

(by the taste (or foretaste) of which alone can what you seek in your earthly relationships (love, faithfulness, joy) be maintained, or take on that complexion of reality, of eternal endurance, which every man's heart desires.

44 From a letter to Michael Tolkien 18 March 1941

[Tolkien's maternal ancestors, the Suffields, came from the West Midlands, and were particularly associated with Worcestershire.]

Though a Tolkien by name, I am a Suffield by tastes, talents, and upbringing, and any corner of that county [Worcestershire] (however fair or squalid) is in an indefinable way 'home' to me, as no other part of the world is. Your grandmother, to whom you owe so much – for she was a gifted lady of great beauty and wit, greatly stricken by God with grief and suffering, who died in youth (at 34) of a disease hastened by persecution of her faith¹ – died in the postman's cottage at Rednal,² and is buried at Bromsgrove.

45 To Michael Tolkien

[Michael was now an Officer Cadet at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.]

9 June 1941

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

My dearest Michael,

I was so glad to hear from you. I would have written earlier to-day, only Mummy carried your letter off to Birmingham, before I had time to do more than glance at it. I am afraid that I show up badly as a letter writer: but really I get sick of the pen. Lectures ended on Thursday, and I hoped to get a little while (a) to rest, and (b) to put some order into the garden before 'Schools'¹ begin on Thursday (Corpus Christi). But the everlasting rain has prevented my outdoor work, and lots of extra business prevented any rest. I sympathize with Govt. officials! I have spent most of my time of late drafting rules and regulations,² only to find all kinds of loopholes as soon as they are in print, and only to be cursed and criticized by those who have not done the work, and won't try to understand the aims and objects!

One War is enough for any man. I hope you will be spared a second. Either the bitterness of youth or that of middle-age is enough for a life-time: both is too much. I suffered once what you are going through, if rather differently: because I was very inefficient and unmilitary (and we are alike only in sharing a deep sympathy and feeling for the 'tommy', especially the plain soldier from the agricultural counties). I

did not then believe that the 'old folk' suffered much. Now I know. I tell you I feel like a lame canary in a cage. To carry on the old pre-war job – it is just poison. If only I could do something active! But there it is: I am 'permanently reserved', and as such I have my hands too full even to be a Home Guard. And I cannot even get out o' nights to have a crack with a crony.

Still you are my flesh and blood, and carry on the name. It is something to be the father of a good young soldier. Can't you see why I care so much about you, and why all that you do concerns me so closely? Still, let us both take heart of hope and faith. The link between father and son is not only of the perishable flesh: it must have something of *aeternitas* about it. There is a place called 'heaven' where the good here unfinished is completed; and where the stories unwritten, and the hopes unfulfilled, are continued. We may laugh together yet . . .

Did you see Maxwell (the 'tobacco-controller's')³ account of what the wholesale dealers were doing! They ought to be in quod. . . . Commercialism is a swine at heart. But I suppose the major English vice is *sloth*. And it is to sloth, as much or as more than to natural virtue, that we owe our escape from the overt violences of other countries. In the fierce modern world, indeed, sloth does begin almost to look like a virtue. But it is rather terrifying to see so much of it about, when we are grappling with the Furor Teutonicus.

People in this land seem not even yet to realize that in the Germans we have enemies whose virtues (and they are virtues) of obedience and patriotism are greater than ours in the mass. Whose brave men are just about as brave as ours. Whose industry is about 10 times greater. And who are – under the curse of God – now led by a man inspired by a mad, whirlwind, devil: a typhoon, a passion: that makes the poor old Kaiser look like an old woman knitting.

I have spent most of my life, since I was your age, studying Germanic matters (in the general sense that includes England and Scandinavia). There is a great deal more force (and truth) than ignorant people imagine in the 'Germanic' ideal. I was much attracted by it as an undergraduate (when Hitler was, I suppose, dabbling in paint, and had not heard of it), in reaction against the 'Classics'. You have to understand the good in things, to detect the real evil. But no one ever calls on me to 'broadcast', or do a postscript! Yet I suppose I know better than most what is the truth about this 'Nordic' nonsense. Anyway, I have in this War a burning private grudge – which would probably make me a better soldier at 49 than I was at 22: against that ruddy little ignoramus Adolf Hitler (for the odd thing about demonic inspiration and impetus is that it in no way enhances the purely intellectual stature: it chiefly affects the mere will). Ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making for ever

accursed, that noble northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved, and tried to present in its true light. Nowhere, incidentally, was it nobler than in England, nor more early sanctified and Christianized. . . .

