

12/12/00 Tuesday's Rock, Serenity Pitt, the Zen Master

Master and servant are names as old history, but given to those of far different condition; for a free man makes himself a servant to another by selling him for a certain time the service he undertakes to do, in exchange for wages he is to receive. And though this commonly puts him into the family of his master, and under the ordinary discipline thereof, yet it gives the master but temporary power over him, and no greater than what is contained in the contract between 'em. But there is another sort of servants, which by a peculiar name we call slaves, who, being captives taken in a just war, are by the right of nature subjected to the absolute dominion and arbitrary power of their masters. These men having, as I say, forfeited their lives, and with it their liberties, and lost their estates, and being in the state of slavery not capable of any property, cannot in that state be considered as any part of civil society, the chief end whereof is the preservation of property.

John Locke  
*The Second Treatise on  
Government*

Although not abstemious, Serenity yet endeavored always to "rise with an appetite" as well as to sit with one, and this was especially so at his midday meal, since he was feign to tax his afternoon's Industry with the Stupor of Intemperance. It was his Habit, therefore, in lieu of too much Leisure devoted to victuals, to eat sparsely and speedily, and then to surrender his offices to Thomas, his son, servant and clerk, and invest some minutes thereafter outside the confines of his professional Seclusion to walking the nearby quays. It brought relief to his Mind to witness the Tumult of arriving and departing vessels and to immerse himself in the bustling of Commerce. The creaking of gangplanks strained by burly stevedores and their weights of cargo — shoes stitched in Liverpool from cowhides harvested in Brazil, coffee in hemp bags from the Country of Sheba, oysters from the fens of the Chesapeake, casks of Continental manufacture — nails, buttons, crockery both plain and fine — and silks and laquerware from the land of Khan or the far off Japans — these things stirred him with the satisfaction of Mercantilism. They reminded him of the Prosperity recovered through Global Industry and through the respite given by the modicum of Peace restored after seven years of war. However, this glow was not without the dusting of a shadow. For as a Man of the World, Serenity understood the vicissitudes of Investment. He knew that each of his Numbers marching evenly down the columns of account ledgers were but the orderly Abstractions derived from a disorderly and arduous, nay, even a dangerous Process — from risks at sea, from the drought or drench of sparse harvests, and from the ceaseless Toils of his Human Brethren, both Slave and Free.

The course of his exercises did also subject him to the casual buffeting suffered by all Mortals, both animal and human, on the crowded quays. And as Serenity was presented

with all these things Temporal, he was also prompted to Universal Musings: what quality of Spirit gave such poignancy to the dog's Devotion, the horse's Patience, the Maternal Instincts of the calm-faced cow? And why were some of God's Children pressed with such arduous Labor while others were rewarded for lounging, or, worse, were able to profit from the sneaking manipulation of their fellows as indentured servants, or even as slaves? And why did He, who made both the nether Sun and the Inner Light, spawn such great quantities of flies? Serenity brushed a swirling swarm from his head, just as a carriage drawn by well-bred horses clopped merrily by him, carrying a bright cargo of Philadelphia's freshest and finest — gaily attired young girls escaped from their drawing rooms on a lark to giggle at the crudity of Labor or at a sturdy Quaker strolling and swatting flies. His brow darkened briefly with Judgment, and Penn's words leapt to his mind: 'Excess Apparel is a costly Folly. The Trimmings of the Vain World would clothe all the naked one.' And then, softening at their Youth, their Freshness, he remembered his own two eldest daughters, Hope and Divinity, much like these girls in Demeanor and Ebullience, and recalled also that Penn himself was once unjustly censored for Worldliness because he condescended to wear a wig. But it was no less a worthy than George Fox, the original and truest Friend, who defended his eminent prodigy by noting three pertinences which absolved the great Admiral's son from Vanity, viz., that first, it warmed Penn's head in winter, as he was bald since the age of three from a fever; that second, it was a small and "very civil thing," not costing upwards of three shillings; and that third, however bad the Vanity of wig-wearing, Censoriousness was worse. Serenity smiled inwardly at this humorous Remembrance, and were it not for his natural Reticence, he might have suffered his Exuberance to convey a gesture of communal Familiarity to the frolicsome maidens. Yet he kept his hands discreetly clasped behind him, nodding good-naturedly at the carriage, but suppressing a wave.

