

## AN INFORMAL PORTRAIT OF GEORGE SARTON

*May Sarton\**

Many years after my father's death I received a letter from a stranger who had just discovered George Sarton, one of those moving readers who comes upon a classic work, ignorant, as it were, and under his own steam, with the freshness of personal adventure : "I can only say that your father's great work moves me just as does the final fugue in *The Art of the Fugue* where Bach sums up all musical knowledge in a quadruple — and also unfinished — fugue." My correspondent had just discovered the two-volume *History of Science* — "an unfinished fugue", since those on Greek and Hellenistic science would have been followed by other volumes through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance if George Sarton had lived longer.

"What manner of man was he ?" the letter concludes. "I shall not cease to wonder about this marvelous genius who said, 'Erudition without pedantry is as rare as wisdom itself,' and then wrote 1,200 pages of erudition without any trace of pedantry..." This sketch of George Sarton is a belated answer to that letter.

What manner of man was he ? He was an exceedingly charming man; this charm made itself felt at once, on first meeting, in his beaming smile, the smile of a delighted and sometimes mischievous child that flashed out below the great domed forehead and sensitive brown eyes

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behind their thick glasses. He was stout, with beautiful hands and small feet, a stocky man who walked down Brattle Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at exactly the same time every morning, with the propulsive energy of a small steam engine, a French beret on his head, a briefcase in one hand, in a coat a little too long for him because he could not be bothered to have his clothes altered and insisted on buying them off a rack to save time.

What manner of man was he who moved with extraordinary freedom over the ages and the continents within a daily orbit as undeviating as that of any planet ? A man of disciplined routine yet who lived surrounded by what might be called the communion of saints : "Today is the first day of spring," he notes in his journal, "the feast of St. Benedict (the beginning of the Middle Ages) and Bach's birthday — what a conjunction !" A man bent over a desk in a tiny bookfilled study in the Widener Library at Harvard University for many hours each day, whose image of himself was that of a crusader in a holy war — the war to convince the universities and the academies that the history of science must be treated as a separate discipline, and the war to convince the public at large that the history of science could be a saving grace.

A man who at one time chose to spend his Saturday afternoons at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, studying Chinese painting for the sheer pleasure of it. "Who is that man who must be a specialist since he comes so regularly and studies so hard ?" someone asked. "Oh, that is George Sarton, the historian of science, taking a half day's holiday", came the startling answer.

A young Belgian who, having just founded the first international journal for the history of science, suddenly found himself transported, with his English wife and baby daughter, to a strange country across the seas; who translated himself into a new tongue when he was over thirty; and who, at over forty, decided that he would have to learn Arabic for the sake of his medieval studies, did so, and read the whole of *Arabian Nights* in the original tongue with huge enjoyment. The least self-aware man who ever kept a journal, the most innocent and willful of hearts,

who could seem totally unaware of the inner lives of those close to him, yet who enacted within himself a daily drama of self-criticism and heroid endeavor — above all, a scholar in the old-fashioned sense of the word, a dedicated man, a man of endless ardor and curiosity, one of the great pioneers in a new discipline.

As one way of trying to answer the question "What manner of man was George Sarton ?" let us follow him through a specimen day. We have watched his elated progress down Brattle Street; after his death several neighbors mentioned their delight in seeing him go past each morning like some Twentieth Century Express with a destination five centuries back in time, perhaps, at a station called Athens or Rome or Mecca or Constantinople or Peking — toward Widener 189 where the five volumes of *An Introduction to the History of Science* were slowly being delved out and written.

The glass door of Widener 189 bore the inscription ISIS; not a reference (as at least one person imagined it might be) to a collection of Gertrude Steiniana, nor an assertion of Being, but the title of the quarterly George Sarton founded and edited for more than forty years. Once he had locked himself safely behind that door, the first thing he did each morning, of course, was to run through the mail, which might bring him letters and queries from scholars and friends in England, Japan, Arabia, Israel, France, Russia — in this sense alone he was truly "a man of the world," a man of many letters, a man of few if any intimate friends except epistolary ones. So it happened that in 1953 I picked up a dictionary of current American slang translated into Japanese by Professor Shituka Saito and discovered that it had been inscribed "To Professor Doctor George Sarton, my best friend." When I inquired who this unknown intimate was, my father gave me one of his slightly guilty yet innocent smiles and answered, "I have never seen him, as a matter of fact." Yet I am sure that Professor Saito was being a little more than polite, and it is quite possible that he had been the recipient of several of those outbursts of rage or self-pity or mere self-revelation that took the place with George Sarton of intimacy in the ordinary sense.

