



BRITISH
SOLDIER
IN INDIA

The Letters of Clive Branson

TWO SHILLINGS & SIXPENCE

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INTRODUCTION

IT is an honour to write an introduction to the letters that Clive Branson wrote from India. They paint an unforgettable picture, that, I am sure, will rouse many people to anger and to action.

Who was Clive Branson? To know this man is to gain added understanding from what he has written.

The son of an army officer, he was born in India, in 1907—oddly enough in the little town of Ahmednagar to which he was to return 35 years later. As a baby he was brought back to England and went later to a boys' preparatory school, and from there to a public school (Bedford Grammar School). While a boy he showed great talent for drawing, and after he left school he went to study at the Slade School of Art. He was a prolific painter, and by the age of 23 had already exhibited two paintings in the summer exhibition of the Royal Academy. From the age of 20 onwards he did a great deal of serious reading, starting with Volume One of Marx's *Capital*, and, after a brief sojourn in the I.L.P., he joined the Communist Party in 1932. From then on he threw himself heart and soul into the working-class movement and temporarily gave up painting altogether. He used to say that to be able to paint one must first learn about life. It was not until five years later that he again allowed himself time for painting, and began to exhibit once more, this time at the Lefevre Galleries. But by this time the Spanish war had broken out, and Clive could not rest until he had volunteered for service with the British Battalion of the International Brigade. In almost his first battle he was captured and spent eight months in a Franco concentration camp. On his return from Spain at the end of 1938 he organised the International Brigade Convoy, toured the country, collecting over £5,000, which was used to send food and medical supplies out to Spain.

After the outbreak of the present war, while continuing his political work, he nevertheless spent a number of months painting very intensively, because, as he said, "it may be my last chance." He painted mainly the life in Battersea, where he lived, the workers in the streets, the events of the blitz. Some of these paintings were subsequently shown at an exhibition organised by the Artists' International Association.

In 1941 he was called up, and became a member of the Royal Armoured Corps. A year later, he was drafted to India, and on

February 25th, 1944, was killed in action on the Arakan Front during the fighting for the Ngankedank Pass.

Such are the bare outlines of Clive's life. What of his work in the Labour Movement?

Clive was one of those who came to Communism, not because of personal experience of, and bitterness against, capitalism, but because of a profound intellectual conviction that it is a very wrong system which cannot be justified by any logic or reason.

He was one of those who endear themselves to all who come in contact with them, because of his untiring fight for social justice, and the boundless enthusiasm with which he carried on the struggle. He was able to inspire others to hate poverty and fight to remove it, to hate ugliness and see beauty. By his death the Movement has lost not only an active member, but a wise counsellor, and one who never asked others to do what he was not prepared to do himself.

He was not only a brilliant speaker and organiser, but also did more than his share of what is sometimes called "the donkey work." Nothing was too much for him: selling the *Daily Worker* at Clapham Junction, house to house canvassing, selling literature, taking up local issues, and getting justice done—all those little things which go to make up the indestructible foundations of the Movement.

He allied all this with serious educational work, and there are few local labour organisations in Battersea which do not remember the way in which he could make difficult subjects easy to understand.

His finest qualities were, however, shown in Spain when for many months he suffered the horrors of a Franco concentration camp. His bearing, his advice and example were of tremendous assistance to those who were with him. One of his comrades wrote of this period in Clive's history:

"In any difficult time, Clive was always cheery, putting forward what we should do, and helping to educate others in order to use the time usefully. He was one of the most popular and most respected among the British prisoners."

After he joined the Royal Armoured Corps, he proved himself a model of efficiency in mastering every aspect of armoured warfare. He was repeatedly recommended for promotion, which might have been quicker in coming had it not been for the political prejudices which die so hard at the War Office. As it was, he held the rank of troop sergeant at the time of his death.

When he was sent overseas to India, as his letters show, he was quick to adapt himself to the new life. He gained new impressions,

thoughts and ideas. He was enraged at the suffering and exploitation he saw. And through this he seemed to have acquired a new giant stature, a new command of language, and a love of India and its citizens which is one of the loveliest and most unforgettable features of his letters.

Written to his wife, these letters have a message for us all. You will read them for yourselves. They will make you angry and they will make you sad. They will make you see new colours and shades, an unimaginable suffering and a truly heroic grandeur, extraordinary nobility and equally extraordinary bestiality. It is a vivid and many-sided picture which Clive wanted to record in painting, and which, we may be sure, he would have executed with feeling and sincerity. As it is, we can capture from his letters something of the beauty which he saw.

Now he has gone. One of his mates, who was with him when he was killed in Burma, wrote home after his death :

“ He now lies buried somewhere among the green-covered hills, but he has left us a high idea of the meaning of human dignity and the immortality of life.

“ Our new humours and reversed outlooks are monuments to his mental virility. It now remains for us to honour him and justify the risks he freely encountered.”

This is indeed a noble tribute. What can we do to prove that we appreciate it?

I think that these letters are a challenge to every one of us. Let us read, again and again, that moving passage which gives almost his first impression after landing in India, when, writing of certain Britishers, he says :

“ They treat the Indians in a way which not only makes one tremble for the future, but makes one ashamed of being one of them.”

And let us remember, in reading this, that we have it in our power to remove this shame, that it is urgent to do so in the interests not only of the Indian people, but of the hundreds of thousands of British troops out there, whose fight against Japan is all the harder because we refuse to enable millions of Indian people to co-operate fully with us in the common struggle against fascism.)

Let us remember, too, that liberty, like war and peace, is indivisible. And let us demand the same democratic rights for the Indian people that we claim for ourselves. Let us demand the right of these people to elect their own Government. And, above all, let us help to relieve the famine, the ravages of which are so movingly described by Clive Branson, the black death of which he

was one of the first to send news to this country, and which, he warned us, as other experienced observers have warned us, may take a greater toll in coming days than it did ever in the past, when bureaucratic inefficiency and heartless profiteering made that land of love into a jungle.

I am proud that Clive Branson was a member of the Communist Party. What inspired him has inspired many others, who have worked and sacrificed their lives, not only to defeat fascism, but to help the people forward towards Socialism. This alone, they knew, can transform poverty into plenty, war into peace, idleness into productive labour, and give new life to every artistic and cultural development in our time.

HARRY POLLITT

NOTE

In preparing this book for the press, we have included everything in the letters which relates to India, to its people and problems as the writer saw them. To have given the letters themselves in full would have required a much larger volume. For the present purpose we have excluded the keen analysis and comment on many aspects of politics and the war which formed a large part of the original, as well as notes and discussion on art and history, some of which it is hoped to publish elsewhere. Like every other soldier overseas, Clive thought and wrote much of his family at home in England; this part of his letters has also been omitted here. Otherwise the extracts stand just as they were written.

PART I

WITH THE REGIMENT

May, 1942. Bombay

SO IT IS INDIA! I have arrived very fit, and in good spirits. On the boat, I ended by giving many lectures on the International Brigade, and found many friends. Although I have only been in India a little time there is one problem which hits you in the face—the life of the peasantry; and, in Bombay, the housing. But Oh, what a people this is for painting! I shall make many small notes and studies for pictures when this bloody business is over. Gad Sir—when I was in Poona in '42. . . .

May 31, 1942. From Gulunche, Nr. Poona

A GREAT deal has happened since my last letter. On landing we had a few hours to ourselves in Bombay. I went up to what looked like an Indian student (he was one) and asked him to show me where were the bookstalls so that I could get a book on Hindustani. I could not get the book as I had no Indian money, but I had a long talk with him.

We went by train from Bombay to a camp outside Poona. Everyone was filled with amazement at the appalling conditions in which the people live—this has been the subject of many very lively discussions since; not always by any means with the same or correct conclusions drawn, but without the slightest divergence of opinion on the basic fact that, after 175 years of Imperialism in India, the conditions are a howling disgrace. For this reason, and its reactions on our own immediate future (and present), the slogan among the British Other Ranks of "India for the Indians" is universally popular.

Of course, the problem for us is far more complicated than this. Naturally, the practical nearness of actual fighting with the Japs, the successes of the enemy, and the far distance we are from home, creates the elementary desire in all of us (except in the minds of those insane fools who look upon war as a sport, good fun, etc.)

for some miraculous ending to the war. As, of course, in the army *nothing* is done to explain things to the lads, one is almost daily called upon patiently to explain and explain why action out here is important, what our attitude to the natives and to Indian politics should be, etc. There is a deep-rooted tendency for the lads to treat the Indians in the traditional way, but daily contact with the native soldiers and civilians in the camp, sympathy for the mass poverty in the surrounding country, and the disgusting snobbishness of the Anglo-Indians both to the Indians and to the newly-arrived British soldiers (in great contrast to the wonderful reception we got in Cape Town from the South African whites) is quickly teaching them the reality of our position.

We have now settled in to our camp. Conditions are not what I had hoped for at all. We are under canvas with beds, sheets. A laundry boy takes in washing at 1 anna an article and returns it clean the same day. A tea boy brings round hot tea many times a day. The food is excellent. We get fruit in plenty. We sleep all afternoon. It is very hot, but heat, dryness and plenty to drink is quite a pleasant combination—it suits me, anyway. I have got the job of rations corporal which lets me go into a small railway town every day where I get a chance of learning by practice to speak Hindustani.

In my letters from the boat I spoke much of guerilla fighting being the key to the successful defence of India. My real contact with this country convinces me even more of this; the mass, dense basis of the peasantry; the structure of the terrain; the food and water problem (practically impossible to solve on any large scale in modern warfare by the old system of army machinery alone) are things which one has seen, as well as the poor roads—now a question being dealt with at length in moving speeches in Bombay after years of increasing neglect by the authorities. A great historian of the nineteenth century—I have forgotten his name—once said that history repeats herself according to formula. First she enacts the drama, then she repeats with a farce. China is the drama—is India to be the farce?

My daily trip for rations has given me the idea for a scheme of large wall-paintings illustrating, for instance, "Road building" in different countries—a scheme of decoration suitable for some large hall in a Ministry of Transport. What dignity the women labourers here in India give to the very primitive making of a country lane! I shall make some sketches of this job here on the

spot as soon as I can speak the language better (providing, of course, I get the C.O.'s permission to draw!). In any case the scene has impressed me so deeply that I shall never forget its essentials. This country is giving me a new colour sense. The other evening the sun was just setting making the whole sky a brilliant hard yellow. A labourer came past, his skin a brown black; round his head the folds of gleaming white cloth. The road, the dry earth, a pale mauve with strips of lemon-green sugar patches. No shadows—the light in the shaded parts being too rich in colour to look different. This is a very simplified description, but a few months out here will improve my ability to see and record these new colour relationships based on green and silver, platinum and mauve (this is the key to the painting of an Indian's head, and not black and white as perhaps with that of the Negro). . .

