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## The Albert Schweitzer Papers at Syracuse University

Ursula Berkling

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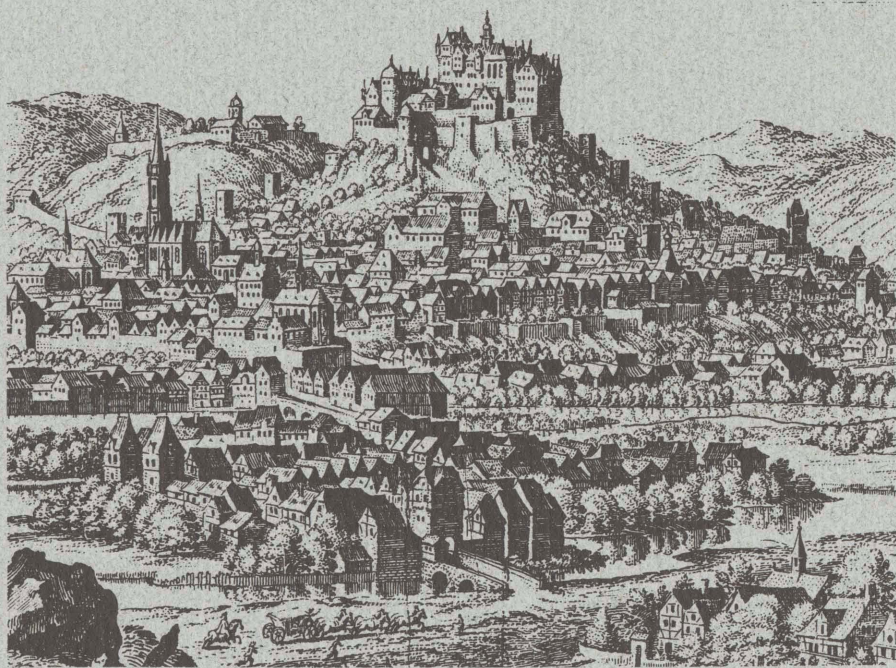
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- Theology for Freedom and Responsibility:  
Rudolf Bultmann's Views on Church and State  
By Antje Bultmann Lemke, Syracuse University 3
- Albert Schweitzer and His Nuclear Concerns Seen Today  
By Rhena Schweitzer Miller 17
- The Albert Schweitzer Papers at Syracuse University  
By Ursula Berkling 27
- Clothing of Wrought Gold, Raiment of Needlework:  
Embroidered Chasubles in the Syracuse University  
Art Collections  
By Susan Kyser, Syracuse University Art Collections 41
- Common Cause: The Antislavery Alliance of Gerrit  
Smith and Beriah Green  
By Milton C. Sernett, Associate Professor,  
Department of Afro-American Studies,  
Syracuse University 55
- My First Book—*Treasure Island*  
By Robert Louis Stevenson 77
- News of the Syracuse University Libraries and  
the Library Associates 89

# The Albert Schweitzer Papers at Syracuse University

BY URSULA BERKLING

The Syracuse University Libraries hold an outstanding body of Albert Schweitzer papers, which complement the Schweitzer archives at Günsbach in Alsace, France, his European home. The Syracuse materials came to us from his daughter, Mrs. Rhenia Schweitzer Miller, through the generosity of the Library Associates. They include a variety of items, all of great interest to the Schweitzer scholar, and divide basically into the following categories: notebooks, letters, manuscripts, miscellanea, and books from Schweitzer's library.\*

## NOTEBOOKS

This segment of the collection comprises 123 "blue books", which consist of single leaves gathered together between hand-cut pieces of soft, blue cover-paper and tied with string. Their homemade appearance attests both to Schweitzer's frugality and his ingenuity.

Fifty-one blue books from the years 1918-19, 1921, and 1928-65 make up the core of what might generally be considered Albert Schweitzer's personal journal. These notebooks range extensively in subject matter: for example, the daily life in Lambaréné, his home (in Günsbach, or Königfeld in the Black Forest), his patients (their diseases and family stories), hospital personnel, and visitors. Included also are: poems; quotations; excerpts from books on philosophy, religion, and history; aphorisms; flashes of wit; and all manner of ideas taken down in rare free minutes during work. Much of this material found its way into his published works.

