

1. Meeting TP – Impressions

Picture to yourself a London businessman, conventional of suit, measured of speech, ‘a plain-looking man, suggesting in dress and appearance the English tradesman.’

Then picture the same man crawling and scraping through underground tunnels in Constantinople as he searches for lost manuscripts. Picture him in the forefront of a cosmic battle, reorienting soldiers as they ‘die’ in the chaos of war. Picture his own life preserved from certain death as a spirit guide intervenes, and a bullet passes right through him.

Welcome to the Two Worlds of Wellesley Tudor Pole.

Don’t stop yet. Climb aboard his Egyptian houseboat in World War One and listen to him ponder the future of the Near East with General Allenby or Chaim Weizmann. Press your ear to a door in the House of Commons in World War Two as he warns Churchill about psychic spying. Listen too at his London office between the wars as he advises the casualties of peace: the starving ex-officer who cannot support his family, the baffled relatives of a man possessed and committed to an asylum, the distressed family of a girl abducted by occultists.

Who was he, this ‘confidant of the great and lowly, the rich and the poor’? Who was he, this plain looking businessman, this spiritual adventurer, this man known as TP? At one time he thought the celebrated novelist Rosamond Lehmann might write his biography, so he gave her his instructions:

Avoid grandiosity. Depict one who lives mundanely, brings up a family, soldiers, engages in industry, travels, risks his life when the object justifies it, starts and runs the Big Ben Minute; takes over the Chalice Well property and administers a boys’ school; writes and lectures, studies Nature’s secrets.

(Letter to Rosamond Lehmann, 2.7.64)

That might have been what he wanted, but after his departure in 1968 (not ‘death’: he considered ‘death’ a misleading and destructive concept) there were many who failed to ‘avoid grandiosity’.

Major General L.L. Hoare, for instance: ‘T.P. appeared to be quite selfless and devoted to helping suffering humanity.’

Squadron Leader Peter Lovatt too: ‘A great man, whose work and example has long gone unrecognised.’

Major Oliver Villiers D.S.O.: ‘T.P. was undoubtedly one of the most spiritually evolved men of our time.’

Richard St. Barbe Baker: 'For me Glastonbury will always be a Holy Land and the Chalice Well a place of pilgrimage, thanks to W.T.P.'

The Chalice Well Trust was set up by TP, and in the Sixties it published its own quarterly magazine, *The Messenger of Chalice Well*. So when he moved on, the following issues were full of testimonies, many with an international flavour.

Simone Saint Clair (France): 'The world owes him a debt that will never be repaid.'

Helen Degler (Germany): 'He was one of God's Messengers, entrusted with a holy Mission on our planet.'

Rey d'Aquila (Holland): 'TP's life was glorified simplicity as a reflection of the Master's life.'

Ann Moray (America): 'W.T.P. is a beacon before us, and a path for our wandering feet.'

Some went further. Sir George Trevelyan, the New Age pioneer, described him in *Operation Redemption* (1981) as 'Undoubtedly one of the great seers and adepts of this epoch.' And Rosamond Lehmann, lapsing at last into 'grandiosity', let it slip in *My Dear Alexias* (1979) that 'Obviously he was a Master.'

But perhaps we should hear from TP himself. In 1960 he published *The Silent Road* a collection of ideas and incidents from the life of a well travelled 76 year old, as he was by then. We can dip in and try to catch the tone of a man of two worlds as he tells one of his tales, even if, typically, he presents himself as just an ordinary sort of person – someone who might catch a train home, miss a bus, then worry about a phone call.

