Dear Mummy

I start this letter on a new pad with an apology for perhaps missing a mail — I posted my last letter at Suez, thinking that I should catch the next mail from Gibraltar did not send anything from Naples & Toulon, with the result that I now have four ports & a variety of other things to chronicle. Also I am very foggy about dates & chronology, hoping you will pardon a certain vagueness in reference thereto. But as you can see from my present address written at the head of this here letter, we are getting on to our destination; this is Tuesday — we get to Plymouth on Thursday at 7am. & to Tilbury on Friday morning. So things are moving. And I don't know whether to post this on the boat & catch I suppose an Australian mail, or hang on to it & trust a mail going immediately; however if you don't get it sooner you will get it later, so it doesn't much matter. Pardon this writing, which is due to the ship's rolling a bit, the pen being consequently liable to skid of a sudden. But the rolling is nothing — we haven't had a day of really bad weather since getting out of the Bight; & since leaving Colombo it has been as calm as & sometimes a good deal calmer than harbour. The Mediterranean was like a millpond; the Atlantic up to lunchtime today like a pool in the rocks. And by gum we have been having some hummer natural phenomena — suns like round balls of fire going down in clear skies over the sea every night; last night an extraordinary dark [unclear: banking] of clouds along the horizon like a huge forest over yellow land till about ½ past 8, with the sea like a sheet of polished dark wood; at late sunrise, quite red, this morning, over the coast of Portugal; wonderful nights, thick with stars & the most romantic moon in the world. I regret that I do not observe much change in the heavens like the astronomical young heroes who run away to sea; a star seems a star to me irrespective of its name or position in the heavens. They're the same colour anyhow, & there appear to be about the same number of them on the whole. But I haven't counted them exactly.

