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# A LAST DIARY

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# A Last Diary

BY W. N. P. BARBELLION

WITH A PREFACE BY

ARTHUR J. CUMMINGS

"We are in the power of no calamity while Death is in our own."—*Religio Medici.*

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1921

*First published, November* 25, 1920
*Second impression, December* 14, 1920

# THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF BARBELLION

THE opening entry in *A Last Diary* was made on March 21, 1918; the closing sentence was written on June 3, 1919. In *The Journal of a Disappointed Man* the record ended on October 21, 1917, with the one word "Self-disgust." An important difference between the first diary and that now published lies in the fact that the first embodies a carefully selected series of extracts from twenty post-quarto volumes of manuscript in which Barbellion had recorded his thoughts and his observations from the age of thirteen without any clearly defined intention, except towards the end of his life, of discovering them to any but one or two of his intimate friends. He often hinted to me that some parts of his diary would "make good reading" if they could be printed in essay form, and I think he then had in mind chiefly those passages which

supplied the inspiration of *Enjoying Life*, the volume of essays that revealed him more distinctively in the character of "a naturalist and a man of letters." Still, the diary was primarily written for himself. It was his means of self-expression, the secret chamber of his soul into which no other person, however deep in his love and confidence, might penetrate. More than once I asked him to let me look at those parts which he thought suitable for publication, but shyly he turned aside the suggestion with the remark: "Some day, perhaps, but not now." All I ever saw was a part of the first essay in *Enjoying Life*, and an account of his wanderings "in a spirit of burning exultation" over the great stretch of sandy "burrows" at the estuary of that beautiful Devonshire river, the Taw, where in long days of solitude he first taught himself with the zeal and patience of the born naturalist the ways of birds and fish and insects, and learnt to love the sweet harmony of the sunlight and the flowers; where, too, as a mere boy he first meditated upon the mysteries of life and death.

The earlier *Journal*, then, was, generally speaking, spontaneous, not calculated for effect, a part of himself. He wrote down instinctively and by habit his inmost thoughts, his lightest impression of the doings of the day, a careless jest that amused him, an irritating encounter with a foolish or a stupid person, something newly seen in the structure of a bird's wing, a sunset effect. It was only on rare occasions that he deliberately experimented with forms of expression. But I cannot help thinking that the diary contained in the present volume, though in one sense equally a part of himself, has a somewhat different quality. It appears to bear internal evidence of having been written with an eye to the reader because of his settled intention that it should be published in a book. He has drawn upon the memories of his youth for many of the most interesting passages. He has smoothed the rough edges of his style with the loving care of an author anticipating criticism, and anxious to do his best. Whether the last diary will be found less attractive on that account is not for me

to say. The circumstances in which it was written explain the difference, if, as I suppose, it is easy to detect. In the earlier period covered by *A Last Diary* the original *Journal* was actually in the press; in the later period it had been published and received with general goodwill. Barbellion certainly did not expect to live to see the *Journal* in print, and that is why he inserted at the end its single false entry, "Barbellion died on December 31"—1917. A few of the later reviewers, whose sense of propriety was offended by this "twisting of the truth for the sake of an artistic finish," rebuked him for the trick played upon his readers. But he refused to take the rebuke seriously. "The fact is," he said with a whimsical smile, "no man dare remain alive after writing such a book."

A further difference between the present book and its two predecessors is that both the *Journal* and *Enjoying Life* were prepared by himself for publication, though the latter appeared after his death, whereas *A Last Diary* was still in manuscript when

he died. He left carefully written instructions as to the details of publication, and he was extremely anxious that there should be no "bowdlerising" of any part of the text. He desired that at the end should be written "The rest is silence." Nearly the whole of the diary is in his own handwriting, which in the last entries became a scarcely legible scrawl, though in moments of exceptional physical weakness he dictated to his wife and sister. Up to the last his mind retained its extraordinary strength and vigour. His eyes never lost their curiously pathetic look of questioning "liveness." In that feeble form—"a badly articulated skeleton" he had called himself long before—his eyes were indeed the only feature left by which those who loved him could still keep recognition of his physical presence. His body was a gaunt, white framework of skin and bone, enclosing a spirit still so passionately alive that it threatened to burst asunder the frail bonds that imprisoned it. I think those who read the diary will agree that while it is mellower and more delicate in tone it

shows no sign of mental deterioration or of any decline in the quality and texture of his thoughts, certainly no failure in the power of literary expression. The very last long entry, written the day before he laid down his pen to write no more, is a little masterpiece of joyous description, in which with the exact knowledge of the zoologist and the subtle sense of the artist, he gives reasons why "the brightest thing in the world is a Ctenophor in a glass jar standing in the sun." Mr. Edward Shanks, in an essay of singular understanding, has quoted this particular entry, a flashing remembrance of earlier days, as a characteristic example of those "exquisite descriptions of landscapes and living things which grow more vivid and more moving as the end approaches." The appreciation written by Mr. Shanks appeared in March of the present year in the *London Mercury*, which also published in successive numbers other extracts from the diary that is now given *in extenso*. With the help of my brother, H. R. Cummings, who has been responsible for most of the work involved in preparing the manuscript for the

press, I have made a few verbal changes and corrections; and certain passages have been omitted which, now that Barbellion's identity is established, seem to refer too openly and too intimately to persons still alive. Otherwise the entries appear exactly as they were made.

In recent months I have been asked by various persons, many of whom I do not know and have never seen, but who have been profoundly interested in the personality of Barbellion, to write a "straightforward" account of his life. Some of these correspondents seem to imagine that it holds a strange mystery not disclosed in the frank story of the *Journal*, while others suspect that the events of his career, as he recorded them, are a judicious blend of truth and fiction. I can only say as emphatically as possible that there is no mystery of any sort, and that the facts of his life are in close accordance with his own narrative. Obviously the disconnected diary form must be incomplete, and in some respects puzzling; and clearly he selected for treatment in a book those entries of fact which were appro-

priate to the scheme of his journal. They were chosen, as I have already indicated, from a great mass of material that accumulated from week to week over a period of about fifteen years. But they are neither invented nor deliberately coloured to suit his purpose. When he spoke of himself he spoke the truth as far as he knew it; when he spoke of others he spoke the truth as far as he knew it; when he spoke of actual events they had happened as nearly as possible as he related them.

The accounts of his career, published at the time of his death last year, were accurate in their general outline. Bruce Frederick Cummings (Barbellion's real name) was born at the little town of Barnstaple in North Devon, on September 7, 1889. He was the youngest of a family of six—three boys and three girls. His father was a journalist who had achieved no mean reputation, local though it was, as a pungent political writer, and had created for himself what must have been, even in those days, a peculiar position for the district representative of a country

newspaper. He was a shrewd but kindly judge of men; he had a quick wit, a facile pen, and an unusual charm of manner that made him a popular figure everywhere. In fact, in the area covered by his activities he exercised in his prime a personal influence unique of its kind, and such as would be scarcely possible under modern conditions of newspaper work. Though they had little in common temperamentally, there always existed a strong tie of affection between my father and Barbellion, and I believe there is to be found among the latter's still unexamined literary remains a sympathetic sketch of the personality of John Cummings. In his infancy Barbellion nearly died from an attack of pneumonia, and from that early illness, one is inclined to think, his subsequent ill-health originated. He was a puny, undersized child, nervously shy, with a tiny white face and large brown melancholy eyes. He was so frail that he was rather unduly coddled, and was kept at home beyond the age at which the rest of us had been sent to school. I taught him in my father's office-

study to read and write, as well as the rudiments of English history and English literature, and a little Latin. Up to the age of nine, when he started to attend a large private school in the town, he was slow of apprehension, but of an inquiring mind, and he rarely forgot what he had once learnt. He was nearly twelve years old before his faculties began to develop, and they developed rapidly. He revealed an aptitude for mathematics, and a really surprising gift of composition; some of his school essays, both in style and manner, and in the precocity of their thought, might almost have been written by a mature man of letters. The headmaster of the school, who had been a Somersetshire County cricketer, and whose educational outlook was dominated by his sense of the value of sports and games, was a little disconcerted by this strange, shy boy and his queer and precise knowledge of out-of-the-way things, but he had the acumen to recognise his abilities and to predict for him a brilliant future. He read all kinds of books, from Kingsley to Carlyle, with an

insatiable appetite. It was about this time, too, that he began those long tramps into the countryside, over the hills to watch the staghounds meet, and along the broad river marshes, that provided the beginnings and the foundation of the diary habit, which became in time the very breath of his inner life. He loved the open air, and all that the open air meant. After hours of absence, we knew not where, he would return glowing with happy excitement at some adventure with a friendly fisherman, or at the identification of a rare bird. Even now the wonder of the world was gripping him in its bewitching spell. In later days he expressed its power over him in words such as these, with many variations:

"Like a beautiful and terrible mistress, the world holds me its devoted slave. She flouts me, but I love her still. She is cruel, but still I love her. My love for her is a guilty love—for the voluptuous curves of the Devonshire moors, for the bland benignity of the sun smiling alike on the just and on the unjust, for the sea which washes in a beautiful shell or a corpse with the same meditative indifference."

In these early years, I remember, the diary took the outward form of an old exercise book, neatly labelled and numbered, and it reflected all his observations on nature. The records, some of which were reproduced from time to time in *The Zoologist*, were valuable not only in their careful exactitude, but for their breadth of suggestion, and that inquiring spirit into the why of things which proved him to be no mere classifier or reporter. They were the outcome of long vigils of concentrated watching. I have known him to stay for two or three hours at a stretch in one tense position, silently noting the torpid movements of half a dozen bats withdrawn from some disused mine and kept for experiments in the little drawing-room that was more like a laboratory than a place to sit in. He probably knew more about North Devon and the wild creatures that inhabited its wide spaces than any living person. Sometimes he was accompanied on his journeys, which occupied most of his spare time and the greater part of the week-ends, by two or three boisterously high-spirited acquaintances

of his own age, who, though leagues removed from him in character and outlook, seemed to find a mysterious charm in his companionship, and whose solemn respect for his natural history lore he cunningly made use of by employing them to search for specimens under his guidance and direction.

When he was fourteen years of age his fixed determination to become a naturalist by profession was accepted by all of us as a settled thing. My father, whose income was at this time reduced through illness by about half, generously encouraged him in his ambition by giving him more pocket money than any of his brothers and sisters had received in palmier days, in order that he might add to his rapidly increasing library of costly books on zoology and biology; and by allowing him such freedom of movement as can rarely fall to the lot of a small boy in an ordinary middle-class home. Here let me say that after the publication of his *Journal*, Barbellion himself expressed regret at having here and there in the book unconsciously conveyed the impression that

in the home of his childhood and youth he received little practical help and sympathy in the pursuit of his great quest. The exact contrary was, in fact, the case; and when in 1910, owing to my father's second, and this time complete, breakdown Barbellion had to decline the offer of a small appointment at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory, the blow was not less bitter to his parents than to himself. At that time he was the only son at home. He had been allowed a great amount of leisure for study; but now, as one of two young reporters on my father's staff, he was compelled for the time being to carry a responsibility which he feared and detested. But the opportunity for which he had passionately worked and impatiently waited was not long in coming. In the following year, in open competition with men from the Universities who had been specially coached for the examination, he won his way by his own exertions to the staff of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington.

Probably the happiest period of his life

was that of his late youth up to the time of my father's collapse. He was in somewhat better health than in his childhood ; the joy of living intoxicated his being ; he was able to saunter at his own free will over his beloved hills and dales ; he was beginning to feel his strength and to shape his knowledge ; and before him stretched a bright vista of vague, alluring, infinite possibilities. And at this time, apart from the diary, he was trying his hand at writing, and revelling in that delicious experience of youth—putting to proof his newly awakened powers. I have in my possession scores of early letters that testify eloquently to his ability to perceive, to think, and to write. Here is a letter which, at the age of seventeen, he wrote to my brother Harry. It seems to me remarkable for the vigour and clearness with which he was able to set down his reflections on a dark and difficult point of philosophy, and interesting because it shows how already his mind was occupied with the mystery of himself.

"I am writing really [he says] to discuss 'Myself' with you. I am particularly interested in it [an

article on "Myself" written by Harry] because it differs so entirely from my own feelings. I am a mendicant friar. It is so difficult to see what one really *believes*, as distinct from what one *feels*; but for myself I can see only too distinctly the world without my own insignificant self, after death or before birth.

"There is one power which I have to an unusual extent developed, so I think, and that is the faculty of divesting my thoughts of all subjectivity. I can see myself as so much specialised protoplasm. Sometimes I almost think that in thus divesting the mind of particulars I seize the universal and for a short but vivid moment look through the veil at 'the thing itself.' I really cannot make myself clear without a great deal of care, and I hope you will not misunderstand me.

"But, to diverge somewhat, it was only the other day that suddenly, when I was not expecting it, I saw *mother's face* in an objective way. I saw and looked on it as a stranger who had never seen her; and mind you, there is a good deal of difference between these two points of view. I never realised until that moment that we look on those whom we know so well in the light and shade of the knowledge we have gained before. . . .

"The natural conclusion of these observations I take to be that we never know *how* anthropomorphic our views may really be. (Somebody else has said this somewhere, but I don't know who. Huxley?) I

am naturally sceptical of all sciences and systems of philosophy. Science, of course, deals with the experienced universe, and cannot possibly ever reach ultimate truth. In philosophy I am always haunted by the suspicion that, if we only knew, we are not anywhere near being able to make even a rough guess at the truth.

"Throw a dog a bone. I'll take it that the dog, if it is an intelligent one, discusses the bone thoroughly. It discovers the natural law of the bone—that it satisfies hunger and provides happiness, and it forms a scientific theory (intelligent dog, mind you) to explain this inseparable correlative phenomenon. It says: 'The world is probably to be considered as an immense mechanism of separate bone-throwing machines, worked by an unknown creature. Bone is necessary to the dog existence as it is the ineffable vital essence of Divine Love in which we live, move, and have our being. This is so, because it has been proved by experiment that in the absence of bone-throwers, dogs have been known to die.'

"Of course you laugh. But why not? I cannot help thinking that we may very well be as much in the dark as the dogs. Our philosophy may be incorrect in respect of the Universe, Reality, and God as the dog's philosophy is in respect of the simple process of digestion and the accompanying physiological changes.

"If I could drop my anchor behind a rock of

certainty I should be greatly relieved, but who can convince a man if he cannot convince himself?

"To sum up, what I think is that we—*i.e.*, each one of us separately—are exceedingly unimportant wisps, little bits of body, mind, and spirit, but that in the whole, as humanity, we are a great immortal organism of real import if we could see behind the veil. In other words I regard individuals as ineffectual units, but the mass as a spiritual power. The old philosophical idea that the world was a big animal had an element of truth in it."

It was only by the skin of his teeth that Barbellion passed the doctors after getting through the scientific examination for the South Kensington post. He was suffering from chronic dyspepsia, he was more than six feet in height, and as thin as a rake, and he looked like a typical consumptive. The medical gentlemen solemnly shook their heads, but after scrutinising him with as much care as if he were one of his own museum specimens they could discover no organic defect, and their inability to "classify" him no doubt saved Barbellion from what would have been the most dreadful disappointment of his life. His appear-

ance, notwithstanding his emaciation, was striking. His great height, causing him to stoop slightly, produced an air and attitude of studiousness peculiar to himself. A head of noble proportions was crowned by a thick mass of soft, brown hair tumbling carelessly about his brow. Deepset, lustrous eyes, wide apart and aglow with eager life, lighted up a pale, sharply pointed countenance with an indescribable vividness of expression. His nose, once straight and shapely, owing to an accident was irregular in its contour, but by no means unpleasing in its irregularity, for it imparted a kind of rugged friendliness to the whole face; and he had a curious habit in moments of animation of visibly dilating the nostrils, as if unable to contain his excitement. His mouth was large, firm, yet mobile, and his chin like a rock. He had a musical voice, which he used without effort, and when he spoke, especially when he chose to let himself go on any subject that had aroused his interest, the energetic play of his features, the vital intensity which he threw into every expression, had an

irresistible effect of compulsion upon his friends. His hands were strong and sensitive, with a remarkable fineness of touch very useful to him in the laboratory, and it was always a pleasure to watch them at work upon a delicate dissection. His hands and arms were much more active members than his legs. In conversation he tried in vain to control a lifelong and amusing habit of throwing them out and beating the air violently to emphasise a point in argument. But he moved and walked languidly, like a tired man, as indeed he was. He was continuously unwell—"chronically sub-normal" was how he once described his condition to me, half playfully. He had lost forever that sense of abounding physical well-being which gives zest to living and strength to endure. But he has discussed his own symptoms in the *Journal* with a force and ironic humour that I have not the capacity or the will to imitate. I will say no more than that those who were closest to him remember with wondering admiration the magnificent struggle which he maintained

against his illness and its effect upon his work. His attacks of depression he kept almost invariably to himself. In the presence of others he was full of high courage, engrossed in his plans for the future, strong in the determination not to be mastered by physical weakness. "I am not going to be beaten" he declared after one very bad bout, "if I develop all the diseases in the doctor's index. I mean to do what I have set out to do if it has to be done in a bath-chair." His will-power was enormous, unconquerable. Again and again he spurred himself on to work with an appalling expenditure of nervous energy, when an ordinary man might have flung up his hands and resigned himself to passive despair.

Let me quote from one of many letters written to me from South Kensington, all charged with a strangely arresting amalgam of hope, despair, defiance, cravings for imaginative sympathy, lofty ideals, and throbbing with a prodigious passion of life. Each and every one was a challenge and a protest. Surely there never was a half-

dead man more alive. It was shortly after war broke out that he wrote this letter:

"The reason why the article 'The Joy of Life' has not been sent you is because it is not finished. . . . My mood just now is scarcely fitted for the completion of an essay with such a title. I am like to ask sullenly, "What the devil's the good?" I have already drawn out of my inside big ropy entrails, all hot and steaming, and *you* say 'Very nice,' or 'effectively expressed,' and Austin Harrison says he is 'too full up.' Damn his eyes! Damn everything! Hall Caine, poor man, said once that a most terrible thing had happened to him. He sat in a railway carriage opposite a young woman reading a book written 'in his life's blood,' and she kept looking up listlessly to see the names of the stations. 'The Joy of Life,' my friend, in the completed state will make people sit up perhaps. So I think as I write it. But perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. It has been like the birth of a child to me. I've been walking about 'in the family way.' The other essay was a relief to be able to bring forth. Both are self-revelations. . . . My journal is full of them, and one day when, as is probable, I have predeceased you, you will find much of B. F. C. in it almost as he appears to His Maker. It is a study in the nude, with no appeal to the highly pemmicanised intellect of such a being as ——, but there is meaty stuff in it, raw, red, or underdone.

