

THE MADRAS PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ENDOWMENT LECTURES 1968-69

By

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LECTURE I

I start in traditional style with an invocation :

“ Change and decay in all around I see
But O Thou that changest not abide with me.”

These well known lines from Lyte's famous hymn apart from its theological implications emphasises two aspects of change—destruction and permanence. The flood-tide of change sweeps many things away but there is a core to reality that is unchangeable. In fact the drama of life takes place in the nexus of the bi-polar tension between change and permanence. Mankind has learnt to accept change as its inevitable and unavoidable destiny. Such an acceptance has lead to both hope and despair for change can be either for better or worse. Nature abhors a vacuum nither can it tolerate the *status quo*. Life should not be empty. There must be something in it and something must be done to it. Change has both the elements of predictability and uncertainty. Within the broad pattern of change which can often be fore-casted there are many minor variations which are unforeseeable.

Our main concern this evening is not change in general but social change. Society is rarely static, it is mostly on the move. Sometimes as during attacks of social neurosis the movement is downward and sometimes it is upward. The rate of progress may be at a snails pace or bewilderingly rapid as in the case of revolutions. Running through all the phases of change is an element of permanence which is embodied in the history and traditions of a people.

Many earlier theories of society that claim to be scientific were in fact theories based on change. They sought to explain the present in terms of the past. Comte, the French Sociologist envisaged civilization as under-going three stages of change :—

1. *Theological*: All things and events are explained in terms of the supernatural.
2. *Metaphysical*: Abstract conceptions were the basic explanatory principles.
3. *Positive*: Nature and society is understood on the basis of scientific study.

Darwin's theory of evolution did much to encourage the idea of a gradual and continuous change and progress towards an ideal. This biological concept was made applicable to all spheres of life including social. Today as we look at many modern societies there is much there, to justify the concept of progress—treatment of children the conquest of disease and the welfare State. But unfortunately there is also much here to suggest the opposite—the atom bomb, the horrors of modern warfare, the ruthlessness of commercial rivalry and cut-throat competition in industry. The modern tendency among scholars is to view social change from the *functional* rather than the *evolutionary* point of view. It is fruitless to search for the causes of a present social change in the limbo of the past. It should be understood in the present setting. For example, the buttons on our coats should not be explained with reference to medieval armour but to contemporary style and the need to close embarrassing gaps.

A powerful cause for social change both in the past as well as in the present is *foreign contacts*. People come to see us and we go out to see other people. The educative value of foreign travel is well known. Today air travel has brought the world nearly to our doorstep. When Marco Polo left Venice for Cathay in 1271 or when Adams left London for Japan in 1598 they were impelled to do so by more than a desire for adventure. They were curious to know. Their curiosity was contagious. There was a great desire all over the West to learn about life in other lands. Travellers tales have always had a great fascination for stay-at-homes. Throughout history this has been the most common source of information. The traveller against the background of his own culture perceives, interprets and reports

what strikes him as noteworthy in the lands that he has visited. The observer may be highly trained, astute and subtle. Or he may be naive and gullible given to imagining things. Good reporting is now and perhaps always will be a source of most of our knowledge of other people and their ways. Desdemona heard Othello speak of "the cannibals that each other eat and Anthropophagi and men whose heads grow beneath their shoulders." She was enthralled by what she had heard and by the narrator and started a social problem, mixed marriages. But this romantic consequence apart, by listening to travel stories or reading about them, we realize that there are other ways of doing the same thing, the thing that we hitherto thought was being done best in our own way. And in spite of patriotic pulls, we may even concede that the other way is better than our own. When he reach this stage, the very patriotism that we had temporarily discarded may urge us to procure the benefits of this new way for our country.

When social change comes about as a result of culture contacts, three things may happen. (1) The complete adoption of a foreign culture (2) A fifty-fifty arrangement and (3) Cultural Pluralism. In the last alternative the idea of uniformity gives place to that of unity in diversity. This type of pluralism may be defined as national unity with cultural and religious differences. The U. S. A. is perhaps the biggest nursery of cultural pluralism in the world today. The danger of cultural pluralism is that during times of crisis, the compounding groups may break loose or be incapacitated through feelings of divided loyalty. An attempt to establish a culturally pluralistic society consisting of two very similar nationalities like the Tamils and the Sinhalese has broken down in Ceylon due to economic and political causes.

