

just before he died, reads 'Dear Ranstead, I'm down with catarrh of the stomach and fear I shall not recover. *In fact I know I shall not.* You might take on my father as we agreed. The old chap's address is. . . . This is my nineteenth day on milk and water and magnesia. I'm sorry. Most for the *Clarion*. Yours, E. F. Fay. P.S. My first two years of the *Clarion* set up all this business.'

My dear Will, Just a line in haste to remind you not to forget to do your Sandow exercises this morning. You ought to do number 13 at least 50 times & the rest about 100 times each. If you will do this every morning while in tropical climes you will be in really good condition when you arrive. Ever of thee, Aleck.

Three or four of these brief bits of nonsense were scattered through the group – presumably to take up a few extra days – by Alexander Thompson, 'Dangle' of the *Clarion*. He, Blatchford, and Ranstead, all lived until they were in their eighties, and all kept in touch with each other for the whole time.

The following letter is from 'Ye Forest of Arden'. Underneath the signature Ranstead has written 'C. E. Touchstone, c/o Harry Beswick. And that's all we know about this writer.

Good Master Ranstead. Most potent, grave, and (more or less) reverend seigneur. To thee, Greeting: And plenty of it.

'Wonder not, nor admire not in thy mind why I do write to thee, for I will show thee no reason for it', save only that while on the Manchester Exchange on Tuesday last as ever was – being at that time, like our old esteemed friend St. Matthew, 'at the receipt of custom' – I was approached by an impossible person of the name of Sutcliffe; man in a flannel shirt & a soft hat, with whom you are doubtless acquainted. This person informed me that you were sailing for New Zealand on July 16th. Wherefore I take my pen in hand to write you a few lines hopping you are the same as this leaves me at present thank God for it. Which sentence will no doubt remind you of the Complete Letter Writer, probably familiar to you in more youthful days.

In the first place I wish you good luck & plenty of it wherever you are, & good health to enjoy it. As Rip van Winkle says 'Here is your good health, and your wife's, & your family's, & may you live long & prosper.' Or in the words of the good old Lancashire toast –

'Here's to thee an' me an' aw on us,
May we ne'er want nowt, noan on us,
Noather thee nor me nor onybody else,
Aw on us, noan on us.'

. . . And now, 'fare thee well; and God have mercy upon one of our souls! He may have mercy upon mine; but my hope is better, & so look to thyself.' Yours as you like it, Touchstone. Of that or any other ilk.

Julia Worrall, part of whose letter follows, wrote under her maiden name, Julia Dawson, for the *Clarion*. She was an indomitable worker for the socialist cause, yet she emerges from her own writings and from references to her in other people's letters over the years, as in some ways an unsatisfactory person. Certainly she took a black view of Ranstead's decision to emigrate and take others with him, and she didn't hesitate to say so in print: 'The Candid Friend' says it is a treat to live in a country where there is nothing to kick at. But I do not agree with him.