Pray for me. I need it, sorely. I love you.

Your own Father.

46 From a draft to R. W. Chapman 26 November 1941

[George S. Gordon, who died early in 1942, was Tolkien's head of department at Leeds University in the early 1920s, before becoming Professor of English Literature at Oxford and then President of Magdalen College. This draft appears to have been written in reply to a request from Chapman, the Secretary to the Delegates of the Oxford University Press, for reminiscences of Gordon, perhaps to be incorporated into an obituary; Gordon was already known to be terminally ill at the time the letter was written.]

I do not remember dates. Perhaps you know these? I put down some impressions, from which your skill may select a few notes or phrases that may seem appropriate. I associate Leeds with Gordon, although as a matter of fact of my six years there (1920–1925 and one year as a pluralist)¹ the larger part was spent in the company of Abercrombie.²

I remember that (before the last war) Gordon's departure from Oxford³ was viewed with some consternation among the undergraduates of the English School in Oxford; but as a stiff-necked young philologist I did not myself regard the event as important. I first met Gordon at the interview in Leeds (June 1920) for the 'Readership' in English Language: established after the death by drowning of Moorman.⁴ I suppose the title (novel in Leeds), and the high salary (as such things go)⁵ were both due to Gordon and his farsighted policy. I was, I believe, only a substitute for Sisam⁶ (not the least of whose kindnesses was his pointing out the chance to me). But Gordon's kindness and encouragement began at our first meeting. He rescued me from the barren waiting-room, and took me to his house. I remember we spoke of Raleigh⁷ on the tram. As (still) a stiff-necked young philologist, I did not in fact think much of Raleigh – he was not, of course, a good lecturer; but some kind spirit prompted me to say that he was 'Olympian'. It went well; though I only really meant that he reposed gracefully on a lofty pinnacle above my criticism.

I was extraordinarily fortunate. And if I speak so of myself, instead of directly and impersonally of Gordon, it is because my prime feeling and first thoughts of him are always of personal gratitude, of a friend rather than of an academic figure. It is not often in 'universities' that a

*God ána wát.*⁵ But as for sermons! They are bad, aren't they! Most of them from any point of view. The answer to the mystery is prob. not simple; but part of it is that 'rhetoric' (of which preaching is a dept.) is an art, which requires (a) some native talent and (b) learning and practice. The instrument used is v. much more complex than a piano, yet most performers are in the position of a man who sits down to a piano and expects to move his audience without any knowledge of the notes at all. The art can be learned (granted some modicum of aptitude) and can then be effective, in a way, when wholly unconnected with sincerity, sanctity etc. But preaching is complicated by the fact that we expect in it not only a performance, but truth and sincerity, and also at least no word, tone, or note that suggests the possession of vices (such as hypocrisy, vanity) or defects (such as folly, ignorance) in the preacher.

Good sermons require some art, some virtue, some knowledge. Real sermons require some special grace which does not transcend art but arrives at it by instinct or 'inspiration'; indeed the Holy Spirit seems sometimes to speak through a human mouth providing art, virtue and insight he does not himself possess: but the occasions are rare. In other times I don't think an educated person is required to suppress the critical faculty, but it should be kept in order by a constant endeavour to apply the truth (if any), even in cliché form, to oneself exclusively! A difficult exercise.

I was much amused by your account of your journey to Jo'burg on Maundy Thursday. If you fetch up at Bloemfontein I shall wonder if the little old stone bank-house (Bank of South Africa) where I was born is still standing. And I wonder if my Father's grave is there still. I have never done anything about it, but I believe my mother had a stone-cross put up or sent out.⁶ (A. R. Tolkien died 1896). If not it will be lost now, prob., unless there are any records.

64 To Christopher Tolkien

30 April 1944 (FS 20)

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

My dearest:

I have decided to send you another air letter, not an airgraph, in the hope that I may so cheer you up a little more. I do miss you so, and I do find all this mighty hard to bear on my own account and on yours. The utter stupid waste of war, not only material but moral and spiritual, is so staggering to those who have to endure it. And always was (despite the poets), and always will be (despite the propagandists) – not of course that it has not is and will be necessary to face it in an evil world. But so short is human memory and so evanescent are its generations that in

only about 30 years there will be few or no people with that direct experience which alone goes really to the heart. The burnt hand teaches most about fire.