When nature surrounded the Indian peninsula on two sides by the sea and by the high Himalayas on the third it intended its people to develop their culture in comparative seclusion. But nature sometimes plays practical jokes and one such was the leaving of a gap in the northern frontier—the Khyber pass. Through it came the Muslim invaders who have both disturbed and enriched the country's ways and thoughts. And then during the 16th century the sea routes were opened. The Portugese, the Dutch, the French and finally the British came into the country. They gave to the inhabitants many cultural shocks. Tolerance and adaptability are said to be the two chief traits in the Indian national character. We

have certainly withstood these cultural intrusions and shocks with commendable equanimity. We have assimilated without being over-powered. We have taken with dignity and have given generously in return.

Social mobility has been a characteristic feature of social change in India during recent times. Daily more and more children are being educated whose fathers had never this advantage. The exodus into towns has been an interesting as well as a disturbing feature of this mobility. Why are the villagers attracted to towns. Obviously there is more fun here—bigger and better shops, cinemas, better employment opportunities and better pay. As contrasted with the sober life of the villages its, simple joys and austere regimentation, town life with a hint of night and naughty life thrown in appears glamorous. Educational facilities especially at a higher level also attract villagers to towns. Whether these expectations are fulfilled or not, a villager once he comes to town seldom shows any inclination to go back. In 1921, 10.6% of India's population dwelt in cities, in 1941, 12.8 and in 1951, 17.3. While the general increase in population in India between 1921 to 1941 was 15% the urban population grew by 33.5%. This exodus has both its liberating as well as its demoralising effects. The villager in the town is free from the moral and social controls of his native society, family and caste group. Though this freedom may be exhilarating for sometime, there is in the long run an experience of loss of guidance. He has lost his old sense of direction and has not acquired a new one. Atomization of society has taken place and with it has come destitution, vagrancy, beggary, crime, drunkenness and prostitution. Migrants to a large city are strangers not only to the city but also to one another. In a big city we cannot love our neighbour because we do not know who he is. By the time we get this knowledge he might have gone and another taken his place. We might have a nodding acquaintance with many but love and affection only for a very few. But the very superficiality of urban inter-personal relationship has made a major contribution to the liberation of the individual within Indian society. In the village one has to conform to the social patterns of the family and caste. The city provides liberation from this enslavement and there is scope for development of personal wholeness, maturity and wider social toleration if the forces that tend to disintegrate one's personality are nullified and overcome.

In the migration from village to town there is also involved a transition from an agricultural to a mechanistic point of view. Agriculture is a seasonal affair. Once you sow the seed there is time to fold up your hands and go to sleep. After harvest there is nothing else to do except to sing, dance and make merry. But in industry you can dance only in the night, possibly on a Saturday night. Industry is high pressure living. The agriculturist is to some extent a fatalist. If the rains fail, he is done for (for as yet we have not yet learnt to make artificial rain on a large scale). He is ever prepared for an element of chance or uncertainty. But industry insists on 100% efficiency. It puts a high premium on human endeavour and imparts blame for failure on man and man alone. To the agriculturist the machine is an interesting toy, to the industrialist the arbiter of his destiny. From worship of Mother Earth one has to go to the worship of Mother Machine. However there is one place where the agricultural point of view coincides with that of the industrial. Agriculture emphasises fertility. Production in factories is a form of industrial fertility. In this respect the transition may not be difficult. One has to do his best wherever he is, whether coaxing an unwilling soil or tending an unruly machine.

A potent factor in bringing about social change in an industrial setting is the eight hour day, a concession won by labour from management after a hard struggle. As long man was in the nomadic stage of existence life was deadly serious business. No distinction was made between work and play. A fixed pattern was followed, hunting all day long, going to bed at sunset, self-preservation and procreation. Before artificial means of lightening were invented, the night was a mysterious affair where wild animals, murder and sudden death lurked. All that one could do was to make bare existence safe. Then mankind entered the agricultural stage. This as we have already noted is a seasonal affair. There was plenty of time between sowing and reaping. This time was utilized to think and as a result often bring about changes in the existing state of affairs--changes for the better which introduced nuances and delicacies unthought of on a strictly utilitarian plane of existence. The third stage in which we are at present is the industrial stage. In the infancy of this stage man's hard won freedom to think was faced with a new danger. Working in dim ill-ventilated factories from dawn to dusk was a soul-killing affair. Women and children were not exempted.