In the morning's mail there would be the usual pile of books and periodicals, and, every now and then, a twenty-pound sack of birdseed as well. George Sarton loved to feed the pigeons who came to coo at the windowsill, and even nested there, so that the endless writing in that fine hand was accompanied by the raising of innumerable pigeon families within two feet of his left elbow. Unfortunately professors and students who had offices across the court did not enjoy the sight of such untidiness in the sacred precincts. Reports reached the authorities, and George Sarton was requested to desist. This was the occasion of a notable exchange of letters, the opening shot being Sarton's expression of horror that Widener would consider becoming a second-class library, since every first-class library the world over, including the British Museum, had its pigeons. And for a time there was a truce. But the cleaning of the court was becoming a real problem, and after some months George Sarton surrendered in a final subdued letter in which he granted that if he had to choose between offending his neighbors and offending the pigeons, he supposed his neighbors must come first. I don't imagine that even kind Dr. Metcalf, then head of the Widener Library, had any idea of the inner agitation with which my father denied the pleading and sometimes even aggressively irritated pecks at his window for some months before the pigeons too gave up. Perhaps they eventually found their way, as did the sacks of seed, to his house in Channing Place, and thus set their seal of pigeonly approval on a remarkable personal library.

The mail attended to, George Sarton could finally get to work. On Columbus Day of 1942 he noted in his journal, "The difficulty — as well as the delight — of my work lies in its great diversity. There is much unity of single-mindedness deep in it — but the surface is infinitely diversified. For example, last Saturday I was revising completely my notes on the Persian theologian Al-Taftāzani. Yesterday and today I had to prepare four lectures to be given tomorrow and Wednesday — dealing respectively with

- 1) The history of science in general (Colby)
- 2) Science and religion
- 3) The Western discovery of printing (Radcliffe)

- 4) Leonardo da Vinci, man of science (American Academy) (Radcliffe)."

We cannot watch a mind at work. We can only measure its caliber by the results. The five monumental volumes called *An introduction to the History of Science* did not go farther than the fourteenth century. But, to give a specific idea of the breadth of the man, as well as of his concentrated power, consider that after his retirement from teaching at sixty-five, he published four books — *Ancient Science and Modern Civilization* (The Montgomery Lectures, University of Nebraska Press, 1954); *Galen of Pergamon* (The Logan Claudening Lectures on the History and Philosophy of Science, University of Kansas Press, 1954); *The Appreciation of Ancient and Medieval Science during The Renaissance (1450-1600)* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955); *Six Wings, Men of Science in the Renaissance*, (The Patten Foundation Lectures, University of Indiana Press, 1957) — and that during this time he was also working on the two huge volumes on Greek and Hellenistic science to which I have already referred, the last of which appeared posthumously, but had been completed before his death.

The days at the office, even when he was not lecturing, were tense and packed. Then, at about four o'clock (though in the later years he sometimes went home at lunchtime), he walked back the full mile to Channing Place, carrying as likely as not two briefcases stuffed with books and papers. There he would be welcomed by my mother and Cloudy, the gray Persian cat, her plume of a tail in air, and soon all three settled down for their ritual tea in the big living room or, from June to October, out-of-doors in the garden. It was the time of intimate exchanges, the relation to each other of the day's accomplishments and difficulties, and the impassioned discussions on art and life which made this marriage such a continuously alive one. He might have brought her an art book from Widener, producing it from his briefcase with the air of a magician; for there were many lacunae in his usefulness to the household, but he would always gladly search out and carry home a heavy book !