\* The author wishes to acknowledge the previous work of Honor Conklin, who prepared the preliminary survey of the Albert Schweitzer Papers at Syracuse University.



29. Dec 1942. Lambarene

Rückblick auf das Jahr. Das Trauri-  
ge ist, dass ich nur vorübergehend einige  
Monate zur Arbeit an der Philosophie  
gekommen bin. Ich war zu sehr mit  
Arbeit überhäuft, zu müde abends ab-  
gewöhntlich gar nicht in der Lage mich  
genügend zu sammeln. Aber stets hing ich  
die Arbeit im Kopfe und bemühte mich,  
so viel Arbeit zu erledigen als nur mög-  
lich, nur einmal Mussestunden, tägliche,  
die, wenn auch nur kurze für die  
Philosophie zu finden. Die Skizzen  
der Philosophie liegen stets auf  
meinem Tische. Es war vielleicht  
gut, dass ich den Stoff immer im Kopfe  
bewegte und nur wenig niederschrieb.  
Aber, hätte ich nur 3 Monate ganz für  
mich, wie viel wäre dann fertig!  
Auf der Müdigkeit ist mein Tisch leer

A page from one of Albert Schweitzer's blue books (1942) in the Syracuse University Libraries. See pages 34-35 for translation.

Pasted onto these notebook pages are many clippings from French, German, English, and African newspapers: current reports on world politics, as well as commentaries on himself and his work. Personal remarks, linguistic curiosities, and jokes reveal an extremely humorous Schweitzer. From the many sarcastic, ironic, sometimes agreeing, sometimes disagreeing notes written in the margins of the articles, one can follow Schweitzer's reactions to the newspaper subject matter. The clippings from the fifties and sixties concern mainly information about militarism and nuclear rearmament in both East and West. Indeed, this topic pervades the notebooks of this period.

In addition to the information about the hospital, this group of blue books describes the African atmosphere and tells of adventures with the animals of the jungle. They recount a Second World War episode in which a twenty-day fight took place around Lambaréné between de Gaulle's troops and soldiers of the Vichy government, as well as a multitude of smaller everyday dramas. Schweitzer's criticism of the French colonial policies are better understood when one reads his account of his observations. The notebooks illustrate again and again that behind Schweitzer's actions stood his basic principle of 'Reverence for Life'. Recounting the origin of this idea, which so determined his later life, Schweitzer wrote: "There were three islands near the village of Igendja, eighty kilometres downstream from Lambaréné on the Ogowé river. It was here on a September day in 1915 that the idea that reverence for life is the basic principle of ethics and humanity came to me." In keeping with this principle, Schweitzer rendered his service not only to the hundreds of patients who came to the hospital but also to the injured animals which were so often brought to him.

In these notebook pages Schweitzer not only expressed his concern for the health of all living beings, but also his dismay over the unending problems with his building projects. On this subject one can find a series of descriptions, starting with the construction of a simple barrack, then of guest houses, and eventually a whole leper village. Trusting nothing to luck, he oversaw the putting in of water pipes and power supply. How exactly Schweitzer informed himself about all the necessary details is made evident by his consultation with qualified people in Europe, his reading notes, his drawings, and the books he ordered. A desire to have everything perfect made it difficult for him to delegate important work to others. But it also seems



Albert Schweitzer giving a hand to fasten the mosquito netting  
(Photo: Erica Anderson).

that only Schweitzer with his authority could in fact keep the natives working. He showed understanding for their attitude towards work, recognizing that they were not lazy in our sense of the word, but merely accustomed (since nature in Lambaréné is usually provident) to put out effort only when required by circumstances, as, for instance: when the land no longer yielded the necessary subsistence and the whole village had to be moved; when money was needed to pay hospital bills, to buy medicine or perhaps a wife. Also, Schweitzer expressed a worry about the alcohol problem.