During supper I read a copy of the *Times of India*. It is evident that this question of a home guard is bothering the authorities. A report speaks of the Poona Civil Guard (the official outfit) and its activities, which include A.R.P., Lathi training (!) and police duties! It is not to be wondered at that it has only 200 members and that the masses won't (or cannot?) join up. A paper the other day solemnly stated that the main reason for not allowing the formation of a mass home guard was the inability to supply arms. Wonderful, isn't it? When the most innocent child should know that a guerilla band's chief immediate task is *to arm itself by taking arms from the enemy* (as the tribesmen do in India at our expense at the moment). But more, the Chinese Eighteenth Route Army is *organised on this basis*. With every two men going into action, armed, there is one unarmed whose job it is to get hold of any equipment found either on fallen Japs or Chinese.

We have all noted the decisions of the Labour Party Conference—things are moving. But how very, very much we long to hear of the second front being started. It is almost dark so I will end this letter.

June 11th, 1942. *Gulunche, Nr. Poona*

LITTLE has happened since my last letter. I have seen one copy of the *Times of India* with a review of world opinion on the Soviet Pact including a statement by the chairman of the Congress. His line is that, since the Pact is based on the Atlantic Charter and

since the Atlantic Charter is not applicable to Indian independence, then Russia, too, has deserted the cause of freedom. Having analysed the prospects thus, he turns on the Indian Communists with the question: "How can you say this is a peoples' war against Fascism?" Of course, he thereby shows his fear of the Indian masses, for it must be clear to any realist that peoples' wars are based on certain basic facts (prerequisites is the term we used to use) and even then it is not a peoples' war unless one passes from the stage of words by parties to deeds by the people. Here, so far as Congress is concerned, the leaders don't want to rouse the masses—but there are times in history when what happens and what leaders want are very different.

I had an amusing interview with an officer today. The conversation went as follows (much abbreviated):

He: Well, Branson, I want to thank you for your work on the rations, blah, blah, blah. No doubt the new Lt. Quartermaster will have you in mind if he wants a job done, etc.

Me: I don't want a job like that again, etc. I want to get some training. I want very badly to be a soldier.

It shook him all right, and perhaps it will result in my being put in charge of a fatigue party whose job it is to line-up the blades of grass as they come up out of the earth since the rain began.

For the rain has indeed changed things. Roads become either blocked where they crossed river beds (normally dry)—previously serviceable tracks become mires, and the earth goes a deep purple with very green vegetation. Lizards, scorpions, and ants are driven into the open. A brilliant claret velvety beetle appears, and gigantic croaking frogs, bright yellow green.

I am continually struck by the extraordinary dignity of the little girls out here. I shall never forget one tiny wee tot walking by a field. She walked along, bolt upright. She had a turquoise blue dress (blouse-skirt, European kind), jet black hair, and dark face and, behind her, brilliant, luscious green stalks of young sugar springing up and curving their new yellow emerald leaves over just above her head.

These last few days I have been suffering from an "upset tummy" which has not improved my temper when dealing with those bloody idiots in the regular army who want to indulge in abuse of the Indians. They treat the Indians in a way which not only makes one tremble for the future but which makes one ashamed of being one of them. Really, some of the most ignorant

men here are to be pitied. They joined the regular army to get away from family trouble in blighty. They never write home, they try to suppress all feelings about blighty, they vent their own misfortunes on any hapless and helpless Indian, and they look upon army life as a scramble (all against all) for good jobs. The art of war, the character of this war, the outcome of the war outside of India just does not concern them; *they dare not let themselves be concerned* for fear of burning homesickness that smoulders beneath their simulated toughness. I have had the chance of talking to a few—My God, what *hideous* lives they lead. Eternally on the scrounge for petty gain; eternally feeling they are being swindled by the paymaster, by the canteen, the shopkeeper, etc., and therefore ready always to swindle someone else; disunited by the bitterness of life and yet united by their common fear of life and common hatred of the individual or persons to whom they attribute at the moment their exile from humanity.

The other morning I woke up from a dream that I had been walking round a picture gallery (I dream this so often) and came across a large picture of a man painting in a field. I looked at it and thought to myself, "I remember painting that." But I was doubtful, so I looked closer to find "Dona Torr" on the bottom left hand corner. I dream a lot these days, mainly due, I think, to the utter mental stagnation of my waking life.

Today, now that the regiment has come, everything is humming. The new Sergeant Major has taken over with the usual announcement, "If . . . to the guard room." There is one thing which no one in authority seems to understand at all—that *we want to get on with the job*, we are *not* peace-time soldiers, and it is not we who prevent things getting done but the persistent peace-time pace and conceptions of the middle leadership. One of the officer's batmen tells me they have carpets down in their tents. We who have come out here recently are longing to get down to work. We got the news two days ago of a breach in the Sevastopol defences. I hope this isn't too serious—when *are* we going to open the second front?

The sky today is that of a fine English summer day, but one misses the great elms with their leaves piled up like banks of cloud. There is so much light, too, that one never gets those resonant contrasts of dark shadow and graduated light of Rembrandt and Constable. The only real darkness other than night is to be found in the homes of the people, and there the contrast is one of colour rather than tone (as in Van Gogh's Potato Eaters).

Two things have just happened which stagger one in their contrast. Tobruk has fallen, and we have been ordered to polish all brasses on all our equipment. How much longer are we, the English race, going to put up with such humiliation from creatures whose only right to leadership is the Divine Right supposed to have rolled from the scene of history along with Charles' head? We now hear that *sergeants* are to have batmen!

. . . Since I wrote the above, a new programme has been put up which promises that from next week on we are going to be really busy, which is very heartening. Many of us are so longing to get on to the job so as to end this bloody war as soon as possible, and any signs of real work raise our spirits no end. As a mere sideline on the subject of politics in the army—two points of view have been expressed by the C.O. and Squadron Leader. The C.O. said the old army method of the horse trough was still the best way of teaching a man patriotism. The S.L. said that we were all paid certain rates for certain jobs by the Government and if we did not do our work properly we were not keeping the contract. It is extremely lucky that the bulk of the men here are, on their own, anti-fascist, and feel this to be the purpose of the fight, otherwise there would be no idealism to spur on fighting morale. It is very difficult to write a decent letter as we are cut off from all civilisation (except an occasional newspaper) and surrounded by the monotonous routine of peace-time soldiering. But we must keep our chins up and do all in our power to win more and more people for the war and against defeatism.

June 20th, 1942. Gulunche, Nr. Poona

THIS morning we had the first meeting of the debating society committee which I am on. Our first debate is for next Thursday. The subject is "Woman's place is in the Home." I proposed this subject as it appeals to the men, they all have ideas on it, and it will lead to some pretty good discussion when they get back to their tents. Among other subjects I put up were, "Tradition is a hindrance to Progress" and "We should treat the Indians as equals." . . .

You have little idea how badly we need the news of the second front—it is the difference between a body of good, stolid-humoured Britishers and an inspired army of warriors. Our troop leader

has just given us a talk—a sort of self introduction—which included an impassioned 20 minutes against the second front (of course, there are no politics in the army). Incidentally, I have yet to meet a junior officer who wants the second front. Today I had a driving test—or rather before the test I told the officer I knew nothing but *very badly wanted to know it* so I have been recommended for a long D. and M. course which will bring me up to the standard of a Driver-Mechanic—I hope to goodness it comes off as this will make me a *real* Armoured Corps man and not a lopsided one.

This morning we went out on a scheme on foot in units representing tanks. We covered ten or more miles over ploughed fields, etc. It was magnificent exercise and although I felt pretty tired I enjoyed it no end. That sort of thing will make real soldiers of us.

But tonight I have had a terrible set-back. On parade this morning we were asked who had seen active service. I said I had. When we came back from the scheme I was informed that I was to go to an inspection by the Duke of Gloucester in a few days' time. This is apparently the purpose of asking about active service. This parade is a purely bull-shit parade. It will take several days to polish boots, brasses, etc. It will take days and nights for some eight Indian tailors to alter, clean, press, etc., etc., clothes for the white-sahibs to wear like bloody waxworks. The Indians will, of course, not be on parade, the lucky fools. I have often been asked, "Have we got a fifth column here?" Yes, we have! For nothing could help the enemy more by undermining morale, destroying enthusiasm and making us incompetent fighters than this kind of tomfoolery.

. . . The above farce develops. This morning we had an inspection. The Duke's show is in five days' time. We are not to wear our inspection clothes for the next four days. On *the* day we get up at 5 a.m. Our clothes will be packed in boxes and taken by lorry to the scene of battle where we will get into them, etc. Sebastopol is falling and our C.O. is disappointed at the lack of polish on the topee chin straps.

July 3rd, 1942. *Gulunche, Nr. Poona*

WELL, the Duke's show is over, at immense expenditure of precious petrol, wear and tear of vehicles, deadening bull-shit. The inspection was over in no time. The Duke merely shook hands with unit commanders and squadron leaders—the men just didn't exist. There were no bands, no music. No show could have been put on better calculated to emphasise the complete lack of interest our rulers have in getting the war over.

Today a General paid us a visit, and a fellow has just been brought into the guard room bringing some news of it. In one squadron they had many men in P.T. kit, some ready to box, some to do P.T., two basket-ball teams, etc., etc. These men were kept sitting about doing nothing for ages until a scout saw the General's car. The scout signalled, and immediately everyone began boxing, playing, etc. As soon as the General disappeared the men were marched back to their tents. This is how things are going on here. There are hundreds of men here compelled to do such bloody ridiculous things. . . .

As a result of the rain the country has a lovely rich earth and green look about it; what enormous wealth could be produced if real irrigation was organised!

I am feeling very tired and depressed, mainly because everything here is like a mad-house—apparently quite sane, however, to the superior inmates.

While on guard tonight I was thinking of Battersea and wrote this poem :

When the edge of day's flag is tattered
 Long before hours terminate day's end
 In bitter wind,
 And birds' wings lag,
 And smoke crawls softly from the power-station chimney.

When at the end of a long day's labour
 Night scrapes the clodded blade of day
 Metallic clean, and engines tire,
 Before this fire sleeps,
 Thoughts of you drift from the still smouldering embers.

July 28th, 1942. *Gulunche, Nr. Poona*

I HAVE just got back from 48 hours' leave in Poona. I bought five books all on science and one on religion in the "Thinkers' Library." I could get nothing on India at all. I had two excellent meals in a Chinese restaurant. I tried to see an Indian film (the Hollywood muck makes me feel sick) but was not allowed inside an Indian cinema. After getting the books and meals I went early to bed at the Y.M.C.A. This morning I had another good meal, a walk down the only street allowed to British troops (!)—we are prisoners all right out here, but more on this—and caught an early train back feeling much refreshed mentally and physically.

