

On Rabbits, Morality, etc.

Selected Writings of
WALTER MURDOCH

Edited and Introduced by
IMRE SALUSINSZKY

Foreword by
RUPERT MURDOCH



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FOREWORD

When I was at school during the 1940s, our English readers included an essay in praise of tripe and onions. From defending the honour of this humble foodstuff, the author moved into a denunciation of jargon. I'm sure we were all amused by the piece, but I stood in a slightly different relation to it than my classmates. The author, Walter Murdoch, was the younger brother, by twenty-four years, of my paternal grandfather, Patrick Murdoch.

In those days, Western Australia was even further away from the eastern states than now. I first met my great uncle when I was nineteen, in 1950, and about to leave for Oxford. My father said, 'You've got to go across and see him for three or four days, or you might never get the chance'. We had no idea that Walter Murdoch, who was then seventy-five, had twenty busy years ahead of him.

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Five years later, it happened that the first expansion of our company's newspaper interests was the purchase of Perth's *Sunday Times*, a newspaper that was on its last legs. I had to spend a good deal of time in Western Australia, and fell in love with Perth.

My memories of that period are flavoured by Walter Murdoch and his second wife, Barbara, who was a wonderful support to him. The time in Perth afforded me a chance to get to know them that was denied to my siblings and cousins. For a time, I borrowed their house while they were overseas. I grasped that Walter Murdoch was a figure in Western Australia when the state's Governor invited us on a cruise up the river, to the wineries in the Swan Valley.

Walter Murdoch was a wonderful old man. While he was certainly proud of my father's achievements, he himself was totally unbusinesslike. It was with some relief that I learned he had been the Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, and not its chief executive. He lived very much in his own mind, writing his essays and lecturing.

His essays are delightful exercises of his imagination. He loved writing and was interested in what was going on around him, although he didn't have a tough political edge to his thinking at all. I'm sure he had great memories of his youth in Scotland, but we all thought of him as Australian. So did his readers. In those days, there was no sense of being aggressively Australian.

I have been accused of many things, but never literary criticism. So I'll leave it to the reviewers to judge the quality of Walter Murdoch's essays. Certainly, familiar essays such as these do not have the staying power of history-making books

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or the masterpieces of fiction. But through this edition, Walter Murdoch's essays might find a new audience, perhaps even a new place on the school curriculum where I first discovered them, nearly 70 years ago.

For me, this book will be an opportunity to renew my acquaintance with the observations of a kind and whimsical man who was loved and admired, not just by my parents, but by my parents' generation of Australian readers.

See what you think!

Rupert Murdoch

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About 15 years ago, when I set about compiling an anthology of Australian essays, an old friend of my parents, John Gullock, said, ‘You’ll be including plenty of Walter Murdoch, of course’. I’ll confess I had never heard of Murdoch, but I quickly discovered John’s enthusiasm was widespread among Australians of his generation. I am sorry John is not alive to read this book.

I would like to thank Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and Rupert Murdoch for their encouragement. It was fun to talk with Rupert Murdoch—my boss at fifty removes—about his memories of his great uncle. Thanks also to Greg Baxter, at News Limited, for his good offices.

An old friend, Elizabeth Webby, helped me get a grip on the context for Walter Murdoch’s early writings on Australian poetry. A new friend, the distinguished Western Australian

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

historian Geoffrey Bolton, kindly provided details of how Murdoch University got its name.

It has been a pleasure working with Terri-ann White and her team at UWA Publishing. Professor White's enthusiasm helped reassure me there is still an audience for Walter Murdoch's writing.

The only writer of newspaper sketches to approach Walter Murdoch's popularity in recent times was another Western Australian, which is why this book is dedicated to the memory of my friend and colleague, Matt Price.