"It is curious to me how satisfied we all are with wholly inadequate opinions and ideas as to the

character and nature of our friends. For example, I have a rough-and-ready estimate of yourself which has casually grown up over a series of years. But I don't really feel very satisfied that I know you, and most folk wouldn't care if they didn't. They want neither to understand nor to be understood. They walk about life as at a mask ball, content to remain unknown and unrealised by the consciousness of any single human being. A man can live with his wife all his days and never be known to her—particularly if they are in love. And the extraordinary thing to me is that they don't wish to understand each other. They accept each other's current coin without question. That seems to me to be uncanny—to be lolling about in the arms of someone who is virtually a stranger to you.

"Not only ourselves, but everything is bound about with innumerable concentric walls of impenetrable armour. I long to pull them down, to tear down all the curtains, screens, and dividing partitions, to walk about with my clothes off, to make a large ventral incision and expose my heart. I am sick of being tied up in flesh and clothes, hemmed in by walls, by prosies, deceits. I want to pull people by the nose and be brutally candid. I want everyone to know, to be told everything. It annoys me to find someone who doesn't realise some horrible actuality like cancer or murder, or who has not heard of R. L. S., or like an infamous man I met the other day who was not sufficiently alive to know that it

was Amundsen not Scott (as he nonchalantly assumed) who got to the Pole first. . . .

"You ask for my dyspepsia in a way which, my dear, good lad, I cannot resist. Well, it has been bad, damned bad. There you are! I have been in hell without the energy to lift up mine eyes. The first twenty-five years of my life have chased me up and down the keyboard. I have been to the top and to the bottom, very happy and very miserable. But don't think I am whining—I prefer a life which is a hunt, and an adventure rather than a study in still life. If you suffer, Balzac said proudly, at least you live. If I were suddenly assured of wealth and health, long to live, I should have to walk about cutting other people's throats so as to reintroduce the element of excitement. At this present moment I am feeling so full of *joie de vivre* that a summons to depart coming now would exasperate me into fury. I should die cursing like an intoxicated trooper. It seems unthinkable—if life were the sheer wall of a precipice, I should stick to it by force of attraction!

"You shall see in the 'Joy of Life' how much I have grown to love it. There is a little beast which draws its life to start with rather precariously attached to a crab. But gradually it sends out filaments which burrow in and penetrate every fibre of its host so that to separate host and parasite means a grievous rupture. I have become attached in the same way, but not to a crab!

"Life is extraordinarily distracting. At times

Zoology melts away from my purview. Gradually, I shouldn't be at all surprised if other interests burrow in under my foundations (laid in Zoology) and the whole superstructure collapse. If I go to a sculpture gallery, the continued study of entomology appears impossible—I will be a sculptor. If I go to the opera, then I am going to take up music seriously. Or if I get a new beast (an extraordinary new form of bird parasite brought back by the New Guinea Expedition, old sport! phew!) nothing else can interest me on earth, I think. But something does, and with a wrench I turn away presently to fresh pastures. Life is a series of wrenches, I tremble for the fixity of my purposes; and as you know so well, I am an ambitious man, and my purposes are very dear to me. You see what a trembling, colour-changing, invertebrate, jelly-fish of a brother you have. . . . But you are the man I look to. . . ."

Whatever kind of man Barbellion may have been he certainly was not a jelly-fish. Any or all of these sentiments might have come red-hot from his diary, and they are absolutely typical of the delightfully stimulating and provocative letters which he loved to write, and could write better than any man I have ever known. He was as greedy as a shark for life in the raw, for the whole of life. He longed to capture and compre-

hend the entire universe, and would never have been content with less. "I could swallow landscapes," he says, "and swill down sunsets, or grapple the whole earth to me with hoops of steel, but the world is so impassive, silent, secret." He despised his body because it impeded his pursuit of the elusive uncapturable. And while he pursued Fate, Fate followed close on his heels. In London he grew slowly and steadily worse. Doctors tinkered with him, and he tinkered himself with their ineffectual nostrums. But at last, after he had complained one day of partial blindness and of loss of power in his right arm, I persuaded him, on the advice of a wisely suspicious young physician, to see a first-class nerve specialist. This man quickly discovered the secret of his complex and never-ending symptoms. Without revealing the truth to Barbellion, he told me that he was a doomed man, in the grip of a horrible and obscure disease of which I had never heard. Disseminated sclerosis was the name which the specialist gave to it; and its effect, produced apparently by a

microbe that attacks certain cells of the spinal cord, is to destroy in the course of a few years—or in some cases many years—every function of the body, killing its victim by degrees in a slow, ruthless process of disintegration.

The specialist was strongly of the opinion that the truth should not be told my brother. "If we do so," he said, "we shall assuredly kick him down the hill far more quickly than he will travel if we keep him hopeful by treating the symptoms from time to time as they arise." Barbellion, then, was told he was not "up to standard," that he had been working too hard, was in need of a prolonged rest, and could be restored to health only by means of a long course of careful and regular treatment. The fact disposes of the criticism of a few unfriendly reviewers who, without reading the *Journal* closely enough to disarm their indignation, accused Barbellion of a selfish and despicable act in getting married when he knew himself to be dying from an incurable malady. Whether I was right or wrong in accepting the medical man's

advice, I do not regret the course I took. Barbellion, in a moment of overwhelming despair at the tragedy of his life, and the calamity it had brought upon his wife and child, afterwards cried out in protest against my deception—based as it was on expert judgment, and inspired solely by an affectionate desire to shield him from acute distress in the remaining period of his life after I had been told that he might live five, ten, fifteen years longer. Yet, reviewing all the circumstances, I realise that I could have come to no other decision even if I might have foreseen all that was to follow. Let it be clearly understood that the devoted woman to whom he became engaged was at once made aware of his actual condition, and after consultation with her family and an interview with the doctor, who left her under no misapprehension as to the facts, she calmly and courageously chose to link her fate with that of Barbellion. How by a curious and dramatic accident Barbellion shortly after his marriage discovered the truth about himself, and kept it for a time from his wife in the

belief that she did not know, is related with unconscious pathos in the *Journal*.

Barbellion was married in September, 1915. In July, 1917, he was compelled to resign his appointment at the South Kensington Museum. His life came to an end on October 22, 1919, in the quaint old country cottage at Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire, where for many months he had lain like a wraith, tenderly ministered to in his utter weakness by those who loved him. His age was thirty-one. He was glad to die. "Life," to use a phrase he was fond of repeating, "pursued him like a fury" to the end; but as he lingered on, weary and helpless, he was increasingly haunted by the fear of becoming a grave burden to his family. The publication of the *Journal* and the sympathetic reception it met with from the press and public were sources of profound comfort to his restless soul, yearning as he had yearned from childhood to find friendly listeners to the beating of his heart, fiercely panting for a large-hearted response to his self-revealing, half-wistful, half-defiant

appeal to the comprehension of all humanity. "The kindness almost everybody has shown the *Journal*, and the fact that so many have understood its meaning," he said to me shortly before he died, "have entirely changed my outlook. My horizon has cleared, my thoughts are tinged with sweetness, and I am content." Earlier than this he had written: "During the past twelve months I have undergone an upheaval, and the whole bias of my life has gone across from the intellectual to the ethical. I know that Goodness is the chief thing."

He did not accomplish a tithe of what he had planned to do, but in the extent and character of his output he achieved by sheer force of will-power, supported by an invincible ambition and an incessant intellectual industry that laughed his ill-health in the face, more than seemed possible to those of us who knew the nature of the disorder against which he fought with undying courage every day of his life. It is scarcely surprising that there have been diverse estimates of his character and

capacities, some wise and penetrating, many imperfect and wide of the mark. It is not for me to try to do more than correct a few crude or glaringly false impressions of the kind of man Barbellion was. Others must judge of the quality of his genius and of his place in life and literature. But I can speak of Barbellion as the man I knew him to be. He was not the egotist, pure and simple, naked and complete, that he sometimes accused himself of being and is supposed by numerous critics and readers of the *Journal* to have been.

His portrait of himself was neither consummate nor, as Mr. Shanks well says, "immutable." "In the nude," declared Barbellion, more than once, with an air of blunt finality. Yes, but only as he imagined himself to look in the nude.

He was forever peering at himself from changing angles, and he was never quite sure that the point of view of the moment was the true one. Incontinently curious about himself, he was never certain about the real Barbellion. One day he was "so

much specialised protoplasm"; another day he was Alexander with the world at his feet; and then he was a lonely boy pining for a few intimate friends. His sensations at once puzzled and fascinated him.

"I am apparently [he said] a triple personality: (1) The respectable youth; (2) the foul-mouthed commentator and critic; (3) the real but unknown I."

Many times he tried thus to docket his manifold personality in distinguishable departments. It was a hopeless task. "Respectability" was the last word to apply to him. Foul-mouthed he never was, unless a man is foul-mouthed who calls a thing by its true name and will not cover it with a sham or a substitute. In his talks with me he was as "abandoned" in his frankness as in the *Journal;* and the longer I knew him the more I admired the boldness of his vision; the unimpeachable honesty and therefore the essential purity of his mind.

His habit of self-introspection and his mordant descriptions of his countless symptoms were not the "inward notes" or the

weak outpourings of a hypochondriac. His whole bearing and his attitude to life in general were quite uncharacteristic of the hypochondriac as that type of person is commonly depicted and understood. It should be remembered that his symptoms were real symptoms and as depressing as they were painful, and his disease a terribly real disease which affected from the beginning almost every organ of his body. Though he was rarely miserable he had something to be miserable about, and the accepted definition of a hypochondriac is that of one whose morbid state of mind is produced by a constitutional melancholy for which there is no palpable cause. He scarcely ever spoke of his dyspepsia, his muscular tremors, his palpitations of the heart, and all the other physical disturbances which beset him from day to day, except with a certain wry humour; and while it is true that he would discuss his condition with the air of an enthusiastic anatomist who had just been contemplating some unusually interesting *corpus vile*, he talked

of it only when directly questioned about it, or to explain why a piece of work that he was anxious to finish had been interrupted or delayed. He had a kind of disgust for his own emaciated appearance, arising, not improbably, from his æsthetic admiration for the human form in its highest development. On one occasion, when we were spending a quiet holiday together at a little Breton fishing village, I had some difficulty in persuading him to bathe in the sea on account of his objection to exposing his figure to the view of passers-by. The only thing that might be considered in the least morbid in his point of view with regard to his health was a fixed and absolutely erroneous belief that his weakness was hereditary. His parents were both over sixty when they died from illnesses each of which had a definitely traceable cause. Though the other members of the family enjoyed exceptionally good health, he continued to the last to suspect that we were all physically decadent, and nothing could shake his conviction that my particular

complaint was heart disease, regardless of the fact frequently pointed out to him that in the Army I had been passed A1 with monotonous regularity.

Mr. Wells has referred to him as "an egotistical young naturalist"; in the same allusion, however, he reiterated the fundamental truth that "we are all egotists within the limits of our power of expression." Barbellion was intensely interested in himself, but he was also intensely interested in other people. He had not that egotistical imagination of the purely self-centred man which looks inward all the time because nothing outside the province of his own self-consciousness concerns him. He had an *objective* interest in himself, an outcome of the peculiar faculty which he divulged in the first of the two letters already quoted of looking at human beings, even his own mother, objectively. He described and explained himself so persistently and so thoroughly because he had an obviously better opportunity of studying himself with nice precision and attentive

care than he had for the study of other people. He regarded himself quite openly and quite naturally as a human specimen to be examined, classified, and dissected, and he did his work with the detailed skill and the truthful approach of a scientific investigator. The "limits of his power of expression" being far beyond those of the average man, he was able to give a picture of himself that lives on account of its simple and daring candour. He is not afraid to be frank in giving expression to a thought merely because it may be an unpleasant or a selfish thought. If a shadowy doubt assails him, or an *outré* criticism presents itself about a beloved friend, he sets it down; if he feels a sensuous joy in bathing in the sea and loves to look upon his "pink skin," or derives a catlike satisfaction from rolling a cigarette between his fingers; if he thinks he sees a meanness in his own heart, or catches himself out in some questionable or unworthy piece of conduct, however trivial, the diary receives its faithful record. The dissimilarity between

Barbellion and other persons is that, while those of us who have not been blessed or cursed with the temperament of an ox frequently experience these queer spontaneous promptings about common things and about ourselves and our fellow-creatures that come we know not how or why, so far from dragging the half-formed thought into the light of open confession and giving it definite shape, we avert our gaze as from an evil thing, or return to it in secret and stealth. It is scarcely possible, one imagines, to read Barbellion honestly without realising that he says in plain, forceful language what the rest of us often think but have not the nerve to say aloud either to others or to ourselves.

Resolute courage was the regnant quality of Barbellion's character. There was no issue he was afraid to face. The more it frightened him the more grimly he held on. Ineffaceable curiosity and the force of his will were a formidable combination. He saw everything in focus, with clear and steady eye. He penetrated the heart of a

book with unerring instinct, as Balzac tore out the secret of a woman's heart. It was hopeless to attempt to deceive him with a sophistry or a platitude. His sense of justice was deep and strong. While he loved disputation for its own sake, no form of mental recreation making a stronger appeal to his vivid intelligence than a set battle in dialectics, he rarely missed the essential argument, which he commonly handled with solid mastery and generally with a wealth of convincing illustrations. He was a captivating companion; easy, humorous, and suggestive in his talk over a wide range of subjects, and knowing something new or piquant about every bramble bush, every bird, every beetle that he passed or that flitted or crept across his path. Anyone less like a self-tormentor, a *malade imaginaire*, a man with a laugh on the wrong side of his mouth could not be imagined. It would be using a weak expression to say that he was cheerful. He was so acutely alive to the imperious charm of the world in which he lived that

a fit of depression, caused usually by some obstinate symptom of ill-health, which foiled his plans and fretted his temper, would melt away at a touch. The cry of a peewit, a gleam of sunshine on the hill, a phrase from a Beethoven Symphony, a line out of Francis Thompson (whose gorgeous verse inflamed his senses to a white heat of enjoyment), or a warm note of human sympathy, would transform him at once into another being. He yearned for the fellowship of sympathy, and rejoiced exceedingly when he seemed to find it. He had a real capacity for friendship, and his affections, when once they were engaged, were deep and abiding; but he could be impishly provoking to an acquaintance, and he suffered fools without gladness or much self-restraint. His judgments of men and women whom he met casually or infrequently were not to be relied upon. He was as impulsive as a woman of Barcelona, and the life-history of some harmless creature newly introduced would be created promptly on such inadequate data as a fortuitous remark,

an odd gesture, or a sweating hand. His nature, I believe, is less readily to be explained by his so-called egotism than by his supersensitiveness to the world about him and the beings in it. He bathed in the sea of life in a perpetual ecstasy, and sometimes it was an ecstasy of pain that made him call out upon God and all the gods, and the devils as well. One of the truest things I have heard said about him was said the other day by an accomplished critic who had never met him, but who had read his *Journal* with a seeing eye. "It seems to me," he remarked, "that Barbellion was a man with a skin too few." A wise saying to which Barbellion himself would have been the first to give his appreciative assent.

Nearly every writer who has tried to form an estimate of my brother's potentialities has discussed the question whether he would have deserted the science of zoology, his first consuming love, for the broader paths of literature. Now that he is dead it must appear to be a fruitless speculation. But it

is not perhaps without interest. I am convinced that he would not have remained at South Kensington longer than was necessary to provide him with bread and butter. He was that comparatively rare combination—a man of science, and a man of letters. He was in love with life as soon as he was in love with science, and the life of man inspired his imagination more than the lives of the animals it was his business to know about. His scientific zeal was aroused in "an extraordinary new form of bird parasite brought back by the New Guinea Expedition," as much because it was a new form of life as because it appealed to the enthusiasm of the trained zoologist. Years before he was filled with sickening disappointment by the drudgery of his labours and the narrow limitations imposed upon him in a department of Natural History that he cared for least, he was contemplating large literary schemes, some of which he unfolded to me with an infectious ardour of hope and determination. He planned in these years a novel that was to be

of immense length, with something of the scope of the *Comédie Humaine*, and a series of logically developed treatises on the lines of his essay, "The Passion for Perpetuation," which in his own words were to be his *magnum opus*. His hopes, high and unquenchable as they always appeared to be, were cut short by his lingering illness and his early death. There remain only a few documentary fragments that testify to the boldness of his intentions. His one published attempt at a short story, "How Tom Snored," is in my opinion quite unworthy of his abilities. It is impossible to say in what direction his undoubted literary powers would have found their true outlet. It is certain that if he had lived in the full enjoyment of normal health the *Journal* in its present outward form or as a narrative of his career and an unreserved record of his personal reflections would never have been published. It is equally certain that months before he resigned his appointment on the staff of the South Kensington Museum he was weary of his work there, and the bias of

his mind was turning rapidly from the cause of biological science towards the humanities. His restless spirit demanded a wider range of expression, unhampered by the many exasperating futilities of his professional labours. But his published work is perhaps all the more valuable on account of his exertions in the laboratory, because even when he "meddles" in his fantastic and compelling way "with things that are too high for me, not as a recreation but as a result of intense intellectual discomfort"—even at these moments, when he plunges with impetuous gusto into the infinities of time and space and God, there is a certain sanity of statement, a suggestion of strength in reserve, a studied self-control in the handling of his theme that his scientific habit of mind makes possible and emphasises. This instinctive restraint can be discovered again and again in vehement passages that at a glance seem to bear the mark of reckless extravagance.

