

W. N. BARBELLION

THE JOURNAL OF A
DISAPPOINTED MAN

Wilhelm Nero Pilate Barbellion

The Journal of a Disappointed Man

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
PART I – THE JOURNAL BEGINS WHEN ITS AUTHOR IS A LITTLE OVER 13 YEARS OLD	7
1903	8
1904	10
1905	11
1906	12
1907	14
1908	16
1909	20
1910	22
1911	28
PART II – IN LONDON	39
1912	39
1913	47
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	49

Wilhelm Nero Pilate Barbellion

The Journal of a Disappointed Man

INTRODUCTION

By H.G. WELLS

Your egoist, like the solitary beasts, lives only for himself; your altruist declares that he lives only for others; for either there may be success or failure but for neither can there be tragedy. For even if the altruist meets nothing but ingratitude, what has he to complain of? His premises abolish his grounds of complaint. But both egoist and altruist are philosophical abstractions. The human being by nature and necessity is neither egoist nor altruist; he trims a difficult course between the two; for the most part we are, within the limits of our powers of expression, *egotists*, and our desire is to think and if possible talk and write about this marvellous experiment of ourselves, with all the world – or as much as we can conveniently assemble – for audience. There is variety in our styles. Some drape the central figure; some let it rather appear than call attention to it; some affect a needless frankness: "I am an egotist, mind you, and I pretend nothing else"; some by adopting a pose with accessories do at least develop so great and passionate an interest in the accessories as to generalise and escape more or less completely from self. An egotism like an eggshell is a thing from which to escape; the art of life is that escape. The fundamental art of life is to recover the sense of that great self-forgetful continuous life from which we have individually budded off. Many people have done this through religion, which begins with a tremendous clamour to some saviour god or other to recognise us and ends in our recognition of him; or through science, when your egotist begins with: "Behold me! I, I your humble servant, am a scientific man, devoted to the clear statement of truth," and ends with so passionate a statement of truth that self is forgotten altogether.

In this diary of an intensely egotistical young naturalist, tragically caught by the creeping approach of death, we have one of the most moving records of the youthful aspects of our universal struggle. We begin with one of those bright schoolboys that most of us like to fancy we once were, that many of us have come to love as sons or nephews or younger brothers, and this youngster is attracted by natural science, by the employments of the naturalist and by the thought of being himself some day a naturalist. From the very beginning we find in this diary the three qualities, from the narrowest to broadest. "Observe me," he says to himself, "I am observing nature." There is the self-conscious, self-centred boy. But he also says "I am observing nature!" And at moments comes the clear light. He forgets himself in the twilight cave with the bats or watching the starlings in the evening sky, he becomes just you and I and the mind of mankind gathering knowledge. And the diary, as the keen edge of untimely fate cuts down into the sensitive tissue, shows us presently, after outcries and sorrow and darkness of spirit, the habits of the observer rising to the occasion. Not for him, he realises, are the long life, the honours of science, the Croonian lecture, the listening Royal Society, one's memory embalmed in specific or generic names, the sure place in the temple of fame, that once filled his boyish dreams. But here is something close at hand to go on observing manfully to the end, in which self may be forgotten, and that is his own tormented self, with desire still great and power and hope receding. "I will go on with this diary," I read between the lines. "You shall have at least one specimen, carefully displayed and labelled. Here is a recorded unhappiness. When you talk about life and the rewards of life and the justice of life and its penalties, what you say must square with this."

Such is what we have here. It will be going beyond the necessities of this preface to expatiate upon a certain thread of unpremeditated and exquisite beauty that runs through the story this diary

tells. To all sensitive readers it will be plain enough, and those who cannot see it plain do not deserve to have it underlined for them, that, still unseeing, they may pretend to see. Nor need we dilate upon the development of the quality of this diary from the rather fussy egotism of the earlier half. But it may be well to add a few explanatory facts that the opening chapters rather take for granted. Barbellion began life at a material as well as a physical disadvantage; neither of his parents were sturdy people, his mother died at last of constitutional heart weakness, and his father belonged to that most unfortunate class, the poor educated, who live lives of worry in straitened circumstances. Barbellion's father was a newspaper reporter in a west country town, his income rarely exceeded a couple of hundred pounds a year; the educational facilities of the place were poor, and young Barbellion had to get such learning as he could as a day boy at a small private school, his father supplementing this meagre training and presently taking him on as an apprentice reporter. How the passion for natural science arose does not appear in this diary; we already find the naturalist formed in the first schoolboy entries. An uncle, a chemist, seems to have encouraged the tendency, and to have given him textbooks and other help. Somehow at any rate he acquired a considerable amount of knowledge; by the time he was eighteen he was already publishing quite excellent observations of his own in such periodicals as the *Zoologist*, and by the time he was twenty he could secure an appointment as assistant naturalist to the director of a well-known marine biological station. It was a success, as the reader will learn, gained only to be renounced. His father was ill and he had to stand by his family; our economical country cannot afford to make biologists out of men who can earn a living as hack reporters. Poverty and science are sisters wherever the flag of Britain waves; for how could the rich live if we wasted money on that sort of thing? But the dream was not altogether abandoned, and in 1911 Barbellion got a post, one of the dozen or so of rare and coveted opportunities to toil in a scientific atmosphere that our Empire affords; he secured an assistantship at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, to which a living wage was attached, a fair equivalent to a reporter's earnings. The rest of the story needs no helping out. Let me only add that since 1911 Barbellion, in spite of his steadily diminishing strength, has published articles in both British and American periodicals, that entirely justify the statement that in him biological science loses one of the most promising of its recent recruits. His scientific work is not only full and exact but it has those literary qualities, the grace, the power of handling, the breadth of reference, which have always distinguished the best English biological work, and which mark off at once the true scientific man from the mere collector and recorder of items. With this much introduction Barbellion may be left to tell the tragedy of his hopes and of the dark, unforeseen, unforeseeable, and inexplicable fate that has overtaken him.

PART I – THE JOURNAL BEGINS WHEN ITS AUTHOR IS A LITTLE OVER 13 YEARS OLD

[The Following are Selected Entries.]

1903

January 3.

Am writing an essay on the life-history of insects and have abandoned the idea of writing on "How Cats Spend their Time."

January 17.

Went with L – out catapult shooting. While walking down the main road saw a Goldfinch, but very indistinctly – it might not have been one. Had some wonderful shots at a tree creeper in the hedge about a foot away from me. While near a stream, L – spotted what he thought to be some Wild Duck and brought one down, hitting it right in the head. He is a splendid shot. We discovered on examining it that it was *not* Wild Duck at all but an ordinary tame Wild Duck – a hen. We ran away, and to-night L – tells me he saw the Farmer enter the poulterer's shop with the bird in his hand.

January 19.

Went to A – Wood with S – and L – . Saw a Barn Owl (*Strix flammea*) flying in broad daylight. At A – Woods, be it known, there is a steep cliff where we were all out climbing to inspect and find all the likely places for birds to build in, next spring. S-and I got along all right, but L – , being a bit too careless, let go his hold on a tree and fell headlong down. He turned over and over and seemed to us to pitch on the back of his neck. However, he got up as cheerfully as ever, saying, "I don't like that – a bit of a nasty knock."

February 8.

Joe became the mother of one kitten to-day. It was born at 1.20. It is a tiny little thing. One would almost call it deformed. It is gray.

March 18.

Our Goldfinch roosts at 5.30. Joe's kitten is a very small one. "Magpie" is its name.

March 28.

Went our usual ramble. But we were unfortunate from the very beginning. First, when we reached the "Nightjar Field," we found there were two men at the bottom of it cutting the hedge, so we decided not to venture on, as Gimbo and Bounce were with us, and it would look like poaching. Later on, we came to a splendid wood, but had to withdraw hastily from it, an old farmer giving us a severe chase. There were innumerable rabbits in the wood, so, of course, the dogs barked hard. I gave them a sound beating when we got back out of danger, The old farmer is known as "Bale the Bell-hanger."

April 2.

I was glad yesterday to see the egg season so well in. I shall have to get blow-pipes and egg drills. Spring has really arrived and even the grasshoppers are beginning to stridulate, yet Burke describes these little creatures as being "loud and troublesome" and the chirp unpleasant. Like Samuel Johnson, he must have preferred brick walls to green hedges. Many people go for a walk and yet are unable to admire Nature simply because their power of observation is untrained. Of course some are not suited to the study at all and do not trouble themselves about it. In that case they should not talk of what they do not understand... I might have noticed that I have used the term "Study of Nature." But it cannot be called a *study*. It is a pastime of sheer delight, with naught but beautiful dreams and lovely thoughts, where we are urged forward by the fact that we are in God's world which He made for us to be our comfort in time of trouble... Language cannot express the joy and happy forgetfulness during a ramble in the country. I do not mean that all the ins and outs and exact knowledge of a naturalist are necessary to produce such delight, but merely the common objects – Sun, Thrush, Grasshopper, Primrose, and Dew.

April 21.

S – and I have made a little hut in the woods out of a large natural hole in the ground by a big tree. We have pulled down branches all around it and stuck in upright sticks as a paling. We are

training ivy to grow over the sticks. We smoke "Pioneer" cigarettes here and hide the packets in a hole under the roots of the tree. It's like a sort of cupboard.

August 6.

In the evening, S – and I cycled to S –, and when it was dark we went down on the rocks and lit a fire which crackled and burnt in the dusk of the evening... Intend to do a bit to Beetles these hols. Rev. J. Wood in the *B.O.P.* has incited me to take them up, and it is really time, for at present I am as ignorant as I can hang together of the Coleoptera.

December 24.

Went out with L – to try to see the squirrels again. We could not find one and were just wondering if we should draw blank when L – noticed one clinging to the bark of a tree with a nut in its mouth. We gave it a good chase, but it escaped into the thickest part of the fir tree, still carrying the nut, and we gave up firing at it. Later on, L – got foolishly mischievous – owing, I suppose, to our lack of sport – and unhinged a gate which he carried two yards into a copse, and threw it on the ground. Just then, he saw the Squirrel again and jumped over the hedge into the copse, chasing it from tree to tree with his catty. Having lost it, he climbed a fir tree into a Squirrel's drey at the top and sat there on the three top, and I, below, was just going to lift the gate back when I looked up and saw a farmer watching me, menacing and silent. I promptly dropped the gate and fled. L – from his Squirrel's drey, not knowing what had happened, called out to me about the nest – that there was nothing in it. The man looked up and asked him who he was and who I was. L – would not say and would not come down. The farmer said he would come up. L – answered that if he did he would "gob" [*i. e.* spit] on him. Eventually L – climbed down and asked the farmer for a glass of cider. The latter gave him his boot and L – ran away.

1904

January 23.

Went to the meet of the Stag hounds. Saw a hind in the stream at L – with not a horse, hound, or man in sight. It looked quite unconcerned and did not seem to have been hunted. I tried to head it, but a confounded sheep-dog got there before me and drove it off in the wrong direction. I *was* mad, because if I had succeeded in heading it and had there been a kill, I should have got a slot. Got home at 6.30, after running and walking fifteen miles – tired out.

April 5.

Just read *Stalky & Co.* Of Stalky, Beetle, and McTurk. I like Beetle best.

April 14.

Won the School Gymnasium championship (under fifteen).

August 25.

Had quite an adventure to-day. D – and I cycled to the Lighthouse at – . On the way, in crossing the sands near the Hospital Ship we espied a lame Curlew which could hardly fly. I gave chase, but it managed to scramble over a gut full of water about two yards wide. D – took off his boots and stockings and carried me over on his back, and we both raced across the sands to where the Curlew lay in an exhausted state. I picked him up and carried him off under my arm, like the boy with the Goose that laid the golden eggs. All the time, the bird screamed loudly, opening its enormously long bill and struggling to escape. Arrived at the gut again, we found that the incoming tide had made the gut wider and deeper so that we were cut off from the mainland, and found it necessary to wade across at once before it got deeper. As I had to carry a pair of field-glasses as well as my boots and stockings, I handed over the struggling bird to D – . While wading across, I suddenly sank to my waist in a sandpit. This frightened me, and I was glad to reach the other side in safety. But on arrival I found D – , but no Curlew. In wading across the current, he grew flurried and let it go. The tide swept it upstream, and the poor bird, I fear, perished by drowning... Knocked up my friend P – , who is skipper of the ship *N–* and asked him if he had a fire so that I could dry myself. He replied that they had no fire but that his "missus" would look out a pair of pants for me. Before falling in with this plan unconditionally, I thought it best to inspect the garment. However, it was quite clean – a pair of blue serge seaman's trousers, very baggy in the seat and far too long. But I turned up the bottoms and hid the baggy part underneath my overcoat. So, I got back home!

September 8.

Wet all day. Toothache.

September 9.

Toothache.

September 10.

Toothache.

September 11.

Toothache.

Xmas Day.

Mother and Dad wanted to give me one of G.A. Henty's, but, fearing lest I did not want it, they did not put my name in it, so that if I wished I could change it. Intend doing this. Am reading the *Origin of Species*. It requires careful study, but I understand it so far and shall go on.

December 26.

I have caught nothing in my traps yet. A little while ago I set a springe and two horse-hair nooses in the reed bed for water rails. I have bought a book on practical trapping.

1905

January 15.

I am thinking that on the whole I am a most discontented mortal. I get fits of what I call "What's the good of anything" mania. I keep asking myself incessantly till the question wears me out: "What's the good of going into the country *naturalising*? what's the good of studying so hard? where is it going to end? will it lead anywhere?"

February 17.

When I can get hold of any one interested in Natural History I talk away in the most garrulous manner and afterwards feel ashamed of myself for doing it.

May 15.

The Captain, in answer to my letter, advises me to join one of the ordinary professions and then follow up Nat. History as a recreation, or else join Science Classes at S. Kensington, or else by influence get a post in the Natural History Museum. But I shall see.

June 9.

During dinner hour, between morning and afternoon school, went out on the S – B – River Bank, and found another Sedge Warbler's nest. This is the fifth I have found this year. People who live opposite on the T – V – hear them sing at night and think they are Nightingales!