Imre Salusinszky
Sydney
September, 2010

INTRODUCTION

If you had told Walter Murdoch in 1911 that, a century later, one of his two claims to fame would be a university named after him, he would have been surprised. Having failed, in August of that year, to secure a chair in English language and literature at the University of Melbourne, Murdoch, who was then thirty-seven, quit teaching. Feeling battered and bruised, he took up a position as a leader writer with *The Argus*, the Melbourne newspaper to which he had contributed literary reviews and columns for more than a decade, beginning with 'The New School of Australian Poets' in 1899. Murdoch had no academic prospects whatsoever and could not have known that, within a year, he would be thrown a lifeline by the University of Western Australia.

If you had tried the same exercise in 1950, and told the recently retired Murdoch that, within 30 years, his other claim

to fame would be a world-famous great-nephew, he would have been even more surprised. Long before Rupert Murdoch was known outside the confines of the Adelaide publishing world, Walter Murdoch was a household name—indeed, throughout the second quarter of the twentieth century, he would have been the first person many Australians thought of, if asked to name an Australian writer. He was also the closest thing the country had to what nowadays we call a public intellectual. The decline in Murdoch's literary fortunes, since his death in 1970, aged ninety-five, says something about the vagaries of Australian literary history. But it also says something about the genre of which he became the first celebrated Australian exponent.

To this day, along with Clive James, Murdoch remains one of only two major Australian writers to specialise in the familiar essay. His fame was built on the weekly essays he contributed to *The Argus* and other newspapers from the 1920s, and which form the bulk of this selection. I have speculated elsewhere¹ that the essay, which is shaped by an idea rather than by a narrative or a description, is ill-suited to a pioneer or nascent culture, so it is probably no surprise that nineteenth century Australia did not throw up an Emerson or a Carlyle (both favourites of Murdoch). In 'The Essay', Murdoch states his credo, and gives a crisp outline of the generic qualities of the non-specialised essays, as follows:

The essay is to prose what the lyric is to poetry; it is intensely personal. It is not a statement of facts, it is not a cold, abstract argument, it is not an inflammatory harangue; it is a quiet talk, reflecting the personal likes and dislikes of the author. It never pretends to treat a subject exhaustively; it is brief, informal, modest.

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These had been the distinguishing characteristics of the familiar essay since the European renaissance. Murdoch goes on, in his usual provocative terms, to make the point that a culture needs to have achieved a certain degree of leisure to savour the essay:

If the essay should come to displace the novel in popular favour, it would be a clear sign of an advance in civilization. When we are prepared to sit down and listen to an easy, informal talk by a wise, humorous, kindly observer of life, without demanding that he shall tell us a story, we show that we are growing up.

For more than three decades, Australian readers *were* prepared to sit down and listen to an informal talk from Murdoch. The collected versions of his essays sold many thousands of copies, with one alone, a selected edition of 1945, selling 24,000. His biographer, John La Nauze, writes:

The extraordinary popularity, for nearly fifty years of the twentieth century, of the journalistic writings of a professor of English is a simple fact of Australian social and (in the general sense) cultural history. Sooner rather than later it will be examined by historians concerned rather with the Australian people than with their leaders and institutions.²

Writing to his daughter Catherine King in 1931, Murdoch describes the ‘trick’ of his essays as the ability to literalise an abstract idea—to find a ‘concrete peg’, as he puts it:

I had often written more or less ineffectively about the self-righteousness of politicians, and had spoken of them as begirt with metaphoric haloes; but when the idea flashed upon me of a real and not a metaphorical halo developing round one of these absurd creatures' heads, behold my peg. The point is...to get such a peg every time—some perfectly concrete, and preferably some perfectly common and familiar word or thing, and by its means to excite people's interest or curiosity, and so lead them on to what you want to say.³

Murdoch's titles alone give a sense of what the familiar essay, and only the familiar essay, can be about: 'On Growling', 'Tripe and Onions', 'On Sitting Still'. At their worst, the essays reflect Murdoch's Scottish Edwardian upbringing and succumb to that Edwardian affectation, that precursor of *Seinfeld*, the 'essay about nothing'. But at his best, like all great modern essayists, Murdoch is able to apply the scalpel of Enlightenment reasoning to popular prejudice and illusion, as when, in 'Laughter', he turns the tables on that famous piece of doggerel that says the whole world is prepared to laugh with us, but we shall weep alone:

The truth...is almost exactly the opposite. Weep and (if you weep loudly enough) the whole habitable globe will be only too ready to mingle its maudlin tears with yours; laugh, and the chances are that not one in a million of your fellow creatures will see the joke.

