

## 1921

Books published:

Richard Aldington, *Medallions in Clay*

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In the 1920s Flint's time-consuming work commitments, and family troubles and concerns, together with his growing feeling of self-doubt and disillusionment about continuing to write poetry while having it ignored or rejected, led him gradually to restrict his literary activities for the most part to spasmodic bouts of translation, and occasional criticism and reviewing.

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### 203. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Malthouse Cottage,  
Padworth,  
Nr. Reading,  
Berks.  
14/1/21

Mon brave,

Si je ne t'ai pas écrit pendant ces derniers temps c'est que je me suis trouvé tout occupé à mettre ma maison en ordre et je craignais de t'être importun. Je ne sais quoi penser de ta lettre. Avoir un salaire de £570, une femme jeune, belle, saine, qui t'est dévoué, se plonger dans un travail assez intéressant, aussi utile, aussi sûr que celui dont tu t'occupes, enfin avoir un bon petit réputation de poète, d'homme de lettres, de "pundit" en littérature français – voilà ce que j'appelle le bonheur pour un mortel dans cette terre où tout n'est que larmes et poussière. Qu'est-ce que tu as? Est-ce que quelque malheur, dont je reste forcément ignorant, te frappe? Quelle est cette abîme où tu crois sombrer? Explique-toi donc. Est-ce que tu as fait un enfant à ta femme? Vas donc! Nous avons vu des choses pires en France. Enfin – dis-moi ton peine, et je te ferai connaître ma philosophie souriante et désabusé.

Si tes nouvelles sont vraies, c'est moi qui aura besoin d'être plaigné! Si Richmond quitte le [*Times Literary Supp.*], si Murry en est fait directeur, je crois que c'est fini pour moi, fini ma carrière de dictateur des capotes – pardon, lettres – française, fini cette vie de doux lectures, de songeries, où je me plais tant! Naturellement Murry ne me flanquera pas à la porte, mais petit à petit je serai doucement congédié, pour faire place à ces Messieurs, comme Forster,<sup>1</sup> comme Shanks, comme Huxley (qui a beaucoup plus de talent que moi) et autres moins dignes mais qui ont le bonheur d'agréeer à Monseigneur. Je serai fort fâché, fort triste, fort indigné, fort pauvre enfin; mais je suis arrivé à une assez belle indifférence. Je chercherai un emploi quelconque – et je continuerai de lire et d'écrire quand je peux.

Je t'envoie deux livres dont on m'a expédié des duplicatas. Je te conseille fortement de lire les oeuvres de Loti,<sup>2</sup> si tu n'a déjà fait – c'est un poète en prose des plus magnifiques. Lis mon article sur son 'Mort de Philae' au *Lit. Supp.*

Je garde un exemplaire de quelques poèmes curieuses de Valéry<sup>3</sup> que je vais "reviewer" si tu n'en veux pas.

Vas, remets-toi dans ton assiette! Cesses un peu de te taquiner et surtout dépouilles-toi de cet imbécile d'idée que tu es ou dois être un homme distingué, un homme pas comme les autres. On n'est jamais grand que si on se fiche de la grandeur; on n'est jamais heureux que si on accepte la vie telle qu'elle est, que si on se dit dans le coeur le grand "motto d'humanité":

Pulvis et umbra sumus!<sup>4</sup>

A toi,

R.

*[My dear fellow,*

*If I haven't written to you of late it's because I've been quite busy putting my house in order, and I was afraid of bothering*

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1. E.M. Forster (1879-1970), English novelist, short-story writer, essayist and critic.
  2. Pierre Loti (1850-1923), French novelist.
  3. Paul Valéry (1871-1945), French poet.
  4. "We are but some dust and a shadow", Horace, *Odes*, IV, vii. I

*you. I don't know what to think about your letter. With a salary of £570, a young, beautiful, healthy, devoted wife, and immersed in quite interesting work, as useful and as secure as yours, finally, with a decent little reputation as a poet, a man of letters, a "pundit" of French literature – that's what I call happiness for a mortal on this earth where everything is but tears and dust. What's the matter with you? Are you being hit by some misfortune, about which I'm bound to remain ignorant? What is this abyss into which you think you are sinking? Please explain. Have you got your wife pregnant? Come now! We saw worse things in France. In a word – tell me your trouble, and I'll make you acquainted with my smiling and disenchanting philosophy.*