Well, to get back to the strict narrative of my adventures: we reached Suez about 10 Saturday night the 18th, & a dark night it was. We saw the lights in the distance strung out in a long flat semi-circle, just after dinner & gradually drew in & anchored till 2am. We weren't allowed off the ship, but a crowd of maritime merchants were allowed on board to sell Turkish delight & genuine amber necklaces & English newspapers & La Vie Parisianne; but I didn't buy anything, though I hung around & browsed. We had a Greek on board then, going back to his fatherland after a money & a wife & kid in Australia this same bloke being an expert in precious stones; & he by the exercise of rapid examination & vast gesticulation brought the price of one necklace (genuine) down from about 25/- to 3/6. Which shows how you would be exploited if you weren't careful. But some of these niggers look so darn starved & miserable that it goes against your grain to argue any point with them. Others of course are big burly or ingratiating personalitites that [unclear: win]; & you wouldn't mind [unclear: pinching] the goods off them, but one of them looked so timid & half hearted that I nearly bought his whole stock from him in pure commiseration. However I didn't have any cash on me just then, which saved me & probably him from a horrible debauch. We thought of staying up & seeing the ship into the Canal, but considering that it wouldn't pass the entrance till about 3 all went to bed requesting the others to call us then; with the result that nobody saw anything till broad daylight. Well, the Canal's a great piece of work & you can well understand the dirty scrabbling as to who shall have charge of it, politicians & empires being what they are. On one side is sand, with here & there a mob of niggers doing work, all by hand, on the widening of the canal, a £12 or £14,000,000 job, & a few reels of rusty barbed wire left over from the war; & on the other the British zone of occupation, more or less neat & clean, with some good lines of trees along the road. The railway runs alongside the road again; with very neat & well-built stations nearly all with French names on notices eg: "Gare El [unclear: Kautuah]" where the big & camp was during the war. It must have been a big place, if what's left is any indication. It was very satisfying to observe some mirages on this day; being cities & hills & running water & so on & so forth; so you can take the yarns you read in the books as substantially true. Otherwise there isn't much to record about this celebrated canal bar the extremely odd sailing ships that evidently carry on the local commerce — they have very broad bows coming up in front like this Sketch diagram of side view of ship bow on Suez Canal. (side view) flat Sketch diagram of front view of ship bow on Suez Canal. front view. There is no ship bow at all; it is the same width as the rest of the ship. We reached Port Said about 2.30 & were immediatley assaulted by thousands more niggers to do the
coaling. Well, I never saw anything more like hell. Talk of exploiting cheap colonial labour; in about five minutes on both sides of the ship there was an entirely black zone — the air so black that from up on the top deck you could just see long lines of indistinct figures walked up planks to tips in the side of the ship with no interval between them whatsoever. The lighters were so crowded that how they managed to do any work at all I don't know. They worked barefoot & practically naked; how their feet escaped the spades with which they were digging the coal into baskets is a miracle. One poor devil got an eyefull of the stuff; & there he stood, agonising & crying like a child, as we went past on our way to the shore. Very pretty. You can easily see why mechanical labour-saving inventions aren't needed here. Same thing in a modified form at Naples; same getting still cleaner, at Gibraltar. However there were diversions for members of the exploiting West like us; a conjuror was on board about as soon as the ship anchored, & my word, he did some clever things. He had a chicken secreted somewhere "Gally, gally, gally!" was the constant mysterious cry of this genial magician about his person, which he dragged out every now & again & caused to lay boxes of matches & eat them with equal facility; or discovered in gentlemen's waistcoat pockets or other curious & unimaginable places. Likewise curious evolutions with an illimitable number of corks & three tin cups & sixpences he threw over the side with many apologies & recovered again; but it wasn't so much the tricks, which were extraordinarily good of their kind, as the amazing patter that proved the artist (I forgot to say that he chopped the chicken's head off & put it on again — it was a real dinkum chicken) He had a long string of names at command "the (unclear: McPhersons)" "Mr Mackenzie", "Lady [unclear: Asquinti]" etc etc & he linked odd people together as husband & wife ("Now you give this to your husband, Lady [unclear: Asquinti]!") in a moment manner that gave great amusement to all concerned. They were in fact like his Majesty at the Royal Academy, observed to laugh heartily. So much for that. After a good long wait we got into be small boats & were rowed the 25 yards or so to shore & were in Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs, the amorous adventures of Cleopatra, the Sphinx & Pyramids & other historical phenomena. We met a new curse here, the licensed dragoman, who will follow you up for miles on the chance of a job. However we weren't having any, preferring to walk round at our own sweet will. And having escaped these we ran into tents for exhibitions of the can-can, to which was apparently added free beer, all described in the most seductive language ("just round the corner, not far, have a glass of beer, needn't stay if don't like, come on, can-can, naked dancing"). But we all thought hard of our Aunties & turned these very attractive invitations (several of them) down. It is too sad to think what I have missed on my travels from a perhaps exaggerated regard for Auntie's feelings. Not to mention Auntie Win. However putting these things aside, as we did in actual fact, if somewhat reluctantly, we walked up the main street & along various side streets & examined every thing else that was going. Antique horse-trams, sheiks, guttersnipes, what looked like illegitimate left-overs from the war. Street-cleaners, Arabs, Greeks & Dagos of all sorts & conditions, Egyptians, donkeys, café's in the approved style (wasn't it at Port Said, amid said surroundings, that McFee's "Command" started? — well, I could see the whole thing happening). We examined a Russian orthodox church, well built, but full of shrines & a department for selling tinpot little charms; & it was delightful to see Duneen, the hardened rationalist, who was the only lad with small change on him, tipping the man who showed us over with a couple of bob for the Church funds. So much for the most corrupt form of christianity. Then we followed up the trades of a couple of mosques, the outside of one of which was pretty good, & came finally to the sea beach, which was crowded & filled with the most varigated colour. A soccer match, what looked like firemen & were apparently boy-scouts drilling, children playing, all the fun of the fair, & everything in continual & imminent danger of getting mixed up with everything else. All this time we were taking pot-shots with our cameras; while McG's was going snap-snap-snap like a machine gun. The lad brought about 180 spoons of film with him & takes about 30 pictures at each port — doors (unclear: odd) gates & the sides of houses & heaven knows what. And some of them were worth taking. I never saw a more extraordinary lot of houses. Some were quite good blocks of flats; others were the same, damnable; but the little 12 side streets with their houses pass imagination. They have two or three stories; they lean over at any angle, they bulge inwards or outwards or both together, they have odd bits or whole second stories patched up with what look like old fruit cases; they appear to be full of people, & the family goats & hens sniff & peck round in & out of the doors. These lanes are so narrow that the houses seem to meet in a perspective of 20 feet or so. The extraordinary thing about the place is that most of the kids seem perfectly healthy; & some of the Greek girls are positively pretty; but jingo! I saw one baby I bet is buried by now. I suppose the weaklings get killed off pretty rapidly, & the survivors would thrive in hell. But the biggest luck of the day was falling in with an enormous religious festival. We saw little bits of processions gathering all over the place all the afternoon & marching round with drums & brilliant banners & a kid or two swinging incense; & finally they all got together & we saw Lord knows how many of them march up the street about six abreast. Old men, young men, children, all in separate divisions, in all imaginable sorts of garments, beating on little drums, singing in a curious mechanical monotonous sing-song, more incense, hundreds of banners red, green, white, covered with crescents — I never saw such a delightful romantic exhibition. Henning got into conversation with some sort of a sort of sad resignation
made some bad grammatical mistakes) & learned what all the noise was about — it was the last day of the 7 or 10 or 11 (I forget which) days of the celebration of the Prophet's birthday. Well, what I say is, may my birthday be celebrated likewise 1300 years hence, & give like gratification to some other genteel voyager. We arrived back at the ship finally about 10 minutes before she sailed, at 7, after running the gauntlet of numerous vendors of Turkish delight & cigarettes & the enterprising bootblacks described by Keithles with his usual vividness & verve. I repulsed one of these lads with some warmth when he arbitrarily took control of my foot; for which however I was afterwards rather sorry, as I don't like behaving like the Conquering Race. However they are certainly confounded nuisances. On the advice of Stuart whom we met with a cobbler an expert outside a café (leaving the boat at Port Said) we bought a couple of hundred best Turkish cigarettes for 5/- 100, after beating the merchant down somewhat. I understand you pay about 6d each for these cigarettes in Sydney. So that's that. And then coaling having finished & hell for the time being abrogated & a dark gentleman who had positively guaranteed to on receipt of a sufficient sum in cash (which he got) to dive off the boat deck, swim under the ship to come up the other side & having failed to do so, on the plea that the water was too dark & that he would do it first thing in the morning, we gave an inadequate blast on our whistle, & left the Canal behind, & moved into the Mediterranean. Here, having reached a spot where I & the historical imagination began to play havoc with my brain, I shall call an interval & go up on to the boat deck on spec of a game of quoit-tennis with the lads & Whinfield before dinner.