Schweitzer often copied out by hand verses of gratitude and respect written and addressed to him by staff members and patients. Most of these were dated near his birthday and bear testimony to the love he inspired in so many who were connected with the hospital.

Poetry, in general, was a major interest. The countless poems inserted in his notebooks reveal a sensitive response to lyric poetry and a nostalgic remembrance of his beloved home country. On these grounds one might be tempted to think of Schweitzer as only a romanticist. However, his realistic and practical handling of problems frequently provided proof to the contrary.

Schweitzer's pedagogical instincts, inherited from his forefathers, are apparent in his remarks about historical events, natural phenomena, word origins, and in the allegorical anecdotes that he records.

And finally, one finds some biographical details which are of interest. In one notebook he wrote about his own family origins. He believed his roots were Swiss and that he derived his name from the canton "Swytz" (or "Switz"—therefore the "tz" in his name). His ancestors moved from Switzerland to the area around Toggenburg, where Schweitzer still found relatives after the Second World War. After the Thirty Years War his family had moved to Alsace, where immigrants were being sought to repopulate the devastated villages. There, the name "Schwytzer" became "Schweitzer". For over two centuries the Schweitzers produced organists, teachers, and weavers—weavers in the summer, when the children did not go to school but worked in the fields, and schoolmasters in winter. The first theologian among the Schweitzers was Albert Schweitzer's father. His father's brother, Charles, also studied theology but gave it up to become a high-school teacher in France. This same uncle helped Schweitzer later on to feel at home in Paris.

While studying philosophy in Paris, Schweitzer continued his organ studies with his former teacher, the composer and organist Charles Marie Widor. Schweitzer's book, *J. S. Bach*, dates from this time. It did not remain his only statement on Bach. Scattered throughout these notebooks are many ideas and notes for future publications and lectures on Bach, on special violin bows necessary for Bach pieces, and on works by Bach for keyboard instruments. Schweitzer inherited his love for organs and organ-building from his grandfather. He became passionately interested in the preservation and renovation of old organs. When Schweitzer and his wife embarked for Lambaréné in 1913, he was given a piano with a pedal attachment by the Paris Bach Society, enabling him to continue his work on Bach and to keep in practice. On extended tours in Europe between the two world



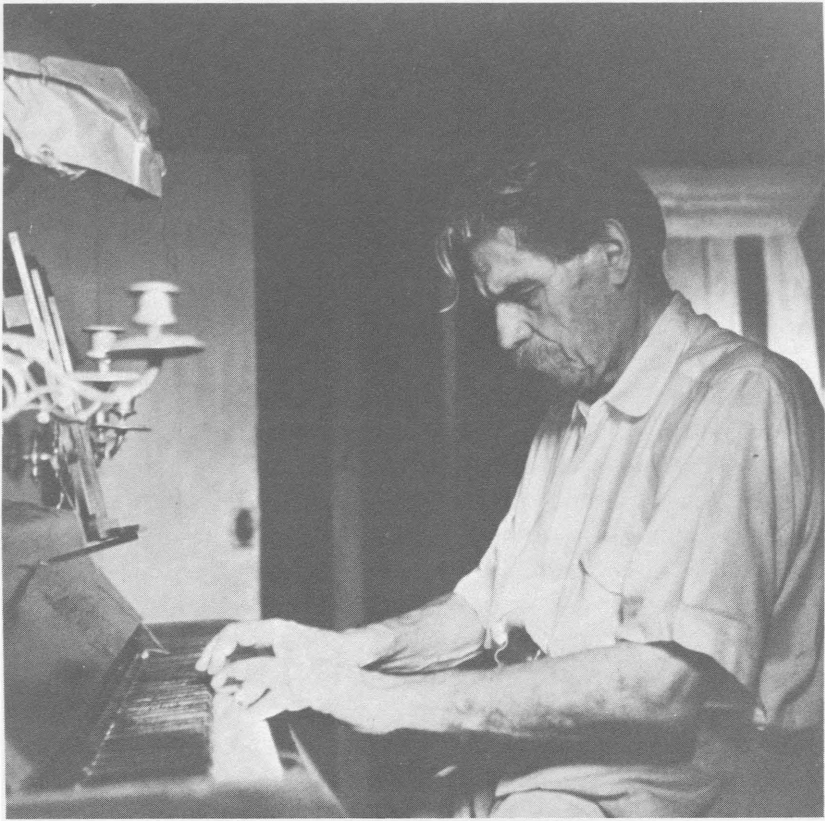
wars and after the Second World War, he played Bach concerts in order to earn money for Lambaréné. From his comments and receipts from record companies can be seen that Schweitzer recorded the organ music not only of Bach, but also of César Franck, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Charles Marie Widor.

