

Approaching Colombo.

1921 5

May 2. 1921.

My dearest Ruth, I've been thinking of you a great deal, particularly yesterday, for a reason you will remember. - I think I have wanted you more during this voyage than at any other time when we have been separated. Perhaps my dear one we are really closer than we used to be - we are indeed very close. Anyway I feel that the voyage would have been more than tolerable, even quite enjoyable had you been here. We should at least have seen far more of each other than we ever do elsewhere.

The company I have really doesn't merit the effort of description. My "Black-Tan" turns out to have wandered a good deal in the Middle East - he was captured at Kut - & though his mind is singularly untrained a certain amount of interest comes of that; & in an ill-bred & too hearty way he is good-natured; I generally have a chat with him sometime during the day. The Colonel & Mr. Messer who are table companions & gentlemen are Irish by birth beside being typical Anglo-Indians in their outlook & opinions. He has a very nice character - but as for conversation! The Captain is a jay raconteur & keeps up his end in a lively manner - I feel that one would never get below the surface with him, & what with the noise of fans etc it is very difficult to hear what he says from

my place; however it is very valuable in him to make so much talk. Mrs Vernon who sits between me & the Captain is a nice woman, the wife of an India Civilian, a Collector now stationed in Madras; she is a lady & sensible & kind; I see more of her than anyone - but absolutely mortally lazy - never to be stirred (my partner - never wanting to be stirred). And with two other ladies, friends of Mrs Vernon since she joined the ship, I pass the time of day & chat small pleasantries, & sometimes ⁱⁿ go so far as to amuse ourselves at the expense of the other passengers. Nice people & it's depressing to feel I make so little account of them. That ends the count of ladies & gentlemen. There are besides a number of unpleasant youths & several couples who are not disagreeable. The 2nd class people look more interesting but there are obstacles to pursuing acquaintance there which I haven't the energy to surmount.

I amuse myself sometimes by making gloomy remarks about this doomed ship, but it has ceased to be a good subject of jest. These last two days have laid low most of us both passengers & crew - the Captain himself included - with some internal trouble. Luckily it seems readily curable with castor oil. Feeling some mild symptoms yesterday afternoon I took a couple of pills - but I was up in the night - feel though unwell to-day. Luckily I have for sometime cut down my consumption of food so that I am probably less liable to a severe attack than most people & it certainly seems that mine

is a mild attack. But apart from all this it is
curious how much I have a sense of the nearness of disaster
or danger. All this appearance of a civilized life is a hollow
sham, - the sea is as deep evil as it is attractive. I am
always longing to leap into the sea & am still much delighted
by the sport of porpoises & dolphins & flying fish which are con-
stantly scuttling about the surface, more like little winged toy-
torpedoes than anything else; & if ever I were to leap in I should
probably be done for in thirty seconds - by sharks. And there's
an inquiet spirit in the ocean - even at the dead-calm
times when the surface really appears frozen into stillness
the heart seems to go on beating with a long slow swell &
we go perpetually rolling & pitching in a lazy, gentle fashion
as though we might so go on to the end of time - so that
we seem to be pursued by the shadow of its brute nature, not allowed
to forget the violence of which it is capable. I am not
yet well understood depressed by the evil possibilities - myself
interested to be conscious of a contrast between the calmness
on the one hand with the well-behaved passengers & the stability
outside. Supposing the water or the cold storage were to go
wrong - push this well-behaved crowd off its balanced
mightn't they just go mad & discover their claws?

This is a gloomy letter! Gepp has not pro-
ceeded much these past few days - presumably because
it is no longer a question of re-writing the earlier parts,

but simply of finishing the story; & the effort required for so much invention seems to be beyond me at present.

The temperature goes gradually up - it was 87° last night - very moist again. We shall be very hot at Colombo - after all it is only ~~about~~ ^{about} 6° North I think. We shall get there to-morrow morning at this rate & have about six hours there.

We're just reaching Colombo - I feel very cheerful. I had a splitting headache last night, but lay with my eyes over my burning & sweated profusely & a cup of tea this morning seemed to have chased away the malady. What shall I find in Colombo? Little I fear to interest you. There is said to be lace. It looks like a place carved out of tropical forest - which is probably the fact, in spite of its imposing size. Palms are popping up every where.

We are earlier than we expected - 8.0 a.m. now. I must finish this.

With ever so much love to you.

Your loving George.