The reception for British troops out here is an insult. I am not referring to that given us by the Indians, but by our so-called countrymen. A soldier walks in Poona past large houses with well groomed gardens belonging to British officers, etc. He cannot get a room in the many big hotels—they won't entertain having him in. He is compelled to go to the Y.M.C.A. where there are no hot baths, no separate rooms, in fact, a bare barrack less comfortable than in our tents. Lady Lumley has given her name to a *typical canteen for the troops* where some white women do the serving "to show how patriotic we really are." It stinks!!

August 12th, 1942. *Gulunche, Nr. Poona*

BY the time you get this letter the arrest of the Congress leadership* will be stale news. You will be well aware of the elementary fact that these arrests do nothing to solve the basic problem (namely, *the Indians' fight for their own freedom*)—except that it will teach the Indians to hate us all the more! Two sides are now emerging—one, positive, for an agreement on Pakistan by Congress (this is the Communist Party's line—more on the C.P. in a minute); two, negative, a looking towards Japan for help (a line already adopted by Chandra Bose, and, from what one can hear, as well as inferences made by Gandhi, considered by

* On August 7th, 1942, the Congress Working Committee had issued a resolution (an amended version of the Wardha resolution) restating its demand for the withdrawal of British power "so as to enable India effectively to become an ally of the United Nations and fight the aggressors." If this appeal was ignored, Congress would resort to a campaign of mass struggle on non-violent lines. The All-India Congress Committee endorsed this resolution on August 8th, and requested Gandhi to open negotiations with the Viceroy for a settlement. But the next day, before Gandhi had the opportunity of opening negotiations, the Congress leadership (including Gandhi and Nehru) were arrested, following which riots broke out spontaneously.

sections of the peasantry—this fact was brought out strongly at the recent Students' Conference in Delhi).

Now about the Indian Communist Party—it is obvious to anyone who knows anything that (1) the C.P. was made legal as a final effort to disrupt Congress as it is the only party with any following among the people; (2) that as in Burma it has been made legal too late to prevent the Wardha resolution and propaganda. Now the position is that the Indian Communist Party stands for alliance with the British Sahib, but also is working for Indian unity, Pakistan, an Indian National Government *now*. Which raises a new problem for the British Raj—shall we suppress the C.P.I. again, or shall we have democracy in India as we have in Blighty and suppress their newspapers only?

This is all in the field of general politics. Among the fellows there is extraordinary confusion, especially brought out over the Congress business. Discussions go on night and day with views expressed ranging from two extremes: (a) I came to fight the Japs not the Indians, to (b) It would be all right to have a go at Gandhi and his Hindus; we should get some practice like the Japs got in China. One has to keep one's head screwed on very tight, keep one's ear to the ground, and one's arguments apt.

August 20th, 1942. Gulunche, Nr. Poona

As it is Saturday afternoon, I have retired to the canteen to read and write quietly. I must confess there is an ulterior motif for this exclusiveness. Parties from our squadron have been detailed and left camp to maintain law and order in a nearby town. This sort of warfare is so distasteful to me that I take every care not to be detailed.

The whole business is *tragic* to say the least. The Indians want independence, so as to fight for their independence against Japan. The white sahib says, No—not just verbally, but in numerous practical ways—no home guard, no mass people's army, no nuclei of guerillas, no arrests and shooting of profiteers, a heavy hand on most urgently necessary development of Indian industry (as, for example, the careful suppression of the report of the American Industrial Mission) and last but not least, the continued arrogance, extravagance and domination of the white Raj.

Congress takes up the demand of the masses—good! Then Gandhi imposes pacifism, which means, in fact, sabotage of the struggle. But today things have gone so far that pacifism is impossible—so in place of a positive struggle, the people's movement takes an anarchist turn *in every way ideologically helped by the firm hand of authority*—i.e., arrest the leadership, give no concessions, call out the police and then troops.

No set of actions could be better suited to embitter *even more deeply* Anglo-Indian relations. For example—the ex-premier of Madras, Mr. Rajagopalachari, recently revolted against Nehru and Gandhi by proposing, and actively organising a campaign on behalf of the recognition of Pakistan by Congress to get Hindu-Moslem unity. He was expelled from Congress. Now, after locking up the Congress leadership, the British have turned to Rajaji with honeyed words, only to be met with blunt condemnation for their exhibition of the firm hand.

One cannot foretell what will happen. The movement so far is confined to the towns, mainly angry demonstrations against police stations with a little shop breaking, telephone wire cutting, shop closing, etc.; a small strike movement. As far as one can tell, the peasantry is not involved and the class-conscious proletariat is following the C.P.I. The movement is mostly among the students, shopkeepers and near-peasant town dwellers. As a purely personal comment it seems curious to find oneself on the side of the Cossacks—rather revolting in fact. Even though one does not agree with what the people are doing, one understands why they do it.

I have just seen the evening paper. Rajaji has written an article against the arson, etc., which is going on, and he is, of course, quite right, but this does not mean he has forgotten the real perpetrators of the trouble. Let us hope the present disorders stop soon and the masses consider the position once again *positively*, although it is a little difficult to see how this will happen when the one really great Indian Nationalist Party is suppressed and its leaders gaoled.

I had a long chat with a friend of mine from another squadron who tells me the men there are worried about the situation. I see that the Labour leaders have called upon the Congress leaders to call off civil disobedience—how *brilliant*!! Doesn't the Labour Party know that the Congress leaders are in jail, and that is why the rioting is going on, anarchistic because without leadership.

One of the men in my tent has just come back off leave. He

had an eventful train journey with the Congress supporters. He is one of these objective liberals—educated, middle class. His conclusions are : (1) that these Indians in the main are kicking up a row for Gandhi's release and that the present campaign is *not* re the "Quit India" resolution; (2) that the presence of the British is synonymous with their low incomes, and therefore Indian independence has an economic foundation in the minds of the people; (3) and, by far the most serious of all, it is perfectly clear that the Nazi and Jap propaganda is getting a wide hearing. This fellow is convinced that, from the reactions of his listeners to his own stories of himself and other lads from Blighty, etc., the propaganda of the British is futile or even nil.

One of the things I have already commented upon in my letters is that we are like prisoners out here; like lepers who are forbidden to enter the villages or Indian regimental quarters or in any way get to know the Indian people. Let alone the fact that we haven't even thought of helping the villagers to organise a people's or guerilla army.

The view from here is very lovely just now. A wide plain horizoned by blue, light-blue mountains. And in the foreground a group of labourers are scraping up the dry soil to sieve it for making cement paving. The women in all kinds of reds, deep purple, and pink, with shallow bowls which, when filled, they lift up on to their heads. The men in spotless white. The earth where they work is a light red, but a little distance back the landscape is a patch work of very flat strips of black earth and rich green crops with dark green round trees dotted about.

Today has brought in the great news of the landing at Dieppe. Dare we hope that this is the beginning of the second front? Everyone is very excited and discussing this great news from every aspect. Tonight on orders I am detailed for an escort duty to a place some hundreds of miles from here. It will take several days so I should see a lot of India—only I'm afraid as a spectator and a very ignorant one at that, but I shall use my eyes.

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August 27th, 1942. Gulunche, Nr. Poona

THE really important thing that has happened is the Dieppe raid, and the tremendous impetus it has given to the idea of opening a second front. Many of the men thought it was the second front and instead of being what we are, we went about as though life

had a purpose and a future. Now that the show is over we have returned to normal. We read the news about the Red Army. Occasionally an odd man says, "Well, they'll attack soon, the winter is coming," but the overwhelming majority look hungrily for that news of the second front which Dieppe has proved to them as thoroughly practicable.

Tonight we had a joint debate between us and another squadron on should doctors be allowed to practise mercy killing. Not on the face of it a very interesting subject, but it was interesting to notice a number of the speakers showing that they are stepping out of their little individual selves and becoming social minded. An officer came up to me after the debate to inform me he had seen me speaking in Finsbury Square. A bit of a shock, what! But I am pleased, as we had a good talk afterwards.

It is only two days now before I am due to go on leave to Bombay. I hope to goodness I am able to go—I want so badly to get some books. I wrote to you recently that soon the question of the continued legality of the Indian C.P. would come up. Two or three days ago it was discussed by the *Times of India*. Things out here are extraordinarily interesting.

One thing I have learnt out here more than anything else is that life in England, and therefore one's outlook towards people and the world, is hopelessly divorced from the rest of humanity. When this war is over we must go to China, come back to India as civilian friends. This all sounds rather unpractical I know, and it probably is, but it just lets you know that my stay abroad this time is not having the effect of making me want to settle down at home after the war, but to see and learn more, much, much more.

The Sergeant Major assures me I shall get my leave. So I am very excited. Unless something happens, I shall be away on Monday.

August 30th-September 7th, 1942. On leave in Bombay

HERE I am in the St. John's Institute in *Bombay*. I arrived after dark so I have not seen anything yet, except that from the gari which took me from the station to here, I saw some huge book-shops. I shall try during the coming days to get to know some

Indian students. I am here entirely on my own—to tell you the truth I am glad as I shall not have to make army small talk or do things I don't want to do. . . .

My first day in Bombay has been a great success. I have bought a number of excellent books "the Communal Triangle in India," by Mehta and Patwardhan. It is written in the tradition of Dutt's classic and if published at home you should get it. All the other books are on man's early history.

Apart from book buying, I spent an hour or so in the Prince of Wales Museum—a pathetic effort for a nation with such magnificent sculpture as India, with such prehistoric cities as Mohenjo Daro of 3,000 B.C., whose baths, drainage, planning, etc., would do credit to any Indian city today. But even more important, from my point of view, it shows that what we are pleased to call civilisation (i.e., sanitation, architecture, social organisation in townships, sculpture) are far older than has been the common opinion based on the sole example of ancient Egypt—the easiest to get at and the best preserved and therefore the most explored ancient society.

From the balcony outside my room I look out on the bay and can hear the waves breaking on the rocks. Wherever I have met Chinese people in India I cannot help contrasting, just from their appearance, the intense national pride of that great people with the still unformed nationalism of the Indian. The Indians have some way to go, but I wish we were here to help them instead of to play the Jap. . . .