McGrath has just come down & said there is nothing doing upstairs so I suppose I had better get on with my romance.

Wednesday 29th: I got fed up with writing at that stage & thought I would finish up after dinner; so I pounded out the 1st & 3rd of the Pathetic Sonata which a gent in the music room said was very acceptable, viewed another sunset with admiration, fed, & yapped a bit; & then going into aforesaid music room, was ordered to play by a fat dictatorial lady from Melbourne called Mrs Percy Turnbull Berry, whom I haven't mentioned before & can't be bothered describing now; but I will give you a full description some day, if not epistolary, then in my novel, if not there in my famous historical work on the 50th voyage of the Osterley, Sydney to London, with remarks on the habits religion & social customs of the inhabitants thereof. And this morning I decided that there really wasn't any hurry, as I think the best thing will be not to post this on the boat but to wait till I get to London on the chance of a mail going direct. So I spent the morning writing the larger part of a magnificent epic in six cantos & about 200 lines, heroic couplets entitled the Osterliad; this fine work has for its hero the 3rd officer & is mainly descriptive of his life, achievements & character, with some account of the chief actions, meal, & events in which we have jointly adventured. We are going to present it to him at lunch tomorrow with a box of cigars we all came in on at Gibraltar. That being the last meal at which we shall see his cheery presence. At the present moment Duncan is typing same to the dictation of Henning which is a very cheerful sound for the creative artist. I need hardly remark that the intellectual strain even on such a brain as mine during the day has been immense. I may send it out some day for your perusal, if it does not appear in the subtest of references.