The eight hour day is the labourers *magna carta*, assuring him the right to think, the right to have a cultural life. There are 24 hours in a day. Eight hours are spent in work. Another eight hours, I trust not more, in sleep. This still leaves another eight hours to account for. Two hours for eating, more if one is a glutton one hour for dressing before a mirror, definitely much more for women, say two. Even then four or five hours are left. What is the industrial worker going to do with his hard won right for leisure? The correct use of leisure is an important social problem to which sufficient attention has not been given by our sociologists and social psychologists. There are already indications that habits formed during leisure hours like drinking and gambling may enslave man afresh.

During a recent visit to the States I heard a good deal about automation and its possible effects on industry. As a result of automation the industrial worker is bound to have more leisure than he is having at present. Perhaps many have to face the problem of unemployment. There are indications already that automation may have a curious and unexpected effect on the industrial worker. He is turning to handi-crafts both as a reaction against an extremely mechanized attitude to life and as a profitable and interesting way of spending his leisure time. This it is expected will bring about a cultural revolution in America resulting in the popularization of the fine arts and the growth of new trends.

Another area of rapid social change in India is regarding the status of women. The liberating opportunities of two world wars though not experienced in India to the extent that it was in Europe, was still availed of to some extent by Indian women. And then came Independence which had an exhilarating influence on man, women and child alike. Indian women were determined to win all the privileges that the law, the Constitution and public opinion had given their sisters in other parts of the world. They were out to fight the forces of adverse public opinion and conservative customs. A real step forward in creating an united public opinion among women was taken by the formation of important woman's organizations like The Bharath Shree Mandal, Poona Seva Sadan and the Women's Indian Association. In 1929 the different institutions working for the uplift of women came together in one platform and the first session of the All India Women's Conference was held in Poona—a city that has always nurtured constructive and cultural forces. Equal opportunities for education was one of

the important items discussed. Also the removal of certain evil customs that impeded the onward progress of women. A series of legislative enactments has since then striven to weaken the hold of some of these customs. I quote a few :—

1. 1856. The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act. — For some reason that I cannot understand the *widow* has been the favourite target of the Indian social reformer. He does not want her to live in peace. He insists on her getting married again.
2. 1874. Married Women's Property Act. — Making provision for the enjoyment of wages and earnings by married women and insuring their lives.
3. 1929. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, amended in 1938, prohibiting marriages between boys and girls below 18 and 14 respectively. The well known Saratha Act, a classic example of law evasion.
4. 1937. The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, amended in 1938 entitling the widow to her husband's property on his dying in estate.
5. 1952. The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Bill—recognizing both sacramental and civil marriages and laying down certain conditions under which Hindu couples can seek judicial separation and in some cases making it easier than in *Reo*.

Over 5,000 women willingly walked into prison during the Sathyagraha movement started by Mahathma Gandhi. By the New Indian Constitution adapted in 1950 all Indian women are enfranchised. Articles 15 and 16 give women the same rights as men in social and economic spheres. Today in both local and central legislatures we have both women Members and Ministers not to speak of a Prime Minister. The Government of India alone now employs over 20,000 women in various capacities. In 1948, 1500 women sought the help of employment agencies. In 1957, 40,000.

The ever rising spiral of the cost of living has forced the sharing of the task of bread-winning in many middle-class families. It is not uncommon in urban areas for husband and wife to both go out to work in the morning and rerurn home late in the evening, leaving the children—the fruit of porodic maternity leaves - to the care of a convenient aunt or grand-mother.

Woman in modern India is entering a stage reminiscent of her glorious role in the age of Rajput chivalry. But her part today is less spectacular and more all round, less glamorous but more business-like and efficient. The *sari* though a picturesque garment has a somewhat restrictive and impeding effect on physical movement. This may also have some psychological side effects. Unless our sisters were *slaks* the women's movement in India may not become a *tour-de-force*. There are also signs that the traditional chivalrous attitude towards her is also declining. One cannot have a seat in the Parliament and in the Bus as well.