The following story, copied out by hand, is found in one of the notebooks from the year 1943 with a postscript by Albert Schweitzer that he remembered the situation very well. The story is recounted by the organist Marcel Dupré, with whom, on a given day every week in Paris, Widor and Schweitzer used to meet for luncheon.

On one such occasion Schweitzer made the strange announcement of his plans to leave Europe for distant parts. His two companions were overcome with amazement. Schweitzer going to Africa! What could it mean? Schweitzer—a doctor of Medicine, a doctor of Theology, a doctor of Philosophy, a world-famous interpreter of Bach—going to Africa! What a waste of talent! “But the cause of art will suffer irreparable loss if you go”, remonstrated Widor. “We can’t afford to lose you!” “As long as you remain in Paris”, Schweitzer answered, “the cause of art is safe. With you here I am free to go. You are the master.” There was something in that episode which reminded me of words echoing through the ages: He must increase, but I must decrease! It is when we lose our little lives unto an all-important cause that we really find life, the abundant life’s sacrifice remains the path to true selfhood. And so Schweitzer went to Africa. Indeed, the cause of art in Europe suffered a great loss. But what immeasurable gain was brought to the dark continent with the advent of this herald of light! Whatsoever things are good, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely—he had new audiences to think of them.

Overall, these fifty-one blue books constitute the most interesting portion of the entire notebook collection to the general reader. The remaining notebooks, however, contain abundant detail that will be indispensable to the Schweitzer scholar.

Another group of Schweitzer’s blue books might be termed his ‘travel notebooks’. There are forty-two of them. They contain dates,



Albert Schweitzer at his piano in Lambaréné.

information about people, meetings, and accommodations, explanations of organs in general and comments and technical data on specific organs which he visited and played.

Throughout the entire collection of notebooks a surprising amount of space is taken up by addresses of donors, acquaintances, and people in whom Schweitzer was particularly interested. But fifteen books contain only addresses, accompanied frequently by brief mnemonic notations on the correspondents themselves, as well as what might best be termed a 'correspondence log', namely, a record of letters sent and owed. Having no time to answer the many letters, which arrived with every mailboat and, later, by airplane, was one of Schweitzer's most burdensome frustrations. Pasted onto one page of

this group is a small press cutting about George Bernard Shaw on his eighty-fifth birthday. In it, Shaw is described as having thrown away, immediately upon receipt, all his incoming mail. Schweitzer's marginal note reads: "He is missing the simplest humanity!"

Three notebooks relate only to financial details: receipts and expenditures; royalties from publishers and recording companies; and notes and correspondence concerning income tax from the years 1946 through 1958.

Two notebooks list or refer to ordered books, medical equipment, medicine, and other materials needed at Lambaréné.

Two notebooks contain in alphabetical order the names of medications from Switzerland and the United States.

Five notebooks (among them three voluminous ones) relate to diseases, with source references and notes for the exact medical treatment common in the years between 1930 and 1950. Very orderly and conscientious notes demonstrate the aspects of diseases in that time and describe the natives' primitive condition of life. In reading through them one can see the progress that the science of medicine made in three decades.