Having got out I went for a long walk, very long, and was just about to turn back when I ran into some *friends*. And what a long talk we had together. It was marvellous. Tomorrow, and it seems for the rest of my stay in Bombay, I am meeting them, so my leave has turned out a real success. When they heard I was stationed at Poona, they gave me the name of someone who lives there. I am very excited at this because it may enable me to have a guide to see some of the great historic remains in the Poona district, a thing which I have been longing to do since I came to this country. In the bookshop I picked up a book on Indian sculpture which really is magnificent—it is of interest to know that in the making of New Delhi, Indian architects were not called upon, only Indian cheap labour.

I felt a new man to-night after meeting some friends to talk with. By the way, the legalizing of the Indian C.P. is progressing well.

There are only 900 members still in jail, including the recognised leader of the Bombay working class. This, with Congress leaders in jail, shooting, whipping, rigorous imprisonment, profiteering and the black market should teach these wogs the meaning of democracy—what?

This evening I have been out to an Indian meal in an Indian's house. On the way, my tram passed the body of a man, killed by a car or something, lying out in the road with people going by as though it were a dead cat or dog. India is bound to explode soon, and what an explosion it will be when it comes.

September, 1942. On leave in Bombay

YESTERDAY evening I was invited out to the house of a friend, where I had the chance of meeting a number of Congress supporters and explaining to them the need for developing different methods of struggle, as the present methods were, in fact, helping the Japanese and helping the British Government carry through its provocation—started by the arrest of the Congress leadership—the purpose of which is to smash the organised nationalist movement here under the plea of smashing the fifth column!

Last night I had a very pleasant surprise. A leading comrade called in at the house—he was very pleased to see me. He is just out of doing two and a half years in prison—really isolation, as he told me the treatment was quite good—i.e., political prisoners and not à la criminal prisoners. He is president of the Bombay T.U.C. I am meeting him today and he is going to explain to me the position among the workers.

It is now more clear than ever that the arrest of the Congress leaders at the precise moment when it took place was an act of flagrant provocation on the part of the bureaucracy. It, of course, resulted in a wave of anger throughout the country and gave the British raj the long-sought opportunity to smash the nationalist movement—the organised nationalist movement. Certain elements in India (including Tata*) are egging on the Congressmen in their actions, which are precisely those which an unarmed people takes against an armed army of occupation (the Tata works is on strike; rail, telephone wire, stations and looting sabotage). There is no doubt at all that some of this is directly led by Jap agents, and

* Tata Iron and Steel Co. Ltd.—Works at Lamshedpur.

the Jap wireless (with Bose from Berlin) is giving *precise* instructions to the angry Congressmen.

The plan of the bureaucracy has already gone wrong because (a) they never expected such a mass (including Moslem) sympathy for and demand for the release of the Congress leaders—all sections are demanding this, (b) the resignation of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer as gesture that he who had taken a lead against Congress *could not form an anti-Congress government*. The bureaucracy now hopes to form what they are pleased to call an Indian National Government out of all recognised parties (the Congress will not be there as it is banned). But it is crystal clear that the whole country, including the rank and file Muslims, is just not interested in such a "National Government." A new storm is brewing with as much anger in its heart, with more clarity in its head as to aims and methods, and with less instinctive passion. The question is, will it come in time to save India from the Burma strategy of the British?

All Christians are working overtime today having a day of prayer. (Those Godless Russians don't realise the value of religion, and therefore in their crude Marxist materialist manner *will* spend the day killing Nazis!)

I have said a lot about going to bookshops, but I have never mentioned something which hits you in the face about the general trend of literature. 1. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is on sale prominently at every bookstall—of course, proceeds go to the Red Cross. 2. Sex literature—from Van der Velde to the "confessions of a young wife"—is plastered all over every bookstall as well as large bookshops. 3. Bourgeois novels. 4. The "left" literature consisting of the usual vicious anti-Soviet explanations of the Soviet Union and Communism, plus a thin dribble of Pat Sloan's *Russia Without Illusions* and *Russia Resists*. Not only is Dutt's book on India banned, but so also is the Penguin book *Problem of India*, by Shelvankar. 5. There is a mass of religious-fanatical literature. Such is the state of affairs. Can you wonder that, with their hatred of the British, some of the Indians, with their brains starved of anything practical, give way to rioting and listening to the practical voice from Tokio and Berlin coming over the ether?

Although the C.P. is legal, its meetings are banned if they wish to speak on Indian Affairs.

I see now the *New Statesman* is proposing a Government of Hindus and Muslims, who will be willing to function, while

leaving the Army Command, etc., etc., in the hands of the British—*but that is no good*. It is precisely on this rock that the tide has burst. Indians have absolutely no confidence either in the British Burma strategy, nor have they any confidence in British promises, nor do they have the slightest desire to fight *under* British command and *under* British control. This is how the matter stands with the mass of the Indians—and they are *the only people* who can beat Japan. Their demand is—let India fight under an Indian National Government as free allies of the British. *Nothing less* will induce the Indian masses to change their 150 years' accumulated hatred of the white-Sahib.

So far as T.'s ideas on India are concerned—he always used to argue that he had been here and I hadn't—I can only say he must have got himself mixed up with certain caste of high-class women and worn a veil—and a thick one—over his eyes permanently. I can think of no other logical explanation. One cannot look at life *incessantly* for 30 years through the golden lustre of a glass of whisky—unless one is an absolute drink addict, and I know that T. was definitely not that.

. . . I have been for a lovely walk along the sea front and then took a tram to the Museum and went through the National History Galleries—really well laid out. The Museum was packed with Indians, who were all talking in the most excited way about the exhibits as though they enjoyed looking and seeing what they saw—I was reminded very forcibly of visiting museums in Moscow.

. . . This morning I heard a sound I haven't heard for a long time—an air raid siren. Which reminds me, I had a long talk with our friends about tasks arising out of air raids and mentioned the work around refugee centres. They have five of these in the whole of Bombay! So I urged that every step possible should be taken to get more, and described in as much detail as possible the reasons for this.

One of the things which, ever since I came to India, has been a source of wonderment and intense joy are the little Indian girls. There were some going round the Museum with all the solemnity of grown-ups—but they could not have been more than three years old and about 1½ ft. high. Their faces are very round, with very round dark eyes, and the hair is done flat to emphasise the roundness. Sometimes the hair is cut like a European child's, but there is always such incredible dignity and poise.

There is an interesting example of how "we" are dealing with

the Indian Problem. At Baramatti, Poona, there was some rioting about 2-3 weeks ago, with burning of a railway station, cutting telephone wires and attacks on police. A score or so were arrested and given heavy sentences. There was then quiet. Now it is announced that a collective fine of 30,000 rupees has been imposed (excluding the police, authorities and scheduled classes!). This is a classic example of how the bureaucracy *is creating hatred among the whole population*. In this atmosphere we shall probably be called upon to fight the Japs. Promising, isn't it?

And are we hated out here by the people? *Oh, no!* I say in all seriousness, God help us if the Japs come, unless the Government makes some move to repair the damage. This theme drums in my mind like a persistent warning. It is so elementary, so absolutely necessary. It is the, and the one and only, precondition for winning the war against the Japs. You people at home *must* stir up Blighty on this question. We English fellows came out here to fight the Japs and face the possibility of finding a grave in India. But we did not come out here as a suicide squad to be stabbed in the back by the British bureaucracy in Delhi and Whitehall. We did not come here to be killed by Indians provoked by the insane reactionary policy of Amery and Co.

This morning I paid a visit to the Zoo. It looks just like the rest of this country. Exactly the same kind of parrot in the cage as out. Exactly the same pigeon in as out. The whole thing a mockery of a country extraordinarily rich in fauna.

From time to time some small-minded idiots have said to me—when you have got socialism, how will people occupy their time? Well, from just this few months' glimpse I've had of India (and then keeping in mind China, Siberia, Africa and Brazil), my suggestion would be to *discover the world we live on*. As yet we have only named vast areas on the map—some few, very, very few, have travelled over them—a few large firms have organised the exploitation of the human labour to be found there ready-to-hand. But the history of these places—thousands of years deep, upon which the present rests—is only scraped at with a prehistoric concept of history, as the Indian peasant "ploughs" his land. Our first duty lies with our own country, but when that is firmly set on its way, I know I shall want to come back to India, where I can feel I am with humanity and not just one of a stuck-up little part of it. The civilised white Sahib most certainly has jerked humanity out of its antiquity. But now humanity will teach him to be human once again instead of an arrogant beast.

I can hear the sea-waves breaking on the shore,
 I can hear the buses passing down the street,
 I think the human voices ask " How long before,
 How many waves and buses pass before we meet? "

My candle burns the wick of time low down,
 While in night-silence, history turns the pages.
 Wars and religion, imperial Gods are gone.
 The pavement where they trod winds through the ages.

My doors are shut. Yet in the world outside
 Humanity in birth-pangs gets no sleep.
 The sea prepares to swell a further tide,
 Life hesitates before the final leap

To end all strife by elemental force.
 Even the slightest touch will leave its mark.
 In endless stream the traffic flows its course,
 And bit by bit recedes into the dark.

September, 1942. On leave in Bombay

I HAD a very interesting time yesterday evening. I was taken round to meet the wife of an Indian cotton mill owner. Things here get more and more wonderful as one gets to know more. I now learn that Indian industrialists are wanting to put up aircraft factories, *but the British won't let them*. At this house I saw one of the loveliest Indian carvings of two dancing figures—part of a wooden frieze from a temple in South India.

The Bombay Council has rejected a resolution proposing to set up two birth control clinics in Bombay on the grounds that such advice " to wives whose health will not permit them to bear more children, to husband or wife who is suffering from venereal disease and to couples who wish to regulate the birth of children " will mean an extension of prostitution and a lowering of morals. The bloody hypocrisy of it—two doctors and of course the only Christian voting against the resolution.

Last night I met a number of Indian students, C.P.I., and we had a splendid time. I gave them a report on what is happening, or rather *has* happened, in England since the war started. And

then we had questions. It was a strange gathering. Everyone sat down on the floor. I did, too, until my knees began to ache, so they got me a box to sit on. Think of it—a white sahib soldier in uniform sitting among wogs discussing politics as friends and equals! And not far away, outside, other white-sahib soldiers were patrolling the streets with tommy-guns, increasing the hatred of the Indian peoples *for them* just when the Japanese may invade.

All day today I have spent at the house of a friend, who has a marvellous collection of books on Indian and European Art. So I had one last revel in culture before going back to the regiment.

September 12th, 1942. Gulunche, Nr. Poona

My leave is now over. I must tell you how it ended. I travelled by a midnight train, 3rd class, in a carriage packed with peasants and poor workers. A very interesting journey. Some Indian soldiers and one British were also there. I got the British one out of the way, asleep on the luggage rack. Then I dealt with the peasant question—how to get everyone, especially the women and children, a seat. The Indian soldiers behaved like Cossacks of old. They lay down on the seats, while women and children squatted on the floor and men stood. So I did the white-sahib stuff—inverted—and made them get up and make room for the other people. This caused a stir—and just one more concrete piece of help in overcoming the present Congress line. A fitting end to a magnificent leave.