I sometimes feel appalled at the thought of the sum total of human misery all over the world at the present moment: the millions parted, fretting, wasting in unprofitable days – quite apart from torture, pain, death, bereavement, injustice. If anguish were visible, almost the whole of this benighted planet would be enveloped in a dense dark vapour, shrouded from the amazed vision of the heavens! And the products of it all will be mainly evil – historically considered. But the historical version is, of course, not the only one. All things and deeds have a value in themselves, apart from their ‘causes’ and ‘effects’. No man can estimate what is really happening at the present *sub specie aeternitatis*. All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labours with vast power and perpetual success – in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in. So it is in general, and so it is in our own lives. . . . But there is still some hope that things may be better for us, even on the temporal plane, in the mercy of God. And though we need all our natural human courage and guts (the vast sum of human courage and endurance is stupendous, isn’t it?) and all our religious faith to face the evil that may befall us (as it befalls others, if God wills) still we may pray and hope. I do. And you were so special a gift to me, in a time of sorrow and mental suffering, and your love, opening at once almost as soon as you were born, foretold to me, as it were in spoken words, that I am consoled ever by the certainty that there is no end to this. Probable under God that we shall meet again, ‘in hale and in unity’, before very long, dearest, and certain that we have some special bond to last beyond this life – subject of course always to the mystery of free will, by which either of us could throw away ‘salvation’. In which case God would arrange matters differently!

On Thursday I gave 2 lectures and had some troublesome business in town and was too tired to attend the Lewis séance. I hope to see him tomorrow, and read some more of ‘the Ring’. It is growing and sprouting again (I did a whole day at it yesterday to the neglect of many matters) and opening out in unexpected ways. So far in the new chapters Frodo and Sam have traversed Sarn Gebir, climbed down the cliff, encountered and temporarily tamed Gollum. They have with his guidance crossed the Dead Marshes and the slag-heaps of Mordor, lain in hiding outside the main gates and found them impassable, and set out for a more secret entrance near Minas Morghul (formerly M. Ithil). It will turn out to be the deadly Kirith Ungol and Gollum will play false. But at moment they are in Ithilien (which is proving a lovely land); there has been a lot of bother about stewed rabbit; and they have been

captured by Gondorians, and witnessed them ambushing a Swerting army (dark men of South) marching to Mordor's aid. A large elephant of prehistoric size, a war-elephant of the Swertings, is loose, and Sam has gratified a life-long wish to see an Oliphaunt, an animal about which there was a hobbit nursery-rhyme (though it was commonly supposed to be mythical). In the chapter next to be done they will get to Kirith Ungol and Frodo will be caught. Here is the rhyme cited by Sam: Grey as a mouse,/Big as a house,/Nose like a snake,/I make the earth quake,/As I tramp through the grass;/Trees crack as I pass./With horns in my mouth/I walk in the South/Flapping big ears./Beyond count of years/I've stumped round and round,/Never lie on the ground,/Not even to die./Oliphaunt am I,/Biggest of All,/huge, old, and tall./If ever you'd met me,/You wouldn't forget me./If you never do,/You won't think I'm true;/But old Oliphaunt am I,/and I never lie. I hope that has something of the 'nursery rhyme' flavour. On the whole Sam is behaving well, and living up to repute. He treats Gollum rather like Ariel to Caliban.

It is full Maytime by the trees and grass now. But the heavens are full of roar and riot. You cannot even hold a shouting conversation in the garden now, save about 1 a.m. and 7 p.m. – unless the day is too foul to be out. How I wish the 'infernal combustion' engine had never been invented. Or (more difficult still since humanity and engineers in special are both nitwitted and malicious as a rule) that it could have been put to rational uses – if any.

Now we can only link with this flimsy bit of paper! But may it speed to you and arrive safely. I wish that it might be written in Runes beyond the craft of Celebrimbor of Hollin, shining like silver, filled with the visions and horizons that open in my mind. Though I have without you no one to speak my thought. I first began to write the 'H. of the Gnomes'¹ in army huts, crowded, filled with the noise of gramophones – and there you are in the same prison. May you, too, escape – strengthened. Take care of yourself, in soul and body, in all ways proper and possible, for the love that you have to your own Father.

