

Wimsey Papers

(being war-time letters
and documents of the
Wimsey family)

Dorothy L. Sayers
1939

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WIMSEY PAPERS

(being war-time letters and documents of the Wimsey family)

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

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WIMSEY PAPERS—I

*Honoria Lucasta, Dowager Duchess of Denver, to her American friend,
Cornelia, wife of Mr. Lambert B. Vanderhuysen, of New York.*

BREDON HALL,
DUKE'S DENVER,
NORFOLK.

November 12th, 1939.

Dear Cornelia,

I think I had better write you my usual Christmas letter now, because naturally the War has upset the posts a little, and one can't really expect ships to go quickly when they are convoyed about like a school crocodile, so tedious for them, or keep to Grand Geometry, or whatever the straight course is called when they have to keep darting about like snipe to avoid submarines, and anyway I like to get my correspondence in hand early and not do it at the last moment with one's mind full of Christmas trees—though I suppose there will be a shortage of those this year, but, as I said to Miss Bates, our village schoolmistress, so long as the children *get* their presents I don't suppose they'll mind whether you hang them on a conifer or the Siegfried Line, and as a matter of fact Denver is thinning a lot of little firs out of the plantation, and you'd better ask him for one before he sends them all to the hospitals.

And really, Cornelia, I think you must have been listening to Goering or Goebbels or that Haw-Haw man or something—the suburbs *aren't* in ruins and Oxford and Cambridge *haven't* been invaded by anything worse than a lot of undergraduates from other universities, so good for both sides, I think, though I'm told the plague of bicycles in the streets is quite a menace—still, it never was anything else—and we've got plenty of butter *and* guns, if it comes to that, though they keep on *saying* they're going to ration them, just as Hitler keeps on saying he's *going* to begin, only he doesn't *go*, like the people in the *Pirates of Penzance*, and Peter says if he waits much longer the audience will refuse to clap and perhaps the Munich bomb was in the nature of a cat-call, but what I say is, if little Adolf found anything nasty in that beer-cellar he must have brought it with him. And, talking of Peter, I can't really tell you where he is, because he's gone back to his old job, and everything comes without any proper address through the Foreign Office. I rather fancy he may have been in Turkey a little while ago, from something he said about the coffee being good; I can't think of any other place where that would be likely to

happen, because he never really likes French coffee (too much chicory), and nobody else seems to have any, except us, and I know he's somewhere abroad, the letters take so long. Wherever it was, he isn't there now, and that makes me think it *must* have been Turkey, because they seem to have settled everything splendidly there. But of course this is only guess-work.

It's very hard on poor Harriet, his being sent off like that, but she is being very sensible—they've shut the London house and she's gone down to Talboys with the children—I enclose a photograph of little Paul, he's nearly a year old now, and Bredon just three, how time flies!—and Mary's youngsters are there, too. She's doing A.R.P. work and looking after her husband—you remember him, Charles Parker, the C.I.D. Chief Inspector—naturally he can't leave town. They seem well and happy and very busy. Charles was a little upset the other day over finding two human legs (a very bad match) in a police-post, tied up in brown paper. He said it made him feel he was going to miss Peter. However, it turned out they had only been left there by a man who was taking them to a hospital and had popped them inside out of the rain while he hunted for a taxi in the black-out, and it would all have been cleared up quite quickly, only when the poor man had found the taxi he'd forgotten where the police-post *was*, and drove wildly round the West End looking for it, so confusing, but one must expect these little inconveniences in war-time. And à propos of sandbags (oh, no, I didn't mention them, but the police-post was built of sandbags, a sort of little hut, you know, like a night-watchman's) you can't think how queer Piccadilly Circus looks with Eros gone and a sort of pyramid like King Cheops on a small scale built up over the fountain—though why they should take all that trouble I can't think, unless it's the water-mains, except that people feel very sentimental about it and if anyone dropped a bomb on it they'd feel the heart of Empire had stopped beating. Peter says we ought to do something constructive in the opposite direction and floodlight the Albert Memorial because the Park would be better without it, but poor Queen Victoria would turn in her grave and, as I reminded him, he didn't *know* Queen Victoria personally: *I did*.

Yes, my dear, we are all quite all right. Denver is worried about Jerry, of course, because he's in the R.A.F., and naturally that's rather dangerous, but dear boy, how he is enjoying himself, being able to go just as fast as he likes (you remember how he used to terrify us with that big racing-car). His father says he ought to have got married to somebody first so as to provide an heir in case of accidents. "Really, Gerald," I said, "fancy worrying about that at a time like this. If there's anything left to be heir to when we've finished paying for the War, Peter's got two boys—and, judging by Jerry's present taste in young women, we are mercifully spared." That

was rather tactless, I suppose, because Gerald's fretting quite enough about the estate already; he says we shall be ruined, of course, but he doesn't mind that if only he can do his duty by the land.

And then we've got a big boys' school in the West Wing, and that gets on his nerves sometimes—still, most fortunately, Helen isn't here, which relieves the tension. As you know, I never like to criticise my daughter-in-law, but she is a very difficult sort of person and I was devoutly thankful when she took herself off to the Ministry of Instruction and Morale. What *she* can possibly have to instruct any one about I don't know, but as the place is packed with everybody's wives and nephews and all the real jobs seem to have been handed over to other departments it's as good a spot as any to intern the nation's trouble-makers, and she's got three secretaries paid by a grateful country to endure her, so all is for the best. There was a picture of her in the papers last week, glaring like the wrath of God at poor little Sir Chitterley Rumph, and when Denver saw it I thought he'd burst a blood-vessel or have a blood-bath or something, only fortunately, just at that moment, one of our little evacuees put a cricket-ball through the long window of the yellow saloon, and in the strain of trying to swear on two fronts at once the frightfulness blew itself off. They are all elementaries (the evacuees, I mean) from a rather slummy bit of London, and I'm afraid the infant cherub with the cricket-ball made pique, repique and capot of Denver before he could score half his vocabulary. Curious and charming, isn't it, how much the peerage and the proletariat have in common, once you get down to the raw stuff of life, so to speak. Any nice middle-class foster-parent would have turned purple, but Gerald burst out laughing and has begun to take quite an interest in the school. In fact, he's offered to umpire their end-of-term sports competition, and has lent them a pony for riding lessons!

Well, my dear, I must stop now and see a deputation from the Women's Rural Institute, who are getting up a Nativity Play for Polish refugees, so sweet of them, and most providentially there's a full moon for Christmas, so we shall get a good audience. I have promised to play "Anna, a prophetess"—I'd forgotten there was such a person, so I must look her up quickly before they come. We carry on, you see, war or no war—"we don't take no account of black-outs in these parts," having never known the bright-lights. (Dear me, Cornelia, what *would* you do with a black-out in New York?) And, as for wars, this is a very old country, and we can remember a great many of them.

My best love and all the good wishes of the season to you and Lambert and Sadie, and, of *course*, to John and Margaret and Junior.

Your affectionate old friend,

*From Mr. Paul Delagardie to his nephew, Lord Peter Wimsey,
somewhere abroad.*

EUROPEAN CLUB,
PICCADILLY, W.

13th November, 1939.

MY DEAR PETER,

I do not, of course, know what you are doing (wherever you are) and am ready to believe that it is of the utmost national importance. Unless, however, someone contrives to inject a little common sense into the headquarters staff on the home front, there will soon be no nation for armies to defend or diplomatists to argue about. I enclose a cutting from *The Times*, giving the number of civilian casualties during the ten weeks of the black-out. If you have any influence at all, you had better write a letter to somebody behind the scenes, because the leading comedians in the limelight seem disinclined to take any action. I do not accuse them of indifference to the slaughter of their countrymen, but merely of ignorance and stupidity, those very destructive sins which the English persist in mistaking for virtues. If these people would occasionally walk about London on foot, or make the experiment of attempting to board an omnibus, or would enter into conversation with such valuable citizens as charwomen and taxi-drivers (a race of men whom I find to be exceptionally conversable and intelligent), they would notably increase the efficiency of their departments.

I lunched last week at the House of Lords with your brother Gerald and his wife. Since she is in the Ministry of Instruction and Morale—*Dieu sait pourquoi!*—I suggested to her that some attempt should be made by that body to instruct the urban population in the science of walking in the dark. Needless to say, I got no satisfaction—I do not suppose that any man has ever got satisfaction out of Helen, least of all her husband. (As I warned him thirty years ago, she has neither the figure nor the temperament.) On this occasion she replied that the Ministry saw no need to issue propaganda; the public was accepting the black-out very well, and the spirit of the nation was excellent. I replied that I was not concerned for its spirit, but for its body and brain, of which the one was being mutilated and the other neglected. Scrampole (of the Ministry of Redistribution) was with us, and said that avenues towards mitigating the severity of the black-out were being carefully explored. I told

him my objection was not to the black-out (which provides a refreshing relief from the vulgarity which normally disfigures the streets of the metropolis), but only to the accidents. I added that the spirit of any nation, however good, was liable to be depressed by an expectation of death, which at present stood higher in Great Britain than on the Western Front.

Gerald said he saw no difficulty about crossing a street in the dark. "My dear boy," said I, "of course you don't. You were brought up in the country. There, you have a black-out every night, and take your precautions accordingly. You are aware of the ditch on your right, the quickset hedge on your left, the unfenced pond at the corner, and the possibility of an unlit cow straying through a gap. But the town-dweller is accustomed to lighted streets; there are men and women born since 1918 who never saw the dark in their lives until last September. They are as much bewildered as a Nubian savage on Epsom Downs on Derby Day."

At this point we were joined by Bleatworthy, who, as you know, has an *idée fixe* about motorists. He suggested that any driver who killed a pedestrian should be hanged for murder. I begged him not to talk nonsense. I pointed out to him that the black-out had destroyed his case against the motorist. The trouble cannot be due to fast driving, since speed is almost impossible in the dark. Nor can it be due to careless driving, otherwise the list of collisions with structural objects and other cars would be very much higher than it is. It is the pedestrian who is in error and needs instruction and assistance. He imagines that in normal times he stops to look before crossing the road. The black-out proves that he does no such thing. If he looked, he could not fail to see the car, since under present conditions it is the only thing to be seen, and is as conspicuous as a film-star at a mothers' meeting.

No; what happens normally is that, at most, the pedestrian allows the motorist to see *him*. He is saved from destruction by the driver's sight and skill. Now observe what happens in the black-out. The pedestrian can see better than ever; it is the motorist who is deprived of the use of his lights and eyes. As a taxi-driver said to me the other day, "Gets on your nerves it does" (I quote his exact words), "it's nothing but things a-looming up at you." I thought the expression vivid and apt. The pedestrian does not realise this; he supposes that since he can see the driver, the driver can see him; but this is not the case. To him, the driver is a moving light; to the driver, he is a looming shadow.

