

April 2016

Alfreda Withington Correspondence

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Alfreda Withington

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WITHINGTON, Dr. Alfreda,

Pennsylvania

Withington, Alfreda

Dr. Withington was born in Pennsylvania and received her early education at the Hicksite Quaker School in Germantown. She was graduated from Cornell University and began her medical career among the poor of the world's worst slums. In Europe she studied in Zurich, Vienna and Prague. She spent a summer in Labrador working with Dr. Grenfell. During the first World War she served in France, working, among other positions, as chief of the Franco-American Dispensary and Hospital at Dreux. After she had returned to the United States, she worked for a while as doctor in the Pine Mountain Settlement in the mountain district of Harlan County, Kentucky. At present she is living in Washington, D. C.

Adapted from the review on the
jacket of MINE EYES HAVE SEEN.



DR. ALFREDA
WITHINGTON

April 7, 1941

Dr. Alfreda B. Withington
20 E Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Withington:

May we join your many friends in congratulating you upon the publication of MINE EYES HAVE SEEN. Advance reports indicate that the book will enjoy a justifiable popularity. We notice that Burton Rascoe calls it "magnificent."

Mrs. Laura E. Richards called to our attention the pleasant fact that we may claim you as a Maine author. Biographical data seem difficult to find, and we are therefore writing directly to you about the matter. The Maine Author Collection is an exhibit of over a thousand volumes, inscribed and presented for this purpose by those who have written them. These authors were born in Maine, have lived here, or written about the state. The friendly cooperation and generosity of Maine authors is heart-warming, and it is always a glad day when we are able to add another name to the literary roster, and place another outstanding book on these exhibit shelves.

We also gather all available information -- biographical, critical, photographic -- and these files, together with the books, form a most valuable representation of the contribution of Maine authors to our country's literature.

We hope that it will be possible for us to enjoy the privilege of including an inscribed presentation copy of MINE EYES HAVE SEEN, and we send you our sincere wishes for its instant success.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

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SECRETARY

Apr. 14. 1941

THE DODGE HOTEL
WASHINGTON

Mrs Huda M. Luch Jacob-

Secretary - Maine State Library

My dear Mrs Jacob:-

I should be very happy to
contribute a copy of "Maine Eyes
Have Seen" to your Maine Author
Collection, if you consider me so
entitled -

I was born in Pennsylvania -
Have owned a place in Maine -
(until I recently deeded it to a nephew)

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

Enc-1

I have spent my summers in
Douhegan for ten years -

My father was Principal of the
Hallowell Academy which according
to Mrs Mason in her book on "Old
Hallowell on the Kennebec" - he made
famous by his personality and
scholarly methods, Later ^{in 1853} he went - as
Principal of its Classical Academy -
to Germantown - Pa -

I await your reply.

Sincerely - Alfreda Withington

My mother's family through of Mass. origin
lived in Maine for a couple of generations -

April 18, 1941

Dr. Alfreda Withington
The Dodge Hotel
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Withington:

Your connection with Maine seems to us sufficient to claim you as a Maine author, by adoption, at least. We cannot be insistent, of course; but we assure you that you would have excellent company, for among our adopted authors (some of whom live here the year round, some during summers only) we number Laura E. Richards, Gladys Hasty Carroll, Rachel Field, Ben Ames Williams, and Booth Tarkington.

MINE EYES HAVE SEEN is certainly a book that would bring distinction to the Maine Author Collection; and we can think of no volume of the season that would give us more pleasure to accept for the exhibit. We have been, by your friendly and charming letter, encouraged to enclose a label and stamp for you convenience in sending the book, inscribed for the collection. We shall be exceedingly glad to place it upon the shelves, and to call you a Maine author.

Our good wishes continue, and we add a cordial invitation to visit the library if you are again in Maine.

Very truly yours

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May 17, 1941

Dr. Alfreda Withington
Dodge Hotel
Washington, D. C.

Dear Dr. Withington:

What a thoroughly delightful and individual inscription you have placed in the exhibit copy of your splendid autobiography, MINE EYES HAVE SEEN! We are certainly very pleased and grateful for this gift, and for the enrichment and distinction of the Maine Author Collection by the addition of a most outstanding book.