While millions *did* laugh with Murdoch, humour is a vehicle in his essays, not a destination. Murdoch uses jokes to get across a serious point—in the title-essay of this selection, for example, the

point that, without information to guard and direct it, ‘virtue’ can be stupid and dangerous, unleashing a plague of rabbits on a vulnerable environment: true virtue is knowledge.

If there is a real ‘trick’ in Murdoch, it is the signal device of the essay since Montaigne popularised the genre, more than four centuries ago: irony. It is the ability to derive pleasure from irony’s multiple perspectives and dual meanings that shows a reader, or culture, as ‘grown up’. In this volume, we can see an extended exercise in irony in the essay on ‘Too Much Genius’. There is not an excess of genius at all; there is an excess of log-rolling. In ‘On Being Australian’, discussing the unique subjects available to a dinky-di essayist, Murdoch lets go a few zingers that could get you into trouble these days: ‘The Australian country town has, I think, characteristics which mark it out from any other country town; though, being a patriot, I should be disinclined to dwell on them’.

It is incredible how much information, even learning, Murdoch is capable of conveying on the way through. Note, for example, how his ‘peg’ of talking about ‘Beasts in the Basement’ manages to communicate the key insights of Freud. This volume is not crammed with Murdoch’s literary essays, because shifting standards of taste have dated them faster than some of his other pieces. But it is important to observe that Murdoch was able to disseminate an appreciation of serious literature long before ordinary people could watch dramatisations on television of the works of the major English novelists. For Murdoch, Austen, Shakespeare and—easily above all—Dickens were a compass for life. Some of his essays despair about the possibility for English literature to be taught, even as they do a good deal of such teaching themselves. And despite sounding old-fashioned, courtesy of

their references to back collar studs and the cable page of the newspaper, Murdoch's essays are surprisingly forward-looking. In 'Home Truths for Australia', for example, Murdoch provides an account of the 'cultural cringe' years before A. A. Phillips addressed the subject.

The essayist is anything but a crank, a proselytiser or an angry man. Murdoch was a moderate in politics—a position he calls the 'pink man's burden', though in his day that means seeing equal merit in capitalism and communism—and a tolerant Christian humanist in religion, despite an intensely religious upbringing. But the observant reader will notice that, at a couple of moments, Murdoch starts to sound cranky on the subject of money. For reasons unknown, during the early 1930s Murdoch became a devotee of the ideas of C.H. Douglas, who urged a system of social credit to replace the monetary system. Should we judge Murdoch harshly for falling prey to 'funny money'? Better, I think, to place the episode in the context of the long history of political and economic naivety by literary intellectuals. Murdoch certainly never succumbed to the racism that frequently went along with social credit. In a brief introduction to an anti-anti-Semitism pamphlet in 1945, he wrote that 'our immediate duty, not as a country but as individuals, is to do our best, in whatever circle of our friends and neighbours we can reach, to fight the anti-Semitic virus for all we are worth, and to create, as far as we can, a sane and reasonable and humane public opinion throughout Australia'.⁴

Walter Logie Forbes Murdoch was born in Rosehearty, in north-east Scotland, in 1874, and emigrated to Melbourne with his family ten years later. His father, James, was a retired minister of the Presbyterian Free Church, a Calvinist. The family

came to the antipodes for James's health—less than entirely successfully, as he died within a month of arrival. Murdoch was the youngest of fourteen children, and junior by twenty-four years to his brother Patrick, who was inducted as minister of West Melbourne Presbyterian Church a few days after the family landed in Melbourne. Three years later Patrick moved to Trinity Church in Camberwell, where he would remain as minister for 40 years. Walter and his mother also moved to the eastern suburbs, a part of Melbourne with which their branch of the family would always be associated. Patrick's son Keith was born in 1885. He would establish an Australian publishing business that his son, Rupert, would eventually expand around the world.