George Sarton, who had grown up in a bourgeois society where

women were indulged rather than respected, emerged as a young man into the artistic and social ferment of the city of Ghent at the turn of the century, and became an ardent feminist and socialist; several of his friends among women were artists, including his future wife (as in his later years at least three of his women friends were distinguished scholars); he always had respect for women's judgment and gifts. My mother was not a learned person, but she was an artist and had a spirit that matched his in its intensity, although since her life was twice dislocated by transplanting, first from England to Belgium, and then from Belgium to the United States, her gifts had to be turned primarily to help us keep afloat financially, and so perhaps never fully flowered. But that these two shared a true companionship about all the things that mattered most to them (including cats and gardens !) is clear. I was delighted to find the following note in my father's journals : "A flower garden is a poetic creation; Any woman who knows how to grow flowers and loves them is immensely superior to one who does not." My happiest vision of these parents of mine is of my mother lying in the garden at teatime on a chaise longue, a white shawl flung rather elegantly round her shoulders, a cat on her lap, looking at her husband with a slightly quizzical tender expression, and of my father, a battered soft straw hat tilted down over his eyes, smoking a cigar and enjoying her creation, the garden : I sometimes think this hour was the only relaxed one of his day. The journal notes more than once, "A Blessed day — thanks as always to Mabel."

Of course she mothered him, and I think he was quite unaware of it, although he often called her "Mother," as he had done since I was a child; he was chiefly aware of his very real deprivation in his own infancy and while he was growing up, and there are several references to it in the journal. Among these, one seems to me especially characteristic in its approach to an intimate matter; it was written on his sixty-second birthday : "I have now discovered that the thirty-first of August is the saint's day of the Spaniard Raymond Nonnatus (1200-1240). He was called Non-natus because he was 'not-born,' but removed from his mother's womb after her death. My own fate was not very different from his, because my mother died soon after my birth and I never knew her.

Neither did I really miss her until I saw Mabel mothering our child. Then only could I measure the greatness of my loss. Many of my shortcomings are due to the fact that I had no mother, and that my good father had no time to bother much about me. I am indeed 'an unlicked bear' (*un ours mal léché*)."

I must append to this passage one from a later entry on the same subject, this one written after my mother's death, "I sometimes mutter, 'Bear it, Bear !' or else 'Five Bears !' which is an abbreviated form of the great rule of conduct 'Bear and Forbear.'" Bear and forbear he did, even when a pipe burst, the cellar flooded, and his response was "Let nature take its course," as he went upstaire to his study, leaving my mother to cope ! You who ask, "What manner of man was he ?" Was he not a charming man ? Whatever his faults as a human being, whatever his lacks as husband and father (they were not inconsiderable), all must be forgiven such innocence and such charm.

But by now tea is over and George Sarton has disappeared into the upper regions of the house, to his study there, with its shelves of records and books, and its pigeon-frequented balcony. There, as he himself explains, "For the last twenty or thirty years it has been my habit to spend at least a half hour before dinner reading Arabic, Greek or Latin (not Hebrew, my knowledge of it being insufficient) and that reading, which is necessarily *slow* (even in Arabic) is restful. It is like praying, for it implies a humbler and quieter state of mind." As long as my mother was alive, this period of quiet reading was followed by an hour or so of recorded music. Methodical in all things, George Sarton always noted what records he had played in every month. In April of 1952, for instance, I find that he had been listening to Dvořák, Gluck, Beethoven, Brahms, Palestrina, Stravinsky, Chopin, Pergolesi. Curiosity and a developing musical taste led him to buy many recordings of modern music, some of which he came to enjoy (it was he who introduced me to Mahler), but in 1952 he explodes in his journal, "Many modern composers make me think of people who cannot tell a joke without punching you in the back; they are so brutal, they insist with increasing noise. I am willing to forget their dissonances and I would gladly smile

or laugh if they were not so terribly anxious. They seem to say : 'You have never heard music like this' and they deafen you. Impudent rascals.

"Yet if I must choose between artistic impudence on the one hand and administrative complacency and stupidity on the other, I shall never hesitate — give me the impudent artists and the rebels."