On a wet and stormy night in December 1952, I found myself at a country station some mile and half from my Sussex home. The train from London had arrived late, the bus had gone and no taxis were available. The rain was heavy and incessant. The time was 5.55 p.m. and I was expecting an important trunk call from overseas at 6 p.m. at home. The situation seemed desperate. To make matters worse, the station call box was out of order and some trouble on the line made access to the railway telephone impossible. In despair I sat down in the waiting-room and, having nothing better to do, I compared my watch with the station clock. Allowing for the fact that this is always kept two minutes in advance, I was able to confirm the fact that the exact time was then 5.57 p.m. Three minutes to zero hour! What happened next I cannot say. When I came to myself I was standing in my hall at home, a good twenty minutes' walk away, and the clock was striking six. My telephone call duly came through a few minutes later. I should have explained that I had set out that morning minus both coat and umbrella. It had been a fine morning but by early evening the downpour had become almost tropical. Having finished my call, I awoke to the realisation that

something very strange had happened. Then, much to my surprise, I found that my shoes were dry and free from mud, and that my clothes showed no sign of damp or damage. My housekeeper looked at me somewhat strangely at supper that night, but no word was said. Indeed what 'word' was there to say?

(The Silent Road, 1960, p.23)

Much of the book has this tone: a tone of 'much to my surprise' and 'what happened next I cannot say' – as though he is simply the decent sort who leaves his umbrella at home but manages to get away with it. This, of course, was calculated: he didn't want to put people off with too much 'grandiosity'. Throughout his life he had stories like this to tell, sometimes domestic, sometimes quite otherworldly. For instance, forty three years earlier he found himself with an unexpected companion.

On Monday, 12th March 1917, I was walking by the sea when I felt the presence of someone. I looked round; no one was in sight. All that day I felt as if someone were following me, trying to reach my thoughts. Suddenly I said to myself, 'It is a soldier. He has been killed in battle and wants to communicate!'

(Private Dowding, 1917)

And so TP settled down to a conversation between the worlds, publishing the results in *Private Dowding*, a volume of massive interest to people suffering the anxieties and bereavements of World War One. Many enquiries resulted, which TP could not personally answer, having been posted to the front. However, his friend, David Russell, was able to respond and here is what he told one enquirer:

My dear Sir,

Your letter of the 26th April addressed to W.T.P. has been forwarded to me. I should in the first place explain that during his absence abroad I am dealing as far as I can with his correspondence. He at present has the rank of Captain in the British Army and holds an important staff appointment.

W.T.P. has from the age of 16 or 17 had abnormal vision, but since leaving school he has, until he joined the army, led a strenuous business life, and the development of his psychic powers has been natural.

Since the outbreak of war he has come into touch with many soldiers killed in battle. Practically all his experiences have been in the homes of friends or of a personal nature, and the

vision is direct and he seldom makes written records of experiences. Speaking generally, he lives a perfectly normal life and sees abnormally while in a perfectly normal state. He has never so far as I am aware been in a trance condition.

(Letter from David Russell to James S. Hyslop, May 1918)

We might notice here TP's facility for contacting 'killed' soldiers in a state of normal consciousness. This places him in a different category from the trance mediums, table-turners and ectoplasm exuders who, round about this time, would extract snorting dismissal from fierce sceptics. TP appears, on the contrary, to communicate as if people have just popped in for a chat. Russell continues:

He works as many others do during the period of sleep and can bring back clear memories of his experiences. In normal life he can guide and help people by telling them simply what he sees in their lives. He is a man of much business ability and to him, the Private Dowding experience was, although in some respects unusual, of a perfectly genuine nature.

With regard to his intellectual interests, he is primarily a man of business. He has visited Egypt and the Near East on several occasions. He has had no special training and he is as much at home conversing with a Professor of Science as with authorities on social and religious subjects.

(Letter from David Russell to James S. Hyslop, May 1918)

There are more notable details here: for instance, TP's capacity to 'work' during sleep. There again: 'In normal life he can guide and help people by telling them simply what he sees in their lives.' But if we are discussing 'normal life' we ought to seek the opinions of those who lived with him. What, for instance, did Florence, his wife, think of her unusual husband? Children can often be good witnesses and TP's daughter, Jean (later Lady Carroll), recalled some of her younger days in the 1920's like this:

My mother supported WTP in everything he did and frequently had psychic experiences herself. They entertained a lot and there seemed to be a constant stream of visitors, either people down on their luck, refugees from Russia, struggling pianists and so on, as well as people interested in spiritual matters. All this made for a lot of work for Florence, but she enjoyed it and her parties were famous.

