

If Glasier's is the most impressive letter, Robert Blatchford is the most impressive person among this select bunch. Known as 'Nunquam', he was editor of the *Clarion*, and a prolific writer on socialism, man-in-the-street philosophy, English prose, Shakespeare, spiritualism, and many other subjects. In one of his last letters to Ranstead he enclosed a charming, if rather thickly nostalgic, love-story, written when he was in his eighties. His 'Ocean Postage' letter, of which excerpts are given here, does him less than justice: it is by no means up to the standard of his regular letters. Was he self-conscious about this one, written to order as it was, or depressed at the prospect of Ranstead's going, or envious? One can only guess.

Dear Will, It is a good idea of Sutcliffe's, this ocean postage, and I hope there will be a lot of letters and that they will be pleasant reading. . . . I wonder where you will be when you get this, and how you will be. Right out of sight of land – on a rushing Grand Hotel – in the centre of a great blue saucer, with a great blue bowl over it. Better than the *Clarion* office – or the Flowery Dean? It is a fine sight that sky-circle, and that dish of heaving blue.

It is raining as I write this, and the sky is grey, and the air is damp and cold. And I've the hump. . . . But when you get it I suppose it will be sunny here and I shall have forgotten the hump. What a curious thing would be a collection of cast-off humps. A grim museum of the forgotten worries that galled our tribe. How petty hindrances and puny hurts do irritate and dispirit us. And they are as transient as the little flies that sting and annoy us on a summer walk. And we *know* they are, and yet we get angry or despondent at the next crease in the rose leaf. Yes, a collection of cast-off humps would be both amusing and instructive.

About a museum of worn out or damaged hopes, desires and ambitions I'm not so sure. We forget the humps: but the disappointments cling, and the disillusionments sometimes leave scars that hurt us in dull or cloudy weather. Yet a collection of such human follies and miscarriages as every one of us must have cause to remember would be very eloquent. The path of Socialism is strewn with such wreckage. Broken toys – for which we were charged dearly.

The worst of it is we are always children and always in want of toys. And as we get older the toys please less – and cost more. Of course our business – as grown up children – is to make toys for other children. Le Gallienne described himself as a fellow engaged in 'growing dreams for the London market'. It's a neat thought. So I make Julie's, and Fellowships, and you go out building model villages in New Zealand. . . .

By the way do you know I don't feel at all sure that we shall not be at war with France this winter. And our government of weary pantaloons is making no preparation! You'll be surprised if a French army comes and takes possession of your model village! And imagine poor old Robert in a muddy trench, with no bacca and no burgundy, shooting at Mounseers! or maybe – Won't Fay laugh if I waltz into Valhalla with a hole through my crummet and say 'Hello, Ned, I've just got shot in the French Invasion'.

. . . and my love to all the children, and I wish I could have put some jokes in this letter, but I have none about me. Till we meet again. Yours, Bob.

The 'Fay' mentioned towards the end of Blatchford's letter is E. F. Fay, 'the Bounder' of the *Clarion*. His death in 1896 had shocked all his friends, since he was a comparatively young man and very much one of the *Clarion* group. His last letter to Ranstead, scrawled in pencil