We conversed for some time, at the end of which Helen suggested that I should write a letter to the Ministry. I did so. It has not yet been acknowledged. In a month's time it may be acknowledged. In six months' time I shall be informed that the Ministry cannot see their way to do any propaganda on these lines and that the

spirit of the nation is excellent. I have now written to the B.B.C, the respectable newspapers, and even the regrettable newspapers. I do not suppose they will do anything, because the pedestrian has the sympathy of the public which buys the papers. I have written to the motoring associations; they are, naturally, sympathetic, and suggest that I should write to the papers.

Briefly, I have asked for an intensive and extensive advertising campaign (*one* broadcast, by nobody in particular, at a time when few people can listen, is useless). The aim is to inform the pedestrian public of the driver's difficulty (which they do not in the least understand) and to place before them my own trifling precautions which keep me safe when I take my little dog for his nightly constitutional. (He is very well, by the way, but has taken a violent dislike to all persons in tin hats, which makes his company *tant soit peu* embarrassing.) My rules are very simple.

1. Take a torch. (If you cannot get batteries, wear some white thing about you.)

2. Before crossing the road, look to see what is coming, remembering that *unless* you carry a lighted torch, the driver will not be able to see you till you are practically under his wheels.

3. When you decide it is safe to cross, switch on your torch and keep it on till you reach the opposite kerb. No driver can fail to see that moving pool of light. (If you have no torch, agitate some white object—it is better than nothing.)

4. If you have a torch, direct the light on the ground, and not into the driver's eyes, to deprive him of such sight as he has.

5. Never walk in the roadway, except to cross the street.

6. Cross at the pedestrian crossing, if you can identify it; the driver expects to find you there.

Vous voyez, ce n'est pas sorcier! My manservant, who makes use of the omnibus service, desires me to add that if the London Passenger Transport Board would place the route-number *at the side* of the vehicle, as well as in front and behind, it might be possible to discover which omnibus had arrived at the stop without darting out before it as before an oncoming juggernaut. He informs me that this all-important number is placed so high from the ground as to be invisible to any passenger but an eagle (he himself is slightly myopic), and that moreover the number varies in position and style of design from one omnibus to another. I have checked his statement by personal observation and find that it is so.

If, my dear Peter, you can bring these matters in any way to the attention of somebody with *real* influence and active imagination, you will be instrumental in saving civilian lives to the number of a small army by the time the war is over.

With every confidence in your ability to assist your country in this perplexity,

Your affectionate Uncle,

PAUL AUSTIN DELAGARDIE.

P.S.—I have just seen a placard: “BERLIN SUPPRESSES CHURCHILL.” If Berlin can do that, it can do anything, and we might as well lay down our arms at once.

WIMSEY PAPERS—II

3. *Harriet, Lady Peter Wimsey, to Lord Peter Wimsey, somewhere abroad. (Extract.)*

TALBOYS, PAGGLEHAM,
NR. GREAT PAGFORD, HERTS.

17th November, 1939.

. . . I've been trying to write an article about war-aims and peace-aims, though I'm not at all sure that all this definition doesn't end by darkening counsel, on the principle of "Mummy, I think I might understand if only you wouldn't explain." We all know pretty well that something we value is threatened, but when we try to say what, we're left with a bunch of big words like justice, freedom, honour, truth and so on, that embarrass us, because they've been misused so often they sound like platform claptrap. And then there's "Peace." Peter, I'm terrified by this reiterated demand for "enduring peace and lasting settlement"—it's far too like the "war to end war." Do we really still persuade ourselves that there's some final disposition of things—territory, economic adjustment, political machinery—that will stabilise all human relationships by a stroke of the pen? That the story can end in the old-fashioned way with wedding-bells—"so they married and lived happy ever after"? If so, we need an Ibsen to deal with public life.

If one looks back at the last twenty years, one sees at how many points we might have prevented this war, if it hadn't been for our inflexible will to peace. We said "Never again"—as though "never" wasn't the rashest word in the language. "River, of thy water will I never drink! We will never go to war again, we will revise all treaties in conference; we will never revise anything for fear of starting a war; we will never interfere in other people's wars, we will always keep the peace." We wooed peace as a valetudinarian woos health, by brooding over it till we became really ill. No wonder we couldn't stand by the Covenant of the League, which set out to enforce peace by making every local injustice an occasion for total war. That idea was either too brutal or too heroic, I'm not sure which. A mistake, anyway. What I want to say is that there's no hope of getting peace till we stop talking about it. But I don't suppose that view will be very popular!

Oh, well! Meanwhile, Pagleham continues to adapt itself to war conditions. On Wednesday we had a fire-practice, with Mr. Puffett in charge. (His all-round experience in the building and chimney-sweeping way is held to qualify him to take the lead in emergencies of this sort.) I said they might hold their demonstration here,

on the strict understanding that little Paul should take no personal part in the proceedings and that the pouring of water inside the house should be a purely symbolic act. We arranged a very fine performance—an incendiary bomb was to be deemed to have come through your bedroom ceiling, with accompaniment of high explosive in the scullery, the maids playing parts as casualties, and the children and I as victims of the fire. We thought it better not to sound the local siren and whistles for fear of misunderstanding, but Mr. Goodacre kindly gave the signal for the attack by having the church bells rung. Everything went off beautifully. Miss Twitterton was with us, having come over from Pagford for choir-practice (even in war-time, Wednesday is always choir-practice), and rendered first-aid superbly. I lent her your old tin hat (“for protection from shrapnel and falling brickwork”), and her pleasure was indescribable.

We evacuated Polly and Bredon from the bedroom window and the other two from the attic in a sheet, and had just got to the *pièce de résistance*—my own rescue from the roof with a dummy baby under one arm and the family plate under the other—when Mr. Goodacre’s kitchen-maid arrived panting to say that the Vicarage chimney was afire and would Mr. Puffett please come quick. Our gallant fire-captain immediately snatched away the ladder, leaving me marooned on the roof, and pelted up the lane, still in his gas-mask, and followed by the A.R.P. Warden crying that it would be black-out time in half an hour, and if Hitler was to catch sight of that there chimney ablaze there wouldn’t half be trouble with the police. So I retired gracefully through the skylight, and we transferred the venue to the Vicarage, getting the fire extinguished in nineteen and a half minutes by the warden’s watch—after which, the fire-fighters adjourned to the ‘Crown’ for beer, and I had the Goodacres to dinner, their kitchen being—like Holland—not actually flooded, but pretty well awash. . . .

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4. *Extract from a sermon preached on November 12th, 1939 (Armistice Sunday), by the Rev. Theodore Venables, Rector of Fenchurch St. Paul, Lincs, and printed in that week’s issue of “The Fenland Weekly Comet.”*

. . . It is well, I think, that we should have chosen to commemorate this day, rather than that on which the Peace Treaty was signed; for the Armistice was at least what it claimed to be, but the Peace turned out to be no true peace. Indeed, several writers yesterday pointed out, very truly, that the whole interval between this war

and the last had been indeed a period of armistice—not peace at all, but only an armed truce with evil.

We are, perhaps, too much inclined to imagine that peace is a thing that can be made once for all, and then left to look after itself. Something occurs to disturb us, and we make great efforts to be rid of it, and suppose that we have done with it for ever. This is true, whether the thing that disturbs us is good or bad. You know very well—there is no need for *me* to tell people like you who work on the land—that if you clear the weeds from a patch of ground you have not finished. The seeds are still there, and will spring up again, unless you are very vigilant to keep on rooting them up, and careful to plant good crops in their place. Just so, it is not enough to overthrow a wicked tyranny; we have to see to it that the seeds of strife and injustice are prevented from sprouting anew in the world, and that in their place we industriously sow the good seed that brings forth the fruits of the spirit. But it is comforting to remember that good things also cannot be wholly destroyed by a single act of violence. When King Herod slaughtered the Innocents, he did it in the name of peace and quietness—an evil peace and a false quietness—to put an end to the Jewish hope of a deliverer. And once again, when Pilate had Christ executed as a disturber of the Roman peace, he, too, thought he had settled that troublesome matter for ever; but he was mistaken.

In this world there is a continual activity, a perpetual struggle between good and evil, and the victory of the moment is always for the side that is the more active. Of late years, the evil has been more active and alert in us than the good—that is why we find ourselves again plunged into war. Even evil, you see, cannot prosper unless it practises at least one virtue—the virtue of diligence. Good, well-meaning, peaceable people often fail by slipping into the sin of sloth, that is what our Lord meant when He said that the children of this world were wiser in their generation than the children of light. He commended them for it and told us to imitate them. Because if Christian men and women would put as much work and intelligence into being generous and just as others do into being ambitious and covetous and aggressive, the world would be a very much better place, and there would not be nearly so many occasions of warfare.

We often quote the Sermon on the Mount, as though that were the only pronouncement Christ ever made about peace, but He said a good deal more than that—some of it very strange, and looking very contradictory. “Think not that I came to bring peace unto the world; I came not to bring peace, but a sword.” And when He saw that the time for peace had gone by, He said, “*now*, he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.” He reminded Peter that “they that take the

sword shall perish by the sword”—but that was *all* He said would happen, and He said also, “Fear not them that kill the body.” The sin that was worse than violence, that incurred a heavier penalty than death, was a cold and sneering spirit; “He that saith unto his brother, thou fool, is in danger of hell-fire.” Yet He is called the Prince of Peace—“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you.” He thought of peace, you see, as something that happens inside the mind—something extra bestowed as a gift when we are going about our work in a spirit of active faith.

On this Armistice Sunday, don’t let us think of peace as something that concerns governments, statesmen, other people: let us consider what *we* can do, each one of us, here and now, to make the world better, in the hope and faith that peace may be given to us as a result. . . .

5. *Letter from Miss Agnes Twitterton, of Great Pagford, Herts, to a Friend at Worthing. (Extract.)*

Sunday evening, 19th November, 1939.

. . . So I *rushed* over to the Vicarage, and *there* was Mr. Goodacre taking dead leaves out of the bird-bath. “Oh, Vicar,” I said, “what *has* happened? I’ve played the voluntary twelve times, and it’s a quarter past eleven, and there’s not a *soul* in church.” So he said, “My dear Miss Twitterton, didn’t you put your clock back?”—So that just *shows* you how war upsets everybody, for if there is *one* thing I *never* forget . . .

WIMSEY PAPERS—III

6. *From Miss Katherine Alexandra Climpson to Lord Peter Wimsey, somewhere abroad.*

FLAT 718, UTOPIA COURT,
OXFORD STREET, W.

Sunday, Nov. 19th (24th after Trinity).