65 From an airgraph to Christopher Tolkien 4 May 1944 (FS 21)

I saw Lewis (solo) on Monday and read another chapter: am busy now with the next; we shall soon be in the shadows of Mordor at last. I will send you some copies, as soon as I can get them made.

foul. Cold, windy; roads littered with torn leaves, and broken blossom. It has veered from SW > W > NW > NE. Buchan is at it (as usual).² I wrote in the morning, wasted an afternoon in footling Board Meetings, and wrote again. P. and Mummy went to the Playhouse at 6. I had some brief peace; a late supper with them (about 9). A new character has come on the scene (I am sure I did not invent him, I did not even want him, though I like him, but there he came walking into the woods of Ithilien): Faramir, the brother of Boromir – and he is holding up the ‘catastrophe’ by a lot of stuff about the history of Gondor and Rohan (with some very sound reflections no doubt on martial glory and true glory): but if he goes on much more a lot of him will have to be removed to the appendices – where already some fascinating material on the hobbit Tobacco industry and the Languages of the West have gone. There has been a battle – with a monstrous Oliphaunt (the Mâmuk of Harad) included – and after a short while in a cave behind a waterfall, I think I shall get Sam and Frodo at last into *Kirith Ungol* and the webs of the Spiders. Then the Great Offensive will burst out. And so with the death of Theoden (by a Nazgûl) and the arrival of the hosts of the White Rider before the Gates of Mordor we shall reach the denouement and the swift unravelling. As soon as I can get the new matter written legibly, I will have it typed and sent to you.

67 From an airgraph to Christopher Tolkien 11 May 1944 (FS 23)

I completed my fourth new chapter (‘Faramir’), which rec’d fullest approbation from C.S.L. and C.W. on Monday morning. I visited church on your behalf. Lunched with Mummy in town. Saw C.S.L. on Tuesday morning. Dined at Pembroke (Rice-Oxley¹ as guest): boring. McCallum seems to think well of Mick’s work.² Rest of time filled with lectures, house, garden (very exigent just now: lawns, hedges, marrow-beds, weeding) & what can be spared for ‘Ring’. Another chapter proceeding, leading to disaster at Kirith Ungol where Frodo is captured. Story then switches back to Gondor, & runs fairly swiftly (I hope) to denouement. Ithilien (you may remember its situation on the map you made) is revealed as rather a lovely land. I wish I had you here, doing something useful and pleasant, completing the maps and typing.

68 From an airgraph to Christopher Tolkien 12 May 1944 (FS 24)

Spent a morning writing and we are now in sight of Minas Morghul. Gardening in sultry (and properly midday) heat this afternoon. . . . I have done nothing about getting new copies typed to send to you of

fresh chapters, as I am pushing on while there is a chance and cannot wait to make fair copy. . . . Very much love to you, and all my thoughts and prayers. How much I wish to know! 'When you return to the lands of the living, and we re-tell our tales, sitting by a wall in the sun, laughing at old grief, you shall tell me then' (Faramir to Frodo).

69 To Christopher Tolkien

14 May 1944 (FS 25)

20 Northmoor Road, Oxford

Well my dearest, here goes to begin a proper letter again . . . I did a certain amount of writing yesterday but was hindered by two things: the need to clear up the study (which had got into the chaos that always indicates literary or philological preoccupation) and attend to business; and trouble with the moon. By which I mean that I found my moons in the crucial days between Frodo's flight and the present situation (arrival at Minas Morghul) were doing impossible things, rising in one part of the country and setting simultaneously in another. Rewriting bits of back chapters took all afternoon! . . . Fr C.¹ gave a pretty stirring little sermon, based on Rogation Days (next Mon – Wed) in which he suggested we were all a lot of untutored robots for not saying Grace; and did not suggest but categorically pronounced Oxford to deserve to be wiped out with fire and blood in the wrath of God for the abominations and wickedness there perpetrated. We all woke up. I am afraid it is all too horribly true. But I wonder if it is *specially* true now? A small knowledge of history depresses one with the sense of the everlasting mass and weight of human iniquity: old, old, dreary, endless repetitive unchanging incurable wickedness. All towns, all villages, all habitations of men – sinks! And at the same time one knows that there is always good: much more hidden, much less clearly discerned, seldom breaking out into recognizable, visible, beauties of word or deed or face – not even when in fact sanctity, far greater than the visible advertised wickedness, is really there. But I fear that in the individual lives of all but a few, the balance is debit – we do so little that is positive good, even if we negatively avoid what is actively evil. It must be terrible to be a priest! . . .

