TO HIS BROTHER (W):

[The Kilns]

April 11th 1940

My dear W-

The other cat's name was Origen, called after the heretical father of that name who, taking literally the text about some who are eunuchs for the King's sake, cut off his stones[194]

And à propos of stones, Barfield made a good pun during the walk. I had been talking of the Castor's habit of biting off its stones when pursued and someone, not knowing the word, said 'I thought that was the Beaver.' SELF: 'Castor is the Latin for Beaver.' BARFIELD: 'Hence the association of Castor and Bollox.'[195] From this you will see that I have got your letter and had my walk.

I was on tenter hooks for fear your leave should come before I got back and did the best I could by ringing up home every evening to see if they had any news of you. If the war lasts long you will find a certain monotony in the account of these walks, for as long as Harwood is at Minehead they will always begin and end there to save him expense.

I left home by the 12:45, having lunched at the station, on Friday 8th.[196] I had with me a book by Chavasse (did you meet him when he was curate of St Mark's?--an Exeter man and a friend of Coghills–it was he who in the army riding school, for sitting all hunched up, was told 'If you swallowed a poker you'd sh-t a corkscrew) wh. had been sent me to review for *Theology*, called *The Bride of Christ*.[197] Its thesis is that the idea of the Church as Bride was disastrously transmuted into that of the individual believer as Bride (see some of your quietists etc) and then into that of the Blessed Virgin, but recovered in its purity by 'the Anglican reformation'.

From Reading on I had a crowded train. The first part of the journey I passed sitting on my pack in the corridor, till told by a ticket collector that I had 'no excuse' for doing that. Excuse indeed! It's almost Paxfordian. However, in obedience to his exhortations I went further down the train and got a seat–not much of an improvement really, since I had a blistering sun beating on my

head and a small child walking in and out of the compartment saying 'A-a-a' *continuously* for about two hours. I had the grace even at the time to think myself rather a sullen creature in disliking two such very symbols of life as solar radiation and a child: but there's no denying I was glad to make Taunton.

Here I had the rather pleasant experience of finding bathed in evening light that same little local train which I described to you as dark and smoking on the winter walk. From then on all was delightful, specially that first glimpse of waves and wet beach at Watchet–and then one's final emergence from the station at Minehead into all the freshness (even ordinary *sounds* sound different) of a town one doesn't live in.

I reached the Plume of Feathers at about 6:10 and, after a wash, was just seated in the bar consuming a glass of sherry when, to my delight, I was visited by Dyson, who is staying down there with his in-laws, and had got into touch with Harwood only the day before. Characteristically, he knew a better tap across the road and carried me there to drink draught Bass.

On our return we met both the Harwoods (there had been no possibility of excluding Mrs from the evening: Mrs Dyson cd. not come, having measles) with Field. We were a little damped to hear that Barfield had wired to say he cd. not join us till the following day. It was arranged, for his sake, that H. and I would do for our first day some walk that would bring us back to Minehead in the evening. We had a pleasant night. Somewhat to my surprise, Field and Dyson took to one another amazingly, and that despite the fact that Field unloaded the whole Douglas scheme on him.[198] It was a novelty to hear Dyson reduced to comparative silence. Whenever he attempted to speak, Field, though having held the floor ever since we finished dinner, interrupted him with some such expression as 'If I might just put *one* word in'. All the same he seemed to like it.

The whole party had just left me when Barfield rang up to say that he was at Taunton and would arrive for breakfast in the morning. I had, as is part of the ritual on holidays, a bad night, but all the taste of it vanished as I walked down to the sea-front to meet Barfield in a fine crisp sunshiny morning, and returned with him to a really good breakfast (you have not had Kilns bacon for so long now that you will hardly realise the inwardness of this).

The arrangement for returning to Minehead that night was now no longer necessary, but we decided to let it stand so as to have the advantage of Dyson's company (who had naturally no idea of walking) and of Field's (who had not enough petrol to follow us far by car). When Harwood turned up, we decided to spend the day in the ascent of Dunkery Beacon.