MY DEAR LORD PETER,

I am just *seizing* a moment this evening to write you a little letter PERSONALLY: of course all the *reports* have been duly sent in *every* week *regularly* to the PROPER QUARTER—and I must tell you again how *proud* and *delighted* all the members of the “Cattery” (to use your own humorous phrase!) are feeling to know that they are really being of *use* to their country in this terrible time of *emergency*. Especially the *older* ones—because it is so *humiliating and depressing* when one comes to a certain age, to feel that one is NOT WANTED, and though you are always so wonderfully sympathetic, I’m sure even *you* can’t realise the callousness, well really one might almost say *cruelty*, with which older women are sometimes treated when they apply for *employment*, either in a national or a civil capacity. Would you believe it, a man actually said, only the other day, to a *highly-trained* University woman of only THIRTY-SIX—a *most* able person in the *prime* of her intellect and capacity—that she was *too old* for a position of responsibility on his staff, and had the *brutal* insolence to add: “We don’t want you to die on our hands, you know”!! This is *absolutely* true—it was told me by the Head of the most important organisation for the employment of University women. I am afraid, in these days, *experience* and *skill* are held of very little account by comparison with *cheapness*—except, of course, when it comes to the *very top*. CABINET MINISTERS and people like that seem to come rather *elderly*, and perhaps have almost an *excess* of rather OUT-MODED experience!—but then, of course, I suppose nobody has to *pay* them extra for having experience!!

But dear me! I seem to be *rambling* away into POLITICS! which is very *naughty* of me, because I’m sure you don’t want to be bothered with any *ignorant* observations! It must be just the pleasure of being able to sit down and *chat* to you for a little bit. Sunday *evening* is my *quietest* time now—of course we have to have *Evensong* in the *middle of the afternoon*, what with the black-out and *winter* time, and the choir-school has been evacuated and two of the assistant priests have gone to be Army chaplains, so we have to have *Low Mass* instead of *High Mass*, and

what with an *Air-Raid Shelter* in the *Crypt* and one thing and another, we are beginning to feel quite *persecuted* like Early Christians in Catacombs! Though *indeed* I oughtn't to talk in that *light-hearted* way when Christians in Germany and Austria are being *really* persecuted—so subtly and wickedly, too, the *older* people being allowed to go to church, and all the CHILDREN being kept away by Hitler-Jugend meetings on *Sundays*, and being taught to *insult* Christ and *despise* their parents for believing in *religion*. It must be terrible to be a father or mother and feel that the Government is *deliberately* ALIENATING one's children and BREAKING-UP the *family* and encouraging quite little boys and girls to read horrible, *dirty* stories about Jews and priests in that dreadful *Stuermer*. I believe they even *teach* those horrible things in schools. But I suppose a Totalitarian State can't afford to allow *any* group of people to have *interests* and ideas of its own—not *even* the FAMILY! And when one thinks how *deeply* the nicest Germans have always been attached to their *gemuetlich* (isn't that the word?) home-life, it seems quite *heartbreaking*.

Well, we must try to be cheerful. What *do* you think one of my *younger* "cats" (quite a "KITTEEN" really!) said to me the other day? She said, "Oh, I *do* hope the British Agents who have been captured in Holland weren't either of them Lord Peter!" I said, "My dear girl, Lord Peter wouldn't ever be *captured*, how can you think he would be so thoughtless? Besides he has *much* too much sense and *experience* to let Germans get the better of him! And if he'd been *killed*, he'd be certain to have let us know." So I hope we shall *soon* have a letter from you to say you are NOT killed or anything dreadful!

My reports are *very* encouraging, really, and show that there is a wonderful *spirit* among the people, just as the papers say, but they do rather feel that the Government has been a little UNIMAGINATIVE about some things—*dislocation* of *commerce*, and *evacuation* and that kind of thing. They seem (the Government, I mean) to have thought out the *beginning* of everything very well, and then to have rather *stopped thinking*! For instance, there was one poor gentleman who works for a *French* firm that makes *scent-bottles* over here—Well, I suppose you *might* say nobody ought to want *luxuries* in war-time, but still, they've put a lot of *French* money into the firm and employ *British* workers, and it is all *employment*, isn't it, and after all the French are our ALLIES and we *must* all have *money* for the war! And you can't have money unless you *make* it, can you? Anyway, these people can't go on making their bottles because of *one* tiny part that has to be *imported* from FRANCE, and the Board of Trade won't let them import it because of letting *money* go out of the country. So the poor French people have offered to send over the little part for *nothing* and only be paid after the war's over—but apparently *that*

won't do either, so they'll have to *stop* manufacturing and all the *bottles* and *stoppers* and things will be wasted and the men thrown out of *work*, and it doesn't *seem* very *kind* or *sensible*, does it? Especially when we are talking such a lot about a *United Economic Front*, whatever that means? Of course, it may be quite right—but don't you think, if there's any good reason for *obstructing* trade, the Board should give it and EXPLAIN, and not just say *flatly* they see no *hope* of ever doing *anything*.

It's rather like the *school-children*. I expect it was *necessary* to get them *out* without any books or pencils or anything to the *nearest* available place; but I do think the Government might have *helped* the subsequent *arrangements* rather more, and got the schools *together* and *organised* the distribution of equipment and things. If they would only make a *picture in their heads* of what it MEANS to *teach* under such *difficulties*! I *do* think it's a pity so many children are drifting back to Town—it's being so *good* for them to find out how people *live* in the country. I *must* tell you about my *nice* taxi-driver the other night. He'd driven me back a *long* way in the dark and we had *such* a conversation on the door-step while I was finding change, having stupidly put my money in the wrong *compartment* of my hand-bag, and got it all mixed up with my gas-mask.

His *wife* and *family* had been evacuated to Hertfordshire (*quite* near your wife's village, so perhaps she *knows* them) and he said his *wife* found the country a little dull, but the CHILDREN were doing splendidly and getting *so* fat and sturdy on the *good* country food and fresh *air*. He said he thought country people were so *kind*, much more NEIGHBOURLY than they were in Town. So I said, I expected that was because one had *fewer* neighbours and VALUED them more, and of course, in case of *sickness* and so on, one couldn't always get to a doctor or hospital so quickly, so that neighbours *expected* to help one another. But the thing that MOST struck him, he said, was that his children were *learning* such a lot. He said: "You'd be surprised, the things my kiddies are getting to know—all about *animals*, and what they eat and how to look after them, and how to *grow* things—they know a lot more than their parents, my kiddies do. It makes me realise," he said—he was a very *intelligent* man and so nice—"that I don't know nothing! What do I know? Only how to drive a cab round London—anybody could do that. But I go down there and talk to the family that's taken us in—*very kind* people they are—and we sit down after supper and talk about *quite different* TOPICS from what I'm used to. My wife, too—you know, the women usually (excuse me, miss) just talk *gossip* and that; but down there, we all discuss *topics*."

Now, isn't that a *splendid* tribute to the country people? And isn't it nice to

think that those children, when they grow up, will *understand* what they read about *Agriculture*, and *Milk* and *Pig-Marketing Boards*, and all those DIFFICULT “Topics” that we all have to vote about—so often without knowing *anything*!

I’ve put all this into my report, of *course*, but it *cheered* me up so much, I thought I’d like to tell *you*. Your friend in “the Department” (even to you, I’d better not mention *names*, had I?) is *most* friendly, and says our *reports* are VERY helpful, because we just LISTEN to what people say, instead of *asking questions*—and as you so RIGHTLY say, dear Lord Peter, if you ask *questions*, everybody gets self-conscious and tells you what they think will *sound* well. I used to think it was so *cynical* of one’s nurse to say, “Ask no *questions* and you’ll hear no LIES”—but I dare say she was really a very *good* psychologist in a *practical* sort of way.

I must *stop* now. All your “cats” and “kittens” send you their very LOUDEST purrs!!!

Most sincerely yours,

KATHERINE ALEXANDRA CLIMPSON.

WIMSEY PAPERS—IV

7. *Extracts from the private Diary of Lord Peter Wimsey, somewhere abroad.*

Tuesday

. . . My brother writes that he is planting oak-trees in the Long Coppice. I acknowledge that there is something in him that is indomitable. He is persuaded that the next generation, if not this, will see the end of our stewardship, and for him (being what he is) that means the end of everything that was England. Even if we, by some miracle, are not left ruined beyond repair, even if a new kind of society does not take the soil from us and hand it over to God knows what kind of commercial spoliation, his personal situation is hopeless, because he can place no confidence in his heir. He knows well enough that Jerry would not care if the whole place were surrendered to ribbon-building or ragwort. But what the land requires, the land shall have, so long as he is alive to serve it. All the same—oaks!

Two hundred years ago, life presented little difficulty for such as us. Personal privilege and personal responsibility marched together. Now, something within us makes common cause with those who attack the privilege, but forbids us to deny the responsibility. I have tried—Heaven knows how hard—to view myself in the light of history and acquiesce in my own decay, but there is some vital imperative in my blood that breaks down my own indifference. . . .

Wednesday

Arguing all evening with P——; very leftish, of course, denouncing the present economic system and eloquent about freedom and equality. What madness coupled those two words together? They are mutually destructive. The “system” arose from the determined struggle to “free” economics from the control of Church and State. The war-cry was “equal opportunity” for all. What happens when you demand equal opportunity for the rabbit and the tiger? P—— talks about “the natural law”; I presume he does not mean the law of the jungle, nor yet whatever it is theologians understand by the term. (Who was it said that whenever the word “nature” came into an argument he prepared himself to hear bad reasoning?) What do we know about nature, except that it is man’s nature to be “unnatural”? Where does man begin? Marx said that man “first distinguished himself from the animals when he produced the means of subsistence.” *First*—chronologically? We have no means of knowing what man did “first.” If he lived like an ape on wild fruit and made a song to celebrate the largest pumpkin, was the song the act of an animal? And where is the

proof that the song came into history later than the sowing of pumpkin-seed? This is Rousseau's noble savage all over again. We have no proof either way. Song and pumpkin-seed are alike subject to mutability.

Birds sing—but it is always the same song. Only man sings a new song every day.

“Man first distinguished himself”—“first,” then, in the sense of the primary quality of the distinction. But that is to assume what you set out to prove. . . .

Thursday

. . . I was glad last night's discussion was carried on in French. It would have been better still if I could have spoken Z——'s language or he mine, but at least we had both to make the same kind of mental adjustment, in order to think in the same speech. To negotiate, not knowing what the other fellow's words mean to him, or what one's *own* words mean to him, is like wrestling with a feather-bed. The professional interpreter is a minor miracle—far better than a man translating his own words badly into a language in which he cannot think—for he does interpret and not merely de-code. Even so, I have heard a phrase change status and stature—change *emphasis*—in the course of interpretation. The original speaker is still thinking in his own tongue and the hearer in his. It's a question of approach to the subject; in speaking another language one instinctively alters one's mental attitude to suit the medium. The mere knowledge that other attitudes are possible is a safeguard against insularity of thought, and the politician with no language but his own can never really hope to solve international problems—worse, he can never really understand what the problem is, or even that there is a problem at all. That was the value of the classical education—nothing to do with whether Latin fits you to be a successful pill-merchant or engineer—the value of the double mind. If a diplomatist is not double-tongued he will almost certainly appear double-faced; not through treachery but through ignorance. I would have no man eligible for Parliament that could not think in two languages. . . .