During the last two days since I have been back it has got much hotter, as though before a storm, and I have felt off-colour with a perpetual headache. I am continually struck by the appalling contrast here and on leave. I am back again now with racial hatred, anti-nigger sahibs, etc., which is depressing, however scientific one may be about it. There is one thing, many of the old sweats are being sent back to their original regiment, so they are happy again.

We are to go out on a lot of schemes. I cannot say more about them than that the fellows complain bitterly of the unnecessary destruction of crops that takes place. The interesting point is that many of the men are closely related to small farmers, or are such themselves, and feel very acutely about these acts of vandalism which, in their opinion, could be avoided. In their minds this is creating a sympathy for the Indian peasant. But what is it doing

in the minds of the Indian peasant other than making another cause of hatred for their over-lords? The question of compensation for war damage of this kind and confiscation of property for war purposes has been a bone of contention raised often by Congress.

Of course any discussion on this topic invariably brings out the old soldier. ("It serves the bastards right; they are a defeated nation and should stay like it; they're black outside and yellow in. I've seen them in riots," says the white sahib who was armed with armoured car, machine-guns, rifles, horse, revolvers, etc.) And no argument will change these idiots—although one should be clear that these men are often very decent as individuals, and this "wog" insanity is the release mechanism for years of being ordered about, spied upon, fooled, and what is called disciplined or "broken in." But we who do see sense, in addition to much patient explaining, need the help of history, and especially of the Indians themselves. The Chinese are greatly esteemed, not as a result of the arguments of some who faced facts, but by their own actions *in addition*.

The only development now taking place, alongside continued disorders on a decreased scale, is definitely an increased demand for unity and for an Indian National Government. Churchill's speech* on India was just filth. It may have fooled some people in Britain and America, as well as the flunkeys out here, but as regards the vast mass of the Indian people (as well as the Jap and Berlin radios, worse luck) they dismiss the speech with the remark: "He hasn't even taken the trouble to think out some new argument, to invent some new 'facts.'" The situation here is developing according to its own logic.

September 19th, 1942. Gulunche, Nr. Poona

I HAVE today made another effort to get some D. & M. training. Let us hope with some result. I also had a row from our S.S.M., whose mentality is that of a beaten child and whose concept of war is approximately that of a mounted guardsman outside St. James' Palace. He will make quite a good soldier when he has been in action against a modern army for about four hours. This should make a man of him and lay the basis for him to learn from his fellow human beings what the war is about. He is an intelligent bloke, but a typical product of the peace-time army, especially the

* Sept. 10th. In this speech Churchill implied that the riots were a deliberate plan of Congress in order to help the Japanese.

British army in India. Of course the above remarks apply to most of the regular soldiers, who are sergeants, etc.

The above business came up today when we were put on revolver. We drew the revolvers—each one signed for. Then who to take the class? I was forbidden to do so by the S.S.M., so I couldn't—*i.e.*, wasn't allowed to—so as no one else could, we returned the revolvers and did nothing. The sergeant in charge knows perfectly well I am well capable of instructing at this arm. But no! His attitude is: "The S.S.M. says Corporal Branson mustn't do the job; there's no one else who can, so — him, we won't do the revolver." You see the mentality that rules the camp? — the S.S.M. or — the C.O., but *never* "we must learn what we can, as best we can now, so as to beat the Japs." It is hell, especially as one knows that soon, possibly very soon, we may be in action. And in a modern tank there is so very much one wants to know, *absolutely instinctively*, in order to think tactically as quick as possible.

I have in my tent one of those intellectuals—lower middle-class school teacher—who is of the really infuriating type. We have just had an argument about the Red Navy. And believe it or not, his two points were these: "Russia is a land power, and therefore has a large army," and "Russia has a rotten navy because look at what happened to it against the Japanese." These arguments are made with all the authority of an H. G. Wells. What can one do to a brain so hopelessly unconnected with reality—and he teaches the young!

We are all feeling pleased tonight. At midnight we leave for a two days' outing. The place we are going to is a lake. There is one thing I love doing, and that is being out in the open, sleeping in the open, and so on. I will finish this letter when I come back. . . .

We left camp at 1.30 a.m. and started off towards Nira. Here I got a really exciting surprise. As we entered the village everything was dead still. We were driving without lights. But the sky was clear, with almost a full moon. When we came half way down the only street I saw a great crowd of peasants, men with their white turbans and white linen cloth round them, sitting by the roadside. And among them sat many women in brilliant colours, lit up by the moon. With no stage and only a back-cloth with

painted scenery, two men, lit by ordinary hurricane lamps, were acting a play to a large audience.

That is all I saw as our lorry went past. But what ideas crowded through my brain as we went on through the night. Of Indian student youth going to the peasants of Bengal, showing them in plays how to unite against Japanese Fascism. All that I have so often read about became perfectly practical. How I wanted to stay, to see the play through, and talk to the peasants about it! But our worlds are different, so I had to go on with the white sahibs in lorries.

As we drove through the villages we passed many carts with their lamps hung below on the axle, moving at the pace of a sleepy bullock. On their outskirts, tiny shelters, not more than 3 feet high and 7 feet long, clustered, where the poor—in this country where millions are poor these just exist—wait through their life-time. Such clusters of rags, tins, old mats, etc., are to be seen in every village and town. Millions of human beings must live in them. Oh, why am I here as a soldier and conqueror, and therefore the prisoner of my conquest?

I cannot stress too much the appalling mass poverty, dirt, ignorance and backwardness of the people. Yet *we* travelled in modern lorries, went across railway lines and at times passed a factory with machinery. Past miles and miles of tilled soil, with not a sign of a tractor—only a bullock, with a single blade scraping the earth. Past village after village where human beings live in hovels; a bit of a roof resting against an old stone wall, with mud floor; a shelter of matting laid over sticks, improved with bits of tin, old carpet, some tenting, perhaps; just high enough for the occupants to sit up in on their haunches.

This type of dwelling is the same as that used by man 50,000 years ago. At Mohenjo Daro, on the Indus, a town of 3,500 B.C. has been unearthed. There were remains of carts exactly the same as now used by the peasants in Sind. And so on.

But these peasants are not unobservant. Every time an aeroplane flies overhead, a lorry goes through the village, a nail is hammered in the coffin of feudalism, and from the soil of ancient India springs yet one more Indian nationalist. A journey through this country

is indeed painful—there is such a vast mass of human happiness, human intelligence, gone to waste.

September 26th, 1942. Gulunche, Nr. Poona.

IT says in the *Times of India* today that about 5,000 signatures have been taken in Ahmedabad by the local Communist Party to a memorandum which has been forwarded to Rajagopalachari and Jinnah* stressing the urgency of a rapprochement between the Congress and the Muslim League as a preliminary to the establishment of a National Government led by Nehru and Jinnah. Over 100,000 signatures from about 700 villages of Kaira district are being sought to a memorandum to be forwarded to the Government demanding the establishment of a National Government and the release of Congress leaders.

There are continued acts of violent pro-Congress demonstrations—mainly among students. The proletariat and the peasantry are almost completely quiet. From all quarters the question of unity is being voiced. In the Council of State debate on the present situation, the main points of the C.P.I.'s line were voiced time and again. It is an extremely interesting set-up. Any Japanese invasion must be resisted by the British. The concrete impact of Japanese invasion and the resistance of the British to the Japs will, now that the Gandhi policy has been experienced for what it is and the C.P.I. has had time to give the correct line, concretise the latent tendencies among the proletariat and peasantry for independence and nationalism.

I have been in the gunnery wing all day where it seems I am on the permanent staff, which is something to keep my mind alive.

There is more news of the movement towards unity here. You can take it that this is the only real positive movement in hundreds of resolutions, petitions, discussions, speeches being sent to the Governor, Jinnah, Raja, Nehru, etc. The bombing, etc., is practically at an end. But there is one thing that is quite definite—the Indian masses are completely apathetic about *our* war effort. The British are loathed, and only an Indian National Government will make this India's war. Indians just don't believe one word of our claims to be fighting for freedom, etc. This is the truth of the set-up out here, and no other explanation is correct.

* The President of the Muslim League.

October 3rd, 1942. *Gulunche, Nr. Poona*

I AM again on a 24-hour guard at Gulunche. With me is one of the old sweats. He started off by saying that he had heard of trouble at. . . . When asked what had happened, he replied dramatically, "Women raped." It would have made me laugh outright—fancy Congress students demonstrating for the release of Nehru by raping women—had it not been such excellent Fascist propaganda.

Some great mental analyst should make a study of the regular soldier in India. I took my book on Human Origins to the gunnery wing today to read during the break. A young regular, aged 23, with seven years' service, looked at the photos for a bit, read some sentences, and closed it, saying, "Those bastards write books like that to make millions out of poor soldiers." And no explanation on my part could convince him otherwise. It all emphasises how deeply has the sense of oppression, humiliation, and lack of human friendliness or suspicion, been driven upon their minds by the imperial army machine. I am not in the least surprised nowadays after getting to know these fellows, why they're not interested in fighting in this war. *They don't believe in it.*

. . . It is now past 4 a.m. I have had a long read and made some notes. In front of me is a kerosene lamp. Dozens of moths, insects, beetles keep madly flying at it. After watching a bit, and thinking about the Red Army, I wrote this poem :

Sleep on, sentries, through your turn of duty,
 The night is dark, stressed by the bugle moon,
 These insects warn you of the futility
 Of mistaking lights and flying out of turn.
 Look how they beat against the glass!
 With frenzied repetition they are stunned.
 Yet had they made no flight to reach false stars
 Death would have been a sleep with no wings singed.
 Sleep on, sentries, while your beds are safe.
 Your sanity commends you to long nights.
 These brainless idiots emulate the brave
 Who, in their madness, dare celestial flights
 Without a hope of getting back alive.
 Sleep on, you sentries, no need to wake up now.
 Who was the fool is walking on your grave;
 He met the new day rising while you slept, long ago.

The Sergeant slept all night and went without so much as a word of thanks. I find these nights on guard go very quickly if one can get into a good, useful book.

October 12th, 1942. Dhond Camp, Poona

Please note change of camp. I am now quite alone in my barrack room. All the fellows are either at the cinema or Y.M.C.A. Next week there is to be an added "attraction" of a brothel under official patronage. I need make no comment on this.

A new order has been issued to the effect that we must salute Indian officers. This has produced a flow of indignant remarks from the regulars.