*A Last Diary* is the last of Barbellion as a writer. For those of us who knew and

loved him as a boy and as a man the memory of his masterful personality—his courage, his wit, his magnetism, his pride of intellect and his modesty withal, his afflictions, his affectionate tenderness—will endure without ceasing. As the most modern of the journal-writers he addresses to the public a dauntless message, the value and significance of which time alone can measure. Like all men of abnormal sensibility he suffered deeply; but if he suffered deeply he enjoyed also his moments of exquisite happiness. He lived fast. He was for ever bounding forward in an untameable effort to grasp the unknown and unknowable. Fate struck him blow upon blow, but though his head was often bloody it remained unbowed. Mr. Wells says the story of his life is a "recorded unhappiness." I prefer to think of it as a sovereign challenge.

A. J. CUMMINGS.

1920.

# 1918

# A LAST DIARY

## 1918

*March* 21*st*, 1918.—Misery is protean in its shapes, for all are indescribable. I am tongue-tied. Folk come and see me and conclude it's not so bad after all—just as civilians tour the front and suppose they have seen war on account of a soldier with a broken head or an arm in a sling. Others are getting used to me, though I am not getting used to myself.

Honest British jurymen would say "Temporarily insane" if I had a chance of showing my metal. I wish I could lapse into permanent insanity—'twould be a relief to let go control and slide away down, down. Which is the farthest star? I would get away there and start afresh, blot out all memory of this world and its doings. Here, even the birds and flowers seem

soiled. It makes me impatient to see them —they are indifferent, they do not know. Those that do not know are pathetic, and those knowing are miserable. It is ghostly to live in a house with a little child at the best of times—now at the worst of times a child's innocence haunts me always.

*March 25th*, 1918.—I shall not easily forget yesterday (Sunday). It was just like Mons Sunday. The spring shambles began on Thursday in brilliant summer weather. Yesterday also was fine, the sky cloudless, very warm with scarcely a breeze. They wheeled me into the garden for an hour: primroses, violets, butterflies, bees; the song of the chaffinches and thrushes—otherwise silence. With the newspaper on my knee, the beauty of the day was oppressive. Its unusualness at this time of year seemed of evil import. Folk shake their heads, and they say in the village there is to be an earthquake on account of the heat. In rural districts simple souls believe it is the end of the world coming upon us.

At such times as these my isolation here is *agonising*. I write the word, but itself alone conveys little. I spend hours by myself unable to talk or write, but only to think. The war news has barely crossed my lips once, not even to the bedpost—in fact, I have no bedpost. And the cat and canary and baby would not understand. It is hard even to look them in the face without shame. All the while I hear the repeated "kling" in my ears as the wheel of my destiny comes full circle—not once but a hundred superfluous times. When am I going to die? This is a death in life.

I intended never to write in this diary again. But the relief it affords could not be refused any longer. I was surprised to find I could scribble at all legibly. Yet it is tiring.

*March 26th*, 1918.—In reply to a query from me if there were any fresh news in the village this afternoon, my mother-in-law thus (an *obiter dictum*, while dandling the babe): "No, not good news anyway.

Still, when there's a thorough assault, we're bound to lose some. . . . Dancy, dancy, poppity pin," etc.

But we are all moles, in cities as in villages, burrowing blindly into the future. These enormous prospects transcend vision ; we just go on and go on—following instinct, nursing babies, and killing our enemies. How unspeakably sorrowful the whole world is! Poor men, killing each other. Murder, say, of a rival in love, is comparatively a hallowed thing because of the personal passion. Liberty ? Freedom ? These are things of the spirit. Every man is free if he will. Yet who is going to lend an ear to the words of a claustrated paralytic ? I expect I'm wrong, and I am past hammering out what is right. I must anæsthetise thought and accept without comment. My mind is in an agony of muddle, not only about this world but the next.

### Publication of the Journal

*May 29th*, 1918.—This journal in part is being published in September (D.V.). In the tempest of misery of the past three weeks, this fact at odd intervals has shone out like a bar of stormy white light. By September I anticipate a climax as a set-off to the achievement of my book. Perhaps, like Semele, I shall perish in the lightning I long for!

My dear E. has had a nervous breakdown —her despairing words haunt me. Poor, poor dear—I cannot go on.

*June 1st*, 1918.—A fever of impatience and anxiety over the book. I am terrified lest it miscarry. I wonder if it is being printed in London? A bomb on the printing works?

When it is out and in my hands I shall believe. I have been out in a beautiful lane where I saw a white horse, led by a village child; in a field a sunburnt labourer with a black wide-brimmed hat lifted it,

smiling at me. He seemed happy and I smiled too.

Am immensely relieved that E. is better. I cannot, *cannot* endure the prospect of breaking her life and health. Dear woman, how I love you!

Regard these entries as so many weals under the lash.

*June 3rd*, 1918.—When it is still scalding, grief cannot be touched. But now after twenty-five days, I look back on those dreadful pictures and crave to tell the story. It would be terrible. . . . I scorn such self-indulgence, for the grief was not mine alone, nor chiefly, and I cannot desecrate hers.

The extraordinary thing is that all this has no effect on me. The heart still goes on beating. I am not shrivelled.

*June 15th*, 1918.—I get tired of these inferior people drawn together to look after me and my household. If, as to-day, I utter a witticism, they hastily slur it over so as to resume the more quickly the flap-

flap monotone of dull gossip. I had a suspicion once that my fun was at fault. I was ill and perhaps had softening of the brain and delusions. So I made an experiment: I foisted off as my own some of the acknowledged master-strokes of Samuel Foote and Oscar Wilde, but with the same result. So I breathed again.

However, I except the old village woman come in to nurse me while E. is away. She is a dear, talks little and laughs a lot, is mousy quiet if I wish, has lost a son in the war, has another an elementary-school master who teaches sciences—"a fine scientist." She keeps on feeling my feet and says, "They're *lovely* warm," or else is horrified because they are cold. Penelope she calls "little miss" (I like this), and attempts to caress her with, "Well, my little pet." But P. is a ruthless imp and screams at her.

I sat up in my chair to tea yesterday. It was all very quiet, and two mice crept out of their holes and audaciously ate the crumbs

that fell from my plate. It is a very old cottage. In the ivy outside a nest of young starlings keep up a clamour. The Doctor has just been (three days since) and says I may live for thirty years. I trust and believe he is a damned liar.

The prospect of getting the proofs makes me horribly restless. The probability of an air raid depresses me, as I am certain the bombs will rain on the printers. Oh! do hurry up! These proofs are getting on my mind.

### Malignant Fate

*June 16th*, 1918.—I'm damned; my malignant fate has not forsaken me; after the agreement on each side has been signed, and the book partly set up in type, the publishers ask to be relieved of their undertaking. The fact is, the reader who accepted the MS. has been combed out, and his work continued by a member of the firm, a godly

man, afraid of the injury to the firm's reputation as publishers of school-books and bibles! H. G. Wells, who is writing an Introduction, will be amused! At the best, it means an exasperating delay till another publisher is found.

*June* 17*th*, 1918.—E. comes home on Thursday.

A robin sits warming her eggs in a mossy hole in the woodshed. A little piece of her russet breast just shows, her bill lies like a little dart over the rim of the nest, and her beady eyes gleam in a fury at the little old nurse in her white bonnet and apron who stands about a yard away, bending down with hands on her knees, looking in and laughing till the tears run down her face: "Poor little body, poor little body—she's got one egg up on her back." They were a pretty duet. She is Flaubert's "Cœur simple."

*July* 1*st*, 1918.—Turning out my desk I found the other day:

"37, West Frambes Ave.,
"Columbus, Ohio.
"*September 30th*, 1915.

Mr. Bruce Cummings, England.

"Dear Sir,

"I wonder if you will pardon my impertinence in writing to you. You see I haven't even your address; I am doing this in a vague way, but I wanted to tell you how much I appreciated your "Crying for the Moon" which I read in the April *Forum*. You have expressed for me, at least, most completely the insatiable thirst for knowledge. I can't live enough in the short time allotted to me, but I've seldom found anyone so eager, so desirous as you to secure all that this world has to offer in the way of knowledge. My undergraduate work was done at Ohio State University. Then for two years following I was a Fellow in English at the same school, and at present I am here as a laboratory assistant in psychology. Always I am taking as much work as possible to secure as varied

a knowledge as possible. I am working now for my doctor's degree; I have my master's.

"I have had the idea of trying only *so* much; I can't get away from the Greek idea of Nemesis, but your article gave me the suggestion that one should try everything; better to be scorched than not to know anything about everything. And so this year I am trying to lead a fuller life. The article has inspired and helped me to attain a clearer vision of the meaning of Life. As one of your readers, allow me to thank you for the splendid treat you gave us. Pardon please this long message.

"Respectfully,

"(Miss) Verona Macdollinger."

On its receipt, I was slightly flattered but chiefly scornful. I know the essay deserved better criticism. But *now*, I am touched—beggars can't be choosers—and grateful. Dear Miss Verona Macdollinger! thank you so much for your sympathy, and your truly

wonderful name. Perhaps you are married now and have lost it—perhaps there is a baby Verona. Perhaps . . . I don't know, but I am curious about you.

### Four Weeks of Happiness

*August 7th*, 1918.—In the cottage alone with E. and nurse. Four weeks of happiness—with the obvious reservation. I am in love with my wife! Oh! dear woman, what agony of mind, and what happiness you give me. To think of you alone struggling against the world, and you are not strong, you want a protector, someone's strong arm. But we are happy, these few weeks—I record it because it's so strange. I am deeply in love and long to have something so as to sacrifice it all with a passion, with a vehemence of self-abnegation.

*August 15th*, 1918.—The Bishops are very preoccupied just now in justifying the ways of God to man. I presume it an even harder task to justify the ways of man

to God. Why does not God stop the war? the people are asking—so the Bishops complain. But why did man make it? Man made the war and we know his reasons. God made the world, but He keeps His own counsel. Yet if man, who aspires to goodness and truth, can sincerely justify the war, I am willing to believe—this is my faith—that God can justify the world, its pain and suffering and death. We *made* the war and must assume responsibility.

Yet why is not the world instantaneously redeemed by a few words of reproach coming from a dazzling figure in the Heavens, revealed unmistakably at the same instant to every man, woman, and child in the world? Why *not* a sign from Heaven?

*September 1st*, 1918.—Eighteen months ago I refused to take any more rat poison, with food so dear, and I refused to have any more truck with doctors. I insist on being left alone, this grotesque disease and I. Meanwhile I must elaborately observe it getting worse by inches. But I scoff at

it. It's so damned ridiculous, and I only give ground obstinately, for I have two supreme objects in life which I have not yet achieved, tho' I am near, oh! so very near the victory. The days creep past shrouded in disappointment; still I cling to my spar—if not to-day, why then to-morrow, perhaps, and if not to-morrow it won't be so bad—not so very bad because *The Times Literary Supplement* comes then; that lasts for two days, and then the *Nation*. . . . My thoughts move about my languid brain like caterpillars on a ravaged tree. All the while I am getting worse—and they are all so slow: if they don't hurry it will be too late—oh! make haste. But I must wait, and the caterpillars must crawl. They are "Looper" caterpillars, I think, which span little spaces.

### A Splendid Dream

*September 2nd*, 1918.—It was a brilliantly fine day to-day, with the great avenue of blue sky and sunlight thro' groups of clouds

ranged on each side. I rolled along a very magnificent way bordered by tall silvered bracken and found two tall hedges. It irked me to remain on the hard road between those two high hedges fending me off from little groups of desirable birch-trees in the woodlands on each side. Suddenly I sprang from my chair, upset it, dumbfounded the nurse, and disappeared thro' the hedge into the woods. I went straight up to the birches and they whispered joyously : " Oh ! he's come back to us." I pressed my lips against their smooth, virginal cheeks. I flung myself down on the ground and passionately squeezed the cool soft leaf-mould as a man presses a woman's breasts. I scraped away the surface leaves and, bending down, drew in the intoxicating smell of the earth's naked flesh. . . . It was a splendid dream. But I wonder if I *could* do it if absent-mindedly I forgot myself in an immense desire !

*September 3rd*, 1918.—Passed by the birches again to-day. Their leaves rustled as I approached, thrilling me like the liquefaction of Julia's clothes. But I shook my head and went by. Instantly they ceased to flutter, and no doubt turned to address themselves to prettier and more responsive young men who will pass along that road in the years to come.

*September 4th*, 1918.—Still no news. I have to reinforce all the strength of my soul to be able to sit and wait day by day, impotent and idle and alone. . . .

### Goodness the Chief Thing

*September 7th*, 1918.—During the past twelve months I have undergone an upheaval, and the whole bias of my life has gone across from the intellectual to the ethical. I know that Goodness is the chief thing.

## Thatching: A Kodak Film

*September 24th*, 1918.—Two brown men on a yellow round rick, thatching; in the background, a row of green elms; above, a windhover poised in mid-air; perpendicular silver streaks of rain; bright sunlight, and a rainbow encircling all. It was as simple as a diagram. One could have cut out the picture with a pair of scissors. I looked with a cold detached eye, for all the world as if the thatchers had no bellies nor immortal souls, as if the trees were timber and not vibrant vegetable life; I forgot that the motionless windhover contained a wonderful and complex anatomy, rapidly throbbing all the while, and that the sky was only a painted ceiling.

But this simplification of the universe was such a relief. It was nice for once in a way not to be teased by its beauty or overstimulated by its wonder. I merely received the picture like a photographic plate.

*September 25th*, 1918.—Saw a long-tailed tit to-day. Exquisite little bird! It was three years since I saw one. I should like to show one to Hindenburg, and watch them in juxtaposition. I wonder what would be their mutual effect on each other. I once dissected a "specimen"—God forgive me—but I didn't find out anything.

## Emily Brontë

*September 26th*, 1918.—It was over ten years ago that I read *Wuthering Heights*. Have just read it again aloud to E., and am delighted and amazed. When I came to the dreadfully moving passages of talk between Cathy and Heathcliff——

"'Let me alone, let me alone,' sobbed Catherine. 'If I have done wrong, I'm dying for it. It is enough! You left me too! But I won't upbraid you for it! I forgive you! Forgive me!'

"'It is hard to forgive, and to look at

those eyes and feel those wasted hands,' he answered. 'Kiss me again, and don't let me see your eyes! I forgive you what you have done to me. I love my murderer—but yours? How can I?'"——

I had to stop and burst out laughing, or I should have burst into tears. E. came over and we read the rest of the chapter together.

I can well understand the remark of Charlotte, a little startled and propitiatory —that having created the book, Emily did not know what she had done. She was the last person to appreciate her own work.

Emily was fascinated by the *beaux yeux* of fierce male cruelty, and she herself once, in a furious rage, blinded her pet bulldog with blows from her clenched fist. *Wuthering Heights* is a story of fiendish cruelty and maniacal love passion. Its preternatural power is the singular result of three factors in rarest combination—rare genius, rare moorland surroundings, and rare character. One might almost write her down as Mrs. Nietzsche—her religious beliefs being a com-

paratively minor divergence. However that may be, the young woman who wrote in the poem "A Prisoner" that she didn't care whether she went to Heaven or Hell so long as she was dead, is no fit companion for the young ladies of a seminary. "No coward soul is mine," she tells us in another poem, with her fist held to our wincing nose. I, for one, believe her. It would be idle to pretend to love Emily Brontë, but I venerate her most deeply. Even at this distance, I feel an immediate awe of her person. For her, nothing held any menace. She was adamant over her ailing flesh, defiant of death and the lightnings of her mortal anguish—and her name was Thunder!

### Raskolnikoff and Sonia

*October 4th*, 1918.—This evening, E. being away in Wales for a few days, sat with Nurse, who with dramatic emphasis and real understanding read to me in the firelight St. Matthew's account of the trial of Jesus. It

reminded me, of course, of Raskolnikoff and Sonia, in *Crime and Punishment*, reading the Bible together, though my incident was in a minor key. Nurse told me of the wrangle between Mr. P. and Miss B. over teaching the Sunday School children all about hell.

*October 5th*, 1918.—Some London neurologist has injected a serum into a woman's spine with beneficial results, and as her disease is the same as mine, they wish me to try it too. I may be able to walk again, to write, etc., my life prolonged!

They little know what they ask of me. Whatever the widow may have expressed, I doubt not Jesus received scant gratitude from the widow's son at Nain for his resurrection—and I have been dead these eighteen months. Death is sweet. All my past life is ashes, and the prospect of beginning anew leaves me stone cold. They can never understand—I mean my relatives—what a typhoon I have come through, and just as I am crippling into port I have no mind to

put to sea again! I am too tired now to shoulder the burden of Hope again. This chance, had it been earlier, had been welcome, but in this present mood Life seems more of a menace than Death ever did. At the best it would be whinings and pinings and terrible regrets. And how could I endure to be watching her struggles, and, if further misfortune came, how could I meet her eyes?

In short, you see, I funk it, yet I am sure the best thing for her would be to wipe out this past, forget it and start fresh. Memory even of these sad years would lose its outline in course of time. My pity merely enervates; and sympathy takes on an almost cynical appearance where help is needed.

*November 2nd*, 1918.—The war news is fine! For weeks past I have gained full possession of my soul and lived in dignity and serenity of spirit as never before. It has been a gradual process, but I am changed, a better man, calm, peaceful, and, by Jove! top dog. May God forgive me all my follies. My darling E., I

know, is secretly travelling along the same mournful road as I have travelled these many years, and am now arrived at the end of, and I must lend her all the strength I can. But it is hard to try to undo what I have done to her. Time is our ally, but it moves so slowly.

*November 3rd to November 26th*, 1918.—Posterity will know more about these times than we do. Men are now too preoccupied to digest the volume of history in each day's newspaper.

On the 11th my newspaper never came at all, and I endured purgatory. Heard the guns and bells and felt rather weepy. In the afternoon Nurse wheeled me as far as the French Horn, where I borrowed a paper and sat out in the rain reading it.

Some speculators have talked wildly about the prospect of modern civilisation, in default of a League of Nations, becoming extinct. Modern civilisation can never be extinguished by anything less than a secular cataclysm or a new Ice Age. You cannot analogise the

Minoan civilisation which has clean vanished. The world now is bigger than Crete, and its history henceforward will be a continuous development without any such lacuna as that between Ancient Greece and our Elizabethans. Civilisation in its present form is ours to hold and to keep in perpetuity, for better, for worse. There can be no monstrous deflection in its evolution at this late period any more than we can hope to cultivate the pineal eye on top of our heads—useful as it would be in these days of aeroplanes. But the chance is gone—evolution has swept past. Perhaps on some other planet mortality may have had more luck. There are, peradventure, happy creatures somewhere in this great universe who generate their own light like glow-worms, or can see in the dark like owls, or who have wings like birds. Or there may be no mortality, only immortality, no stomachs, no 'flu, no pills—and no kisses, which would be a pity! But it's no good we earth-dwellers repining now. It is too late. Such

things can never be – not in our time, anyhow! So far as I personally am concerned, I am just now very glad man is only bipedal. To be a centipede and have to lie in bed would be more than even I could bear.