Friday

. . . Poor P——! he avoided me in the street today. At least I think so. Why else should he dive so hurriedly into the baby-linen shop by mistake for the café next door? It must have been an error of haste—even if some unfortunate indiscretion had brought baby-linen into his life, he would scarcely be making his purchases in person. He probably thought I was going to tackle him about Russia. I wasn't. Does one button-hole a man in the street for a chat about his wife's elopement? *Le chef de gare il est cocu*, poor devil, and that's all there is to be said about it. He's sincere, and the Helsinki business has been a severe shock to him. He isn't one of

the whole-hoggers who are ready to accept an interregnum of fraud and violence as a necessary preliminary to the Kingdom of Man on earth. [*Passage deleted here, dealing with probable military and political repercussions.*] Still, oddly enough, my own immediate feeling is a queer sense of liberation. All these years, to express any doubts about the Russian experiment has laid one under the imputation of upholding capitalism, class-privilege, and so on, for the sake of one's own advantage. As though one had been shown God and had slammed the door in His face for fear of judgement. Difficult to explain that the fear was of another kind—or perhaps not fear, but an instinctive mistrust—something in the back of one's mind saying "*C'est louche.*" "A plague o' both your houses," one said, "Moscow and Berlin alike; the moment you get inside the door there's the same bad smell in the basement." Now the offence is rank, and stinks in P——'s nostrils. Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds. But was Soviet doctrine ever anything but a weed at root, like the other?

The Catholic padre makes no bones about it. "Both started," he says, "by denying God, and no figs could grow from that thistle." But I have no such rational grounds for saying, "I told you so." For me to say, "I object as a Christian" would be rather like saying "I object as a native of Norfolk"—the one qualification bearing about as much relation to my conduct as the other, and being just about as geographical. I don't demand that my bootmaker should have Christian principles. I don't object to an atheist barber—though, come to think of it, I suppose nothing *in theory* need prevent an atheist barber from cutting my throat if he feels like it. The law is framed on the assumption that my life is sacred; but upon my word I can see no sanction for that assumption at all, except on the hypothesis that I am an image of God—made, I should say, by a shockingly bad sculptor. And if I see no sanctity in myself, why should I see it in Finland? But I do. It seems altogether irrational.

All the same, I still have the sense of liberation. "Fall into the hand of God, not into the hand of economic humanity." One can say it now without feeling obliged to apologise for one's class prejudices. . . .

Saturday.

. . . Like the gentleman in the carol, I have seen a wonder sight—the Catholic padre and the refugee Lutheran minister *having a drink together* and discussing, in very bad Latin, the persecution of the Orthodox Church in Russia. I have seldom heard so much religious toleration or so many false quantities. . . .

Tuesday.

. . . My papers have arrived, so the balloon goes up tonight. When M—— handed them over, he said, "You have a wife and family, haven't you?" I said "Yes,"

and felt curiously self-conscious. The first time it has mattered a curse whether I went west or not. M—— looked at me as I used to look at my own married officers when they volunteered for a dirty bit of work, and it all seemed absurd and incongruous.

I shall not keep a diary *over there*. So, in case of accident, I will write my own epitaph now: HERE LIES AN ANACHRONISM IN THE VAGUE EXPECTATION OF ETERNITY.

WIMSEY PAPERS—V

8. *From Mr. Paul Delagardie to Lady Peter Wimsey at Talboys.*

EUROPEAN CLUB,
PICCADILLY, W.

December 9th, 1939.

MY DEAR HARRIET,

I am charmed to learn that you are all progressing favourably in your rustic retirement. Thank you, *mon enfant*, my arthritis is better, in spite of the idiosyncrasies of the climate, which continues to exhibit the British illogicality and independence of enlightened cosmopolitan opinion in its most insular and insolent form. However, it has its uses as a deterrent to that fellow Hitler's aerial ambitions; I understand from the papers that the elimination of this country is now postponed until May.

This will give us time to get forward with your scheme—of which I cordially approve—of immediately pulling down the disgusting rookeries in which the unfortunate proletariat are huddled. My only quarrel with your admirable pamphlet on *National Housing* is that it does not go far enough. I would pull down everything; but perhaps, when we have destroyed the hovels of the poor, enemy bombers will complete the process by blowing up the palaces of the rich and the soulless villas of the middle-class. Then (always supposing we survive the attack) we shall be able to start from a *tabula rasa*, to construct those houses for human beings which you—very wisely—desire, rather than the “houses for heroes” postulated by our previous grandiloquence. (What an expression! It suggests some species of Gothic Valhalla, decorated with baroque ornament in the German manner. But in fact, if I remember rightly, our first attempts to materialise this ambitious scheme were carried out in compressed cow-dung.)

I say, I would pull down everything. I am not being barbarian or perverse—I am being purely logical. Consider how in former days, when Reason was still acknowledged as a universal reality, the structure of buildings was adapted to the method of warfare in vogue. The mediaeval castle or town expected assault *horizontally*, from arrows or primitive artillery: it was therefore defended *vertically* with thick exterior walls and loophole windows. Today, attack may be looked for *vertically* from the air—would not the logical consequence be to remove the defences from wall to roof—from the *vertical* to the *horizontal* position? Yet, as the science of ballistics and acrobatics advances, we continue, in defiance of

common sense, to erect tall buildings with immense acres of glass and even with glass skylights! If we did not suffer from a dislocation of mind that prevents any rational synthesis of aim, we should model our domestic architecture upon the Maginot Line. We should build *downwards* and interpose at least thirty feet of good, smothering earth between ourselves and air-borne high explosive.

You will say: Do you wish to turn us into Troglodytes? Why not? “Troglodyte” is a descriptive epithet; it is not a term of abuse. When the development of civilisation makes it appropriate to dwell in caves, then to be a Troglodyte is highly civilised.

Consider the increased beauty and utility of the countryside when all the ugly evidences of man’s habitation shall have been removed to a decent subterranean privacy! The whole face of England would be one uninterrupted countryside, embellished only by such elegant relics of overground civilisation as might be thought worthy of preservation, such as cathedrals, castles, colleges, family mansions, and so forth. These would be maintained as a national heritage, and could be made the objects of excursions and educational visits, by means of the surface-roads, which I would have reserved purely for pleasurable purposes. No longer would it be necessary to traverse many miles of hideous suburbs to gain the open country. Rural delights would be—not at your door, but on your roof; the nearest municipal lift would lift you and your car, in a few minutes, into the enjoyment of the wide open spaces. No longer would rich arable land be rendered sterile by the operations of the speculative builder. On every foot of English soil, the corn would wave, trees flourish, and flocks and herds find pasture. At threat of aerial assault, the cattle could be swiftly removed to a safe harbour below ground where they and the civil population could remain at ease while the bombs exploded harmlessly over their heads.

Defence would be greatly simplified. Nothing would need to be guarded except the entrances and ventilating shafts; and indeed these, in time of emergency, could be closed in by strong trapdoors and covered with sandbags, while a central plant dispensed chemically produced artificial air to the protected city. Thus attention could be concentrated upon sea-routes and coastal defences, with great economy of man-power. The disposal of sewage presents itself to me as a problem—but I have no doubt that engineering ingenuity could deal with it by pumps, septic tanks and so forth, transporting it to sewage farms placed on the surface at a sufficient distance from the pleasure-routes. (After all, the Maginot line presumably enjoys sanitary advantages of this kind.)

As for transport and communications, these would be carried, as the Mersey traffic is at present, by great arterial tunnels for road and electric rail, which would

also form conduits for water, electricity, telephones *et hoc genus omne*. Ventilation would be artificial, as proposed for the Channel Tunnel; and as the lighting would be equally good by night and by day no headlamps would be necessary. Only light vehicles would be permitted on the surface-ways; every species of *monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens*, whether lorry, omnibus, army caterpillar or goods-train, would be confined below, to the great improvement of the landscape and the general amenities of travel.

To an underground population, the English climate would be robbed of more than half its terrors; and in addition, there would be a great saving in such items of domestic expenditure as rain-proofing, frost-proofing and heating. You cannot have failed to notice the equable temperature of such natural caves as Wookey Hole, for example, which are warmer in winter and cooler in summer than any spot on the surface. This economy would counterbalance the necessarily increased expenditure in lighting. No doubt there would be a great outcry from old-fashioned persons of the fresh-air brigade; but, as you know, I have no prejudices in favour of "*le courant d'air*," any more than any other healthy animal. My cat and my dog are not such unnatural fools as to sleep—or endeavour to sleep—exposed to the violent stimulants of strong air and light; they very sensibly choose the snuggest corner, and bury eyes and nose as deeply as possible in their fur. Thus they anaesthetise themselves to slumber, in the same manner as birds and other creatures that are not afraid to trust their God-given instincts. Animals prefer to be either definitely indoors or definitely out-of-doors. It is "man, proud man," who confounds all natural distinctions by setting the windows of his house ajar and taking his outdoor exercise enclosed in a box. Thus, either way, he relinquishes the healthy enjoyment of cosiness on the one hand and fresh air on the other, to indulge in a perverted passion for draughts. Not that I condemn his passion as such, for all man's passions are perverted; I object, logically, to his miscalling them virtues, and breaking all natural laws in the name of "Nature."

No, my dear child: if we truly desire to see "England's green and pleasant land," let us refrain from building a shoddy brick Jerusalem all over it. Let us quietly dig ourselves in—and thus not merely "dig for victory," as the new-fangled slogan runs, but "dig for peace" by removing the temptation to aerial attack which a great, sprawling, vulnerable network of open town must of necessity present to the ill-disposed. No doubt the period of transition would be costly, but less so than a war, and in time we should so adapt our lives and resources that to dig would be as cheap as the building of sky-scrapers. Further, agricultural and industrial pursuits could be carried on without mutual interference: towns would no longer devastate

agrarian sites, nor would the free pursuit of rural occupations obstruct the proper development of urban districts. All would be orderly; all would be safe; all would be beautiful.

I have, of course, no hope that my reasonable counsel will prevail in the face of rooted prejudice, vested interests and the steady refusal of mankind to contemplate radical changes in their mode of living. I have just read that, last week, three barrage balloons broke loose, fouled the overhead power cables and plunged half a county into darkness. Need I point out that, in the Utopia I contemplate, there would have been no necessity for the balloons and no overhead cables for them to foul? Would any body of people except English business men ever put high-tension cables in the air, to be a menace to birds, cattle, aeroplanes and human beings and perpetually vulnerable to atmospherical conditions and trifling accidents? The excuse given is that it will prove still more costly to bury a defunct civilisation, and that a live rabbit is better than a dead donkey.

I send you my little idea; you might make a novel out of it. It is proof, at any rate, that a rationally-minded person is never too old to contemplate revolution.

Meilleures amitiés. Embrasse les enfants de ma part.

Bien à toi—

PAUL AUSTIN DELAGARDIE.

WIMSEY PAPERS—VI

9. *Honoriam Lucasta, Dowager Duchess of Denver, to Lady Peter Wimsey (Harriet Vane) at Talboys.*

THE DOWER HOUSE,
BREDON HALL,
DUKE'S DENVER, NORFOLK.

December 15th, 1939.