June 27.

On reviewing the past egg-season, I find in all I have discovered 232 nests belonging to forty-four species. I only hope I shall be as successful with the beetle-season.

August 15.

A hot, sultry afternoon, during most of which I was stretched out on the grass beside an upturned stone where a battle royal was fought between Yellow and Black Ants. The victory went to the hardy little Yellows... By the way, I held a Newt by the tail to-day and it emitted a squeak! So that the Newt has a voice after all.

August 26.

In bed with a feverish cold. I am afraid I have very few Nat. His. observations to make. It is hard to observe anything at all when lying in bed in a dull bedroom with one small window. Gulls and Starlings pass, steam engines whistle, horses' feet clatter down the street, and sometimes the voice of a passer-by reaches me, and often the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind. I can also hear my own cough echoing through my head, and, by the evening, the few pages of Lubbock's *Ants*, *Bees*, and *Wasps* which I struggled to get through during the day rattle through my brain till I am disgusted to find I have them by heart. The clock strikes midnight and I wait for the morning. Oh! what a weary world.

October 13.

Down with another cold. Feeling pretty useless. It's a wonder I don't develop melancholia.

November 6.

By 7 a.m. H – and I were down on the mudflats of the River with field-glasses, watching Waders. Ringed Plover in great numbers.

1906

January 13.

I have always had one ambition to be a great naturalist. That is, I suppose, a child's fancy, and I can see my folly in hoping for such great things. Still, there is no reason why I should not become a *learned* naturalist if I study hard. I hope that whatever I do I shall do in the hope of increasing knowledge of truth and not for my own fame. This entry may suggest that I am horribly conceited. But really I am as humble as possible. I know I have advanced beyond many others, and I know I shall advance further, but why be conceited?.. What a short life we have, and what heaps of glorious work to be done! Supper bell – so I am off... This reads like Isaac Walton's funny mixtures of the sublime with the ridiculous. He discusses abstract happiness and the best salmon sauce all in one breath.

February 26.

Although it is a grand achievement to have added but one jot or tittle to the sum of human knowledge it is grander still to have added a thought. It is best for a man to try to be both poet and naturalist – not to be too much of a naturalist and so overlook the beauty of things, or too much of a poet and so fail to understand them or even perceive those hidden beauties only revealed by close observation.

March 17.

Woke up this morning covered with spots, chest inflamed, and bad cough. H – carted me down from the Attic to the Lower Bedroom, and when the Dr. came he confirmed the general opinion that I had measles. It is simply disgusting, I have somewhere near 10,000 spots on me.

April 27.

Went to A – Woods, where, strange to say, I again saw Mary. But she had a tribe of friends with her, so did not speak, but watched her from a distance through my field-glasses.

May 8.

On interviewing my old friend Dr. H – , found I had chickenpox. This instead of being a Diary of a Naturalist's observations¹ will be one of infectious diseases.

May 28.

[Letter from Editor of *Countryside* to my brother saying that if the *Countryside* grew he might be able to offer me a billet. "Meanwhile he will be able to get along with his pen ... he will soon make a living and in time too a name."] This is a bit of all right. I shall always be on the look-out for a job on a N.H. Journal.

December 7.

Went to F – Duckponds. Flocks of Wigeon and Teal on the water. Taking advantage of a dip in the land managed to stalk them splendidly, and for quite a long time I lay among the long grass watching them through my field-glasses. But during the day Wild Duck are not particularly lively or interesting birds. They just rest serenely on the water like floating corks on a sheet of glass. Occasionally one will paddle around lazily. But for the most part they show a great ennui and seem so sleepy and tired that one would almost think to be able to approach and feed them out of the hand. But I moved one hand carelessly and the whole flock was up in a minute and whizzing across the river. Afterwards, at dusk, on returning to the ponds, they had come back; but now that the sun was down, those dozy, flapdoodle creatures of the afternoon were transformed into quacking, quarrelsome, blustering birds that squabbled and chivvied each other, every moment seizing the chance of a luxurious dip, flinging the ice-cold water off their backs with a shake of the tail that seemed to indicate the keenest-edged delight.

¹ Up to 1911, the Journal is mainly devoted to records of observations in general Natural History and latterly in Zoology alone.

It was now quite dark. A Snipe rose at my feet and disappeared into the darkness. Coots and Moorhens clekked, and a Little Grebe grew bold and began to dive and fish quite close to me, methodically working its way upstream and so quartering out its feeding area.

A happy half-hour! Alas! I enjoy these moments the more as they recede. Not often do I realise the living present. That is always difficult. It is the mere shades – the ghosts of the dead days – that are dearest to me.

Spent my last day at school. De Quincey says (or was it Johnson?) that whenever we do anything for the last time, provided we have done it regularly for years before, we are a little melancholy, even though it has been distasteful to us... True.

December 14.

Signed my Death Warrant, *i. e.*, my articles apprenticing me to journalism for five years. By Jove! I shall work frantically during the next five years so as to be ready at the end of them to take up a Natural History appointment.

1907

March 1.

As long as he has good health, a man need never despair. Without good health, I *might* keep a long while in the race, yet as the goal of my ambition grew more and more unattainable I should surely remember the words of Keats and give up: "There is no fiercer Hell than the failure of a great ambition."

March 14.

Have been reading through the Chemistry Course in the Harmsworth *Self-Educator* and learning all the latest facts and ideas about radium. I would rather have a clear comprehension of the atom as a solar system than a private income of £100 a year. If only I had eyes to go on reading without a stop!

May 1.

Met an old gentleman in E – , a naturalist with a great contempt for the Book of Genesis. He wanted to know how the Kangaroo leapt from Australia to Palestine and how Noah fed the animals in the Ark. He rejects the Old T. theogony and advised me to read "Darwin and J.G. Wood!" Silly old man!

May 22.

To Challacombe and then walked across Exmoor. This is the first time I have been on Exmoor. My first experience of the Moors came bursting in on me with a flood of ideas, impressions, and delights. I cannot write out the history of to-day. It would take too long and my mind is a palpitating tangle. I have so many things to record that I cannot record one of them. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to draw up an inventory of things seen and heard and trust to my memory to fill in the details when in the future I revert to this date. Too much joy, like too much pain, simply makes me prostrate. It wounds the organism. It is too much. I shall try to forget it all as quickly as possible so as to be able to return to egg-collecting and bird-watching the sooner as a calm and dispassionate observer. Yet these dear old hills. How I love them. I cannot leave them without one friendly word. I wish I were a shepherd!

At the "Ring of Bells" had a long yarn with the landlord, who, as he told us the story of his life, was constantly interrupted but never disconcerted by the exuberant loyalty and devotion of his wife – a stout, florid, creamy woman, who capped every story with: "Ees quite honest, sir; no 'arm at all in old Joshua."

June 5.

A half-an-hour of to-day I spent in a punt under a copper beech out of the pouring rain listening to Lady – 's gamekeeper at A – talk about beasts and local politics – just after a visit of inspection to the Heronry in the firs on the island in the middle of the Lake. It was delightful to hear him describing a Heron killing an Eel with "a dap on the niddick," helping out the figure with a pat on the nape of his thick bull neck.

July 22.

Am reading Huxley's *Crayfish*. H – brought me in that magnificent aculeate *Chrysis ignita*.

August 15.

Met *her* in the market with M – . I just lifted my hat and passed on. She has the most marvellous brown eyes I have ever seen. She is perfectly self-possessed. A bad sign this.

August 18.

When I feel ill, cinema pictures of the circumstances of my death flit across my mind's eye. I cannot prevent them. I consider the nature of the disease and all I said before I died – something heroic, of course!

August 31.

She is a ripping girl. Her eyes are magnificent. I have never seen any one better looking.

October 1.

In the afternoon dissected a Frog, following Milnes Marshall's Book. Am studying Chemistry and attending classes at the Evening School and reading Physiology (Foster's). Am also teaching myself German. I wish I had a microscope.

October 3.

What heaps of things to be done! How short the time to do them in! An appetite for knowledge is apt to rush one off one's feet, like any other appetite if not curbed. I often stand in the centre of the Library here and think despairingly how impossible it is ever to become possessed of all the wealth of facts and ideas contained in the books surrounding me on every hand. I pull out one volume from its place and feel as if I were no more than giving one dig with a pick in an enormous quarry. The Porter spends his days in the Library keeping strict vigil over this catacomb of books, passing along between the shelves and yet never paying heed to the almost audible susurrus of desire – the desire every book has to be taken down and read, to live, to come into being in somebody's mind. He even hands the volumes over the counter, seeks them out in their proper places or returns them there without once realising that a Book is a Person and not a Thing. It makes me shudder to think of Lamb's *Essays* being carted about as if they were fardels.

October 16.

Dissected an Eel. Cassell's *Natural History* says the Air-bladder is divided. This is not so in the one I opened. Found what I believe to be the lymphatic heart in the tail beneath the vent.

1908

March 10.

Am working frantically so as to keep up my own work with the daily business of reporting. Shorthand, type-writing, German, Chemistry classes, Electricity lectures, Zoology (including dissections) and field work. Am reading Mosenthal's *Muscle and Nerve*.

April 7.

Sectioned a leech. H – has lent me a hand microtome and I have borrowed an old razor. My table in the Attic is now fitted up quite like a Laboratory. I get up every morning at 6 a.m. to dissect. Have worked at the Anatomy of *Dytiscus*, *Lumbricus*, another Leech, and *Petromyzon fluvialis* all collected by myself. The "branchial basket" of *Petromyzon* interested me vastly. But it's a brute to dissect.²

May 1.

Cycled to the Lighthouse at the mouth of the Estuary. Underneath some telegraph wires, picked up a Landrail in excellent condition. The colour of the wings is a beautiful warm chestnut. While sweeping the sandhills with my field-glasses in search of Ring Plover, which nest there in the shingle beaches, I espied a Shelduck (*Tadorna*) squatting on a piece of level ground. On walking up cautiously, found it was dead – a Drake in splendid plumage and quite fresh and uninjured. Put him in my poacher's pocket, alongside of the Landrail. My coat looked rather bulgy, for a Shelduck is nearly as big as a Goose. Heard a Grasshopper Warbler – a rare bird in North – . Later, after much patient watching, saw the bird in a bramble bush, creeping about like a mouse.

On the sea-shore picked up a number of Sea Mice (*Aphrodite*) and bottled them in my jar of 70 per cent., as they will come in useful for dissection. Also found the cranium of a *Scyllium*, which I will describe later on.

Near the Lighthouse watched some fishermen bring in a large Salmon in a seine net worked from the shore. It was most exciting. Cycled down three miles of hard sand with the wind behind me to the village where I had tea and – as if nothing could stay to-day's good luck – met Margaret – . I showed her one by one all my treasures – Rail, Duck, Skull, Sea Mice, etc., and felt like Thomas Edward, beloved of Samuel Smiles. To her I must have appeared a very ridiculous person.

"How do you know it's the skull of a dog-fish?" she asked, incredulous.

"How do I know anything?" I said, a little piqued.

On arriving home found T – awaiting me with the news that he had discovered a Woodpecker's nest. When will the luck cease? I have never had such a flawless ten hours in *le grand air*. These summer days eat into my being. The sea has been roaring into my ears and the sun blazing down so that even the backs of my hands are sunburnt. And then: those coal-black eyes. Ah! me, she *is* pretty.

May 2.

Dissected the Sheldrake. Very entertained to discover the extraordinary asymmetry of the syrinx...

May 3.

Dissected Corncrake, examining carefully the pessulus, bronchidesmus (incomplete), *tympaniform and semi-lunar* membranes of a very interesting syrinx...

May 6.

Dissected one of the Sea Mice. It has a remarkable series of hepatic ducts running into the alimentary canal as in Nudibranchs...

May 9.

² There are numerous drawings of dissections scattered through the Journal about this period.

Spring in the Woods

Among the Oak Saplings we seemed enveloped in a cloud of green. The tall green grasses threw up a green light against the young green of the Oaks, and the sun managed to trickle through only here and there. Beves of swinging bluebells grew in patches among the grass. Overhead in the oaks I heard secret leaf whispers – those little noiseless noises. Birds and trees and flowers were secretive and mysterious like expectant motherhood. All the live things plotted together, having the same big business in hand. Out in the sunlit meadows, there was a different influence abroad. Here everything was gay, lively, irresponsible. The brook prattled like an inconsequential schoolgirl. The Marsh Marigolds in flamboyant yellow sunbonnets played ring-a-ring-a-roses.

An Oak Sapling should make an elderly man avuncular. There are so many tremendous possibilities about a well-behaved young oak that it is tempting to put a hand upon its shoulder and give some seasoned, timberly advice.

June 1.

A Small Red Viper

Went to L – Sessions. After the Court rose, I transcribed my notes quickly and walked out to the famous Valley of Rocks which Southey described as the ribs of the old Earth poking through. At the bottom of one of the hills saw a snake, a Red Viper. Put my boot on him quickly so that he couldn't get away and then recognised him as a specimen of what I consider to be the fourth species of British Serpent — *Vipera rubra*. The difficulty was to know how to secure him. This species is more ferocious than the ordinary *V. bera*, and I did not like the idea of putting my hand down to seize him by the neck. I stood for some time with my foot so firmly pressed down on its back that my leg ached and I began to wonder if I had been bitten. I held on and presently hailed a baker's cart coming along the road. The man got out and ran across the grass to where I stood. I showed him what I had beneath my boot and he produced a piece of string which I fastened around the snake's tail and so gently hauled the little brute up. It already appeared moribund, but I squashed its head on the grass with my heel to make certain. After parting with the baker, to whom all thanks be given, I remember that Adders are tenacious of life and so I continue to carry him at string's length and occasionally wallop him against a stone. As he was lifeless I wrapped him in paper and put him in my pocket – though to make assurance doubly sure I left the string on and let its end hang out over my pocket. So home by a two hours' railway journey with the adder in the pocket of my overcoat and the overcoat on the rack over my head. Settled down to the reading of a book on Spinoza's *Ethics*. At home it proved to be quite alive, and, on being pulled out by the string, coiled up on the drawing-room floor and hissed in a fury, to my infinite surprise. Finished him off with the poker and so spoilt the skin.

