

Cambridge University Press

0521561965 - The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volume 7 - 1920-1922

Edited by Laurence Davies and J. H. Stape

Excerpt

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1920

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To Edward Garnett

Text MS Bryn Mawr; G. 292–3

[letterhead: Oswalds]

New Year's day.

1920.

Dearest Edward¹

I won't mock yours and mine* philosophy by a parade of good wishes. This is the first letter I write in 1920 and we all here old and young send you our love.

I ought to have written you immediately after our return² here – instead of which I became immediately ill with a beastly complaint (not gout)³ which prevented me sitting up at the table and made me generally unwilling to stir as much as my little finger if it were to save my life.

I am better to-day. As to Mrs Jessie she is going on well and strong; and I see the time when she will become ungovernable. But even that prospect is cheering in comparison to a bedridden future which hung over our heads for the last 3 or 4 years.

I've done nothing for the last six weeks and I feel that I'll never do anything any more. Somehow I don't feel so happy about it as I ought to – for what could be more soothing than a sense of impotence?

Give my affectionate New Years greetings to your wife and to David.⁴ I wish more power to his right arm; for he, at any rate, may yet hope for one (at least) lucky shot against some Philistine⁵ or other, in his life.

May you live long enough to see him whirl his sling! As to me I have no such expectation. I admit that I am not buried (or incinerated) yet but I have a strong feeling that I ought to be.

Ever yours

J. Conrad.

¹ Edward Garnett (1868–1937), a publisher's reader and critic, was the husband of Constance, the translator. He lived some (and Constance all) of the time at The Cearne, a meeting-place for writers, artists, anarchists, socialists, and Russian refugees. Garnett's encouragement of Conrad in the 1890s and beyond was typical of his generous and painstaking attention to writers new and old, among them Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, D. H. Lawrence, and Dorothy Richardson. Although Conrad disapproved of his pacifism and Russophilia, Garnett remained a loyal and often close friend.

² From Liverpool, where the Conrads spent much of December 1919 for an operation on Mrs Conrad.

³ Inflammation of the prostate; see the letter to Pinker of 29 December 1919, *Letters*, 6, p. 545.

⁴ Constance Garnett (née Black, 1862–1946), a distinguished translator of Russian fiction, and David (1892–1981), future author of *Lady into Fox* (1923) and many other novels.

⁵ A sparkish pairing of Goliath, the Philistine giant whom David kills with a well-aimed stone (1 Samuel 17) with the modern Philistine, as characterised by Matthew Arnold, who has little or no love for artistry or learning.

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*Letters of Joseph Conrad***To G. Jean-Aubry***Text* MS Yale; *Ljfr.* 150-1

[letterhead: Oswalds]

Jour de l'An

1920.

Très cher ami.¹

Il faut me pardonner mon silence. En arrivant ici j'ai dû me mettre au lit. Je viens de me lever juste à temps pour vous envoyer de la part de tout le monde New Years wishes of all health and prosperity.

L'affaire de Arrow of Gold est arrangée.² Vous pouvez marcher. Le titre de En Marge des Marées plaît à Gide. J'ai trouvé une lettre de lui³ en arrivant ici.

Nous sommes encore sans domestiques – en camp volant. Il faudra cependant que Vous veniez bientôt. Je vais Vous envoyer un petit mot dans quelques jours.

Je n'ai pas travaillé encore, et je m'en sens incapable. Il faudra bien s'y mettre quand Mlle H[allowes]⁴ arrivera – lundi prochain. J'ai le trac.

Toujours le Votre affectueusement

J. Conrad

Translation

New Year's Day

1920.

My very dear friend.

You must forgive my silence. On arriving here I had to take to bed. I have just got up in time to send you New Year's wishes of all health and prosperity from everybody here.