Well, to get back to the Mediterranean. It was traditionally blue, but not bluer than the Red Sea or the Arabian Sea or the Indian Ocean; still it was blue. But we didn't have very brilliant weather so that may account for it. But jingo, the deep, profound blue of the really deep sea is about the best colour in the world; & if you look over the side of the ship you can see deep clouds of green bubbles breaking in the wave it throws off. Even in the Tasman they didn't have this; neither did we get phosphorescent waves at night. But now I have seen all the nautical wonders of the world — phosphorescence, flying fish, porpoises dashing & leaping hither & thither, ships that pass in the night, likewise those that pass in the day- time, this, that & the other thing, complete & up to date. I have not seen I've heard off at first hand. You can't surprise me any more. Well, we didn't do anything in the for a couple of days but sail along pleasantly & play the second games tournament; & here let me say that in this & other competitions our party was remarkably successful. But I shall confine myself mainly to my own deeds. I got wiped out in the first round of nearly all the games, in the second of quoit-tennis, but ata in bucket quoits I survived to the third round then, to the semi final, then to the final, when I came up against Duncan. Well in the last throw I had six quoits to get in to make a break & go on throwing when I would indubitably have won. Alas! the strain of the great contest was beginning to tell on my finely tempered spirit; I only got four in & we finished up 24, 23, he being the victor by 1 point. He got a silver match-box; I got a bag of lollies, from which I picked out all the chocolates & gave the rest to him. Then came a gymkhana, in which by a remarkable combination of skill & speed I won the egg & spoon race hands down for which I got an order for 4/- on the barber's shop, & took it out in a tobacco pouch. Then the night before we arrived at Naples came a fancy-dress ball, to which we four lads went in uniform rig-out as ghosts.
We got a lot of cardboard from Whinfield & made it into oblongular boxes, minus minus one end, then painted four ghastly faces on same & we stuck our heads in them, with eyeholes & ventilation ditto. We then got four sheets from the steward & draped ourselves artistically in same & were supplied with four pieces of rusty chains by the faithful Whinfield. And our state entry into the saloon for dinner, barefoot, dragging our chains down the stairs with a terrific clatter & perambulating all round the room to our table was the chief & cardinal incident of the evening. Well, of course they weren't prepared with four first places; so we all got a special prize of a silver matchbox. I got another matchbox for my prowess in the guessing competition; & I was nearly sending one of these home for you to suitably inscribed, to show around to your friends; but I reflected that you had a terrific lot of junk like this around the house already, & that it would only mean more polishing for Auntie, during process of which the silver would probably wear off; so I put in two bob & swapped it for a chic little candlestick; these things all have the ship's crest on, bar the tobacco pouch. But Lord knows I am going to pack them all — a problem I will have to face tomorrow.

