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23/1/27

My dear Mummy,

The ultimate mystery to me is the way the NZ mail behaves. Now if you want a fit subject on which to exercise your noble pen in the columns of the Evening Post, here is a chance for you. I don't believe I've got it on the same day in the week more than three or four times since I got here. In the first month or so I gathered that Thursday was the normal day for it to arrive, since when it has come on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday & Saturday — once it came on the preceding Tuesday, but on the other occasions ~~about~~ from two to five days late. What happens this week? I hadn't had a mail since my last Saturday in M/C so naturally I looks in the Times on Wednesday expecting to see "Incoming Mails : Tomorrow. NZ" Nothing. I looks in on ~~unclear:~~ ~~Friday]~~ Thursday — Nothing. I looks in on Friday. "Saturday Jan 22. N.Z." . Saturday morning I leap out of bed & tear downstairs to the hall table. Nothing. I get into a tube & blow down to the Bank of N.Z. (a) to draw a cheque (b) to look for mail. Notice up "NZ mail due on ~~S~~ Monday Jan 24th". On these occasions if Duncan happens to be with me he draws his hat down over his ears & walks hurriedly in the other direction. Luckily for the boy's morals he rarely is. Then last night as we were all (personnel to be explained later) tailing out of the door to the Opera what should there be but one letter on the hall-stand addressed to me — from NZ! I'm blown if I can understand it, bad weather in the North Atlantic withstanding. I see that the NZ postmaster general has made arrangements to send mails via Australia when it offers a better dispatch, & it certainly seems about time. Still if you have an overmastering desire to enter into public controversy I daresay you could get a tick or two out of the Post. The net result yesterday was that I went along to Bumpus' very peeved & to console myself bought a very flash edition of Selected Essays of Edward Thomas, with twenty four wood engravings by R. Ashwin Maynard & Horace W. Berry, one of three hundred copies(Nos 51 — 350) printed on Van Elsder paper & bound in blue buckram. Orders may be sent through a Bookseller or direct to R. Ashwin Maynard, at the Gregynog Press, Newtown, Montgomeryshire. I asked the cove in B's if he would sell it to me half-price, but he courteously declined, so I had to fork out. I've been considering it since the beginning of December. It is a very beautiful book. It appears that two rich Welsh sisters having cash to play around with, want to publish fine editions of Welsh authors, so they have got this press going. Most of it is in English. They have published a hummer George Herbert & an equally good Vaughan, which I hadn't seen till yesterday, & which I may get some day. The trouble is that books are so darn expensive, the ones you want. There is a great book out on climbing, On High Hills by Geoffrey Winthrop Young — 18/-, which I must get some day. I must wait for the next Times Book Club sale; but cripes, the state of 9/10 of the books you see there makes you think that the bourgeoisie who can afford the T. Bk Club have just as dirty fingers as the low proletariat, & use their ~~unclear:~~ ~~library]~~ books to prop up the window or the table or to throw at the cat just as frequently. Or pour water or their beer & spread jam over the cover with quite as much impartiality. You see it is not much use having dilettante tastes, wherever you live. You ask Daddy & see if he doesn't bear me out. Which reminds me; quite a long time ago Frannie told me with every appearance of extreme joy that her parents in law to be had given the young bride & bridegroom £50. Now I recollect that you gave Geoffrey the same amount so if this is going to be a habit of yours why not send me the cheque right away? It would come in very handy during the next year or so; while if you wait till some unscrupulous girl trips me up & smothers me what would be the use of it? This is an aspect of the question very well worth thinking over, I think. Auntie might like to do the same thing with her cheque, not to mention Auntie Win, Keithles & other lesser benefactors. I reckon I have saved over Keith's wedding — I told Frannie I would give the young couple a quid to do what they liked with; she said (she appeared to be a bit peeved with me) that she would never lower herself so far as to take a penny let alone a quid from my hands for herself, but but seeing that Beagle was my brother she supposed she would have to allow him to take it. Well, I don't see ^{feel} any call to me to set up Keithles in ~~M~~ matrimony, him so young too, when I am struggling for dear life in a foreign land; so I reckon that's a £1 saved. You can't say I didn't offer them a wedding-present & a generous one too; so you needn't start slinging off any moral back chat at me when you answer this as to what's done & what's not done. Bourgeois morality. Me & Father Johnson, we've freed ourself from all that stuff.