¹ Jean-Frédéric-Émile Aubry (1882–1950), French music critic and writer on literature, wrote under the names G. Jean-Aubry and Gérard Jean-Aubry. An admirer and close friend of Conrad during Conrad's later years, he became a one-man Conrad industry, promoting the writer's reputation in France, translating a number of his works, producing the first biography, and compiling the first edition of his letters. Among his other friends were many composers, including Debussy and Ravel; both Manuel de Falla and Roussel wrote settings of his poems. From 1919 to 1930, he lived in London, editing the *Chesterian*, a magazine published by a firm of musical instrument makers.

² Jean-Aubry was interested in translating the novel, already assigned; bowing to Conrad's wishes, Gide reassigned it to him (see *Letters*, 6, pp. 517, 535–6, and Stape and Knowles, pp. 145–9).

³ Now lost; that of 21 November 1919 (Stape and Knowles, pp. 148–9) leaves the issue unresolved.

⁴ Lilian Mary Hallowes (1870–1950), Conrad's secretary, who, hired in 1904 for a month, remained his 'typewriter', with interruptions, for the rest of his career.

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The *Arrow of Gold* business is settled. You can go ahead. Gide is pleased with the title *En Marge des Marées*. I found a letter from him on returning here.

We are still without servants – camping. Nevertheless, you must come soon. I will drop you a line in a few days.

I still haven't done any work and feel unable to do any. I shall certainly have to get down to some when Miss H. arrives – next Monday. I'm nervous.

Always affectionately yours

J. Conrad

To Captain David Bone

Text MS Sprott; Knowles

[letterhead: Oswalds]

4.1.20

My dear Cap^t Bone.¹

I was laid up directly on arriving here, and this is the explanation of the delay in thanking You for the precious copy of the book.² Pray convey to your brother³ my great appreciation of his signature on the fly leaf.

I am an old admirer of his art – of his great vision of the soul of things.

Between you, you have produced the very thing in the way of a memorial of the men and Ships of *the* Service. I can't tell you how glad I am that Fate has provided the right men for that work.

May all luck and every prosperity attend you and all yours this year and in the years to come. I hope that some day we shall meet again – perhaps on the deck of your new ship.⁴

I shall have a copy of my next book bound specially for you and send it to Your Glasgow address.

With most friendly regards believe me always yours

Joseph Conrad

¹ Captain David William Bone (1874–1959; knighted 1946), a seaman-writer, corresponded with Conrad in 1910, though only met him in December 1919 during the Conrads' stay in Liverpool. Conrad at first disliked his novel *The Brassbounder* (1910) intensely, but his attitude eventually softened. When Conrad sailed in her to America in 1923, David Bone was captain of the *Tuscania*. Conrad also knew his brothers, Muirhead, the artist, and James, the newspaper editor.

² *Merchantmen-at-Arms: The British Merchant Service in the War*, published in November 1919.

³ Muirhead Bone (1876–1953; knighted 1937) had provided drawings for the book.

⁴ They had both spoken at a University Club dinner in Liverpool in December 1919 to honour the Merchant Service. Bone had recently taken command of the *Tuscania*, in which Conrad sailed to America in 1923.

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PS The wretches who undid the parcel lost the wrapper with the address of you[r] Glasgow home. So I send this to your publishers.¹

To Richard Curle

Text Curle 56

Oswalds
Bishopsbourne,
Kent.

Tuesday [6 January 1920]²

Dearest Dick,³

Ever so many thanks for your letter of yesterday inclosing the list of papers for the misce[lane]ous volume.⁴ It seems to me absolutely complete. I don't think there can be a scrap of my writing hiding anywhere.⁵ There is nothing I can remember, at any rate.

The questions you raise require a little thinking over; I want to consult you about my ideas on that matter. I will write to you soon, very soon, asking you to run down here. Just now the conditions are unspeakable – rather. I have been unable to work or even to think. I was plunged in gloom and obsessed by dismal forebodings.