*If your news is true, I'm the one who will need to be pitied! If Richmond leaves the Times Literary Supplement, if Murry is made director, I think it's all over for me, the end of my career as a dictator of French letters – sorry, French literature, the end of a life of gentle reading and dreaming, which provide me with so much pleasure! Of course Murry won't sack me, but gradually I will be gently dismissed, to make room for those gentlemen, like Forster, like Shanks, like Huxley (who is far more talented than me) and others less worthy but who have the good fortune to agree with His Lordship. I will be very angry, very sad, very indignant, in fact very poor; but I've arrived at a quite beautiful state of indifference. I'll look for some sort of job – and I'll carry on reading and writing when I can.*

*I'm sending you two books I have duplicates of. I strongly advise you to read Loti's works, if you haven't already done so – he is one of the most magnificent prose poets. Read my article on his 'Mort de Philae' in the Literary Supplement.*

*I'm keeping a copy of some strange poems by Valéry which I'm going to "review" if you don't want to.*

*Come on now, buck yourself up! Stop worrying for a bit, and above all get rid of this idiotic idea that you are or ought to be a distinguished person, a man unlike other men. One is never great until one starts not giving a damn about greatness; one is only ever happy when one accepts life as it is, when one says to oneself inwardly the great "motto of humanity":*

*We are but some dust and a shadow!  
All the best,  
R.]*

## 204. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Malthouse Cottage

24/1/21

Mon brave,

Est-ce que tu es sot? Que veux-tu? Tu n'a pas fait l'univers; tu n'as pas la responsabilité de ses méfaits. Tu as perdu ta confiance dans la vie, dis-tu? Et pourquoi faut-il avoir de la confiance dans ce qui est "éminemment cocasse"? Es-tu malade? Ou bien est-ce que tu as pris le pli du malheur, et, n'ayant pas des ennuis de l'argent, tu te trouves un âme maladif? O René de Highbury, réjouis-toi! Je te conseille de laisser les livres français, de laisser la critique, (je ferai les poètes au *Times*) de laisser enfin tes pensées noires. Soignes-toi, n'abuse pas des actes vénériens, fumes le moins possible; intéresse-toi au monde visible, au monde qui t'entourne. Tu as une femme intelligente qui comprend le théâtre et la musique – laisse-la t'emmener à des concerts, à des drames de son goût. Ne te claustres pas trop avec tes livres et tes rêves d'un siècle malade – tous les siècles sont malades pour les hystériques; tous les siècles sont bons pour les gros cochons comme moi, les gros rieurs, les gros mangeurs, les détresseurs de filles. Est-ce que tu es maladif, populacier, guirlande de Julie,<sup>1</sup> mièvre, bon papa, et marchant de caco avec tes abîmes et tes peines et tes emmerdements! Vas donc te faire chrétien, (pauvre âme!) si le courage te manque pour affronter la vie saine et large! Quoi! tu as toutes les choses de la bonheur et tu obstines à te dire que tu es mélancolique, malheureux, je ne sais quoi. Bah, t'es maboule.

Suis content que le bon Spire va se trouver à Londres. Je ferai volontiers le petit trajet pour un si bon ami. Arrange-toi un rendezvous à ta guise.

Les socialistes? Mon brave, ce sont des gens qu'il faut respecter infiniment, parce qu'ils ont pitié de la misère humaine, mais ils sont aussi des gens dont il faut se méfier hautement, parce que c'est par les idéalistes que le mal est entré dans le monde. Louis XIV, c'est bon, c'est doux,

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1. Probably a reference to Julie, the heroine of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761).

c'est respectueux; mais la Montagne,<sup>1</sup> mais Robespierre,<sup>2</sup> mais des philosophes humanitaires à la Trotsky,<sup>3</sup> cela ne connaît pas les mesures, cela ne fait jamais des bons trucs avec notre lacheté si humaine. L'homme moyen sensuel, comme moi, se fiche des pouvoirs politiques; que ceux que cela amuse fassent le gouvernement; tous ce que l'h[omme].m[oien].s[ensuel]. demande c'est que l'on ne l'embête pas trop. Mais la réforme, la révolution, en voilà des embêtements profonds! Donc, vive Georges V (qui est un crapule, sans doute) et à bas Lansbury (qui est un bon garçon, sans doute); – donc à toi,

R.