The weather has been a bit more wintry lately, & we have even had snow, which has looked very nice lying in the squares, but less nice after ten minutes traffic along the road, or when you ~~bg~~ begin to skid over the steps of the house. We went out to Golder's Green & Carmen the other night; the theatre is next door to the Tube

Station, but there is a bit of inclined pavement between the two; about 11.30 we started to traverse this, when the night was nice & freezing; when whoosh! my feet shot from under me & my centre of gravity after remaining quite poised in the air for a sickening second thudded to the ground — Duncan turned round to say Well, what the —! when his feet also suddenly fled from under him. However with immense effort of coordination of brain & muscle he managed to regain them, so the incident was robbed of its logical climax. But the British were ever an illogical race, as Dean Inge remarks with great acuteness & originality. It is a noble thing to give free entertainment to the general public, & the mark of a noble mind to do so ungrudgingly. Well, that's me. What you say of my early upbringing (in connection with our house-motto) I regard as profoundly true. Give to the uttermost & expect nothing back. You don't get anything anyhow. We have had fogs too & mists without number & rain & sleet & smoke & [unclear: grime] unending. The fogs are funny some times. I came back to the house one lunch time last week to get a paper I forgot; it had been very clear all the morning along the Museum way but coming along Guilford St, a few yards away from here I could see a solid bank of fog over all this district cut off quite sharply from the clear air like this; Sketch diagram of fog it had been foggy like that here all the morning, the woman who cleans the place told me. Then a very light wind started to blow, & five minutes afterwards I walked back to the museum practically in black night. When I got to the M, there was fog all round, but standing in the courtyard I looked up & clear sky. So what do you make of that? Fair dinkum, it's a queer country; the people are queer & their customs are queer & their weather's queer. It's all very strange.

I have had a pretty busy fortnight, which accounts for my writing desperately in the last two or three days before the mail closes — the confounded thing always closes with clockwork regularity — at 2am on Wednesday. Apart from work, which occupies a relatively unimportant part in my scheme of higher education, after all, I have had a full measure of concerts etc. I hardly ever seem to have time to do any reading; about a book a fortnight is my average — I have been reading C.E. Montague's *The Right Place* & jolly good too, & have been week getting half-way through it; I bet even Daddy couldn't beat that. Oh I had better say with regard to work, that Newton improves a lot on acquaintance; he is a great teacher, I think, with an extraordinary range of knowledge, & he puts it across well. He can be darned nasty if he likes, but he always explains that it's for your own good, if that's any consolation. He is a lot more use to a cove than Pollard, anyhow. The only N.Z. teacher he has any use for is Hight, whom he admires; I'd feel sorry for old F.P. if he got into Newton's seminar for ½ hour. Most of us are colonials or yanks too; the English high-brow girls I have met give me the pip, & the men on the whole aren't much of an improvement; give me a Boer or an Aussie any day.