July 18.

Have had toothache for a week. Too much of a coward to have it out. Started for P – early in the morning to report Mr. Duke, K.C. After a week's pain, felt a little dicky. All the way in the train kept hardening myself to the task in front of me by recollecting the example of Zola, who killed pain with work. So all day to-day I have endeavoured to act as if I had no pain – the worst of all pains – toothache. By the time I got home I was rather done up, but the pain was actually less. This gave me a furious joy, and, after days of morose silence, to-night at supper I made them all laugh by bursting out violently with, "I don't know whether you know it but I've had a horrible day to-day." I explained at length and received the healing ointment of much sympathy. Went to bed happy with tooth still aching. I fear it was scarcely playing the strict Zolaesque game to divulge the story of my sufferings... No, I am not a martyr or a saint. Just an ordinary devil who's having a rough time.

August 17.

Prawning

Had a glorious time on the rocks at low tide prawning. Caught some Five-Bearded Rocklings and a large *Cottus bubalis*. The sun did not simply shine to-day – it came rushing down from the sky in a cataract and flooded the sands with light. Sitting on a rock, with prawning net over my knees I looked along three miles of flat hard and yellow sands. The sun poured down on them so heavily that it seemed to raise a luminous golden yellow dust for about three feet high.

On the rocks was a pretty flapper in a pink sunbonnet – also prawning in company of S – , the artist, who has sent her picture to the Royal Academy. They saw I was a naturalist, so my services were secured to pronounce my judgment on a "fish" she had caught. It was a Squid, "an odd little beast," in truth, as she said. "The same class of animal," I volunteered, "as the Cuttlefish and Octopus."

"Does it sting?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, it ought to with a face like that." She laughed merrily, and the bearded but youthful artist laughed too.

"I don't know anything about these things," he said hopelessly.

"Nor I," said the naturalist modestly. "I study fish."

This was puzzling. "Fish?" What was a Squid then?

... The artist would stop now and then and raise his glasses at a passing ship, and Maud's face occasionally disappeared in the pink sunbonnet as she stooped over a pool to examine a seaweed or crab.

She's a dear – and she gave me the Squid. What a merry little cuss!

September 1.

Went with Uncle to see a Wesleyan minister whose fame as a microscopist, according to Uncle, made it worth my while to visit him. As I expected, he was just a silly old man, a diatomaniac fond of pretty-pretty slides and not a scientific man at all. He lectures Bands of Hope on the Butterfly's Life History and hates his next-door neighbour, who is also a microscopist and incidentally a scientific man, because he interests himself in "parasites and those beastly things."

I remarked that his friend next door had shown me an *Amphioxus*.

"Oh! I expect that's some beastly bacteria thing," he said petulantly. "I can't understand Wilkinson. He's a pervert."

I told him what *Amphioxus* was and laughed up my sleeve. He likes to think of Zoology as a series of pretty pictures illustrating beautiful moral truths. The old fellow's saving grace was enthusiasm... Having focused an object for us, he would stand by, breathless, while we squinted down his gas-tube, and gave vent to tremendous expletives of surprise such as "Heavens," or "Jupiter." His eyes would twinkle with delight and straightway another miracle is selected for us to view. "They are all miracles," he said.

"Those are the valves" – washing his hands with invisible soap – "no one has yet been able to solve the problem of the Diatom's valves. No one knows what they are – no, nor ever will know – why? – why can't we see behind the valves? – because God is behind the valves – that is why!" Amen.

October 1.

Telegraphed 1,000 words of Lord – 's speech at T – .

Spent the night at a comfortable country inn and read Moore's lyrics. "Row gently here, my Gondolier," ran through my head continuously. The Inn is an old one with a long narrow passage that leads straight from front door to back with wainscoted smoke room and parlours on each side. China dogs, bran on the floor, and the picture of Derby Day with horses galloping incredibly, the drone of an old crony in the bar, and a pleasant barmy smell. Slept in a remarkable bedroom full of massive furniture, draped with cloth and covered with trinkets. The bed had a tremendous hood over

it like a catafalque, and lying in it made me think I was an effigy. Read Moore till the small hours and then found I had left my handbag downstairs. Lit a candle and went on a voyage of discovery. Made a considerable noise, but roused no one. Entered drawing-room, kitchen, pantries, parlour, bar – everywhere looking for my bag and dropping candle grease everywhere! Slept in my day shirt. Tired out and slept like a top.

November 3.

Aristotle's Lantern

Dissected the Sea Urchin (*Echinus esculentus*). Very excited over my first view of Aristotle's Lantern. These complicated pieces of animal mechanism never smell of musty age – after æons of evolution. When I open a Sea Urchin and see the Lantern, or dissect a Lamprey and cast eyes on the branchial basket, such structures strike me as being as finished and exquisite as if they had just a moment before been tossed me fresh from the hands of the Creator. They are fresh, young, they smell *new*.

December 3.

Hard at work dissecting a Dogfish. Ruridecanal Conference in the afternoon. I enjoy this double life I lead. It amazes me to be laying bare the brain of a dogfish in the morning and in the afternoon to be taking down in shorthand what the Bishop says on Mission Work.

December 4.

Went to the Veterinary Surgeon and begged of him the skull of a horse. Carried the trophy home under my arm – bare to the public view. "Why, Lor', 'tis an ole 'orse's jib," M – said when I got back.

1909

March 7.

My programme of work is: (1) Continue German. (2) Sectioning embryo of (a) Fowl, (b) Newt. (3) Paper on Arterial System of Newts. (4) Psychology of Newts. (5) General Zoological Reading.

May 2.

To C – Hill. Too much taken with the beauty of the Woods to be able to do any nesting. Here are some of the things I saw: the bark on several of the trees in the mazzard orchards rubbed into a beautifully smooth, polished surface by the Red Devon Cows when scratching where it itched; I put my hand on the smooth almost cherry-red patch of bark and felt delighted and grateful that cows had fleas: the young shoots of the whortle-berry plants on the hill were red tipped with the gold of an almost horizontal sun. I caught a little lizard which slipped across my path... Afar off down in the valley I had come through, in a convenient break in a holly bush, I could just see a Cow sitting on her matronly haunches in a field. She flicked her ears and two starlings settled on her back. A Rabbit swept out of a sweet-brier bush, and a Magpie flew out of the hedge on my right.

In another direction I could see a field full of luscious, tall, green grass. Every stalk was so full of sap that had I cut one I am sure it would have bled great green drops. In the field some lambs were sleeping; one woke up and looked at me with the back of its head to the low sun, which shone through its two small ears and gave them a transparent pink appearance.

No sooner am I rebaptized in the sun than I have to be turning home again. No sooner do "the sudden lilies push between the loosening fibres of the heart" than I am whisked back into the old groove – the daily round. If only I had more time! – more time in which to think, to love, to observe, to frame my disposition, to direct as far as in me lies the development and unfolding of my character, if only I could direct all my energies to the great and difficult profession of life, of being man instead of trifling with one profession that bores me and dabbling in another.

June 5.

On Lundy Island

Frankie is blowing Seagulls' eggs in the scullery. His father, after a day's work at the farm, is at his supper very hungry, yet immensely interested, and calls out occasionally, —

"Ow you're getting on, Foreman?"

"All right, Capt.," says Frankie affectionately, and the unpleasant asthmatic, wheezy noise of the egg-blowing goes on... There are three dogs asleep under the kitchen table; all three belong to different owners and neither one to A – .

June 6.

Our egg-collecting with the Lighthouse Keepers. They walk about the cliffs as surefooted as cats, and feed their dogs on birds' eggs collected in a little bag at the end of a long pole. One dog ate three right off in as many minutes, putting his teeth through and cracking the shell, then lapping up the contents. Crab for tea.

June 7.

After a glorious day at the N. end of the Island with the Puffins, was forced to-night to take another walk, as the smell of Albert's tobacco, together with that of his stockinged feet and his boots removed, was asphyxiating.

June 9.

The governess is an awfully pretty girl. We have been talking together to-day and she asked me if I were a naturalist. I said "Yes." She said, "Well, I found a funny little beetle yesterday and Mr. S – said I ought to have given it to you." Later, I felt she was looking at me, so I looked at her, across the

beach. Yes! it was true. When our eyes met she gave me one of the most provokingly pretty smiles, then turned and went up the cliff path and so out of my life – to my everlasting regret.

Return to-night in a cattle steamer.

June 18.

Dr. – , M.A., F.R.S., D.C.L., LL.D., called in the office to-day, and seeing Dad typing, said, "Are you Mr. Barbellion?" Dad replied in the affirmative, whereupon the Doctor handed him his card, and Dad said he thought it was his son he wanted to see. He is an old gentleman aged eighty or thereabouts, with elastic-sided boots, an umbrella, and a guardian nephew – a youngster of about sixty. But I paid him due reverence as a celebrated zoologist and at his invitation [and to my infinite pride] accompanied him on an excursion to the coast, where he wanted to see *Philoscia Couchii*, which I readily turned up for him.

I chanced to remark that I thought torsion in gastropods one of the most fascinating and difficult problems in Zoology. Why should a snail be twisted round?

"Humph," said he, "why do we stand upright?" I was not such a fool as to argue with him, so pretended his reply was a knock-out. But it enabled me to size him up intellectually.

In the evening dined with him at his hotel... He knows Wallace and Haeckel personally, and I sat at his feet with my tongue out listening to personal reminiscences of these great men. However, he seemed never to have heard of Gaskell's Theory on the Origin of Vertebrates.

June 27.

Walked to V – . As usual, Nature with clockwork regularity had all her taps turned on – larks singing, cherries ripening, and bees humming. It all bored me a little. Why doesn't she vary it a little?

August 8.

A cold note from Dr. – saying that he cannot undertake the responsibility of advising me to give up journalism for zoology.

A hellish cold in the head. Also a swingeing inflammation of the eyes. Just heard them singing in the Chapel over the way: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Hope so, I'm sure.

August 9.

A transformation. After a long series of drab experiences in Sheffield, etc., the last being the climax of yesterday, an anti-cyclone arrived this morning and I sailed like an Eagle into cloudless, windless weather! *The Academy* has published my article, my cold is suddenly better, and going down by the sea this afternoon met Mary – !

August 20.

Had an amusing letter from my maiden-aunt F – , who does not like "the agnostic atmosphere" in my *Academy* article. Poor dear! She is sorry if I really feel like that, and, if I do, what a pity to put it into print. Then a Bible reference to the Epistle to the Romans.

Xmas Day.

Feeling ill – like a sloppy Tadpole. My will is paralysed. I visit the Doctor regularly to be stethoscoped, ramble about the streets, idly scan magazines in the Library and occasionally rink – with palpitation of the heart as a consequence. In view of the shortness, bitterness, and uncertainty of life, all scientific labour for me seems futile.

1910

January 10.

Better, but still very dicky: a pallid animal: a weevil in a nut. I have a weak heart, an enervated nervous system; I suffer from lack of funds with which to carry on my studies; I hate newspaper-reporting – particularly some skinny-witted speaker like – ; and last, but not least, there are women; all these worries fight over my body like jackals over carrion. Yet Zoology is all I want. Why won't Life leave me alone?

January 15.

Reading Hardy's novels. He is altogether delightful in the subtlety with which he lets you perceive the first tiny love presentiments between his heroes and heroines – the casual touch of the hands, the peep of a foot or ankle underneath the skirt – all these in Hardy signify the cloud no bigger than a man's hand. They are the susurrus of the breeze before the storm, and you await what is to follow with palpitating heart.

February 3.

For days past have been living in a state of mental ebullition. All kinds of pictures of Love, Life, and Death have been passing through my mind. Now I am too indolent and nerveless to set them down. Physically I am such a wreck that to carry out the least intention, such as putting on my boots, I have to flog my will like an Arab with a slave "in a sand of Ayaman." Three months ago when I got up before breakfast to dissect rabbits, dogfish, frogs, newts, etc., this would have seemed impossible.

February 6.

Still visit Dr. – 's surgery each week. I have two dull spots at the bottom of each lung. What a fine expressive word is *gloom*. Let me write it: GLOOM...

One evening coming home in the train from L – County Sessions I noticed a horrible, wheezy sound whenever I breathed deep. I was scared out of my life, and at once thought of consumption. Went to the Doctor's next day, and he sounded me and reassured me. I was afraid to tell him of the little wheezy sound at the apex of each lung, and I believed he overlooked it. So next day, very harassed, I went back to him again and told him. He *hadn't* noticed it and looked glum. Have to keep out of doors as much as possible.

The intense internal life I lead, worrying about my health, reading (eternally reading), reflecting, observing, feeling, loving and hating – with no outlet for superfluous steam, cramped and confined on every side, without any friends or influence of any sort, without even any acquaintances excepting my colleagues in journalism (whom I condemn) – all this will turn me into the most self-conscious, conceited, mawkish, gauche creature in existence.

March 6.

The facts are undeniable: Life is pain. No sophistry can win me over to any other view. And yet years ago I set out so hopefully and healthfully – what are birds' eggs to me *now*? My ambition is enormous but vague. I am too distributed in my abilities ever to achieve distinction.

March 22.

Had a letter from the Keeper of Zoology at the British Museum, advising me of three vacancies in his Dept., and asking me if I would like to try, etc... So that Dr. – 's visit to me bore some fruit.³ Spent the morning day-dreaming... Perhaps this is the flood tide at last! I shall work like a drayhorse to pull through if I am nominated... I await developments in a frightfully turbulent state of mind. I have a frantic desire to control the factors which are going to affect my future so permanently. And

³ He had spoken about me to the Museum authorities, and it was his influence which got me the nomination to sit for the examination.

this ferocious desire, of course, collides with a crash all day long with the fact that however much I desire there will still remain the unalterable logic of events.

April 7.

... How delicious all this seemed! To be alive – thinking, seeing, enjoying, walking, eating – all quite apart from the amount of money in your purse or the prospects of a career. I revelled in the sensuous enjoyment of my animal existence.

