
Poverty and Brains Made a Socialist of Rose Pastor Stokes

by Pippa

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A long time ago, the charity organization ran some appeals in the *New York Times* asking for small sums of money to save some families from destruction — temporarily. Among the appeals was one that told of a young girl of 14 or thereabouts, high spirited and intelligent. Said the appeal: “If a certain sum of money does not come in to help her, she will develop her energies into anarchistic channels” — or some such truism to that effect.

So you see the charity organization in a general way knows what goes to make Socialists. Just poverty and intelligence.

At present there is a “frenzied fanatic to Socialism” convicted by a jury of spreading “subtle and vicious propaganda” — Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes.

Why is she a “frenzied fanatic to Socialism”?

The reason harks back to the dark days in Yagstower Guberniia, Russia, and to the darker ones in Blackline Road, near the Whitechapel district, London, when a little girl too weak to go to school stayed home and sewed black and white ribbons on pumps. I harks back to the panicky days of '85, when the same girl, grown even more delicate, sat rolling endless cigars at \$3 a week.

But it all resolves itself into the admission that the charity organization was right. Socialists are made by poverty and intelligence.

The life of Rose Pastor, the oldest of 5 children, as told by her mother, Mrs. Anna Pastor,

reads like a page from a novel, with incidents here and there as gentle reminders that this novel at any rate would not be on the library tables of a certain class of people.

Whitechapel district corresponds to that section in New York City where 5 Italian families settle together in two rooms, with a few boarders thrown in for good measure. Here the “little dreamer,” as Rose Pastor was known, gathered to herself friends and one day made herself an enemy. This was the little woman in the candy store, where Rose when stocks were high would invest in ha’penny candy. As she entered one day, a beggar came in to ask for a penny.

First Philanthropy.

“Get out of here, you,” was the reply from the proprietress, at which the old man shambled off. The little girl, listening, with here eyes big with a new light, was asked what she wanted. And she replied:

“I want nothing from you! And I’ll never buy anything from you. You’re a mean woman.”

Finishing the outburst, Rose ran into the street to catch up to the shambling derelict, slip the ha’penny shyly into his palm and run back to her mother. That night she shed a few tears, for her eyes had been opened to other things besides shoe bows. For the doctor had pronounced Rose unfit to attend school — her health being too frail — so the little 8-year old girl helped to keep

up the home without any boarders.

On arriving at Cleveland, where the family moved some three years later, Rose became a frequent visitor to the public library, where she gained most of her education.

“Then she said to me one day,” said her mother, “I’m going to go along with Ida to the cigar factory. All the girls work there.”

That is how the first flush of girlhood was greeted — by the stale fragrance of tobacco leaves. Ten years — ten long years.

“The first week,” said her mother, “she made \$1.50; but later, for she was recognized as an expert by the foreman, she made as much as \$10.

Thinks, Writes, Works.

But always near her was a tablet, where she could write her thoughts as they occurred to her, and, as her companions in the shops laughingly said: “While we can do but one thing, Rose can do three things — think, write, and roll cigars.”

In addition, she taught girls to read and write both Yiddish and English. She also gave dancing lessons. Then the father of the family died, and Rose had to redouble her energies and earning capacity, for she was the oldest, being followed by a boy 8 years her junior.

Rose would come home of nights to teach the girls their ABC and to waltz. And when other folks were asleep Rose would read by the aid of a candle, quickly extinguishing the light when the steps of her mother were heard in the next room, for she would not hurt the feelings of her mother, her comrade.

Then came the chance that opened the door to New York.

The *Jewish Daily News* ran an English page on which one day it was announced a beautiful picture would be given for the most interesting letter sent to the editor. Rose read the paper. The letter was dispatched and Rose won the prize. More than that, she got an opportunity to go

to New York through the efforts of the collector of the subscriptions for the paper in Cleveland. When he came to the home of the Pastors, Rose was teaching one of her pupils, who insisted on talking of a “Zelda” who wrote in the news. The collector chimed in, complaining of the fact that “Zelda” did not write any more. Mrs. Pastor here stated that the reason for her not writing was that she could not roll her cigars and keep up a column without her health suffering. The collector went back to New York and soon after an invitation from the *Jewish Daily News* came to Rose to join the staff at \$15 a week.

Interviews Future Husband.

Within 4 months the entire family came to New York and settled on Grand Street, between Pitt and Ridge Streets — which is still the border line for Yiddish aristocracy.

The young reporter was assigned to interview J.G. Phelps Stokes at the University settlement. Rose demurred — she was not well educated enough to talk to this philanthropist — why not send some more experienced reporter, a brighter light, etc., etc. But the editor, Sarasohn, was obdurate.

So that University settlement, the gray stone building where the roar of the elevated drowns the cry of the peddler, was the birth of Rose Pastor’s romance. In July 1905, she became the wife of Stokes.

Mrs. Stokes after this is largely remembered as an organizer and picket in strikes. Her mother related that after Rose had finished addressing an audience of strikers Mrs. Pastor herself would mount the platform, while Rose hurried on to the next meeting.

About this time both she and her husband joined the Socialist Party. Thus the lives of both were filled up with work for the workers, writing, lecturing, and speaking.

Returned to Party.

What follows has been keenly appreciated by the papers — the announcement of a state of war between the United States and Germany and the withdrawal of the Stokeses and some others from the party. Not quite a year later Mrs. Stokes returned — with the spirit of Rose Pastor — for, she said, she could not work for the workers outside of the party.

When she had been asked by some people to what college she had gone, Mrs. Stokes had always replied that she had attended the college of the world — of life. She was eager to return to the college, evidently.

Mrs. Pastor, stunned by the news of the conviction of her daughter, crumpled the telegram in her hands.

“It is a telegram from Graham [Phelps Stokes],” she said. “See what he says.”

The husband, now in the uniform of a Sergeant in the 9th Coast Artillery Guard, where one son of Mrs. Pastor’s is a member, writes of his wife:

“I know the purity of her mind, and, furthermore, that she was greatly misjudged at the trial.”

This to cheer the mother and comrade, for she was never forgotten.

The youngest boy, about 18, has enlisted in the navy; the oldest has served 7 years in the national army, while a third is a member of the 9th Coast Artillery Guard. Thus Mrs. Pastor is doing her part for the war.

Whether or not Rose Pastor Stokes spends the rest of her life in jail will not be known until some few months later, but until then, as she announced at the time of her conviction, she will go

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