To get back to the important things of life: The British National Opera Company (hereinafter referred to as the B.N. O.C.) has been having a fortnight's run out at Golder's Green, with practically a different opera every night. Such were the exigencies of circumstance that I couldn't go at all the first night week, but last Monday I went to the *Mastersingers*, which was very good. They don't go in for highly-paid stars, but the general ensemble & presentation is as good as anything you're likely to get I gather, & it was good enough for me, in my first modest introduction to Wagner. It started at ¼ past 7 & finished ½ past 11, & all for 2/- in the gods. You see here both the high regard I have for quality & the passionate lust for quantity which animates me. On Tuesday I was somewhere else; on Wednesday I wanted to go to the *Marriage of Figaro*, but stayed home instead to do some German, a fiendish language which leads me to a very simple & satisfying explanation of why the Germans lost the war — the poor cows couldn't communicate with one another. Then on Thursday the B.B.C. had a big concert on at the Albert Hall; Sir Hamilton Harty brought the Halle Choir down to do Berlioz's *Requiem*, in addition to which he had an orchestra of 150 & four brass bands. I think you have read Berlioz's *Autobiography*, so I needn't say anything about the thing. Cripes! when the brass bands all got together in the *Tuba Mirum* it was worth hearing! These brass players were all picked from crack north country bands, too. The choir was first-rate, with a first-rate soloist for the solitary solo, Tudor Davies. The rest of the programme was ^{also} Berlioz of whom Hamilton Harty has made a speciality, finishing up with the good old *Rakoczy March*; with brass once more to the fore. In the orchestra for this 2nd half he had 13 trumpets, 9 trombones, 14 doublebasses, & twelve drums, while I couldn't be bothered counting such things as cellos & fiddles. And all playing as one man too. This is the real stuff. On Friday we went to *Carmen*; couldn't get into the Gods & finished up by paying 3/- to stand at the back of the pit. However it was worth it to see the thing for the first time, although *Carmen* herself was more of a big fat lump, to quote the *White Headed Boy* than she should have been. The great Eugene Goossens sen. conductor. The evening was also notable for the aforementioned exercise in skating. Last night was supposed to be *Tannhauser*. We met the Beebes at a dago chophouse in Soho, one Poggioli's, & invited them round to tea on toasted crumpets provided by us, & custard tart kindly contributed by [unclear: Mr] McGrath who also came. It was the Beebes who told me about Poggioli's; you can occasionally get a jolly good feed there for 1/-; but whatever you get you get plenty of it & well-cooked. The B's occasionally order one helping & two plates. Beebe has improved a bit, & there is nothing wrong with Beatrice B. Well, we had a terrific burst on crumpets (14 for Gd), though it made great inroads on our butter, &

then all trailed up to Euston to tube it out to Golder's Green. And then when we got there they had changed the bill to Faust & there wasn't a seat to be had in the place. Nevertheless a queue had formed up outside the gods door — these pathetic English queues! As soon as an Englishman sees a door in a large building he automatically stands outside it and waits, & other people come & stand behind him in the most patient, well-organised, well-bred way, without seemingly knowing or caring in the least what they are waiting for. And the fools who ran the show hadn't the sense to put out a house full notice anywhere. So we stood and watched a heaving crowd jammed in the porch & struggling to get into the expensive seats; & then stood round in the snow & argued about what we'd do next; which ended in our piling into the tube for Tottenham Court Rd, emerging from whence we drew lots to see who should have the deciding voice in what to do. McGrath won & was going to take us to some picture he'd seen & was raving about, when I said with one of my usual brain-waves, I'll tell you what, the Criterion doesn't start till 8.40; Let's all go to the White Bearded Boy; so we all piled into a bus & dashed down the Charing Cross Rd & Shaftesbury Avenue to Piccadilly & by dint of walking round & round the block in which the Criterion Theatre & the Criterion Restaurant & the Criterion Palais de Danse & the Criterion Whatnot are situated found our way into the pit & all for 3/-. And by jingo! it was a good play. Of course you have it at home, but I don't think I've ever seen better acting — it was pretty well all perfectly done. I must say I'm darn sorry you & Daddy can't see some of these plays. Pygmalion started a season last week, & Nigel Playfair is running a brilliant (according to all the papers) revival of Farquahar's Beaux Stratagem at Hammersmith; while such is the multiplicity of our engagements that we haven't had time to see Macbeth yet. However we hope to get all these three done in the next fortnight plus a considerable number of concerts & lectures. It was the Irish Players wot done the White Headed Boy; I will send you out the programme some time.