Well, one day we came to the hills of Italy & the straits of Messina & Sicily & memories of Garibaldi, my admiration for that eminent swashbuckler growing a good deal when I saw the sort of country he fought over; by gum! it is pleasant to get into a part of the world that has some real history. By the way I can only regard the Scylla & Charaybdis yarns as gross exaggerations of the truth: I couldn't see whirlpools or rocks enough to sink an old tin-can, let alone the noble Ulysses. This merely confirms the opinion I have held for a long time, that the ancients were great liars — But what we saw were hummer hills, with vineyards growing on them, or perhaps olive groves, & Roman aqueducts & ruined castles, & an old fortress on a rock cliff, & river-torrents, & a fleet of fishing-boats & dozens of small sailing-ships, & everything else that could contribute to excite & enlarge the romantic mind. However we didn't stop for this, but went straight on to Naples, which we reached one night at 11pm being due to depart again at 2; & it was 12 before the Dagos returning home got their passports fixed up & we who didn't have to get anything fixed up were allowed to go on shore. Now it's a very funny thing that these foreign countries who are supposed to be so particular about these details, let us casual visitors land without any formality at all; while the only places at which we have to show out darned passports are the two lands of freedom, Ceylon & England. They didn't look at them at Gibraltar, so obviously the whole business is a [unclear: footling] waste of time & money. We were allowed on shore at last, saying goodbye here to one or two of our brightest & best & likewise to some of our worst duds, & taking on board a few newcomers. We thought we would see all we could for the time of night, so we hired a car & a guide, who was greatly impressed with the value of his own services, for 16/- each & ran all over the town. They say it is one of the chief seats & repositories of dirt in Italy, but it looked all right by moonlight, & the moon was full. We went round the waterfront & up hills in two different directions, where we looked at the city & the dim outline of Vesuvius, which was smoking away quite impressively. (I forgot to mention [unclear: Stromboli], an impressive gaunt looking place which we passed the day before, or it may have been the same morning; why anybody wants to go & live there is more than I can see understand; also Capri stirred me up, & various other islands we passed, either before or after Naples) We hopped out of the car beneath an old castle (built 1301 according to our guide) & I really felt that I had got real history at last. They certainly built their castles for permanence. And we passed another fortress (1302) & convented monasteries & dozens of newly-built blocks of flats -& they were jolly jolly good too. If could build flats like these I shouldn't mind going & living in one. And the colours they use are delightful. While according to Naples is supposed to be (besides the dirtiest) one of the feeblest cities in Italy as regards modern architecture. Well, I'm going to Italy anyhow. We managed to decipher various Fascist notices & calls to duty; & succeeded in repelling the efforts of the guide to get us into the can-can. We told him we had come from Port Said, which finally shut him up — but not before he had explained that the idea was to give in living form the delightful poses characteristic of the wall paintings of Pompei. I pointed out to the lads that this was an excellent, perhaps unique in their experience, opportunity to study history in the flesh, & that historical study was now growing in importance, being undoubtedly the chief of the modern humanities; but it was no good, they were all hard at work thinking of their Aunties. So that was the second chance we missed; & when we woke up in the morning we were at sea.

And then we came to Toulon for another three hours, lost most of our original passengers, & took on a huge number of tourists & excursionists, a good many from the Ouvieto, also in harbour; these people for the sake of a sea-voyage I suppose come out in one boat as far as Toulon & go back in the homeward bound one. Funny way of spending a holiday: Of course they get plenty of dancing & the opportunity of being sea-sick. But what with this lot & a big crowd we picked up at Gibraltar it makes the ship too darn full for us — too much like an old-world-population-problem. They have to have two sittings for lunch & dinner & we have had to fight for our bre usual breakfast seats against two ancient doddering parsons — it resolves itself into a race to see who can get there first, somebody invariably being left out; but the parsons always arrive among the first four, being keen on their food in spite of extreme age. They induce a certain gloom also where there was festivity; you can't argue when you are scattered & that they are far too old to make it worth while pulling their
legs. I'm willing to bet they've never heard of [unclear: Dear lipe]. So much for population problems. Except that as the old crowd have the second sitting, it is very annoying not to be able to get our usual posy in the lounge for coffee after dinner. At Toulon we didn't do much but observe life. We had to leave Henning at the Customs seeing about some bag s he was sending to Paris & wandered up the streets — we had only an hour actually on shore — bought a few papers, the die-hard ones & the celebrated Communist rag "L'Humanité" at a shop where was amazed to find that the woman didn't speak English. I did the punchasing in my best linguistic manner, & was delighted to find that when i said "deux" she knew that I meant two. We also bought some stunner books, about magazine size, in a new series, good paper & type, all illustrated with first-class woodcuts — nearly went mad over these. I bought Marie-Claire & Flaubert's "Trois Contes", Mac three or four just for the pictures — they were 3 francs or 3 ½ 2/6 – 3/- in pre-war currency; now equal to 6d or 7d. The British are on a win in France 4 all right. We then thought we would sit down outside a café in the correct style & break a bottle of wine between us; which we did at what seemed the ridiculous price of 15 francs — 3d glass; on working out which we felt very pleased with ourselves, till Whinfield said we shouldn't on any account have paid more than a franc. But 2d for 9 glasses seemed trading a bit too much on the Gallic generosity of our gallant allies. How ever it was apparently they who did the trading. Anyhow the garçon was all that a French waiter in the flesh ought to be; & he also understood my abbreviated demands for vin rouge. Duncan & I f e decided to feign drunkenness for the benefit of Miss Rowe when we got back to the ship, as she had been telling us what a devil she was thought to be at Canterbury College & how she had really & truly once been drunk at the Hermitage; but we put so much energy into our rehearsal that, though we had Mac biting a bit during same we didn't have enough strength left to simulate the after-effects of an orgy when it came to lunch-time. You're damn bad [unclear: minces] anyhow, says Whinfield. But I decided to go to France, also; not for the vin rouge of which it would take about a barrel to make a flea stagger, but on the strength of the cobbled streets & cheerful waiters of Toulon. The hills round the harbour are a good deal like parts of too; though not so much as those on both sides of the Straits of Messina. I say my first submarine at Toulon too; also some antique-looking battleships that the Duchess could row down.

