

Friday
13. Nov.

My dear Hazel,

The latest is that our letters are to be censored, although we were distinctly told that those addressed to New Zealand would not be. So I have had to tear up a long screed which I had written up from time to time since we left Albany, and make a fresh start.

We got no mail again at Albany, but are hoping to get one in a few days now. We are forbidden to say anything about our movements, strength etc, but I think you know as much as we do anyhow, and I could not tell you anything more than I have told you already in previous letters. The censorship seems quite unnecessary, since we will surely have reached our destination

by the time our letters get to New Zealand, and then what use will it be to the enemy to know which route we took? And it is certainly very annoying to think ~~of~~ some one else reading our letters: you just feel as if someone were looking over your shoulder as you write.

We have had a beautiful trip, but I am disappointed in the tropics. They are so like anywhere else. There are no "skies of molten brass", all the flying fish we have seen were about the size of herring, and the dark does not come "at one stride". Even the heat is not up to expectations, though I would not say I am disappointed in that respect. Certainly the sun is straight overhead, and very hot, but there have been plenty of showers to cool the air, and by keeping under the awnings on deck, and

reducing our clothing to one garment we manage to keep perfectly comfortable. The nights, of course, are very warm at sea, but we mostly sleep on deck. There have been heavy showers nearly every night, and it is amusing to see the sleepers awake and break for cover. Fortunately I have a sheltered spot for my bed, where the rain has only penetrated once. I miss my cold bath more than anything. I always got it till the last week, but now the water gets heated somehow in the pipes - not by the sun, but by the engines - and is practically boiling. Sometimes we get ^{under} the hose on deck, or better still get a fresh shower bath in the rain. Fresh water is very scarce, and is only turned on at certain hours. I have a cake of salt water soap which is worth gold to me, as it enables me to

cut out the long wait in the "queue" for a fresh water, and just wash in the salt water, which is never rushed.

We are getting rather tired of the food, and hope to get some change of diet at \pounds our next port. The canteen is sold out of everything worth buying, so we have just the rations. The allowance of bread is generally ample - a pound a day. We get meat twice a day - stew for breakfast and roast for dinner, and "duff" twice a week. The butter (2 ozs a day) would be just enough with careful management, but we generally have none ^{left} for tea. We get a pound of jam per week, but it is issued in fourteen lb tins, and we use it all in about four days. For the remaining three days we are liable to have nothing but dry bread for tea, and a little scouting and foraging is required.

The stewards and people in the officers' quarters are not incorruptible and one can get a few luxuries from them. I can't help getting on the subject of food, because it is so important to us. We do practically nothing but eat and sleep now. The parades are very slack since we reached the tropics - just a little physical drill and signalling. I have had plenty of amusing books to read. My taste in literature has sadly degenerated, I fear - I simply revel in Rex Beach and R.W. Chambers. I have two by our old friend Arnold Bennett in store. The rage for "Five Hundred" still continues, and boxing is also popular on deck in the evenings.

I am sending home Christmas cards which we got at Albany. They are very poor affairs, but they will serve. We stayed at Albany four days, and so had

time to get them printed. I have no very pleasant recollections of Albany, though of course every port is a very welcome break in the monotony. If ~~the~~ the approach to Hobart was dreary, I have no words to describe the utter desolation of Albany. The outer harbour is a large bay, about the size of Wellington harbour, protected by a chain of islands. The inner harbour is formed in the same way, and the islands almost ^{hide} the town and shipping from view. The country is high, almost mountainous, and absolutely barren, covered with scrub.

We anchored near the outer entrance, at some distance from the Australian fleet. Next day our boat and the "Maunganui" went to the wharf for a few hours. There was some special reason for it, and as far as we know, no other boat was so favoured.

The inner harbour is very shallow, and it took our boat an hour to get against the wharf. The port is about three miles from the township, but there were a good many people on the wharf. One could notice that they were a distinctly different type from New Zealanders - a type bred of the great heat and the poverty of the country. Immediately after tea we were allowed a short route march, about halfway to the town and back. It was very refreshing to get ashore, but we were disappointed when turned back so soon. The scrub proved to be quite pretty at a nearer view. Almost all the varieties were in full bloom; a dozen kinds of flowering gums, wattles, and many other shrubs resembling, at a distance, veronica and manuka. We left the wharf that evening, and returned to the outer harbour. The rest of our stay, till Sunday 1 Nov, was very dull.

Bathing was forbidden on account of sharks, and we got tired of the glare of the harbour, with its dazzling white sand beach all round.

Saturday

We crossed the ~~to~~ equator before dawn yesterday morning, and the usual time-honoured ceremony took place in the afternoon. It provided great fun, and plenty of "victims" willingly volunteered. I was on guard at the time, but I got a friend to relieve me for five minutes while I had a look. The "initiation" consists of a kind of vaccination with a huge syringe, extracting a tooth, shaving, and finally tipping back off the chair into a tarhauled bath, and plastering the unfortunate with lamp-black in his blind escape.

I suppose you read of the capture of the "Ender". We got some details by wireless, but I had better not tell you in case it is a secret.

I am keeping in splendid health and spirits, and seem to be under a lucky star. I escaped the measles, which "took" everyone else & at my mess-table and ^{nearly everyone} in my alley in the sleeping quarters. Also the inoculation for B enteric fever, which made many of them ill, did not trouble me in the least. I have just begun my turn as mess orderly, which is rather a "soft job", giving exemption from all parades and guards. The latter is worth escaping nowadays, since sitting down and reading have been forbidden. The four hours at night, from 10 to 2 or 2 to 6, without company, in half darkness, forbidden to do anything but stand and sulk and fume, is an impossible test of patience.

We expect to sight land tomorrow morning, and reach port in the afternoon. Our stay will be a short one.

I hope this reaches you before Christmas: it should, even if the mail is delayed for some time. I have had plenty of time to think of you lately, and to picture you toiling in that horrid hall. But it will all be over long before you get this, and that glorious old "long vac" will be in full swing. "Eheu fugaces" - some tags are never trite. I hope you are going to the C.U. camp - I am sure you would enjoy it immensely - but I hope still more that you are going to Haritane. I would not feel so far away if I could think of you being there. Good-bye, my Hazel. (Bother that censor person)

With love from
Becil.

P.S. This is a grand, lazy, healthy, sleepy life. I am having a perfect rest - not that I needed one, but it is very delightful.