*[My dear old chap,*

*You really are stupid! What do you want? You didn't create the universe; you are not responsible for your misdeeds. You say you've lost confidence in life? And why should one have confidence in what is "eminently farcical"? Are you ill? Or perhaps you've won a trick in the game of misfortune, and, not having any money worries, you find you've got a sickly soul? O René of Highbury, rejoice! I advise you to put aside your French books and criticism (I'll do the poets for the Times), and finally your dark thoughts. Look after yourself, don't overdo the sex act, smoke as little as possible, take an interest in the visible world, the world around you. You have an intelligent wife who understands the theatre and music – let her take you to the concerts and plays she likes. Don't shut yourself away too much with your books and your dreams of a sick century – all centuries are sick for hysterical people; all centuries are good for swine like me, cheerful types, big eaters, girl bandits. You really are sickly, one of the rabble, one of Julie's garlands, precious, a good father, and a shit merchant with your abysses and your damned problems! Go and become a Christian (poor soul!) if you lack the courage to face up to healthy, expansive living! What! You possess all the elements of happiness and you persist in saying you are melancholy, unhappy, I don't know what. Bah, you're a crackpot.*

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1. La Montagne: the group of extreme radical delegates who, in 1792, began to occupy the highest seats of the Convention.
  2. Maximilien François Marie Isidore de Robespierre (1758-94), French revolutionary and Jacobin leader.
  3. Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), Russian revolutionary and communist theorist.

*I'm glad that good old Spire is going to be in London. I'd willingly make the short journey for such a good friend. Fix up a meeting to suit you.*

*The socialists? My dear chap, they are people we should respect profoundly, because they show compassion for human misery, but they are also people we should mistrust greatly, because it's through idealists that evil entered the world. Louis XIV is good, gentle, considerate; but la Montagne, Robespierre, and humanitarian philosophers of the Trotsky type, have no sense of moderation, they never do anything good with our so human weakness. The average sensual man, like me, doesn't give a damn about political power; let those who enjoy it form governments; all that the average sensual man asks for is not to be pestered too much. Reform and revolution are profound troubles! So, long live George V (who is doubtless a villain) and down with Lansbury (who is doubtless a good sort); – so, all the best to you,  
R.]*

## 205. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Lundi

[undated, but possibly early 1921?]

Mon brave,

Puisque le nommé Bossard<sup>1</sup> m'a envoyé ses livres je vous renvoie les quatre exemplaires que vous avez eu la gentillesse de me prêter. Si tu n'as pas lu les mémoires de la reine Margot<sup>2</sup> je te conseille fortement de le faire. Ces mémoires sont extrêmement de mon goût. J'éprouve un frisson en lisant les pages que cette bonne princesse a écrit sur les massacres de St. Barthélemy. Ce bruit à la porte, ce cri de "Navarre", cette entrée précipitée, cette chemise trempée de sang, cet autre homme tué "à trois pas" de la reine elle-même – voilà qui est impressionnant. Et plus, remarque avec quel parfait convenance elle parle de ses amants. "M. de la Mole a perdu sa vie" – rien que ça. Vous savez peut-être (par Stendhal)<sup>3</sup> le conte de la

1. Bossard, French publisher.

2. Marguerite de Valois (1553-1615), also known as La Reine Margot.

3. Stendhal, pseudonym of Henri Beyle (1783-1842), French novelist.

reine et de la tête de la Mole? Enfin, lis ces mémoires si tu peux te débarrasser de tes préjugés canailles et sans-culottes!