Well, then we sailed away from the pleasant land of France to Spain & Gibraltar. I won't enlarge on Gibraltar, of which we didn't see a great deal; we only put in an hour there, I bought two Times & climbed up above the old ramparts on to the hill behind & walked down the main street, but s that's about all. We put in 2 ½ going across the bay to Algeciras to have a look at Spain. Well, Spain I am also going to later on. A bright little town, Algeciras, with a cathedral, & numerous very tastefully dressed soldiers, & equally numerous small boys whose only English word was "penny" & who for some reason clustered all almost exclusively round Henning; although there was a critical period when loud shouts from me of Vaya al diavolo! Get out! Go to blazes! Imshi! seemed to have very little effect. But Henning made the fatal mistake of putting his hand in his pocket & producing an ancient cancelled Spanish coin they worked off on us at Toulon. I put my hand in my pocket also (loud cheers) but all I produced was my handkerchief, with which I wiped my face quite unfinancially. (groans) The place is up & down little hills all over the place, the streets all cobbled, traction almost exclusively per donkeys & mules, though there were a few decrepit looking carriages & one or two motor-lorries for purposes of commerce. Everything ambled rather than ran, & slouched rather than walked. There were numerous little pubs, i.e. casas; kids whose simplicity in dress seemed to consist mainly in the presence of a shirt but the absence of trousers or the female substitute; women in mantillas, but betraying no sign of romantic southern beauty; balconies galore, but nothing attractive-looking from them; & men who might have stepped straight out of "Romance". There was also an amiable gentlemen who once more wanted to show us the can-can; but him we turned down again, though it appears probable that the thought of out aunties will at this rate become so familiar as to lose its efficacy.

I pause here to say that Eddystone is bright on the port side, with two or three other minor lights strung out very low down below it. Can this really be England? Well, well, well, well, well. And we'll wake up in the morning & find ourselves in Plymouth harbour. I can feel my inside quivering already. So Duncan & Henning having finished their arduous labours, we are going to have a drink on the strength of it — But only lemon squash.

At Algeciras we also investigated the cathedral, such as it is; numerous effigies of saints, virgins, crucified Christs & so on, dressed in real clothes, with lace handkerchiefs, or extremely bloody hands & knees; the Mick church certainly goes in for a realistic art. We arrived just in time for a christening, very interesting, but requiring a painter to discribe in the half-light with candles burning, rather than me, consummate master of words though I doubtless am. The priest mumbled, & the kid, about the size of a nine-pin, squalled & the father looked proud & glad, & a vicious organ squealed & yelped the whole time, from start to finish. And everybody went away satisfied, including us, who had seen superstition in its native haunts. Then we ambled round in the dust & the sun to the superior part of the town, past fishermen's houses to the villas & gardens of the great & the hotel where the celebrated conference was held that helped to cause the Great War: & so back to our
motor-boat, in which we proceeded to Gibraltar. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon & the white houses of Algeçiras showed up well against the dark hills as we receded. And we had the launch & two stalwart bronzed Spaniards at our disposal for the whole afternoon for 5/- each. And the Mediterranean looked divine.