DEAREST HARRIET,

How tiresome for you that Polly should have caught this horrid 'flu germ! I can't think why the Almighty should have wanted to make such a lot of the nasty little creatures—misplaced ingenuity I should call it in anybody else. Though I read in a book the other day that germs were probably quite well-behaved, originally, but had taken to bad habits and living on other people, like mistletoe. Interesting, if true, and all Adam and Eve's fault, no doubt. Anyway, I saw Mary in Town and told her not to worry and she sent love and said how sweet of you to stay at home and look after her erring offspring.

I hope you have received all the parcels. I couldn't get a gas-mask case to match the dress-pattern exactly, but the one I sent tones in pretty well, I think. The shoes have had to be specially dyed, I'm afraid—it seems to be rather a difficult colour. I hope the Christmas cards will do. I had a terrible time with the sacred ones—there seems to be nothing this year between quaint missals and things from the British Museum and those sentimental modern ones with the Virgin and angels either very thin and willowy and ten feet tall, or else very chubby and smirking, such an unrobust idea of the whole affair, don't you think? The attendant in the last shop—I tried five—was deeply apologetic. She said it wasn't their fault—the public *insisted* on sentiment, and the clergy were much the worst—personal taste, I wonder, or pandering to what they think their flocks prefer? Such a mistake, too, to imagine that *children* approve of Baby Cherubs and little darling boys and girls swarming over everything. At least, I know *my* children always wanted stories and pictures about proper-sized people, whether it was knights or cavaliers or pirates or St. Michael all in scarlet with a big sword, and just the same with their dolls and things—I suppose it gave them a grown-up feeling and counteracted their inferiority complexes and things.

Never shall I forget the contempt of my nursery for a most well-meaning present from my sister Georgiana, now dead, poor dear, of a Maude Goodman. (That was

the present, I mean, not what she died of. They were thought very sweet in the 'nineties, Little girls dressed like Kate Greenaway, with their hair done up on the top, dancing to elegant ladies and gentlemen playing the harpsichord.) I'm sorry to say the boys took it out of the frame and used it as a target for pea-shooting, poor Georgiana, her feelings were dreadfully hurt when she discovered it calling unexpectedly one day when I was out and invading the nursery, always such a rash thing to do. It's only grown-ups who want children to *be* children; children themselves always want to be real people—do remember that, dear, won't you? But I'm sure you will, because you're always most tactful with them, even with your own Bredon—more like a friend than a parent, so to speak. All this cult of keeping young as long as possible is a lot of unnatural nonsense, no wonder the world seems to get sillier and sillier. Dear me! when I think of some of the Elizabethan Wimseys—the third Lord Christian, for instance, who could write four languages at eleven, left Oxford at fifteen, married at sixteen and had two wives and twelve children by the time he was thirty (two lots of twins, certainly, but it's all experience) besides producing a book of elegies and a learned exhibition [*Qy.* disquisition? *D.L.S.*] on Leviathans, and he would have done a great deal more, I dare say, if he hadn't unfortunately been killed by savages on Drake's first voyage to the Indies—I sometimes feel that our young people don't get enough out of life these days. However, I hear Gherkies shot down a German bomber last week, and that's something, though I don't think he's likely to do very much with the languages or the Leviathans.

Talking of books, I had a heartfelt outburst from the young woman at the Library, who said she really didn't know what to do with some of the subscribers. If there isn't a brand-new book published for them every day they go in, they grumble frightfully, and they won't condescend to take anything that's a couple of months old, even if they haven't read it, which seems quite demented. They seem to spend their time running to catch up with the day after tomorrow—is it the influence of Einstein? The girl asked when there was going to be a new Harriet Vane murder-story. I said you thought the dictators were doing quite enough in that way, but she said her readers wanted their minds taken off dictators, though why murders should do that I don't know—you'd think it would remind them. I suppose people like to persuade themselves that death is a thing that only happens in books, and if you come to think of it, that's probably the way they feel about religion, too—hence the pretty-pretty Christmas cards. All the same, I'm sending a few assorted murders to the poor dear men who are being so bored on the Balloon Barrage and jobs like that. So dull for them, poor things, and nobody seems to take much interest in them. More romantic,

of course, to send to them men over-seas, but it can't be so *solitary* out there as sitting up all night with a Blimp in darkest England.

Talking of darkest England, what one wants on the shops at night *is* not just a sign saying "Open," but something to show what they've got inside. They're allowed a little light on the goods—but if one's *driving* along one can't possibly see whether a pile of vague little shapes is cigarettes or chocolates or bath buns or something to do with wireless sets—and it doesn't help much to see just "J. Blogg" or "Pumpkin and Co.," unless you know what Blogg or Pumpkin is supposed to be selling. And even so, the poor souls have to go through a terrible fuss to get their lighting authorised. The garage people told Roberts (he's driving me now, Pickett having been called up) how they got permission from the chief A.R.P. officer to have a red night sign inside the archway, and he came along and saw it and gave it his blessing. Well, the very first night they had it lit, along came the police and tackled the night attendant—rather ancient and deaf, but quite capable of seeing to the pumps—and told the old boy to put it out or he'd get summonsed. So he said it had been approved by the A.R.P. chief. So they said, never mind the A.R.P. chief, he must put it out *instantly* or be arrested! In the end the manager had to go and make a commotion, and in the end they got it back. Too many cooks, of course—but what I say is, Sir John Anderson ought to get somebody to design a set of *standardised* signs with *standardised* lighting—just a plain, well-drawn outline of what the shop contains, so that you could recognise it from a distance. You could have it set into the middle of a black blind—then all you've got to do is to draw down the blind, light the sign from the back, and there you are. Something very simple is all you want—such as a Teapot for a Café, Pipe for a Tobacconist, a Knife and Fork for a Restaurant, a Tankard for a Public House, and a Cow for a Milk-Bar—quite unmistakeable, and thoroughly mediaeval and charming, like the Goldbeater's Arm and the Chemist's Pestle and Mortar—you could keep those, of course, though I suppose you wouldn't often want to drop casually in on a Goldbeater after black-out time. It would be quite cheap, if standardised, and would save all the argument, and there couldn't be any favouritism or discrepancies—just apply to the local police for your authorised sign. But there, it's only an old woman's notion—much too simple to appeal to a Ministry!

My dear, this letter is full of shopping and nonsense—but I've made up my mind that we just mustn't worry about Peter, because he disappeared so many times in the last war and always turned up again more or less safe and sound. He's got quite a good instinct of self-preservation, really. And he's not stupid, which is a comfort, whatever Kingsley has to say about being good and letting who will be clever—

though I don't see how you can be clever just by willing. Peter always maintains that Kingsley said "can," not "will," and perhaps he did. I only hope he still has Bunter with him, though if he's gone into any queer place in disguise I can't think what he can have done with him, because if ever a man had "English gentleman's personal gentleman" written all over him, it's Bunter. I had a letter from him yesterday, so discreet it might have been written from Piccadilly, and conveying the compliments of the Season to all the Family, with a capital F.

We're looking forward to seeing you all for Christmas, germs permitting. I hope you won't mind our being overrun with evacuees and children's parties—Christmas Tree and Conjuror in the Ball-Room, with charades and games after supper—I'm afraid it will be rather noisy and rampageous and not very restful.

Always your affectionate

MOTHER.

P.S.—I'm sorry my English is so confusing. It was Bunter, not Peter, who wrote the discreet letter, and Peter, not Kingsley, who had Bunter with him—at least, I hope so.

WIMSEY PAPERS—VII

10 and 11. *Miss Letitia Martin, Dean of Shrewsbury College, Oxford, to Lady Peter Wimsey at Talboys.*

ACADEMIC WOMEN'S CLUB,
FITZROY SQUARE, W.1.

18.12.39.

MY DEAR HARRIET,

Thank you so much for that lovely book and the delightful photograph of the infants—a most gratifying addition to the portrait-gallery of Shrewsbury grandchildren! I hope my little offering to the nursery will arrive in time. I'm not sending much in the way of presents this year, because *what* with the income-tax, and cigarettes for soldiers, and scarves for mine-sweepers, and Funds for Distressed Victims (assorted), and subscriptions to entertainments, and Bonds, and Savings, and one thing and another, one's cheque-book just *melts* away, leaving one bankrupt of all but good wishes. If Sir John Simon would only explain *how* exactly one is to *spend* hard to win the Economic War, and at the same time *save* hard to win the Economic Peace, he would confer a benefit on mere narrow-minded logicians like me—but I suppose the answer is that in war-time one has to do the impossible, and will end by doing it. Anyway, my dear, all my best wishes to you all, and may your lord and master soon return home, with new detective exploits to his credit!

How tremendously the fight off Montevideo has taken hold of one's thoughts! Like the loss of the 'Rawalpindi,' it has the unmistakable heroic quality that links it up with all our naval history back to the Armada—one feels that Nelson must have been aboard the 'Exeter,' and that Drake and Grenville helped to command the 'Ajax' and 'Achilles' when they ran in under the 'Graf Spee's' guns. It's good for us to have these reminders, especially just now. "This is a funny war," people say—and I know what they mean. When everything happens at sea, it's rather like two people playing chess. There's a deathly silence, and you don't know quite what they're up to; you only see one piece after another swept off the board and accounted for—a destroyer here, a merchantman there, a black knight exchanged for a white bishop—all queerly impersonal and worked out in terms of *things*—pieces—so many taken and so many left. And then, suddenly, the combination gets into action, and you see what it was all about, right away from the original gambit—a knight comes dancing across, two little pawns you'd scarcely noticed trip forward hand in hand, the black

queen is forced into a corner, the knight hops away and unmasks the waiting rook, and plonk! the black queen's gone and the king in check.

It's sobering to read of so many casualties—all one can say is that, if men have to be killed, it's a cause for pride and gratitude to know that the job they were doing is done, and done well. The most heartbreaking thing must be to feel that one's husband or son died for something that turned out badly, or ought never to have happened. And I am most dreadfully sorry for poor Langsdorf. He seemed to have had a very good chit from our people—"a very great gentleman," they said, and he must have simply hated having to scuttle his ship. Of course, it was a bit spiteful to do it right in the middle of the fairway, but no doubt Hitler told him to. I hope there's no truth in the extraordinary rumour that H. offered him a million marks to get the ship home. That would be the last insult. Not that I would put it past the little wretch—he never *was* out of the top drawer.

Look here, I do think somebody ought to do something to throttle that Haw-Haw creature. I don't mind his having said that half Oxford was in flames, and that the soldiers had to be protected by pickets from the unwelcome attentions of the Women Students. That gave us much harmless pleasure. And I don't mind his pointing out that even the War hasn't stopped unemployment. It's true, and you can't expect him to mention that the same thing is happening in Germany, in spite of the fact that guns are their staple manufacture. It's all part of the world-problem—production having got ahead of distribution—and if everybody stopped fighting tomorrow we should all still have to cope with it. And I don't blame him for saying that our Evacuation hasn't turned out as well as it might, because all our own papers have said it *ad nauseam*. After all, it's not our fault that Hitler let us down—if only he'd started throwing things when he said he would, everything would have worked out as planned. Our big mistake was to suppose that that man could *ever* speak the truth, even by accident. And the interesting thing is that quite a lot of people are finding out now how much better their children are doing in those evacuated areas where they're only getting about 1½ hours' teaching a day, *in small classes* of about a dozen, than they did working a full day in classes of 40 or so. One working woman told me it had given her a quite new outlook on education. And so it should—because those children are getting what only wealthy people can afford as a rule—individual attention from a private tutor. And it just shows that when the war's over we shall just *have* to overhaul the whole thing, and have more teachers and smaller classes, no matter *what* it costs; and now that some of these parents have discovered what proper education means, it's up to them to badger the Government till they get it. And we shall all of us have to learn to treat the teaching profession

decently, and not as a bunch of comic pariahs, or we shan't be able to get enough teachers for the new era in education.

