

**Lester Dudley wrote the following when he was twenty and facing death**

***July 14 1941***

Within the next few minutes I must speak on one of the things on which I have been silent for five and a half years. And on my mother's birthday. I can't keep silent now for it has swollen my left cheek and thought I have taken the opportunity to write these words, the swelling must soon be seen, so I must speak of it first. It's not the thought of learning the truth that frightens me now, or has been the chief fear for a couple of years, but the thought of explaining to mum, and the worry to which she will be put. Once I began to keep silence I had to keep silence, and the longer I went the more impossible it was to speak, and the worse worry it would be to mum when I ultimately did speak.

I thought if I could only hide it till I got a job in town and went to a doctor myself, it would not be quite as bad breaking the news to her after, but now I must tell her first and she must wait till I have seen the doctor. I find it hard to believe I will be told I am going to die, especially as I have gone so long, but the way this secondary growth has swelled up and the way my teeth growths get irritated, I am afraid some of them are pretty likely to be malignant. I have lived with that fear for years. ....at the moment my worst fear is the horror I will so soon cause Mum, who is reading in a chair by the fire, reading, and apparently in an easy state of mind. How can I bring myself to speak? But it is impossible to hide it.

***July 15 1941***

Mum doesn't reckon they're growths. She reckons the top one is part of the gum ridge, as she did when I showed her in 1936, that the ones between the teeth are twists of the gums or overlaps, and that the swelling, as I'm now sure is an abscess. Nevertheless, I'm still thinking of the soft tender lump that was there for months before the swelling, still doubtful of the "gums" and of the "gum ridge". But since Mum isn't worried I no longer worry. That worry is past, even if they should prove growths.

I bet there'll be as many people (or more) die by the scorched earth policy as died by it in 1812-13. ....

There is no cause for satisfaction in Syria, even if the terms prove to be total occupation.....

**A fragment written a year earlier when he was 19 and hoping one day his diaries would be published**

**From Book 4, 1940**

Lester reviews *Speaking Personally* by Walter Murdoch, *Linguistic Change* by Sturtevant (1917), *Martin Chuzzlewit* by Charles Dickens, essays by Hazlitt, poetry by Coleridge, *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens and *Grey Diplomatists*

**Walter Murdoch, *Speaking Personally*, essays**

Memo: get some of Jane Austen on my next list of 12 (*books from the library*).  
Walter Murdoch, you're a bloke after my own heart. These confounded whiskers have always worried me. I even remember my sense of disappointment when Andrea's death in *War and Peace* was complicated by the introduction of a moustache which he twirled as he lay dying. My enjoyment of a modern novel is invariably marred till I can forget the hero's neat moustache. And as for whiskers.

...I am a creative "artist". This is the chief reason which gives me a hope that I may play a part in literature, especially in this ebb tide age. I have found myself quite unable to write about Australians, for a number of reasons. For one thing I don't know enough even about my small Australia, and for another the tendency to intrude the contemporary event, and to attempt "photography", is too great. ...When I'm confident that my creative "faculty" can rise superior to external and internal influences I will try to write of Australians.

...I scarcely set out an opinion or write a self-satisfying line of poetry, without an uneasy question arising some time or other as whether it is almost

word for word a copy of something (I never know what) that I have read before. However, while well aware that I was guided into appreciation of literature by others and that I have merely accepted odds and ends of their opinion, I must say that I did so against my will. I long held it a positive virtue to despise great literature, and it was almost with a feeling of dismay that I found my objections dwindling and dwindling. I'm becoming (a stock size) one of Them (instead of – had I known it – a stock size one of The Rest).

And now I am a patchy, blotchy, imperfect one of them, imperfect alike whether I like or dislike. Now I'm clinging pathetically to the reminder of my dislikes – Shelley, Keats, Byron, Tennyson...

### **A very early fragment written when Lester was 17 – serious mode**

#### **For Why, and What About**

Directly suggested by my desire to set down my appreciation of 'Little Dorrit', this exercise books subject will be – first, as a sort of trial run, my often vague recollections and vaguer enjoyment of some of the few important books I have read, both books from the library and books from other places and people; and secondly, the books from the Library I now have, the dates of commencement and completion, and arrival and departure, and the books that are to come, to be written of as they come; and thirdly, any poems (and possibly prose extracts) from books to come, that I particularly like.

Other reasons for the book are: a wish to get my thoughts marshalled as well as possible for my present satisfaction, and future profit (my memory being what it is), a desire to know just when I read the books, for various reasons, and a desire to prevent as far as possible any mistaken conjectures as to my reactions or careful consideration (for which reason I have marked many a short story with my rating of it in Selected Short Stories and the Great Book of Humour, though I haven't gone into any detail); and Amy Cruse's interesting "After the Victorians", which seemed to suggest that the opinions of intelligent nonentities can be of considerable interest if not value to people engaged in literary research. The whole of the commentary will be written with one eye or both on possible

readers, like many little notes to my verse, and like them will be explanatory, both in its seriousness and defensive gibes at myself and others, and, almost, invariably, written in a spirit of “and be damned to you all”.

....I chose 'Little Dorrit'.

I suppose I'd have very much enjoyed another book by Dickens, but I'm glad I got this one, for I like it probably better than any novel I have read. (*Lester felt that way for the remainder of his life. He reread 'Little Dorrit' every year for the following 61 years. His copies of the book are clearly well read.*)