

7/9/26

S.S. "Osterley"
Indian Ocean

Dear Mummy

We crossed the equator last night, or rather in the early hours of this morning, & although there has been rain part of the day — real tropical sheets of it last night à la Conrad, and a breeze all day it's darn hot sitting down to write in my dinner rig-out although the Sydney lads reckon it's bonzer weather. I don't wear anything but my white shirt & trousers and my blazer all day & manage to keep reasonably cool except in games, but my oath! this dressing up makes a man sweat like a pig. Hoping Auntie will excuse the Anglo-Saxon. Likewise you! Talking of clothes, I don't think a man needs many dress-shirts — three are plenty, & two would be enough for all the wear they get; but you could do with about six pairs of white trousers. If you mess around with quoits your hands get filthy in five minutes & even if you don't wipe them on your trousers you have to hitch same up sometimes or delve into your pocket for a handkerchief, or you lean against a rope; and the net result is that you look rough. I have a good mind to resurrect my shorts & wear them — only it might cause fevered protest from all the old girls on board. Shirts are all right, because although they look decent for one wearing I wash them in the morning alternately & hang them up in my cabin & they're dry in about three hours. The same with ^{white} socks every two or three mornings. And you get all your shoes cleaned for you; though it isn't invariably a safe procedure. I had mine pinched two nights ago, but I bought a new pair on the ship (you can purchase all sorts of general merchandise at the barber's shop from the novels of H.J. Locke to fancy soap) & the purser said he would give me a certificate for the insurance people so I'm not worrying much. A I brought too many pyjamas and not enough books. So much for the Great Clothes Question. Also I forgot to get any sleeve-links, & I've consistently forgotten to buy them at ports of call so far. I think I'll have to try the barber's shop, which I never thought of before or I might get something classy in an Eastern genre at Colombo. Colombo is going to be a bit of a problem though; we have been making bad time against contrary swells, & though we are scheduled to get there at 1 o'clock tomorrow we're not expected to do it till 3, & we're leaving again at 4 the next morning. So it looks as though we'll have to concentrate on the nightlife of the East, east of Suez. I thought I'd be able to get some films developed & printed there & enclose in my letter from there, but I don't think there's much hope of that now. I didn't take any pictures in Australia, but I took a few on the ship the other day. I haven't struck much out of the ordinary so far for photographs.

I'm trying to write this late at night in the smoking-room & at the same time eavesdrop on a very interesting conversation about Lord Curzon between the administrator of Fiji & a nephew of that eminent, but dead statesmen. Said nephew has the Curzon beak & pots of money (never done a day's work in his life, according to what an officer told me) but sits in the smoking-room all day and most of the night absorbing drinks. He has a most astonishing facility in disposing of same & must be a perfect gold-mine to the bar. I heard from another source that he is a brilliant scholar but I never saw a weaker-looking, more idiotic-sounding specimen in all my life. The perfect sponge. Name of Duggan.

Since leaving Fremantle we have had a fairly tranquil existence; no rough weather & very good for deck games. I polished off the last of my letters of thanks & posted them there so I am now able to write to anybody I like to, but gosh! writing in this weather is hard work. Fremantle is a ghastly hole. We spent most of the time here discussing whether we would go to Perth or not. As a preliminary we ambled up to the Fremantle gaol & inspected the exterior of that; & then with the full intention of going to Perth we caught a tram to circle round to the nearest railway station, the railway-bridge over the river having busted. But by the time we had gone as far as the tram went & found that we had gone too far & argued a good deal more & found the railway station we decided it was too late to go. It's a fifty minutes' train journey. And then we bought some chocolate & peanuts & a Perth evening paper & decided that a town that could produce such a paper wasn't worth going to anyhow. So we ate peanuts all along the road to a tram junction & caught a tram on spec to its terminus — & low & behold! it landed us on the uttermost outskirts of the suburbs of the place, practically in the country in some scraggly bush where we disembarked & picked wild flowers & ate a few more peanuts. And then on the way back the sunset gave even that despondent place with its dirty river a sort of beauty. So we thought we had profited by its existence all we reasonably could; & we'd only spent about 1/6 each (party consisted of ~~the Great~~ ^{tunclear:} the three Australians & me). We were only there four hours in all — 3 to 7. The glory of the place appears to be the gaol. They had an execution there quite recently; & one of the ballads I bought on the Domain

at Sydney was descriptive of this melancholy occasion.