The dhobi-walla—or laundry man—has just brought our clean clothes. So out on the verandah is the shouting, bawling, threatening which invariably signifies that a white sahib is talking to a wog—showing him the true meaning of British *democracy*.

The other day I had a row with one of these white sahibs. He accused me of lowering the prestige of the whites because I am on friendly terms with the tea sellers, fruit sellers, etc. Especially am I friendly with the little boys—mere children—who earn annas in the camp getting cups of tea, etc. These kiddies get *no* education and see life in the raw. Anyway, I answered, much to the pleasure of other men just out here, that, of course, the well-known fact that white sahibs go into cheap brothels with native women must do much to uphold this prestige.

You have no idea how abysmal is the "cultured" life we are made to live. Never allowed to learn anything about India or the Indians. Never once have we been shown anything to do with the Indians. The other day I had an argument with an old sweat on India—the usual, "I've been here N years so I know." So I asked him if he'd ever met any Indian Trade Unionist or any Indian public figure when he went on leave instead of the usual girl in a brothel, the char (tea) walla, etc. He not only admitted no! but asked "What is a trade unionist?" And this man is a soldier for democracy.

This morning the idiot with whom I had the argument about "prestige" smacked a chicko (the one who fetches cups of tea) across the face. The little chap was being shouted at by this "gentleman" and didn't understand English. He was bewildered

when struck and then burst into tears. But I soon comforted him and gave him an anna.

All day I've been in the gunnery wing on odd jobs. There are some Indians—men, women and little children—who come there to work. The children don't work but come with their parents. I've seen wee babies being taken by their parents to the work place. There they are put down on one side while the elders—over 10 years?—work. It is scandalous that there are no crèches or schools for these children. Anyway, I made friends with them by giving them fruit and nuts I bought from the fruit walla. Needless to say, my ignorant behaviour always leads to an argument with those who know how to treat natives. Of course, there are those who say in a charitable way, "You'll change when you've been here longer." How well I remember the wise ones saying ten years ago, "You'll change when you grow older." But now see what *they're* saying about the Soviet Union. Why, only today a conversation between a sergeant and a one-pip officer was overheard. To this effect: O. What's the latest news about Stalingrad? S. They're holding on. In fact, it seems they're beginning to push the Germans back. It's a marvellous show. O. Yes, it certainly is. There must be something in this man Stalin." *And* I know very well who is going to change in their attitude to the Indian people—it won't be me.

Last night I went to the cinema to see "One of our aircraft is missing." Excellent; with an excellent result on the spirit of the men. The most serious gap in the training of the army is the complete absence of propaganda. But the remark by the Dutch woman about the Germans, "They are the most miserable people, they want so badly to be friends," hit the mark. It described so very vividly our position out here. We jack up our own "cheerfulness" among ourselves in order to hide our loneliness and our lack of friends out here.

October 25th, 1942. *Dhond Camp, Poona*

THE latest developments in India concern Congress. Congress consists of (1) Bourgeois nationalists such as Gandhi; (2) People's nationalists such as Nehru, Azad, etc.; (3) Communists; (4) Congress Socialists; and (5) Forward Block and fifth column. Now the

latest information gathered from the character of the police arrests is that although the acts of sabotage and incendiarism are without any doubt organised by the Forward Block and fifth column, the overwhelming majority of arrests are of honest Congressmen of categories 1, 2 and 3. The bureaucracy here is so excited about this God (Berlin-Tokio) -given opportunity to smash the nationalist movement, that they leave free the real disruptors. But I have not the slightest doubt that if the Japs attack India the British Government will be forced to release Nehru, etc., in order to defend India with any degree of success.

In the meantime the Indian C.P. is doing tremendous work to clear up the mess produced by "those who know best." Their line is everything for the unity of the people and the unity of the people comes first, for the defence of India, for Indian freedom. Anyway, the smashing of the Congress goes on, to be followed in a short time when it is complete, by the round up of Congress socialists and Forward Block.

Now that the Congress organisation has been smashed to pieces, dozens of nitwits, large and small, are all proposing their blue-prints for future "settlements." Meanwhile the workers and peasants go on living, taking due note of events while they labour, and preparing for the next manifestation that a free India can fight, work and progress as well as China.

November 7th, 1942. Dhond

THIS afternoon I went for a walk in Dhond City! A modern railway line with great steel engines runs by the straw, tin and sackcloth "houses" of the people. A huge engine of war roars past a settlement of the poorest of the poor. Dhond is derelict, filthy and poverty-stricken—I mean where the people live, not the workshops, etc. Whatever is put across the Indian people, nothing can argue against the logic of their living conditions in contrast to the motor cars that mock their bullock carts and them—for they, too, drive the motor. And, however much people at home believe in British imperialism, there are four hundred millions who *know* by bitter daily experience the reality. Of course, this is not exactly the ideal background for Indian support for the British war effort—but I have dealt with this very fully in previous letters. Only the sight of Dhond, the daily sight of men and women walking to work

(cheap manual labour with a vengeance) in contrast to the lavish munificence of the gods of war constantly reminds one of the "Indian Tragedy."

But all this is not abstract. The other night I had a hell of a row over a young Indian being hit by a great white sahib and then being shouted at by the R.O.C. like a dog. I am certain I shall not end my tour of duty in the army in India without getting into some trouble through sticking up for the Indians. But I know who is right.

The other day, out of the blue, I was interviewed by my squadron leader and Adjutant *re* my doing some painting, with the promise that any cost of materials would be met by the R.R.I. Now I know it may sound just cussedness on my part, but I cannot get up any enthusiasm to paint the life in the army. If I paint at all, I want to paint the Indians or the two subjects I have written of before in letters. Of course I want to paint—just as I want to live. But my conception of life is my conception of painting. I don't paint things I want to forget, and this is not a people's war so far as we are concerned—there is nothing constructive in our motive for fighting—we are the unwilling tool of progress.

I have just got back from a swim—it was lovely. It is of course piping hot—a cruel sun that makes the earth sand-dry even within a few yards of the water's edge; and the green, long leaves of the young sugar cane glint like bayonets. But oh, the ghastly poverty of the Indian people! Wherever one goes it is the same thing. Little clumps, sometimes village size, of broken stone walls, sacking, bits of tin, corrugated iron roofing propped against a wall, and matting, called "home" by millions of human beings. In the middle, or nearby, a temple or a church, and far away in the cities the swine who live wealthily.

There is little news. I am very fit, working hard and quite happy under the circumstances.

November 14th, 1942. Dhond

Just after I had posted my last letter to you a really exciting thing happened. I ran across a friend who had lived in India all his life. We had a long talk together. He lives near here, and so is going to lend me good books from time to time. This bucked me up no end. I also get a good paper regularly.

November 25th, 1942. *Dhond.*

IN my last letter I spoke of a friend whom I had met. I met him up by the Cinema, where he was in the habit of coming quite openly on week-ends. This last week-end he didn't come on the Sunday, but on Monday. He had on him some copies of *People's War* (the C.P.I. weekly paper) and a book or two for me, as well as an official receipt for a donation I had given him. While he was talking to a fellow the Regimental Police came up and told him to go with them to the Adjutant. He was then taken immediately to a civil magistrate, who sentenced him to six months' rigorous imprisonment, plus a fine of 50 rupees or alternative of another three months. The charge was for being in a prohibited area! Now, added to this, the stinking swine are spreading the story that he was distributing Congress material under cover of being a C.P.er. Such is the legality of the C.P.I.! Party members are being and have been arrested all over India for being active against Congress, but in reality because they fight for Indian Unity and National Government. We felt very sad and angry about this happening, but we have replied as best we can by a "Lenin enrolment" campaign. God, how things reek out here! I have written a lot about India in my letters, but don't think I exaggerate in the slightest degree.

By the way, a slight injury to my hand was done under almost symbolical circumstances. The Squadron Leader, an officer—both holding an ankle—the Squadron Sergeant-Major and Sergeant with the help of a large trooper were all together trying to get me to do a hand-stand (*i.e.*, one hurls oneself until one arrives upside-down, supported on one's hands). While they were all engaged in this piece of essential war effort I was having a hearty laugh (with many other B.O.R.s laughing also) and thinking to myself, "You stupid idiots, why don't *you* try to stand on your feet. I will be only too pleased to help you."

December 16th, 1942. *Dhond*

THERE IS NOW a famine on in the Bombay area. When we arrived here there was one on in the Orissa area. Of course the glib explanation is crop failure, rain failure, etc. But come and see the Indian peasantry! With wells from which a bullock team draws water in a skin trough. With a plough that scratches what one is

pleased to call a furrow with one blade. The task of providing modern machinery (with houses, roads, railways, etc., etc.) is a job that would occupy British industry for generations.

Tonight I have written for a week's reservation for leave in Bombay—let's hope it comes off.

December 24th, 1942. Dhond

TODAY is Christmas Eve. The atmosphere in India is now sober and it is more than likely that people are doing some very deep thinking, not so much about the future, but about the present, the present policy of Jinnah, the present leadership of Congress, and of course the *ever-present* white-sahib (who doesn't need much real thinking about, anyway!).

An entertainment party, including a conjuror, has turned up to entertain us. It is sincerely hoped that the conjuror will do the Indian Rope Trick and the Adjutant will go up the rope.

I should be going on leave in a few days.

December 28th, 1942-January 4th, 1943. On leave in Bombay

HERE I am in Bombay. I had originally intended staying at the St. John's Institute where I stayed last time. But this Christmas I've had as much as I can stand of drunken revelry and at the last minute I remembered my leave spread over New Year's Eve so I decided to go to a posh hotel where I could get good food, good bed, hot baths and *quiet*.

My first day has been quite successful. I've bought two of Pat Sloan's "How the Soviet State is run." I went around to the Party headquarters, had a long talk and got some pamphlets.

It is clear that now, on top of the anti-Congress campaign, a wide food shortage is looming up all over India. It has already affected the middle class as well as the workers and peasants. Food hoarding and black marketing is rampant. But the most serious aspect is that while this affects the workers and peasants very badly they will not tell the police, they will not co-operate with the authorities although they know the offenders *because of their hatred of the white sahib*. . . .

... This morning a friend of mine, in the regiment, called for me at 10 a.m. and we went to the Party Centre where we were immediately welcomed to an Indian meal. We took our boots and socks off and sat on a little straw mat to eat an ordinary meal. It was really great. Afterwards we were shown the Lenin Room and talked with a number of comrades. They have lent us some copies of *Labour Monthly* and *World News and Views* which we are now reading. We then went for a walk round the book shops and bought up every copy of Sloan's book—we must get enough lit. for the next three months. While I was at the Party Centre, one Indian rank and file comrade gave me a postcard picture of Joe. This lad had signed it on the back "With red greetings from ... his name." Wasn't it sweet of him? I promised him I'd have it up in my tank if ever I went into action. I am going to leave a note for another friend to join us and go to a cinema this evening. . . .