LECTURE II

Yesterday I remarked that certain aspects of social life are relatively permanent while others change often. The ratio of permanence to change differs in different countries and cultures. In countries with a predominantly agricultural type of civilization much would be permanent over long stretches of time. In industrialized countries much may change rapidly even in a short time. If a man belonging to a big Indian city like Madras, travels abroad for ten years and then comes back home, he may find that the new houses coming up are built in a different style of architecture—more ornate outside, less comfortable inside. He will find changes in men's cloths—the bush-coat and the slack-shirt taking the place of the open and closed varieties of the last decade. When I was a student, we use to wear little round caps. They are unknown today. Bare-headness is the fashion. With the British rule has gone the stigma attached to Western dress. One will be surprised to find that hats have invaded the citadel of Hindu orthodoxy—Tirupati. Expensive and elegant-looking fountain-pens and wrist-watches are used by our student population, in contrast to the crude devices of 20 years ago. A modern Rip Van Winkle will also find striking alterations in women's hair-do's and jewellery. However, he would find little change in the food habits of the people. He will find that wheat has not replaced rice in spite of much propaganda. Not only the diet but the eating habits our people remain relatively unchanged. Whenever I visit my hostels at the University I am surprised and pained at the way in which students take their food, in the quickest possible time in grim silence. There are no pictures, no music, as you will find in the dining halls of the West and if there is a table cloth, it will bear circumstantial evidence of the menus of the last three days. And over our dining halls like a miasma hangs the smell of *sambar* which not all the perfumes of Araby can drown. It is hightime that we had a social change here. Our politics and our prejudices continue to be much the same during the last 20 years. R. S. and H. M. Lynd made a thorough sociological study of an American community in 1925 and again in 1935. They did not find any significant change in the general cultural pattern of the community after a decade. Generally speaking folkways, mores and institutional ways were fairly permanent. The things that changed were *fads and fashions*.

Fads and fashions are the means of bringing about quick but relatively unstable social changes in a community. Fads refer to the rapid but usually temporary adoption of new habits by large groups of people. In 1950 the sociologist E. S. Bogardus made a report on an investigation he had been conducting for the last 35 years regarding fads in the U. S. Every year he had asked about 150 persons to give him a list of five leading fads of that year. Out of the total number of fads reported each year, he only selected those which had figured atleast in five lists. There were altogether 3160 fads collected by him which were brought under eight general heads. The following table gives these eight categories and the percentage of people mentioning each :-

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Women, dress and decoration | 54% |
| Men and Boy's dress | 17% |
| Amusements, Recreation and Songs | 8% |
| Automobiles | 5% |
| Vageries of Speech | 5% |
| Education and Propaganda | 3% |
| Architecture and Interior Decoration | 2% |

Once a fad starts it gains adherents rapidly. After the peak is reached, there is a flat period when it gains no further following. This may last for two or three months. Then there is a decline which may consist of either a sudden or a gradual drop. Fads sometimes *cluster* i.e. they are made to center round a particular idea. For example in U. S. A. there was the Liberty fad which included Liberty toys, Liberty bonds, Liberty stakes, Liberty sandwiches and Liberty parade. In our country jewels, sarees, perfume^s may cluster round the name of a film star. Clustering helps to prolong the life of a fad. Fads thrive only when there is popular opinion in favour of the new. Where the old is worshipped fads cannot get momentum. The automobile is an object of universal^l interest in U.S.A. Hence, here, automobile fads easily maintain the lime light, Wearing apparel was standardized in old China and hence dress fads did not get a chance there. As an example of the somewhat extreme manifestation of a fad may be mentioned the tulip mania that swept through Holland during the 17th century.

A large part of the population of the country gave up attending to their normal work and began to speculate in the buying and selling of tulips. Tulip roots were sold at fantastic prices as it was the natural thing to convert money into them.