If the civilisations of Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome had permeated the whole world they would never have become extinct.

We are now entered on the kingless republican era. The next struggle, in some ways more bitter and more protracted than this, will be between capital and labour. After that, the millennium of Mr. Wells and the Spiritistic age. After the aeroplane, the soul. Few yet realise what a transformation awaits the patient investigations of the psychical researchers. We know next to nothing about the mind force and spirit workings of man. But there will be a tussle with hoary old materialists like Edward Clodd.

### The Old Lady Shows her Coins

*November 26th*, 1918.—My old nurse lapses into bizarre malapropisms. She is afraid the Society for the *Propagation* of Cruelty to Animals will find fault with the way we house our hens; for boiling potatoes she prefers to use the camisole (casserole)! She says *Mr. Bolflour*, *arminstance*, *von Tripazz*, and so on. Yesterday, in the long serenity of a dark winter's night, with a view to arouse my interest in life, she went and brought some heirloom treasures from the bottom of her massive trunk—some coins of George I. "Of course, they're all obsolute now," she said. "What! absolutely obsolute?" I enquired in surprise. The answer was in the informative.

In spite of physical difficulties surrounding me in a mesh-work, I have now unaided corrected my proofs in joyful triumph—an ecstatic conqueror up to the very end. I

take my life in homœopathic doses now. I am tethered by but a single slender thread —curiosity to know what Mr. Wells says in the Preface—a little piece of vanity that deserves to be flouted.

*November 29th*, 1918.—O all ye people! the crowning irony of my life—where is the sacred oil?—is my now cast-iron religious convictions shortly summarised as *Love and Unselfishness*. These, my moral code, have captured the approval, not only of my ethical but my intellectual side as well. Undoubtedly, and dogmatically if you like, a man should be unselfish for the good of the soul and also to the credit of his intellect. To be selfish is to imprison in a tiny cage the glorious ego capable of penetrating to the farthest confines of the universe. As for love, it is an instinct and the earnest, like all beauty, physical as well as moral, of our future union into One. "One loving heart sets another on fire."—St. Augustine (*Confessions*).

*December* 1*st*, 1918.—What I have always feared is coming to pass—love for my little daughter. Only another communication string with life to be cut. I want to hear "the tune of little feet along the floor." I am filled with intolerable sadness at the thought of her. Oh! forgive me, forgive me!

### The "Puggilist"

*December* 3*rd*, 1918.—"My word! you do look a figure!" the old nurse exclaimed to me to-day in the course of one of the periodical tetanuses of all my muscles, when the whole body is contorted into a rigid tangle. "I shall never make a *puggilist*" (the word is her own), I said.

I was rather impressed, though, for she is one of those who, like Mr. Saddletree, I believe, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, never notice anything. She would not notice if she came into my room, and I was standing on my head as stiff as a ferule. "You may observe," I should say, "I am standing

upside down—would you turn me round?" "With pleasure," is her invariable reply to *every* request I proffer.

### Victory at Christmas

*December 23rd*, 1918.—It is strange to hear all this thunderous tread of victory, peace, and Christmas rejoicings above ground, all muffled by the earth, yet quite audible. They have not buried me deep enough. Here in this vault all is unchanged. It is bad for me, for, as to-day, a faint tremor passes along my palsied limbs —a tremor of lust—lust of life, a desire to be up and mingling in the crowd, to be soaked up by it, to feel a sense of all mankind flooding the heart, and strong masculine youth pulsing at the wrists. I can think of nothing more ennobling than the sense of power, unity, and manhood that comes to one in a sea of humanity, all animated by the same motive—to be sweep-

ing folk off their feet and to be swept off oneself; that is to be man, not merely Mr. Brown.

## Death

*Christmas Day*, 1918.—Surely, I muse, a man cannot be accounted a failure who succeeds at last in calling in all his idle desires and wandering motives, and with utter restfulness concentrating his life on the benison of Death. I am happy to think that, like a pilot hard aport, Death is ready at a signal to conduct me over this moaning bar to still deep waters. After four years of war, life has grown cheap and ugly, and Death—how desirable and sweet! Youth now is in love with Death, and many are heavy-hearted because Death flouts their affection—the maimed, halt, and blind. How terrible if Life had no end!

With how splendid a zest the young men flung themselves on Death — like

passionate lovers! A magnificent slaughter —for indifference to Life is the noblest form of unselfishness, and unselfishness is the highest virtue.

*Victurosque Dei celant ut vivere durent, Felix esse mori.* Lucan, with Sir Thomas Browne's rendering:

> We're all deluded, vainly searching ways
> To make us happy by the length of days;
> For cunningly, to make 's protract this breath,
> The gods conceal the happiness of death.

This mood, not permanent, but recurring constantly, equals the happiness and comfort of the drowning man when he sinks for the third time. A profound compassion for my dear ones and friends, and all humanity left on the shore of this world struggling, fills my heart. I want to say genially and persuasively to them as my last testament: Why not die? What loneliness under the stars! It is only bland, unreflecting eupepsia that leads poets to dithyrambs about the heavenly bodies, and to call them all by beautiful names. Diana! Yet the moon

is a menace and a terrible object-lesson. Despite Blanco White, it were well if the night had never revealed the stars to us. Suppose a man with the swiftness of light touring through the darkness and cold of this great universe. He would pass through innumerable solar systems and discover plenty of pellets (like this earth, each surging with waves of struggling life, like worms in carrion). And he would tour onwards like this for ever and ever. There would be no end to it, and always he would be discovering more hot suns, more cold and blasted moons, and more pellets, and each pellet would be in an internal fatuous dance of revolutions, the life on it blind and ignorant of all other life outside its own atmosphere.

But out of this cul-de-sac there is one glorious escape—Death, a way out of Time and space. As long as we go on living, we are as stupid and as caged as these dancing rats with diseased semicircular canals that incessantly run round and round in circles.

But if we be induced to remain in this cul-de-sac, there is always an alleviative in communication and communion with our fellows. Men need each other badly in this world. The stars are crushing, but mankind in the mass is even above the stars—how far above, Death may show, perhaps to our surprise.

But if I go on, I shall come round to the conviction that life is beer and skittles. Cheerio! . . . This is not written in despair —"despair is a weakening of faith, hope in God." But I am tired and in need of relief. Death tantalises my curiosity, and sometimes I feel I could kill myself just to satisfy it. But I agree that Death, save as the only solution, is merely a funk-hole.

*Boxing Day*, 1918.—James Joyce is my man (in the *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*). Here is a writer who tells the truth about himself. It is almost impossible to tell the truth. In this journal I have tried, but I have not succeeded. I have *set down* a good deal, but I cannot *tell* it. Truth of

self has to be left by the psychology-miner at the bottom of his boring. Perhaps fifty or a hundred years hence Posterity may be told, but Contemporary will never know. See how soldiers deliberately, from a mistaken sense of charity or decency, conceal the horrors of this war. Publishers and Government aid and abet them. Yet a good cinema film of all the worst and most filthy and disgusting side of the war—every-one squeamish and dainty-minded to attend under State compulsion to have their necks scroffed, their sensitive nose-tips pitched into it, and their rest on lawny couches disturbed for a month after—would do as much to prevent future wars as any League of Nations.

It is easy to reconcile oneself to man's sorrows by shutting the eyes to them. But there is no satisfaction in so easy a victory. How many people have been jerry-building their faith and creed all their lives by this method! One breath of truth and honest self-dealing would blow the structure down

like a house of cards. The optimist and believer must bear in mind such things as the C.C.S. described by M. Duhamel, or this from M. Latzko's *Men in Battle:*

"The captain raised himself a little, and saw the ground and a broad dark shadow that Weixler cast. Blood? He was bleeding? Or what? Surely that was blood. It couldn't be anything but blood. And yet it stretched out so peculiarly, and drew itself up like a thin thread to Weixler, up to where his hand pressed his body as though he wanted to pull up the roots that bound him to the earth.

"The captain had to see. He pulled his head farther out from under the mound—and uttered a hoarse cry, a cry of infinite horror. The wretched man was dragging his entrails behind him."

The reviewer suggests that the book should be *read by school-children* in every school in the world! I should like to take it (and I hope it is large and heavy) and bring it down

on the heads of the heartless, unimaginative mob, who would then have to look at it, if only to see what it was that cracked down on their skulls so heavily.

Certainly Joyce has chosen the easier method of transferring his truth of self to a fictional character, thus avoiding recognition. I have failed in the method urged by Tolstoi in the diary of his youth: "Would it not be better to say" (he asks), "'This is the kind of man I am; if you do not like me, I am sorry, but God made me so'? . . . Let every man show just what he is, and then what has been weak and laughable in him will become so no longer." Tolstoi himself did not live up to this. He confessed to his diary, but he kept his diary to himself. Some of my weaknesses I publish, and no doubt you say at once "self-advertisement." I agree more or less, but believe *egotism* is a diagnosis nearer the mark. I do not aspire to Tolstoi's *ethical* motives. Mine are *intellectual.* I am the scientific investigator of myself, and if the

published researches bring me into notice, I am not averse from it, though interest in my work comes first.

Did not Sir Thomas Browne say ever so long ago : " We carry within us the wonders we seek without us ; there is all Africa and her prodigies in us . . . "?

1919

## 1919

*January 1st*, 1919.—My dear Arthur!—if it's a boy, call him Andrew Chatto Windus. Then perhaps the firm will give him a royalty when he is published at the font.

My life here has quite changed its orientation. I am no longer an intellectual snob. If I were, E. and I would have parted ere now. I never liked to take her to the B.M. (in my petty way) because there all the values are intellectual.

I write this by candlelight in bed. In the room above E. is in bed with 'flu. We have had days of cold rain, and just now it drips drearily off the roof, and the wind blows drearily in gusts round the cottage as if tired of blowing, and as if blowing prospects were nothing to be roaring about.

### Wilson

President Wilson is my hero. I worship him. I could ask him to stamp across my prostrate body to save getting his feet wet in a puddle. But I know nothing about him save what I read in the *Nation*, and I don't want to. Supposing I discovered traits . . . ? I have had enough of disenchantment to last me a lifetime. If he is not the greatest figure in modern history, then there's no money in Wall Street.

*January 3rd*, 1919.—She taxes me with indifference, says my sympathy is cold. By God! this is hard to bear. But she is so desperate, she is lunging out right and left at all. I fear for her mental balance. What's going to happen to us? Why does everyone seem to have forsaken us? Ah! it is almost too hard for me to bear. And I can't break down. I am like ice. I can't melt. I had a presentiment of evil awaiting us about now. I don't know why, unless

long experience of it produces a nose for it, so that I can smell it in advance.

*January 4th*, 1919.—I have talked of being *in love with one's own ruin*, Bashkirtseff of liking to suffer, to be in despair. Light, frivolous talk. At the most, such moods are only short lulls between the spasms of agony of suffering; one longs to be free of them as of acute physical pain, to be unconscious. I look forward to night, to darkness, rest, and sleep. I sleep well between twelve and six and then watch the dawn, from black (and the owl's hoot) to grey (and the barncock's crow) to white (and the blackbirds' whistle). The oak beam on my ceiling, the Japanese print on the wall come slowly into view, and I dread them. I dread the day with my whole soul. Each dawn is hopeless. Yes, it is true, they have not buried me deep enough. I don't think I am buried at all. They have not even taken me down from the tree. And my wife they are just nailing up. I can never forget, wherever I may be, in Heaven or Hell, her

figure in dressing-gown and shawl drawn up erect—but swaying because she is so weak—before me at the fireside (she had just been bending over me and kissing me, hot cheeks and hot tears that mingled and bound us together to that moment for ever), her head tilted towards the ceiling, and her poor face looking so ill and screwed up as she half-whispered: "Oh, God! it's so hopeless." I think that picture is impressed even on the four walls of the room, its memory is photographed on the air to haunt those who may live here in the time to come. I said: "Fight it out, dear. Don't give in. I believe in a personal devil. The human spirit is unconquerable. You'll come through if you fight." It was but a few weeks ago that she came home one evening, dug out from a drawer her beautiful dance dress, got into it, and did a *pas seul* for my pleasure round the little cottage room. That ogre Fate was drawing out her golden wing and mocking her loss of liberty. Ah! the times we *intended* to have together!

*January 8th*, 1919.—I lie stiff and contorted till Nurse arrives at nine-thirty. She straightens me out and bolsters me up. Breakfast at nine. Cigarettes while I listen with ravenous ears for the postman. No letter for me, then *plop* right down into the depth among the weeds and goblins of the deep sea for an hour. There usually is no letter for me.

My chief discovery in sickness and misfortune is the callousness of people to our case—not from hard-heartedness (everyone is kind), but from absence of sympathetic imagination. People don't know the horrors and they can't imagine them—perhaps they are unimaginable. You will notice how suicides time and again in farewell notes to their closest and dearest have the same refrain, "I don't believe even you can realise all I suffer." Poor devil! of course not. Beyond a certain point, suffering must be borne alone, and so must extreme joy. Ah! we are lonely barks.

*January 13th*, 1919.—All the postman

brought me to-day was an income-tax form!

*Last night*—Nurse (having put me back to bed).—Shall I shut up your legs?

B.—No, thank you. They've been bent up all the evening, and it's a relief to have them out straight.

*Later*—B.—Before you go you might uncross my legs.

(She pulls bed-clothes back, seizes my feet, one in each hand, and forces them apart, chanting humorously: "Any scissors to grind?" As I have pointed out to her, the *sartorius* muscle, being on the inside of the thigh and stronger than the others, has the effect of crossing my legs when a tetanic spasm occurs.)

N.—There, good-night.

B.—And a good-night to you.

N.—I'll come in first thing in the morning.

[*Exit.*

I lie on my back and rest awhile. Then I force myself on to the left side by putting my right arm over the left side of the bed

beneath the wood-work and pulling (my right arm is stronger than any of the other limbs). To-night, Nurse had not placed me in the middle of the bed (I was too much over on the right side), so even my long arm could not reach down beneath the wood-work on the left. I cursed Nanny for a scabby old bean, struggled, and at last got over on my left side. The next thing was to get my legs bent up—now out as stiff and straight as ferrules. When lying on the left side I long ago found out that it is useless to get my right leg up first, as it only shoots out again when I come to grapple with the left. So I put my right arm down, seized the left leg just above the knee and pulled! The first result is always a violent spasm in the legs and back. But I hang on and presently it dies away, and the leg begins to move upward a little. Last night Nanny uncrossed my legs, but was not careful to separate them. Consequently, knee stuck side by side to knee, and foot to foot, as if glued, and I found, in pulling at my

left, I had the stubborn live weight of both to lift up. I would get them part way, then by a careless movement of the hand on a ticklish spot both would shoot out again. So on for an hour—my only relief to curse Nanny.

And thus, any time, any week, these last eighteen months. But I have faith and hope and love in spite of all. I forgive even Nanny!

*January* 19*th*, 1919.—The situation is eased. E. is at Brighton for a change, and has P. with her (she came up from Wales with the nurse after seven months' visit). But I am heartsore and unhappy.

*January* 20*th*, 1919.—If I were to sum up my life in one word I should say *suffocation*. 'R. has been my one blow-hole. Now I look forward to a little oxygen when my Journal is published! I am delighted and horrified at the same time. What will my relatives say? 'Twill be the surprise of their lives. I regard it as a *revanche*. The world has always gagged

and suppressed me—now I turn and hit it in the belly.

*January 22nd*, 1919.—Am now lodging alone under one roof with Nanny! Makes me think of some of Sterne's adventures in the *Sentimental Journey*, only I must shut my eyes very tight to see the likeness and imagine very hard. This is a selection from last night's conversation (remember she is deaf, old, and obstinate; she hates to be instructed or corrected; hence her ignorance and general incapacity):

ORNITHOLOGY

N.—I think a sparrow out at the back has young birds, by the way she carries off the food.

B.—It's too early for young sparrows. A sparrow is too worldly wise to encumber himself with a young family in January, or in February or March for that matter.

N.—I've seen young sparrows in March.

B.—Why didn't you write to the papers about it?

N.—There wasn't so much writing to the papers in my days. But there were things I could have written about. Young plovers, for example, I used to catch and hold in my lap. You know the plover? It's called the lapwing sometimes; only a few young at a time——

B.—Four.

N.—Yes. Now Charlie used to show me partridges' nests with as many as twenty-four.

B.—Yes, but laid probably by more than one hen.

N.—Charlie said it was all one bird. The prettiest nest he ever showed me was a greenfinch's.

B.—What was that like?

N.—It was swung underneath the bough of a fir-tree right at the end.

B.—That was not a greenfinch's.

N.—Well, Charlie said it was, and he showed it to all of us; we all saw it.

B.—It was the nest of a goldcrest.

N.—Yes? Charlie had a wonderful col-

lection of eggs. He could name them all, and labelled the names on them. They would cover the table when all set out.

B.—Yes?

N.—Oh, I forgot, another nest he showed me—a kingfisher's.

B.—What was that like?

N.—It was right down among some reeds of a stream.

B.—What were the eggs like?

N.—There were no eggs in it when I saw it. Another pretty——

B.—That was not a kingfisher's nest. A kingfisher nests at the end of a hole in the bank of the stream.

N.—Charlie said it was. Another pretty nest was the robin's.

B.—The prettiest nest of all, I think, is the long-tailed tit's.

N.—Oh, yes, I know that.

B.—What's it like?

N.—I can't recollect.

B.—All arched over with sticks and lined with green leaves?

N.—Oh, yes.

I suspect "Charlie" (whoever he was) could not tell a hawk from a handsaw, even when the wind was southerly. Now what a stupid old woman not to make better use of me!