June 2.

Up to now my life has been one of great internal strife and struggle – the struggle with a great ambition and a weak will – unequal to the task of coping with it. I have planned on too big a scale, perhaps. I have put too great a strain on my talents, I have whipped a flagging will, I have been for ever cogitating, worrying, devising means of escape. Meanwhile, the moments have gone by unheeded and unenjoyed.

June 10.

Legginess is bad enough in a woman, but bandy legginess is impossible.

Solitude is good for the soul. After an hour of it, I feel as lofty and imperial as Marcus Aurelius.

The best girl in the best dress immediately looks disreputable if her stockings be downgyved.

Some old people on reaching a certain age go on living out of habit – a bad habit too.

How much I can learn of a stranger by his laugh.

Bees, Poppies, and Swallows! – and all they mean to him who really knows them! Or a White Gull on a piece of floating timber, or a troop of shiny Rooks close on the heels of a ploughman on a sunny autumn day.

June 30.

My egoism appals me. Likewise the extreme intensification of the consciousness of myself. Whenever I walk down the High Street on a market day, my self-consciousness magnifies my proportions to the size of a Gulliver – so that it is grievous to reflect that in spite of that the townsfolk see me only as an insignificant bourgeois youth who reports meetings in shorthand.

July 17.

We sang to-night in Church, "But when I know Thee as Thou art, I'll praise Thee as I ought." Exactly! Till then, farewell. We are a great little people, we humans. If there be no next world, still the Spirit of Man will have lived and uttered its protest.

July 22.

Our Simian Ancestry

How I hate the man who talks about the "brute creation," with an ugly emphasis on *brute*. Only Christians are capable of it. As for me, I am proud of my close kinship with other animals. I take a jealous pride in my Simian ancestry. I like to think that I was once a magnificent hairy fellow living in the trees and that my frame has come down through geological time *via* sea jelly and worms and Amphioxus, Fish, Dinosaurs, and Apes. Who would exchange these for the pallid couple in the Garden of Eden?

August 9.

I do not ever like going to bed. For me each day ends in a little sorrow. I hate the time when it comes to put my books away, to knock out my pipe and say "Good-night," exchanging the vivid pleasures of the day for the darkness of sleep and oblivion.

August 23.

Spent the afternoon and evening till ten in the woods with Mary – . Had tea in the Haunted House, and after sat in the Green Arbor until dark, when I kissed her. "Achilles was not the worse warrior for his probation in petticoats."

September 1.

I hope to goodness she doesn't think I want to marry her. In the Park in the dark, kissing her. I was testing and experimenting with a new experience.

September 4.

Last evening, after much mellifluous cajolery, induced her to *kiss me*. My private opinion about this whole affair is that all the time I have been at least twenty degrees below real love heat. In any case I am constitutionally and emotionally unfaithful. I said things which I did not believe just because it was dark and she was charming.

September 5.

Read Thomas à Kempis in the train. It made me so angry I nearly flung it out of the window. "Meddle not with things that be too deep for thee," he says, "but read such things as yield compunction to the heart rather than elevation to the head." Forsooth! Can't you see me?

September 15.

A puzzling afternoon: weather perfect, the earth green and humming like a top, yet a web of dream overlaid the great hill, and at certain moments, which recurred in a kind of pulsation, accompanied by subjective feelings of vague strife and effort, I easily succeeded in letting all I saw – the field and the blackberry bush, the whole valley and the apple orchards – change into something unreal, flimsy, gauzelike, immaterial, and totally unexperienced. Suddenly when the impression was most vivid, the whole of this mysterious tapestry would vanish away and I was back where 2 and 2 make 4. Oh! Earth! how jealously you guard your secrets!

October 4.

Sat at the Civil Service Commission in Burlington House for the exam, for the vacancy in the B.M. No luck at all with the papers. The whole of my nine months' assiduous preparation helped me in only two questions. In fine, I have not succeeded, I shall not obtain the appointment, and in a few weeks I shall be back in the wilds of

N – again under the old regime, reporting platitudes from greasy guardians of the poor, and receiving condolences from people not altogether displeased at some one else's misfortune.

October 14.

Returned home from London. Felt horribly defeated in crossing the threshold. It was so obviously *returning* after an unsuccessful flight.

October 22.

Dissected a *Squilla* for which I paid 2s. 6d. to the Plymouth Marine Laboratory.

October 23.

Ambition

Am attempting to feel after some practical philosophy of living – something that will enable me to accept disappointment with equanimity and Town Council meetings with a broad and tolerant smile. At present, ambition consumes me. I was ambitious before I was breeched. I can remember wondering as a child if I were a young Macaulay or Ruskin and secretly deciding that I was. My infant mind even was bitter with those who insisted on regarding me as a normal child and not as a prodigy. Since then I have struggled with this canker for many a day, and as success fails to arrive it becomes more gnawing.

October 24.

In the morning a Town Council and in the afternoon a Rural Council. With this abominable trash in my notebook waiting to be written up and turned into "copy," and with the dream pictures of a quiet studious life in Cromwell Road not yet faded from my mind, where can I turn for consolation? That I have done my best? That's only a mother's saying to her child.

Perhaps after all it is a narrow life – this diving and delving among charming little secrets, plying diligently scalpel and microscope and then weaving the facts obtained into theoretic finespun. It is all vastly entertaining to the naturalist but it leaves the world unmoved. I sometimes envy the zealot with a definite mission in life. Life without one seems void. The monotonous pursuit of our

daily vocations – the soldier, sailor, candlestick-maker – so they go on, never living but only working, never thinking but only hypnotising themselves by the routine and punctuality of their lives into just so many mechanical toys warranted to go for so long and then stop when Death takes them... It amazes me that men must spend their precious days of existence for the most part in slaving for food and clothing and the bare necessities of existence.

To sum up my despondency, what's the good of such a life? Where does it lead? Where am I going? Why should I work? What means this procession of nights and days wherein we are all seen moving along intent and stern as if we had some purpose or a goal?.. Of course to the man who believes in the next world and a personal God, it is quite another matter. The Christian is the Egoist *par excellence*. He does not mind annihilation by arduous labour in this world if in the next he shall have won eternal life... He is reckless of to-day, extravagant in the expenditure of his life. This intolerable fellow will be cheerful in a dungeon. For he flatters himself that God Almighty up in Heaven is all the time watching through the keyhole and marking him down for eternal life.

October 26.

The nose-snuffling, cynical man who studies La Rochefoucauld, and prides himself on a knowledge of human motives, is pleased to point out that every action and every motive is selfish, from the philanthropist who advertises himself by his charities to the fanatic who lays down his life for a cause. Even secret charities, for they give pleasure to the doer. So your cynic thinks he has thus, with one stroke of his psychological scalpel, laid human nature bare in all its depravities. All he has done really is to reclassify motives – instead of grouping them as selfish and unselfish (which is more convenient) he lumps them together as selfish, a method by which even he is forced to recognise different grades of selfishness. For example, the selfishness of a wife-beater is lower than the selfishness of a man who gives up his life for another.

October 28.

The result arrived. As I thought, I have failed, being fourth with only three vacancies.

November 7.

It is useless to bewail the course of fortune. It cannot be much credit to possess – though we may covet – those precious things, to possess which depends on circumstances outside our control.

November 9.

Dined at the Devonshire Club in St. James's Street, W., with Dr. H – and Mr. – , the latter showing the grave symptomatic phenomena of a monocle and spats. A dinner of eight courses. Only made one mistake – put my salad on my dish instead of on the side dish. Horribly nervous and reticent. I was apparently expected to give an account of myself and my abilities – and with that end in view, they gave me a few pokes in my cranial ribs. But I am a peculiar animal, and, before unbosoming myself, I would require a happier *mise-en-scène* than a West End Club, and a more tactful method of approach than ogling by two professors, who seemed to think I was a simple penny-in-the-slot machine. I froze from sheer nervousness and nothing resulted.

November 11.

Returned home and found a letter awaiting me from Dr. A – offering me £60 a year for a temporary job as assistant at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory.

Left London horribly depressed. They evidently intend to shuffle me off.

Read Geo. Gissing's novel, *Born in Exile*. Godwin Peak, with his intense pride of individuality, self-torturing capacities, and sentimental languishment, reminds me of myself.

November 20.

A purulent cold in the nose. My heart is weak. Palpitation after the least exertion. But I shall soon be swinging my cudgels in the battle of life, so it won't do to be hypochondriacal... Let all the powers of the world and the Devil attack me, yet I will win in the end – though the conquest may very well be one which no one but myself will view.

Have accepted the Plymouth appointment.

November 30.

Struggling in the depths again within the past few days with heart attacks. Am slowly getting better of them and trying to forget as soon as may be visions of sudden death, coffins, and obituary notices.

December 2.

Death

At first, when we are very young, Death arouses our curiosity, as it did Cain in the beginning.⁴ It is a strange and very rare phenomenon which we cannot comprehend, and every time we hear of some one's death, we try to recall that person's appearance in life and are disappointed if we can't. The endeavour is to discover what it is, this Death, to compare two things, the idea of the person alive and the idea of him dead. At last some one we know well dies – and that is the first shock... I shall never forget when our Matron died at the D – School... As the years roll on, we get used to the man with the scythe and an acquaintance's death is only a bit of gossip.

Suppose the Hellfire of the orthodox really existed! We have no assurance that it does not! It seems incredible, but many incredible things are true. We do not *know* that God is not as cruel as a Spanish inquisitor. Suppose, then, He is! If, after Death, we wicked ones were shovelled into a furnace of fire – we should have to burn. There would be no redress. It would simply be the Divine Order of things. It is outrageous that we should be so helpless and so dependent on any one – even God.

December 9.

Sometimes I think I am going mad. I live for days in the mystery and tears of things so that the commonest object, the most familiar face – even my own – become ghostly, unreal, enigmatic. I get into an attitude of almost total scepticism, nescience, solipsism even, in a world of dumb, sphinx-like things that cannot explain themselves. The discovery of how I am situated – a sentient being on a globe in space overshadows me. I wish I were just nothing.

Later: While at a public meeting, the office-boy approached me and immediately whispered without hesitation, —

"Just had a telephone message to say that your father is at the T – Railway Station, lying senseless. He has evidently had an apoplectic fit."

(How those brutal words, "lying senseless," banged and bullied and knocked me down. Mother was waiting for me at the door in a dreadful state and expecting the worst.)

Met the train with the Doctor, and took him home in the cab – still alive, thank God, but helpless. He was brave enough to smile and shake me by the hand – with his left, though he was speechless and the right side of his body helpless. A porter discovered him at the railway terminus lying on the floor of a second-class carriage.

December 10.

He is a trifle better. It is fifteen years since he had the first paralytic stroke.

Am taking over all his work and have written at once resigning the Plymouth appointment.

December 23.

It really did require an effort to go upstairs to-day to his bedroom and say cheerfully I was not going to P. after all, and that the matter was of no consequence to me. I laughed gaily and Dad was relieved. A thundering good joke. What annoys me is that other folk – the brainless, heartless mob, as Schopenhauer remarks, still continue to regard me as one of themselves... I had nearly escaped into a seaside laboratory, and now suddenly to be flung back into the dirt and sweat of the newspaper world seems very hard, and it *is* very hard.

December 26.

⁴ In Byron's poem.

Windy Ash

With the dog for a walk around Windy Ash. It was a beautiful winter's morning – a low sun giving out a pale light but no warmth – a luminant, not a fire – the hedgerows bare and well trimmed, an Elm lopped close showing white stumps which glistened liquidly in the sun, a Curlew whistling overhead, a deeply cut lane washed hard and clean by the winter rains, a gunshot from a distant cover, a creeping Wren, silent and tame, in a bramble bush, and over the five-barred gate the granite roller with vacant shafts. I leaned on the gate and saw the great wisps of cloud in the sky like comets' tails. Everything cold, crystalline.

1911

January 2.

As a young man – a *very* young man – my purpose was to plough up all obstacles, brook no delays, and without let or hindrance win through to an almost immediate success! But witness 1910! "My career" so far has been like the White Knight's, who fell off behind when the horse started, in front when it stopped, and sideways occasionally to vary the monotony.

January 30.

Feeling ill and suffering from attacks of faintness. My ill health has produced a change in my attitude towards work. As soon as I begin to feel the least bit down, I am bound to stop at once as the idea of bending over a desk or a dissecting dish, of reading or studying, nauseates me when I think that perhaps to-morrow or next day or next week, next month, next year I may be dead. What a waste of life it seems to work! Zoology is repugnant and philosophy superfluous beside the bliss of sheer living – out in the cold polar air or indoors in a chair before a roaring fire with hands clasped, watching the bustling, soothing activity of the flames.

Then, as soon as I am well again, I forget all this, grow discontented with doing nothing and work like a Tiger.

February 11.

Walked in the country. Coming home, terrified by a really violent attack of palpitation. Almost every one I met I thought would be the unfortunate person who would have to pick me up. As each one in the street approached me, I weighed him in the balance and considered if he had presence of mind and how he would render first aid. After my friend, P.C. – , had passed, I felt sorry that the tragedy had not already happened, for he knows me and where I live. At length, after sundry leanings over the river wall, arrived at the Library, which I entered, and sat down, when the full force of the palpitation was immediately felt. My face burned with the hot blood, my hand holding the paper shook with the angry pulse, and my heart went bang! bang! bang! and I could feel its beat in the carotids of the neck and up along the Torcular herophili and big vessels in the occipital region of the head. Drew in each breath very gently for fear of aggravating the fiend. Got home (don't know how) and had some sal volatile. Am better now but very demoralised.

February 13.

Feel like a piece of drawn threadwork, or an undeveloped negative, or a jelly fish on stilts, or a sloppy tadpole, or a weevil in a nut, or a pitchcocked eel. In other words and in short – ill.

February 16.

After some days with the vision of sudden death constantly before me, have come to the conclusion that it's a long way to go to die. Am coming back anyhow. Yet these are a few terrible pages in my history.

