

ARTEMUS LAMB. 1905-1998

Artemus Lamb was a tireless, focused, utterly devoted servant of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, who during almost six decades profoundly contributed to the development of the Faith in r~tin America. What many of the friends do not k~ow is that his life prior to his becoming a baha~i indicated precious little to suppose or anticipate his .sterling and selfless service.

He was born on January 20, 1905 into a prosperous and influential family in Clinton, Iowa, but his father drowned in the Mississippi River when Artemus was three months old. At the age of one year he was almost given up for dead from milk poisoning and this left his nervous system damaged through most of his childhood. The only lasting effect was a life-long stammer. These early years were spent on a large property which included woods, meadows, lawns and several buildings and he spent much of his time roaming the land with his dogs. He loved fishin~. riding, swimming, went to dancing school and took piano lessons. He and his sister Valeria, were attended by maids and educated by tutors. He was sent off to . boarding school in Connecticut (Hotchkiss) at age 12 as hisá mother had married a~ain to one who could hide a weakness for alcohol, and she did not want her children to be exposed to that. After prep school Artemus then went to Yale University where he graduated with a B.S. degree in 1927. These early years were very comfortable economically and he was active in upper social echelons. During vacations at Yale he would go by boat to watch the French Tennis Open in Paris. He wore a racoon skin coat when it was the rage. He missed some morning classes in New Haven because he had spent the night with friends~n Manhattan nightclubs. He was very attracted to the New York social and night life.

He and his family were nominal Episcopalians. but not regular church-goers. and on occasions he accompanied friends to various other places of worship. His mother was. very spiritual and hi~hly moral, but not a very churchy person. As a child his maid had him say prayers before going to bed and his tutor made him and his sister Valeria learn parts of the Bible as literature. He did admire the Psalms and some parables for their messages. In Boarding school chapel was obligatory, so to enjoy it he sang in the choir. He believed in God and called himself a Chriatian~ but religion simply did not play an important role in his life. And like most college students~ especially those majoring in science, he lost what little faith he had as he could not reconcile the common knowledge of religion with what he was learning in the classes, and he became a sceptic.

After Yale his sister and her husband persuaded him to go to California with them instead of Oxford or Cambridge as he had

planned and he enrolled in law school in USC. Later he went into business and in 1929, married the daughter of a wealthy and prominent family. He was active in the social life of Los Angeles and even played golf with Douglas Fairbanks Jr. at the Beverly Hills Country Club. He had inherited from his father, his great aunt and his grandmother and at age 21 had considerable wealth.

Then in the great depression he lost his job and a great deal of money. He, like so many, was brought back hard to earth after the roaring twenties. Eventually he went into the oil production business, but that also failed. His whole life went into, as he wrote:

stage of confusion, difficulties and finally

"... a

crisis. It was as if a mysterious hand took hold of my life and turned it completely upside down, including separation from my wife and son "

Valeria had meanwhile become a Bahá'í and mentioned it to him. Though he had no interest in religion of any kind, in this crisis of his life he was in ever closer contact with his sister and mother who had also become a believer. He attended his first "fireside" and did not understand much of what was said but found the atmosphere very sincere, wholesome, friendly and intelligent. He began to read Bahá'í literature and found it, to his surprise, "most interesting, educational, forward looking and inspiring, very different from the usual religious literature". He then began a serious and careful investigation, and in 1939 entered the Faith in Los Angeles. He writes:

"I felt with all my heart and mind that this was what I had been born for and entered into complete service".

With his sister and mother he transferred to Beverly Hills to form the first local Spiritual Assembly there. Later he went to Salt Lake City, Utah, and then in 1942, to Denver at the request of the National Teaching Committee, to restore the Spiritual Assembly which had been lost.

He had always been interested in new places, people and first-hand learning, and as a youth had travelled extensively in the U.S. and Canada. After Yale he spent the following three summers in Europe, and then in 1938-9 made a seven month tour around the world, but he knew nothing about Central and South America. Now as a Bahá'í he sensed that he had a destiny in Latin America and began to study the culture and learn Spanish. His first teacher was the official translator of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City. He offered to pioneer anywhere in

Latin America but the National Spiritual Assembly asked him to stay in the Western States until the end of the First Seven Year Plan as there were still few Baha'is in that area.

The Guardian began to urge the NSA of the U.S. to send a male pioneer to establish the Faith in Punta Arenas, Chile, on the Straits of Magellan, the southernmost city of the world. He was in touch with Marcia Stewart (Atwater), the first pioneer to Chile, who had written to the Guardian that Punta Arenas was more suitable for a man. Marcia also encouraged Artemus to go there, so at the National Convention of 1944, he offered to fill this goal and this time his offer was gratefully accepted.