Wednesday 8/9/26 9.45am. We can see a ship and very faintly land, & I am getting really excited for the first time. It is a pleasant sensation to be crossing part of the earth that has really some history behind it & not just a few twopenny. ha'penny scraps & tenth-rate politics. This reminds me I am thinking I may change my work when I get to England & consult the birds in charge ~~for~~ to something in political theory; however we'll see, — the NZ Coy still may be the handiest subject to work on.

When we left Fremantle we proceeded to elect a sports committee & make our lives miserable. It seems to be the accepted idea that you can't do anything or enjoy anything on board unless you have organised sports & screw a whacking big subscription out of everyone to pay for prizes and a band for the very small minority to dance to. £1 they charged men, 15/- women, ½ price to Colombo, so I entered for pretty well everything to get my money's worth. Won most of my first rounds too, but got wiped out later on. The best game is quoit-tennis, which you play with a net & a single quoit, singles or doubles, scoring the same as in tennis. This would be a good game to ring up at home down on the lawn. Ring quoits isn't bad, either some birds do wonders at it. But after quoit-tennis cricket is the best; we have nets rigged up from four o'clock in the afternoon, & I am developing quite a pretty talent as a bowler, I invariably get Whinfield, the 3rd off, out — I think when I'm bowling him he gets an inferiority complex. They have a bath about 15 ft by 10 rigged up in the back-deck now, too; so that after playing you can go for a wallow — not much good trying to swim as four strokes gets you there & back; & if you get about six people in it there isn't much room for the water. Still it's about the best thing to do on board to work up a sweat for a couple of hours & then hop into the bath. It gives you an appetite too — my word! you do eat on board. It gives a man a unique opportunity to get experience with food, the meaning of culinary French, & so on; & the combinations you can work out are astonishing. Potege à la Russe, [*unclear*: Samoan], sauce [*unclear*: Tartare.] Roast Turkey, ice-cream & coffee — there's one sample. We are experimenting a bit with liqueurs, too; each bloke shouts all round, @ 6d a head, now & again. Crème de menthe & Benedictine we have tried so far, the first sickly pepperminty stuff but the Benedictine was good. Don't tell Bobby Stout.

The funniest thing about this sports committee is what I have noticed before — that sporting leaders find them most comfortable rendezvous & sympathetic environment the bar. The president a dissipated cove called Moss, who seems to experience considerable difficulty in keeping his trousers up, announced at the first meeting that their object must be to prevent any of the passengers from accumulating mould. His own method apparently is to wash it off internally — he was the one man on board bar Ld Curzon who took no part whatsoever in the sports (except to make allegedly humorous announcements). But his brightest remark ~~to~~ was so full of humour that we nearly choked, that is, those of us who hadn't swooned. "There are a number of young men on board" he said to someone "who are very fortunate to be able to rub up against men of the world & so broaden their minds. I refer to the students" If you could only see some of the men he refers too! I have seen them. And my oath! The secretary is the one genuine example of the genus moron we have on board; one or two of the others are pretty batty, but they're John Stuart Mills to him. However I'm ~~am~~ getting fed up with commenting on this type. The treasurer is a cheerful contrast, a bloke from Melbourne, just married, going to London off his own bat to do chemistry & we shoved on Duncan & Henning as a method of paying off scores. The girls on the committee are about the silliest asses on the boat; those off it are quite decent some of them, a darn sight better than the average of the men. Apart from sports they think up batty things like guessing the names of towns, head-dress competitions, a very feeble mock trial etc. I got a certain amount of fun out of the head-dress affair; I made a splendiferous general's hat out of the newspaper I bought at Fremantle & three different colours of crepe paper for gold braid & plumes. But you get a darn sight more fun out of doing what you like than out of these organised amusements, if you can call them such. I play the piano now & again, but the flash mob generally have it in hand, with gems of concerted melody like "Where is my baby tonight?" One of them, a girl called Berry ~~with~~ ^{who has} a mother with an expansive bosom, a mission to manage the ship, & a talent for "kindly consenting" to do things, & also the silliest giggle I have heard in my life, has some jolly good songs though, Purcell, W.H. Hadow, & 18th Century French, & I am hoping ~~her~~ to get her to sing them some time. In fact she has promised to do so, but points out that with all the business that she has to get through it is hard to find time. Going to England to be married, I believe. Brave man.