The Time drew nigh for him to return to his accounting. He deemed that he had taken his share of what the good Woolman extolled as "moderate Care and Exercise." Serenity had an Inheritance to bestow to his successors, one that we wished to amass in Fear of the Lord, in Honesty, with Equity, and in Uprightness of Heart — but Lord, Lord, the Teeming of Life throbbed brightly here, and the ciphers in his Book spelled Tedium.

Back at his desk, in the dust of the darkened office, Serenity poised his quill above straight columns. He had dismissed his son Thomas for the young man's own repast, and was alone now with his numbers and his thoughts. The quill, though it was the feather of a goose who could pierce the very heavens in weightless flight, yet seemed to weave, as it scrawled its numbers, a chain of leaden Weariness round his heart. For a moment, all the deeds and assigns of property, of which his business consisted, seemed to take on an enormous weight, the displaced mass of so many manipulated or murdered things, filling the hollow spine of the quill with the crush of unresolved Grief and unjust Suffering. A column of light fell through the pane of the window, and pressed a cloth of gold across his eyes. For a moment, the books and the quays fell from his vision, and he saw a naked stripling in the byways, unseemly in the street on market days — an honest Englishman, who, like Isaiah, proclaimed, while barefoot, humble buttocks blazing, the coming Shame intended for the Mighty — bare Nayler in Bristol denouncing a Naked Culture!

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Time Closed: 11:56 p.m., C.S.T.

Granting that heaven has the same kind of relationship to hell (and hell to heaven) as two opposing entities that act against each other, with a balance resulting from their action and reaction, and with everything remaining being within that balance, then for each and every thing to be kept in a balance, it is necessary that the person who rules one rules the other. For unless the Lord controlled the rebellions from hell and imposed limits on the forms of madness that exist there, the balance would be destroyed, and with the balance everything would go.

Emanuel Swedenborg  
*Heaven and Hell*

Since the Incident on the quays and his unfortunate fisticuffs with the one-eyed ruffian, Serenity's Peace had been more frequently ruffled. There were revolting Visitations that affected him physically, enervating him with dyspepsia by day and insomnia by night. Hellish or angelic visions disturbed his sobriety, which sights he durst not reveal either to Friend or Family, for fear of their righteous Judgement. Once, as he made a journal entry for some Brazilian hides, his quill seemed, for a ghost of an instant, to drip thick blood. Another time, recording a debit for woolens, he saw impressed upon his inner eye the piteous bleeding form of a bleating lamb. And often in the midst of his copying, he would suddenly notice that a strange power possessed him, and in lieu of the correct rows of numbers, he would find himself filling the columns of his account book with the initials "S.P.G." Serenity began to fear greatly for the sanctity of his mind.

But this morning he was more put upon than ever. As he and Thomas arrived at their offices, they found that the jamb of the door had been *gnawed!* The orange gash of exposed heart-wood seemed to greet them with an accusation, and what was even more astounding, through the lacunae of the new-made wound, a strange gift had been stowed. It was some kind of portfolio or journal, of antique design, bound with leather strips and covered with an unseemly brown skin, soft as neat, but ghastly, and almost human in texture. Son Thomas angrily surmised that the portfolio was an omen of ill intent perpetrated by some associates of the misused ruffian, or else by some others to whom their Sect's pacifism was anathema. Incensed, the young man urgently pressed his father to summon the constable. But Serenity, prompted perhaps by an inner angel or fiend, deflected his son's passion, and merely remarked: "Let us study it first. Perhaps this strange token intends us good." With that, he bid Thomas take his usual seat at the desk in the vestibule, while he himself retired to his inner sanctum, closed the door, opened the book and read.

*Entry the First:*

I arrived here after an illness on what I believe was October 27<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup>, 1704, but to speak truly, I have lost track of time in this place, as the days and nights do not succeed one another in orderly progression, and except for these journal entries chronicling my experiences, I have no way of marking the passage of what I now timorously call my life.