There speaks my father, who had observed Parkinson's Law long before Mr. Parkinson did. In 1954 he was writing in his journal, "The steady development of administration everywhere afflicts me more than I can say because it always implies irreversible losses in personality and humanity. It is now spreading with the virulence and malignity of a cancer. It does not affect only offices (like the Postal one, the Treasury, etc.) but universities, museums, and many scholars and artists today have the mentality of an administrator if not of a business man. Think of a university Professor who manages his work and thinks steadily of his 'interests' in the same spirit as the owner of a delicatessen store. I know such. What caused that pitiful disease ? Is it the result of the growth of industry and technology, of the availability of more machines and gadgets, or is it simply the result of growing numbers of people ? Every administration grows like a cancer. Administrative problems grow much faster than the number of students and teachers..." and he adds in a typical peroration, "It is high time for me to leave this mechanical and administrative world and return to the bosom of Nature."

Possibly the violence of this reaction became a crotchet in the later years; or perhaps it was rather a kind of passive resistance, the involuted answer to certain real humiliations which he had suffered during World War II when, for instance, the then head of the Carnegie Institution (which, it must also be remembered, had generously supported my father through the years) told him to his face that the history of science had become "irrelevant." For George Sarton and his way of thinking, the history of science and its humanizing influence would never be less "irrelevant" than in an age of vast technological progress, and never less "irrelevant" than in time of war, if the values for which we fought were to be preserved. But whatever the subconscious reasons may

have been, it must be admitted that my father was the "enfant terrible" of administrators, and at one time threw away letters from the Harvard deans without opening them, as "irrelevant"; if this was childishness, and it surely was, the childishness sprang from a kernel of hard-won personal truth.

When George Sarton first came to Harvard through the kind offices of L.J. Henderson, he had no official position in the university; a viva voce arrangement was made with President Lowell that he teach a half-course in the history of science in exchange for a study at the Widener Library. It must be remembered that he was already a fellow of the Carnegie Institution and was receiving a modest stipend from them. No doubt from President Lowell's point of view it had seemed a fair arrangement. But when, after twenty years, this informal agreement had added up to an enormous amount of work without pay, or ridiculously low pay, George Sarton, too shy or too proud to complain, had taken a stance of bitter resentment against Harvard.

The incoming President Conant made all possible amends within his power — the modest lecturer was given a Professorship and an Honorary Doctorate. But the tragic flaw in George Sarton's relations with the university remained, and the wound was never healed. However, his relations with the staff at the Widener Library, to whom he owed much, were cordial and even affectionate : "I do not love Harvard so much, a hard stepmother, but I love the library, and I am grateful to all its officers, from the top Dr. Metcalf, to the girls who replace books on the shelves."

There is no doubt that George Sarton's image of himself as a kind of martyr was somewhat unrealistic, but was it not a concomitant part of the fury with which he set himself to work ? He studies as other men have gone to war; the sense of a great mission was constant, and alas, great passion is inevitably flawed. For those who inherit a wilderness the pioneers have opened up and civilized for them, certain graces are possible which were denied their forbears.

I was the more touched to find in one of the journal entries in the last year of George Sarton's life a belated recognition that, after all, fate had been kind. Here he gently lays aside the mantle of isolation and injustice which he had worn with such dramatic verve for so long. The entry is called "Conversation with Rufus" (Rufus was his orange cat) : "As I was going down from my study I passed Mabel's bedroom and found Rufus stretched out luxuriously on her bed. His red fur was shining in the sun, and he looked very handsome. I stroked him and said, 'You are a very happy puss. To think that you came here as a beggar, sitting at the threshold, without any introduction or explanation. You were taken in, and now you enjoy all the comforts of a big house, garden and wood... You are a lucky puss.'

"He opened wide his big eyes, looked at me without smiling, and finally answered (this was the first time I heard him speak and I was taken aback), 'You are a good master and I love you as much as I can, but speaking of luck, what about yours ? If the Carnegie Institution had not come to your rescue what would have happened ? You would have been finished.'

"Puss was right. Every creature needs luck, and he is very ungrateful who ascribes his success to his merit and naught else. All the merit in the world will not save a man against bad luck. The theory of success is written by successful men who would be wiser if they boasted less..."

These journal entries were written at the end of the day after supper, when my father returned eagerly to his study to get back to what he called "lazy work" : The best time of every day is the evening. A simple meal, a glass of wine, half an hour of music and then lazy work. That is my best working time : creative laziness."

