

**THE LETTERS OF  
CAPTAIN DREYFUS  
TO HIS WIFE**

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The letters of Captain Dreyfus to his wife by Alfred Dreyfus

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CAPTAIN ALFRED DREYFUS

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# DREYFUS, THE MAN

BY WALTER LITTLEFIELD

Author of "The Truth About Dreyfus"

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In cases of high treason no less than in violations of the criminal code the personal character of the accused has always had great weight with French judges. In attempting to prove that Captain Alfred Dreyfus carried on treasonable negotiations with a foreign power, M. d'Ormescheville, in his Acte d'Accusation or indictment, laid great stress on the information collected from the municipal police tending to show that the prisoner was an habitual wrong-doer. The supposition that as an Alsatian he might have entered the French army and remained there with the patriotic and unselfish desire to serve Germany is treated with secondary importance. It was the intention of the officer who served as Juge d'Instruction to show that Dreyfus was criminally corrupt, and hence was quite capable of being a traitor. Not only did the semi-official press of Paris, in the winter of 1894-95, dwell upon those acts that seemed intimately connected with the alleged treason, but they delved into his domestic life. With diabolical frankness and in a network of specious details they branded him profligate as well as traitor. The Acte d'Accusation charges him with being a gambler and libertine, unmindful of the well-being of his family, faithless to his wife.



## INTRODUCTION

For many weeks this most infamous campaign was kept up in the columns of *L'Echo de Paris*, *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Gaulois*, *La Libre Parole*, and *L'Intransigeant*. So varied in character and so ingenious in conception were these libellous tales, that it became impossible for the friends of the condemned man to make an adequate defense. Dreyfus's counsel, Maître Demange, heard the stories, and could do nothing. The verdict of the court-martial closed the door to legal redress. The devoted wife of Dreyfus at first attempted to reply to them in *Le Figaro*. Parisians laughed at her *naïveté*. She was not the only deceived wife in the world, they said. At length, wearied of the unequal combat—one woman against a horde of anti-Semitic vilifiers—she gave to the world a volume of letters written by her husband to herself. It was her desire simply to show him as he was, to rehabilitate the prisoner as a husband and a father in the eyes of Frenchmen. But "*Les Lettres d'un Innocent*" have done more than this. To the women of France, at least, they have established the innocence of the man. No one can read these letters without being struck by the absolute sincerity of the writer; by his love for his wife and his family, and for his country; by his devotion to duty and to the traditions of the army whose heads had so remorselessly sacrificed him; by the utter hopelessness of his position. When, in the papers of January 6, 1895, the story of his dramatic degradation was published to the world, the French people pretended to see in his proud, fearless demeanor, as his uniform was stripped of insignia and his sword broken before him, a criminal stoicism that would have been impossible in an innocent man. Many English and American readers recognized simply the

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final desperate appeal of an entirely innocent man. The sentiment that was then aroused outside of France will be emphasized by "Les Lettres d'un Innocent." Although not destined to have the judicial and logical weight of the testimony before the Cour de Cassation, they have a sympathetic and persuasive significance that is eminently human. The evidence before the Court proves that Dreyfus did not write the *bordereau*. The letters convince one that he was incapable of treason.

The reader who expects to find in the epistles before us arguments tending to prove the innocence of the writer will be disappointed. Even if the prisoner actually attempted defense it was not allowed to pass the censor. Only a persistent declaration of innocence will be found here—a declaration that is repeated with awful and tragic monotony until it smites the ear like the wail of an innocent soul in Dante's "Inferno."

As has been said, the conditions under which these letters were written forbade the author to indulge in details concerning the circumstances of his awful fate. Hence, for a fuller appreciation and a better understanding of the emotions that moved the writer at given periods, the following data must constantly be borne in mind: Dreyfus was arrested October 15, 1894; his trial by court-martial began December 19 of the same year and ended December 23. The condemned man was publicly degraded January 5, 1895, and on the 9th day of the following February the Chamber passed a law decreeing his place of confinement to be French Guiana, in South America; in March he was transported thither.

The prisoner wrote regularly to his wife until the spring of 1898, when he became a victim of the conditions of his solitary position. In September, 1898, he

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bade a final adieu to his wife and children and declared that he would write no more.\* He was beset with unconquerable sadness. He complained to his physician, Dr. Veugnon, of Cayenne, of mental exhaustion and insomnia. He was haunted by the "fixed idea" to exculpate himself from the charge of treason. Yet he could only deny and deny.

He knew nothing of what was passing in Paris and in the world at large.

On November 15, 1898, M. Darius, the Procureur Général of Cayenne, entered the room occupied by the prisoner on the Ile du Diable and said to him, "Dreyfus, the Cour de Cassation has decided to revise your case. What have you to say?" Dreyfus seemed like one dazed. The day for which he had so fervently prayed had come at last. Yet, according to his inquisitor, this is what he replied: "I shall say nothing until I am confronted by my accusers in Paris." No further facts were revealed to him, but, under the direction of the authorities in Paris, he was interrogated at given periods. In the mean time he was left a prey to strange conjectures concerning his ultimate fate. On July 3, 1899, he was told that he was to be taken immediately to France to stand trial before a new court-martial at Rennes. He had been a prisoner on the Ile du Diable for more than fifty months.

Alfred Dreyfus, captain in the 14th Artillery, was appointed to the General Staff of the French Army in 1893. He was the first Jew to be so honored. His record at the Chaptal College, at Sainte-Barbe, at the Ecole Polytechnique, at the Ecole d'Application, at the Ecole de Guerre, no less than his service in the 31st

\* See Appendix A.