*January* 23*rd*, 1919.—Have been sustaining a hell of tedium by reading a sloppy novel—sentimental mucilage—called *Conrad in Quest of His Youth*, which sent me in quest of mine. I see now that my youth was over before I came to London. For never after did I experience such electric tremors of joy and fear as, *e.g.*, over ——. As a small boy I knew her, and always lifted my hat. But one day at the age of sixteen, with a heart like nascent oxygen (though I did not know it), I lifted my hat and, in response to her smile, fell violently in love. During country rambles I liked to pause and carve her initials on the bark of a tree. It pleased me to confide my burning secret to the birds and wild things. I knew it was safe in their keeping. And I always

hoped she might come along one day and see the letters there, and feel curiosity, yet she couldn't find out. . . . I daresay they are still legible in places, some of them of exquisite rural beauty; though the letters themselves probably now look obscured and distorted by the evergrowing bark, the trees and locality doubtless are still as beautiful:

> "Upon a poet's page I wrote
> Of old two letters of her name;
> Part seemed she of the effulgent thought
> Whence that high singer's rapture came.
> When now I turn the leaf the same
> Immortal light illumes the lay,
> But from the letters of her name
> The radiance has waned away."

For a whole year I was in agony, meeting her constantly in the town, but never daring to stop and speak. I used to return home after a short cap-lifting encounter with an intolerable ache that I did not understand. Even in subsequent miseries I do not believe I suffered mental pain equal to this in acuteness. I used to lift my cap to her in the High Street, then dart down a side-

street and around, so as to meet her again, and every time I met her came a raging stormy conflict between fear and desire. I wanted to stop—my heart always failed me. How I cursed myself for a poltroon the very next moment!

I always haunted all the localities—park, concerts, skating-rink—where I thought to see her. In church on Sundays I became electrified if she was there. One afternoon at a concert in company with my sister, I determined on a bold measure: I left before it was over—saw my sister home, and at once darted back to the hall and met my paragon coming out. She was with her friend (how I hated her!) and her friend's mother (how I feared her!) I was seventeen, she was seventeen, and of ravishing, virginal beauty. I spoke. I said (obviously): "How did you enjoy the concert?"

While the other two walked on, she replied "Very much." That was all. I could think of nothing more, so I left her, and she rejoined her friends. It had been a

terrible nervous strain to me. At the crucial second my nose twitched and I felt my face contorted. But I walked home on air and my soul sang like a bird. It was the beautiful rhapsody of a boy. There was nothing carnal in it. Indeed, the poor girl was idealised aloft into something scarcely human. But that at the moment of speaking to her I was in the power of an unprecedented emotion is obvious if I write that neither before nor after has anything ever caused facial twitching. It is evidence of my ardour and youth.

Our acquaintance remained tenuous for long. I was shy and inexperienced. I was too shy to write. I heard rumours that she was staying by the sea, so I went down and wandered about to try to see her. In vain. I went down another day, and it began to pour with rain. So I spent all my time sheltering under doorways and shop awnings, cursing my luck, and groaning at the waste of my precious time. "There was a large halibut on a fishmonger's stall," I

posted in my diary, "but not caught, I think, off this coast." Then follows abruptly:

> "A daughter of the gods she walked,
> Divinely tall, and most divinely fair."

I bought a local paper in the High Street, and, examining the "Visitors' List," I went through hundreds of names, and at the end saw "The most recent arrivals will be found on page 5." I turned to page 5 and found nothing there. I complained to the manager. "Ah, yes, I know, an unfortunate oversight, sir. If you will leave your name and address, I will see it appears in next week's issue." I felt silly, and slunk off, saying: "Oh, never mind. I don't care much about it."

"It is the more worrying to me because I know—

(1) It is wasting good time.

(2) A common occurrence to others, and they all get over it.

(3) There is no comfort in study or reading. Knowledge is dull and dry.

Poetry seems to me to be more attractive."

Then immediately follows a description of a ring snake with notes on its anatomy. Then a few days later: "Have not seen my beloved all the week. Where on earth has she been hiding herself?" And again: "I cannot hope ever to see more wonderful eyes—of the richest, sweetest brown-amber, soft, yet bright." At length we became friends, wrote letters to one another (her first one was an event), and went for walks.

Of course, the next stage was kissing her. It took me over another twelve months to kiss her. I must have been close on nineteen. We had been walking in the woods all the afternoon, then had tea in the garden tea-rooms. We sat in the green arbour till after dark. I was in a terrible state. Restlessness and fever were exhausting me. Desire struggled with pride. What if she smacked my face? Then I lit a cigarette for her (I used to buy her little heliotrope boxes of cigarettes labelled in gold "My

Darling"). Greatly daring, I put my left arm round her neck, and holding the match-box, struck a light and kissed her at the same moment. She said, "I ought not to let you really," quite calm. I was in too much of a turmoil to answer, but kissed her again.

I kissed her many times after that. One wet afternoon we had spent kissing in a linhay by a country lane. Coming home, we met her sister's baby, and she stopped to lean over the pram, and crow. This irritated me, and I strolled on. "Do you like babies?" I asked when she came up. "Yes," she answered, "do you?" "Not much," said I with dryness, and changed what I felt to be almost an indelicate subject. After all, a baby is only a kiss carried to a rational conclusion, in natural sequence, sometimes arithmetical, sometimes geometrical. It depends on the length of the engagement.

But it was curious how this kissing destroyed my ideal. I soon knew I was not in love. With callous self-possession I

was investigating a new sensation, and found it very enjoyable. "I kiss *you*," I said to her one night in the park, "but you never kiss me." She at once gave me a passionate token on my lips, and having exacted thus much tribute, I sank into complacency, self-adulation, and, ultimately, indifference. I had been *surcharged*. The relief was too complete. After exchanging impassioned verses (oh, such tosh!), each other's photographs, and plenty of letters, my romance died a natural death. My agony and sweat became a trifle, and one I wished to blot from my memory out of boyish sense of shame.

Doubtless I broke her heart. She had left the town, when one morning I received a last pathetic appeal. I remember now the nausea that love-letter caused me. I put it on the fire, and thought, "Heavens what a fool the girl is!" In 1913 I met her again, and had the effrontery to go to her home and have dinner with her people. (See May 31st and June 3rd, 1913.)

Now, in my old age, I like to gaze back on this flashing gem of youth. It still reflects the light, and she is a princess again. "Love in the Valley" becomes a personal memory instead of someone else's poem.

Ah! what a heart I had in those days! a nascent oxygen with an affinity for every pretty girl who smiled at me. I fell in love with a post-office girl, a silversmith's daughter, a grocer's daughter, the daughter of a judge. For months I worshipped ——, and bought every kind of photograph of her. But I've never seen her in my life, and now she's Dead Sea fruit. I had never set eyes on any beautiful women until I came to London. Then I was dazzled by them all—in every rank or station, in the street or on the street, in the Café de l'Europe or the Café Royal—pretty, laughing girls, handsome women, or beautiful pieces of mere flesh only. . . . I was doomed to destruction from the first. If I had not developed disease, if I had

come up from the country a healthy, lusty youth, I must soon have got on the rocks. Now that the blood is slow, it is difficult to recall the anguish. That I only succumbed twice is a marvel to me and a joy. My situation at one time was fraught with dire possibilities. My secret life was a tumult. I never went skylarking with jaunty pals in the West End. I crept along the streets alone . . . all this time I was alone, in dirty diggings, by myself. I am consumed with self-pity at the thought.

I cannot understand how saints like Augustine and Tolstoi confess how they went with women in their youth, but recall no sense of nausea. They just deplore their *moral* lapse. When St. Augustine's mother enjoined him never to lie with his neighbour's wife, he laughed at the advice as womanish!

For myself, I never received any parental instruction. I first learned of the wonder of generation through the dirty filter of a barmaid's nasty mind.

I remember —— telling me in sardonic

vein that the only advice his father ever gave him on leaving home was to keep his bowels open. The present generation has altered all that.

Birds' eggs were another electrifying factor in my youth. I can remember tramping to and fro all one warm June afternoon over a bracken-covered sandy waste, searching for a nightjar's eggs. H. and I quartered out the ground systematically, till presently, after two hours' search, the hen goat-sucker flipped up at my feet and fluttered away like a big moth across the silvery bracken out of sight. Lying before me on the ground were two long, grey eggs, marbled like pebbles. I turned away from this intoxicating vision, flicking my fingers as if I had been bitten. Then I turned, approached slowly, and gloated.

It was just such an effect on me as a girl's beautiful face used to make—equally tantalising and out of reach. I stared, fingered them, put one to my lips. Then it was over. I had to leave them, and an

equal thrill at goat-suckers' eggs could never return again.

## The Cottage on the Shore

*January 24th*, 1919.—It was as mysterious as Stevenson's Pavilion on the Links. For a long time I never noticed any indication of its being inhabited, save a few chickens at the back which no one seemed to feed. I could see it from miles around, as it was situated in a desolate, treeless waste, thousands of acres of marshes and duckponds (known as the *Mires*) on the one side, and on the other a wilderness of sandy links and sandhills swarming with rabbits (known as the *Burrows*). Immediately in front, the waters of a broad tidal estuary came up almost to the door during spring tides. The nearest human habitation was the lighthouse, a mile away round the corner on the sands near the harbour bar. In my rambles in search of bird or beast, I used occasionally, while eating sandwiches at

midday on a sandhill top, to turn my field-glasses on the cottage idly. For long I saw no one. Then one spring, while thousands of lapwings circled above my head, calling indignantly at me "Little boo-oy," and larks dotted the blue sky everywhere in little white-hot needle-points of song, I saw a tiny man—a manikin—come out of this tiny cottage—a doll's house—and throw some corn to the chickens. He was three miles away, and by the time that I arrived at the cottage, the little man had disappeared. It was a little four-roomed cottage, with no path leading up to it, no garden, no enclosure, only a few hardy shrubs to keep the sandy soil from drifting. For a long time I never saw him again, and began to think he had been an hallucination. But the desolate cottage was still there and the chickens were still alive, so they must have been fed. Then one day I ran up against him on the Mires, and we exchanged greetings. He was a round, tubby, short man with a stubble of beard. Devon folk

would have called him bungy, stuggy. His face bore a ludicrous resemblance to the monkey in the "Monkey Brand" advertisement, only fatter and rounder. We discussed birds (he was the gamekeeper) and became fast friends. He would take me the round of his duckponds, and sometimes he sent me a postcard when there were wild swans or geese "in over," or when he had discovered a "stranger" on his water.

But this did not dispel the mystery of the cottage. For he had a woman inside whose presence was never suspected until I had occasion to knock at the door. There was no answer and no sound. All the windows were shut. I knocked again, and heard a distant noise. Then there were long, preparatory noises, as if someone were climbing up from an underground cellar or cave, or wandering down a long, dark passage. Bolts were drawn (and powerful enough they sounded to make fast a portcullis), and I watched the door opening with curiosity; a tall, fat, middle-aged

woman stood there blinking at me like an owl unaccustomed to daylight. Her eyes were weak blue, and her face puffy and red.

"Oh! is Fedder about?" I enquired.

Without changing a muscle of her face, she replied mechanically:

"No, but Fedder said if the young gentleman called, I was to say that the shovellers brought off their brood all right."

I thanked her and departed, as she was obviously embarrassed. In her moping countenance I detected a startled look—Robinson Crusoe, as it were, discovering Friday all at once without any advertising Friday. I heard her bolting the door again, as I strolled off down by the waterside to examine the tide-wrack. It was almost eerie to hear the cackle of herring gulls overhead. They seemed to be laughing at the stupidity of human nature.

There are some things the imagination boggles at. For example, what did that woman in that desolate cottage do? What did she think about? What were her

wants, her grievances? Where were her relatives? Did she ever love, or want little babies? Did murder stories interest her at all? Drugs? That is an easy explanation —to jump at some horrible vice. Theatrical. In reality I should have found, I expect, the answer would be just *nothing at all.* She did nothing, thought nothing, perhaps only feared a little, so she always bolted the door and hid herself away. I suppose if one saw nothing bigger than a kingplover or a seagull during the twelve months, and heard no noises other than the trumpet of wild swans and the cries of Fedder's wild fowl, a tall man six feet high, with a voice like a human being's, must seem a little disconcerting.

*January 26th,* 1919.—Here is some arithmetic which ought to please me. But it doesn't. I wrote:

12 papers in the *Zoologist* in the years 1905-1910; 6 in the *P.Z.S.* (1912-1916); 7 in the *Annals and Magazine*

*of Natural History* (1912-1916); 3 in *Bulletin of Entomological Research;* 2 B.M. pamphlets, in addition to 18 literary efforts (some in newspapers and some not published), and other old scientific papers in different periodicals such as *British Birds*, the *Journal of Animal Behaviour*, etc. In all 65 publications.

Further, in my locker lie :

6 unpublished literary MSS.
17 volumes of Journal post quarto, pre-war 1s. thickness.
12 smaller volumes written in boyhood.
6 volumes (post quarto 1s.) of abstracted entries from the Journal.
2½ post quarto volumes of abstract, abstracted from the volumes of abstract for publication purposes.

In vulgar parlance, *cacoëthes scribendi.*

*January 27th,* 1919.—Have you ever considered what a fever of anticipation

must be raging in me as I sit by the fire, day after day, awaiting the constantly delayed publication of this my Journal; how I strain to hold it, to smell the fresh ink, to hear the binding crackle as I open it out, and above all to read what one of the foremost literary men thinks about me and my book.

I wait with head on the block for my child to be brought to receive my farewell blessings.

Will it come in time? I nearly died last month of 'flu, and get worse almost daily. I am running a neck-and-neck race up the straight with my evil genius on the black horse. It is touch and go who wins; and if I do, I expect some horrible forfeit will be exacted of me, a penalty will have to be paid—*lèse-majesté*—for my audacity in challenging the stars in their courses and defeating them.

My life has certainly been an astonishing episode in human story. To me, it appears as a titanic struggle between consuming

ambition and adverse fortune. Behold a penniless youth thirsting for knowledge introduced into the world out of sheer devilment, hundreds of miles from a university, with a towering ambition, but cursed with ill-health and a twofold nature — pleasure-loving as well as labour-loving. The continuous, almost cunning frustration of my endeavours long ago gave me a sense of struggle with some evil genius. Think of the elaborate precautions I took of my MSS. during the air-raids! I saw each bomb labelled "Barbellion's contemptible ambition." Consider the duplication of abstracts—I saw an army of housemaids prowling round to throw them on the fire after Carlyle's *French Revolution.* I have been consciously contesting with an incendiary, a bomber from Hunland, a wicked housemaid, a whole world of wicked folk, in league with a hostile spirit decided on killing and obliterating me and my ambition—a grotesque couple, a monkey astride a hippogriff, an ass with a Jabberwock! True, he has

ruined me; yet the struggle is not over. With demoniac determination, I am *getting on* still, crawling on all fours, with the dagger between my teeth. I am mauled, battered, scorched, but not slain. The dagger I hope to see published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus next month.

You can search all history and fiction for an ambition more powerful than mine and not find it. No, not Napoleon, nor Wilhelm II, nor Keats. No, I am not proud of it, not at all. The wonder is that I remain sane, the possessed of such a demon. I am sane or I could not make fun of it as I do. Ah! my God! it is a ridiculous weakness, but the leopard cannot change his spots, and I feel just as hopelessly spotty as a leopard.

*January 28th*, 1919.—"The rest is silence"—I should like this inscribed at the end of this garrulous Journal, an inscription for the base of my self-erected monument.

ROWBOTHAM, THE MODERN HOMER

*January 30th*, 1919.—*The Human Epic; The Twelfth Epic Poem of the World; The Story of the Universe and Prehistoric Man; The Vanished Continent in the Atlantic; The Ice Age; The Anemones, Corals, and Population of the Primeval Ocean* ("These latter cantos have been made the subject of interesting lectures"—*The Bard*); *Other Epics by Rowbotham, the Modern Homer; God and the Devil; The Swiss Lake Dwellers; The Epic of the Empire; London; Charlemagne.* Each Epic 2s. 6d. Foyle, 121, Charing Cross Road.

Who is "The Bard"? What a safe remark to make about the anemones and corals! Who is Rowbotham? I wish someone would lecture to me on him. What are the "other epics of the world"? The twelfth has the suggestion of quack verse sold as a green liquid from a four-wheeled vehicle at a country fair. But I can't run to 2s. 6d., though I ache to read and know you, O Rowbotham! Rowbotham,

*the late Mr. Homer*, I suppose. Say, though, who is this Rowbotham ?

Snow lies on the ground outside. All the morning it was too dark in my vault to read. Even had it been light, my eyesight had become temporarily too deranged for me to see the print. Had my eyes been all right, it was so cold that I had to keep my hands under the bedclothes.

All the afternoon I dozed. In the evening I sat by the fire and read *Urn-burial.* During the day, at long intervals, Nanny comes in, and I shout out fatuities—*e.g.*, "Still snowing," or "Colder than ever."

There are some days when I give up, surrender voluntarily every earthly desire, when every thread binding me to life is cut. I long to be free, and hack and cut in a frenzy—frenzies in which I curse and swear out loud to myself, alternating with fits of terrible apathy, when I am indifferent to everything and everybody, when the petty routine of my existence, washing, eating, and sitting out, goes on and carries me along

with it mechanically. And I wonder all the time why on earth I trouble about it. I look at human life and human affairs with inhuman detachment, yet not from the side of the angels. I am neither one thing nor the other, neither dead nor alive, a nondescript creature in a No-Man's Land, and, like all who keep a middle course, not claimed with any enthusiasm by either side. The living must be tired of me, and the dead don't seem eager for my reception. Yet I must go somewhere, and by heavens! I will not choose willingly, God knows, the bare heath of this world. The bare bodkin is an alluring symbol to lonely paralytics, meaning liberty, fraternity, peace. Ever since I came into it, I have felt an alien in this life—a refugee by reason of some pre-natal extradiction. I always felt alien to my father and mother. I was different from them. I knew and was conscious of the detachment. They seemed the children and I was a very old man. My father's youth, which continued to

flower past middle-age and in the midst of adversity and terrible affliction, and his courage and happiness of soul I admired greatly. But we were very far from one another. I was proud and irritable. My mother I loved, and she loved us all with an instant love and tenderness such as I have never seen in any mother since. I did not realise this at the time, alas! Her love helped to wear her out. She never parted from me for however short a period without tears—tears certainly of weakness—especially later, of sheer inability to stand steady any longer against the buffetings of a hard lot. But we had little in common. I was a queer duckling, self-willed and determined at the water's edge, heedless of her frantic "clucks." Dear soul! "If you behave so," she would warn me sorrowfully, "no one, you know, will like you when you go out into the world." "I don't care," I would answer. "I don't want them to like me. I shan't like them. Theirs would be the greater loss." Ours was a family—not

uncommon I imagine, at any time—in which the parents were under the tolerant surveillance and patronage of the children.