While preparing to leave, another letter from the NSA explained that there were urgent problems in Ecuador and they wished him to go there first, and then, perhaps, to Punta Arenas. Artemus was overcome. He had promised to go to Punta Arenas to fulfill a special request of the Guardian, and felt that he was destined to go there. For several days he prayed for guidance and finally decided that for confirmation he should obey the National Assembly and leave everything in the hands of God. The war was still on and air travel from the U.S. was impossible. By chance (1) he saw in the Salt Lake City newspaper the announcement of the last trip of the Argentinian steamship "Mal de Plata" up the Pacific coast, to Los Angeles and then back to Buenos Aires. He rushed to Los Angeles, got passage and in a few weeks embarked - ostensibly for Ecuador.

On the second or third day the boat stopped in Acapulco, Mexico and all the passengers went ashore. Some time later walking back along the beach toward the ship, he noticed that the shore was lined with people and there was lots of smoke. He then saw the steamship was immersed in flames and had to be towed out and sunk. Everything he had was on that boat: passport, money, clothes, everything but what he had on and in his pocket.

He found himself in a strange land, with no possessions but a few traveler's cheques. His first reaction was that Bahaullah did not consider him worthy of the mission and that he should return home. He then realized that this was a test of his determination and that by whatever means he should continue the journey. The steamship company finally got them to Mexico City, returned the passage money and left them on their own. The U.S. Embassy replaced his passport and offered him travel to any point in South America. He cabled the Interamerican Committee in Wilmette recommending that he take advantage of the offer and fly to Santiago, Chile, by-passing Ecuador. They approved and after flights lasting five days and four nights he arrived in Santiago, and later went to Punta Arenas. He comments:

"How to explain these mysterious events? I had taken the course of spiritual action. I put all my affairs in the Hands of God. I had been guided to take the Mar de Plata which later burned and sank. I thus bringing about my arrival at my cherished goal. In any event; I got

which later burned and sank. I thus bringing about: D.V. arrival at my cherished goal. In any event: I got there. which is what is important. , Incidentally. the Guardian. after the original letter regarding my offer. did not communicate with me again until I got to Punta Arenas. Then I wrote through his secretary and added -in his own handwriting: "I am delighted that at last VOIL

I have reached your goal (and are wholeheartedly engaged in YOUR noble pioneer work in that far distant land" _ Did he know what was taking place and what the final outcome would be? Did his prayers bring these things to pass'? Questions we never will be able to answer... at least not in this world".

After helping to form the first LSA in Punta Arenas and other services in Chile, he returned to the U.S. in 1949 to look for a higher income with an international agency in Washington D.C. He was recommended for an important post but learned through his cousin that two employees of the State Department had "black-balled" his name because of his Bahá'í activities in Chile. He later realized that this job would not have been suitable for pioneer service.

So again he put all his affairs in the hands of God and in January of 1951 went to Costa Rica where he immediately obtained a good position with the Costa Rican-North American Cultural Center.

In 1953 when he made his pilgrimage~ he had some family problems and commitments in the U.S. and he did not know if these would tie him there for an indefinite period against his will. At the end of the Pilgrimage, The Guardian asked him: "What are your plans? He answered unconsciously "I am going to return" to Costa Rica". The Guardian rubbed his hands together with evident pleasure and said: "Magnificent! Splendid!, Magnificent! Splendid!"

Since he did not have any certainty of being able to return to Costa Rica, this question of the Guardian surprised him, and his own answer surprised him even more. When he arrived in the U.S. he found, to his amazement, that the problem had resolved itself by a strange turn of events, and that the way was clear to return to, Costa Rica.

Since that time he has remained in Central America and Yucatan, Mexico, living in different countries according to the needs of the Faith. From 1951 to 1961 he served on the National Spiritual Assembly for Panama, Central America, Mexico and the Greater Antilles and from 1963 to 1968 as Executive Auxiliary Board member for the same area; then from 1968 to 1985 as member of" the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas. In 1958 he married another pioneer he had known, then serving in the Dominican Republic, Dora (Dee) Worth. Their wedding took place in Santa Ana, El Salvador, where he had established an English language academy and was active in the teaching work. These included a successful radio program and aroused significant interest both among the prominent and in the towns and among the small indigenous communities in the area. After a dramatic incident with the authorities caused by false reports from some religious officials, Artemus and Dee moved to Guatemala City and later lived in Caban, helping to establish a community in that Mayan area. Meanwhile the government changed in El Salvador, the President who ordered Artemus out, was himself exiled, Artemus' name was cleared and he was able, even invited by the new government, to return there. This he eventually did, and here he served for several years as Secretary of the Continental Board of Counselors. Later he and Dee moved to Merida, Yucatan where for many years he was active in the promotion of the Faith among his beloved Mayans. In the late 1980s they moved to La Ceiba, Honduras, where Dee died in 1988. After that he again lived for a time in Costa Rica and finally returned to El Salvador in September of 1992.