The brightest thing that we have in the way of entertainments is the pictures — one of the largest cinema-theatres in the Indian Ocean. We have had two lots since Fremantle, a primitive Harold Lloyd, fashion parades, Felix the Cat, a comic dog of the same type, St. Paul's Cathedral, natural history of bees, & a real dinkum thrill in the way of a serial, The Fortieth Door. It would take all day to elucidate the plot; the hero is a young Yank archaeologist in Egypt, scholar, sportsman, & gentleman, who spends most of his time however combatting the forces of evil. He is half-killed at the end of every reel, but gets up & does the most incredible feats of nerve & superhuman strength at the beginning of the next. Delving for an explanation I could only find it in the surmise that being a Yank with the above-mentioned attributes, his strength is of the strength of ten

because his heart is pure. Attempted assassinations, sudden dark vengeance, patent trapdoors in gloomy dungeon floors, asphyxiating prison- cells, Egyptian generals with hatchet-faces & secret [*unclear: seraphines*], heroine fairer than the skies, supposed ½ French ½ Egyptian but manifestly Yank of the baby doll type — my word! a man feels limp as rag at the end of each reel. After which we press the button in the smoking-room & call in a lordly manner for a lemon-squash. They throw in sandwiches, so it is a cheap supper at 6d a head. I must say, to recur to the food question, that we get fed very well, & that there isn't much need to bring anything extra in the first — you simply can't eat it. Thus I have still a good half of Auntie's biscuits left, & some lemons I bought in Melbourne. We get grapefruit & some other fruit every morning, & can have it to finish off with at other meals; & ice-cream now that it is hot at 11 every morning. The trouble is to get cold water except at meal times; & we can have iced tea or coffee then if we like. But it's not much good. Iced soup is another thing I've never struck before. In contrast to this palatial diet & service I believe the third class gets it pretty rough. I went through their dining-saloon the other day to get to the baggage room; & Lor' bless you, a delicately- nurtured bloke like me recoiled. It is going to come with a bit of a crash to bach on scholarship-money after this. However, you can see that you needn't worry after the boy's health yet awhile.

The third are a very mixed lot, Dagos, Turks, h Hindus, plain Australians, & one bird whose language nobody knows. An Italian walked on at Fremantle in an aimless sort of way & shot himself two nights afterwards; & two or three nights ago another (a turk I think this time) hopped overboard & was just grabbed by the leg as he disappeared. The officers say they get a suicide every voyage more or less. It certainly seems a waste to shoot yourself when the whole Indian Ocean is just over the side. There is also a German family going home to the Fatherland for a holiday — Herr & Frau & 16 children all from Brisbane, where they have left two more kids to look after the house. This is heroic work. The only thing is that the Disarmament Commission may keep them out lest the German army get too big.

We can see land stretched out all along the starboard side of the ship now — thank heaven for some hills. I never saw a more god forsaken place than Australia in this respect. I see it is 11 — I must break of for five minutes & go & collect my ice-cream or I shall be melting all over the page.

I had two ice-creams, & now we can see the beach & a long ~~line~~ line of bush behind it, & the hills are [*unclear: stunner*].

I forgot to tell you about the cricket-match, officers v ladies which the former arranged to let the letter win by 17 runs to 11, the officers further appearing in fancy dress, batting left-handed & using only one hand to field with. They are past-masters in the art of fancy- dress — a few of them would be the making of the capping procession. Our little Whinfield was about the funniest & also the vulgarest of the bunch, leading Mrs Berry to reiterate in tones of distress — 'I don't like that man — I think he's horrible!' However apparently no harm came to [*unclear: hurt*] her little daughter who sat & giggled away ad nauseum as per usual. Whn somehow managed to get a eø weird collection of bunions on his legs & turned his toes in, wore a bowler hat & a white dinner jacket & nothing much else but a bathing suit so far as I could see, except long stockings, which left a gap before the bathing dress started. The others were also suitably attired. By gum! it was about the best cricket-match I've ever seen.

I [*unclear: ve*] haven't read much — Davies' [*unclear: hang*] book & some of Hardy's poems that's about all. So I can't give you any intellectual discussion. I [*unclear: 've*] will now conclude — the Orsava will pick this up in two or three days, I think & you will get it about the time I advance to the conquest of London with love to all & sundry I am etc

Jack