Walter Murdoch was an outstanding student at Camberwell Grammar, Scotch College and the University of Melbourne, where he graduated with First Class Honours in logic and philosophy in 1895. After graduation, Murdoch turned to teaching, and to literary journalism for *The Argus*. He was a prominent and enthusiastic member of Melbourne's vibrant literary and intellectual scene in the two decades that spanned the turn of the century. His teaching endeavours expanded from tutoring the children of squatters, to schoolmastering, to establishing his own college at Camberwell (the endeavour did not last, but Keith was a student).

Murdoch was appointed assistant lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne in 1904 and was a popular, hard-working teacher. He was understandably bitter, eight years later, when the vacant chair was given to an Englishman, suspecting snobbery in stereo: in the appointing committee's preference for a British degree, and in its disdain for his work in the public

sphere at *The Argus*. However, in 1912, Murdoch secured the foundation chair in English at UWA, where he would remain a teaching Professor until 1939, and serve as Chancellor between 1943 and 1948.

In seeking the chair at UWA, Murdoch was helped along by the good offices of an influential friend. In 1900, Murdoch had written to Alfred Deakin, asking him to provide a preface for a school primer on the federation movement. Deakin pleaded lack of time. But in 1905, in the brief interregnum between his two stints as prime minister, Deakin wrote to Murdoch to congratulate him on a defence of the novels of George Meredith. (Murdoch later met Meredith, on Deakin's introduction.) A close friendship and intellectual conversation was begun, which was to last until close to Deakin's death in 1919.

Murdoch had married Violet Hughston, also a teacher, in 1897. They had a loving partnership for fifty-five years, including a son, William (1900–1950), who was a journalist in Perth, and a daughter, Catherine (1904–2000), who was a successful broadcaster for the ABC. After Violet died in 1952, Murdoch was accompanied by a nurse, Barbara Cameron, whom he eventually married and with whom he was able to make visits to his favourite places in Europe, especially Italy, into his nineties.

Just as he had been at Melbourne, Murdoch was a popular and respected teacher at UWA. He was also a well-liked colleague and administrator. But Murdoch did not publish widely in his academic field. Instead, the Perth years are when he established himself as Australia's most successful essayist, via *The Argus* and the *West Australian*. When the ideas for full-blown essays ran out, after World War II, he broke the rule of a lifetime and wrote for Keith's newspapers, contributing a syndicated column

responding to readers' questions. Like the essays, 'Answers' was sensationally popular.

Apart from his essays, the two publications for which Murdoch is remembered are independent of his academic career. The first, his 1899 essay on 'The New School of Australian Poets', published in *The Argus*, is one of the earliest examples of systematic or 'practical' criticism in the field of Australian literature. (As Elizabeth Webby has pointed out, there is not much 'objective criticism' of Australian literature until the final quarter of the 19th century.⁵) But the essay was to cause Murdoch nothing but headaches. It aroused heated controversy—including on the *Red Page* of the *Bulletin*—as a result of its negative comparisons between the Australian poets of the 1890s and their British counterparts. Murdoch's method here is self-consciously Arnoldian, using 'touchstones' to test the work of Paterson, Lawson, Boake and the rest for their permanency. It is, of course, ludicrous to set these poets up against the major Romantic and Victorian figures. Nowadays—when no serious student of literature takes notice of 'bush poetry', unless they carelessly switch on the radio on a Sunday morning—we would say that Murdoch is making a category mistake, comparing a popular form with high art. But this is the wisdom of hindsight. There was the lyricism of Henry Kendall in the past, and the lyricism of Christopher Brennan in the future, but when Murdoch was writing this *was* Australian poetry.