March 4.

... The Doctor's orders "Cease Work" have brought on in an aggravated form my infatuation for zoological research. I lie in bed and manufacture rolling periods in praise of it, I get dithyrambic over the zoologists themselves – Huxley, Wallace, Brooks, Lankester. I chortle to reflect that in zoology there are no stock exchange ambitions, there is no mention of slum life, Tariff Reform is not included. In the repose of the spacious laboratory by the seaside or in the halls of some great Museum, life with its vulgar struggles, its hustle and obscenity, scarcely penetrates. Behind those doors, life flows slowly, deeply. I am ascetic and long for the monastic seclusion of a student's life.

March 5.

From One Maiden Lady to Another. (Authentic)

"My dear Sister, – You have been expecting to hear from me I know, I have had inflammation to my eyes twice in 3 weeks so I thought I had better let the Doctor see and he says it is catarrh of the eyes and windpipe. I am inhaling and taking lozenges and medicine. You will be sorry to learn Leonora Mims has been taken to a Sanatorium with Diphtheria, we heard yesterday, she is better, poor Mrs. Mims herself quite an invalid, she has to walk with a stick, I believe you know she has had to have her breast cut off, they keep a servant as she can't do anything, old Mrs. Point is 87 I think it is so they too have a lot of trouble, Fred Mims has just got married...

"Poor old Mrs. Seemsoe is just the same, she doesn't know anybody but she talks, the nurse put a grape in her mouth but she didn't know what to do with it, I think it is very sad. She was taken about a fortnight before Easter. Will you tell me dear if this is right receipt for clothes 1/2 oz. carbolic in 1/2 pint of rose water. Harry Gammon's 2 little children have measles, poor Maisie has gone with her Aunt Susan, poor old Joe Gammon they say had very little to leave, we don't know where Robert gets his money from. I dare say you saw that Tom Sagg has married another of Ned Smith's daughters and we hear these Smith girls are rare housekeepers and this girl that has married Tom Sagg has made all her own linen. Mrs. Wilkins, the butcher's wife is going to have a little one after 15 years, our Vicar has been laid up with an abscess, he told us about his brother the other day, he says as brothers they love each other very much. We have 3 very sad cases of men ill in the village. We had 4 but one man died of cancer.

"Yr loving Sister Amy."

Voilà!

March 7.

If I die I should like to be buried in the cherry orchards at V – .

How the beastly mob loves a tragedy! The sudden death of the Bank Manager is simply thrilling the town, and the newspapers sell like hot cakes. Scarcely before the body is cold the coincidence of his death on the anniversary of his birth is discussed in every household; every one tells everybody else where they saw him last "he looked all right then." The policeman and the housemaid, the Mayor and the Town Clerk, the cabman and the billposter, stand and discuss the deceased gentleman's last words or what the widow's left with. "Ah! well, it is very sad," they remark to one another with no emotion and continue on their way.

March 10.

On coming downstairs in the evening played Ludo with H – . At one stage I laughed so much in conjunction with that harlequin H – that I got cramp in the abdominal muscles and the tears trickled down my face.

March 13.

H – and I play Ludo incessantly. We've developed the gambling fever, and our pent-up excitement every now and then explodes in fiendish cackles, and Mother looks up over her spectacles and says, "William, William, they'll hear in the street presently."

A Character

For this world's unfortunates, his is the ripe sympathy of a well-developed nature, standing in strong contrast with the rest of his personality, which is wholly self-centred, a little ungenerous, and what strong men of impeccable character call "weak." If you are ill he is delightful, if you are robust or successful he can be very objectionable. To an influenza victim he goes out of his way to carry a book, but if you tell him with gusto you have passed your exam, he says, "Oh, but there's not much behind it, is there?" "Oh! no," I answer, comforting him, "it is really a misfortune to be

a success." And so only the bankrupts, dipsos (as he calls them), ne'er-do-weels, and sudden deaths ever touch his heart or tap his sympathy. He is a short, queery, dressy little fellow, always spruce and clean. His joy consists in a glass of beer, a full stomach, a good cigar, or a pretty girl to flirt with. He frequents drinking saloons and billiard rooms, goes to dances and likes to be thought a lady's man. "Urn," he will say, with the air of a connoisseur, "a little too broad in the beam," as some attractive damsel walks down the street. Any day about twelve you can see both of us, "the long and the short of it" (he is only half my height and I call him .5), walking together in the Park, and engaged in the most heated discussion over some entirely trivial matter, such as whether he would marry a woman with sore eyes, etc., etc. More than once we have caught cabmen idle on the cab-rank or policemen on point duty jerking their thumbs backward at us and expressing some facetious remarks which we longed to overhear. I usually walk in the gutter to bring my height down a bit.

A good raconteur himself, he does not willingly suffer a story from another. The varmint on occasion finishes your joke off for you, which is his delicate way of intimating that he has heard it before. He is a first-class mimic, and sends every one into a thousand fits while he gives you in succession the Mayor and all the Corporation. He also delights me at times by mimicking me. His mind is receptive rather than creative: it picks up all sorts of gaudy ideas by the wayside like a magpie, and I sometimes enjoy the exquisite sensation of hearing some of these petty pilferings (which he has filched from me) laid at my feet as if they were his own. The ideas which are his own are always unmistakable.

His favourite poems are Omar and the Ballad of Reading Jail, his favourite drinks Medoc or a Cherry Mixture. Me he describes as *serpentina* with *Gibbon-like arms*, pinheaded, and so on. He amuses me. In fact I love him.

March 16.

No one will ever understand without personal experience that an exceedingly self-conscious creature like myself driven in on himself to consume himself is the unhappiest of men. I have come to loathe myself: my finicking, hypersensitive, morbid nature, always thinking, talking, writing about myself for all the world as if the world beyond did not exist! I am rings within rings, circles concentric and intersecting, a maze, a tangle: watching myself behave or misbehave, always reflecting on what impression I am making on others or what they think of me. Introduce me to a stranger and I swell out as big as Alice. Self-consciousness makes me pneumatic, and consequently so awkward and clumsy and swollen that I don't know how to converse – and God help the other fellow.

Later: Youth is an intoxication without wine, some one says. Life is an intoxication. The only sober man is the melancholiac, who, disenchanted, looks at life, sees it as it really is, and cuts his throat. If this be so, I want to be very drunk. The great thing is to live, to clutch at our existence and race away with it in some great and enthralling pursuit. Above all, I must beware of all ultimate questions – they are too maddeningly unanswerable – let me eschew philosophy and burn Omar.

In this week's *T.P.'s Weekly* a youth advertises: – "Young thinkers interested in philosophy, religion, social reform, the future of humanity, and all freethought, please communicate with 'Evolution,' aged 21!" All right for 21.

Later: I have in mind some work on the vascular system of larval newts. In the autumn I see a large piece of work to be done in animal psychology – namely, frequency of stimulus and its relation to habit formation. Yet the doctor advises long rest and the office work remains to be done. I must hack my way through somehow. I sit trying to disentangle these knots; then some one plays a dreamy waltz and all my fine edifices of the will vanish in mist. Is it worth while? Why not float with the tide? But I soon throw off these temptations. If I live, I shall play a fine game! I am determined. A lame-dog life is of no use.

April 17.

Railway Travel

A journey in a railway train makes me sentimental. If I enter the compartment a robust-minded, cheerful youth, fresh and whistling from a walk by the sea, yet, as soon as I am settled down in one corner and the train is rattling along past fields, woods, towns, and painted stations, I find myself indulging in a saccharine sadness – very toothsome and jolly. I pull a long face and gaze out of the window wistfully and look sad. But I am really happy – and incredibly sentimental.

The effect is produced, I suppose, by the quickly changing panoramic view of the country, and as I see everything sliding swiftly by, and feel myself being hurtled forward willy-nilly, I am sub-conscious of the flight of Time, of the eternal flux, of the trajectory of my own life... Timid folk, of course, want some Rock of Ages, something static. They want life a mill pond rather than the torrent which it is, a homely affair of teacups and tabby cats rather than a dangerous expedition.

April 22.

Who will rid me of the body of this death? My body is chained to me – a dead weight. It is my warder. I can do nothing without first consulting it and seeking its permission. I jeer at its grotesqueness. I chafe at the thongs it binds on me. On this bully I am dependent for everything the world can give me. How can I preserve my *amour propre* when I must needs be for ever wheedling and cajoling a despot with delicate meats and soft couches? – I who am proud, ambitious, and full of energy! In the end, too, I know it intends to carry me off... I should like though to have the last kick and, copying De Quincey, arrange to hand it over for dissection to the medical men – out of revenge.

"Hope thou not much; fear thou not at all" – my motto of late.

April 30.

I can well imagine looking back on these entries later on and blushing at the pettiness of my soul herein revealed... Only be charitable, kind reader. There are three Johns, and I am much mistaken if in these pages there will not be found something of the John known to himself, and an inkling, perhaps, of the man as he is known to his Creator. As a timid showman afraid that unless he emphasises the feature of his exhibit, they will be overlooked, let me, hat in hand, point out that I know I am an ass, that I am still hoping (in spite of ill health) that I am an enthusiast.

May 2.

Maeterlinck's *Wisdom and Destiny* is distilled Marcus Aurelius. I am rather tired of these comfortable philosophers. If a man be harassed by Fate with a red rag and a picador let him turn and rend him – or try to, anyway.

May 8.

Staying by the Sea

I have been living out of doors a lot lately and am getting sunburnt. It gives me infinite pleasure to be sunburnt – to appear the man of the open air, the open road, and the wild life. The sun intoxicates me to-day. The sea is not big enough to hold me nor the sky for me to breathe in. I feel I should like to be swaying with all the passions, throbbing with life and a vast activity of heart and sinew – to live magnificently – with an unquenchable thirst to drink to the lees, to plumb the depth of every joy and every sorrow, to see my life flash in the heat. Ah! Youth! Youth! Youth!!! In these moments of ecstasy my happiness is torrential. I have the soul of the poppy flaming in me then. I am rather like the poppy in many ways... It is peculiarly appropriate. It must be my flower! I am the poppy!!

May 9.

L – was digging up the ground in his garden to-day and one shovelful came up thick and shapely. He laid the sod on its back gently without breaking it and said simply, "Doesn't it come up nice?"

His face was radiant! – Real happiness lies in the little things, in a bit of garden work, in the rattle of the teacups in the next room, in the last chapter of a book.

May 14.

Returned home. I hate living in this little town. If some one dies, he is sure to be some one you had a joke with the night before. A suicide – ten to one – implicates your bosom friend, or else the little man at the bookshop cut him down. There have been three deaths since I came home – I knew them all. It depresses me. The town seems a mortuary with all these dead bodies lying in it. Lucky for you, if you're a fat, rubicund, unimaginative physician.

May 16.

Two more people dead – one a school friend. Sat on a seat on the river bank and read the *Journal of Animal Behaviour*. It made me long to be at work. I foamed at the mouth to be sitting there perforce in an overcoat on a seat doing nothing like a pet dove. A weak heart makes crossing a road an adventure and turns each day into a dangerous expedition.

May 18.

A dirty ragamuffin on the river's bank held up a tin can to me with the softly persuasive words,

—
"Ere, Mister, BAIT."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Fish."

"What for?"

"Salmon."

We have all tried to catch salmon with a bent pin. No matter though if no salmon be caught. Richard Jefferies said, "If there be no immortality still we shall have had the glory of that thought."

May 19.

Old Diaries

Spent some happy time reading over old diaries. I was grieved and surprised to find how much I had forgotten. To forget the past so easily seems scarcely loyal to oneself. I am so selfishly absorbed in my present self that I have grown not to care a damn about that ever increasing collection of past selves – those dear, dead gentlemen who one after the other have tenanted the temple of this flesh and handed on the torch of my life and personal identity before creeping away silently and modestly to rest.

June 6.

Brilliantly fine and warm. Unable to resist the sun, so I caught the ten train to S – and walked across the meadow (buttercups, forget-me-nots, ragged robins) to the Dipper stream and the ivy bridge. Read ardently in *Geology* till twelve. Then took off my boots and socks, and waded underneath the right arch of the bridge in deep water, and eventually sat on a dry stone at the top of the masonry just where the water drops into the green salmon pool in a solid bar. Next I waded upstream to a big slab of rock tilted at a comfortable angle. I lay flat on this with my nether extremities in water up to my knees. The sun bathed my face and dragon flies chased up and down intent on murder. But I cared not a tinker's Demetrius about Nature red in tooth and claw. I was quite satisfied with Nature under a June sun in the cool atmosphere of a Dipper stream. I lay on the slab completely relaxed, and the cool water ran strongly between my toes. Surely I was never again going to be miserable. The voices of children playing in the wood made me extra happy. As a rule I loathe children. I am too much of a youth still. But not this morning. For these were fairy voices ringing through enchanted woods.

June 8.

Brilliantly fine and warm. Went by train to C – Woods. Took first-class return on account of the heat. Crossed the meadow and up the hill to the mill leat, where we bathed our feet and read.

Ate a powerful lunch and made several unsuccessful grabs at Caddie flies. I want one to examine the mouth parts. After lunch we sat on the foot-bridge over the stream, and I rested on it flat in the face of the sun. The sun seemed to burn into my very bones, purging away everything that may be dark or threatening there. The physical sensation of the blood flow beneath the skin was good to feel, and the heat made every tissue glow with a radiant well-being. When I got up and opened my eyes all the colours of the landscape vanished under the silvery whiteness of the intense sunlight.

We put on our boots and socks (our feet seemed to have swollen to a very large size) and wandered downstream to a little white house, a gamekeeper's cottage, where the old woman gave us cream and milk and home-made bread in her beautiful old kitchen with open hearth. China dogs, of course, and on the wall an old painting representing the person of a page boy (so she said) who was once employed up at the squire's. An unwholesome atmosphere of pigs pervaded the garden, but as this is not pretty I ought to leave it out...

June 14.