The last three of the entire collection of 123 blue books are devoted to problems concerning the consequences of the atom bomb tests and of a possible nuclear war. In addition to handwritten remarks, there are, predominantly, clippings from international newspapers in French, German, and English.

Pervading all the notebooks is a sense of the pressure of time, frustrating most particularly to the philosophical element in Schweitzer's character. He had already expressed in his early letters his fears that, intellectually, mankind lives on the past without realizing it, and he wanted very much to bring about a change with his *The Philosophy of Civilization*. He had begun this work before first embarking for Lambaréné, and he tried to continue it in his rare free time and even as a prisoner during the First World War. The notebooks are full of notes about philosophy, interspersed as well with regrets whenever a year went by again without his finishing the *Philosophy*.

On the last page of his notebook for the year 1942, he wrote:

The sad part is, that I could continue with my work with the Philosophy only temporarily sometimes. I was too much

overwhelmed with work, too tired in the evening and normally not at all in a condition to concentrate enough. But I always carried the work in my mind, and tried hard to finish as much work as possible in order to find daily some spare time, even if short, for the Philosophy. The draft is always on my table. Perhaps it was good that I had the subject always in my mind and did not write down a lot. Oh, could I have only three months for myself, how much would then be completed.

#### LETTERS

The Schweitzer papers at Syracuse include an important group of letters touching on all of Schweitzer's major concerns. The principal correspondents are Rhena Schweitzer, Rudolf Karl Bultmann, and Erica Anderson.

Ninety-five letters from the years 1930 to 1937 to his daughter, Rhena, who was at that time between eleven and eighteen years old, show a strong, uncompromising, but always loving, understanding and forgiving father, full of caring, especially for the health of his little daughter.

Eighty-five more letters from the years 1945 to 1965 to his then-married daughter Rhena and her family reflect his longing for a home, his worry about the well-being of the family, the daily life in Lambaréné with its joys and its difficulties. The unconditional devotion to his calling remained intact, though he did not hide an often severe exhaustion which resulted from his work and the heavy responsibility that continued to grow, in spite of his advanced age.

There are three letters from Albert Schweitzer to the German existentialist theologian Professor Rudolf K. Bultmann, a group of whose papers are also located at Syracuse University. These letters deal mostly with theological problems concerning the interpretation of Apostle Paul's writing. However, in his letter of July 1912 to Bultmann, Schweitzer added the following comment: "This second volume will be my good-bye to theological scholarship. I want to spend the second part of my life in the Congo as a physician to the poor natives." Nevertheless, he continued with his research on Paul, as one sees not only from the many remarks in his notebooks but also from his





Albert Schweitzer with Erica Anderson, circa 1952 (Photo: Hans Steiner).

letter to Professor Bultmann written on 11 October 1931. Here he wrote: "First I would like to thank you for your kind letter of 28 August and the review of my book on Paul in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*. I am so glad that you wrote about the book in such detail, and that you agree with most of my views."

Among other interesting letters in the collection there are: a handwritten letter of thanks to the Reverend Dr. Edwin T. Dahlberg, First Baptist Church, Syracuse, in French; a letter from the year 1946 from Mrs. Lilian Russell, Schweitzer's temporary assistant, to Dr. Charles M. Courboin, organist at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, in English, with an accompanying letter by Albert Schweitzer, in French; and a copy of a typewritten message on the occasion of the Brazza Centennial, in French.

However, the biggest corpus of Schweitzer correspondence at Syr-

acuse University is the group of 396 letters from Albert Schweitzer to the New York photographer Erica Anderson from the years 1950 through 1965.

Erica Anderson was born in Vienna, but she left Austria in 1938 together with her parents as refugees from National Socialism. After two years in England she followed her parents to the United States and became an American citizen. She had already produced successful film biographies of the English sculptor Henry Moore and of Grandma Moses before she first met Albert Schweitzer in 1951. During her first stay in Lambaréné a deep and lasting friendship developed, and, over the years, Erica Anderson became, in Schweitzer's words, the "Court Photographer of Lambaréné".