Life! The very word seems hollow to my mind. For though I am corporeally formed, this dress of seeming flesh suffers such prodigies of humiliation, change and torment that I scarcely can deem the hand I write with mine! I, or what I used to brazenly call myself, rise and fall like a wave on a dark green sea, making as many shapes as does a dream. If I be dead and this place be heaven, it is a starker and lonelier dungeon than ever I imagined or that any scripture or theologian has foretold. A room, a cot, a table, this strange book to which I now commit my miseries, and lastly, a mind alive with twisting distortions — this is all that has been consigned to me after my passage hither — and yet . . . and yet . . . it is a world, nay, not a world, a cosmos! Nay! Nay! Not a cosmos, a chaos! For here, everything shifts in the blink of an eye, like so many hobgoblins of imagination, yet everything seems more solid than all my earthly possessions. Perhaps, then, this is hell. But if, indeed, I be in hell, I cannot think what failing of due merit consigned me to this place, having been in all my days most punctilious in the performance of every Christian duty.

*Entry the Second:*

After a fitful sleep, I awakened (did I awaken?) in the most beautiful room of what seemed to be an inn, but it was so fine in every respect that I believed that it could be no inn in England, and after hastily and properly dressing myself from a sumptuous array of costumes laid out on a green, silk-covered divan, I stepped eagerly into the wide, well-lighted corridor and asked one who seemed to be in this grand palace's employ, what place this was, and if I had at last ascended to the celestial abode. As the good servant that he seemed to be, although he was a black-skinned African, he quickly suppressed his mirth at my assertion, and politely answered in the most perfect French (which I do herewith translate). "Why, Sir, this may be heaven to many, but truly, most call it France, and the city of Nantes. And this place wherein you are a guest is what my Masters tell me is the finest accommodation in all of Europe: The Hotel Henri the Fourth." With that, he bowed low, and before I could thank him for his courtesy, he seemed, almost like a spirit himself, to disappear. Naturally I was curious concerning the means of my transportation to this magnificent commercial domicile, but there being no one now about who might conceivably satisfy me on this point, I resolved to exit my elegant lodgings and explore the town. For I was burning to know what manner of place this was which could afford to lavish such grandeur on its guests. The day was bright, but the dazzling city seemed a rival to it. The town was situated on a fine harbor, its waters laden with the bounty of innumerable stout and well-polished ships, the waters brilliant as gemstones. And the streets, not to be o'reshadowed, were nearly pearlescent, so clean their stones and white, their arbor-shaded avenues widely set at orderly right angles. The buildings too were new, expensively adorned, and all of a fine and tasteful modern design. As I wandered about in awe of all this grandeur, I soon came upon the architectural crown jewel of the city, not, as one might surmise, a church, a place of governance, or even a counting house, but rather, a magnificent theater. Moving nearer to this marvel, I saw that the playbill for the current fare was a play by Aristophanes entitled "Peace," and that the lettering of the advertisement was in the original Greek. "How now," thought I, "have the French so surpassed us in learning and cultivation that even their idle entertainments bespeak of the highest culture?" And as I was now standing

