

Bragg Excerpts 3

A) To Ed Wilson who had passed on the comments of Col. Ruby Garrett, member of ASUC and Board Member, AHA.

March 26, 1952

[Boston]

Many thanks for your letter of March 25th.

Garrett's evaluation of the Unitarian scene in Kansas City is approximately what I have heard from other sources. There is undoubted factionalism, yet no one seems to feel that it runs deep enough to endanger wholesome group life. I have felt for a year or more (perhaps because I am approaching my fiftieth birthday) that I ought to think solemnly about the remainder of my career. For a variety of reasons I incline toward a church, particularly a church within the borders of the Western Conference. There I am at home; there I feel that my best work can be done.

Having reached such a decision, I had to acknowledge that there are relatively few churches in a position to pay a livable salary, livable for me has to include extraordinary expenditures on behalf of Kate. Then, too, a forthright Humanist has to recognize that relatively few churches are interested in him. Kansas City is obviously one; Madison another. There are many attractive features in Madison -- a great capital city with a grand liberal inheritance despite Joe McCarthy. When you add the features of a new and interesting building with a great university near at hand, you have an almost perfect set-up. Upon inquiry, I learned that Madison could not pay a salary in keeping with what I am used to for my needs. With this impression fixed in my mind, I made overtures to Randall Hilton regarding Kansas City.

B) To Rev. John Ruskin Clark, Jr. in Concord, NH:

January 29, 1953

[Kansas City]

We are thoroughly happy in Kansas City. There is much to do, much to plan. By New England standards and 85th anniversary sounds unimpressive. By western Missouri standards, in Unitarian terms, eighty-five years is quite a span. I am impressed with the eagerness of these folks to get at some of the basic themes. I have tried to think of a New England church familiar to me where fifty to seventy-five persons would turn out of a Monday evening to think about the contents of the new testament. By gosh it's true here, and I rejoice in such truth.

To Fred Putney in Lincoln, NE: (The Braggs had just suffered through their first Kansas City summer.)

August 5, 1953

[Kansas City]

We are hoping to get away next week for at least a fortnight in Colorado. If you have not left Lincoln I suspect that you will have in the fairly near future. It was reported to me a day or two ago that the only reason for remaining in Kansas City during the summer is that in the event you die there is time off in hell.

C) To Rev. Ellsworth Smith in Chicago:

March 31, 1959

[Kansas City]

You will. . . find things looking up Unitarian-wise in Kansas City. At our Congregational meeting last evening the Board was instructed by an overwhelming vote, 154 to 16 precisely, to proceed immediately with the construction of a new building. As you might well expect, the minority was comprised of those who would find it difficult to build a new building if all the funds necessary were presented to the church. It was a good meeting in every detail.

To Agnes Birkhead, Falls Church, VA, who had wired congratulations to All Souls Church on the occasion of the dedication of its new building:

February 25, 1960

[Kansas City]

I wish you might have been here last evening. Despite the remains of a wicked snow storm we had a large company. It was a typical sort of Unitarian gathering — warm-hearted and full of self-approval. Nonetheless, it was a good wholesome occasion.

To Rev. Alan Deale in Rockford, Ill:

March 1, 1960

The Dedication Book has a rough representation. As you will note, it is far from adequate, though it will give you an impression of what stands here. We had an unusual architectural problem in that the building stands alone in a wedge reaching out into a boulevard. Windows in the auditorium would have made anyone attending an evening meeting dizzy, since automobile lights would play on the interior walls. The lounge, a large area to the rear of the auditorium, has large glass surfaces.

I am impressed that you are confronting so quickly the problems imposed by growth. We are still renting space from the Conservatory of Music across the street — space for half our church school. Our second unit we hope to build in the not dim future, and that ought to take care of all our church school needs until it is feasible to think of another Unitarian church in this metropolitan area.

D) *To Raymond Palmer in West Brattleboro, VT. October 25, 1935*

Mangasarian was an old-fashioned Bible buster. In his way he probably did an effective job, but Rationalism as a self-conscious movement was dead long before Mangasarian ended his career in Chicago. He failed to keep abreast of modern movements and for that reason went on in pretty much the good old-fashioned

nineteenth century way of pointing out the mistakes of Moses and ignoring the stupidities of the contemporary world. Naturally, Mangasarian recruited people who fell in with his prejudices. As I have sometimes said, they transferred their ultimate loyalties from the Christian setting to the setting created by the Republican party. Of the two, give me Christianity at any time.

E)

To Dr. Moses Levine, at the University of Minnesota, who had given RBB a subscription to The Scientific Monthly:

April 30, 1951

[Boston]

Recently, traveling to California on a train, a young man noted me reading the Monthly. Immediately he assumed that I was a fellow scientist and tried to talk to me in rather abstruse terms. He happened to be a nuclear physicist who had just been in Boston to be interviewed by M.I.T. physicists and was on his way back to Cal Tech. When I explained my inability to talk his language he was curious that a preacher was enough interested in science to read such a journal. That comment opened the way to some healthy talk on naturalistic humanism. You see in some quarters the fellow who reads The Scientific Monthly is a man of distinction.

F)

To Dr. Maurice Visscher, an old friend and Professor of Physiology at the University of Minnesota Medical School:

May 14, 1952

[Boston]

The day will never dawn when I can write a paper in your field that encompasses the knowledge and thought that you have written in my field. I take comfort in the notion that almost everyone is a religionist and only the wise are physiologists.

I am beginning to think about Sunday morning addresses. For after September 1, 1952 I shall be doing a weekly stint [in Kansas City]. On an early date I intend to speak on the theme, "Are the Scientists Always Changing Their Minds?" One of the sly ways in which theologians are baffling the scientists is to the effect that there is no abiding truth in the findings of the scientist. This is such a sickening simplification that I must have a go at it.

G) *To Dr. Alfred Stiernotte in New Haven, CT:*

November 17, 1954

[Kansas City]

I think you are on shaky ground when you suggest that half-baked Humanists drove you out of the movement. I recall many years ago asking Scott Nearing whether his expulsion from the Communist party had in any sense modified his Marxism. He responded thus: "Why should ten thousand damned fools lead anyone to change their mind?"