What was I saying about Haw-Haw? Oh, yes! I really cannot stand the creature saying that we called Langsdorf a coward for running into Montevideo. We never dreamed of saying anything of the sort. We went out of our way to throw bouquets. I'm damned if anybody shall call us bad winners—that's worse than being bad losers.

19.12.39.

I couldn't finish last night, because I had to go out. Today's papers don't show the 'Graf Spee' business in an awfully good light. Yesterday's first editions took it for granted the captain had gone down with his ship, and I must say the picture today of him and his men grinning all over their faces isn't quite what one expects. Somehow, it's a shock that Nazi cynicism could get as far as their Navy. One isn't surprised when S.S. men are brutal, or when the New Army behave like fiends in Poland, or German airmen bomb open towns, or even when submarines torpedo without warning—they're a new-fangled sort of ship, and one more or less excuses them—but one had a feeling that battleships were somehow or other all right. It's funny how the papers feel it. They don't so much point out that Nelson would have turned a deaf ear and blind eye to inglorious instructions from home; they point to the tradition of the 'Scharnhorst' and the 'Gneisenau,' and say that old Admiral von Spee would have turned in his grave. It's the thought that this vulgar little madman can stretch out his hand over half the world and force a decent sea-captain to do a dishonourable action that makes one sick. That's really what we are fighting about—the utter submission of the individual conscience to an ugly system in the hands of one unscrupulous gangster.

Well, bless the Finns! They are a bright spot, and no mistake. I'm not surprised. The only Finnish child I ever taught in my school-teaching days was a miracle of competent independence. At eight years old she organised her form; at ten, she would lead the school crocodile from Swiss Cottage to the Old Vic, while I meekly followed in her wake; at eleven, she got up and ran an athletic competition for the Junior School, and now she is manager of a big and successful store. You can't keep a nation like that down. But what it must be like, fighting in that dreadful cold place in the pitch dark, one simply can't imagine. You'd think the Russians would be used to snow, but apparently they sent the wrong sort of Russians—the Southern kind. Isn't that a War-Office all over? They're all alike. I suppose, if ever we had to conduct a campaign at the North Pole, we should send troops from Bombay! Anyway, I never thought communism had much to do with common sense, judging by the bright

undergraduates who go in for it. Never did they succeed in arriving in time for a coaching, or arranging a meeting without at least three mistakes in the hour and place. An entertaining small consequence of the war, by the way, is that the membership of the Communist Society at Shrewsbury has gone down by precisely the same number that the membership of the Student Christian Movement has gone up. There is a pleasing neatness about it.

Well, my dear, I must stop twaddling and go and finish my shopping. Christmas must go on, Hitler or no Hitler. I go back home tomorrow.

With the best of good wishes.

Yours affectionately,

LETTIA MARTIN.

*Telegram from the above to the above, 20.12.39, handed in at
Selfridge's, 4.48 p.m.*

Take back anything harsh I said about poor Langsdorf sorry I spoke—Martin.

WIMSEY PAPERS—VIII

12. *Colonel Marchbanks to Lord Peter Wimsey (transmitted by a devious route to a destination unknown).*

BELLONA CLUB,

W.

23.12.39.

MY DEAR BOY,

I must try to send you a line for the New Year, though God knows when you'll get it. Still, better late than never. I ought to have put it in hand for Christmas, but the confounded season creeps up on one in such a dashed stealthy manner that it's here before one realises it. Not but what I ought to realise it, as my wife and I have been working hard to get up entertainments for the Camp near our little place in the country—about all that's left in the way of military service for an old war-horse like me. However, with three grandsons doing their bit, we can't complain. It's a fairly high proportion as things go nowadays. Some of the young fellows—and the older ones too—are grumbling pretty heavily because the W.O. doesn't seem to have any use for their services. See here, I said to them the other day, I'm older than you, and I've served in two major wars, not counting the Burmese business when I was only a lad, and you can take it from me, the best thing you can do is to stand by and wait till you're wanted. They're not going to want you in a hurry, except for replacement of casualties. How many of our fellows do you want slaughtered, I said, so that you can put up a couple of pips? Robert Fentiman said this wasn't what he called a war—more like a ruddy sit-down strike. I said, I suppose what you want is another Passchendaele, but we're not having any this time, thank-you, we know what it's like. Nor is the German High Command, not unless that fellow Hitler starts sending out his personal order to scuttle the army. If you've forgotten, I said, and I haven't, what a frontal attack in impossible weather on a strong position looks like, go and see what's happening to those poor dashed Russian blighters driven up like sheep against the Mannerheim line. Fentiman said, anyhow, the Finns were showing us how a war should be fought. Good luck to them, I said, so they are, and Stalin's showing us how it ought not to be fought, and why should we follow his example? What we've got in hand, I said, is siege warfare, and it's got to be fought in the proper manner. There's no sense in trying to fight the last war but one.

Thank God, I say, we're not saddled with Russia as an ally, which we should have been if some of our bright intellectuals had had their way. Remember those

dashed Socialists last August? Bursting into tears all over the place, and prophesying the end of this country if we didn't throw both arms round Comrade Stalin's neck? I protested to the committee, and got their beastly rags shot out of the place. I'd a fairly good idea those Bolshies wanted to make a pretty dirty bargain for their priceless assistance, but even if we could have swallowed that—Heaven be praised we didn't—the Russians have never yet won a war against a first-class Power, and why should they begin now? They won't win this one, what's more, if somebody has the decency to keep Finland going with munitions and supplies. You can't turn incompetent soldiers into competent ones by abolishing Church and King—dashed ungentlemanly thing to do, anyhow—nor yet by shooting all your officers, poor devils. It's to be hoped some of these neutrals will pluck up heart and tell the Stalin lot to go to blazes. I only wish I was twenty years younger and free to go and join in the scrap. But creaking old dug-outs like me can only sit tight and applaud, and hope that somebody will come along to push the supplies through.

Wish I had half the energy of old Admiral Barnacle. Somebody brought him in here yesterday, and he pooped off a broadside of I-told-you-so's that carried away all our defences and even put Wetheridge's guns out of action. (Wetheridge is getting very cranky—temper worse and worse—sits growling in the corner with a neutral zone all round him, and nobody but the new members ever ventures within range. Worst of it is, he completely monopolises one fireplace and I'm afraid he'll end by driving all the members out of the Club.) The Admiral had always said the next war would be fought at sea (and by gad! Sir, wasn't he right?) and the only way to keep the peace in Europe was to have a British Navy so big that nobody would dare challenge it, and so keep the whole adjectival lot quiet. He got so excited that Culyer and a couple of other fellows had to sacrifice themselves, and give him a game of bridge, and we heard him roaring away in the little card-room, and holding a court-martial—court-naval, rather—on every hand, till his friends convoyed him away to bed. Time too; he must be well over eighty.

But I'm beginning to think seriously, Peter, that there's something in what he says. So far, all the advantage in this war has been with the defence, and I think we might argue that if every country would provide itself with a Maginot Line so strong that an attack wasn't worth the candle, we might reduce land warfare to a sort of perpetual check and fight everything out by air and sea. That would mean much less expenditure in lives, because there's a limit to the number of men you can put in a ship or an aeroplane. Of course, it would mean a really efficient scheme of air-defence for every town, but that's not impossible either. They say the Helsinki shelters were solidly put in hand twelve years ago, and that's why the Russian raids

haven't produced anything like the casualties you might expect. You may think this is a queer line for an old army man to take, but, speaking as a professional soldier, I don't like this business of whole nations in arms, and the wiping out of millions of decent youngsters. I say, strengthen your defences, and don't waste men, and for us that does mean a strong Navy and Air arm, and personally I'm all for it. I never want to see anything like the 1914-1918 casualty lists again, and if you ask me the people who keep bawling to the Army to get a move on are a bunch of bloody-minded murderers. Of course, if the Boche gets to work on Holland, or Belgium, or Luxemburg, we may look for trouble.

Talking of the Navy, I thought that was a dashed handsome touch in Daladier's speech the other day. Saying that "the English, who were connoisseurs," had praised the work of the French Navy, and that he looked upon it as a good compliment. Upon my word, I call that a confoundedly graceful way of putting it. None of our newspapers seemed to appreciate it half enough. Very pretty turn to them, these Frenchmen have, in public speeches. Wish our lot would follow their example. We mean well, but we're so damned clumsy. Anyhow, there's my little tribute, for what it's worth, and I wish somebody could tell Daladier that one old fellow, at any rate, had the grace to feel gratified.

You ought to have heard the row there was this week when Winston hopped in ahead of the newspapers and told the country about the Canadians being landed here. I wonder the whole Censor's office didn't go up in smoke. Naughty of Winston, of course, but mind you, the public loved it. It pleased them no end to hear a tit-bit of piping-hot news direct from the First Lord of the Admiralty. If you ask me, the powers that be ought to arrange to give us that kind of thing more often. I don't mean they ought to take the papers by surprise—that's not fair, and besides, it takes the gilt off the gingerbread when you've been given your little treat one day, and the next have to read a lot of cursing and blasting about muddles in Ministries. It shakes public confidence. But I do say that, every now and again, when something damned good has happened, our Government ought to say deliberately: that's something the Prime Minister, or the First Lord, or somebody, ought to say *himself*, with his own lips, to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the country personally. The people would appreciate that, and it would be damn well worth it. They don't care two hoots about newspapers and Ministries, but they do love to be told the news, and the more personal touch about it the better, and curse the red tape.

Not much good, I'm afraid, writing all this to you, because you aren't in a position to do anything about it, but an old fellow like me gets his head full of ideas, sitting about with nothing much to do except think. Last war we were too busy to

think much, and since then I'm afraid we've left the thinking too much to the youngsters, and they think like mad, but they haven't got the experience. What's that French thing—if youth but knew, if age were only able? Age ought to be able to think a bit, anyhow. My wife says I've done my bit, and ought to sit quiet and stop fretting, but I find that rather hard work.

There's not much news, I'm afraid. All quiet on the Home Front so far. Rationing looms ahead—that's a new one on me. My wife and daughters laugh at me when I grumble about this butter business, and ask, how about my breakfast bacon? They say I ought to have been through the last war, and this one's a picnic to it. That's damn funny, when you come to think of it. D'you know, honestly, I hadn't realised that in 1918 they couldn't get matches, and sat about like the fox in the fable, hoping luck would send them a bit of cheese. When you think of all the cheese there was knocking about the lines! Still, I suppose it's never too late to learn, and now it's my turn to learn the civilian end of the business. I tell my wife she's getting a regular old soldier, always bragging about what she did in her last campaign.