There are a hundreds of episodes, hundreds of friends whose lives he touched and influenced toward a heightened and more focused service in all these places (far too many episodes and names to even begin mentioning here). There are so many stories of his relentless drive to fulfill the wishes of the Guardian, and later of the Universal House of Justice. One remembers his "sense of urgency, his impatience with obstacles and his always pushing the activities forward, which made him known affectionately among some co-workers as "Sargent Lamb". But also one remembers" the blessing of his marriage with Dee and his subsequent mellowing; his humour and the wry and perspicacious observations of Dee; his profound emotion upon discovering new insights and meanings in the Writings; his affection for countless children and youth who considered him as a spiritual grandfather, and in many cases he had brought their' parents and/or grandparents "into the Faith.

He mentioned that after becoming a believer he had a deep

inner feeling~ that his destiny was to serve in Latin America. While in Washington he received the following cable from the Guardian: "Fervently praying renewal invaluable service in Latin America. Loving appreciation. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani". Then came a letter through his secretary with the following sentence: "He feels that all this means you should make every effort to get a job in Latin America. as your service there is not only very valuable. but infinitely more valuable than elsewhere".

He writes of his inspiration: "The picture cannot be complete without special mention of the constant loving encouragement, guidance and influence of our beloved Guardian.

both in the process of the establishment of the Faith in Latin America as well as on me personally greatly more so on looking back that I had realized at the time.

In October 1953, as mentioned, he had the priceless privilege of making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and knowing the Guardian. He had been elected to attend the Inter Oceanic Conference in New Delhi, India, as representative of the NSA of Central America, and wrote the Guardian requesting permission to stop in Haifa on his return. Previously he had asked for this permission. but the Guardian had answered that it was premature. This time he received the cable "Welcome. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani". He recalls:

"I find it difficult to describe the experience. except to state that it exceeded my highest expectations. I had expected to ask the Guardian many questions. but all I could do was bask in the glow of his presence and wait for him to speak".

He often mentioned that his pilgrimage group was only three. and that they had meals with The Guardian and Ruhayyih Khanum. The first time he sat at the table across from Shoghi Effendi. and lifted his face he could only see radiant light, not the semblance of the Guardian. Then the Guardian turned jovial and he could then see his wondrous face.

This writer remembers hearing a returning pilgrim talk of his impressions of the Guardian in a meeting in Denver in 1954. The pilgrim interrupted his main theme to mention how great was the Guardian's love and appreciation of Artemus Lamb.

In these last years and after Dee's passing in 1988, Artemus was becoming quite deaf, and even with a hearing aid had difficulty in communicating. This limited his services and the usefulness of his presence in the activities so he decided to do what his always filled agenda did not permit earlier; to write a book on the journey of the soul. He began this in Costa Rica

where he learned, at age 87, a word-processing system, and finished the book in El Salvador. It has gone through several printings in Spanish and the version in English, "The Odyssey of the Soul". has also been a brisk seller. It has since been published in at least three other European languages.

Expecting that this would be his swan song, he was surprised to still have time in this world, and even in his waning years he could not just sit and do nothing. So his work now centered upon his writing on diverse themes, not only long latent in his teeming mind but very pertinent for the teaching work in Latin America. Booklets and pamphlets in Spanish such as: (in translated titles) "The [Infolding of the World Order of

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Baha'u-'Allah". "Miracles and the Symbolism of the Holy Books", "Dreams, Visions and Psychic Phenomena II", "Mediations of a Balui" i". "The Title New World Order: Folding the Model of a New Society". "Wealth and Poverty", "The Greatest Gift of God to Man", and finally, "Life Beyond Death". Previously he had published his "Rememberance" and the "Development of the Baha'i Faith in Latin America" and other pamphlets. These are certainly a vital part of his legacy and they are written in a clear, simple, very accessible style.

One remarkable aspect of Artemus is that although he was raised in great comfort and financial security, his services as a pioneer led him through times of very scant income and sacrifice. This had no effect on his spirit, though the periods he was obliged to receive income from the International Fund, chafed on him. He somehow always found some other productive activity and an adequate but always modest living. He learned to live on very little, but always made contributions to the Funds. To observe Artemus over time one is astonished by his selflessness, his simplicity of life, his disinterest in things most people deem necessary, his love and concern for humble people. One must marvel then remembering that this man, during the first three and a half decades of his life had lived close to the top of the economic and social pyramid, and had thoroughly enjoyed the privileges and comforts of that life.