Brilliantly fine. Went by the early train to S – . Walked to the ivy bridge and then waded upstream to the great slab of rock where I spread myself in the sun as before. The experiment was so delightful it is worth repeating a hundred times. In this position I read of the decline and fall of Trilobites, of the Stratigraphy of the Lias and so on. Geology is a very crushing science, yet I enjoyed my existence this morning with the other flies about that stream.

June 20.

Sat at Liverpool University for the practical exam. Zoology, Board of Education.

At the close the other students left but I went on working. Prof. Herdman asked me if I had finished. I said "No," so he gave me a little more time. Later he came up again, and again I said "No," but he replied that he was afraid I must stop. "What could you do further?" he asked, picking up a dish of plankton. I pointed out a *Sagitta*, an *Oikopleura*, and a *Noctiluca*, and he replied, "Of course I put in more than you were expected to identify in the time, so as to make a choice possible." Then he complimented me on my written papers which were sent in some weeks ago, and looking at my practical work he added, "And this, too, seems to be quite excellent."

I thanked him from the bottom of a greedy and grateful heart, and he went on, "I see you describe yourself in your papers as a journalist, but can you tell me exactly what has been your career in Zoology?" I answered of course rather proudly that I had had *no* career in Zoology.

"But what school or college have you worked at?" he persisted.

"None," I said a little doggedly. "What I know I have taught myself."

"So you've had no training in Zoology at all?"

"No, sir."

"Well, if you've taught yourself all you know, you've done remarkably well."

He still seemed a little incredulous, and when I explained how I got a great many of my marine animals for dissection and study at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory, he immediately asked me suspiciously if I had ever worked there. We shook hands, and he wished me all success in the future, to which I to myself devoutly said Amen.

Came home very elated at having impressed some one at last.

Now for Dublin.

June 30.

Oeconomic biology may be very useful but I am not interested in it. Give me the pure science. I don't want to be worrying my head over remedies for potato disease nor cures for fleas in fowls. Heaven preserve me from ever becoming a County Council lecturer or a Government Entomologist!⁵... Give me the recluse life of a scholar or investigator, full of leisure, culture, and delicate skill. I would rather know Bergson than be able to stay at the Ritz Hotel. I would rather be

⁵ See entry for October 8, 1913.

able to dissect a star-fish's water-vascular system than know the price of Consols. I should make a most industrious country gentleman with £5,000 a year and a deer park... My idea is to withdraw from the *mobile vulgus* and spend laborious days in the library or laboratory. The world is too much with us. I long for the monotony of monastic life! Father Wasmann and the Abbé Spallanzani are the type. Let me set my face towards them. Such lives afford poor material for novelists or dramatists, but so much the better. Hamlet makes fine reading, but I don't want to be Hamlet myself.

July 6.

In the afternoon went out dredging in fifteen fathoms off the pier at I – , but without much success... Got a large number of interesting things, however, in the tow net, including some advanced eggs of *Loligo* and a *Tomopteris*...

July 7.

Went to the trout stream again. After stretching a muslin net crosswise on the water for insects floating down, sat on the footbridge and read Geology for the Dublin Examination. Later, waded downstream to a hazel bush on the right bank beneath a shady oak. Squatted right down on the bush, which supported me like an arm-chair – and, with legs dangling in the cool water, opened a Meredith and enjoyed myself.

July 28.

Had to write backing out of the Dublin Examination for which I am nominated to sit. I am simply not fit for the racket of such a journey in my present state of health. My chances of success, too, are not such as to warrant my drawing on Dad for the money. He is still ill, and secretly agitated, I fear, because I am so bent on giving up his work. It looks, however, as if newspaper journalism is to be my fate. It was the refinement of torture having to write.

July 31.

Had a letter from Dr. S – enough to wring tears from a monument.

Sat like a valetudinarian in the Park all day getting fresh air – among the imbeciles, invalids, and children. Who cares? "But, gentlemen, you *shall* hear."

August 4.

Still another chance – quite unexpectedly received a second nomination this morning to sit for another exam, for two vacancies in the British Museum. Good luck this.

August 11.

Very hot, so went to S – , and bathed in the salmon pool. Stretched myself out in the water, delighted to find that I had at last got to the very heart of the countryside. I was not just watching from the outside – on the bank. I was in it, and plunging in it, too, up to my armpits. What did I care about the British Museum or Zoology then? All but the last enemy and object of conquest I had overcome – for the moment perhaps even Death himself was under heel – I was immortal – in that minute I was always prostrate in the stream – sunk deep in the bosom of old Mother Earth who cannot die!

August 14.

At 4 p.m. to the Salmon Pool for a bathe. 87.3 in the shade. The meadow was delicious in the sunshine. It made me want to hop, flirt my tail, sing. I felt ever such a bright-eyed wily bird!

August 17.

Caught the afternoon train to C – , but unfortunately forgot to take with me either watch or tubes (for insects). So I applied to the station-master, a youth of about eighteen, who is also signalman, porter, ticket-collector, and indeed very factotal – even to the extent of providing me with empty match boxes. I agreed with him to be called by three halloos from the viaduct just before the evening train came in. Then I went up to the leat, set up my muslin net in it for insects floating down, and then went across to the stream and bathed. Afterwards, went back and boxed the insects caught, and returned to the little station, with its creepers on the walls and over the roof, all as delightfully quiet as ever, and the station youth as delightfully silly. Then the little train came around the bend of the line – green puffing engine and red coaches, like a crawling caterpillar of gay colour.

August 20.

A trapper killed a specimen of *Tropidonotus natrix* and brought it to me. I gave him sixpence for it and am just going to dissect it.

August 21.

There are folk who notice nothing. (Witness Capt. McWhirr in Conrad's *Typhoon*.) They live side by side with genius or tragedy as innocent as babies; there are heaps of people who live on a mountain, a volcano, even, without knowing it. If the stars of Heaven fell and the Moon were turned into blood some one would have to direct their attention to it... Perhaps after all, the most obvious things are the most difficult to see. We all recognise Keats now, but suppose he was only "the boy next door" – why should I read his verses?

August 27.

Preparing a Snake's Skull

Prepared the skull of grass snake. I fancy I scooped out the eyes with patent delight – I suppose symbolically, as though, on behalf of the rest of suffering humanity, I were wiping off the old score against the beast for its behaviour in the Garden of Eden.

September 5.

At 2.30 Dad had three separate "strokes" of paralysis in as many minutes, the third leaving him helpless. They sent for me in the Library, where I was reading, and I hurried home. Just as I entered the bedroom where he and Mother were another attack came on, and it was with the utmost difficulty that with her help I managed to get him from the chair to the bed. He struggled with his left arm and leg and made inarticulate noises which sounded as if they might be groans. I don't know if he was in pain. Dear Mother.

September 14.

Dad cannot live long. Mother bears up wonderfully well. Tried to do some examination work but failed utterly. A – is watching in the sick-room with Mother who will not leave.

8.30. The nurse says he will not live through the night.

8.45. Telegraphed for A – to come.

11.00. A – came downstairs and had a little supper.

12.00. Went to bed. H – and the others lit a fire and we have all sat around it silent, listening to its murmur. Every one felt cold. Dad has been unconscious for over an hour.

1.45 a.m. Heard a noise, then heard Mother coming downstairs past my bedroom door with some one – sobbing. I knew it must be all over. H – was helping her down. Waited in my bedroom in the dark for three parts of an hour, when H – came up, opened the door slowly and said, "He's gone, old man." It was a tremendous relief to know that since he had to die his sufferings and cruel plight were over. Fell asleep from sheer exhaustion and slept soundly.

September 18.

The funeral. *It is not death but the dreadful possibilities of life which are so depressing.*⁶

September 21.

A Day in Autumn

A cool, breezy autumn day. The beach was covered with patches of soapy foam that shook tremulously in the wind – all the rocks and everything were drenched with water, and the spray came off the breaking waves like steam. A red sun went lower and lower and the shadows cast by the rocks grew very long and grotesque. Underneath the breaking waves, the hollows were green and dark like sea caverns. Herring gulls played about in the air balancing themselves as they faced the breeze, then sweeping suddenly around and downwards with the wind behind them. We all sat down on the rocks

⁶ Italics added 1917.

and were very quiet, almost monosyllabic. We pointed out a passing vessel to one another or chucked a bit of shingle into the sea. You would have said we were bored. Yet deep down in ourselves we were astir and all around us we could hear the rumours of divine passage, soft and mysterious as the flight of birds migrating in the dark.

The wind rose and tapped the line against the flag-staff at the Coastguard Station. It roared through my hair and past my ears for an hour on end till I felt quite windswept and bleak. On the way home we saw the wind darting hither and thither over the long grass like a lunatic snake. The wind! Oh! the wind – I have an enormous faith in the curative properties of the wind. I feel better already.

October 17.

Staying in Surrey. Exam, over and I feel fairly confident – after an agony for a few days before on account of the development of a cold which threatened to snatch the last chance out of my hands.

Justifiable Mendacity

Sitting on a gate on the N. Downs I saw a long way below me in the valley a man standing in a chalk pit and wielding a stick vigorously. For some reason or another the idea came to me that it would be interesting if he were in the act of killing a Snake – he so far away below and I above and unnoticed quietly watching him. At dinner to-night, this revised version of the story came out quite pat and natural and obviously interested the assembly. I added graphically that the man was too far away from me to be able to say what *species* of Snake it was he was killing. I possess the qualifications of an artistic liar. Yet I can't regard such a story as a lie – it was rather a justifiable emendation of an otherwise uninteresting incident.

October 24.

Une Caractère

... She is a tiny little old lady, very frail and very delicate, with a tiny voice like the noise of a fretsaw. She talks incessantly about things which do not interest you, until your face gets stiff with forcing a polite smile, and your voice cracked and your throat dry with saying, "Yes," and "Really."

To-night I attend the Zoological Society to read my first paper, so I am really in a fluster and want to be quiet. Therefore to prevent her from talking I write two letters which I represent as urgent. At 6.15 desperate, so went out for a walk in the dark London streets. Returned to supper and to Her. After the wife, the husband is intellectual pyrotechnics. Referring to the Museum, —

"Would you have there, I suppose, any insects, in a case like, what you might say to study to yourself when no one is by?" he inquired.

6.40. It is now one hour before I need leave for the meeting, and whether I sigh, cough, smoke, or read the paper, she goes on. She even refuses to allow me to scan the lines below photos in the *Illustrated London News*. I write this as the last sole resource to escape her devastating prattle and the ceaseless hum of her tiny gnat-like mind. She thinks (because I told her so) that I am preparing notes for the evening meeting.

Later: Spent an absolutely damnable day. Am sick, tired, bored, frantic with her voice which I have been able to share with no one except the intellectual giant, her husband, at tea time. In order to break the flow of chatter, I would rudely interrupt and go on talking, by this means keeping my end up for as long as I could, and enjoying a short respite from the fret-sawing voice. But I tired of this and it was of no permanent value. When I broke in, she still went on for a few sentences unable to stop, and lo! here was the spectacle of two persons alone together in a room both talking at the same time and neither listening. I persisted though – and she had to stop. Once started, I was afraid to stop – scared at the certain fact of the voice beginning to saw again. After a while the fountain of my artificial garrulity dried up, and the Voice at once leaped into the breach, resuming – amazing and incredible as it seems – at the precise point where it had left off. At 7 I am quite exhausted and sit on the opposite side of the hearth, staring with glassy eyes, arms drooping at my sides and mouth druling. At 7.05 her cough increases, and she has to stop to attend to it. With a fiendish smile I push back my chair, and quietly watch her cough... She coughs continuously now and can talk no longer.

Thank God! 8 p.m., left for the meeting, where I read my paper in a state of awful nervousness... I read out all I had to say and kept them amused for about ten minutes. I was very excited when Dr. – got up and praised the paper,⁷ saying it was interesting, and hoping I should continue the experiments. The chairman, Sir John Rose Bradford, asked a question, I answered it and then sat down. After the meeting we went upstairs to the library, had tea and chatted with some of the big people... Zoology is certainly delightful, yet it seems to me the Zoologists are much as other people. I like Zoology. I wish I could do without Zoologists...

October 30.

Home once more. The Natural History Museum impressed me enormously. It is a magnificent building – too magnificent to work there – to follow one's profession in a building like that seems an altogether too grandiose manner of life. A pious zoologist might go up to pray in it – but not to earn his daily bread there.

October 31.

I'm in, in, in!!!!!!! being first with 141 marks to spare. Old M – [the servant] rushes up to my sister's bedroom with the news just after 7 a.m., and she says, "Fine, fine," and comes down in her nightgown to my bedroom, where we drink our morning cup of tea together – and talk! I'm delighted. What a magnificent obstacle race it has been! Still one ditch – the medical exam! Wired to friends.

November 1.

This is the sort of letter which is balm to me: – "My darling W – , – I need hardly tell you how absolutely delighted we were at the grand news of this morning. You must be feeling a huge glow of satisfaction with the knowledge of your object attained through untold difficulties. I don't wish to butter you up, or to gush, but I must honestly say that I feel tip-top proud of my old Beano. I admire your brains more than ever, and also your indomitable pluck and grit, and your quiet bravery in disappointment and difficulty..."

November 14.

The three most fascinating books in Science that I have so far read are (easily): – 1. Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions*. 2. Gaskell's *Origin of Vertebrates*. 3. Bergson's *Le Rire*.

Went to the dentist in the afternoon. Evening chiefly occupied in reading *Le Rire*. By my halidom, it is an extraordinarily interesting book!

November 29.

... I am always looking out for new friends – assaying for friendship... There is no more delightful adventure than an expedition into a rich, many-sided personality. Gradually over a long probation – for deep minds are naturally reticent – piece after piece is added to the geography of your friend's mind, and each piece pleases or entertains, while in return you let him steal away piece after piece of your own territory, perhaps saving a bit up here and there – such as an enthusiasm for Francis Thompson's poetry – and then letting it go unexpectedly. It's a delightful reciprocity.

I dream of "the honeyed ease of the Civil Servant's working day" (Peacock). Yet the French say *Songes sont mensonges*.

December 13.

In the Park it was very dark and she said, —

"If I lose you I shan't be able to find my way home."