in the archway of this edifice's enormous portico, I looked up, and was surprised, nay, alarmed, to see a gargantuan dung beetle constructed through I know not what cunning devices, dangling above my head. An instant of extreme alarm darkened my heart, but in another instant this terror passed, as I jocularly recalled the comic theme of the play. I was thus uncivilly laughing to myself, when I remembered that I was in a gracious public thoroughfare in a foreign city, and so, quickly glancing about to ascertain if I had chanced to cause offense, I had occasion to notice for the first time the citizens of this celestial locale. All were costumed as if each were a member of a blessed and elevated aristocracy, the women, haughty and white under layers of crinoline and silk, and the men, even more genteelly attired in suits of colored silk, with long waistcoats and silk breeches, superb white stockings and linens, and polished shoes fastened with genuine silver or gold buckles. As these nobles — or gods — conversed, they leaned on high, gilt-crowned canes, and took snuff from exquisitely jeweled wrist-boxes, nodding their arranged and powdered coiffures in a most mannerly and elegant fashion as they imbibed the perfume of one another's speech. As I was absorbed in this enthralling scene, half-believing that the hotel's livery had misinformed me, and that this French port-town was indeed none other than heaven, I was suddenly and inexplicably presented with the person of my beloved, deceased patron, Lord Shaftsbury, the great defender of liberty and the author of the *Habeas Corpus* Act. Oh what a sea-change was here! Death had washed over my great and noble benefactor and had bartered his shining earthly aspect for that of a horribly deformed monstrosity! Puffed-up and varicosed with a hideous sort of gout, one-eyed, toothless, incapable of speech, he yet mimed feelingly to me, his last, large generous orb o'rebrimmed with tears. Repulsed as I was by his disfigured and (Pah!) odiferous personage, I was yet nearly unmanned by pity, my own sight blurred with spurge, when his ghastly, claw-like hand, rummaging through the leprous rags that festooned him produced first one, and then a second scroll. He shook them violently, warningly in my face as if their contents bonded me to my fate. Thus assaulted, I stumbled backwards, frantically attempting in my retreat to establish the significance of these documents. I fell to the ground, and in my flailing terror, I wallowed accidentally through the offal of some beast of burden, soiling my elegant borrowed garments. My pity giving way to indignation, I at once started to rise and remonstrate with this specter, when he, with an inarticulate and bestial whimper, threw the questionable papers at my bosom, their slight bulk striking with me with a mysterious leaden fire: my stock shares in the R.A.C.

*Entry the Third:*

After days of forced marching, fastened together by harsh wooden yokes at the neck and shackled with irons on our ankles, we arrived during the blackest of nights at an isolated harbor. The first object that saluted my eyes the next dawn was the sea, upon whose green bosom a slave ship rode at harbor. This object filled me with an astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, as I, and my wretched companions, were driven on board. Shivered momentarily from my yoke-mate, I was immediately handled in the roughest manner and tossed up in the air like a hempen sack to ascertain if my limbs were sound. After this indignity, I was branded on the chest with the initials R.A.C., the smell of my own burning flesh provoking my stomach to disgorge its meager contents. None of the agonies of my ordeal incited the slightest pity in my tormenters, who seemed to

view my miseries as the most frolicsome of diversions, laughing the more the more I groaned. It was then that I was persuaded that I had fallen into a world of evil spirits who were intent on nothing less than my murder. How could I have imagined otherwise? Everything about these demons differed from my own form. Their ghastly pale complexions, rotting brown teeth, noisome bloated breath — all produced in me the greatest disgust and horror. Their greasy, limp hair and the barking tones of their language — all these things united to confirm my most dreadful surmises. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at that moment that if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with the meanest slave in my own country. I was then yoked and chained once again to one who was so feeble and sick that he could scarcely shuffle his fetid limbs. Then I, with my captive twin, were crowded with all the others into the ship's dark hold, a place so close and noxious in its stench and heat that any death would have been preferable to a moment of life in such a pestilence. Our captors slaked their thirsts with a red fluid, which some among us said was human blood. And they drizzled an oil on their biscuits which many claimed was an effluent squeezed from the corpses of children. Also they devoured a noxious substance which they labeled with the horrible epithet "cheese," the which grisly tallow was identified by the prisoners as human brains. Now I, who was always rich with answers, had nothing but the paucity of my questions. Tormented with anxiety, I queried my manacle-mate: "Who are these people? Do they make their lives in this hollow infernal space? Do they have wives, and if so, where do they stow them? And were their wives creatures of mercy, or devils like to these?" My pain and trepidation multiplied my fruitless queries so that I babbled like an anxious child. I asked how the ship was sailed, and would we move over or under the waters. I asked if our captors were cannibals and if they would kill us and cook us before eating us, or would they merely tear at our living flesh with their metal hooks and taws. I asked to what hell were we bound. To my surprise and sorrow, the poor demented creature replied with words that I myself had written, oh!, so many, many lifetimes ago: "this is a state of war continued between a lawful conqueror and a captive." I must confess, that at this juncture, I lost all sense and reason, and made moan, at last, in my anguish, that I was a child of the living God and as such was entitled by divine fiat to the necessities of air and light. To which my impassive fellow-captive replied: "whatever Compliance the Necessities of Nature may require, the Wants of Fancy, Children should never be gratified in, nor suffered to *mention*. The very speaking for such a thing, should make them lose it."