My father was a very good host and to use a commonplace phrase, was the life and soul of the party.

('Florence Tudor-Pole', by Jean Carroll, short ms sent to the present author, 20.6.02)

‘Life and soul of the party.’ There, in all likelihood, we have a vital component of Two-Worlds spirituality. Few would be able to withstand the strange challenges without a sense of fun as safety valve. So let us pause in the mid twenties to see him tell a funny story in a letter to David Russell. It is headed, *Grand Hotel du Parc, Chatel-Guyon*, and is dated September 1926:

Everyone here is an invalid and the waters are for the ‘Intestins’ I understand. A Spaniard speaking little French casually addressed me and enquired gently after my ‘Intestins’. I thought he was referring to some make of car (he spoke vile French) and so I said I hadn’t got one. He seemed very shocked and said: ‘Mon Dieu! Quel operation.’ Being still at sea, I said one could get on very well in England without one. ‘Diable. Quel Pays!’ He then entered into a description of his own insides and I thinking still he referred to a car, and as he spoke in the plural, enquired how many he had? It was only then that I tumbled to the situation. I fled. But I am sure I am now known throughout the hotel as the strange Englishman without an inside!

(Letter from TP to David Russell, Sept 1926)

TP’s humour is at its most evident in a book published after his passing, *My Dear Alexias* (1979), a selection from the letters he wrote to Rosamond Lehmann. She mentions a touch of his bantering style in the Foreword as well as another, more disturbing, sort of liveliness:

I first met him in 1963; and it was my great privilege to become his close friend and collaborator during his last six years.

I still remember his amusement when I told him that our meeting had been foretold by a numerologist at the College of Psychic Studies’ Christmas Fair in 1962. A gentleman, she told me, about seventy-eight years old, was shortly coming my way and would change my life. Elderly gentlemen, did I not agree, could be such wonderful companions? Dubiously and with strong if tacit reservations, I agreed. This was a story he particularly relished – pressing me to admit that it had been a spot-on prediction.

When I first came face to face with him, which was over coffee in the St. Ermin’s Hotel, I experienced a distinct sense of shock. I don’t know if this was due to some subconscious stir of recognition, or to a deeper, one might say spiritual malaise. I was in the presence of someone quite formidably awake; and my nerve ends got the message which his old-fashioned courtesy and shield of banter tried to mask. Then and later he gave me a sense... a tingling electric sense, as of

being lightly showered with fiery particles - and sometimes lightly stung by them.

(‘My Dear Alexias’, 1979, pages 2 & 3)

He did not always switch on his charisma so obviously. If we meet him again, this time in the company of Walter Lang, we find him ensconced in his more mundane, unspectacular persona. Lang was the collaborator on the last book TP published in his lifetime, *Writing On The Ground* (1968), so his observations have a quality of summation:

The first impression you got of T.P. was his ordinariness: this whether you met him at a friend’s house, in his own home at Hurstpierpoint or in his panelled eyrie in Ivorex House in the City.

He was an ordinary, sound chap, you felt; good company, literate and astute but without ordinary. He was of medium height and straight, with a formidable jaw, a most direct gaze and a deep resonant voice, the precision of which was further accentuated by a slightly formal choice of words.

The vast un-ordinariness of T.P. revealed itself only gently and slowly to a few, and even then, only if he chose to reveal it. You would notice a deliberation about something he said and you would get the impression of an old-time elocutionist over-making a point; and insist on doing it, moreover in the third person, as though T.P. was somebody not in the room at the time.

If you resisted the temptation to pass this over as mere eccentricity you would begin to catch the glint of something under the surface.

(‘The Messenger of Chalice Well’, number 9, Spring 1969)

Reading between the spiritual lines we might guess that some of the qualities stressed by Walter Lang may have been necessities for TP: the straight posture, formidable jaw, direct gaze, strong voice, even the precise choice of words. To be a man of two worlds, he would need a method of staying stable.

Let us see how he managed. It is time to begin his story and discover the Two Worlds of Wellesley Tudor Pole.