Murdoch's benign scepticism, for all the anger it aroused, is something of a relief in the age of literary nationalism. And there are glimmerings of the future essayist, and of the thesis of 'Too Much Genius', in the way Murdoch deals with the poets of the 1890s:

There are so many of them to accept; that, to the average reader, is the initial difficulty. They have settled on the land like a plague of locusts, or, to use a more gracious metaphor, the country has become a nest of singing-birds. We might, possibly, be induced to accept one new poet in, let us say, every ten years; but one in every month, or thereabouts! It is too much for our feeble system to assimilate.

Murdoch's most substantial publication also had nothing to do with his scholarship. *Alfred Deakin: A Sketch* was published in 1923, with the full approval of Deakin's family. It was criticised by professional historians and did not sell. But the *Sketch* has survived (it was reprinted in 1999, with an introduction by Frank Moorhouse) and with good reason: the book is a delight to read, from beginning to end. The skill with which the cultural environment of Deakin's student years are evoked, along with the characters and atmosphere of the imperial conferences and federal conventions he attended in his prime, suggests Murdoch could have done much more in the mode of the popular historian. What attracted Murdoch to Deakin as a subject? I'd suggest it has something to do with the way both men were split between 'higher' pursuits—political reform for Deakin, scholarship for Murdoch—and the hurly-burly of literary journalism.

Murdoch received many honours in his life, including a knighthood in 1964. The greatest honour was bestowed literally on his death bed, when he was told the Western Australian government had decided to name the state's new university after him. La Nauze hints there is a story to be told about the naming of Murdoch University, but says that, in 1977, he cannot tell it.

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Geoffrey Bolton was a member of the interim council of the university, and can illuminate the circumstances:

At its first meeting in July 1970 we were advised that the new university would be named 'Murdoch' in honour of Sir Walter Murdoch, who was then very ill...The name was chosen on the advice of Sir Kenneth Townsing, who between 1954 and 1979 was the very influential Under-Treasurer of Western Australia. It seems that the then premier (Sir) David Brand had asked him to take responsibility for suggesting a name. In a conversation with me he told me that four names had been under consideration, all of them beginning with 'M'. The first was Sir Robert Menzies, who as prime minister had been a great benefactor to Australian universities, but it was felt that he had no particular connection with Western Australia. Another was Sir Keith Murray, the British academic who was invited by Menzies in 1956-57 to compile a report on Australian universities which provided the basis for the Menzies government's reforms, but the same argument (about lacking Western Australian connections) applied even more strongly to him. The third was Sir James Mitchell, who had been premier of Western Australia 1919-24 and 1930-33 and subsequently lieutenant-governor and governor from 1933 to 1951. He was a popular incumbent at Government House, but no intellectual. It was felt he might have done for an agricultural college, but not a university. Sir Walter Murdoch was the last name. He was foundation professor of English at The University of Western Australia . . . and was Australia's leading essayist. He had the intellectual credentials and was widely respected

in Western Australia, so he met all the criteria. Townsing requested that this information should not be made public while he was a serving public servant, and for this reason John La Nauze did not include it in his biography of Walter Murdoch. However Townsing made it pretty clear that he was telling me the story precisely because I am a historian and he did not want the record to be lost.⁶