His idea of "lazy work" would have seemed like labor to most of us, for it was in the long evenings when he sat in his big chair, smoking a pipe, his feet (so small in their soft slippers) stretched out on a pouf, a pad and pencils at his elbow, that he kept up the critical bibliographies

so valuable to historians of science. What exactly did this mean ? It meant reading or at least scanning all the books in the field as they came out, and making a critical note describing their contents, these notes to be collated periodically in *Isis*. In 1952, when it became necessary to cut down somewhere, this was the logical place, and at that time the journal notes : "Sunday, 5203.23 Laetare. The preparation of these 79 bibliographies represents an almost uninterrupted labor of forty-one years (beginning in 1912 to the end of 1952). If we assume that the 79 C.B. include 100,000 notes, this means that I have written an average of six notes a day (holidays included).

"It is like the walking of 1,000 miles in 1,000 consecutive hours. To write six notes each day for a few days is nothing, but to do so without stop or weakness for 14,975 days is an achievement. It implies at least some constancy !"

When, finally, he had spent an hour or two at his "lazy work," the time had come to assess the day. "It has been my habit for a great many years (some thirty ?) to unite two numbers in my pocket diary. The first is the number of hours of work, the second (varying from 1 to 5) indicating my state of happiness or grace." Dear methodical man ! I have an idea that if the state of grace was as high as 5, he then rewarded himself with a good cigar and some reading purely for enjoyment. He was always discovering writers for himself — George Eliot, for instance (as a boy of course he had missed the English classics, as he was reading the French ones), or Turgenev, or Freya Stark; sometimes he re-read an old favorite such as Geoffrey Scott's *Portrait of Zélide*, and every week he read *The New Yorker* with absorbed interest. So the long rich day came to an end and George Sarton went down the two flights to call Rufus in, lock the door, and go to bed, where, as he often said, he "slept like a log."

Does the figure of a man begin to emerge from these pages, the style of a man, the being of a man ?

The concentrated essence emerges from a sampling of journal

entries from 1945 to 1953 — a little bouquet of humors, beliefs, self-analyses, and pleasures as I came upon them the other day scattered through the thick black spring binders where the journal was kept on lined loose-leaf paper. It will be remembered that each entry was preceded by the name of the Saint's Day. George Sarton was not a Catholic; in his family the men were anti-Catholic and the women, on the whole, Catholic. His father, for instance, was a high officer in the Masonic Order, but his father's sister Elisa (Mère Marie d'Agréda) became Mother Superior in the Société de Marie-Réparatrice, and was wholeheartedly respected and admired by her nephew George. Beyond this personal reason, why did he always keep such tender respect for the Church ? I have an idea that it was in part historical piety, his sense of the continuity of the spirit of man, his wish to feel himself surrounded by all these unworldly souls, the communion of saints on earth; it is a fact that the only reading he abhorred was in metaphysics. He was truly religious in spirit, but he was not interested in metaphysical speculations, and found even Plato irritating. A friend once found him in a mood of despair in his little study at Widener, where he ejaculated in a tone of exasperated misery, "My wife is dying and I have had to read Plato all morning !" He would have been hard to "convert"; he remained a liberal in politics all his life, and the worldly and political aspects of the Church (where clerical administrators lurk) would have been unacceptable to his uncompromising stance.

Here, then, is the man talking to himself :

[HE ALWAYS DATED LETTERS AND JOURNAL ENTRIES BY A METHOD OF HIS OWN INVENTION. THE FIRST TWO NUMERALS REFER TO THE YEAR, THE SECOND TWO TO THE MONTH, AND THE FINAL TWO TO THE DAY OF THE MONTH.]

Friday, 4506.08

Cloudy's Death... Cloudy, alias "Big Puss," was a Persian cat who had shared our lives in Channing Place since 1932. She was thus in her 14th and had given us a hundred kittens. We miss her. She was so beautiful and sweet. If there is a heaven for cats she is there now...

Adieu, sweet Puss !

4508.28

Bless the crickets that chirp all night, when the birds are not singing.