You will be interested to know that we are purchasing a copy for the lending section of the library, and that we have already had more than one request for it,

We send you our congratulations, our thanks, and a sincere invitation to visit us when you are in Maine this summer.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
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Encl--postal refund

A WOMAN DOCTOR'S SAGA

A Magnificent, Challenging Autobiography

By BURTON RASCOE

Author of "Before I Forget,"
"Titans of Literature,"
"Prometheans," "A Bookman's
Daybook," "Joys of Reading,"
etc.

ALFREDA WITHINGTON, M.D., is my candidate, in modern times, for sainthood in the non-denominational hierarchy of those who live, or have lived, the dangerous life of unselfish devotion to the service of humanity. Dr. Withington, however, is the last person in the world to think of herself as a saint: she has humor, a profound sense of reality, a sense of duty so inherent in her nature that she never uses the word except in another sense, as "on duty": throughout her life she has accepted the most appalling hazards without the slightest notion that she was doing anything noble or self-sacrificing or dangerous. There is nothing soft, sentimental, holier-than-thou, egotistical or petty-minded about her.

There is not a bogus word or a bogus sentiment in the whole of Dr. Withington's magnificent autobiography, *My Eyes Have Seen*. After you have read it, the words, "service," "humanity," "democracy," "sacrifice," "liberty," etc., become recognizable to you as the catchwords of politicians, editorialists, columnists and reviewers; for they are not words which Dr. Withington uses. Her life has been so much one of service; her work has been so humane; she has been so democratic in every fibre of her being; she has "sacrificed" comfort, security, "pleasure," the soft-and-easy way of life so naturally and unwittingly; she has enjoyed liberty so much by accepting the limitations which time and circumstance impose upon one's concept of liberty, that these words have no meaning for her, in the vague sense in which they are ordinarily bandied about.

She Chose the Hazardous, Dangerous Jobs

It would seem, on reading this book, that this eighty-year-old pioneer among women in medicine always instinctively and almost perversely turned down every "great opportunity" to make herself rich, famous, honored with academic degrees, a celebrity and a "personage" in order to take up some ill-paying, unpublicized, hazardous and dangerous job—always a job in which there was no conceivable satisfaction except the satisfac-

tion of her own soul, and in which that satisfaction was to be gained only by hardships, discomfort, hunger, exposure to cold and disease, and hard physical labor.

She decided upon a career in medicine at a time when it was generally considered immoral, immodest and against the mandates of God for a girl or woman to learn the use of a typewriter for wages in an office, let alone attend clinics, dissect cadavers, hear the physiological functions of the human body described in detail and prepare to earn a living as a doctor. From the first, after her graduation from the Woman's Medical College in New York City and in search for post-graduate work in Zurich, Vienna and Prague, she ran up against the prejudice against women in the medical profession. But she took everything in her stride, never complained, and, probably, simply by declining to make a nuisance of herself as a vociferous feminist, she so won the interest of the great diagnosticians, biologists and surgeons of Europe by her intelligence and integrity that the barriers against her pursuit of knowledge were gradually, and sometimes surprisingly, let down for her. Her adventures in Europe, where she walked without fear, like Horace in his forest, because her heart was pure, are so simply and dramatically told that you often catch your breath at what looks like an incredible combination of courage and naiveté.

To Labrador She Went to Minister to Starveling Whites, Tubercular Eskimos

It was entirely in character for Dr. Withington to ignore specialization, in gynecology for instance, which was the one field in which women were beginning to make some headway, to go in for general practice and choose a town like Pittsfield, Mass., where she would have to learn to ski in order to visit her patients in winter. And it is entirely in character that, just when she had built up a fine, comfortable practice in Pittsfield, had kept abreast of the progress in medicine by periods of study in New York, and had been offered the chair of Physiology and Resident Physician at Vassar, she would hear about Sir Wilfred Grenfell and volunteer to go up and minister to the diseased and starveling whites and the tubercular Eskimos of Labrador—and to go there in a foul tub, so unsafe that a man doctor deserted it at the first opportunity. In Labrador she had to live in overcrowded huts, eat raw fish (once for a long time when there was a famine of salt), go forty miles alone over dangerous ice to doctor the gangrened hand of some coughing and miserable native who had been careless

with a fishhook or to help a mother bring another Eskimo into the world.