It is hard to know how Murdoch would regard the present volume, the first to gather up his writings in different genres. He seemed embarrassed at the popularity of the selected editions of his essays. (Each of them has an ironic note at the beginning, warning readers who took *The Argus* they would find nothing new.) He regarded the essays as slight things and gave his books a shelf-life of three months. For almost half a century, the literary market-place has taken him at his word. However, there are reasons to feel optimistic about a new audience for Murdoch's essays. Advances in technology he could not have imagined have provided unheralded opportunities for writers to place short, pithy, familiar pieces, on every subject under the sun, in the public domain. The same technology has provided avenues for essayists and their readers to exchange ideas in ways the author of 'Answers' would have relished. Murdoch's essays still have plenty to offer 'grown up' readers. And they may well provide a model for Australia's growing army of bloggers.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Introduction, *Oxford Book of Australian Essays* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.
- 2 John La Nauze, *Walter Murdoch: A Biographical Memoir* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1977), 104.
- 3 Quoted in La Nauze, 102.
- 4 Preface, B. Burgoyne Chapman, *The Compleat Anti-Semite* (Sydney: Associated General Publications, 1945), iii.
- 5 'Before the *Bulletin*: Nineteenth Century Literary Journalism', in Bruce Bennett, ed., *Cross Currents: Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature* (Melbourne: Longman, 1981), 9.
- 6 Letter to the author, May 13, 2010.

Essays and Answers

TRIPE AND ONIONS

The Australians have a reputation for hospitality; and the hospitality of their newspapers is simply extraordinary. For instance, I myself have, in the past few years, been given space in various newspapers for discourses on every kind of topic, from rabbits to the League of Nations, from the poetry of Keats to the proper way of killing fowls, from cabbages to kings. But, curiously enough, I seem to have omitted, hitherto, to write an essay on tripe and onions.

It is not, of course, easy to be sure of this. I could make certain by hunting through the files; but looking back over one's past life is an insidious habit justly condemned in the Scriptural story of Lot's wife. Apart from the danger of being turned into a pillar of salt, few experiences are more painful than reading an old newspaper article of one's own. I confess, with Macbeth,

I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.

Still, without looking, I feel tolerably certain that I have not communed with you, heart to heart, on the subject of tripe and onions.

The reason probably is, that the subject is too great for a mere essay. It has ever so many different aspects. For example: taking it quite literally, I could easily write a column in vigorous defence of a dish which has been shamefully underrated; making this the text of a sermon on our neglected blessings. Why should tripe—I might passionately ask—be singled out for contumely? Why should it be used as a symbol for trash—as when we say that the late Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote tripe, or that the novels of Mr So-and-so, or the political speeches of Mr Blank (you must really fill in the name for yourself) are unmitigated tripe?

A friend of mine refuses to touch tripe because he objects to eating what he calls the 'works' of any animal. (Yet he swallows oysters with gusto, complete with all their works.) His objection will not explain the general attitude towards tripe. Devilled kidneys are ranked among the aristocracy of foods. Liver is not considered quite so dashing: there is a touch of the bourgeois about liver; we are a little ashamed to be seen in its company, and we call it 'lamb's fry' to veil its commonness. But tripe! Tripe is a social pariah.

When someone collects into an anthology the best English poems about eating—why has it never been done?—one omission will be conspicuous. There will be numbers of songs about the Roast Beef of Old England; but nobody has thought tripe worth making a song about. Mr Chesterton has introduced sausages

and mash into one of his poems: but even this democratic singer draws the line at tripe. There is felt to be something essentially prosaic and even vulgar about it. I do not know how to account for this injustice. When you consider the varied beauty of its appearance, and the incomparable delicacy of its flavour—such delicacy that it has to be reinforced with onions, to fit for our coarse human palate what would otherwise be more suitable for angels—you can but stand amazed at the perversity of mankind.

My enthusiasm, however, is carrying me off my feet. This was not the line I meant to take. Faithful readers expect from me something more than a rhapsody about a mere dish, however delectable. They expect a serious contribution to thought; they look for a Deep Inner Meaning; and they shall not be disappointed. To unfold that meaning, I must be a little personal, and tell them how tripe and onions came into my life, so to speak.