... This morning the three of us went along to the Party Rooms where we spent quite a long time reading and talking. We then went to one of the big bookshops, just looking. We had lunch at a Chinese restaurant and then all departed to our own ways.

The black market here is on an enormous scale. In all the industrial towns in India there is a food shortage becoming serious; there have been already a few food riots, looting of shops—of course, this is just what the fifth column and bureaucracy want. The arresting of Party members is now taking place on quite a large scale, because the Party are demanding People's Food Committees, etc., and are doing propaganda in the food queues. In Bombay the workers are in the queues for eight hours a day. The Government has far too few grain shops for emergency distribution and these only stay open for three hours. The arresting of Party comrades is according to pattern. When our comrades were out trying to stop rioting as a result of the arrest of Congress leaders the police arrested them. When our comrades are trying to explain, to keep order in the food queues and a riot starts, the police arrest them. Still, after months have passed since the Party was declared legal, many leading comrades are in prison.

But, not to digress, the food shortage affects even the middle class and yet you can go into the hotels and restaurants and buy what you like. In this hotel, breakfast, lunch and dinner are all *five course* meals. In yesterday's evening paper it speaks of 10,000 bags of wheat being bought for Delhi and adds the comment, "and

particular care is being taken to prevent the incoming wheat from disappearing underground" (N.B!). Incidentally, there is, in the same paper, a three-column account of the growth of Bombay's underworld. All very good, but the article begins "Sheltering behind legal loopholes, and encouraged by police pre-occupation with more urgent (!) and important (!) tasks, etc."

Never have I felt so depressed; so incapable of doing anything to meet the huge situation; so little able to atone for the stinking, filthy, crooked, hypocritical bastards of so-called Englishmen who rule this great country. The only thing is to do everything one can in one's own little sphere, so that when the great Indian people rise for freedom they will find some white sahibs at least are civilised and angry. Especially must one understand India as a sector of the world war. The essential difference of this war to the last is the unequal development of the various fronts. But that does not mean the war has not come to India, it simply means that here the forces are not so in the open as on the Russian Front, not so conscious of themselves nor so clear cut.

. . . In tonight's paper there is an important article on the food situation in Bombay. The following points are made: (1) Food stocks in the city are not likely to last more than two months . . . the authorities have discussed food rationing and "it is likely the scheme will be enforced by the middle of *March next*." (2) The mills have curtailed supplies to their workers in order to cope (N.B.) with the situation; the paper reports a strike of workers in one of the mills against this. (*Note*: You know that the factory workers as a whole remained firm during the days following the arrest of the Congress leaders—only because they were led by the Party. It was no secret at the time that many factory owners—pro-Japanese in their anti-British struggle—did everything, including lock-outs, invitations to Congress agitators, etc., to incite the workers. It all failed—but the food shortage *may* be their next weapon, and tonight's news looks as if it *is*.)

You know that Calcutta is being bombed. But do you know that an acute food crisis is raging throughout Bengal? In this rice producing province there is practically no rice. There is a coal crisis in Calcutta. Food queues are everywhere and food riots are already reported. Such is the mass basis prepared by Linlithgow and Co. for our armies to reconquer Burma!

The *Times of India* now has an important article on the food situation. It writes: "The people of Bombay will not be able to

have any large supplies of wheat for some months unless Australia agrees to export. The present stock of rice, jowar and bajri in the city are expected to last for two months," and again, "Large crowds wait in rows in front of Government grain shops from early morning in order to get their daily requirements of food grains, and scores of people return disappointed owing to the depleted supplies and imperfect arrangements made in the shops."

Now the food situation has been getting steadily worse for months past, yet the Committee of the Grain Merchants' Association, Bombay, has wired to the Viceroy urging him "to impose an embargo on exports and re-exports of foodstuffs from India . . . since the outbreak of war, exports of foodstuffs in large quantities have been allowed and believes that if stringent measures to stop them are not taken promptly, serious unrest may take place." (Note, of course, what has finally moved the committee of the G.M.A. is not the hunger of the workers but their anger.)

I am now going out for my evening stroll—then some reading and to sleep. Tonight they see the New Year in and already the streets are noisy with drunks—when are we going to open the second front?

. . . This evening's paper has this bit on the food situation. "The Government of Bombay have decided to freeze the stocks of bajri held by merchants in Bombay city. Orders are expected to be served on the merchants any moment. Under the order, the whole stock will be acquired by Government and will be sold at a fixed rate. The decision has been taken in view of the tremendous rise in price of bajri during the past fortnight. It is stated that owing to the absence of control over bajri, heavy purchases were made by speculators in bajri during the past two weeks with the result that the rate has now shot up from Rs. 80 per candy to Rs. 130." Of course, it remains to be seen which of the following will be done by the Government: (1) Shoot the speculators; (2) confiscate their holdings of bajri; or (3) pay them a fair price, i.e., Rs. 130. We shall see, but I can make a safe bet it won't be 1 or 2.

Anyway, don't worry! At a society wedding in Bombay on December 30th "several hundred friends and relations (of the married couple) drank their health with enthusiasm. Followed a sumptuous party at which the guests were entertained with a lavish hospitality that was extraordinary, even for such weddings. Some time later the guests sat down to dinner which had to be

taken in relays." The wedding was attended by the daughters of the Governor of Bombay—some war effort.

This morning I went to the usual place. Read the latest copy of *People's War** and after much insisting got the comrades to give me some work to do. I checked over a number of typed copies of extracts from the "Colonial Question"—which, incidentally, I was very glad to read again. I then did some work on a translation one of them had made of a Soviet story. At five o'clock I went to see Mrs. Wadia, where I had tea and looked through a book of reproductions of Soviet paintings—very academic, but, thank God, of people doing things. Mrs. W. gave me a book by that egotistical ass, Charlotte Haldane, which I will try to read.

I have just been for my evening stroll. As usual I went into the Coffee Club to have an iced coffee. In came one of our officers—a second lieutenant. Looked at my shoulder tabs and sat down at the same table. He has a fortnight's leave and has spent most of it drunk and in low haunts, has a woman and a borrowed motor car. I asked him if he knew India at all well. No, but he knows Bombay, especially the haunts, better than his home town, Belfast. "Back home one can never get away from one's parents—here there is nobody to watch what you do or where you go." After this very enlightened conversation, I left him.

I went to the Victoria station, passing on the way hundreds of people sleeping on the pavement, to find out tomorrow's trains to Poona.

I caught the train after saying good-bye to my friends. The journey was quite uneventful. At Poona I stopped for a meal and then back to camp. I am feeling a little sad as things out here are so dreadful. The arrest of the Congress leaders does not abolish the class struggle nor imperialism. I fear that we may again be called out to maintain law and order—don't misunderstand me—not to shoot the speculators, landlords, government officials, but to deal with the angry people.

January 25th, 1943. Dhond, Nr. Poona

I AM in a predicament. Lots of really interesting things have happened this week but I can't describe them as they are connected with military doings. I am very fit, doing a lot of reading

* Indian Communist Party's weekly newspaper.

and having many good discussions about various things. Included with this letter are a number of pages of notes on peasant life. These notes were made in a very rough form some weeks ago when I had the incredible luck to find some deserted farmsteads and so could wander around them and inside them making notes. When this war is over we must decide to spend some time, perhaps a couple of years, living in a peasant country, among peasants.

I have mentioned several times that I am making notes for a book on the history of art—it would be absurd to propose such a history without an understanding of peasant art. This is not to be got by merely reading books on the subject—but also by making a serious effort to understand why a human being should not only make a little pulley but should fashion it a particular shape and mark lines and patterns on it. Or, again, why, among people who are so intimate with cows, goats, trees, etc., should one find a complete absence of realism and a totally stylised art of sculpture and drawing. You can well understand how excited I was to go into these houses. Incidentally, while prying about I ran into a group of peasant men—herdsmen to be precise. They wanted to tell me about everything the moment I made it clear to them, by signs and queries, what I was doing.

*Notes**

There was a certain amount of brick decoration. The end walls of the farm house were of rough stone to about 6 ft. and for the remainder of flat red brick. The patterns of decoration were made by (a) turning the brick to have one corner jutting out; (b) making a ledge to emphasise a line; and (c) sinking the brick about 1 in. behind the general wall surface.

In one house, stuck into the plaster around a door, broken glass bangles were pressed to make a pattern. The broken pieces were all colours (glass, etc.). I found, in one room only, a similar use of broken bangles. Over one doorpost were stuck strips of brightly-coloured paper. One stone wall made of squared stones had been coloured black and white check according to the stones. The main entrance doorways, built round with small, flat brick had a great variety of pattern by protrusion and insertion of brick, colouring of bricks to make a pattern, colouring of mortar between bricks, etc.

*This is a brief selection—the numerous drawings illustrating them have to be omitted.

A brief inspection of peasant farm houses suggested that house-building originated from the shelter provided by a cliff, a bank or a tree (edge of wood) *not* a cave. The place chosen being the site of water. Every farm has a well here. This develops to the building of walls of rough stone (dykers in Scotland—a trade now almost extinct there) and palisades or wicker mats. Only later do men build walls round them and for long these auxiliary walls are hinged on one main wall facing the prevalent wind, etc.

By the main building are set up sheds, either as a continuation of the main wall or independent. But the whole group spreads round the well.

The houses are built of rough stone, thin slab brick and plaster. This plaster is used sometimes as bricks, as mortar to hold stones or bricks, as inside lining to walls, etc.—it is a mixture of earth, clay and dung. The insides of the rooms appear to be washed down with a soft brush to make it quite smooth.

The stone craftsmanship is particularly noticeable in the construction of wells. Again all to one pattern. The wells are always dug *round*, never square. And down the side is a spiral of steps, large stone jutting out from the stone lines sides. In most there is no hand grip but in some a smaller stone projection is provided. A well may have just a single channel for the drawn water to flow or multiple with troughs to hold water for washing, etc. The most profound revolution in Indian peasant economy could be achieved by killing one out of every two bullocks and providing a petrol pump to the wells. It is no use killing the bullocks without providing alternative power to draw water. And, above all, the zeminders, landlords and bankers must not reap the benefit.

In a fair-sized village I found several clay models of bulls. One was painted white all over and then profusely covered with patterns in purple, green and gold. Another was left the colour of clay but decorated with strips of red and gold paper stuck round the horns. These models, while still stylized, were extraordinarily lively.