Je viens d'éreinter le dernier livre de l'homme aux cochons – c'est à dire Léon Bloy.<sup>1</sup> Il est mort, c'est vrai, mais il a vécu d'un tenu déplorable. Haïr ses ennemis, avoir besoin de l'argent, se croire grand homme, se donner comme ami particulier Dieu – voilà des faiblesses bien humaines; mais a-t-on jamais vu un mélange de ces fautes aussi désagréable que celui qui s'appelait "Léon Bloy"? Tu l'as trouvé un verve incomparable; moi, je dis, avec Villiers [de l'Isle-Adam]: "Il déshonore la pauvreté"!

Il fait bon ici. je lis, je me promène, je cause avec ce pauvre Jean Pillules, enfin je m'amuse bien sagement. Je n'ai jamais pu savoir si je me trouve plus heureux avec ou sans femme. Chaque état a du bon et du mauvais. On est plus tranquille, plus intelligent quand on est seul; on est plus confortable, plus humain, plus bête avec une femme. Pourquoi s'acharne-t-on tellement pour avoir "une p'tite femme à soi"? Est-ce bête! J'ai au[ssi] remarqué que les femmes en général sont à tout le monde qui leur font l'honneur de les désirer!

Tu vas bâtir des hypothèses saugrenues sur ces quelques remarques, et me supposer ou jaloux ou las. Il n'en est rien. J'aime à faire des folies, mais à condition que je le sais. Et, fin tout, ce n'est jamais le bonheur d'une femme que nous cherchons mais notre propre plaisir. On se trouve presque toujours quand on s'attribue des sentiments désintéressés.

Tu vas croire que je lis La Rochefoucault [sic] à ce moment?<sup>2</sup> Nullement. Je pense. Et bien! C'est presque obligatoire que je fais des pensées de la taille de ceux d'un de la Rochefoucault!

Bien le bon jour, gros bête, tiens-toi tranquille; je te vois un bel avenir de bourgeois, – fonctionnaire bien rangé, bien nippé, bien léché, bien libéral, bien doux, sans écarts,

1. Léon Bloy (1846-1917), French novelist. Aldington may be referring here to Bloy's last work, the eighth part of his journal, published in 1920, *La Porte des Humbles*. With the reference to "cochons", Aldington is alluding to the third part of Bloy's journal, *Quatre ans de captivité à Cochons-sur-Marne* (1905).
2. François de Marsillac, duc de Rochefoucauld (1630-1680), French courtier, soldier, and moralist, whose *Maximes* (1665) consist of brief, wide-ranging reflections of extreme concision.



sans mauvaises pensées, sans souci du lendemain, bon père, bon époux, bon fils, bon citoyen, – pardon – camarade! Va donc! Si tu te sens des dispositions capables de te faire ensevelir à l'abbaye de Westminster, préviens-moi!

Ton ami qui t'aime,

R.

P.S. As-tu remarqué que les auteurs dans la collection Bossard ne nous ont pas écrit des dédicaces? Est-ce curieux? Crois-tu que c'est parce qu'ils sont des classiques méconnus, et qu'ils boudent?

*[My dear chap,*

*Since the person named Bossard has sent me his books I am sending you the four copies that you were kind enough to lend me. If you haven't read the memoirs of Queen Margot I strongly advise you to do so. These memoirs are very much to my taste. I experience a shiver when I read the pages that this good princess wrote about the St. Bartholomew massacres. That noise at the door, that shout of "Navarre", that rapid entrance, that shirt drenched in blood, that other man killed "three paces" from the queen herself – all that is impressive. And also, notice with what perfect propriety she speaks of her lovers. "M. de la Mole lost his life" – that's all. You know perhaps (via Stendhal) the story of the queen and the head of de la Mole? In short, read these memoirs if you can rid yourself of your low-class, republican prejudices!*

*I've just exhausted the last book by the pig man – that is, Léon Bloy. He's dead, it's true, but he lived in a deplorable manner. Hating one's enemies, being short of money, making God one's special friend – these are true human weaknesses; but has such a disagreeable mixture of these faults ever been seen as in the one person of "Léon Bloy"? You found him to be incomparably vigorous; but I, along with Villiers de l'Isle d'Adam, say: "He brings disgrace upon poverty"!*

*Everything's fine here. I read, walk, chat with this poor John Ball [?],<sup>1</sup> in a word I am enjoying myself sensibly.*

1. Aldington may be referring to an acquaintance with the same name as John Ball (d. 1381), the leader of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381.