"Oh! I'll look after you," I said.

Both being of the same mind at the same time we sat down on a seat together when a fortunate thing happened. It began to rain. So I offered her part of my overcoat. She nestled in under my arm and I kissed her out of hand. *Voilà!* A very pretty little girl, 'pon my word.

December 20.

⁷ The paper was "Distant Orientation in Batrachia" – detailing experiments on the homing faculty in newts.

The thing is obsessing me. After an early supper called and found my lady ready to receive me. No one else at home. So walked into the oak-panelled room with the red-curtained windows, took off my coat and scarf. She followed and switched off the light. There was a roaring fire in the grate. She is very amorous and I am not Hippolytus, so we were soon closely engaged in the large chair before the fire. As we sailed thus, close hauled to the wind, with double entendres and she trembled in the storm (and I was at the helm) the garden gate slammed and both of us got up quickly. I next heard a key turn in the lock and a foot in the passage: "Mr. – " she said...

She switched on the light, went out swiftly into the passage, and meeting him conducted him to her office, while I as swiftly put on overcoat and scarf, and slipped out through the open door, stumbling over his bicycle, but of course not stopping to pick it up. Later she telephoned to say it was all right. Very relieved!.. She recalls Richépin's *La Glu*.

December 21.

She is a fine sedative. Her movements are a pleasant adagio, her voice piano to pianissimo, her conversation breaks off in thrilling aposiopoeses.

An awful comedy this morning – for as soon as I was securely "gagged" the dentist went out of the room. She approached, leered at me helpless, and said provokingly, "Oh! you do look funny." Minx. On returning he said to her, "Would you like to hold his hand?"

She: "Oh! not just now."

And they grinned at one another and at me waiting to be tortured.

December 23.

... On the Station waited for an hour for the train. Gave her a box of sweets and the *Bystander*. We walked up the platform to extreme end in the dark and kissed! But it was very windy and cold. (I noticed that!) So we entered an empty luggage guard's van on rail beside platform left there by shunters. Here we were out of the wind and far better off. But a shunter came along and turned us out. She gave me a silver match-box. But I believe for various reasons that it is one of her own and not a new one. Said "Good-bye."

December 28.

At R – . Played the negligent *flâneur*, reclining on the Chesterfield, leaning against the grand piano, or measuring my length on the mat before the fire.

December 31.

To-morrow I begin duties at the British Museum of Natural History. I cannot quite imagine myself a Museum assistant. Before I get there I know I shall be the strangest assistant on the staff. It will be singing my song in a Strange land and weeping – I hope not too bitterly – down by the waters of a very queer Babylon.

Still, I have burnt my bridges like Cæsar – or burnt my ships like Cortez. So forward!

PART II – IN LONDON

1912

January 21.

Am at last beginning to get more content with the work at the Museum, so that I muse on Bernard Shaw's saying, "Get what you like or you'll grow to like what you get." I have a terrible suspicion that the security of tenure here is like the lion's den in the fable —*Nulla vestiga retrorsum*. Of course I am wonderfully proud of being at the Museum, although I am disappointed and write as if I were quite blasé.

January 25.

I should be disappointed if at the end of my career (if I live to see it through) I do not win the F.R.S. I should very much like it... My nature is very mixed – ambitious above all things and yet soon giddy with the audacity of my aspirations. The B.M. and my colleagues make me feel most inferior in fact, but in theory – in the secrecy of my own bedchamber – I feel that there are few men there my equal.

April 26.

Down with influenza. A boarding-house with the 'flue!

May 8.

Went home to recuperate, a beef jelly in one pocket and sal volatile in the other. On arrival, my blanched appearance frightened Mother and the others, so went to bed at once. "Fate's a fiddler, life's a dance."

May 12.

Weak enough to sit down before dressing-table while I shave and brush my hair. Dyspepsia appalling. The Doctor in Kensington seemed to think me an awful wreck and asked if I were concealing —

Reading Baudelaire and Verlaine.

May 24.

Bathing

Sat on a seat overlooking the sand-hills with stick between my legs like an old man, and watched a buxom wench aet. 25 run down the path pursued by "Rough" and two little girls in blue. Later they emerged from a striped bathing tent in the glory of blue bathing dresses. It made me feel quite an old man to see the girl galloping out over the hard level sands to the breakers, a child clinging to each hand. Legs and arms twinkled in the sun which shone with brilliance. If life were as level as those sands and as beautiful as that trio of girls!

May 26.

Two Young Men Talking

With H – in his garden. He is a great enthusiast.

"I disapprove entirely of your taste in gardening," I said. "You object to the 'ragged wilderness' style, I like it. You like lawns laid out for croquet and your privet hedges pruned into 'God Save the King' or 'Dieu et mon droit.' My dear boy, if you saw Mr. –'s wilderness at – you'd be so shocked you'd cut and run, and I imagine there'd be an affecting reunion between you and your beloved geraniums."

For my part, I don't like geraniums: they're suburban, and all of a piece with antimacassars and stuffed birds under glass bells. The colour of your specimens, moreover," I rapped out, "is vulgar – like the muddled petticoats of old market women."

H – , quite unmoved, replied slowly, "Well, here are some like the beautiful white cambric of a lady of fashion. You've got no taste in flowers – you're just six feet of grief and patience." We roared with laughing.

"Do stop watering those damned plants," I exclaimed at last. But he went on. I exclaimed again and out of sheer ridiculousness, in reply he proceeded to water the cabbages, the gravel path, the oak tree – and me! While I writhed with laughing.

May 27.

By the Sea

Sat upon a comfortable jetty of rock and watched the waves without a glimmer of an idea in my mind about anything – though to outward view I might have been a philosopher in cerebral parturition with thoughts as big as babies. Instead, little rustling dead leaves of thoughts stirred and fluttered in the brain – the pimple *e. g.* I recollected on my Aunt's nose, or the boyishness of Dr. – 's handwriting, or Swinburne's lines: "If the golden-crested wren Were a nightingale – why, then Something seen and heard of men Might be half as sweet as when Laughs a child of seven."

I continued in this pleasurable coma all the afternoon and went home refreshed.

May 29.

Have returned to London and the B.M. My first day at the M. Sat at my table in a state of awful apathy.

At least temporarily, I am quite disenchanted of Zoology. I work – God save the mark – in the Insect Room!

On the way home, purchased: —

Peroxide of hydrogen (pyorrhœa threatened). One bottle of physic (for my appalling dyspepsia).

One flask of brandy for emergencies (as my heart is intermittent again).

Prussic acid next.

Must have been near pneumonia at R – . Auntie was nervous, and came in during the night to see how I was.

June 20.

It caused me anguish to see my article returned from the *Fortnightly* and lying in a big envelope on the table when I returned home this evening. I can't do any work because of it, and in desperation rushed off to the stately pleasure domes of the White City, and systematically went through all the thrills – from the Mountain Railway to the Wiggle Woggle and the 'Witching Waves.

June 21.

To-day I am easier. The cut worm forgives the plough. But how restless this disappointment has made me... I have no plans for recuperation and cannot settle down to work.

July 6.

On my doctor's advice, went to see Dr. P – , a lung specialist. M – found a dull spot on one of my lungs, and, not feeling very sure, and without telling me the nature of his suspicion, he arranged for Dr. P – to see me, allowing me to suppose he was a stomach authority as my dyspepsia is bad.

Well: it is *not* consumption, but my lungs and physique are such that consumption might easily supervene. As soon as Dr. P – had gone, M – appended the following lugubrious yarn: —

Whenever I catch cold, I must go and be treated at once, all my leisure must be spent out of doors, I must take cream and milk in prodigious quantities and get fat at all costs. There is even a question of my giving up work.

July 10.

A young but fat woman sitting in the sun and oozing moisture is as nasty as anything in Baudelaire.

July 14.

A "Brilliant Career"

My old head master once prophesied for me "a brilliant career." That was when I was in the Third Form. Now I have more than a suspicion that I am one of those who, as he once pointed out, grow sometimes out of a brilliant boyhood into very commonplace men. This continuous ill health is having a very obvious effect on my work and activities. With what courage I possess I have to face the fact that to-day I am unable to think or express myself as well as when I was a boy in my teens – witness this Journal!

I intend to go on however. I have decided that my death shall be disputed all the way.

Oh! it is so humiliating to die! I writhe to think of being overcome by so unfair an enemy before I have demonstrated myself to maiden aunts who mistrust me, to colleagues who scorn me, and even to brothers and sisters who believe in me.

As an Egotist I hate death because I should cease to be I.

Most folk, when sick unto death, gain a little consolation over the notoriety gained by the fact of their decease. Criminals enjoy the pomp and circumstance of their execution. Voltaire said of Rousseau that he wouldn't mind being hanged if they'd stick his name on the gibbet. But my own death would be so mean and insignificant. Guy de Maupassant died in a grand manner – a man of intellect and splendid physique who became insane. Tusitala's death in the South Seas reads like a romance. Heine, after a life of sorrow, died with a sparkling witticism on his lips; Vespasian with a jest.

But I cannot for the life of me rake up any excitement over my own immediate decease – an unobtrusive passing away of a rancorous, disappointed, morbid, and self-assertive entomologist in a West Kensington Boarding House – what a mean little tragedy! It is hard not to be somebody even in death.

A sing-song to-night in the drawing-room; all the boarding-house present in full muster. There was a German, Schulz, who sat and leered at his inamorata – a sensual-looking, pasty-faced girl – while she gave us daggers-and-moonlight recitations with the most unwarranted self-assurance (she boasts of a walking-on part at one of the theatres); there was Miss M – listening to her fiancé, Capt. O – (home from India), singing Indian Love Songs at her; there was Miss T – , a sour old maid, who knitted and snorted, not fully conscious of this young blood coursing around her; Mrs. Barclay Woods pursued her usual avocation of imposing on us all the great weight of her immense social superiority, clucking, in between, to her one chick – a fluffy girl of 18 or 19, who was sitting now in the draught, now too close to a "common" musician of the Covent Garden Opera; finally our hostess, a divorcee, who hated all males, even Tom-cats. We were a pathetic little company – so motley, ill-assorted – who had come together not from love or regard but because man is a gregarious animal. In fact, we sat secretly criticising and condemning one another ... yet outside there were so many millions of people unknown, and overhead the multitude of the stars was equally comfortless.

Later: ... Zoology on occasion still fires my ambition! Surely I cannot be dying yet.

Whatever misfortune befalls me I do hope I shall be able to meet it unflinchingly. I do not fear ill-health in itself, but I do fear its possible effect on my mind and character... Already I am slowly altering, as the Lord liveth. Already for example my sympathy with myself is maudlin.

Whenever the blow shall fall, some sort of a reaction *must* be given. Heine flamed into song. Beethoven wrote the 5th Symphony. So what shall I do when my time comes? I don't think I have any lyrics or symphonies to write, so I shall just have to grin and bear it – like a dumb animal... As long as I have spirit and buoyancy I don't care what happens – for I know that or so long I cannot be

accounted a failure. The only *real* failure is one in which the victim is left spiritless, dazed, dejected with blackness all around, and within, a knife slowly and unrelentingly cutting the strings of his heart.

My head whirls with conflicting emotions, struggling, desperate ideas, and a flood of impressions of all sorts of things that are never sufficiently sifted and arranged to be caught down on paper. I am brought into this world, hustled along it and then hustled out of it, with no time for anything. I want to be on a great hill and square up affairs.

August 28.

... After tea, we all three walked in Kensington Gardens and sat on a seat by the Round Pond. My umbrella fell to the ground, and I left it there with its nose poking up in a cynical manner, as She remarked.

"It's not cynical," I said, "only a little knowing. Won't you let yours fall down to keep it company? Yours is a lady umbrella and a good-looking one – they might flirt together."

"Mine doesn't want to flirt," she answered stiffly.

September 13.

At C – , a tiny little village by the sea in N – .

Looking up from a rockpool, where I had been watching Gobies, I saw three children racing across the sands to bathe, I saw a man dive from a boat, and I saw a horse-man gallop his mare down to the beach and plunge about in the line of breakers. The waters thundered, the mare whinnied, the children shouted to one another, and I turned my head down again to the rockpool with a great thumping heart of happiness: it was so lovely to be conscious of the fact that out there this beautiful picture was awaiting me whenever and as often as I chose to lift my head. I purposely kept my head down, for the picture was so beautiful I did not want to hurt it by breathing on it, and I kept my head down out of a playful self-cheating delight; I decided not to indulge myself.

September 16.

Out in the Bay dredging for Echinoderms with "Carrots." Brilliantly fine. The haul was a failure, but, being out in a boat on a waveless sea under a cloudless sky, I was scarcely depressed at this! We cruised along from one little bay to another, past smugglers' caves and white pebble beaches, the dredge all the while growling along the sea bottom, and "Carrots" and I lying listless in the bows. I was *immensely happy*. My mercury was positively ringing the bell.

Who, then, is "Carrots"? He is a fine brawny boat-man who jumps over the rocks like a Chamois, swims like a Fish, pulls like an Ox, snorts like a Grampus – a sort of compound zoological perfection, built eclectically.

September 18.

Early Boughies

Up the village, Mrs. Beavan keeps a tiny little shop and runs a very large garden. She showed us all about the garden, and introduced us to her husband, whom we discovered in an apple tree – an old man, aged 76, very hard of hearing, and with an impediment in his speech. He at once began to move his mouth, and I caught odd jingles of sound that sounded like nothing at all – at first, but which gradually resolved themselves on close attention to such familiar landmarks as "Early Boughies," "Stubbits," "Ribstone Pippins" into a discourse on Apples.

The following curious conversation took place between me and the deaf gaffer, aged 76, standing in the apple tree, —

"These be all appulls from Kent – I got 'em all from Kent."

"How long have you lived in C – ?"

"Bunyard & Son – that's the firm – they live just outside the town of Maidstone."

"Do you keep Bees here?"

"One of these yer appulls is called Bunyard after the firm – a fine fruit too."

"Your good wife must be of great assistance to you in your work."