Well, good luck to you, my boy, and a successful New Year. If you meet any of Little Adolf's friends, give them a kick in the pants from

Yours ever,
GEO. MARCHBANKS.

WIMSEY PAPERS—IX

*Letters to the Ministry of Instruction and Morale (various dates).
Dept. Public Opinion (Home); Sub-Dept. Propaganda (Enemy); Section Radio;
Sub-Section Hamburg.
File Ref. MIM/QXJ945/ak/722683; Cross-Ref. BBC/OL3/ zp/999334 (Copies to
BBC).*

Room 569 (2) Duchess of Denver:

*Passed to you for information and comment please. (Sgd.) BEETLE OF
OAKWOOD.*

Dear Sirs,—I welcome the suggestion to reply to the German propaganda from Hamburg. Anything for a change from the everlasting drone of cinema organs.

Incidentally, why is the news-bulletin broadcast to the Empire on the short wave at 11.30 a.m. always so much fuller of interesting and detailed information than those on the Home Service? Are we considered mentally inferior to our cousins overseas? Or is this a class distinction in favour of plutocrats who can afford expensive wireless sets?—Yours faithfully, J. WETHERIDGE (Maj. Retd.), *Bellona Club, W.*

Dear Lord Beetle,—Do try and stop this suggestion that the B.B.C should broadcast an answer to Haw-Haw. It would merely encourage my husband to turn the man on, and the creature's voice gets on my nerves, so monotonous and genteel, like a shop-walker. We need not, surely, *add* to the horrors of war!—Yours very sincerely, AMELIA TRUMPE-HARTE, *Bridge House, Mayfair.*

Dear Sirs,—I see that Mr. Harold Nicolson is rousing up the House of Commons to make a good debating reply to the German propagandist they call Haw-Haw. I am a member of the Primrose League and do not agree with Mr. Nicolson's political views, but I think this is an excellent idea and hope you will see that it is carried out. I have written to my M.P. and told him he is to support it or lose my vote. Is there anything further I can do in the matter? I am a church-warden, and run the Boy Scouts in this neighbourhood.—Yrs., &c., J. SMITH, *Gt. Pogford.*

Dear Sirs,—I read in my paper that the B.B.C. have decided not to broadcast any reply to “Lord Hee-Haw” for fear of making the man too important. I say, if he’s important enough to have headlines in the papers he’s important enough to be answered, and either the B.B.C. or the papers ought to have more sense. Why can’t you make up your minds one way or the other and get the whole thing straightened out? I enclose my card and remain,—Yours faithfully, PLAIN CITIZEN, *East Croydon*.

Dear Sirs,—I see Mr. Harold Nicolson wants to run a series of replies to Haw-Haw. This is all very well and a fine idea, but for pity’s sake don’t make it one of your College Professors but somebody as understands what is a good debating speech. There is nothing like a good controversy for Entertainment but it must be good Lively stuff. I am a working man myself and wireless is my hobby, I have a set gets all the foreign stations. I think Haw-Haw is very dangerous for ignorant people and there’s plenty with posh wireless sets more ignorant than the working class by a long chalk. If anybody was to make a good fighting speech in answer I would be pleased to listen into same but see it is a good one. We have speakers in our W.E.A. Debating Circle could give these Professors and Govt. speakers five yards and a beating.—Yours faithfully, A. CARPENTER, *Walbeach, Norfolk*.

Dear Sirs,—I am a social worker, and I find that a great many of the people I come in contact with take the line that much of the German propaganda about social conditions here is true, and they point out that he gets it all out of the English papers. I always tell them that that is the great difference between us and Germany—their papers are not allowed to say how bad their social conditions are, and so cannot be quoted against them. I find they are impressed by this, and also by the revelations of the miserable conditions in the Russian Army as compared with the glowing accounts of the “Workers’ Paradise” in the Soviet controlled Press. I think that any reply to German propaganda would be most effective if done along these lines.—Yours faithfully, SYLVIA STANNIFORTH, *Sheffield*.

My dear Lord Beetle,—With regard to the suggested broadcast in reply to “Lord Haw-Haw,” I have noticed in the course of my *researches* that a *great many people*, while listening-in to his remarks are

instinctively moved to utter derisive *ejaculations*, such as: “You don’t say!” “What about Old Gobbles?” “Have a nice cup of bramble-tea!” “What’s become of the ‘Deutschland’?” and so on, according to the *subject* he is discussing. This makes me think that it would be *amusing*, and afford *relief* to irritated *feelings* if a *running commentary* could be broadcast SIMULTANEOUSLY with his on the *same* wave-length, so as to give the *effect* of a speaker being HECKLED at a *public Meeting!* The *listeners* could JOIN IN with *shouts* and *cheers*, and a GOOD TIME would be had by all. This to be *immediately* followed, of course, by a *reasoned reply*, in which the *Germans* could heckle *too!* This would, I am sure, appeal greatly to the SPORTING INSTINCTS of our people! But perhaps there is some *technical* difficulty!—Yours sincerely, ALEXANDRA KATHERINE CLIMPSON, *Oxford Street, W.*

Dear Beetle,—What’s the good of complaining about the publicity given to Haw-Haw? Do you imagine anything is going to stop the British Public from taking cock-shies at an enemy alien? Last war the Stage and Press were full of Little Willie and the Kaiser’s moustache, and in the Boer War it was Oom Paul’s beard. Now that Hitler seems to have taken a back seat, they’ve got to make an Aunt Sally of some one. By all means answer the fellow and give the nation its money’s worth. Undignified be damned!—Yours ever, DENVER, *Bredon Hall, Norfolk.*

Dear Lord Beetle,—Since our conversation during your visit to Oxford last term, I have given some thought to the question of Propaganda, and the current controversy about the advisability, or otherwise, of issuing a public reply to the statements broadcast from Reichssender Hamburg affords a convenient occasion for putting my (very tentative) conclusions on paper.

Generally speaking, I am inclined to think that propaganda defeats its own object, by arousing a spirit of opposition in the hearer, and thus suggesting to him counter-arguments to the propositions advanced. (I remember a very entertaining essay on this thesis written a good many years ago by Miss Rose Macaulay.) Thus, I always recommend the President of any Religious Society among my own students to encourage her members to read *The Freethinker*—an organ whose quaintly old-fashioned Victorian atmosphere I personally find most refreshing.

This leads me to suppose that the most effective form of propaganda might very well be a reasoned reply to propaganda by an enemy speaker—the audience being caught in a receptive frame of mind occasioned by a recoil from the position suggested by his arguments. The reply should not be too lengthy (for fear of provoking a counter-recoil), and the tone should be brisk and humorous. Under these conditions, I can imagine that a broadcast on the lines sketched out by Mr. Nicolson might be very effective.—Believe me, yours sincerely, M. BARING (Warden), *Shrewsbury College, Oxford*.

Dear Sirs,—Since the identity of the German broadcaster known as “Haw-Haw” seems to be arousing some public interest, may I offer a suggestion? His accent seems to me to resemble very closely (particularly in the vowel-sounds) that used by (a) an actor of insufficient breeding and experience when impersonating an English aristocrat, or (b) (more subtly) an experienced actor of good social standing impersonating a man of inferior breeding apeing the speech of the English aristocracy. It is, in fact, very like the accent I use myself in the character of the self-made “Stanton” in *Dangerous Corner*, which I have played with marked success in the West-End and in the Provinces (photograph and press-cuttings enclosed, with stamped addressed envelope for return). If it is decided to broadcast a reply to this propaganda, would you consider me for the part? By exaggerating the accent and thus showing up the German speaker in a ridiculous light a very good comedy entertainment might be provided. I should add that I have had several broadcasting engagements and can be trusted to give a good performance from a script at first reading.—Yours truly, ALAN FLOAT, *Ground-Row Club, Soho*.

Covering Note to the Above File—HD/191—4/1/40
Ref. MIM/QXJ945/ak/722683.

Spirit of the nation as shown by these letters seems quite excellent. Cannot see that there is any general demand for reply to German propaganda. Advise no action. (Sgd.) H. DENVER (*Return to Ld. Beetle, Room 6*).

WIMSEY PAPERS—X

Mr. Ingleby, Copy-writer in Pym's Publicity, Ltd., to Mr. Hankin, Head of the Copy Department in that establishment.

13 PEMMICAN ROAD, WIMBLEDON.

13.1.40.

DEAR MR. HANKIN,

I greatly appreciate the kindness of your letter, but I'm afraid I can't change my mind. The fact is, I have developed a conscience of a sort. After all these years in advertising, I'm pretty hard-boiled, but to my own surprise I find there's still a vulnerable spot in me.

I'm quite well aware that business has to be carried on, and that it can't be carried on without advertisement. As a matter of fact, I don't much mind—never have minded—the sort of direct lying we put out. It's labelled "advertisement," and if the public believe everything we tell them, they have been warned. And they have got some sort of check on it. If we say somebody's soap is made only of the purest ingredients, and neglect to add that one of the ingredients is the purest pumice, the "discerning housewife" has a chance to discover the facts and has only herself to thank if she goes on buying the stuff after the first spoilt pair of sheets.

What I can't stomach is the indirect lying in the daily Press. It's always a pretty bad joke, but in war-time it gets beyond a joke. All this righteous indignation poured out in the name of the Gallant Troops or the Great British People whenever there's a hint of Government interference with the sacred rights of Branded Goods! I daresay the public ought to keep their eyes skinned. Anybody confronted with a leaderful of wrath about the pooling of This and That has only to turn over the pages of his favourite organ and see how many thousand pounds' worth of advertising it carries for Branded This and Proprietary That, and discount the righteous wrath accordingly. Possibly I am a scrupulous fool. But I don't think it's scruple so much as sheer damned irritation.

It's not that I don't believe in a free Press. It would be a bad thing if even that kind of criticism were censored away. I shouldn't mind if I were equally free to say to the umpteen millions of readers all over the country, "That's all right, but do remember that papers have to please their advertisers." But no paper is going to make its columns free to letters of *that* sort, and I hate being made to feel helpless.

If only one could get a platform, one could say to these poor goops, "Do realise that, in the end, you can be the masters! Policy depends on advertising, but

advertising depends in the long run on circulation. If enough of you stop taking a paper, its advertising revenue will fall off and its space-rates drop. A consumers' strike will bring any commercial body to heel." But they wouldn't do it, because they want the football news or the racing news or the fashions, so they swallow the pill of policy with the sugar. The public is fair game, very likely—but, nevertheless——

This is a queer line for me to take, isn't it? "Ingleby's always so cynical." That's why I write what you are good enough to call "convincing copy." But I've suddenly got a distaste for the game. I'm a coward, too. I don't propose—you needn't imagine it for a moment—to give up my time and energies to enlightening the public mind. I've managed to wangle an Army job, and I'm clearing out, washing my hands, behaving exactly like Pontius Pilate and all the other respectable people who let crimes go on because it's too much trouble to try and stop them. So my cynicism holds good, you see.