*I could never be sure if I was happier with or without a woman. Each state has its good and bad side. One is more at peace, more intelligent when one is on one's own; one is more comfortable, more human, more foolish with a woman. Why are we so determined to have "our own little woman"? How stupid! I've also noticed that women in general belong to everyone who does them the honour of desiring them!*

*You'll construct ludicrous hypotheses based on these few comments, and will reckon I'm either jealous or weary. Nothing of the sort. I like moments of lunacy, but on condition that I am aware of them. And, in the final analysis, it's never a woman's happiness that we seek but our own pleasure. One nearly always discovers oneself when one attributes disinterested feelings to oneself.*

*You'll be thinking that I'm reading La Rochefoucauld at the moment!*

*Now, you stupid lout, take things quietly; I can see a fine middle-class future for you – a steady civil servant, nicely rigged out, well polished, very liberal, very mild, well behaved, with no bad thoughts, without a care for the morrow, a good father, a good husband, a good son, a good citizen – sorry – comrade! Come on now! If you feel the inclination to have yourself buried in Westminster Abbey, give me due warning!*

*Your loving friend,*

*R.*

*P.S. Have you noticed that the authors in the Bossard collection have not dedicated their books to us? How odd! Do you think it's because they are unrecognised classics, and because they're sulking?]*

## 206. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Malthouse Cottage

1/3/21

Dear Frank,

Merci!

I am sending back 5 books which I have. Don't despise Ponchon, he's rather good.<sup>1</sup> I shall certainly "do" some French poet articles. Any hints you feel like sending will be most welcome. Glad to hear what you say of *Le Père Humilié* – I find Claudel not worth the candle!

I like the excuses you fabricate – you villain – for getting back the books! But [you] shall have them. It is well enough for you to collect poetry, if I collect prose – we can mutually support each other's ignorance.

Yes I have the 3 *N.R.F.* books you mention. Morand's *Tendres Stocks* (prose) is A.1.<sup>2</sup>

I've done an article (short) on Spire.

I have glanced at Cournos's book.<sup>3</sup> He has a "talent âpre de Juif" [grim Jewish talent], a pungent *verve* which I find amusing, as I used to find Huysmans and Bloy. Really, Cournos is exceptionally gifted. His portraits of the [illegible word]'s, diabolical in malice, enough *vraisemblance* [plausibility] to hit 'em off, but every action and motive misinterpreted for the worse. Will discuss this more when we meet.

Come down, my dear old lad, by all means; I shall feel so happy to see you once more. Just as soon as I can, I am going to get a large bed, so that you & your wife can run down from Sat. to Mon. It is only 80 minutes from Paddington, & you can be in town by 10 on Monday. Don't you think it would do you both good during the summer?

The rest of our matters we'll talk when you come.

Thine

Richard

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1. Raoul Ponchon (1848-1937), one of the 'fantaisiste' group of poets. His collection, *La Muse au Cabaret*, was published in 1920.
  2. Paul Morand (1888-1976), French novelist and poet. His novel, *Tendres Stocks*, was published in 1920.
  3. Cournos's first novel, *The Mask*, was published in 1919; his second, *The Wall*, in 1921. The latter is probably the one referred to by Aldington.

## 207. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Malthouse Cottage  
23/3/21

My dear Frank,

Herewith an Easter egg from Amy [Lowell] – Imagist royalties she says.<sup>1</sup> You might write & acknowledge it.

Best wishes to the children for Easter.

And come down as soon as you can.

Yours

Richard

## 208. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Malthouse Cottage  
7/4/21

Mon cher,

Do I neglect you? Perhaps it is mere vulgar laziness. But I have no intention of doing so.

I wonder what you will think of the next volume of the *Chapbook*, which I have edited.<sup>2</sup> I think it quite a reasonable addition to serious criticism, but Monro feels it is too learned. It was amusing to arrange it. Following my policy of being “sincèrement bête” [genuinely stupid], I have not announced on the cover that I am the editor!