The letters, in which Albert Schweitzer wrote very openly and trustfully about his life, his problems, his joys and sorrows, and his thoughts about philosophy and theology, show how close to him Erica Anderson came to be. Often, he expressed his concern about the possibility of another war, with its inescapable consequence of human extermination by nuclear weapons, and on those occasions his thoughts turned to the principle of Reverence for Life, to ethics, and to the continuance of civilization. Schweitzer always showed strong feelings for the religions of the world. In particular, he was attracted by the Indian philosophers and their view of the world. In one of his last letters to Erica Anderson, Schweitzer, full of hope, wrote:

More and more the ethic for life makes its way into the world. In India they see its significance in bringing the European and Indian ethics into a relationship through the ideal of Humanism. This I had realized already, but I am deeply pleased that the people in India have the same certainty.

After Albert Schweitzer's death, Mrs. Anderson founded the Albert Schweitzer Center in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

#### MANUSCRIPTS

For the most part these handwritten documents, first drafts of radio appeals, and reports concern the dangerous consequences of atomic

rearmament. Albert Schweitzer hesitated a long time before he went public with his three appeals against atomic danger, "Peace or Atomic War?", broadcast by Radio Oslo in April 1958. Only after intensive research and considerable correspondence with physicians and physicists, did he feel obligated as a person representing the principle of Reverence for Life to speak about his fears. Whoever reads these appeals for peace today cannot help but be moved by their urgency. Typewritten versions in English, French, and German are part of the file.

Other papers speak of the danger of progress in science, which, in addition to possible benefits, might eventually lead to the destruction of mankind. Schweitzer was predominantly concerned with the medical consequences of radioactivity for people today and future generations.

He mused over the psychological background of the arms race between East and West. There is the handwritten draft of a letter to President Kennedy from the year 1962 with the urgent request to do everything in his power to bring about a stop to atomic weapons tests.

Other manuscripts deal with problems of ethics and culture and a potential, complete loss of culture through powerseeking and destruction of mankind by nuclear weapons.

In his "Reports about the Relationship between White and Coloured Races" are questions about the morality of colonizing and the obligations and responsibilities of colonial rulers as well as about human rights.

There is also a handwritten draft dated 1961 for the last chapter of a projected book with the title: "Free from Inhumanity: Free from Nuclear Weapons".

#### MISCELLANEA

From the time of Schweitzer's early years as a student of philosophy, theology, and music (1893–1902) as well as from the time of his studies of medicine (1905–1913), the file contains various documents, concert programs, photographs, and press cuttings. Among the items is, for instance, the newspaper clipping of an annoyed letter from Kaiser Wilhelm II to Admiral Hollmann, Officer of the

Deutsche Orientgesellschaft. The letter referred to the Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, Professor at the University of Berlin, who pioneered in researching the Assyrian language and gave lectures on the subject "Babel and Bible". His presentations caused polemic discussions, since he had concluded from his reading of the Assyrian papers that Jesus Christ could not be God's son.

Additionally, the following inventories are available:

1. Inventory of manuscripts by Albert Schweitzer, in the Zentral-Bibliothek, Zürich.
2. Inventory of materials of Albert Schweitzer, brought on 15 March 1977 from Günsbach to the Zentral-Bibliothek, Zürich.
3. Inventory of literature by and about Albert Schweitzer, including records, editions of music, handwritten papers, and various archival materials in the Library of Erwin R. Jacobi, Zürich.
4. Inventory of all manuscripts, notebooks, and letters at Syracuse University with short notes about their content.

#### BOOKS FROM SCHWEITZER'S LIBRARY

Syracuse University also has in its possession a number of books (predominantly on music, religion, and Africa) from Albert Schweitzer's personal library. Presented by Rhena Schweitzer Miller in 1978, all are signed by Albert Schweitzer. Several carry his extensive annotations. Noteworthy is Schweitzer's own marked copy of *Les Mots* by his cousin Jean-Paul Sartre. In addition, Mrs. Miller's gift included from her own library other books both by and about her father.