About six months ago he awoke at the usual six AM - he was very methodical by the way - and at breakfast said that he had heard the most unearthly and celestial music in a dream, more real than if he were in a concert hall, though he was then totally deaf. In the last weeks he said that he had been thinking so much about Dee, and then could not go on for the emotion. He wanted so much to leave this world, but also wanted to share some deeper experiences and thoughts with the friends

before leaving.

Artemus Lamb in his younger years was quite handsome, and many said he looked like the actor Jimmy Stewart. (He joked that maybe Jimmy Stewart looked like him). Yet he was really quite shy and modest and was never able to cure his stammer when he spoke. He was not self-conscious about it, as he just focused on getting the message out. He was not the most charismatic of nor the most gifted of personalities. But he was surely one of the most devoted lovers and servants of this Cause. Tireless, purposeful and selfless are the attributes that come most to mind. He consecrated his life to serve the advancement of the Faith in so many areas: in personal teaching and deepening, proclamation and public talks.. in the representation of the Cause before the prominent and the authorities, in the Administration of the Cause at all levels when that was not at all easy, in the example of his conduct and the transparency of his dealings~ in the work and

love he had for the indigenous believers. He could also be very pleasant and enjoyable - he loved good music. a good joke or humorous banter~ and could enjoy watching a good movie on TV~ a game of football, baseball and tennis especially. to have a good conversation and enjoy good food he knew the value of moderation. He tried sincerely not to be a bother to others and even in his deafness and weakness enjoyed being present with the friends. He always arrived on time in the activities. Instead of preaching he always tried to be a good example~ even if, toward the end~ it was to be an example of punctuality.

His last days were quite difficult and uncomfortable.

Three youth of the Lemus family in El Salvador~ after watching him during the final Feast he attended wrote a beautiful letter which touched him deeply. One paragraph reads:

"Dearest Grandfather. we didn't realize how great is our love for you until we saw you smiling in the last Feast. with your eyes fixed on the Abha Paradise, then our hearts witnessed the truth of our most profound love for our dearest grandfather. Truly we say that our love as your grandchildren does not really express itself in this letter, but lives and beats in our hearts. Every day we pray that God gives you the patience to bear the last days of this ephemeral life until you lift your wings to the Divine Presence. We also thank you for having given us such a precious treasure, yourself, with your guidance, explanations and all the beauty you have given in your books, for the opportunity to be able to communicate with Buell a gallant servant of Baha'u'llah, and to have the fortune

to hear your counsels ... "

His last day was quite serene as he had to be given pain suppressors and sedation. The National Spiritual Assembly of El Salvador was invited to lunch at the Farrand home where he lived. Before eating the members gathered around his bed and said prayers. After lunch two of the members then went to check on him and found he had left us. It was so fitting that the NSA was present and the arrangements all flowed as if on wheels. All were moved but happy for him, for the end of his sufferings, and trying to imagine the unimaginable welcome in that paradise he so longed for and deserved.

The funeral the next day, January 18, two days before his 93rd birthday was serene, poignant, and spiritually as well as visually beautiful. It took place in the highest level of a cemetery with a gorgeous panorama. After the words and prayers no one wanted to leave for a long time.

Rodrigo Tomas had flown up from Costa Rica representing the Counselors and stated that he did not come to commiserate with

the Bahajia of El Salvador for the passing of Artemus Lamb, but to rejoice with them for the blessing of having the earthly remains of such a beloved, wonderful, devoted servant of the Cause laid to rest their country. Then he read those lines from the last selection in Prayers and Meditations (CLXXXIV.- p 326-7) where Bahá'u'lláh asks God to create "for those of Thy people who are "wholly devoted to Thee and for such of Thy loved ones as love Thee Thy - paradise of transcendent holiness and to exalt it above everything except Thee. and to sanctify it from aught else save Thyself ... "

The day after the funeral the NSA received this E-mail from Haifa which was read at the prayer service attended by believers and friends alike:

Deeply deplore 1055 outstanding longtime servant
Beloved Artemus Lamb. Well-nigh six
decades his noble-hearted, self-effacing devotion to
needs Faith unforgettable. Recall with keen admiration
sterling achievements pioneering and administrative
fields Latin America, culminating seventeen years as
Continental Counselor. Confident his life of service
will garner immense reward Abha Kingdom. Urge hold
befitting memorial gatherings in Houses of Worship
Wilmette and Panama and other countries where he
labored so long. Praying fervently progress his
luminous spirit. Kindly extend our condolences his
many friends and admirers. With loving Bahá'í

greetil{;!s.

Universal House of Justice.

Quentin Farrand, Jan 31, 1998

(With the help of Artemus Lamb's notes).

— Artemus Lamb, 1905-1998 (Used by permission of the curator)