*Entry the fourth:*

I am at Leaden Hall Street in London in the oil-polished paneled room of the Royal African Company. I am alone. It is eerily quiet. I am glad to be relieved of my former terrors, and to find myself returned whole in body and mind to my rightful and familiar haunts. I feel calm. Powerful. I place my hands face down on the great oak table, and as if by magic, my gesture generates a disembodied speech:

The *Idea of Solidity* we receive by Touch; and it arises from the resistance we find in the Body to the entrance of any other Body into the Place it possesses, till it has

left it. There is no Idea which we receive more constantly from Sensation, than Solidity.

Suddenly, although a moment before my hands had rested merely on wood, a paper appears beneath them on the table. It is the Company Charter. My hands, although not transparent, strangely provide no barrier to my sight, and I read the words granting our rights to “trade from Cape Blanco in the North to the Cape of Good Hope in the South with a license, which will last a thousand years.” The paper, or perhaps it is only the words on the paper, seem to be adhering my hands to the solid oak, and try as I might I cannot break them loose. “A thousand years, a thousand years,” I keep repeating this phrase to the walls as I try to lift my hands from the contract, wondering anxiously if I shall ever manage to pull them free.

*Entry the fifth:*

I find myself seated in the docket of a stiflingly hot, but august courtroom, a bewigged and scarlet-robed judge peering down on me as if he were the angel called upon by a stern Deity to divide the sheep from the goats on the Day of Doom. A black-clad advocate approaches the docket to depose me concerning my knowledge of a shipboard incident which has resulted in a charge of murder being leveled at one of the Company’s employees, a Captain William Lugan, of Bristol. The advocate queried me as to the character of said Captain. I was pleased to reply quickly and forthrightly that Captain Lugan was a man whom I deemed of sound morals and stout courage, as he had accomplished the hazards of the Atlantic crossing many times previous, always returning a healthy profit on our investment and trust. Moreover, I asserted my contemptuous opinion that the indictment itself was a miscarriage of justice, and had sprung solely from the Court’s misunderstanding of the good Captain’s regrettable but correct actions during that portion of the crossing in tropical latitudes where Providence finds it fit to test men’s characters and wisdom with pestilential heat. As it happened, one of the female captives had returned to her Master, Beelzebub, leaving behind upon her death her suckling daughter. The crew, sensible to their own incapacity for caring for the infant negro, committed the child to the people of its own color, but they, as the truly benighted savages they were, refused their charge, claiming the mother’s fatal illness to be infectious. Therefore, not wishing to invite the specter of pestilence to visit them in their already debilitated state, they cast the babe back on deck, where it lay exposed to the ravishments of the boiling equatorial sun. Whereupon Captain Lugan, a hard man but just, after consulting with the ship’s surgeon, whose opinion was that the child’s agonies were only being prolonged, and that life could not reside in such a vessel for more than an hour, ordered that this unfortunate bit of chattel be consigned to the waves — “a reasonable, nay, a merciful, injunction,” said I, “given the peculiar severity of the circumstances.” After my deposition, the court ruled “that there could have been no premeditated malice,” and dismissed the case. From the gallery, a hubbub of huzzahs from the Company’s Directors and stakeholders echoed discreetly about the humid room, and as I prepared to exit the docket, I too was forced to master the beginnings of a smile, which I did, but only to honor the solemnity of the occasion and the various dignitaries there at hand. But as I stepped down, the judge, having somehow grown even larger when my attention was diverted to my testimony, handed down, literally in this case,

from a great height, some sort of leather-bound portfolio. “What,” thought I, “is this?” the book in my hands suddenly warming and twitching, as if it were some kind of sentient animal. Taken aback by this unexpected development, I sought immediately to cast the book aside, but found to my dismay that I could not. And as I stared at the offending object, these gilt letters whelmed up on its calfskin cover, as a monster might rise up from the depths of the sea: “Fundamental Constitutions or Grand Model of the New Company of the Carolinas.”

