

WALTER BUCHANAN CLINE

A MEMOIR

Carleton S. Coon

The first time I met Walter Cline was at the first lecture of Anthropology 1 at Harvard, in September 1922. Since our names came next to each other alphabetically, we were given adjoining seats. He was a Freshman, taking the course by special permission, since it was not ordinarily open to first year students. Long before this he had decided to dedicate his life to anthropology. He told me that he had sailed across the Pacific as a crew member on a freight ship, and visited India and the Philippines. Outside Manila harbor he was polishing the brass ship's whistle when the officer on the bridge blew it; miraculously he escaped injury. He had come to Cambridge from Los Angeles by sea through the Panama Canal. Docking at Providence, he had arrived at Harvard too early for registration, and had taken a room in a small hotel in Boston.

At once he found work washing dishes, but a more interesting job soon opened to him. Professor Charles Townsend Copeland, the famed Copey of the English department, wanted a factotum to care for him in his bachelor rooms in Hollis Hall. I suggested Walter to Copey, who asked, "Is he thin or fat?" "He is thin," I replied. "Then he will not do," said Copey, "all factotums must be fat and merry." Nevertheless he gave Walter a try-out, with great success, and the close relationship between these two men which then arose lasted through Walter's undergraduate career, to his profit. Professor Copeland, who was born in 1860, survived Walter by a single month.

Walter Buchanan Cline was born in Los Angeles in 1904, the son of Horace Buchanan Cline and Mildred Lee Tarbell Cline. His schooling began in 1912 in the public schools of Los Angeles; in 1921 he transferred to the Pasadena High School from which he graduated in 1922. In 1917 he was confirmed in St. John's Episcopal Church in Los Angeles. In 1921 he took the sea voyage of which he told me, and which is described in a more circumstantial way by his mother:

"During the summer of 1921 Walter joined a group of boys in a voyage to Calcutta. In return for their passage they performed various duties. This created an incident which brought about Walter's first meeting with Dr. Kroeber. Walter had just settled himself in the Museum of Anthropology at the University of California in Berkeley to work for the summer, when he received a letter from a steamship company in answer to an application which he had made to them for a summer job, and which he supposed had long since been forgotten. The company's Granite State would be sailing from San Francisco in a few days, and

would take him on. What could he do? Yes, he would risk censure. He would sail for Calcutta. Admonition from Dr. Kroeber, reminding him of his obligation to others, was embarrassing, but Walter was firm. Dr. Kroeber, however, sent him on his way with good wishes. Thus began a lifelong admiration and friendship."

Mrs. Cline's account continues;

"In the fall of 1922 Walter passed his entrance examinations for Harvard with honor. At the end of his Freshman year he received Harvard's special award, the Detur, for outstanding work of the year. Remaining in the first group for the following three years, he was awarded the Bowditch, John Harvard, and Henry D. and Jonathan M. Parmenter scholarships and was entitled to the privileges of the Dean's List for the last six months of his Senior year. During his Sophomore year he received the Phi Beta Kappa key. His Junior year was spent with the Egyptian Staff of the Metropolitan Museum of New York in Deir al-Bahri in the Theban metropolis. For this he received college credit. Returning to Harvard he graduated Magna cum Laude in 1926."

"Leaving immediately, he spent the following year in Berlin, Cairo, and on the Libyan Desert. Under the direction of Dr. E. A. Hooton Walter lived for over three months in a mud hut in Siwa Oasis, while he gathered facts about the culture of the Berbers of this oasis. By the end of the year, Walter was back at his desk in the Peabody Museum to continue his research and tutoring until he was formally appointed resident tutor in Anthropology and Ethnology at the newly completed Dunster House. Here he remained until 1936, spending his summers in Europe, Morocco, Syria, Ethiopia, and Arabia as far as the Hadhramaut, as well as in the American Southwest. On one occasion he lectured to summer classes at the University of New Mexico, and to Dr. Leslie Spier's classes at Chaco Canyon. In 1936 he received his PhD in Anthropology at Harvard.

"In the autumn of 1936 Walter went to the University of Minnesota, where he organized an African Division of Anthropology, and worked there for seven years under the direction of Dr. Wilson Wallis. In 1942 the war interrupted his work, and he volunteered to serve the Office of Strategic Services in Morocco. His familiarity with the country and its people and his command of the Arabic language especially fitted him for this work. At the end of the war he returned to Minnesota to continue his duties, but rapidly failing health forced him to seek a warmer climate. He spent two years at San Juan Capistrano and Newport, California, writing and deep-sea fishing in his boat, the Shrimp.

"In 1949 Walter was married to Marjorie Miller of Palm Springs. That same year he received an assignment to Morocco from the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. His wife went with him. At the end of three months work in Morocco Walter found that another operation was necessary, and they returned to New York, where he was admitted to the Memorial Hospital. Soon back on the West Coast, he

was happy to become affiliated with the University of California at Los Angeles. He transferred to the University at Berkeley in 1950, establishing a residence on Shasta Road, where he died on June 10th, 1952."

In a letter dated October 16, 1952, Randolph Mohammed Gusus, a life-long friend of Walter's, wrote from Tangier: "We are very sorry to hear about the death of our mutual good friend, Walter Cline. I have passed this sad news to all of our Moroccan friends in the French Zone as well as here, and they have all been very sorry for him. They are all sending ta'azia to all of his friends, family, and relations. Hajj Abd el-Qader al-Alj wishes to be remembered to you, and would like to have you pass his ta'azia to Walter's family."

A ta'azia is a message of consolation, sometimes sent in the concrete form of a model tomb. Few Americans indeed would receive the ta'azia from Fez in these troubled times. Walter's quality of kindness mingled with gaiety won him friends wherever he went, in all countries and among peoples of all tongues, colors, and faiths.

This quality is hard to reach in the single dimension of writing. Perhaps it had to do with his suffering. During his first year at Harvard he had his first operation, and for the next thirty years, as his body was progressively mutilated, he walked without fear in the shadow of death, by day and by night, wherever he went. Being shipwrecked on the Hadhramaut coast in a dhow, as he once was, made no difference to him. He could afford to joke with the Arab sailors as they scrambled over the beach searching for driftwood with which to build a signal fire. In Addis Ababa he took a room in an obscure hotel, and there he lived so quietly for several weeks that the other Americans did not even know he was there. In Fez, which was his favorite city, he lived with the Arabs as one of them, and won the unending affection of these polished aristocrats, along with their confidences. No American has ever learned to speak Moroccan Arabic better than he, and his eastern Arabic was also masterly.

No one could tell a story more artistically. In his classroom lecturing he stood at the top of his profession. A student passing in the hall could tell which was his class, by the laughter. Always eager to learn new things, he was impatient at the ordeal of writing, particularly after the loss of his right hand. Yet what he wrote he wrote well. At the time of his death he was working on an analysis of the social structure of Fez, and a history of the Egyptian Twelfth Dynasty. In his earlier years he refused to be bothered by the current academic fashion of grinding out dozens of puny monographs with long titles, to build bibliography with an eye to promotion. In his later years he did not need it. What he published was sound stuff, but no indication of the vast storehouse of knowledge which departed with him.

In all the world he had not a single enemy, and thousands will join Gusus, al-Alj, and me in sending his family, and each other, our ta'azias at his untimely passing. With the Arabs we can thank God for letting us have him as long as He did.