I was a little alien among my schoolfellows. I knew I was different, and accepted my ostracism as a quite natural consequence. I never played games with them, but after afternoon school hurried home, gobbled down an early tea (prepared for me in the kitchen by Martha), and went off on a long solitary ramble till nightfall (and later sometimes), through orchards of very old crooked trees; the air reeking of garlic or humming with the scoldings of tits whose nests I was after in the holes in trees; through gorse-covered thickets, over streams, in woods, disturbing the game—I went across country, avoiding lanes, roads, and footpaths as if they were God-forsaken.

I never entered into any intimacy with my masters. They and the boys regarded me quizzically with a menacing "Now then, Barbellion, where are you sloping off to?" I would flush, and parry with them with

"I've got to be home early to-night." It was a lie. I knew it was a lie. They knew it was a lie. But I presented such an invertebrate, sloppy, characterless exterior, that no one felt curious enough to probe further into my way of life. And I was content to leave it at that.

It was the same in London. I was alien to my colleagues and led a private life, totally outside their imaginings. Among them only R., dear fellow, has ventured to approach my life, and seek a communion with me. And I can't believe he has suffered any hurt. I am not a live wire. Now at all events my power station is dismantled, my career a cinder-path. I wish I could think that others who have come near me are similarly immune. My wife and child seem at a remote distance from me. Strange to say, I am calmer in mind when they are away, as now. Would that they could go on with their lives as if I had never been. E. is a dear woman. I love her, and she, I hope, loves me a little. She

is my wife, and it is my child, and my dreamy ineffectual existence, poised between earth and heaven, cannot annul the physical contact. They may be dream figures, but I created them, and am responsible. Forgive me, forgive me, and try to think well of me. I am weak, and this great universe is a bully. This disease has weakened the fibre of my life. Existence blows me about anywhere. I am possessed by any idle devil who cares to take me, give me a shake, and pass on: forebodings and evil visions, imaginary pictures of horrible accidents, cataclysms, fears—fears that the earth may drop into the sun.

*February 3rd*, 1919.—Suffering does not only insulate. It drops its victim on an island in an ocean desert where he sees men as distant ships passing. I not only feel alone, but very far away from you all. But what is my suffering? Not physical pain. I have none. Pain brings clusters of one's fellows—a toothache is intelligible. But when I say I am grown tired of myself,

have outlived myself, am unseasonable and "mopy" like a doomed swallow in November, it is something that requires a John Galsworthy to understand. The world to me is but a dream or mock show; and we all therein but Pantalones and Anticks to my severe contemplations. This used to be a transitory impression that amused my curiosity. But it hurts and bewilders now that it has become the permanent complexion on my daily existence, when I long for real persons and real things. Tinsel and pictures are melancholy substitutes to anyone heart-hungry for the touch of real hands, and the sound of real voices. Acute mental pain at intervals seizes me with pincers and casts me helpless into the whirlpool—it may be E.'s despair, or the failure to find a home for me to go to. But these are spasms of reality, the momentary opening and closing of a shutter on Life. As soon as they are over, I at once relapse into the dull monotone of misery and picture-show.

I have not left my room since Novem-

ber 11th. I eat well, sleep well, am in possession of all my higher faculties—those for feeling and thinking. But I can't get out.

I think sometimes folk do not come to see me because I am such a gruesome object. It is not pleasant to feel you are gruesome. I have outstayed my welcome. I know everyone will be relieved to hear of my death —no doubt for my sake, as they will eagerly point out, but also for their own sake, as I believe. Yet now and then in selfish and ignoble moods, I, being an egotist, fancy I would like some loving hands to clutch at me, in a blind, ineffectual effort to save me in any condition, if only alive.

*February 4th*, 1919.—The last part of yesterday's entry was maudlin tosh—*entirely foreign to my nature*. I hereby cancel it.

### The Day's Life

I woke at seven, when my desk, the Japanese print on the wall, the wooden chair with my basin on it, the chest of

drawers were emerging out of a grey obscurity. I had tetanuses of my legs (which alternately shot out straight and contracted up to my chin) till eight-thirty, when Nanny came in and drew the blinds, letting in a foggy light. It is bitterly cold. I hear noises in the kitchen—a dull mewing sound (this is the tap being turned on), then a scrape, scrape (she is buttering my toast).

Then breakfast arrives (two pieces of toast and two cups of tea), for which I am set up in bed with pillows. Through the window on my left I can see the branch of a walnut-tree and beyond, a laurel. The little squares of ancient glass are so loosely fixed in the leads (one is broken and covered over with a piece of cardboard) that the draught pours through and sometimes makes wind enough to blow out my match for a cigarette. As I eat comes a heavy scrunch, scrunch, right up the front door, which is only a few feet away from me, concealed behind a curtain. It is the postman, who puts the letters in the porch, gives a resounding knock, and goes

away again. As I smoke my cigarette there is another scrunch, scrunch, but this one goes round to the back door. There is a hammering on the door (they all know Nanny is deaf) and I hear a rough, throaty voice, saying, "Nearly copped him that time," and Nanny replying, "Yes, 'tis cold this morning." It is the newspaper man, who always shies half a brick at a rat that haunts our garden.

While reading the *Daily News* I hear every now and then a distant rattle, which comes nearer, increases to a roar and passes off again in a furious rattle of sound—it is a motor-car along the Oxford Road. Then I hear the clock at the Manor strike twelve, sparrows chattering, or a scolding tit in the garden.

Presently a smell of dinner comes through from the kitchen, and while it cooks, N. comes in with the hot water and helps me to wash. All the afternoon I sleep or doze. At four-thirty I get up, by a little careful arrangement get into my wheeled chair, and

am taken to the fireside. My legs having shot out in a tetanus meanwhile, they have to be bent up before I can climb into my armchair. As soon as I have tricked myself into the chair they shoot out again, and have to be bent up, and feet placed on the hot bottle.

Then tea! N. sits opposite—a short, fat little woman, who always on all occasions wears large black boots, which she says are necessary on account of her varicose veins. Her white apron above the waist is decorated with an embroidered design—a large red "O" with green leaves around it. She always eats with her mouth open, otherwise, I suspect, she has discovered the noise of her mastication drowns every other sound.

After tea I read Gogol. After supper, Gogol. Then, my eyes aching, I stop and gaze into the fire. Nanny reads me a lot of funny stories out of *Answers*. I listen with a set smile, still gazing into the fire. I do not mind in the least, for to me it is all a mock show. Then came a biographical

study of Charlie Chaplin—his early struggles, his present tastes and habits, what his Japanese chauffeur said of him (in the pidgin English of a Chinaman), his favourite holiday retreat, how he reads voraciously and always carries with him when he travels a trunk full of books (ah! my God, it did not give their titles!), etc. There was a ridiculous likeness in all this to a "critique" of, say, George Moore in the *Bookman*. It aroused my slumbering brain. It interested me. (N. was absorbed.) This flashlight into a strange new world where the life, thoughts, habits of Mr. Chaplin were of transcendent interest recalled me to reality. I had been floating in a luxury of dream. Now I flouted Circe, and struggled back into full possession of my personality. I was tickled, amused, amazed.

Then N. read me a series of informative snippets: how to make your lamp burn brighter (by putting a spoonful of sugar in the oil-well); how black beetles were not really *beetles* at all; how Alfred Noyes was

a great poet; what a red bargee meant; what a Blue Peter signified.

At this my gorge rose at last. In the tones of a puff-breasted pedagogue addressing a small boy, I said: "Oh, don't you know the famous line of R. L. S. about climbing into a sea-going ship when the Blue Peter is floating aloft?"

Now this was a contemptible piece of pride, for I only wanted to demonstrate to this scabby old bean that I knew all about a Blue Peter, and it was like her cheek to suppose I didn't. I experience the same irritation when she explains to me how to go from Paddington to Victoria, or where the British Museum is. Of a truth I am no dream figure then. The veritable W. N. P. B. shows his bristling pelage from every opening in the wires of the cage.

How petty! Intellectual pride has been the bane of my life. Yet I must be fair to myself. Who, I should like to know, has received greater incentive to this vice? Have not inferior types all my life choked me,

bound me, romped over me? But what a beautifully geometrical Nemesis it all is! Here I am in the last scene of the last act, the ruthless, arrogant intellectual, spending the last days of his ruined life alone, in the close companionship of an uneducated village woman who reads *Answers*.

*February 8th*, 1919.—100,000 copies of Marie Bashkirtseff's Journal were sold in America alone. If 100,000 copies of my book are sold, that will mean £5,000 for E. Then I have a second volume for posthumous publication, the remainder of my diary from March, 1918, to the end, under the sensational and catchpenny title of *The Diary of a Dying Man*, beginning with Sir Thomas Browne's "We are in the power of no calamity while Death is in our own," and finishing up with Hamlet's last worst words: "The rest is silence." Another £5,000, eh? and E. a rich woman? Time will show.

## The Icons

Every man has his own icon. Secreted in the closet of each man's breast is an icon, the image of himself, concealed from view with elaborate care, treated invariably with great respect by means of which the Ego, being self-conscious, sees itself in relation to the rest of mankind, measures itself therewith, and in accordance with which it acts and moves and subsists. In the self-righteous man's bosom, it is a molten image of a little potentate who can do no wrong. In the egoist's, an idol loved and worshipped by almost all men, addressed with solemnity and reverence, and cast in an immutable brazen form. Only the truth-seeker preserves his image in clay-covered, damp rags—a working hypothesis.

A man towards his icon is like the tenderness and secretiveness of a little bird towards its nest, which does not know you have discovered its heart's treasure. For everyone knows the lineaments of your image

and talks about them to everyone else save you, and no one dare refer to his own—it is bad form—so that in spite of the gossip and criticism that swirl around each one's personality, a man remains sound-tight and insulated.

The human comedy begins at the thought of the ludicrous unlikeness, in many cases, of the treasured image to the real person—as much verisimilitude about it as, say, about a bust by Gaudier-Brzeska.

Heavens! what a toy-shop it will be at the Last Day, when all our little effigies are taken from their cupboards, unwrapped and ranged along beside us, shivering and nude. In that day how few will be able to say that they ever cried "God be merciful to me, a sinner," or "a fool," or "a humbug."

The human tragedy begins as soon as one feels how often a man's life is ruined by simple reason of this disparity between the image and the real—the image (or the man's mistaken idea of himself) like an

*ignis fatuus* leading him through devious paths into the morass of failure, or worse, of sheer laughing-stock silliness. The moral is γνῶθι σεαυτόν.

(My dear chap, quoting Greek at your time of life!)

*February* 11*th*, 1919.—At 9 a.m. I heard the garden gate being forced open (it was frozen to the post) and the postman's welcome footsteps up the path. He dropped a parcel on the porch seat, knocked and went away again. I could not get at my parcel, though I was only a few feet away from it. So I lay and reflected what it might be. Surely not the book ordered at Bumpus's? Too soon. H.'s promised cigarettes? It sounded too heavy. My own book? An early advance copy? Perhaps.

Nanny came in and settled it. It was the book from B.'s. I was so interested I let her go away without cutting the string. I struggled, but could not tear off the cover, and had to sit with the book on my lap, wondering. She came in to light the fire,

and I asked for a knife. She picked the parcel up, took it to the kitchen, and brought the book back opened. I did not like this. I like opening my own parcels.

It was James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist*—a book which the mob will take fifty years to discover, but having once discovered it will again neglect.

It was cold enough to freeze a brass monkey. I had had some diary to post up. The diary seemed to lose all interest and attraction. It was a sore temptation, but I decided to be a Stoic, and wrote till eleven-thirty, though my hands were blue and my nose ran.

Then I read Joyce. An amazing book. Just the book I intended to write—had started it, in fact, when the crash came. He gives the flow of the boy's consciousness —rather the trickle of one thing after another—almost as well as Bashkirtseff. I have never read anything so extraordinary as the latter's pages wherein she plumbs to the bottom and the dregs of current con-

sciousness. Her brain runs synchronously with her pen. She eviscerates her current thoughts and records them exactly with a current pen.

It is difficult to do. I've tried it in this Journal and failed. I am trying it now, but it's not coming very easily. What I like is Joyce's candour and verisimilitude. I have tried that, but it's no good. The publishers rejected two splendid entries about prostitutes and other stuff. That is why I think, in truth, 100,000 copies will not be sold. My diary is too unpleasant for popularity. It is my passion for taking folk by the nose and giving them a wigging, my fierce contempt for every kind of complacency. Stephen *Daedalus.* Butler started the fashion with Edward *Pontifex.* Then there is Wells' George *Ponderevo.* Pontifex is a good name.

On the wall in front of me is a pattern of ivy-leaves. In odd moments of listlessness I am always counting them: there are 30 perpendicular rows with 47 leaves in each row—that's 1,410 leaves in

all. You'd never think there were so many, to look at the wall. I know to nausea that there are 40 little panes of glass in the window on my left—really only 39, as one is broken and stopped with cardboard. There are 7 bars (5 thin and 2 thick) in the back of the wooden chair. There were 17 degrees of frost this morning, and I have to stop constantly to wipe my nose and warm my hands on a water-bottle. There is also a water-bottle at my feet. KLIM—that is MILK backwards—printed on a wooden box I use as a book-rest and now lying upside down. YLIAD SWEN—this is the *Daily News* backwards. I am for ever

reading it backwards as it lies about on my bed upside down. Then there are faces on the morris-patterned curtain and in the fire. I saw a face like this last night. It was like me, but with a big hole excavated in the top of the skull, carrying red-hot coals and giving off a

black smoke. The face was coal-black, too. I might have been some evil genie stoking the fires of hell.

Heavens! I wish I could discuss James Joyce with someone. I must write to R.

"DEAR OLD LAD,

"Have you ever read James Joyce? *Literature*, my boy; the most vivid book, living, obviously autobiographical, candid, such realism, beauty of style. Am so pleased I have found him out! I am quite exultant. He is one of us!"

Our sukie is an old copper one, and sings sometimes in splendid imitation of an orchestra tuning up. I can hear very clearly the oboes and violins. It makes me thirsty.

My hand has gone too cold and stiff to write more.

### My Canary

The jacket is put over his cage at nightfall, and all night he roosts on a table close to my bed. When I wake in the silence of the night, it is difficult to believe that close to me there is a little heart incessantly pumping hot red blood. I have a sense of companionship at the thought. For I, too, silent, concealed in my bed, possess a heart pumping incessantly, though not so fast. I, too, am an animal, little bird, and we must both die.

### A Gasconade

I owe neither a knee nor a bare gramercy to any man. All that I did, I did by my own initiative. To this sweeping assertion I make one exception—R., if for no other reason than that he taught me to love music.

*February 13th*, 1919. — I had a letter from H. G. Wells this morning. He says:

"You will have seen my Preface by this time." (I haven't.) "Prefaces always devastate relationships. But I hope you didn't think it too horrible. I had to play up to your standard of frankness." I knew he would be rude. But I'm afire to see what he says.

I am going to be quite fond of this old Nanny. She is always cheerful and ready to do any mortal thing for me. Across the frightful abyss that separates our two several existences I throw this thin line of attachment and appreciation.

The difference between a highly developed human—say, like Meredith—and his housemaid is greater than the difference between the highest ape and the housemaid.

*February* 16*th*, 1919.—The publishers this morning sent me a proof of Mr. Wells' Introduction. It is excellent, and not rude at all. I devoured it with avidity—can't you see me? The book won't be ready till about the end of March.

### The Bankruptcy of Imagination

Mr. Lloyd George, at the Peace Conference, said that he was persuaded to the League of Nations idea when recently he saw in France the innumerable graves of the fallen covering acres.

Perpend. The statement is worth considering. Note that it is at the end of the war he is speaking, that it is the *number* of graves he is moved by, and that what moves him to realise the horrors of war is the graves of *dead* men. What was Mr. Lloyd George's imagination doing before he went to France and saw the graves? Would it help on the League, think you, if someone took his child by the hand and showed him all the acres of all the graves in Europe; or all the mutilated in the hospitals when their wounds are being dressed; or all the asylums when the madmen are having their morning rave; or all the St. Dunstan's in the world; or all the dying and dead babies?

The war has beggared the imagination.

If a woman loses five sons, she is not smitten five times as much as if she lost only one. All suffering has limits beyond which the heart is insensible. We are no more appalled at the death of ten million men than at that of ten thousand, or, indeed, if it be under our eyes, ten or one. It is a fact that we are forgetting the war already—those who weren't in it. Skating, dancing, political squabbles are all the go—pigs over their pannage. If a woman has lost a son, compensations are manifold—*e.g.*, some gewgaw from the King's hands at Buckingham Palace. What the son thought or suffered no one knows, because he's dead. If he survives he wants to remain dumb, or lacks capacity to express his thought about the hell and damnation of war. If he had such a capacity, his hearers would lack the imaginative sympathy to be scalded by his boiling ink.

In this week's *Times Literary Supplement* is a cringing review of a rotten book *Notebooks of a Spinster Lady*—obviously a nob—say, an earl's daughter. True, the

reviewer deferentially refers to some of the stories as *old*, but hastens to explain that all he means is *old to him*. In the same issue is another snobbish review on the life of Meredith, excellent according to other reviewers. It is headed "Small Talk about George Meredith"—from which one knows what to expect. The reviewer knew Meredith personally, and explains with delightful *naïveté* that the reason why Meredith would not go to see his first wife on her death-bed, though she asked him to come, was his sensitive horror of death-bed scenes. As for Meredith being ashamed of being a tailor's son, the idea is scouted. Yet, he was, and I hate him for it.

*February 17th*, 1919.—Reading the Introduction was like reading my own obituary notice. It rather moved me. All day yesterday I buzzed over it like a famished bee. Streaks of it at intervals would shoot through my mind. I weighed sentences, measured them, tested them. I was curious over "a certain

thread of unpremeditated and exquisite beauty that runs through the story this diary tells." Lord in heaven, what is it?