*Entry the sixth:*

I am back in the hollow space of the ship’s hold, if space this is, its closeness is so compacted with death and darkness. The stench of this place exceeds any applicable description of loathsomeness, but here we captives must remain, for if taken on deck so near to our own shores, or to any shores, we will attempt to throw ourselves overboard, though we be shackled together and weighted with heavy irons. No risk, no alternative torment or demise, can stay our desire to escape our present fate. The whole ship’s cargo, for we are no more than that, although we are sensible living creatures and no mere bundles of furs or hides, is therefore confined to this hell. Words balk at any description of these horrors. The atmosphere here is absolutely pestilential. The heat of the climate, the stench of the bodies packed “spoonways” in spaces which do not allow for movement, even in cases of injury or death, the attacks of violent rectal fluxes and bloody colics. These factors, plus the violent pitching of the ship, all but suffocate us, the air being unfit for respiration. This insupportable situation is aggravated by the galling irons, which work into our infected flesh. Even the tubs laid by for the relief of our bodily necessities add to our torments, for having surfeited with their filth, the few surviving children fall into them and have to plucked out by their terrified mothers before they are drowned in their own offal. The constant shrieking of the women and the groaning of the dying fester unremittingly into ever new and ever more gristly abominations. And I, John Locke, the promulgator of freedom, and now more bereaved than any, still hear him who is shackled to me saying with calm discernment: “When any number of men have so consented to make one community of government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and include the rest.”

*Entry the seventh:*

I heard bells tolling, and reasoned that it must be the Sabbath day, and marveled that there could be any remembrance of God in such a forsaken place. For now we were disembarked, but our sufferings were scarcely concluded on that account. Someone announces our port of call as Kingston, but if this be a town fit to be the namesake of a king, he must perforce be the king of the damned. Our sight is greeted with dunghills as high as the ships, and on the ground lie human bodies as naked as beasts, their wounds and orifices blackened by flies. Here we are taken to market, herded together and examined by auctioneers and port surgeons for skin abrasions, ophthalmia, missing fingers or toes or any other physical defects, which might adversely affect our price. We suffered, I suffered, I, the author of *An Essay on Human Understanding*, the unspeakable humiliation of having my genitals fingered and weighed for potential abnormalities which might render me unfit for breeding. Distracted by this fresh assault of indignities,

I yet overheard one speak jocularly of the coming “scramble,” and my exhaustion and humiliation were abruptly overcome by a more exalted terror. At the striking of a drum, the buyers rushed upon us like maddened swine, though no mere animal, even if goaded by the sharpest pangs of starvation, could possibly sink to such depths of depravity. The noise and clamor with which this onslaught was attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, once again swept us into a new dimension of torment, one scarcely thought possible on the green surfaces of earth, and hardly to be imagined in the deeps of hell. And yet, we few who were so savagely set upon, incredibly were counted among the fortunate, for those too ill or deformed to become property, were left to join the bodies heaped on the dunghills and scattered along the roads. This is where my previous shackle-mate and benefactor was left to wander, the unrecognized wisest of the wise, though he only quoted this poor scholar’s words. Bony, bereft, one eye now matted closed, yet did he speak these words with swollen tongue. Only through all this din, it was I alone who heard them: “As nothing teaches, so nothing delights more than history.”

*Entry the eighth:*

### **On Board**

On the green sea of darkness, in ships of wood,  
In chains we came, branded with misery —  
This is the body groaning with desire,  
The mind fixated on corporeal pleasures,  
The spirit flayed in galling atmospheres.

In this deep pain, is any shape of good  
Wending its way into the light and air?  
Desire draws us up and drags us down,  
Despair at last brings freedom from despair,  
The eyes, the breath, the suffering turns inward,  
And burns these hells to bliss with loving care.

These ships, these wooden bodies, stowed with death,  
Flame as they sink to freer, brighter depths,  
The dark green sizzling with light and air.  
As we go wending in and winding down,  
Twisting on links of chain to paths of freedom,  
Rending the body loose from its obsessions,  
Tearing the skin that bound us in these lairs,  
And finding home, our home, in one devotion,  
One scintillating act of silent prayer.

Serenity saw that the rest of this strange journal was composed of elaborate whorls, astonishing glyphs, spirals, grimoires, magic squares, letters, sketches, icons, all enigmatic, but seemingly sapient, a code or language defying, and crying out for, decipherment.