It is true I wrote two prefaces in my life, one for Ada Gals[worthy] the other for Edward Garnett's book.⁶ But they were not concerned with their work. In one I speak of Maupassant *only* – in the other of Turgenev, almost exclusively. But writing for your book⁷ would have been another matter altogether. It would have had to be a direct personal appreciation. You see the difference? The facts of our case: – you the author of the only serious Study of J. C. (a book well known and generally acknowledged);⁸ the actual

¹ Chatto & Windus.

² Curle's letter to Conrad of the 4th (Stape and Knowles, pp. 150–1) fixes the date.

³ A journalist and writer, Richard Henry Parnell Curle (1883–1968) was Scots by birth but English by residence and education. He left Wellington College in 1901, and began working in publishing in London in 1905. His passion for travel appears in such books as *Into the East: Notes on Burma and Malaya* (1923) and *Caravansary and Conversation* (1937); his psychological curiosity in *Women: An Analytical Study* (1947). His first book was *Aspects of George Meredith* (1908), and he published many studies of other writers, including Robert Browning, W. H. Hudson, Thomas Hardy, and Dostoevsky. In his relations with Conrad, about whom he wrote three books and many articles and pamphlets, Curle became both protégé and protector – a combination of sympathetic critic, bibliographer, collector, acolyte, entrepreneur, and friend.

⁴ *Notes on Life and Letters*.

⁵ Conrad's essay on Galsworthy had been missed out (see the letter of 8 June 1921).

⁶ For *Yvette and Other Stories* (1904) and *Turgenev: A Study* (1917).

⁷ *Wanderings: A Book of Travel and Reminiscence*, to appear in March.

⁸ *Joseph Conrad: A Study* (1914).

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dedication¹ staring people in the face – would have thrown a complexion of complimentary futility upon the most sincere expression of literary opinion and personal regard.

All this may be controverted, no doubt, – but I shrank from the risk, both for your sake and mine. It did not seem to me worth the occasion. On general grounds a laudatory preface is not a good thing. The critics react instinctively. No, I don't think it would be good for the book. Honestly I don't. It looks as if the author had not enough faith in himself. And in this instance there is a disadvantage that in a book of that sort (travel) there is no question of sheer art involved which could be taken up and treated in a preface abstractedly. It must be either personal backing up – or nothing. A most difficult thing to do and moreover extremely liable to defeat its own ends. It occurs to me, however, that the dedication might be cancelled and, in that case, I would – if you really want it – try to write you a letter which you could print. I would try – and that's all I can say. And even then I fear you would have to wait for it. My dear, I am unable just now to write prefaces for my own stuff! They are clamouring for them in U.S. I can't even tackle the text of the *Resc*.² My mental state is awful.

Ever yours,

J. Conrad.

To J. B. Pinker

Text MS Berg; Unpublished

[letterhead: Oswalds]

Mond. 13[12].1.20³

Dearest Pinker.⁴

This is the week of your visit – is it not?

Please drop Jessie a timely warning.

I've been laid up. Serious. I mean the situation is – or is growing so, at least.

¹ 'To Joseph Conrad whose genius and friendship have given me many of my happiest hours, I inscribe this book, which his unfailing interest and sympathy have encouraged me to write.'

² Serialisation of *The Rescue* in *Land and Water* was to begin on 30 January. Revision for book publication was next on Conrad's agenda.

³ Conrad was more likely to confuse the date than the day.

⁴ James Brand Pinker (1863–1922), a Londoner, was one of the first literary agents in Britain. Over the years his clients included Ford Madox Ford, Henry James, Stephen Crane, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and D. H. Lawrence. He began acting for Conrad in 1900 and helped him through many financial crises, but a serious quarrel in 1910 suspended their relationship for several months and strained it for many more. By the time Conrad had finished *Chance*, however, they were closer than ever before. They visited one another's homes and took holidays together, including the visit to Corsica in 1921. In autumn 1920, they collaborated on *Gaspar the Strong Man*, a film scenario of Conrad's story 'Gaspar Ruiz'.

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I expect the best results from your visit. But even if you came with the worst intentions You couldn't do much in the way of flattening me out more than I am already.