And now comes one of the curious black-outs of the human mind. I see from the map that we must have lunched at Woot[t]on Courtney after crossing a wooded ridge, but the whole of that morning–landscape, weather, conversation etc–has absolutely gone. Sorry! And I can't explain it. Memory begins at the coming down into Woot[t]on Courtney a little too early for lunch and going in to inspect the Church, where the others asked me (according to our old custom) to 'read a chapter'. I chose the second Psalm–wh. led to a series of enquiries and hypotheses from Harwood on the meaning of 'Kiss the Son lest He be angry'[199] of which I could make neither head nor tail until we discovered that he was mistaking SON for SUN, which naturally made the text rather hard.

Oh the heathen ignorance of these Anthroposophists–and you may add, of these Congregationalists, for 1 think he was of that sect by birth and a minister's son.[200] I had always supposed him (and indeed found him) a man of 'too much literature' for such an absurdity. By the way, you will gather from the fact that we had to fill in time at this village before lunch, that we were there before 12 o'clock, and hence that the morning stretch had been very short–perhaps that is why I can't remember it. We now turned to a very A.A.-looking hotel which was the only hostelry the place afforded and approached it up a drive lined with stables–a long equine head regarding us scornfully from almost each half-door, for this [is] almost as horsy a place as Newbury. It turned out, however, to have a bar, and there we got good beer, bread and cheese, and tea.

Emerging we saw our work before us–a green descent of lanes and fields sloping down for about half a mile, and beyond that an almost interminable upward slope of heather–rather like a roller (*not* a breaker) when you turn round and see it behind you in a rough bathe. It soon became the sort of walk in which you straggle far apart and do not converse. Presently we had a soak–you know how good heather is for that purpose! I have the clearest picture of the view–Wootton

Courtney below us and above it a steep green hill with bare flanks and wooded top which we had descended in the morning: and funnily enough I remember tracing from there the whole route we had come through. I cannot remember traversing it.

We went on. The prospect–hills on hills on hills to the end of the world–was magnificent but the slow ascent, with no sign of a top, never steeper and never less steep, began to lose its charm. Presently one began to get to the *false tops*; and so at long last to the stone cairn and the real top with (as usual) a change of weather for the worse, sunless sky and cold wind. We stayed no longer than it took Barfield to recite a sonnet, and then began descending the N.W. side which is much steeper than the one we had come up by and sinks into delightfully winding woods and combes.

We got to a farm called Cloutsham for tea, where we unfortunately had to share the room with an odd family. The father was a man rather like a fat edition of Condlin (can you imagine it) who sprang to his feet without any warning to examine a print on the wall, read out very slowly and gravely the legend underneath it (about thirty words–of no conceivable interest) and sat down without any comment. I had to bite my lip to keep a straight face.

After tea we proceeded, in the tracks of the January walk, down the decaying, mossy-tread valley of the Horner and debouched onto the Porlock-Minehead Rd, where we awaited a bus home in the unusual convenience of a proper bus-stop with roof and bench–true, it was the narrowest bench I have ever sat on, but better than 'hanging about'.

We had a splendid evening 'telling a story'--an old diversion on these walks in which each player invents a chunk in turn: the natural tendency of each to introduce new characters and complications and then to 'hand the baby' to the next man, produces the fun. Dyson proved specially good at it, and two young officers who were sitting in the room followed him with every sign of appreciation—up to his final shot, when the whole thing was over. 'Next week–*The man with the magic truss*.'

I remarked, after the two officers had left, that the subalterns of this war looked both more manly and more military than what I remembered of those in the last: but Barfield says it is unfair to compare the 1918 ones with those who really correspond to the 1914 vintage. (This reminds me

of another point he and discussed on the journey home, à propos of the boarding of the *Altmark* and one or two similar episodes–how wonderful it is after twenty years of cocktails and cynicism to find such a supply of 'the Kipling virtues' still existing–almost beyond our desert.)

On Sunday morning Barfield, Harwood, and I set off on the only real 'tour' of this holiday–i.e. the only day that involved lying at a different place. It was a fine, but not bright, morning. We began by walking to Dunster–then along that beautiful town and out at its S.E. end, across several foot bridges, and slowly up steep paths into fir woods with a short soak on that *tinder*-like reddish brown surface which makes the floor of such places. A troup of glossy horses ridden by glossy young women went creaking and jingling by with their leathery and fleshy smell.