The hotter it is and the louder they chirp. I can *hear* how hot it is. There are simpler ways, however, of measuring the temperature.

4511.17 St. Gregory Thaumaturgos

We cannot reach God except through our fellowmen. We cannot really love him except in them. We can do nothing for him except through them, and whatever good or evil we do to them we do to him. Nothing can be clearer, or more certain to me, than that.

4511.25

The first time I saw my whole head in a mirror was thirty years ago when I was lecturing at the University of Illinois in Urbana. The bathroom of the house where I was staying contained a triple mirror (like an open triangle) and I suddenly saw my head sidewise, and did not like it. In fact, I was shocked.

In recent times I have often interrogated my mirror, and not only when I was shaving. I caught myself doing so, and tried to understand why I did it.

The reason was not difficult to discover. I often feel very tired, and I am asking the mirror, "Do I look as tired as I feel ?" The answer is sometimes *yes*, sometimes *no*, — for I feel too tired for expression.

4708.31 Sixty Third Birthday

This birthday ended the hardest summer of my life — hard labor on the index to Vol. III. I began the preparation of the main index on 4707.07 and ended 4708.15. Greek Index 4707.12-18; Chinese index 4708.15-26; Japanese Index 4707.27-29. The main index was ended and the Chinese one begun on The Assumption — the most memorable Assumption of my life next to the one in 1925 when Mabel, May and I were in Lourdes, in the Pyrenees.

Hard as it was, the work was bearable because I thought of its

usefulness, and because I realized that this was the last large (gigantic) index of my life. An index is the nearest approach in the world of scholarship to charity in common life. Whether this was due to accumulated tiredness and the need of relaxation, or simply to a kind of hay-fever, this birthday found me somewhat depressed and deflated.

4709.04

This morning, having finished all urgent work, I left at about eleven for a halfday holiday in Boston (the first since June 18th, almost three months ago). I went to the Museum of Fine Arts where I lunched, then in the afternoon to the Exeter to see two English films, neither very good, but I was in the mood to be entertained. Then I walked to the Public Gardens where I spent a delightful half hour watching the ducks, swans, pigeons, squirrels, and the people. Then home where I found Mabel — a lovely day.

St. Thomas of Villanova 4709.22

The pigeons and other birds in the garden give me great pleasure. They sit on the balustrade of the balcony and watch me working in my study; they must think of me as the old man in a cage, for they are free while I seem to be confined. My only objection to them is that they do not allow the other birds to share the meals which I provide for them, except the small part which they throw overboard in their eagerness...

I wish there were a pond close to the house and that we could give hospitality to wild ducks and swans, but one cannot have everything, and I am well satisfied with the pigeons, starlings, chickadees, blue birds, etc., and with the squirrels. We sometimes hear an owl at night but never saw him.

St. Nicolas 4712.06

[THE ENTRY IS A LONG ONE ABOUT OUR GOOD-BYES TO THE NURSE COMPANION OF NEIGHBORS OF OURS, WHO BECAME MORTALLY ILL AND DECIDED TO GO HOME TO NORWAY TO DIE. THE PASSAGE ABOUT THIS TRAGIC LEAVE-TAKING ENDS, "THE SAILING AWAY OF A PERSON TO GO AND DIE IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY ACROSS THE OCEAN."

This made a deep impression upon me and yet I am ashamed to confess that my attention was soon diverted by a series of petty accidents. Doctor Ayer wrote me that there might be sugar in my urine and that a new examination was necessary. The only pair of trousers I had left contained many holes; it was clearly going to pieces. I broke my only watch, and am now a timeless man. Professor Ware communicated new difficulties concerning the printing of the Chinese index. I discovered the need of preparing a few more lectures to complete my course on ancient science...

5204.28

I have always envied the good orthodox people and have always been heterodox; I could not help it. Nobody can help being what he is. I might say that I have tried all my life to be orthodox, "bien pensant," and have never quite succeeded.

5210.28

What a conjunction of major stars in 1685, Handel born in Halle, Saxony; Bach in Eisenbach; Domenico Scarlatti in Naples. They died in the fifties of the next century...

