devoid of sentiment. Whenever the subject of the illness or death of some member of the family is brought up, (a brother died at the age of six from pneumonia, although none of the children remember him) he treats the subject very lightly and jokingly. This ability to totally dominate his feelings is a trait that I have always admired, but I believe that it is, in this case, carried too far to the extreme for it has the effect of making the children believe that their father is too "cold" to become friendly with or confide in. Secondly, all the children have always carried a fear of their father because of the spankings they have received since early childhood, and this fear of their father is responsible for the fact that they always run to their mother when they are in trouble.

Even at present, although I am at the age of twenty-one, and have tried very often, I have nevertheless not been able to break the barrier between myself (all the children are in the same position) and my father. However, I shall not cease until I succeed.

However, there seems to be some discrepancy in my father's nature. Although he is very cold to the children, he nevertheless is very jolly and is the "life" of every group. From conversations held by his friends and relatives, and from what I have seen, I realize that he is very well liked and sought by all people. He always has a joke for everybody and leaves every group in good spirits and desirous of his company. I have often seen people begging him to remain at a gathering in order to keep the life of the party at a high level. It is rather difficult for me to explain this difference in attitude within and out of the home.

Another reason which may account for the fact that my father has never been intimate with the children is the largeness of the family. There are at present ten in the family; I am the oldest of the eight children. All the children are and have been very proficient in their studies. The four eldest, including myself, have graduated from high school in three and one-half years. With the exception of two girls who are now in business, all the children are contemplating a college career.

This fact is due mainly to my father's high regard for an education--an attitude obtained partly because he himself was deprived of an education and because his partner in business is a European college graduate.

Another fact, for which I feel fortunate, is the fine home conditions under which I have been brought up. First living in a poor neighborhood on the lower east side of New York, my parents have steadily moved to a better neighborhood. As far as I can recall, I have never been in want of any of the necessities of life such as food, clothing, or shelter. Fortunately, my father who is a manufacturer of dresses, has been able to provide rather well for his family. The relations among the children have always been of the best. I may say with perfect safety that both my family history and home conditions have been very good and conducive to the development of a well-rounded and wholesome personality. Let us now turn to my personal history.

I was born in August 11, 1909 on the lower east side of New York City. It was in this district that I started my schooling. When I was nine years old, my parents moved to Carnarsie where I resumed my schooling. Nothing of outstanding importance or significance occurred in my boyhood days; it was the boyhood of the average. Fortunately the conditions surrounding my birth and boyhood were very good, and I have never suffered any

any serious illness. From Carnarsie, we moved to a good section in upper New York where I completed my public school education. As I gaze back to the days of my boyhood, I see one happy day after another; I still feel the blissful innocence of those days. I can remember that little group we used to call the "gang" playing make-believe "Cops and Robbers" and "Cowboys and Indians." We used to romp about Mount Morris Park, climb the trees and visualize with all its horrors the drama of the colorful West. I can still remember the thrill we felt from hiding on the roofs of the houses and smoking the tobacco of the discarded cigarette butts in penny corn-cob pipes. Without shame or horror, in fact with pleasure, I recall the days the "gang" would hike to the Hudson River, and after stripping ourselves of our clothes, swim about in the mucky waters of this river. I also recall with joy the thrill I received when I passed the tenderfoot test in the scouting organization. I can still remember the fun we used to have when we went "hitching" on the street cars with our roller-skates. All in all, I may say that it was a boyhood filled with frolic and fun, but also fraught with much danger..

At the beginning of my high school career, my parents moved to the residential end of Coney Island. After completing the last month of my grammar school career in an elementary school in Coney Island, I entered

New Utrecht High School and elected a general course. Although I graduated from High School in three and one-half years, I nevertheless never studied much; I always did the minimum amount of school work. There was only one subject that caused me much trouble, and that was Latin. When I first entered New Utrecht High School, I found Latin on my program, even though I had not elected this subject. This was due to the fact that the class had to carry five subjects instead of the four that we had elected. Unfortunately for me, I did not take the trouble to drop Latin and elect another subject--which privilege I had. Because I had a teacher in the first year of the subject who was very "easy-going," and because I seldom completed the assignments, I never mastered the fundamentals and always had great difficulty in keeping up with the class in later years. Although I never failed the course, I nevertheless never obtained more than the minimum passing grade throughout the three years' study of this language. However, I have only myself to blame; and it has taught me an important lesson--the one who shirks his duty always loses out in the end. I have never had any difficulty with the other subjects; but still, I have never received any good grades because I always spent all the time I could spare in playing ball with my friends. I am very glad that I exercised a great deal, perhaps to the detriment of my school grades, because I have developed a very strong

body which I hope will make the "physical obstacles of life" very easy to conquer. I have spent all my summer vacations from high school on the beach (which is only one block from my house), and have during this period mastered all the sea sports such as swimming, canoeing, and rowing. Well! To get back to school. After completing the third term in New Utrecht, the students who lived in Coney Island were sent to James Madison High School to complete their course. In June, 1927, I graduated from the latter school.