Generally speaking *fashions* are less trivial and less temporary than fads. We connect fashions mainly with clothes but furniture, art, music and other realms are also influenced by it. Fashions thrive in a society which is undergoing rapid social change like many American societies today. In many countries the current fashion is brought to the public through window displays in shops and advertisements in newspapers. In the past, one way of popularising fashions in clothes was to make kings and queens wear them. But today as there is no royalty left film stars have taken their place. Clothes fashions generally start with people high up in the social scale and slowly comes down. This is neatly illustrated in the famous case of the *Wally Dress*. On June 3, 1937 pictures of the Duchess of Windsor's 250 Dollar Main Bochur wedding gown appeared in several American newspapers. Ten days later Bonwitt Teller, a fashionable New-York store advertised a version of this dress for 25 Dollars. Early in July, another firm, Lord and Taylor, had a copy of this dress for 17 Dollars. By the middle of July a firm in the poorer quarters of New York had a rack full of the same dress for 9 Dollars.

A new fashion is generally built into the old, it is seldom a sweeping departure. If a fashion is completely new it may not have a large following. The force of habit must be taken into consideration. Fashions also must be in harmony with the country's general pattern of culture. Foreign fashions may be looked down upon with suspicion. But sometimes exoticism has a special appeal. Economic factors also play a part on initiating fashion trends. For example, it was cloth shortage the first started the vogue of the Bush-coat in our country. Bobbed hair became fashionable when women entered the business world in large numbers and had no time in the morning to indulge in an elaborate hair toilet. Another aspect of modern fashions is their *cyclic* nature. What is fashionable this year may cease to be so the next. But an out-moded fashion may once again come into circulation in course of time. This trend is clearly seen in jewellery in India.

The neck-laces that our grand-mothers were have become fashionable once again, after ceasing to be so for 50 years. A. L. Krober studied the changes in the evening dress worn by American women from 1844 to 1919. He found that the length of the skirt slowly increased till it reached the ground. Here it remained stationary, sweeping the floor, for sometime. Then it became shorter and shorter till it reached the knee. Then once again it began to be longer. This cycle from ground level to knee level and back to ground level took exactly 35 years.

To be fashionably dressed today involves a lot of money and this amount of expenditure is beyond the means of many people. And yet in order to be considered fashionable they are prepared to indulge in practices which they know to be extravagant. To keep up with the latest fashions not only money but a lot of energy is to be spent. Bogardus observes "continued attention to the dress forms and details consume annually immense quantities of energy—energy enough perhaps to run a League of Nations successfully and indefinitely."

Why are people so very receptive to social change as envisaged in fashions. Fashions create illusions. By wearing certain types of clothes you can create the impression that you are very rich while you are really not so. Older people, village communities and poorer people pay very little attention to the latest styles. People belonging to the middle class often keep a car for 10 years or more. They are not bothered about exchanging their car for a new model every time one comes into the market. They do not bother because they cannot afford. Two reasons that impel people to be fashionable are, a desire for *conformity* and a desire for *recognition*. Other reasons for popularity of this type of social change are, the desire for new experiences to make up for feelings of inferiority and the need for *comfort* and *beauty*. The psychoanalysts have suggested that fashions are *sublimations* of aggressive and exhibitionistic tendencies. One way in which one woman can score a point over another is by being more fashionably dressed than her. A well-dressed woman symbolises her husband's success and prestige. Here fashionableness satisfies both husband and wife, of course the husband pays, but in doing so, buys status for his wife.

And now let us examine some general aspects of social change. Firstly, what is the best way of bringing it about? There have been two views (a) by changing external conditions (b) by converting individuals to the new point of view. Mustafa Kamal Patsha brought about extensive social changes in Turkey by a stroke of his pen. On the other hand Gandhiji always spoke of changing the heart of man. One way of bringing about changes in external conditions is through legal enactments. Law as a social reformer has come in for a good deal of criticism and cynicism. Yesterday I referred to the Saradha Act as a classic example of law evasion. Where public opinion is unfavourable to a Law, ways and means will be found to evade it. *Prohibition* in our country is another case to the point. However it must be pointed out that whenever a social law is passed at a given point of time it catches a fair sample of the population in their middle age when the habits are well set. They may find themselves in a *marginal state* with divided pulls. It is only when a generation that was born after the law has been passed reaches maturity that we can really judge the success of that law. In most democratic Countries there is an innate respect for law. People may grumble and grumble, yet they dare not disobey. No doubt *conviction* is the best way of bringing about social change but the statute book can be a helpful ally.