Monday 4 p.m. . . . I saw C.S.L. from 10.45 to 12.30 this morning: heard 2 chapters of his 'Who Goes Home?'² – a new allegory on Heaven and Hell; and I read my 6th new chapter 'Journey to the Cross Roads' with complete approval. So far it has gone well: but I am now coming to the nub, when the threads must be gathered and the times synchronized and the narrative interwoven; while the whole thing has grown so large in significance that the sketches of concluding chapters (written

[1 August] I hear that there is just coming out *First Whispers of the Wind in the Willows*; and the reviews seem favourable. It is published by Kenneth Grahame's widow, but it is not, I gather, notes for the book, but stories (about Toad and Mole etc.) that he wrote in letters to his son. I must get hold of a copy, if poss. I'm afraid I have made a great mistake in making my sequel too long and complicated and too slow in coming out. It is a curse having the epic temperament in an overcrowded age devoted to snappy bits!

78 From a letter to Christopher Tolkien 12 August 1944 (FS 43)

It is longer than I meant to leave since my airgr. of Aug. 8 . . . I read your letters carefully, and of course as is quite right you open your rather troubled heart to us; but do not think that any detail of your exterior life, your friends, acquaintance, or the most minor events, are not worth writing or of interest. I am glad that you are finding it (at times) easier to rub along. I shouldn't worry too much, if the process sometimes seems to be a declension from the highest standards (intellectual and aesthetic, at any rate, not moral). I don't think you are in the least likely permanently to decline upon the worse; and I should say that you need a little thickening of the outer skin, if only as a protection for the more sensitive interior; and if you acquire it, it will be of permanent value in any walk of later life in this tough world (which shows no signs of softening). And of course, as you already discover, one of the discoveries of the process is the realization of the values that often lurk under dreadful appearances. Urukhai is only a figure of speech. There are no genuine Uruks, that is folk made bad by the intention of their maker; and not many who are so corrupted as to be irredeemable (though I fear it must be admitted that there are human creatures that seem irredeemable short of a special miracle, and that there are probably abnormally many of such creatures in Deutschland and Nippon – but certainly these unhappy countries have no monopoly: I have met them, or thought so, in England's green and pleasant land). All you say about the dryness, dustiness, and smell of the satan-licked land reminds me of my mother; she hated it (as a land) and was alarmed to see symptoms of my father growing to like it. It used to be said that no English-born woman could ever get over this dislike or be more than an exile, but that Englishmen (under the freer conditions of peace) could and usually did get to love it (as a land; I am saying nothing of any of its inhabitants). Oddly enough all that you say, even to its detriment, only increases the longing I have always felt to see it again. Much though I love and admire little lanes and hedges and rustling trees and the soft rolling contours of a

rich champagne, the thing that stirs me most and comes nearest to heart's satisfaction for me is space, and I would be willing to barter barrenness for it; indeed I think I like barrenness itself, whenever I have seen it. My heart still lingers among the high stony wastes among the morains and mountain-wreckage, silent in spite of the sound of thin chill water. Intellectually and aesthetically, of course; man cannot live on stone and sand, but I at any rate cannot live on bread alone; and if there was not bare rock and pathless sand and the unharvested sea, I should grow to hate all green things as a fungoid growth. . . .

I am absolutely dry of any inspiration for the Ring and am back where I was in the Spring, with all the inertia to overcome again. What a relief it would be to get it done. How I miss you on that count alone! I forgot to make a note of when I sent the MSS. off, but I suppose it must have been about a month ago and you may soon be getting it. I shan't send any more until I know your next address, though the subsequent chapters are better. I shall be very eager to know what you think of them. This book has come to be more and more addressed to you, so that your opinion matters more than any one else's.

79 From a letter to Christopher Tolkien 22 August 1944 (FS 45)

[A reply to Christopher's comments on Kroonstad, where he was stationed, and on Johannesburg.]

Kroonstad is the real product of our culture, as it now lives and is; Jo'burg (in its good spots) is what it would like to be, but only can be in special economic circumstances which are quite unstable and impermanent. In England, and there less than in most other European countries, it has up to now been softened and concealed by the relics of a former age (not confined to ruinous buildings). There will be a good many Kroonstads, architecturally, morally, and mentally, in this land in ten to twenty years time, when the Portal Houses, 'temporary', are blistered and bent like rotting tin mushrooms but nothing else is forthcoming. As in the former dark age, the Christian Church alone will carry over any considerable tradition (not unaltered, nor, it may be, undamaged) of a higher mental civilization, that is, if it is not driven down into new catacombs. Gloomy thoughts, about things one cannot really know anything [of]; the future is impenetrable especially to the wise; for what is really important is always hid from contemporaries, and the seeds of what is to be are quietly germinating in the dark in some forgotten corner, while everyone is looking at Stalin or Hitler, or reading illustrated articles on Beveridge ('The Master of University College At Home') in *Picture Post*. . . .