Immediately after graduation, I began making plans for my future. My parents had always desired that I enter the legal profession, and since I thought that I was better adopted for this profession, I decided to obtain an Arts degree and then enter the study of Law. Somewhat later, I decided that I would first enter the teaching profession and study law in my spare time; but I have at present decided otherwise. Unless I change my mind again, I shall remain in the teaching profession for it seems to appeal to me more. During the summer of 1927, I worked in "Feltman's" in Coney Island selling frankfurters. This work aided me in two respects--first, in respect to health, for it made me work in the open on the boardwalk; and second, I managed to save some money in order to help pay my tuition for the first year. My decision to enter Long Island University was rather unexpected. I had applied at City College but learned that my grades were low and that I would have to take competitive examinations in latin, Mathematics, and others. Since I

greatly disliked the first two subjects, I decided to try another college. I applied at New York University and was admitted, but learned that I must continue the study of Latin for the Arts Course. This and the fact that the tuition in Long Island University was somewhat less finally made me decide to enter the latter school. In September 1927, I entered Long Island University.

I have never, during my four years attendance in this university, studied any subject that was actually distasteful--in fact, I have received very good marks in every one. At the beginning, I began to concentrate upon history, although I never really liked it, because I heard that it would help me in my study of Law. Later, when I decided to remain in the teaching profession, I continued to major in History, although I have always enjoyed much more the study of Public Speaking. I have taken about twenty points of speech work and have about a 92% average in this field, and I hope to teach both History and Speech in the future. My average per cent in History is somewhat lower; it is about 88%.

As far as extra-curricular activities go, I can say that I have attended very few indeed. With the exception of the History and Government Clubs, I have participated in no extra-curricular activities. The reason for this lack of interest in outside school activities lies in the fact that I always hurried home to meet my friends and

play ball. During the first three years of my college career, I have worked only during the summer vacations. I spent the first two seasons working in "Feltman's" and became very intimate and friendly with my employer. However, although my employer urged me to come back, and I had to openly disregard the advise of my father to continue, I flatly refused to go back to the same position the third season. The work had become too monotonous. I could not bear to work twelve hours a day, and six days a week, even though the work was very easy. That summer, I worked in a laundry, driving my own wagon, on my own route. I enjoyed the work tremendously. I worked from seven o'clock in the morning to four in the afternoon, and had a glorious time. Whistling gayly as I drove leisurely around to my customers, I learned for the first time what it meant to be utterly free from all mental cares. It was indeed a mental and also a physical rest. The following summer was spent working in the post office about two hours every evening except Sunday. I have always regretted the fact that I accepted the post office appointment in June 1930. I am still working in the Post Office on a part-time basis (about 10 hours a week) and expect to drop this position as soon as I graduate. I work in the post office as little as possible--up to the point where I may be fired for excessive absences. The trouble lies in the fact that the work is monotonous--"monotonous" is, I daresay, a word much too mild to express the utter listlessness and hopeless tediousness of this so-called "work."

The labor is neither physical nor mental; it is merely automatic, and machine-like and can give no satisfaction except to a perfect automaton. In the first place, each employee is merely a number--he enters as a number, he punches his time-card as a number, he is placed to work as a number, and finally is paid as a number. Everything is so lifeless, stereotyped, and unnatural. Day in and day out, year in and year out, the employee is required to stand before a case with thirty-six coup-holes--each one representing a certain district; and continuously place the letters into their corresponding "coup." The foremen stand over the men like the ants over the aphids attempting to exact the utmost from these human "cogs." I am so disgusted with the work that I have often hoped to be fired and thus be relieved from this obsession which financial conditions at present prevent me from casting aside. I believe that this experience has branded me with an intense hatred for all work of a monotonous and tedious character--an impression which I shall never be able to eradicate. In fact I have always remarked to my friends that if I had the choice between working in the post office for the rest of my life and becoming a tramp, I would immediately and without any hesitation select the latter course. Speaking about a dislike for monotonous and routine work, or as one may call it the lack of perseverance, although I do not possess this latter fault, I can recall the time I began to study the art of playing the violin at