Secondly, the speed of change. It is commonly believed the social change is more rapid in modern times than in ancient days. Rate of movement is a relative matter. Wars and conquests, natural disasters and social upheavals have occurred from time to time and here and there throughout recorded history and there is no reason to suppose that pre-historic or non-literate people were exempt from radical dislocations. What appears to be slow in retrospect may have appeared rapid enough at the time of happening. Yet there is no denying that the contemporary world is more hazardous than the past and that these hazards affect more people. I think we are safe in generalizing that in any given society or culture rapid change is more frequent now than in the past. A characteristic feature of much contemporary changes is planning with which we are very familiar in this country. Innovations are not left to the whims and fancies of a single politician or dictator as in the past but to whims and fancies of a group of politicians who meet under the shadow of the Parliament. Another characteristic is coverage. Social changes are no longer isolated events

News of such change in our country are carried to the four corners of the world through modern means of mass communication and serve either as an example or as a warning to other countries.

A third question is, what determines our attitude towards social change? First and foremost factor in such a determination is the family in which we grew up. Newcomb found that the attitudes of children in regard to religion, war and communism correlated about 5 to 6 with their parents' attitudes. Furthermore he found that the parents' consistencies and inconsistencies of attitude tended to be reflected in their children. School is also important but not as much as family. By the time the child comes to School he has acquired certain values and attitudes. Besides in many countries there is a strict taboo on the School-room being used for any kind of propaganda. The individual's intelligence and knowledge also counts. Sargeant and Williamson have reported many studies of college students' attitudes in this respect in the U.S.A. These indicate that the more intelligent and better informed students are also more liberal in their outlook, though there are many exceptions. There is also the age factor. In America many investigators have found a positive correlation between conservatism and age. Radical political movements make their greatest appeal to these below middle age. Rigidity of attitude is perhaps part of the aging process. Also as one grows old one gets more and more disillusioned. He has also an interest in maintaining the *statusquo* in order to stabilise his position as a parent, as a wage-earner, a house-holder and a respected member of the community. Sometimes rigidity of attitude may be explained by unconscious motivational factors. An individual may resist changes because such changes are associated with his father towards whom he feels hostile. *Frustrated* persons find in either radical or reactionary movements a means of sublimating their inner conflicts.

Finally let us consider *resistance to change*. There is always a conservative element in society which resists change. Conservatism is not to be condemned *in toto*. It may not have the attractions of liberalism nor the glamour of radicalism but it performs a useful service as a break on excess and as an agent for the thoughtful and selective preservation. However there are some people who stick to the past for the sake of sticking. They resist

all change as ruinous and leading to chaos. Their favourite formula is, what is good enough for our forefathers is good enough for us. When a country has had a glorious past and has now come down a bit in the world, its people tend to have a *golden age complex*. They like to dwell more on the pleasant *past* than on the uncomfortable *present*. This backward thinking is made a substitute for *forward planning or present action*. Every citizen should be proud of his country's past provided that there is something to be proud about, and seek inspiration from it. But excessive admiration in this direction tends to develop in some, a defeatist mentality which argues—we can never recapture the past, so why even try. To such, all present attempts to change society are but second best solutions. Thus loyalty to the past and a hopeless longing for a golden age may hang like mile-stones round our neck, throttling effectively all contemporary social effort. Faith in present capacity becomes an act of disloyalty.

Men and women will cling to the old until they are hopeful of alternative provisions on a new level for satisfying the fundamental needs for security and recognition. This accounts for great deal of opposition among people to necessary social change. If men and women are led from a social structure to a social vacuum the resulting anarchy may be worse than the present evil. This fear is very real among thinkers of today and is one of the factors that contributes to the strength of the conservative reaction. The pace at which we destroy the old society must be commensurate with our resources for finding and using alternatives.

The Indian mind thinks more in terms of *continuity* and *evolution* than in terms of *revolt* and *radical change*. In India the past and the present form an unbroken chain. The *law of continuity* holds, the *law of innovation* is very much an intruder. Already there are ample indications all over the country that the impetus given to social change by independence is gradually waning. The inner fires that lit our renaissance are dying out. Stagnation is in the air. The emotional exuberance of the post-independence years has now given place to a mood of realism.

From where should come the life-giving breath that would revive the forces of idealism once again in India? I have no hesitation in answering the question—from our Educational Institutions, especially from our Psychology Departments. I close in traditional style with a benediction—May all the changes that the future holds for you be happy ones.

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