Then at 7 o'clock we drew out from Gibraltar & I quoted Browning melodramatically & after dinner we entered on the Atlantic & I saw a fresh ocean. Since when I have seen no other. The Atlantic sunsets have equalled the best of previous days, the sea has been as smooth, the Bay of Biscay the smoothest of the lot, Whinfield & I versus Duncan & Henning have had soome good games of tennis; & we have seen the finish of our picture shows with Terence the Troublesome Tike for the time being in the ascendant, the serial brought to a triumphant & morally gratifying conclusion, the final clutch in romantic circumstances on board a liner outward bound from Port Said, the villians satisfactorily dead or suffering under their correct nemesis (or nemeses or nemises): & Harold Lloyd has performed in the last of his antique comedies on this trip. So all things draw to a close. Two more breakfasts, one more lunch, one more dinner, & I shall be finished with this ship. A melancholy thought, considering the standard of the meals. I send you two or three menus for you to see how I progress. I am getting a bit tight round the waistcoat anyhow. It will be a bit of a crash to come down to baching after this.

has just done a lightning caricature of me which I enclose also. And the ship has stopped to wait for the tide before going into Plymouth. Close on midnight. 12.15 We're here. Plymouth on the port bow. Oct 1st. here we are, stuck ignobly in a fog in the Thames estuary after an over-night packing & an early breakfast & expectations of being off the ship by about 10; & now it is 1/4 to 11, & someone says we have missed the tide; while the quartermaster sounding, & every now & then the ship blows off steam lugubriously & the bell bangs & clangs away. We left Plymouth very early yesterday morning & anchored off the [unclear: Nore] early this morning to wait for aforesaid tide. The Channel was as smooth as this paper & the sight of England very stimulating; but when we shall actually feel its hallowed soil beneath our sacrilegious feet I don't know.

We handed over the Epic & the cigars yesterday at lunch with great éclat, & the great man seemed extremely bucked, so that is all right. He gave us a cigar each, too; so we were likewise bucked.

I got my packing done pretty successfully this time, except that I have to strap my rug & dressing gown & cushion on to the outside of my suitcase, & get Henning to transport a pair of shoes. I had a final gorge off Auntie's biscuits for breakfast this morning & gave the small remainder away, not wishing to have to cart a tin around with me. They were very good biscuits & retained their savour remarkably well.

On going to bed last night I found my cabin festooned with green streamers, the life-belt tied to the electric- fan, biscuits in my shoes & pyjama pocket & under the pillow, a skull & crossbones [unclear: drored] on the looking-glass in toothpaste & a glassful of a horrible mixture of water, some cough- cure of Duncan's, tooth-paste & a liberal sprinkling of shaving- powder. And when I went & woke up Duncan & put his boots in his wash basin & turned the tap on he swore at me! This is how we celebrate the the beginning of the conquest of the Old World. And this is all to date. I suppose we shall be having lunch on board now, no doubt much to the steward's disgust.

I hope you are looking after yourself with the meticulous care for which you are not celebrated. I send my love to all & sundry & close here lest I should have no time to do so later on.

With said love I am etc

Jack.

P.S. You might tell Joe I have read

Sect Mencken's book & enjoyed it very much; also

# leant it to

Whinfield, who lent it to the rest of the bridge, I hear; so he has contributed much to the gaiety & instruction of the nations.

I have just about read all Hardy's collected poems, too, & nearly a book on history, so I'm not doing badly — about 4 books in 6 weeks.

P.P.S. I should have sent Daddy birthday felicitations

before now, but I do herewith. If we ever arrive in London I shall send something else. I have forgotten the date of Frannie's Birthday, but anyhow I daresay the Customs birds will pinch Keithles' parcel.

2/10/26 Saturday: 1st morning in London — Kensington: so far so good