the age of twelve. At the end of a month's practice, I gave it up in despair for I could not resist the calls of my friends to play with them. Although I may be in a disadvantageous position in not being able to adapt myself to all kinds of work, I can nevertheless truthfully state that I am very thankful for acquiring this attitude. At least I know that I shall never allow myself to fall into a "rut" and throw my life away working on a tedious and monotonous task as so many people do. However, I must not allow myself to criticize the action of other people so bitterly for they probably hold different attitudes.

During the first half of my college career, I belonged to a small club in the neighborhood. All the boys were with slight variations of the same age, about half attending school of the same grade and the other half working. It was organized for social purposes. When I first entered Long Island University, I moved from Coney Island to Brighton Beach. As I was a stranger in the neighborhood, I decided to help organize a club or join one that had already been formed. After meeting a former high school acquaintance, and after being presented to his friends, I proposed my plan for forming a club. The plan was immediately adopted and after a bitter quarrel over the fact that I was a stranger, I was elected president. The disappointment of my former school friend who was thereby relegated to second position and who had formerly been the

leader of the group caused him to become very unfriendly towards me, but I have always, to the best of my ability, maintained a friendly attitude towards him. During the two years that I remained with the club, I continued to hold the leadership, but I left at the end of this period because I became tired of the monotonous character that the organization was assuming and because I craved for something of a higher type than a small neighborhood club. Later, I joined a junior democratic organization in the neighborhood, but left because it was conducted in a childish manner. At present I am biding my time and waiting for an opportunity to enter an organization of my liking where I shall have a chance to work myself up.

With the exception of playing ball with my friends and engaging very actively in social organizations, and affairs, I have had no particular interests. Reading fiction or attending movies have not appeal; I enjoy most meeting people and studying them. I remember that one of the most interesting experiences I ever had in this connection occurred two weeks ago. During the Easter vacation, some friends and I drove to Atlantic City. There we rented a room for the night in one of the boarding houses. In the evening my friends left to see the neighborhood while I remained at home and attempted to "break into" the family circle of the landlady. Somehow or other, I managed to enter the circle of the family and was introduced to a

middle-aged man who was a doctor and a specialist in the "X-Ray" field. I spent two hours conversing with him on all subjects under the sun and greatly enjoyed his attempt to study me while at the same time I was attempting to find out what type of an individual he was. I take great pride in my ability to "size up" and individual very quickly and often very accurately. I do not know what the reason is but I seem to react very quickly, in fact almost instinctively, to the actions of another person and then be able to give a rather true description of the person's character. I do hope that this ability or as some call it, this "sixth sense," will remain with me always for I have found it very helpful in attempting to retain the leadership of a group.

During my stay with this organization, I have continuously followed the policy of staying out late whenever I could, especially over the week-end. This break-up of the systematic schedule for sleep has probably had harmful effects. However, at present I am doing all within my will power to break my self of this habit, if habit I may call it. With this exception, and the fact that I smoke, I can truthfully state that I have cultivated no other bad habits. My sex experiences have been normal. Although I have never had any sexual contact with women, mainly because of the fear of disease and the lack of funds, I have nevertheless substituted for this so-called necessity what the modern generation call "necking parties." I have never been bothered by my sex instinct. However, I do not look upon

sexual contact with women as a horrible act of immorality as many people do; I merely look upon it as an inevitable act which tends to satisfy one of the primary instincts of humans.

My understanding of human nature which I discussed in a foregoing paragraph extends not only to outsiders, but to myself as well. I often attempt to study my personality as a different entity apart from myself. I try to determine exactly how other people react towards me and then correct my mistakes. However, strange as it may seem, I have not as yet perceived any feature of my personality that requires correction; and I say this in all sincerity. I have found that all who meet me react very favorably. This fact may be due to my perfect honesty in all matters. I would rather lose all my friends than say anything or do anything that is hypocritical or dishonest. I am fair and square to all; I would not leave a friend who is in trouble no matter what gain would thereby accrue to me. I have found also that my brutal frankness and aggressiveness on all matters has all the more tended to alienate my enemies and bring my real friends much closer to me. I am also able to control myself perfectly; I never let my temper get out of my control. My friends know me for a jolly fellow at all times, and are indeed surprised when I seem to lose my temper, ^{which I} ~~and~~ sometimes do for reasons of my own. I have as yet not associated with a group of boys of whom I have not naturally assumed leadership. It seems