Harwood described to us all the new insights he had gained (as master of a billeted school) into the hierarchy of a small town-town councillors, municipal Condlins etc. We continued on our path for a long way and had our next soak in a clearing at the foot of a steep ascent: much bothered by an aeroplane which kept on circling round and coming low each time as it reached us–I took it the more unkindly since Harwood told me it was almost the first he'd seen since he'd come to Minehead. (Horrid thought–have the Little People[201]developed an air-arm?)

The ascent after this wd. have been quite tolerable but that last winter's snow had felled so many trees that the path presently became impracticable and we were forced right out of the wood onto a much steeper path along its eaves–one of those bits on a walk at the end of which–whatever the time and however recent the last soak–all with one accord fling themselves flat on their backs and for many minutes speech is 'not to be thought of'. When we recovered we had a delightful view of Minehead and the hill behind it and the channel. Sounds I don't like could be heard in the offing.

We strolled on again–it always feels like *strolling* on the first bit of level after a steep pull, doesn't it?-- for a bit over open hill country, soon to descend again into woods, and presently to find that we were lost. We got involved in an interminable steep glen with low mossy trees only a couple of yards apart–not a breath of air–and I, at least, was dripping before we reached the top of Croydon Hill.

We walked down fine broad breezy rides cut in the woods, into the village of Luxborough–to find that the inn marked on the map no longer existed 'but' (it was now about 1:40!) 'there's one a mile down the road'. I had done the first ten yards of that mile almost before the words were out of the informant's mouth. I plugged along well ahead of the others for about half of it, when I was overtaken by Barfield who had broken into a trot. We *just* made it. The landlady at first took up the astonishing position that of course [we] cd. have beer, but she 'didn't know about the bread and cheese as it was really after two'!--however, she overcame this scruple in the end.

Our luck was still out, for a fine rain began to fall while we were at lunch. The others had found 'an admirable short cut' for the first bit of the afternoon march but seeing from the map that it consisted of intricate paths through woods and feeling I had had quite enough of that sort of thing for one day, I stuck to my guns and said I would go 'round by the road' and meet them where their path emerged.

So, buttoned up to the chin in my mack, I fought my way up a long winding hill, to be rewarded at the top with a sudden burst of sunshine and a fine wind in which to get dry. I had little difficulty in finding the rendezvous, but as I had taken a goodish time I was surprised to find it empty. I took my seat on a felled tree, spread out my dripping mack and admired as fine a prospect as I had yet seen–endless domed hills picked out in a brilliant variety of colours both by the varieties of cloud-shadow and sunlight and also by their own alterations of plough and pasture and different kinds of wood-dusky forest-trees, black fir, and larch almost arsenically green. I had time to smoke two cigarettes before two weary figures came in sight.

Barfield tried to put a good face on their boasted short cut, but Harwood admitted to me (aside) that they had had 'a perfectly bloody walk'. As usually happens at a soak which is also a reunion I was rested and beginning to get chilly when they were still getting through their groans. (I wonder what you were doing at that moment? Ordering tea in the office, I shouldn't wonder!)

The rest of this not very satisfactory day made some amends. It was *down-hill*: no nonsense about scenery, you understand! It led us to tea at Bridgetown, and thence on through evening

sunlight on that best possible kind of road which, keeping more or less level, follows the windings of a green, narrow valley, with a river on one side and a low cliff of rocks on the other. We came at about 7 to Winsford where we found a delightful hotel within sound of the water in a village so small and quiet that you could dawdle about in the street listening to that sound. We had to sleep in the 'Annexe' not the hotel proper, which turned out to be rather an advantage, for the annexe had a sitting room of its own with a 'cosy stove' lit in it and we had it to ourselves.

By a perversity I have often noticed this ideal opportunity for a really good evening's talk glided away unused–Harwood going to bed early, being tired, and Barfield and I falling into a few rather gloomy 'comparisons of notes' on–well, on the whole damn business. I slept excellently.

Monday morning brought a cold wind so we picked out a route to avoid the bleak moorland heights. Nothing could have worked better. The first half of the morning was spent in one of those delightful little lanes with high banks (primroses) and hedges (still retaining last year's beech leaves) on both sides, and plenty of straw underfoot from carts, so that one has almost the sense of being indoors.

