

Sunday  
22 Nov.

Dearest Hazel,

I have just been writing you a brief note meant for the cold eye of the censor, and now turn with much relief to this.

I wonder if you will ever get my last letter. It contained some rather "risky" things, but I thought each boat would have its own censor, and rejected letters would be returned to us to alter; whereas it seems that there is only one censor on the "Maungani", and he couldn't do otherwise than destroy letters which displeased him.

Well, ~~we~~ we are just nearing Aden - we expect to get there tomorrow night, and the port I last wrote from was of course Colombo. We have had a wonderfully good trip: the proverbial mill-pond - I have never seen one - could not be calmer than the Indian Ocean

has been, ever since we left Hobart  
Albany. The unchanging calm  
of the sea, the blue of the sky  
and the endless sunshine, day  
after day, are producing an  
effect of weary monotony, which  
I think is oppressing every soul  
on board. One feels that a  
tropical downpour would be a  
welcome change, and a wild  
storm an unmixed blessing.  
However, there is not much chance  
of either now, and after all the  
worst is over. No doubt the Red  
Sea will be very warm, but it  
is now nearly midwinter, so  
we should be spared by the  
mosquitoes. Then the Mediterranean  
will be delightful.

We reached Colombo about  
ten o'clock last Sunday morning.  
As usual, we first sighted distant  
mountain peaks at dawn, but  
these were lost to view again,  
and we found that the town  
is situated on a large plain.  
We passed through the fishing  
fleet some miles out to sea -

forty or fifty native catamarans, most of them running under sail. They are not properly boats at all, though the main part is fashioned roughly in the shape of a boat. It rises fairly high out of the water, but is very narrow, and hardly hollowed out at all. The occupants simply perch on top of it - a very precarious position, one would think. The boat is kept from capsizing by its outrigger, a light log running parallel to it, about ten feet away, and held in position by stays. One would think the outrigger would impede the thing entirely, but they were skimming along at a good rate, with their picturesque brown and black sails.

Several of the fleet, and our boat amongst them, went straight into harbour, while the rest came to anchor in the roadstead. The harbour is an artificial one, built of huge concrete blocks, and several times larger than

the inner harbour at Lyttelton. It was teeming with shipping, and presented an animated scene, but it was the shore that attracted our attention. There were the domes and towers and temples and slums, the bright red tiles and cliffs, the dark clustering palms and the tender green of banana gardens - the splendour and the squalor of the East. The colouring was wonderful - vivid, dazling, yet infallibly artistic.

There are ~~no~~ no wharves at Colombo. All trade is done by means of barges and tugs and plenty of cheap labour. Accordingly we anchored some distance from the shore. A few native boats were soon alongside, but we found, to our surprise, that no traffic in fruit etc is permitted on the harbour. The natives are such a lot of thieves and swindlers that it has all been stopped. This was very disappointing, but we were quickly consoled by the promise of a run ashore in the afternoon.

Some natives started diving for coins, but their performance was very ordinary.

We had only the ship's boats to get ashore in, so only two relays were sent, and the remainder - the great majority - were promised a turn next day. I decided to go ashore and be sure of it - tomorrow is very uncertain nowadays. So after much delay and struggling and squabbling, Don Smith and I found ourselves ashore. Each boat-load was under an officer, some of whom left their men to their own devices, but our man insisted on our marching in ranks. We passed up one English street, containing some fine public buildings and hotels, and then plunged into the native quarter, emerging at the forts at the base of the breakwater, where the boats picked us up again. We were only forty minutes ashore - just a brief glimpse into wonder-land. The chief impression I have is of teeming life, animation and

colour; but especially it was a feast of colour. The very streets are a brilliant dark brick-red, the buildings are of beautifully tinted sandstone, red and brown and white, splashed and toned and transformed by the work of nature; and the hand of man has been hardly less artistic. The natives may be degraded and contemptible, but they have a fine instinct for colour. There was hardly a single jarring note of gaudiness. We were simply pestered with beggars - old blind men and gaunt and cunning young ones, little naked children weeping and moaning, but scattering, with the adroitness of habit, before the policeman's ~~habit~~ whip. We passed a Buddhist temple, covered all over with wonderful grotesque carving, and through a section of the market-place, a scene that baffles description. We had to buy fruit, cigars, cigarettes and various odds and ends as we marched along.

The coconuts were prime, but the other fruit was only the winter crop. If a native asked ten shillings for a thing, you proffered sixpence, and generally got it. We saw some beautiful vistas up the side streets, but it was not till the end of our walk that we saw much vegetation - mostly palms - no sign of any flowers. I can only wonder how the place would appear in summer: it was so dazzling even now.

Monday

Next day there was endless trouble and confusion. The men were all ready to go ashore after breakfast, but they had to wait for hours while leave was got from the general. Finally one batch got away about noon, and the rest were to follow after dinner. So after waiting in the burning sun all the morning, they lined up again at one, and were told that no more men could go ashore, as we were to sail at four. To make matters worse, we did not sail at four, but only pulled just outside

the harbour, and lay there till morning. All the time we were at Colombo, the boat was swarming with gorgeous butterflies of all kinds and colours.

We are just passing Socotra, a high, barren-looking island, so we should reach Aden before tomorrow morning. About eight or nine of the fleet have come on ahead of the rest I suppose to take in water first and so save time.

Our scout lectures, which began again on Friday, fill in the time nicely, and are mostly interesting. At the rate we are going, we should cover all the theoretical work by the end of the voyage, and be ready for solid practical work. I will have to learn to ride a horse and motor bike, or it will count against my chances of being chosen.

The time is passing pleasantly enough, except for the sameness. No doubt the time will come when we will look back with longing to the restful life on board.

Good-bye, my Hazel. If we call at Port Said, I will soon be writing again.  
With fondest love from  
Becil.