You've always been very kind to me, and I have a lot to thank you for, so I thought I'd prefer to tell you the truth, for once. I'm not taking a self-righteous line about the people who stick to the job. I admire those who put their shoulders to the wheel, even when the waggon has stuck fast in the midden. I've no right to the luxury of being fastidious. I despise myself for not having the guts either to shove or to take a spade to the midden. I'm the worst sort of Laodicean, and propose to spew myself out with the least possible delay.

The gist of all this rigmarole is that I can't see my way to withdraw my resignation, and have written to that effect to Mr. Pym—putting it on the ground of "National Service," God forgive me! Please accept my assurance that nothing could be less heroic than my conduct, and believe me,—Very gratefully yours,

C. INGLEBY.

Harriet, Lady Peter Wimsey, to Mr. Paul Delagardie, in London.

TALBOYS,
GREAT PAGFORD, HERTS.

15.1.40.

DEAR UNCLE PAUL,

Your amusing letter came just in time to put me in a good temper and prevent me from writing a stinker to Helen, which would only have aroused family prejudice and done the Ministry of Instruction and Morale no good at all. I'll send her a postcard, and make my complaint to your sympathetic ear instead.

It was only a trifle, really. For the last four months I have been badgering H. for speakers for our W.R.I., and got nothing but evasive promises. Now the M.I.M.

want to send someone down, and Helen is “astonished” because I can’t let her have a date before the summer. She knows perfectly well that we have to get our lists out early—she had plenty of experience of that kind of thing at Duke’s Denver. But because she is in an official position, she pretends to be “astonished.”

The rulers of this country seem to live in a perpetual state of “astonishment.” They are “astonished” that anybody should think the German propaganda needs answering—surely the spirit of the people is too good to allow them to listen to what the Germans say. (It jolly well needs to be good—you can depress the boldest spirit by neglect and indifference, and it’s not fair to leave the common man to defend his bit of the moral front without leaders or weapons.) The P.M. is reported to be “astonished” at the “strong reaction” among the people and in the Press over the Belisha business. But obviously the people are going to get a bit of a jolt when the War Office swaps horses in mid-battle, so to speak, without any warning or preparation; and obviously the Press, who have been suffering from headline-starvation for weeks, are going to smack their lips over the feast—so why be “astonished”?

When the Russo-German Pact was signed, the Government proclaimed themselves not only “astonished,” but “astounded” and “thunderstruck.” If they were, they’d no business to be, since any intelligent person who could read had had the probability of something of that kind dinned into his mind for months and years. Governments ought to be able to read, and they ought to know how people are going to react to things. If they are “astonished,” then it simply means that they don’t know how the people of this country are thinking and feeling—which is the one thing that a representative government *must* know, or what is it there for? I’m quite sure Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria didn’t spend their time being “astonished” by their subjects’ feelings—they *knew*; and Ministers and Parliaments ought to know, too—they’re paid to know it. If novelists weren’t better psychologists than politicians appear to be, they might whistle for their royalties. And yet writers are supposed to be a dreamy, unpractical lot! But one can’t blame the politicians too much. The people put them where they are, under the impression that “practical men” are the sort to get things done. As a nation we don’t trust the men of imagination and don’t put them in power, so we’ve really only ourselves to thank when our leaders are “astonished” at every glimpse of the obvious.

And it’s true that the “imaginatives” tend to hold aloof from public affairs. They feel it’s their job to show and to teach, and leave the rest of the world to do the organising; but it looks as though, without imagination, you can’t even organise things properly. And all the time there’s this perpetual fight against stupidity, and the

commercial mind that battens on stupidity. Trying to get people to *see* and *act* with imagination is like trying to hack one's way through a jungle with a penknife. But if you give up trying—well, there's Germany to look at. Even the low-brows ought to realise by now that a country that allows its intellectuals to be rendered completely impotent is not a very edifying spectacle.

So much for that—and now read me your little lecture on “*la raison*” and the superiority of the French attitude to life. I quite agree it's time we went back to learning from the French. They are our Allies, and we shared their civilisation for a good many centuries! . . .

(The remainder of the letter deals with family affairs.)

WIMSEY PAPERS—XI

Mr. Paul Delagardie to Lady Peter Wimsey at Talboys.

CHATEAU L'OREILLER,
EDREDON-SUR-LE-NEZ,
LA GRIPPE,
ANGLETERRE.

January 22nd, 1940.

MY DEAR HARRIET,

As you will see by the address, I have fallen victim to the English climate. *Rassure-toi*. My malady has passed the feverish and entered the catarrhal stage; I mention it only to excuse the inelegance of my handwriting and a certain lack of intellectual clarity which will no doubt betray itself in my epistolary style.

My child, I hasten to answer your letter which finds me full of sympathy. It is indeed a strange misfortune that in the England of today the two most excellent of her national characteristics should have suffered a public divorce. I refer, of course, to the poetic imagination and the talent for practical statesmanship. I believe this has never been the case before, or never to the same extent. Francis Bacon was no isolated phenomenon. That poets should be politicians and diplomats men of letters was a commonplace so long as England shared her culture with the Continent. Account for it how you will, learning and imagination were never despised until the whole population became—I will not say “educated,” for it is not that, but at any rate literate. You see the result of this unhappy development in that lack of vision in public life of which you very properly complain. And you are right in saying that it is the writers and thinkers who must exert themselves, at whatever personal sacrifice, to close the gap, for if they wait till the other side makes the advance they will wait for ever.

If I say that they order this matter better in France, you will laugh—here is Uncle Paul riding his old hobby-horse. But it is true that the man of letters finds it easier *là-bas* to secure a recognised place in the machinery of public life. Our neighbours have not that English tendency to regard a man's art and poetry, like his religion, as a private and personal indulgence. It is, I suppose, that very tendency which was held in check so long as English letters and civilisation derived their life-blood from the common European source. Even in the fourteenth century the Englishman was held to be insular; yet the *educated* Englishman of all centuries down to the present was far more cosmopolitan in his method of thought than he is today; and it was he who then guided public affairs. In those days, travel was difficult and, for that reason,

educative: one could not make the tour of the world in few weeks, finding a stereotype of England in every foreign hotel.

And since, my dear, you propose turning your intelligence to the service of your country, may I mention to you something which gives me considerable pain and disquiet? I am distressed by the failure of all our public bodies and national organs to forge any links of sympathy between ourselves and the French people at this important juncture. True, we have an Allied command; true, we have a united Economic Front—but there it seems to me to end. Neither in the newspapers, nor in broadcasting, nor in any other way do I detect any attempt to make Britain aware of France nor yet to recommend Britain to the French. We treat our partner, indeed, as the Englishman treats his wife—we love, honour, and take her for granted. This seems to me a great folly, as well as a great discourtesy. A true understanding between our two countries would be a noble foundation for an intelligent peace and a united Europe—yet I think we felt more in common with France in the days when she was our “sweet enemy” than we do today, when she is our closest friend and ally. And we ought to take pains to understand France, for there is a great community of culture and interests, despite a great difference of language and temperament. Understanding under these circumstances is easier, perhaps, than with a nation like America, where a likeness of language tends to obscure from us a profound unlikeness of tradition and outlook.

What do *I* want to see done? A great many things are possible. The B.B.C. could do so much. Concerts of French music, little dramas of French history, talks about French literature or performances of French plays, a running commentary from time to time upon French life under war-time conditions, an exchange of views between—shall we say?—French and English housewives, or what not? And in the papers, articles on these subjects, photographs, stories—*que veux-tu?* I do not ask for a heavy educational propaganda—that would defeat its own purpose—nor for the wagging of flags, such as we suffered from too much in the last war. I ask only for a little direction to be given to our thoughts and sympathies. I find more pictures, more headlines, more news, more gossip, devoted to other countries—to Finland, to Russia, to America, to Italy, to the various neutrals, and above all to Germany—than to our ally in arms. And I cannot think this to be wise or right.

We say we stand for liberty and democracy—is there any nation that has so good a right to speak on these subjects as France? We are concerned for the good treatment of political minorities and foreign colonies—cannot France offer us a varied and important experience in such matters? We wish to preserve our Mediterranean civilisation—through whom, if not through France, did we inherit that

civilisation? We are proud in a very particular way of our mongrel race and our noble mixed language double-rooted in Saxon and Latin—have we forgotten that France is one-half of that race and the more intellectual half of that language?

And besides all this, ought we not to try very hard to make the spirit of our own people known to the people of France? Do we suppose ourselves so naturally amiable as to capture their affections without the politeness of a trifling exertion? I fear we are too complacent.

Here, my dear Harriet, is a task for you writers. You have the imagination which the politicians so singularly lack. You must write, you must speak, you must besiege the Press and the wireless; you must even endeavour to impress your opinion upon the Ministry of Instruction and Morale, and if they are “astonished” and inform you that the spirit of Allied understanding is excellent and needs no fostering, you must nevertheless persevere. Keep in your mind that it is this very complacency which makes the incidence of divorce so high in the British home, and that an ally, like a wife, must be won daily with kind and modest attentions. You yourself, *mon enfant*, are satisfied with your husband—I am happy to know it; but let me assure you that Peter would have been as complacent as the average Briton had I not taken his education in hand from the beginning and impressed upon him that a partnership cannot flourish without a continual effort of intelligent planting and pruning and the assiduous rooting-up of the chickweed of indolence.

With this fine horticultural metaphor, I will leave the subject to your consideration. Believe me, my dear child, your very affectionate uncle,

PAUL AUSTEN DELAGARDIE.

*From Lord Peter Wimsey, somewhere abroad, to Harriet, his wife, at Talboys.
(Extract.)*

. . . . You are a writer—there is something you must tell the people, but it is difficult to express. You must find the words.

Tell them, this is a battle of a new kind, and it is they who have to fight it, and they must do it themselves and alone. They must not continually ask for leadership—they must lead themselves. This is a war against submission to leadership, and we might easily win it in the field and yet lose it in our own country.

I have seen the eyes of the men who ask for leadership, and they are the eyes of slaves. The new kind of leaders are not like the old, and the common people are not protected from *them* as they were from *us*. In our time their ignorance was a protection, but now they have eaten knowledge and are left naked. I have no time to explain myself properly, but you will understand.

It's not enough to rouse up the Government to do this and that. You must rouse the people. You must make them understand that their salvation is in themselves and in each separate man and woman among them. If it's only a local committee or amateur theatricals or the avoiding being run over in the black-out, the important thing is each man's *personal responsibility*. They must not look to the State for guidance—they must learn to guide the State. Somehow you must contrive to tell them this. It is the only thing that matters.

I can't very well tell you just how and why this conviction has been forced upon me, but I have never felt more certain of anything. To be certain of something is rather an achievement for me, isn't it? Well, there it is—I am perfectly certain for once. . . .

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

The headers which appeared on each week's part have been removed.

[The end of *The Wimsey Papers—The Wartime Letters and Documents of the Wimsey Family* by Dorothy L. Sayers]