February 1st, 1943. On the move

My last letter had a number of notes on Indian peasant art. The B.B.C. has just announced the loss of a considerable amount of air mail, which probably means the notebook I sent on peasant art and a number of articles on India have been lost. I am very sorry about this.

Recently we have been on the move, and after a very busy week—and incidentally an extremely interesting and instructive one—we are once again at Nira Tank. This time the crops are golden ripe and, dotted all over the wide-stretching fields, are groups of peasants hand-gathering the seed. Whole families, men, women and little children are out all day. Some have built tents of straw and sticks; open air “kitchens.” Wherever there are small children, they are put down at the foot of an enormous tall bundle of millet stalks—sometimes just tied near the top, sometimes wound round with a Sari (peasant women wear pahrans—huge pieces of brightly-coloured cloth—cotton). How very, very much I longed to paint and draw. . . .

An amusing incident happened on the journey here. In one town through which we passed, stuck up prominently in the main street was the old flag with hammer and sickle. It caused quite an amount of comment.

One of the officers with us has given me much food for thought. He is a stickler for machine-like organisation. Now as this *never* happens in real life—as you and I learnt ages ago—he spends most of his time in a state of frantic worry and despair. The Spanish war taught me that war is even worse than normal life in this respect. A commander who expects his command to work like a machine is a bad modern soldier. The side which wins today is the side which can achieve a minimum of machine organisation with a maximum of initiative.

The good news has just been told that we have another full day here. I shall enjoy this very much—it is very much colder here than on our previous visit—but it is so very beautiful.

February 6th, 1943. On the move

THINGS here are going strong. The Communists, made legal by the British because they supported the war, still have many leaders in jail, their members are constantly being arrested, they are not allowed to hold public meetings or processions in most provinces. In Bengal, most threatened by the Japs, the repression is the worst.

This week we have been on the move camping and sleeping out. It is almost impossible to convey the vast richness of insect life in India. An insect so like a stick that it has the notches one finds in twigs—a large grasshopper with wings so like leaves as to have

vein marks, etc. Then the red ant that covers the bole of a tree for many feet up with mud passages. One lot of these ants has a nest on a low branch—about the size of a football—covered with dead leaves on top—it is made with mud and straw (bricks!) and the whole lower part has a surface of folds to resemble the curved surfaces of dried leaves. The other day I saw an *enormous* butterfly with red rear wings. The chief interest was in its flight. It resembled that of a bird, in so far as the main wings beat the air while the secondary ones, like a spread-out tail, balanced and helped direction; whereas in most (every so far I have noticed) butterflies both sets of wings beat the air. I shall probably come across many other exciting things like this before I leave this country.

A friend and I got the chance to go into a country town S. We were walking up the street when we spotted on a small bookstall a paper in Indian writing and a large picture of Harry (1) on the front page.

One fellow said yesterday, "I wish the bloody war would end." I jumped down his throat with the comment, "I wish it would begin, then it will end quick enough." But one never quite gives up hope that one day the news one longs above all to hear will come on the air—Allied forces have landed on the continent of Europe.

February 13th, 1943. On the move

SOMETIMES I have the most penetrating and painful realisations of the utter negativeness of my own existence here. When we are on the road in lorries and we pass a convoy of peasant bullock carts loaded up with heavy stones, huge logs, etc., I sometimes long to give them our trucks. For, after all, they build, while we kill. How often I have thought of providing every well with a petrol pump—the cost would be a mere spoonful from the torrent of war. I am feeling grand—pretty fit, sleeping out. I wish I could tell you something of my present activities—but I mustn't, for security reasons.

February, 1943. Karwar

THIS and the next few letters will be in the form of a diary, as we are moving about. After several days of interesting and, at times, hard work, we have arrived here, Karwar, after an all night drive

through real primary jungle. I didn't sleep a wink but sat and thought. Among other things I wondered what is the explanation of the fact that so many plants have prickles. This is not meant to be funny. We have here an inanimate object—a vegetable—developing weapons of a really powerful order. One can understand an animal or insect developing weapons of attack and seizure. But can one say that a plant (with no brain or nervous system) consciously develops sharp and strong prickles, tendrils, to prevent the encroachment of animals who might tread on it? I shall have to think about this some more.

We arrived here soon after dawn. How to describe it? A beautiful stretch of sand, a gentle sea, palm trees, a fishing community, and warm. In fact, just the place one would love to see turned into a rest home for the thousands of peasants one has seen toiling on the dry soil, or the workers in the mills. A really perfect place for such a purpose. I bathed to get some of the dust off. Then slept for a couple of hours and then went for a walk along the beach with a friend. How very, very much I wished I had a paint box. If we ever get the chance of coming to India in a civilised way we will visit here.

When the sun set this evening, it turned a brilliant vermilion, its roundness absolutely clear. It went down so slowly as to cause no splash on the sea—but rather floated. The ancients believed that a boat took it round to the East for the next morning. At the same time the sea went pale viridian green—the sky a cold transparent mauve and the sandy shore ivory. The fishermen, more black than ever, were in their black boats, adjusting their nets which were stretched out into the water and hanging on long poles. In the next letter I will have a small drawing of this. Across the sun, horizontally to emphasise its floating, were three streaks of madder and its shape was as though its own weight lay on the water level, and so huge as to dominate the whole background.

February, 1943. Karwar

TODAY we went out woodcutting. During the expedition we came across two native woodcutters who cut up two trees for 8 annas each—they were superb at their craft, both with an axe (with a head that is proportionately longer than our usual ones) and with a curved knife. On our way back we stopped by a religious chariot

—a huge mass of deeply carved woodwork on heavy wheels. This Indian woodcarving has a magnificent weight about it. Yesterday evening I went into the "town." Not at all interesting but for the schools and public library, most beautifully kept and with quite a number of good books.

This morning I bathed before breakfast. In a recent letter I described some peasant carvings. Recently I found a toy cat, home-made of wood, and some little stone objects, which I am keeping. From time to time fellows look at them. One chap yesterday solemnly informed me it was unlucky to have them. I asked him why he thought so. He replied that he once had one, and two months after he had a serious motor accident. Incredible, isn't it, for 1943? These old sweats with long service in India are full of such stuff about everything Indian. Sir James Fraser has some excellent material on such "magic" at the beginning of the Golden Bough.

I went at 5 o'clock to watch a game of hockey against the local boys' high school. After the game, which was a very good one, I had a quick look at the school. It had some quite up-to-date scientific instruments. In the museum room there was a good collection of birds, snakes and fish caught by the pupils.

When we got back to camp and had had some supper, a number of students came round to invite us to go for a walk and talk with them. I am very excited about this, as I have carried on, almost alone, a battle on this question—that Indians are human beings. Now a whole group have discovered this to their amazement and *pleasure*, as they have now lost quite a lot of the feeling of exiles. On the walk we had a good discussion on the incorrectness of the Congress policy. It is quite clear that (1) the youths are thinking hard, because Congress has got them nowhere; (2) that British Imperialism is so hated that it represents fascism—their emotional—*i.e.*, national—outlook, which is very strong both as Indians and workers, so hopelessly predominates that they are almost blind to the international basis of pre-requisites of Indian independence.

An interesting incident in connection with all this is that one of the fellows who has been talking to these students made the announcement that in his opinion these Indians are far more intelligent than English youths. This discovery has thrilled him—"Think what that means with 100 millions of them," he says, with eyes alight, and then adds, "It is almost terrifying." His discovery is but half-way towards a full understanding of what independence *does*.

Today I shall spend wandering about looking with notebook and pencil. It is so very beautiful here that I would love to spend some time painting. There is an artist, Indian, who lives here. I am trying to get to know him in the hope of arranging for my next leave.

February, 1943. Karwar

YESTERDAY I shall remember for a long time. The local boys' school headmaster invited one of our fellows to give a talk to the 4th, 5th and 6th forms and staff on "English Education." He invited me to go along with him and his friends, in all a party of six. Imagine six British soldiers being invited to an Indian school to speak on Education—and imagine six British soldiers heartily accepting the offer.

It was a roaring success. He spoke in English for about 15 minutes, and then question time. Questions were invited on *all* subjects. Many were on education itself, but some of the boys asked such questions as "Do you learn Indian history at school?" "What is the essence of English patriotism?" "What are your impressions of India as compared to England?" "Britain has ruled India for 150 years—if India conquered Britain, how long would it rule?" I was asked by the six others to give the replies to these and other such questions, and I took as my guiding rule a people's programme—national unity, liberation of women, universal education, etc. The meeting lasted over an hour and was enjoyed by everyone. What struck us most was that the whole thing was done in English. Imagine such a thing happening, say, in French in an English school with pupils aged 11 to 14! The brightness and intelligence of these children is splendid.

After the meeting in the school, we went for a walk along the seashore with a number of the pupils, when we discussed all sorts of things. This morning I am due to take a class, Standard 5, on an English subject, and have chosen Wordsworth, for which they have lent me one of their school text-books on English verse.

. . . Well, I got to the school where, after a wait of about 15 minutes, during which much arranging was going on between the headmaster and staff, I found myself in front of practically the whole outfit, including the staff. Incidentally, boys *and* girls. I was given an hour, but took three-quarters of an hour, and the rest on questions. I made the work of Wordsworth my theme, and

around this spoke on the elements of poetry—sound, rhythm, etc., of words—the influences of Wordsworth—1789 and industrialism—commerce—the message of Wordsworth—a healthy, youthful love of nature and a people's poetry. Then I read them some of the poems—Westminster Bridge, Milton, etc. The questions included who was the greater, Milton or Shakespeare, and why?—questions about the 20th century English poets, how exactly did Wordsworth react to the French Revolution?—what new things did he impart to English poetry?, etc., etc. Isn't it perfectly clear that these ignorant wogs are not fit to govern themselves? The headmaster was extremely grateful to me for doing this, as though *they* were the ones to benefit! It was marvellous for me to be among them.

This evening the squadron plays them at football, and myself and my colleague have been invited to tea with the staff. Tomorrow we leave here early.

I can say of Karwar that it is one of the loveliest places I have ever seen. I shall never forget these fishermen, these peasants, these children and their little town.

. . . In the afternoon, at 4.30, my friend and I went along to the school, where he gave another talk on the English universities. After this we two had tea with the headmaster and staff—tea, two little bananas and some mixed-up nuts and ginger—all standing round a table. At 6 o'clock I met three boys from a Hindu school and had a really interesting talk with them.

All the time at Karwar I had a curious idea running through my mind—one that is the threme of Barrie, Thunder Rock, not to mention others—*i.e.*, that I, coming literally out of the blue, should speak to them of what Wordsworth said to me over a hundred years ago. As though space were catching up on time.