When are you coming down to see me? Let me know in plenty of time so that I can make arrangements. Don't do one of your impulse stunts! If you want to bring your wife & one child, you can get put up near (about 200 yds away) provided you are not too middle class in your ideas to object to a pub. You can all take meals here – the only difficulty as you know being the exiguity of bedroom accommodation.

I don't think it very extraordinary that Hilton<sup>3</sup> should be in

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1. The last Imagist anthology was published in 1917.
  2. *Chapbook*, No. 24, June 1921, consisted of 'A List of 101 Commendable Plays' with brief critical and informative comments on each play.
  3. John Hilton (1880-1943), head of the Statistics Division at the Ministry of Labour; later Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Cambridge.

your office; in fact, from what I know of you both you were marked from your cradles for the job. The only thing which disturbs me is that Hilton should be yr superior officer & not you his; but I think it must be because you are a little more intelligent than he is.

Come & see me as soon as you can, & bring with you any rotten poets you can bear to lend me for a few weeks.

Ever thine

Richard

## 209. RICHARD ALDINGTON TO F.S. FLINT

Malthouse Cottage

3/5/21

Mon cher,

J'ai été assez occupé des choses à arranger. Il faut bien que j'ai perdu tous mes sensibilités dans l'Artois et près de la Somme, car j'ai assisté à l'enterrement de mon père sans trop d'émotion. Je crois que la vue de tant d'hommes morts, mutilés, défigurés, jaunes et couverts de mouches m'a fort émoussé la sensibilité; un enterrement en cercueil, avec un prêtre, des assistants, en noir &c. me semble un espèce de jeu sociale. Pour moi les morts ces [*sic*] des visages jaunes, des flaques de sang, du khaki boueux, des enterrements hatifs sous les obus – la mort civile ne me touche pas. L'apparat est presque factice quand on a vu la simplicité des bataillons qui se succédaient aux rivages de la mort. C'est comme l'alcoolisation par l'eau de vie – les autres boissons ne font pas d'effet. J'ai eu l'intoxication de la mort en gros; donc, la mort en détail, bien qu'il me touche de près, ne peut pas m'émouvoir beaucoup.

Apropos des meubles – il me vient beaucoup de mon père. Je vais donner quelques-uns à ma mère, et prêter les autres à Mme. Yorke; mais si tu veux, je pourrais peut-être te céder d'autres à bon marché. Je crains que les lits ne soient trop petits, mais il s'y trouve de bons antiques en fait de tables et d'armoires. Tu dois y penser.

Je crois que tu te trompes au sujet de mon article –

lise donc l'article d'Allard au même sujet dans la *N.R.F.* D'ailleurs, tout cela m'est parfaitement indifférent. Je suit un courbe de pensée que tu n'as pas pris la peine de comprendre; tu es toujours dans les parages de 1910! Donc.

Au revoir, mon brave,

Ton R.

*[My dear fellow,  
I've been quite busy arranging things. I must have lost all my sensitivity in the Artois and near the Somme, for I was present at my father's burial without too much feeling. I think that the sight of so many dead men, mutilated, disfigured, yellow and covered with flies, has seriously blunted my sensitivity; a burial in a coffin, with a priest, assistants, in black, etc., seems to me to be a sort of social game. For me the dead are yellow faces, pools of blood, muddy khaki, hurried burials under shellfire – a civilian death doesn't touch me. The pomp is almost false when you've seen the unaffected way battalion after battalion followed one another on the shores of death. It's like being addicted to brandy – other drinks don't have any effect. I became addicted to wholesale death; so, retail death, although it touches me closely, cannot move me greatly.*

*About the furniture – a lot has come to me from my father. I'm going to give some to my mother, and lend the others to Mrs. Yorke; but if you wish, I could perhaps let you have some of the others cheaply. I fear the beds may be too small, but there are some good antiques as regards tables and wardrobes. Think about it.*

*I think you're wrong about my article – read Allard's article on the same topic in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. Anyway, I'm completely indifferent about all that. I'm following a line of thought that you haven't taken the trouble to understand; you are still in the vicinity of 1910! So.*

Goodbye, old man,

Yours,  
R.]