Mr. Wells is sympathetic and almost too generous. Characteristically he concentrates on me as a biologist, whereas I like to look at myself posthumously as a writer.

He is a good fellow, and I am most grateful and most pleased.

It's milder to-day, and the chaffinches are sweetly singing outside my window.

Nurse said to me after breakfast:

"Well, what are you going to do?"

I replied apologetically:

"Oh, writing, I suppose."

"This everlasting writing." She shrugged her shoulders, and I felt it was most unsociable in me not to satisfy her curiosity.

### Legs

*February 15th*, 1919.—B.—(to Nurse stepping on his toes)—Seemingly either my feet or yours are very large.

N.—Oh, but you see it's my legs are so

short. I can't step across easily. It will be all right if you go to Eastbourne. Nurse —— has long legs.

B.—But what's the use of her long legs if she can't get a house?

N.—Aunt Hobart's legs were so bent up that though she was six feet long, her coffin was only four feet.

B.—Why were Aunt Hobart's legs bent up?

N.—Rheumatism. She was buried at the same time as her grand-daughter.

B.—But *her* legs were not bent up?

N.—Oh, no. Bessie was only sixteen, and died of scarlet fever.

## The Water Ousel's Song

*A Memory.*

I leaned over the parapet of an old stone bridge covered with great, old, branching, woody tangles of ivy, and leading from an oak wood across a stream into a meadow. I leaned over the parapet, and gazed long at the rushing water below. "I will look,"

I said, "as if I am never going to see this picture again." And so I looked, and now I am glad I looked like that, for the memory of the picture in every detail comes back, and indeed has never left me.

Along each bank margin grew a row of alders, and in the bed of the river were scattered great slabs of rock jutting out of the water, and spotted white with the droppings of water ousels and kingfishers that loved to pause on them. A great body of swift, strong and silent water came sweeping down to the falls, then dropping over in a solid green bar into a cauldron of roaring, hissing liquid below, churning the surface waters into soapy foam of purest white—the white of the summer cloud and the water ousel's breast. Outside the foam-belt the water of this salmon pool ripples away gently in oily eddies and circles. After the rough passage over the falls, some of the water rests awhile in little recesses on the periphery of the pool. But gradually it works round into the current

which, like the wake of a steamer, cuts diametrically across the pool, and swishes everything—leaves, twigs, dead insects—on to the hurtling shallows. "Watch how the vault of water first bends unbroken in pure polished velocity over the arching rocks at the brow of the cataract covering them with a dome of crystal, twenty feet thick, so swift that its motion is unseen, except when a foam globe from above darts over it like a fallen star."

This is from Ruskin's description of the Falls of Schaffhausen. But note that it is equally applicable to my little falls—if we banish the phantom Size.

It may be only sour grapes for my part, but—

"Why go gallivanting
With the nations round?
Leave to Robert Browning
Beggars, fleas, and vines—
Leave to mournful Ruskin
Popish Apennines.
Where's the mighty credit
In admiring Alps?
Any goose sees glory
In their snowy scalps."

A water ousel alighted on a boulder and bowed to me. He and his little white shirt-front, continually bobbing, were like a concert-room artist acknowledging the plaudits of an enthusiastic audience. I was pleased with him, but his excess of ecstasy at sight of me made my own pleasure seem dull and lethargic.

Then he hopped a little higher on to the stump of an alder, and being twilight now, and the day's food hunt over, he poured out his quivering soul in an ecstasy of song. Like a solo violin with orchestra accompaniment, it blended in harmony with the voluminous sound of the water, now rising above it, now overwhelmed by it. Then, as if suddenly shy and nervous of his self-revelation, the little bird gave one or two short bobs, and flew swiftly away upstream. Such spiritual ecstasy made me feel very poor indeed in soul, and I went home with a sense of humiliation.

*February 20th*, 1919.—My beloved wife spent the night here, then returned to

Brighton. "Do you feel my heart on my lips?" "Dear, I love you," and her tears trickled on to my beard.

Two poor grief-stricken things. She shook with the anguish of the moment, withdrew, and again flung herself on my breast. I sat motionless in my chair. Ah! my God! how I longed to be able to stand and pick up, press to me, and hide away in the shelter of strong arms that sweet, dear, fluttering spirit. It is cruel—cruel to her and cruel to me. I thought my heart must break. There comes a time when evil circumstances squeeze you out of this world. There is no longer any room. Oh! Why did she marry me? They ought not to have let her do it.

*February* 21*st*, 1919.—I sometimes fancy I am not weaned from life even now. Pictures in the paper make me agonise. Oh, for a little happiness for her and me together, jurt a short respite. What agony it is to have a darling woman fling herself into your arms, press you to her dear bosom and ask

you desperately to try to get well, when you know it is hopeless. She knows it is hopeless, yet every now and then. . . . She pictures me in a study in her flat (all her own), walking on two sticks. And already the tendons of my right leg are drawing in permanently.

I am not weaned because my curiosity is not dead. When I think of dying, I am tantalised to know all that will happen after. I want to be at my funeral, and see who's there and if they are very sorry, who sheds a friendly tear, what sort of service, etc. Oh! I wish I were dead and forgotten.

*February 22nd*, 1919.—Mr. Wells, in his Preface, refers to my watching bats in a cave (they were deserted manganese mine borings) and the evening flights of starlings, which were described in separate articles I sent him. Herewith is my adventure among the bats. A first-class field naturalist who has made some remarkable studies in the habits of that elusive and little known animal the mole, said to me at the conclusion of his investigations: "Yes, I have lived two

years with the mole, and have arrived only on the fringe of the subject." He was a melancholy fellow and too absorbed in his studies even to shave his face of a morning. I arrived only on the outside of the fringe in my study of the habits of the Greater Horseshoe Bat, but I got a lot of enjoyment out of the risky adventure of exploring the disused mines. The wooden struts were rotten, and the walls and roofs of the galleries had fallen in here and there. So we had sometimes to crawl on hands and knees to get past. All the borings were covered with a red slime, so we wore engineers' overalls, which by the time we had finished changed from blue to red, speckled with grease dropping from our candles. Occasionally, in turning a corner, a sudden draught would blow the candles out, and in one rather lofty boring we were stopped by deep water, and, boy-like, meditated the necessity of removing clothes and swimming on with candles fastened on our foreheads. One boring opened into the side of a hill by a small,

insignificant, and almost invisible hole at the bottom of a steep slide. We slid down with a rope, and once inside the little hole at the bottom, found a big passage with a narrow-gauge line and abandoned truck—great excitement! Another entrance to the mines was by way of a shaft no bigger than an ordinary man-hole in a drain pipe, its mouth being overgrown with brambles. We fixed a rope round the trunk of a tree, and went down, hand over hand. We crawled along a narrow passage—three of us, leaving no one at the top to guard the rope—and at intervals espied our game, hanging to the roof by the hind legs. We boxed three altogether, gently unfixing the hind legs, and laying the little creatures in a tin carefully lined with wool. The Horseshoe Bat is the strangest sight in the world to come upon in a dark cave hanging upside down from the roof like an enormous chrysalis in shape. For when roosting, this bat puts its two thin hind legs and feet very close together, making a single delicate pedicle, and

wraps its body entirely in its wings, head and ears included. When disturbed, it gently draws itself up a little by bending its legs. When thoroughly awakened, it unfolds its wings and becomes a picture of trembling animation: the head is raised, and it looks at you nervously with its little beady dark, glittering eyes, the large ears all the while vibrating as swiftly as a tuning-fork. These with the grotesque and mysterious leaf-like growth around its nose—not to mention the centrepiece that stands out like a door-knocker—make a remarkable vision by candle-light in a dark cave.

*February* 23*rd*, 1919.—Despite the unfathomable ennui and creeping slowness of the hours in the living through of each day, the days of the past month or two, by reason of their dull sameness, seem, when viewed in retrospect, like the telegraph poles on a railway journey. And always rolling through my head is the accompaniment of some tune—Shepherd Fennel's Dance, Funeral Marches.

I want to hear Berlioz's Requiem. Poor Berlioz! How I sympathise with you.

*February 25th*, 1919.—Am feeling rather queer these last few days, and am full of forebodings. Dear E.'s struggles harrow me, and worst of all, I anticipated this as from December, 1915. When I showed my terrible gloom then, one person laughed gaily. Too much imagination—the ability to foresee in detail and preconstruct—is a curse. For I have lived through all this time before; yet the actual loses none of its poignancy.

*February 26th*, 1919.—The doctor came to-day and recommended petroleum. All right. He is a decent sort and knows his business. Am feeling muzzy. *Horas non numero nisi serenas.* This should make us nineteen-nineteeners smile!

*February 27th*, 1919.—A little easier in mind. Posted proofs of my Journal to R. Am much perturbed. Will he shrink from me, or merely tolerate me as a poor wretched manikin? I fear it will not bring me

any increase of affection from anyone, and some ——

A load of sadness settled on me this afternoon. As I lay resting down in bed, for no reason I can discover, the memory of the evening prayers my mother taught me flashed over my mind, and because steeped in memory seemed very beautiful. Here they are:

> "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look upon a little child,
> Pity my simplicity,
> Suffer me to come to Thee."

Then the Lord's Prayer. Then:

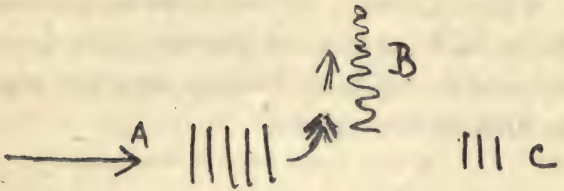
> "Keep us faithful, keep us pure,
> Keep us ever more Thine own,
> Help, O help us to endure,
> Fit us for the promised crown."

Then I hopped into bed and was asleep in a moment.

I went on mechanically saying these prayers when I was grown to a big boy, and subconsciously felt that the first verses were quite unsuitable. But I never had, like some, an instinct for prayer. I don't

suppose I ever prayed, only raced through some rhymed requests learnt by rote!

I can remember very clearly the *topography* these addresses to the Almighty assumed in my brain. Thus:




A. I began here in a horizontal direction with "Gentle Jesus," the successive verses being so many hurdles to leap over. Then I turned abruptly to the left and ran up a tall, narrow, squiggly piece like a pagoda—the Paternoster (B) finishing off with the tail-piece (C), the single verse of 4 lines.

I never had till recently any religious sense at all. I was a little sceptic before I knew it. With no one to direct me, I had a nose for agnostic literature, and when I found Haeckel and Hume I whooped with

satisfaction. "I thought so," I said to myself.

"Beautiful," did I say? Why, no. Sottish doggerel. The pathos of an innocent child repeating it!

*February 28th*, 1919.—I thirst, I thirst for a little music—to replenish my jaded spirit. It is difficult to keep one's soul alive in such an atmosphere.

### Analysis of the "Journal of a Disappointed Man"

*March 10th*, 1919.

1. Ambition.
2. Reflections on Death.
3. Intellectual Curiosity.
4. Self Consciousness.
5. Self Introspection.
6. Zest of Living.

I wonder if any reviewer will bring out these points:

7. Humour.
8. Shamelessness.

My confessions are shameless. I confess, but do not repent. The fact is, my con-

fessions are prompted, not by ethical motives, but intellectual. The confessions are to me the interesting records of a self-investigator.

If I live to read the review notices, I shall probably criticise them. I shall be criticising the criticisms of my life, putting the reviewers right, a long lean hand stretching out at them from the tomb. I shall play the part of boomerang, and "cop" them one unexpectedly. There will be a newspaper discussion: Is Barbellion dead? And I shall answer by a letter to the Editor:

"DEAR SIR,

"Yes, I am dead. I killed myself off at the end of my book, because it was high time. Your reviewer is incorrect in saying I died of creeping paralysis. It was of another kindred but different disease.

"P.S.—It may interest your readers to know that I am not yet buried."

Or,

"DEAR SIR,

"There is an inaccuracy in your reviewer's statement. I was not in the Secret Service. It should have been the Civil Service, of which I was a member up to within eighteen months of my decease."

Or,

"DEAR SIR,

"I should be glad if you would correct the impression generated by one of your correspondents that *Barbellion* is the name of an evil spirit appearing on Walpurgis night. As a matter of fact, my forbears were simple folk—tallow chandlers in B——"

*March* 12*th*, 1919.

"Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight.
Fresh spring and summer and winter hoar
Fill my faint heart with grief, but with delight
No more, O nevermore."

These sobbing words bring a catch in my breath and tears to my eyes. Dear Shelley, I, too, have suffered.

> "No more, O nevermore!
> No more, O nevermore!"

*March 15th*, 1919.—The first peep of the chick: among the publishers' announcements in *The Times*: "*The Journal of a Disappointed Man*, a genuine confession of thwarted ambition and disillusionment."

Am reading another of James Joyce's—*Ulysses*—running serially in that exotic periodical, *The Little Review*, which announces on its cover that it makes "no compromise with the public taste." *Ulysses* is an interesting development. Damn! it's all my idea, the technique I projected. According to the reviews, Dorothy Richardson's *Tunnel* is a novel in the same manner—intensive, netting in words the continuous flow of consciousness and semi-consciousness. Of course the novelists are behind the naturalists in the recording of minutiæ:

Edmund Selous and Julian Huxley and others have set down the life of some species of bird in exhaustive detail—every flip of the tail, every peck preceding the grand drama of courtship and mating. But this queer comparison lies between these naturalists and novelists like William de Morgan rather than Joyce.

*March 16th*, 1919.—I am getting rapidly worse. One misery adds itself to another as I explore the course of this hideous disease.

*March 17th*, 1919.—Here is Hector Berlioz in his amazing Memoirs writing to a friend for forgiveness for causing him anxiety: "But you know how my life fluctuates. One day, calm, dreary, rhythmical; the next, bored, nerve-torn, snappy and surly as a mangy dog; vicious as a thousand devils, sick of life and ready to end it, were it not for the frenzied happiness that draws ever nearer, for the odd destiny that I feel is mine; for my staunch friends; for music, and lastly for *curiosity*. My life is

a story that interests me greatly." This *verfluchte* curiosity! I could botanise over my own grave, attentively examine the maggots out of my own brain.

*March* 18*th*, 1919.—Mother (she liked me to call her Moth. Hubbard, Lepidopterous Hubbard, and she used to sign her letters *Hubbard*) had a pretty custom, which she hated anyone to detect, of putting every letter she wrote to us when stamped, directed and sealed, into her Bible for a minute or two, ostensibly to sanctify the sealing up.

Memories like these lurk in corners of my dismantled brain like cobwebs. I fetch them down with a pen for a mop.

I've had such a dear and beautiful letter from H. this morning.

*March* 19*th*, 1919.

> "While all alone
> Watching the loophole's spark
> Lie I, with life all dark,
> Feet tethered, hands fettered
> Fast to the stone.
> The grim walls, square lettered

With prisoned men's groan,
Still strain the banner poles,
Through the wind's song;
Westward the banner rolls
Over my wrong."

For all C.O.'s and paralytics (selected by E.).

*March 20th*, 1919.—A letter from H. G. Wells. My book, he says, interested him personally as he once "tried hard" to get into the B.M. (in Flower's time), but failed. "I don't think I should have found it very suitable." No! He would have promptly finished on the gallows for murdering the keeper.

*March 21st*, 1919.—Another cobweb: an illustrated book of miscellanies called *The World of Wonders* in our ancient bookcase at home alongside Eliza Cook's poems, Howitt's *Visits to Remarkable Places*, an immense green volume of Hogarth's drawings, a Dictionary of Dates, Roget's *Thesaurus*, etc. I remember distinctly the pictures of the Man in the Iron Mask, freak tubers, and

carrots like human heads in a row across a page, snow crystals, Indian jugglers, two Amazons of heroic girth carrying swords, striding along sands; the swords were curved, and one lady was much stouter than the other. I used to stare at these pictures before I could read, and invented my own legends. I always thought the potatoes and carrots were a species of savage, and many pictures I can recall, but do not know what they represent even now.

*March 26th*, 1919.—Time lures me forward. But I've dug my heels in awaiting those two old tortoises, Chatto and Windus.

*March 27th*, 1919.—I've won! This morning at 9 a.m. the book arrived. C. and W. thoughtfully left the pages to be cut, so I've been enjoying the exquisite pleasure of cutting the pages of my own book. And nothing's happened. No earthquake, no thunder and lightning, no omen in a black sky. In fact, the sun is shining. Publication next week.

*March 28th*, 1919.—Having stabbed my

arm and signed the contract, now when the clock strikes, I'd like to stay :

"O lente, lente, currite noctis equi !
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned."

But I asked for it, have got it—and to the full—and must fulfil my undertaking. My feelings see-saw. To-day I want to live in Hell's despite. The day before yesterday I had my back to the wall in a feat of sheer endurance.

*March 30th*, 1919.—Now that I have spurred my hippogriff to the journey's end, now that I have wreaked my will on that very obtuse gentleman, my Lord Destiny, who failed to take due measure of his man, now as soon as I have freed myself from the hard cocoon of my environment, and can sweeten and soothe my warped frame with a little of the delicious honey of kindly recognition, I can rest in the sun a while, soak up the warmth and sweetness into this tortured spirit and crave everyone's pardon before the end comes. For I know that the

Journal will mean horror to some. I realise that a strong-minded man would by instinct keep his sufferings to himself—the Englishman above all—(but I doubt if I am an Englishman really. My true home I guess is further east). I have been recklessly self-willed and inconsiderate, and I have no sort of excuse except the most unprecedented provocation. I have been in the grip of more than one strong passion, and my moral strength has been insufficient to struggle with them and throw them off. I have been overcome, and the publication of my Journal is really the signal of my defeat.

Ah, but it takes a terrific lot of energy to set about putting one's moral house in order! It is too late, and I am too weakened. You must take me as I am and remember that with a longer life, just as I might have done better things intellectually, so also morally. Give me your love if you can. I love you all, and because I love you comfort my self-despondency with the thought that

there *must* be some grain of goodness in me overlaid.

*April 1st*, 1919.—I love my hair to be combed—it makes one realise what an avenue for self-expression was closed when man lost his tail. I bitterly regret the loss of my tail; I love the benison of hot water for my urticating hands; the tick-tack of our cottage clock; a cigarette—many cigarettes; letters—these are all my pleasures; pills, the air-cushion, hot bottle, a cramped leg straightened—these are my reliefs; sleep —this my refuge.