5302.04

It is curious how some of our common names are badly, stupidly chosen. For example one speaks of the golden age as being in the remote past. That "golden" age was an age of relative poverty. Why call it "golden" ? As soon as the gold began to flow in, everything became tawdry and cheap. Instead of "golden age" we should call it the age of poverty and innocence, the age of virtue.

5303.28 St. Giovanni da Capistrano (1385-1456)

I am deeply interested in the saints because they are rebels against material comfort and money, defenders of the spiritual life. They are the heroes of the human conscience, but my interest is not restricted to the Christian saints, and on the other hand, I realize that in early days canonizations were often arbitrary. Take the case of Isadore of Seville, a great name in the history of the Spanish Church and in the history of

medieval science.

Let us assume he was a real saint; the Church did not canonize him alone however, but also his brothers Leander and Fulgentius and his sister Florentina. Hence four brothers and sisters were saints. Is that credible ? At any rate, it must have been a unique conjunction. It is very probable that the greatest saints have never been discovered; their sainthood was too deep to be obvious.

The pope ought to canonize the unknown saint.

#### 5310.19 St. Frideswide

It is a great pleasure to sit either alone or with friends in my little dining room. During my travels I sometimes thought that I would never see it again.

When I am alone I see St. Jerome in front of me, and to my left Kobo Daishi. They represent two different worlds, two ages, and two periods in my own development; St. Jerome and Kobo, have they ever come together anywhere but in Channing Place ?

[THE ST. JEROME WAS A LARGE REPRODUCTION OF EL GRECO'S PAINTING; IT WAS THE ONE THING MY FATHER'S FAITHFUL HOUSEKEEPER, JULIA, ASKED TO HAVE WHEN THE HOUSE WAS BROKEN UP. THE PORTRAIT OF KOBO DAISHI AS A CHILD, A REPRODUCTION OF A PAINTING BY NOBUZANE (1177-1265) HAS STAYED WITH ME. THE EIGHTH-CENTURY KOBO DAISHI IS THE MOST RENOWNED OF ALL JAPANESE SAINTS ACCORDING TO LAWRENCE BINYON, AND HE WAS NOT ONLY A PRIEST BUT A PAINTER, SCULPTOR, AND CALLIGRAPHER AS WELL. HE IS MENTIONED IN SARTON'S *Introduction*, VOL.1, p. 553]

It will have become clear, I trust, by now that the qualities that made George Sarton the historian he was made him also something else, and gave him the intangible personal quality which elicits a letter such as I received the other day from my unknown correspondent. My father's first ambition had been to become a poet and a novelist — as a young man he even published works of fiction under an assumed name. *Isis*

provided this buried poet and humanist with a platform. Over the forty years of his editorship my father wrote a great many short prefaces — they were known among his intimates as "Sarton's little sermons," and there were people who subscribed to *Isis* (not historians of science, these) for the pleasure of reading them. On the other hand, it must be confessed that they irritated some professional scholars, among them L.J. Henderson, who scolded him bitterly for these "sentimental self-indulgences." They are to a large extent statements of faith, battle cries if you will. When George Sarton wrote a biographical portrait such as that in "Communion with Erasmus," the degree of his identification with the subject was intense; when he talked of the slow beginner, the Ugly Duckling, he was really speaking from his own inwardness.

The fact is that he consistently reached out, not only toward scholars in the field, but toward all men and women of good will. And I have come to understand since his death, whatever the "professionals" may sometimes wish to deny, that just because of this tendency toward self-dramatization he reached a much wider public than scholars usually do, or even wish to do.

How beautiful that he was allowed to die as he wished, in harness, on his way to deliver a lecture in Montreal, he who had written shortly before, "To die suddenly is like taking the wrong bus, and that bus flies out of the road to the stars... in spite of all my recriminations, I am still at heart a Platonist..."

He could die with a sense of accomplishment rare in human life. The notation in the journal for Sunday 4809.03 might as well refer to himself : "It is clear to me that the main purpose of a man's life is to give others what is in him. Such a matter is not a question of selfishness or unselfishness. Mozart was probably rather selfish in a childish way, but he gave the world what was in him (he could not help it) and *what* a gift !

"We only have what we are, and we only have what we give. That is, we only have what we are, but on condition that we give all that is in us."