The Lond Mercury thought fit to send me a fee of £10 for the Crane.¹ I've paid it to my acct so please debit me with the pound which belongs to you there.

Ever Yours

J. Conrad.

To J. B. Pinker

Text MS Berg; Unpublished

[letterhead: Oswalds]

Thursday. [15 January? 1920]²

My dear Pinker.

Please settle this bill which I couldn't find this morning to give you. And may I ask for the six £1 notes as usual, by post.

I went for a little drive this afternoon after working all the forenoon at *R[escue]* to some good purpose.

Ever Yours

J. Conrad.

To Grace Willard

Text MS Colgate; Unpublished

[Oswalds]

[mid-January 1920]³

Dear Mama Grace.⁴

Herewith the £100. You have such a clear conception of the scheme that I'll say nothing more about that. *Aubusson*⁵ is the thing and as to colour in general we will tend towards amber or even frank yellow as much as possible.

N'est-ce pas?

Ever Yours

Joseph

¹ 'Stephen Crane: A Note without Dates' had appeared in the inaugural issue of the *London Mercury*, December 1919.

² The allusion to Pinker's presence at Oswalds (see the previous letter) and a quickened tempo of work on *The Rescue*, mentioned on the 19th and 20th, suggest the date. Requests for the servant's wages on the month's remaining Thursdays disallow those dates.

³ The letter to Pinker of the 19th suggests this dating.

⁴ Grace Robinson Willard (née Cameron, 1877–1933; Mrs James Struthers Willard) was born in Illinois. She had done some book-reviewing and journalism, but during her long residence in London mainly applied her talents to interior design. A visitor to the Conrads, she helped to decorate and furnish Oswalds. She reviewed *Last Essays*, *Tales of Hearsay*, and Jessie Conrad's *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him* for the *New York Evening Post*.

⁵ A flat-woven carpet, named after the French town of its manufacture.

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To Richard Curle*Text* TS Indiana; Curle 57

[letterhead: Oswalds]

Jan. 19th. 1920.

Dearest Richard

I am too slack and languid to sit up to the table and write with pen and ink. I am not too feeble to talk however and if you feel at all disposed perhaps you would run down on Wednesday to lunch and sleep.

I can't ask you for a few days because I am now engaged in correcting the text of *The Rescue* which I promised the publishers in England and America would be ready end of Jan^y. As I have done nothing to it till the last three days Miss H[allowes] and I are slaving at it all the morning and often in the afternoon in order to get through, somewhere near the promised date.

It would do me good to see you, morally and intellectually and I hope you won't mind coming for such a short time. We will have a good long talk. Pray drop us a line by return. Jessie's love.

Ever Yours

J Conrad.

To G. Jean-Aubry*Text* TS Yale; Unpublished

[letterhead: Oswalds]

Jan. 19th. 1920.

Très cher.

I won't wait till I am fit to sit up and write in order to explain to you why we passed through London¹ without letting you know. Jessie was thoroughly overcome with fatigue and stayed in bed with her eyes shut through the one day we spent at the hotel. I was not feeling well already then but my intention was to take Jessie home and then return to London the same week to see you, one or two other persons, and have a men's dinner. Instead of which it turned out that I had to go to bed through a very nasty and unexpected development of a local cold contracted in Liverpool. I had to keep indoors and be very careful, but I expected every day to feel better. However the beastly thing hung on to me, depressing me physically and mentally, and I didn't have the energy to write to anyone. In that respect I am getting better now, but the gout has come since; a very painful wrist and all the usual consequences.

¹ In late December 1919.

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Yesterday I was in bed all day. Catherine came down for Borys' birthday¹ and we talked of you considerably. She is immensely gratified at your wish to give her a part in your play² and she spoke of your kindness on this and other occasions with great appreciation.

We have now a team of servants – since Saturday – and you would not be running an undue risk of perishing from hunger, cold and undue neglect if you managed to come here early on Saturday and stayed for Sunday. The drawing-room still empty except for the piano which has come into it the other day. We are all very much in love with it.