The second half was quite different but quite as good. We struck one of the longest and best fieldpaths I have ever met, which carried us effortlessly over miles of soft turf–all in little valleys with barns and sheepcotes and rivers. Perfect Pilgrims Progress country 'Where streams of living water flow / My ransomed soul He leadeth.'[202]

Catcombe, our lunch halt, was itself a rather unpleasant village, but the approach to it was delightfully appropriate; the fieldpath brought you slap up to a building bearing on its wall the legend 'Rest and be Thankful', and then, noticing the stile and looking more closely, you saw that this was your pub and that was its name. It was during lunch here that B. produced his *mot* about Castor and Bollux. Less fortunately, Harwood's 'tiredness' of the previous night was now unmistakably a bad chill of the inwards which hot rum and water failed to shift. From here to Timberscombe along the valley of the Exe the main road was most fortunately duplicated by a little third class road on the opposite side of the water, so we accomplished this stage in great ease.

At Timberscombe H. was so poorly that we decided to get Field to come out and meet him by car. Barfield volunteered to leave the cold, glossy, horsehair-sofa'd little room where we were having tea and work the local telephone kiosk. He returned to say he cd. get no answer: but as it was found on cross examination that he had rung up the wrong number, I sallied forth, and succeeded. (Why does one so loathe using a call box?) Things began to mend. We were met by Field earlier than we expected, H. got into the car, and Field walked home with us.

The little-road-parallel-with-the-mainroad which we were still following now revealed itself as a road along which Minto and I had cycled in the reverse direction, from Dunster, when we were staying at Old Cleeve in 1920.[203] A few feet of very comfortable vegetation (it turned out to be garlic! but it's good for sitting on) between the road and the river gave us an admirable soak. To crown all, in Dunster itself we found that pubs were opened at 5.30, and stopped for that 'uncovenanted mercy'[204]- the unexpected drink. Mine was a mug of cider. The tramp from Dunster to Minehead was a little boring but it had been a good day, and, but for the absence of H., we had a good evening.

On Monday [205] I travelled with Barfield as far as Reading, lunching with him in the train. It was only as I was going down the High on my bus (at about 2:45) that I saw from the placards what had happened in Scandinavia.[206] I'll give up going away. This is the second time a holiday has played me the scary trick of ending with a public shock...

By the way, when you say it makes you 'heartsick' you mean belly-sick, don't you? It does me. I've never felt sensations bout the *heart* from *any* emotion. Well, good bye Pigibuddie. Write when you can.

Yours

Jack

[194]Origen (c. AD 185-c. 254), Alexandrian biblical critic and theologian, who at one point began to lead a strictly ascetic life. Misinterpreting Matthew 19:12 ('There are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake'), Origen mutilated himself.

[195] In Greek mythology Castor and Pollux were the twin sons of Zeus and Leda who were worshipped as deities and protectors of sailors.

[196]He meant Friday 5 April

[197]See note 190 to the letter of 29 March 1940

[198]'The Douglas Scheme' is named after Clifford Douglas (1879–1952), originator of the theory of Social Credit. He advocated subsidies to liberate prices from cost of production. See his Social Credit (1924).

[199]Psalm 2:12: 'Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way: if his wrath be kindled, (yea, but a little) blessed are all they that put their trust in him.'

[200]Cecil Harwood's father, the Rev. William Hardy Harwood, was a Congregationalist minister.

[201]i.e. the faerie folk.

[202]From the second verse of the hymn 'The King of love my Shepherd is' by Henry William Baker.

[203]See the letters from Old Cleeve of 2, 4 and 11 April and 14 August 1920 (CL I, pp. 477–85, 503–6).

[204]The expression Lewis probably came across in Rudyard Kipling's story 'The Uncovenanted Mercies', found in Limits and Renewals (1932).

[205]He meant Tuesday.

[206]In the early hours of Tuesday, 9 April, German troops invaded Denmark. King Christian X, knowing his army was in no condition to resist, ordered an immediate ceasefire. Denmark thus followed Poland, becoming Hitler's second military conquest.