## R. AND I AT THE B.M.

*April 5th*, 1919.—What friends we were! The mutual sympathy between us was complete, so that our intercommunication was telegraphic in its brevity, frequently telepathic and wordless, yet all-sufficing. He had an extraordinary faculty for apt quotations: he loved Admiral Buzza, Mr. Middleton, and similar cronies.

Shakespeare was a never-failing reservoir. Together we passed along the street to our rendezvous, coats flapping, hands waving, tongues wagging, two slim youths, bespectacled, shoulders bent, bright-eyed.

We used to lunch at Gloucester Road, sometimes in Soho, and in the summer in Kensington Gardens. Our luncheon talks were wild and flippant. It was in the evenings after dinner at his rooms or at mine that we conversed seriously far into the stilly night, serious and earnest as only youth can be. During the course of a year our discussions must have several times passed in stellar transit through the whole zodiac of intellectual, moral, and social arcs. God! how we talked! I took charge of metaphysics and literature; R. of art and sociology.

His room and mine at the British Museum were near one another on opposite sides of the same corridor, and one of my vivid memories of those days is R. coming in the course of the morning, gently opening my

door, stealing in and advancing slowly up towards my table on tip-toe, eyebrows raised as far as he could possibly get them right up under his scalp, arms down straight at the sides, hands raised at the wrists and performing continuous circular movements outwards while he softly whistled some beautiful melody we'd heard the night before. I would drop my dissections, turn and ask "How does that piece go that starts ——?" (I whistled a fragment.)

At lunch-time, whoever was first ready would visit the other's room, and should the occupant's head be still bent over his work, the same kind of remark was regularly made: "Come, come! I don't like to see this absorption in the trivial round. Remember the man with the muckrake. The sun shines: be heliotropic. Let gallows gape for dog, let man go free."

Our intimacy nettled some of our colleagues. "What are you two conspirators up to?" (R. in a black billycock, and I in a brown one, were tête-à-tête in the corridor.)

"Discussing the modern drama" (said to annoy, of course).

"Damon and Pythias," sneered one, and we laughed aloud.

We carried our youth like a flag through those dusty galleries, and our warm friendship was a ringing challenge to all those frosty pows.

*April 8th*, 1919.—Went out yesterday for the first time for nearly five months. A beautiful April day, warm, a full bird chorus, the smell of violets, of wood-smoke—and the war was over. I felt I could as an honourable human being look a Long-tailed Tit in the feathers now and not blench. The sky was above me—scores of white eyots floating in the sea of blue—and my heart fluttered a little, and for a moment my blood ran wine, until the inevitable reflection settled like a blight. I should have preferred not to be reminded, but the realisation how beautiful the world is swept over me all unready in a mighty flood. "Women are pretty things really," said E. as she looked at photos in a

picture paper: it was reborn in her mind in a flash of delight.

*April* 10*th*, 1919.—A quiet day with my heart full of loving-kindness for all. Given time, I could change myself into something better. You may not believe it, but even in my worst days I once had a big desire for self-sacrifice. I was thrilled to find that I was making someone happy by my love and deeply longed to surrender all for love.

### An Enigma

*April* 11*th*, 1919.—In 1915 I received a p.c. which has puzzled me ever since. It is an enigma to me as baffling as a piece of Coptic text. It was in an uneducated hand asking for a museum pamphlet I had written on the louse, signed "T. Wood (*Boggeria princeps*)." Any suggestions?

Nurse and I have lived here alone for over a month, and she is kindness itself, cheerful, willing to fetch and bring, never impatient with me or irritable—a good soul.

### The Rabbits' Golgotha

*April* 14*th*, 1919.—Those sand dunes! Their characteristic feature was rabbits' skulls, rabbits' scapulæ, ribs, pelvises, legs, bleached, white and dry; rotting rabbits being mined and gradually buried by gaudy red-marked carrion beetles; pieces of rabbits' fluff and fur; rabbits' screams in the teeth of a stoat (a common sound); and the little round dry pellets of rabbits, more numberless than the snail shells. And lastly, rabbits —rabbits hopping, racing, slinking, disappearing down holes, always and everywhere showing the intruder fleeting glimpses of the little white patches on the underside of the stumpy tail, the signal to disperse or dive into the sand.

The dunes are always associated in my mind with burning hot, cloudless, summer days, during the whole long course of which without ceasing Lapwings flopped around my head, uttering their crazy wails, circuses of

scimitar-winged Swifts swished by and screamed hysterically, the face of the blue sky was dotted at regular intervals with singing Larks, singing all day long without intermittence, poised menacingly overhead, so that the white-hot needle points of their song seemed likely at any moment to descend perpendicularly and penetrate the skull. Occasionally, a dazzlingly white Herring Gull would sail slowly, majestically in from the cliffs, and from a much greater height than all the rest of us, cry in a deep voice "ha-ha-ha," like some supreme being in sardonic amusement at the vulgar whirligig of life below him.

A still summer day, say you? The air was charged with sound, had you the ears to hear. It is not merely the birds' cries, it is their dangerous living, feverish and intense, that contributes to this uproar of life. The heart-muscles and wing-muscles give out a note as they contract (this is a physiological fact). The interior of, say, a Falcon's body is a scene of dark-sounding romance and

incessant activity, with the blood racing through the vessels, and the glands secreting, and the muscles contracting. Just here at my feet is an avalanche, jagged boulders of silica are descending and spreading out in a fan-shaped talus—only sand grains, so I cannot hear the crash of the boulders, but matter—atomic solar systems—colossal!

And behind all, behind every sight and every other sound, is the sound of the great sea, the all-powerful creator of the dunes, who in a single evening (for a thousand ages are but an evening in his calculations) could sweep them away or sweep up another area of sand and marram grass as big. One church is already obliterated. That was yesterday. To-morrow, maybe, the village further inland will have vanished too.

That is the secret of the fascination of the dunes. Superficially, all seems dead and dull. Reflection brings the deeper understanding of myriad forms of life, creeping, running, springing, burrowing—of noisy, screaming, struggling life, dominated by

the august, secular movements of the great sea.

Sometimes, towards the end of the afternoon, I would grow tired, the brilliance would become garish. Then, leaving the thyme, the eyebright, the wild pansies, the viper's bugloss (in clusters), an occasional teazle, after boxing every sort of insect and every sort of plant that I had not collected before (the birds' eggs I had long ago swept into my cabinet), I would hurry out to the shore, take off my clothes, and be rebaptised in the sea. A hundred yards' run up the cool sands and back, and I was dry, and dallied awhile in the sand-hills before putting on my shirt that smelled of stale sweat.

It was so good to divest myself of particularities that clung like the burrs on my stockings, and plunge into the universality of the sea! Subconsciously that was my motive and the cause of my delight.

*April* 16*th*, 1919.—I am still miserable, especially on E.'s account, that dear brave woman. But I have undergone a change.

My whole soul is sweetened by the love of those near and dear to me, and by the sympathy of those reading my book.

*April* 21*st*, 1919.—Nurse was cutting my beard, and handed me the mirror to report progress. "The right moustache," I said critically, "seems to droop down a lot." She twisted up the left between finger and thumb, and then in a flash, before I had time to scream, damped her finger with her tongue, and gave a powerful screw to the right!

### Beauty

*April* 22*nd*, 1919.—Under the lens of scientific analysis, natural beauty disappears. The emotion of beauty and the spirit of analysis and dissection cannot exist contemporaneously. The sunset becomes waves of light impinging on atmospheric dust; the most beautiful pearl, the encysted itch of a mollusc.

And not natural beauty alone, but all beauty—all the furniture of earth, and all

the choir of heaven at the intellect's beck must shed their beautiful vestments, although their aureoles in the interim shall remain safe in the keeping of man's soul. For just as man's scientific analysis destroys beauty, so his synthetic art creates it, and man creates beauty, Nature supplying the raw materials.

Nature is the clay, man the potter. Everyone feeling the emotion of beauty becomes a creative artist. If the world were as ugly as sin, the artist would recreate it beautiful in the image of his own beautiful spirit, just as Frank Brangwyn and Joseph Pennell are actually now doing with those industrial hideousnesses. But man's generous nature, because there is beauty in his own heart, naïvely assumes its possession by others, and so projects it into Nature. But he sees in her only the truth and goodness that are in himself. Natural beauty is everyone's mirror.

Similarly, as I believe, man creates the world itself after his own mind. Consult

the humanists, in whose system of philosophy I have a profound intuitive belief.

Certainly there are many times when Nature, by pure accident, having other aims than our delight, produces the finished article. Helen of Troy, I suppose, required no emendation from the artist's hand. Nor does the Watersmeet, Lynton. Occasionally a human drama completes itself perfectly in five acts, observing all the unities.

It may be claimed by the moralists that there must be some very definite inherent direction in Nature's processes towards the light of beauty, if in the ordinary course of producing, say, a blue flower to attract insects, a thing of rare beauty at the same time emerges therefrom. But this is putting the cart before the horse. For man's own ideas of beauty are necessarily based on the forms and colour he finds in Nature, the only world he knows. So that we may say roughly that for our purposes we love blue flowers, for instance, because bees first loved them! The bees were the original artists

who created and educated our taste—they and the blue sky above us, that is. As a fact it is impossible to imagine the physical world "as ugly as sin"—unless at the same time you imagine man's soul as being "as ugly as sin." You can imagine the world *different—e.g.*, with fewer forms and colours, say uniformly flat and brown, a desert. But that would mean that, not only art would be poorer, but man himself as such would cease to exist. Instead we should have evolved as glorified sand.

Art has to take its cue from Nature, though Nature, whatever its chance form in any sort of planet, would always be emended by Art provided man were the same, because Mind is above Matter, Art above Nature.

*April 25th*, 1919.—My beloved's birthday.

*April 26th*, 1919.—Here is the nucleus of a sordid newspaper tragedy. I sleep on the ground floor in the front. Nurse sleeps at the back, upstairs. She is very deaf and I am helpless. Her father and mother both died of heart failure. One sister has heart

disease and another heart weakness. Her heart too is weak, and my electric bell won't ring. If it did, she can only hear it when awake. We live alone, and each morning I endure suspense till I hear her coming down the stairs.

### Overheard in the World Outside

In the road, *en passant.*

A Patrician's Voice: I was staying at Lord Burnham's place over the week-end. Very jolly.

Second Voice: I can never understand why he . . . (They passed.)

Two countrymen meeting in the road. I cannot see them, but quite well know how they have drawn up like railway engines standing on their metals, one on the right side and the other on the left of the road, converse a moment across the intervening middle space:

"How is it then?"

"Oh, pretty middling."

"They 'aven't shot your dog yet then, I see" (rabies reported in the district).

"I'll watch it."

And they steam slowly onwards.

*April 28th*, 1919.—Yes, there *are* compensations. Few can appreciate a sunny morning and a blackbird's contralto from the walnut-tree.

The "happy and comfortable" like to hear about the compensations. They always thought things were never so bad as they seem. "You must pull your socks up and make the best of things." But you shouldn't have the impudence to tell him so.

Last night, a blizzard, a gale!

*April 29th*, 1919.—Having cast my bread upon the waters, it amuses me to find it returning with the calculable exactitude of a tidal movement—*e.g.*, in my Journal I stroked *Public Opinion* and it now purrs to the tune of two and half pages of review: the *Saturday Review* I cursed with bell, book, and candle and—*voilà!* they mangle me in their turn.

For the most part the reviewers say what I have told them to say in the book. One writes that it is a remarkable book. I told him it was. Another says I am a conceited prig. I have said as much more than once. A third hints at the writer's inherent madness. I queried the same possibility. It is amusing to see the flat contradictions. There is no sort of unanimity of opinion about any part of my complex character. One says a genius, another not a genius; witty—dull; vivacious—dismal; intolerably sad—happy; lewd—finicky; "quiet humour"—"wild and vivacious wit." As a whole, I am surprised and delighted with the extraordinary kindness and sympathy meted out to it, more than I deserve or it deserves, while one or two critics, with power that amazes, penetrate to the wretched Barbellion's core. To Mr. Massingham I feel I can only murmur, "Too kind, too kind," like the aged Florence Nightingale when they came to present her with the O.M. But what sympathetic understanding! Compare

one man who said I was a social climber; another that I was "finicky" on sexual matters (Ha! ha! ha! pardon my homeric laughter); another—or was it the same?—that I *shrank* from life—yes, shrank! Give me more life, to parody Goethe: I have shouted thus for years. Poor old reviewers! Friends and relatives say I have not drawn my real self. But that's because I've taken my clothes off and they can't recognise me stark! The book is a self-portrait in the nude.

*May* 1*st*, 1919.—What a sad, intractable world! Will human love and goodness *ever* overcome it?

*May* 2*nd*, 1919.—I long to see my little daughter again. Yet I fear it horribly, I am ashamed to meet her gaze. She will be frightened at me. Better she should have no memory of me at all to take through life.

*May* 16*th*, 1919.—On the 14th at 2 p.m. a well-appointed ambulance took me to a nursing home at Eastbourne, where I arrived at 7 p.m., exhausted but cheerful. It was

like being raised from the dead. We travelled *via* Acton and Ealing and Shepherd's Bush, where we turned down H. road past my old rooms, across Kensington Road, and down Warwick Gardens, where one dark November night E. and I plighted our troth beneath a lamp-post. We passed the lamp-post! Then to West Cromwell Road, to Fulham, Wandsworth, Tooting, to Tunbridge Wells, where at four-thirty we drew up at an inn and a servant-maid put a tray of tea and cakes on the bench beside me, and I ate and smoked while the driver in the road compared notes with the landlord on war adventures.

"Where were you then?"

"Messines."

"Ah! I didn't go so far north as that."

It was so hot, I lay on my couch with my rugs, etc., off. But the street boys were so curious over my pyjama suit, I pulled the blinds. Then they moved round and looked in through the door. Nurse closed it. They moved round to the other side, so

Nurse drew those blinds too. Then they capered off.

After that across Crowborough Forest, the car running at an even pace uphill and down. I lay happy and triumphant, and watched the country speeding by. We passed picnic parties—someone should have given them a warning and an exhortation; a dreadful thing for them, thought I, if they are not aware fully of their magnificent good fortune. The sky was cloudless. It was an amusing thing to me to feel so happy. Then I became displeased at my mood, on E.'s account, as I recollected the picture of her and baby in the road waving me good-bye.

*May* 17*th*, 1919.—This egotism business: the Journal is more egoism than egotism, especially the latter part. And ought not Meredith to have called it "The Egotist"?

*May* 18*th*, 1919.—In the Journal I can see now that I made myself out worse than I am, or was. I even took a morbid

pleasure in intimating my depravity—self-mortification. If I had spoken out more plainly I should have escaped all this censure. The reviewers are only too ready to take me at my word, which is but natural. I don't think on the whole my portrait of myself does myself justice.

A beautiful morning. At the bottom of my bed two French windows open out on to the garden, where a blackbird is singing me something more than well. It is a magnificent flute obligato to the tune in my heart going "thub-dup" "thub-dup" wildly as if I were a youth again in first love. He shouted out his song in the evening, the very moment I arrived here. What fine spirits these blackbirds are! I listen to him and my withered carcase soaks up his song with a sighing sound, like a dry sponge taking up water.

### Pompa Mortis

*May 20th*, 1919.—If I could please myself, I should have my coffin made and kept under my bed. Then if I should die they could just pull the old box out and put me in it. It is the orthodox *pompa mortis* that makes death so ugly and terrible. I like the idea of William Morris, who was taken to the cemetery in an old farm-cart.

### Ludicrous Impotence

I often laugh loud at the struggles of Nurse with my perfectly ludicrous, impotent body. If you saw us, you would certainly believe in a personal devil; but when you saw what a devil he is, you would also see in him a most fantastic clown. My right leg is almost completely anæsthetised—curious experience this. You could poke the fire with it, and I shouldn't feel anything out of the way. I could easily emulate Cranmer's

stoical behaviour. It is so dead that if you put my body out in the sun, the flies in error would come and lay their eggs on me. Yes, Satan was the first and chiefest of Pantaloons. Everyone who desires to possess a complete knowledge of the world should read Duhamel, Latzko, Barbusse, and consult the illustrations in a textbook of tropical medicine.

### The Idealist

The ultimate detection of a few bad faults in a good man most unfairly discounts his goodness in the idealist's judgment. For the idealist can be a stern, implacable taskmaster. So a few good points unexpectedly coming to light in a bad man are enough to make the ever sanguine idealists forget the fellow's general badness. For the man of ideals must snatch at a straw. This is not justice, but it's human nature.

### Those Nurses Again

Nurse No. 1 (helping her colleague to put away her books, examining a lapful).—Ah, French novels! Tum-ti-tum-tum!

Nurse No. 2 (scandalised). — French *classics!*

Nurse No. 1.—Oh, I beg your pardon—I thought they were French novels.

*May 22nd*, 1919.—The reviewers say I am introspective — they mean self-introspective. I am really both.

*May 24th*, 1919.—My legs have to be tied down to the bed with a rope. A little girl staying here lends me her skipping rope.

### The Peace Treaty

After those bright hopes of last autumn Justice will be done only when all power is vested in the people. Every liberal-minded man must feel the shame of it.

This is the end. I am not going to keep a diary any more.

### The Brightest Thing in the World

*June* 1*st*, 1919.—Rupert Brooke said the brightest thing in the world was a leaf with the sun shining on it. God pity his ignorance! The brightest thing in the world is a Ctenophor in a glass jar standing in the sun. This is a bit of a secret, for no one knows about it save only the naturalist. I had a new sponge the other day and it smelt of the sea till I had soaked it. But what a vista that smell opened up!—rock pools, gobies, blennies, anemones (crassicorn, dahlia—oh! I forget). And at the end of my little excursion into memory I came upon the morning when I put some sanded, opaque bits of jelly, lying on the rim of the sea into a glass collecting jar, and to my amazement and delight they turned into Ctenophors—alive, swimming, and iridescent! You must imagine a tiny soap

bubble about the size of a filbert with four series of plates or combs arranged regularly on the soap bubble from its north to its south pole, and flashing spasmodically in unison as they beat the water.

*June 3rd*, 1919.—To-morrow I go to another nursing home.

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*The rest is silence.*

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BILLING AND SONS, LTD., GUILDFORD AND ES