Nowhere in this astounding story of fortitude, endurance, deprivation and work do you get the impression that Dr. Withington ever thought she was doing anything extraordinary or anything that her nature and training had not destined her to do. But don't entertain the idea that she meekly submitted to everything disagreeable. If she didn't like something or the way things were done, she said so, firmly, and usually got results. People obeyed her, not because she was domineering but simply because she gave them cause to have faith and confidence in her character, her good sense and her ability. She wouldn't even eat things she didn't like in a place where there isn't any wide variety of diet. She didn't like whale meat after trying only one mouthful and so she never again ate whale meat in a country where it was the principal article of food.

She Met the Challenge of the First World War

When the war came on, Dr. Withington, of course, went right over and, in practically no time, was Chief of the Anglo-French Hospital at Dreux—not, mind you, in some safe hospital in the South of France but one north of Paris within the range of the German guns. Her account of this adventure in mercy is at once thrilling and heart-breaking; but it is told without heroics or flag-waving: Dr. Withington again had a job to do, even to the happy detail of going over the head of a pompous petty officer who refused her the blankets he was sending back to America after the war was over; she wanted them for her shivering wounded and got them.

Invalided back to America by an attack of angina, she read a notice, while she was convalescent, that a doctor was wanted in a hill-billy settlement near the famous coal-mining region of Harlan County, Kentucky. This, the last, chapter in a thrilling book, is the best of all. Here Dr. Withington discloses that she is a born writer as well as a healer of wounds and a healer of souls; for she captures the native idiom in her dialogue; she makes her strange, clannish, feuding, moon-shining, hard-drinking, superstitious, primitive mountain people come warmly to life as people she loves, understands, sympathizes with and is never in the least bit condescending to.

Here, again, she deliberately chose what most people would consider the hard life (it was certainly the unremunerative one) entailing long, lone rides at night over dreary mountainsides where life is held lightly and where shooting and cutting scrapes are of common occurrence and where the people

... Alexander, who heads up, chins in, should British Army. We can summarize Huxley writes, "by saying that it is a certain natural and correct response—a relationship which, when the organs and parts of the body made in a state of nature tend instinctively. It is only when they go wrong, as they have done, acquired under the stresses of not correct relation of head and neck obtained when the head continues in position. Forward and Up! If it means that hundreds of thousands show how to unlearn the bad habits of industrial life and will acquire one health and well-being, a correct Alexander's principle and technique treated exhaustively in his three books: *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, *Conscious Control of the Individual*, and *Conscious Control of the Individual*. All three of his published books by John Dewey. . . . From Ivo successor to Quentin Reynolds' *The* about the R.A.F. titled *Wings of I* surely the first book about one of he written, set-up, bound, publisher, you my personal testimony that I under fire, that pages twenty-eight, typescript costume, were torn by person whether that my loyal ser-

... London, where bombs tumbled shot where bombs assembly of chapters and ing out their solemn warning of *Factory* I have tried to capture of history's greatest moments. 'M the R. A. F.' And here is as her Britain's R. A. F. in action as you Reynolds' descriptive narrative for *Gas Take It* coming April 4th (5. Nazis will be over again tomorrow every night. They will drop thousands of buildings and they'll bomb has its limitations. It can on it cannot fall the unconquerable London." (Note: The royalties from a homeless.) . . . From Van W. Today, (\$1.00) coming April 1st, it is a hunger for affirmation, for a groping, a world that is full of or in America, a chance to build it, and Americans were hankering for *Europe has been made what it is by a stubbornly generation after generation* (Glas Williams), both have that unmistakable McKinney stamp of pleasant insanity. You can feel the pull of one of his books, like a hypochondriac to a new disease, a half block from any bookstore. Once you have bought, read, and laughed, you are absurdly happy, but your friends whisper nervously among themselves.