A vous de coeur

J. Conrad.

To J. B. Pinker

Text MS Berg; Unpublished

[letterhead: Oswalds]

19.1.20.

Dearest Old Friend.

Herewith I send you John's acc^t for his next term. I have also drawn a cheque to Grace Willard for £100 to pay for the drawing-room furniture – since the room must be furnished. How much we'll get for that God only knows: a strip or two [of] carpet and a few seats of sorts – enough to show people into the room when they call.

Will you please then transfer that amount to my acc^t and in this connection it occurs (very anxiously) to me that I don't know in the least how I stand with you. I don't imagine for a moment that you will you* think I want to bother you with accts or figures. But You have been financing me through all the evil days of my writing life and tho' the days now are good I always feel that I³ ought to be told beforehand of the demands I may make on you. So I want to warn you that besides the income-tax 1/2 year now due, there will be accts coming in for curtains – floor coverings and some additional furniture – which have not yet been presented. I don't remember the exact

¹ Borys Conrad turned twenty-two on the 15th. Catherine is the actress Catherine Willard, Grace's daughter, who was either two years younger or three years older. For her biography, see the list of Conrad's correspondents.

² Thanks to her theatrical training in Paris, Catherine Willard spoke excellent French. In England, she made her name as a Shakespearean, touring as Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and then taking such roles as Hermione, Olivia, and Lady Macbeth at the Old Vic. Jean-Aubry wrote several plays, among them *L'Heure fantasque*, *Le Merveilleux Éveil*, and *L'École des vertus*.

³ A slip for 'you'?

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amounts now but in any case it will not be an immense sum. The bill for the moving has not come in yet either.

Ever Yours

J Conrad.

PS I was in bed two days but the corr[ecti]ons of *Rescue* are moving on. Mama Grace took your etching to town for framing. The more one looks at it the more lovely it seems. Jessie's love.

To J. B. Pinker

Text MS Berg;¹ Unpublished

[Oswalds]

[19? January 1920]²

Will you let them? I've no copy. Perhaps you could tell them where to get one
JC

To Thomas J. Wise

Text TS BL Ashley 2953; Unpublished

[letterhead: Oswalds]

Jan. 19th. 1920.

My dear M^r Wise³

I ought to have answered your kind letter long before; but on arriving home I had to go to bed and I have been more or less ailing since. This letter

¹ Text on the verso of a letter to Conrad from The British Drama League (signed Geoffrey Whitworth, Honorary Secretary) of 13 January, asking to see a copy of *One Day More* for possible production by the Sheffield Playgoers Society.

² The note was possibly included with the letter of the 19th.

³ Thomas James Wise (1859–1937) collected – and fabricated – literary rarities. Having prospered as a dealer in lavender and other essential oils, he built up a considerable collection of books and manuscripts, many of which are now in the British Library's Ashley Collection, and enjoyed a steady reputation as a bibliophile and bibliographer. Meanwhile he was forging and selling at high prices unique early editions of Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Swinburne, and the Brownings, all hitherto unknown to scholarship. In order to improve his own collection of Jacobean plays, he was also helping himself to leaves from copies in the British Museum. His career as forger was not exposed until three years before his death, and his side-line as literary thief and vandal came to light long after. In 1918, he began to purchase manuscripts and typescripts from Conrad, and in 1920 overtook John Quinn as principal purchaser. As Conrad's first bibliographer, he published *A Bibliography of the Writings of Joseph Conrad* (1920) and *A Conrad Library: A Catalogue of Printed Books, Manuscripts and Autograph Letters by Joseph Conrad* (1928). He also printed twenty limited-edition pamphlets of Conrad's occasional writings between December 1918 and January 1920. To the best of our knowledge, Wise did not fabricate anything Conradian, and, in an article for the *Bookman's Journal* (31 December 1920, p. 160), was good enough to warn collectors against fraudulent cancels in Conrad first editions.