

Magistrate's Court, Bamenda

Dearest Joy,

I've just slithered my way up the escarpment after spending an afternoon in the 'town' below, and now, secure and dry in my 'folly', with the Spring rains dished up about me, I can say at least that I have been granted a new conception of mud. Looking out of my windows, I behold a scene straight from one of those Japanese films – black and white, and damp: wastes of rain-darted puddles; the eaves bleakly dripping; and the face of the roof cocooned and furry beneath the torrential deluge.

I wish you were here, Joy, to gape with me at all these strange things. Commonplaces such as terra-cotta beehive huts, peacock robes such as the one the one I am wearing now, Morning Glories sprawling over the hillsides, would then appear new to me again. More than anything it is the space and colour that betoken a different world. Every living thing moves against the basic ground of grass and latterite. A short while ago when the hills were burnt in readiness for the new pasture, I was startled to see on a journey to Santa what seemed a marvellous blush suffusing the harsh scorched faces of the mountains, an under-water shagreen springing from the charcoal. The soil to varies from copper to the colour of Gauguin's Tahitian beaches, and it is a lovely sight to see, riding down one of the dusty roads – (there is no tar) – wrapped in his swirling burnoose, whip and sword in hand, a Foulani horseman careering his mount, caparisoned and tasselled as richly as himself.

In spite of not having touched a piano since I left England, my life seems very full. I carry out my tutorial duties during the morning – French and English only, since that is as far as our ambitions leap – and after lunch I either go down to the town my friend Godlove, or spend the afternoon here, reading or working at the open score of *Arbor Vitae*, or perhaps swimming by the waterfall. We have a very good collection of books, and I usually find that I have three or four going at the same time. Do you know 'Moby Dick'? There is an odd refreshment for one marooned near the heart of this continent to read of sea-chases and frozen tracts of ocean. It is the most sonorous and noblest story I have ever read, and for that reason I have to take it very slowly, sometimes savouring a chapter four or five times before I fee I have sucked it dry. Much of the prose, with its battering alliteration, propulsed with the élan of bullets from a rifle, reminds me of the stresses of Hopkins. But the particular oratorical style with its portents of superhuman struggles, although absolutely Melville's, carries with it something of 'The Dynasts'. I wonder, did Hardy read Melville? I remember how much more vivid an impression the books of Europe make when read in a tropical vacuum. Wordsworth's *The Prelude* was unspeakably moving when I first knew it in the Egyptian desert, and so was *Piers Plowman*; and although this country sometimes seems paradise, for lack of ordinary season there is something missing, so that pastoral poetry and 500-page novels are welcome manna.

[I had a long letter from Anthony (Milner), filled with news of you all. I am so glad that the poems with Shush's (Richard Shirley Smith) wood-engravings are going to be published – they certainly deserve to be. Who is taking them and when are they coming out? I can't tell you what it means to me to hear that life continues as ever in Europe, that projects are despatched and industriously pursued. When I hear of you gathered to listen to Anthony's oratorio, playing Trio Sonatas, and having coffee in

the kitchen or on the terrace, it reminds me that we are not utterly divorced, and that perhaps, momentarily by way of Purcell, I was not too distant from you.]

To be honest, with the discovery that my roots in England are far stronger than ever I had thought, I have found myself occasionally oppressed by the gulf between us. From elation in my being free from former travails, a deep sense of wonder at all that was new – the space, the simplicity and gregariousness of my African friends – I've come to feel a growing sense of hopelessness in the face of an endemic inertia, the fatal flaw of this country, and of the smiling corruption that ensnares her from the South and from the East.

For a while I considered seriously the offers that besieged me to teach in the government schools, seeing in the dearth of teachers, engineers and agriculturists a situation that could be remedied. But I now realize that it would be naïve to expect results. Already I have tried to institute classes in English and French – (the Eastern Cameroons to which we have been linked in a Federation since October is French speaking) – but, in spite of initial fervour, the numbers soon fell off, and in order to preserve the classes I shall have to charge a fee. Unless he feels that he is paying for something, whether in money or in pain – the African is a glutton for pain, and will not take a medicine that does not hurt – he will feel no benefit within. His principle of *laissez-faire* is, for a time, a splendid tonic for one whose nerves were worn to the edges in Europe. How absurd you all seem with your CND's, shrieking headlines, Arts Councils, etc. But then I know that I am viewing you with the consternation (underground) of the mariner, foot-sure on his desert island, who watches the ship founder which holds his dearest friends. I have a great nostalgia for the things which worked to unsettle me. In spite of the muddle, there is a tremendous nobility in Europe, seasoned and glowing with the long polishing of centuries, and again I can't help thinking of a ship, obsolete and magnificent, like the *Vasa*, with poops and taffrails richly dight. Here the phrase 'Modern Europe' seems preposterously inept, and one thinks of somewhere like Brazil, Australia, or Russia for the impersonal conquests of science.

I have just finished Alan Moorhead's 'The White Nile' – you must read it. Kiffer might have told you that I am returning in August by way of a pilgrim bus from Kano, Khartoum, and if possible Mecca; thence up the Nile to Alexandria. I pray that Abu Simbel will not be up to its neck in water by that time. How strange it will be to see all these mysteries before they are drowned.

ALL MY LOVE, DEAR JOY. I SHOULD IMAGINE THAT LIFE MUST BE A BIT PERPLEXING AT MOMENTS, AS IT WAS TO ME, WITH THE CORNERSTONE REMOVED. BUT IT OCCURS TO ME THAT EXILE – AS WITH VIRGIL – MAY MAKE GREEN THE EMPTIEST FURROWS, AND WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE SOMETHING TO CAST INTO THEM.

LOVDE TO ALL AND MAGS, AND SHUSH AND JULIE.

WHAT A GHASTLY LETTER! I SEEM TO HEAR THE VOICE OF L. CLARKE (LEONARD CLARKE, POET AND CRITIC). IT'S SO DIFFICULT TO TRY TO DESCRIBE THIS COUNTRY, WITHOUT GOING POETICAL – ION FACT IMPOSSIBLE.