Garden Clubs & Spades takes you gaily through the trials of the amateur gardener who struggles with seed catalogues and garden books, and new-fangled tools, and ends up proudly with a petunia and a touch of lumbago. He does not share the haughty flower show exhibitors, the know-

simply ordinarily "don't take to furriners." And yet here Dr. Withington seemed happiest, riding over trails on her all-but-human horse, Billy. Dr. Withington's references to Billy alone and her touching account of his death (he had been criminally over-ridden by an insensitive mountain boy) makes her story one of the best "horse" books I ever read.

In fact, *Mine Eyes Have Seen* has so much that is thrilling, fine and courageous in it that it is awe-some. It makes one's own life seem such a penny-grubbing, picayune, humdrum wasting of days. (*Mine Eyes Have Seen: A Woman Doctor's Saga*, by Alfreda Withington. Introduction by the late Sir Wilfred Grenfell. Illustrated. April 8. \$3.50.)

MARCH 15, 1941

From: NEWS OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS, March 15, 1941.

E. P. Dutton Company

... Alexander's conclusions." Aldous a man, as in other animals, there relation between the head, neck and it is preserved, guarantees that all shall function harmoniously. Anti-to retain this corrective adjustment man beings interfere with it that by means of the bad postural habits an and industrial civilization. The c to the rest of the body can be justly and progressively obeys the his principal is properly taught, it ds of young Englishmen will be its forced upon them by urban and of the indispensable conditions of natural use of the body." . . . Mr. e of psycho-physical control are oks: *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, *Con-* *didual*, and *The Use of the Self*, carry illuminating introductions.

Publis

E. P. DUTTON

300 Fourth Avenue

FLORENCE W.

(Printed in

DONALD ADAMS "That far stat of life—a faith which has full con. Whitman set forth in Democratic Vi Whitman knew that democracy, to end have possessed themselves of it. The r in the spirits of the men and women a institutions and a prospering economy themselves to make the structure strong that the surest safeguard for its pres literature which would draw its stren, ous, affirmative literature which won The New York Times.

NEW YORK, N

FROM Aldous Huxley. (in a d

Life Again

The list of these would fill a page, if not more. It includes Gustav, that stranger of all Swedish kings, abnormal and still a great man; Madame de Stael, the homely but attractive daughter of Necker, the Swiss financial genius; it includes Madame Tussaud of the waxworks; Cardinal de Rohan, Robespierre, and dozens of others, and most of them touched lightly and sharply into life with the kind of magic that belongs only to writers with the greatest natural gifts in fiction.

And Mr. John moves over the map of the world with the speed and ease of the owner of the famous Magic Carpet; he peers down from above at one European capital after another, and suddenly there is the picture of what goes on below. Not even the most familiar of his scenes, such as the attempted escape of Louis and his queen, or the death of the Swiss Guard in the Tuilleries, loses edge because of its fa-

The time was when Mr. John's attitude toward his aristocrats might have offended more people than it will today, I think, now that the Paradise of the Proletariat seems to be a vanished dream. But in any case, here is a splendid piece of work which should delight all lovers of first-rate historical fiction. (*King's Masque*, by Evan John. \$2.50.)

And a Quick Jump Into Nebraska

A SOUND, good-humored and witty novel about a religion-ridden Middle Western small town is something new in American fiction. Elizabeth Atkins, assistant professor of English in the University of Minnesota and author of a brilliant study called *Edna St. Vincent Millay and Her Times*, has written such a book in *Holy Suburb*, one of the best-tempered pieces of fiction ever produced. I am sure, by anyone who had actually had to live in a community such as Miss Atkins describes.

Mostly, the novel follows an autobiographical pattern. Miss Atkins came of Nebraska stock, and her father moved the family into a small town for educational purposes. Then he moved them again into a suburb of the State Capitol, so that they might have the somewhat dubious advantages of attending a newly-founded Methodist College.

Ted Was Converted At Four

Speaking for myself, I know much less about Nebraska than I do about North Africa, but Miss Atkins might just as well have been writing about Mississippi; the exact pattern of life in her town has repeated itself hundreds