"Little stalks maybe, but a large juishy appull for all that."

Just then I heard Mrs. B – saying to E – , —

"Aw yes, he's very active for 76. A little deaf, but he manages the garden all 'eesulf, I bolsters 'un up wi' meat and drink – little and often as they zay for children... Now there's a bootifull tree, me dear, that 'as almost beared itself to death, as you may say."

She picked an apple off it shouting to poor Tom still aloft, —

"Tom what's the name of this one?"

"You should come a bit earlier, zir," replied T. "'Tis late a bit now doan't 'ee zee?"

"No – what's its name I want," shouted his spouse.

"Yes, yes, give the lady one to take home – there's plenty for all," he said.

"What is the NAME? THE NAME OF THIS YER APPULL," screamed Mrs. B., and old Tom moving his bones slowly down from the tree answered quite unmoved, —

"Aw the name? Why, 'tis a common kind of appull – there's a nice tree of 'em up there."

"Oh! never mind, 'tis a Gladstone," said Mrs. B., turning to us.

"A very fine Appull," droned the old boy.

September 28.

Back in town again. Wandered about in a somnambulistic way all the afternoon till I found myself taking tea in Kew Gardens. I enjoyed the wind in my face and hair. Otherwise there is nothing to be said – a colourless day.

October 10.

Came across the following arresting sentence: "Pale, anæmic, cadaverous, bad teeth and disordered digestion and a morbid egotism." Yes, but my teeth are *not* bad.

October 20.

On the N. Downs

Under the oak where I sat the ground was covered with dead leaves. I kicked them, and I beat them with my stick, because I was angry that they were dead. In the coppice, leaves were quietly and majestically floating earthwards in the pomp of death. It was very thrilling to observe them.

It was a curious sensation to realise that since the last time I sat under the old oak I had been right up to the N. of England, then right down to the S.W., and back once more to London town. I bragged about my kinetic activity to the stationary oak and I scoffed at the old hill for having to remain always in the same place.

It gave me a pleasing sense of infinite superiority to *come back* and see everything the same as before, to sit on the same old seat under the same old oak. Even that same old hurdle was lying in the same position among the bracken. How sorry I was for it! Poor wretch – unable to move – to go to Whitby, to go to C – , to be totally ignorant of the great country of London...

Day dreamed. My own life as it unrolls day by day is a source of constant amazement, delight, and pain. I can think of no more interesting volume than a detailed, intimate, psychological history of my own life. I want a perfect comprehension at least of myself...

We are all such egotists that a sorrow or hardship – provided it is great enough – flatters our self-importance. We feel that a calamity by overtaking us has distinguished us above our fellows. A man likes not to be ignored even by a railway accident. A man with a grievance is always happy.

October 23.

Over to see E – . Came away disillusioned.

October 25.

Met her in Smith's book shop looking quite bewitching. Hang it all, I thought I had finished. Went home with her, watched her make a pudding in the kitchen, then we sat by the firelight in the drawing-room and had supper. Scrumptious (not the supper).

October 27.

Quarrelled with D – ! The atmosphere is changed at the flat – my character is ruined. D – has told them I'm a loose fellow. I've always contrived to give him that impression – I liked to be cutting my throat – and now it's cut!

November 1.

D – came and carried me off to the flat, where they asked why I hadn't been over – which, of course, pleased me immensely.

November 6.

Doctor M – is very gloomy about my health and talks of S. Africa, Labrador, and so on. I'm not responding to his treatment as I should.

November 11.

Met her this evening in Kensington Road. "I timed this well," said she, "I thought I should meet you." Good Heavens, I am getting embroiled. Returned to the flat with her and after supper called her "The Lady of Shalott."

"I don't think you know what you're talking about" – this stiffly.

"Perhaps not," I answered. "I leave it to you."

"Oh! but it rests with you," she said.

Am I in love? God knows – but I don't suppose God cares.

November 15.

On M – 's advice went to see a stomach specialist – Dr. Hawkins. As I got there a little too early walked up the street – Portland Place – on the opposite side (from shyness) past an interminable and nauseating series of night bells and brass plates, then down again on the right side till I got to No. 66 which made me flutter – for ten doors ahead I mused is the house I must call at. It made me shiver a little.

The specialist took copious notes of my evidence and after examining me retired to consult with M – . What a parade of ceremony! On coming back, the jury returned a verdict of "Not proven." I was told I ought to go out and live on the prairies – and in two years I should be a *giant*! But where are the prairies? What 'bus? If I get worse, I must take several months' leave. I think it will come to this.

November 16.

Arthur came down for the week end. He likes the Lady of Shalott. She is "not handsome, but arresting, striking" and "capable of tragedy." That I believe she has achieved already... If she were a bit more gloomy and a bit more beautiful, she'd be irresistible.

November 22.

He: "Have a cigarette? I enjoy lighting your cigarettes."

She: "I don't know how to smoke properly."

He: "You smoke only as *you* could."

She: "How's that?"

H.: "Gracefully, of course."

S.: "Do you think I like pretty things being said to me?"

H.: "Why not, if they are true. Flattery is when you tell an ugly woman she is beautiful. Have you so poor an opinion of yourself to think all I say of you is flattery?"

S.: "Yes. I am only four bare walls, – with nothing inside."

H.: "What a deliciously empty feeling that must be. ... But I don't think you're so simple as all that. You bewilder me sometimes."

S.: "Why?"

H.: "I feel like Sindbad the Sailor."

S.: "Why?"

H.: "Because I'm not George Meredith." The title of "husband" frightens me.

December 9.

It's a fearful strain to go on endeavouring to live up to time with a carefully laid-out timetable of future achievements. I am hurrying on with my study of Italian in order to read the Life of Spallanzani in order to include him in my book – to be finished by the end of next year; I am also subsidising Jenkinson's embryological lectures at University College with the more detailed account of practical and experimental work in his text-book; I have also started a lengthy research upon the Trichoptera – all with a horrible sense of time fleeing swiftly and opportunities for work too few ever to be squandered, and, in the background, behind all this feverish activity, the black shadow that I might die suddenly with nothing done – next year, next month, next week, to-morrow, now!

Then sometimes, as to-night, I have misgivings. Shall I do these things so well now as I might once have done them? Has not my ill-health seriously affected my mental powers? Surely the boy of 1908-10 was almost a genius or – seen at this distance – a very remarkable youth in the fanatical zeal with which he sought to pursue, and succeeded in gaining, his own end of a zoological education for himself.

It is a terrible suspicion to cross the mind of an ambitious youth that perhaps, after all, he is a very commonplace mortal – that his life, whether comedy or tragedy, or both, or neither, is any way insignificant, of no account.

It is still more devastating for him to have to consider whether the laurel wreath was not once within his grasp, and whether he must not ascribe his own incalculable loss to his stomach simply.

December 15.

A very bad heart attack. As I write it intermits every three or four beats. Who knows if I shall live thro' to-night?

December 16.

Here I am once more. A passable night. After breakfast the intermittency recommenced – it is better now, with a dropped beat only about once per half-hour, so that I am almost happy after yesterday, which was Hell. The world is too good to give up without remonstrance at the beck of a weak heart.

Before I went to sleep last night, my watch stopped – I at once observed the cessation of its tick and wondered if it were an omen. I was genuinely surprised to find myself still ticking when I awoke this morning. A moment ago a hearse passed down the street... Yes, but I'm damned if I haven't a right to be morbid after yesterday. To be ill like this in a boarding-house! I'd marry to-morrow if I had the chance.

December 22.

Sollas's "Ancient Hunters"

Read Sollas's book *Ancient Hunters*– very thrilling – mind full of the Aurignacians, Mousterians, Magdalenians! I have been peering down such tremendous vistas of time and change that my own troubles have been eclipsed into ridiculous insignificance. It has been really a Pillar of Strength to me – a splendid tonic. Palæontology has its comfortable words too. I have revelled in my littleness and irresponsibility. It has relieved me of the harassing desire to live, I feel content to live dangerously, indifferent to my fate; I have discovered I am a fly, that we are all flies, that nothing matters. It's a great load off my life, for I don't mind being such a micro-organism – to me the honour is sufficient of belonging to the universe – such a great universe, so grand a scheme of things. Not even Death can rob me of that honour. For nothing can alter the fact that I *have* lived; *I have been I*, if for ever so short a time. And when I am dead, the matter which composes my body is indestructible – and eternal, so that come what may to my "Soul," my dust will always be going on, each separate

atom of me playing its separate part – I shall still have some sort of a finger in the Pie. When I am dead, you can boil me, burn me, drown me, scatter me – but you cannot destroy me: my little atoms would merely deride such heavy vengeance. Death can do no more than kill you.

December 27.

"It is a pleasure to note the success attending the career of Mr. W.N.P. Barbellion now engaged in scientific work on the staff of the Natural History Museum ..." etc., etc.

This is a cutting from the local paper – one of many that from time to time I once delightedly pasted in the pages of the Journal. Not so now.

... At 23, I am a different being. Surrounded by all the stimulating environment of scientific research, I am cold and disdainful. I keep up the old appearances but underneath it is quite different. I am a *hypocrite*. I have to wear the mask and cothornoi, finding the part daily more difficult to bear. I am living on my immense initial momentum – while the machinery gradually slows up. My career! Gadzooks.

1913

January 3.

From the drawing-room window I see pass almost daily an old gentleman with white hair, a firm step, broad shoulders, healthy pink skin, a sunny smile – always singing to himself as he goes – a happy, rosy-cheeked old fellow, with a rosy-cheeked mind... I should like to throw mud at him. By Jove, how I hate him. He makes me wince with my own pain. It is heartless, indecently so, for an *old* man to be so blithe. Life has, I suppose, never lain in wait for him. The Great Anarchist has spared him a bomb.

January 19.

My Aunt, aged 75, who has apparently concluded from my constant absences from Church that my spiritual life is in a parlous way, to-day read me her portion from a large book with a broad purple-tasseled bookmark. I looked up from "*I Promessi Sposi*" and said "Very nice." It was about someone whose soul was not saved and who Would not answer the door when it was knocked. It is jolly to be regarded as a wicked, libidinous youth by an aged maiden Aunt.

January 22.

This Diary reads for all the world as if I were not living in mighty London. The truth is I live in a bigger, dirtier city – ill-health. Ill-health, when chronic, is like a permanent ligature around one's life. What a fine fellow I'd be if I were perfectly well. My energy for one thing would lift the roof off...

We conversed around the text: "To travel hopefully is better than to arrive and true success is to labour." She is – well, so graceful. My God! I love her, I love her, I love her!!!

February 3.

A Confession

H – B – invited me to tea to meet his fiancée.

Rather pleased with the invitation – I don't know why, for my idea of myself is greater than my idea of him and probably greater than his idea of himself.

Yet I went and got shaved, and even thought of buying a new pair of gloves, but poverty proved greater than vanity, so I went with naked hands. On arriving at Turnham Green, I removed my spectacles (well knowing how much they damage my personal appearance). However, the beauty of the thing was that, tho' I waited as agreed, he never turned up, and so I returned home again, crestfallen – and, with my spectacles on again.

February 9.

... "Now, W – , talk to me prettily," she said as soon as the door was closed on them.

"Oh! make him read a book," whined her sister, but we talked of marriage instead – in all its aspects. Bless their hearts, I found these two dear young things simply sodden with the idea of it.

In the middle I did a knee-jerk which made them scream with laughing – the patellar reflex was new to them, so I seized a brush from the grate, crossed to Her and gently tapped: out shot her foot, and – cried: "Oh, do do it to me as well." It was rare fun.

"Oh! pretty knee, what do I see?
And he stooped and he tied up my garter for me."

February 10.

News of Scott's great adventure! Scott dead a year ago!! The news, when I saw it to-night in the *Pall Mall Gazette* gave me cold thrills. I could have wept... What splendid people we humans are! If there be no loving God to watch us, it's a pity for His sake as much as for our own.

February 15.

Tried to kiss her in a taxi-cab on the way home from the Savoy – the taxi-cab danger is very present with us – but she rejected me quietly, sombrely. I apologised on the steps of the Flats and said I feared I had greatly annoyed her. "I'm not annoyed," she said, "only surprised" – in a thoughtful, chilly voice.

We had had supper in Soho, and I took some wine, and she looked so bewitching it sent me in a fever, thrumming my fingers on the seat of the cab while she sat beside me impassive. Her shoulders are exquisitely modelled and a beautiful head is carried poised on a tiny neck.

February 16.

Walking up the steps to her flat to-night made me pose to H – (who was with me) as Sydney Carton in the picture in *A Tale of Two Cities* on the steps of the scaffold. He laughed boisterously, as he is delighted to know of my last evening's misadventure.

At supper, a story was told of a man who knocked at the door of his lady's heart four times and at last was admitted. I remarked that the last part of the romance was weak. She disagreed. H – exclaimed, "Oh! but this man has no sentiment at all!"

"So much the worse for him," chimed in the others.

"He was 66 years of age," added Mrs. – .

"Too old," said P. "What do you think the best age for a man to marry?"

H.: "Thirty for a man, twenty-five for a woman."

She: "That's right: it still gives me a little time."

P.: "What do *you* think?" (to me).

I replied sardonically, —

"A young man may not yet and an old man not at all."

"That's right, old wet blanket," chirruped P – .

"You know," I continued, delighted to seize the opportunity to assume the role of youthful cynic, "Cupid and Death once met at an Inn and exchanged arrows, since when young men have died and old men have doted."

H – was charming enough to opine that it was impossible to fix a time for love. Love simply came.

We warned him to be careful on the boat going out.

"Yes, I know," said H – (who is in love with P –).

"My brother had a dose of moonlight on board a boat when he sailed and he's been happy ever since."

P.: "How romantic!"

H.: "A great passion!"

"The only difference," I interjected in a sombre monotone, "between a passion and a caprice is that the caprice lasts a little longer."

"Sounds like a book," She said in contempt.

It was – Oscar Wilde!

P – insisted on my taking a biscuit. "Don't mind me," she said. "Just think I'm a waitress and take no notice at all."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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