It came with an anecdote. Lady Dorothy Nevill, that incomparably witty woman who may briefly be described as the fine flower of English society in the Victorian era, was once in the company of certain ladies when the topic of conversation was food. Each of them was naming her favourite dish; there was considerable exhibition of what, in the language of today, is called swank; the talk was all of wonderful things which only a *chef* of genius can prepare, and which are to be seen only on the tables of the very rich. Lady Dorothy was silent. When at last they turned to her and asked her to name the delicacy she liked best of all, this fastidious, refined, aristocratic old lady replied—‘Me? Oh, gimme a good blow-out on tripe and onions.’

That reply—which I advise you to learn by heart—has comforted me in some of my darkest hours. Until I knew it, I was in the habit of using another formula, the saying of a character

in Dickens—in *Great Expectations*, if I remember rightly—‘Wot larks!’ That, too, was a comfort; but Lady Dorothy’s formula is more invariably comforting.

What I mean is this. On our way through the world we are constantly reading or hearing of things which would depress us horribly if we had to receive them in silence. The soul demands to be allowed to comment on them. Something in the nature of the human mind makes it suffer unless a satisfying comment suggests itself. (I ought to say something, here, about complexes; but I do not know the jargon.)

When I read in Walter Pater, ‘To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life,’ I reply at once, ‘Wot larks,’ and feel that the danger is past. But a more satisfying reply is, ‘Quite; but can you really burn with a hard, gemlike flame when you are in the middle of a blow-out on tripe and onions?’

Similarly when I read in Mr Bertrand Russell an account of the universe as modern science presents it to our view, ending with the words, ‘only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built’—the obvious comment that springs to one’s lips at once, is ‘Wot larks!’ But this, though comforting, is not wholly convincing. The right comment is ‘All right; and now, let’s have a blow-out on tripe and onions.’ The moment you have said that, you know that your soul is saved. There has been a battle between high-sounding nonsense and humble common sense, and the nonsense has been beaten.

A few years ago a well-known Japanese statesman died. He was a reactionary, an aggressive imperialist, and a militarist of the most fire-eating kind; for the sake of the world’s peace, he

was better dead. But, of course, it would not have been proper to say this at the time. The then Governor-General of Australia said the proper thing. He informed the Japanese government that Australia had heard the news and been saddened by it, and that all Australians felt as if they had suffered a personal bereavement. Confronted with a statement like that, what is one to say or do? You feel at once that unless you can make some comment, find some fitting outlet for your feelings, you will explode. I don't mean that you need say anything aloud; but you must—you simply *must*—find something to say to yourself about the situation. To make an imaginary addendum to the Governor-General's message,—something like 'To mark the universal grief, the Government House blow-out on tripe and onions has been postponed for a week'—relieved the tension of one's mind.

The other day I read, in a textbook of economics, that 'personality is the synthesis of individuality and sociality, and as it grows the forms of society evolve, they take more specific characters, opening out into manifold associations within the community just as the organs of an evolving body are differentiated within the unity of its life.' After reading this three times, I felt that God's worst curse had fallen on me; my mind was gone. Then I remembered my good old talisman, and was saved. Re-write the sentence, beginning 'Personality is the synthesis of tripe and onions,' and sanity returns.

In conclusion, I may let you into the secret of another formula, for use in desperate cases. In Professor Eddington's book, *The Nature of the Physical World*, we read that: 'The atom is as porous as the solar system. If we eliminated all the unfilled space in a man's body and collected his protons and electrons

into one mass, the man would be reduced to a spec just visible with a magnifying glass.' This is, I think, one of the cheerfulest facts that modern science has laid bare. When some large, impressive politician, or some well-nourished ecclesiastic—or, in short, any of our great men—is laying down the law from a public platform, I find it alleviates the pain immediately if I reflect, 'My good sir, you are doubtless a tremendous fellow; but if the empty spaces were subtracted, all that is really solid in you would have to be searched for with a magnifying glass. I could gather you up on a slip of paper and put you into my waistcoat pocket, where you would be lost. Where would your eloquence be then?' But this is too cruel for use except under extreme provocation. For common emergencies, the tripe-and-onions formula is quite effective.