that when some problem confronts us, they all turn to me for a solution; and I am forced to assume leadership. I do not dislike this; in fact, I enjoy it tremendously for there seems to be something within my nature that is aggressive and wants to climb to the top notwithstanding the odds. However, it may merely be the desire to gratify my instinct of assuming power and receiving praise; although I personally do not think this is the reason. I have always hated anything that is not natural. I have always looked upon with disgust all the modern standards of hypocritical etiquette and mollycoddle and insincere conduct. If I dislike to act in a certain way which is looked upon as the standard method, I brush it aside. I believe that I have acquired this attitude from my study of history from which I have come to understand the antiquity and senselessness of many of our folkways, and also from contact with a certain very religious friend of mine. I was for a period of six years very intimate with this person who was watched by his parents as does a cat a captured mouse. He had to observe every religious scruple from "A to Z;" and what was worse, he was very much ashamed of his behavior and tried to conceal it from all--without even once attempting to break the domination of his parents. This experience was very revolting to my nature and may account for the fact that I hate domination of any kind. Strange to say, notwithstanding the fact that I am very aggressive in all matters and fear

no one, I am extremely kind. I have often wondered how this is possible. I cannot even kill a cock-roach without feeling sorry. I seem to have a great deal of sympathy for the "under-dog." I can remember a certain time that I almost antagonized everyone in the club fighting for the retention of a proposed member who did not conform with our standard of intelligence, but for whom I felt a great deal of sympathy. Many of the people I meet seem surprised when they realize the dual nature of my personality. It seems to be a combination of a submissive and a dominant personality. I say that this is a strange fact because the reader will usually notice that there is not very much kindness or sympathy in a dominant and fighting personality and vice versa. However, I feel that I have acquired this unique personality from the make-up of the personality of my parents--my father is dominance personified, while my mother is submissiveness personified.

While we are on the topic of protecting the "under-dog," I remember the arguments I entered into with my friends who attend other universities as to the relative merits of Long Island University. I am proud of the fact that I made ~~my~~ a sneering critic of this university swallow his words with my arguments. In fact I was so obsessed with the idea of pointing out the merits of this institution to outsiders that at a meeting of the student body in the St. George Playhouse I conquered my fear of speaking from a public platform, for it was my first experience of

this kind, and urged the students to "fight" whenever their school was criticised without any substantial reasons. Although I was very sincere at the time, I later wondered if my decision to speak from a public platform was not colored by the fact that it gratified my desire to be "seen."

However, I know that I am not vain and I shall never allow my vanity to dominate my actions.

In matters of religion, I am extremely open-minded. I am very much interested in conversing on the subject of religion and often bring up this subject when I am engaged in a friendly conversation with a stranger. I feel that I can safely judge a person's intellectual ability by his views on religion--whether he is dogmatic and biased, or whether he is open-minded and understanding. Although I personally hold to no religious dogmas or practices because I feel that I can hold myself to the "path of righteousness," as some call it, without any outside aid; I nevertheless never take a sneering attitude towards the practices involved in any religion. I merely say that as long as one received any real satisfaction from so doing, then he should continue with it, for as psychology tells us it will aid him when he is in trouble. Were it not for this fact, I would be utterly opposed to the dogmatic standardization of religion. I am thankful for the fact that my parents are also open-minded in this connection, and never attempt to persuade me to change my views; perhaps

they know it would be futile.

As I stated before, I expect to enter the teaching profession. I believe I am well adapted for this vocation because I have had a good deal of training in caring for the problems of children in my psychology and education courses. I have also studied intensively the art of speaking--a fact which will help me tremendously in the teaching field. However, although I know that I care very much for this profession, I nevertheless do not feel in the mood to enter it immediately. I greatly desire to obtain any type of employment which entails travel and adventure. Perhaps this feeling has arisen because I have never had occasion to leave the city for any length of time. I know that I must satisfy this craving before I can settle down to the teaching profession. After spending several years in travel, I hope to return to the city and obtain employment as a teacher. I then expect to spend a good deal of my spare time in the field of politics. But why worry about the future now? Let come what may!

* * * * *

* *

*