St-Martin-in-the-Fields has been putting over some good stuff lately, too. Yesterday their choral society gave Mozarts' Requiem Mass & a setting of one of the psalms by Gustav Holst, which was good rousing stuff & brought in the organ & made me wildly excited — I haven't been to any organ-recitals yet, but must work in some soon. The Saturday before they had one of the crack pianists, Myra Hess, giving a recital & great stuff it was too — a French suite by Bach, then César Franck's Prelude, chorale, & Fugue, which you know quite well, & then the Sunken Cathedral & some modern Spanish stuff & another bit of Bach, a transcription by herself of one of the chorales. She is good. So much I think for past concerts, though I have got about four more ticked off for next week, including the [*unclear*: Leuen] Quartet, who are giving a series in which they are going to play all Beethoven's quartets in honour of his centenary. There is a great exhibition of Flemish & Belgian art at the Royal Academy to which I must go soon; & they are running a small supplementary exhibition at the Museum of Flemish illuminated mss & miniatures — glorious things; it would be worth a cove's while to take a trip to England purely to see these. They have a big room full of such things & next door to it one full of autograph letters of celebrated kings & authors & other criminals, Scott's last journals & mss of Lord knows how many famous books & early printed books & so on & so forth ad- infinitum. I have had to walk through these rooms on my way to & from the newspaper room in the B.M. where I have been working for two or three days, so you see that the earnest researcher's road is not entirely free from pitfalls. In connection with all this art I may say that I am now sitting to McGrath for my portrait — the one I sent out he did in about 5 mins, so you had better not judge of his abilities from that. He is an erratic cove in the extreme when it comes to doing any work, but after considering most of the schools of architecture in England & Europe & turning them down as inadequate, he has settled down as permanently as possible for him to practical bricklaying & plumbing at the Brixton school of building. Duncan continues to strike the dinkum oil at the L.S.E. & I buzz along there sometimes. There is another Fabian series of lectures in progress now at Essex Hall to most of which I am going. Debate on Thursday between G.K.C & Lady Rhondda, with Shaw in the chair; I have been dragged into what calls itself a study-circle on the Pan Europa scheme organised by the Universities League of Nations Union which is interesting, at Toynbee Hall, though I stayed away this afternoon to get this letter off my chest on view of the many calls on my time during the next week. Meanwhile the air is filling with fog once more, & although the days are getting perceptibly longer, all I can see as I look out of the window now is dark dirtiness, with one street-lamp glimmering inadequately over on the other side of the square. Also my feet have gone very cold, so I think I shall stop. I shall be able to finish when I get your letter tomorrow. If it comes.

24/1/27 Your letter turned up all right this morning, plus the Old Clay Patch, for which many thanks — I was very glad to see it. You seem to be having a pretty fine time together, [*unclear*: bar] the mosquitoes; still, I don't suppose Daddy minds them. No doubt you are well through Shakespeare by now & probably well into Gibbon; so that's ~~will be~~ one more chance for your intellectual pride to manifest itself. I suppose you put a hairpin in at every second page to mark something for me to read out of sheer force of habit. Well, I'm thinking of going out and buying a 5 bob Shakespeare myself & swallowing the whole lot, just to score off you this time. No, I haven't been along to see Old J.M. Robertson yet, but I dare say I shall make time before long. You don't know what a busy man I am. Every day & every night booked up this week & here I am writing for dear life at

my mail all tonight. I have just heard that the Kingsway Hall was booked up to the last seat a week ago for the G.K.C. debate; so that sets me free on Thursday for an exciting concert at the Queen's Hall. You see the fearful choices I have to make. Nothing much else to comment on in your letters, though all very interesting. Glad Daddy liked my Coming Home. I see by this morning's Times that the NZ Times has caved in to the Dominion. I hope Morris remembers he owes me CASH. I should like to know the secret history of the business. Well, so long.

With love from

Jack

P.S. 25/1/27. I quite forgot to say anything about your birthday, Mummy. Many happy returns of same. I hope the parcel Messrs. Bumpus are sending out on my a/c will ~~not~~ reach you not too far behind the date. The Rogers is for you as well — I got it for 6d outside Dobell's shop. The Peacock I thought Daddy might like, & he can have them for cost price i.e. 3/-; only the covers want cleaning up a bit. I am sending you also some B.M. postcards which ought to please you, & a picture of Pepys from the National Gallery. Hoping this finds you as it leaves me etc.