**Woman and Labour Centenary Special**

Olive Schreiner’s ground-breaking *Woman and Labour* was published in 1911. To mark its centenary, this ‘Woman and Labour Centenary Special’ contains a number of letters in which she comments on the completion, publication and reception of the book. There are many more such comments in the complete letters, which can be accessed when the *Olive Schreiner Letters Online* goes live in January 2012, along with many other fascinating letters.

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**Letter Reference**

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<tr>
<td>Archive</td>
<td>National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Friday April 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address From</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address To</td>
<td>Minnie or Mimmie Murray nee Parker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Versions</td>
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**Legend**

This letter has been dated by reference to address and content. Schreiner stayed at Eastbergholt in Cape Town for part of April 1909.

---

1: Eastbergholt  
2: Tamboer's Kloof Rd  
3: Cape Town  
4: Friday  
5:  
6: My dear Mrs Murray  
7:  
8: I have been so busy finishing off a little book on the woman question  
9: I am sending to England. (copying it & writing an introduction.) that  
10: & I've so unwell since I came here I have been hardly anywhere & seen  
11: hardly any one. I have not yet once been to "the House". As soon as it  
12: is done & sent off which I hope will be next Tuesday I will come & see  
13: you. Please let me know not only your address but at which part of Sea  
14: Point I must get out of the train to get to you. Your husband told  
15: mine you had a cold. I hope you are all fit again. I am longing to  
16: have a long talk with you & shall  
17:  
18: ^like so to see the children.  
19:  
20: Yours ever  
21: Olive Schreiner^
Letter Reference  Olive Schreiner
BC16/Box8/Fold4/MMPr/AssortedCorres/FredPL/8
Archive University of Cape Town, Manuscripts & Archives, Cape Town
Epistolary Type Letter
Letter Date 12 June 1909
Address From Matjesfontein, Western Cape
Address To Frederick ('Fred') Pethick-Lawrence
Other To

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Legend
A typescript only of this letter is available. The transcription here follows this typescript and includes uncertain dates, ellipses, mistakes and so on.

1: Matjesfontein
2: June 12th, 1909
3:
4: I am sure, thinking it over, you will be too busy to make arrangements
5: with a publisher about printing my pamphlets so will you give it to
6: any honest publishing agent you may know and ask him to arrange for
7: its publication. I enclose the terms. Don’t give it to Watt & Sons:
8: I have tried them, they don’t do.
9:
10: It is glorious how you are getting on with your work in England. It is
11: the women here we have to rouse! and our Women’s Enfranchisement
12: League, owing to bad management and wrong starting has done more harm
13: than good, I fear. But among the younger South African women a
14: splendid feeling is growing. I am writing a short article defending
15: the tactics of the Women’s Social and Political Union and will send
16: it to the Fortnightly Review and am going to write a paper on the
17: Woman question, in length about like that the pamphlet and am going to
18: have it printed as a small booklet.

Notation
The pamphlet referred to is likely to be Closer Union, which appeared in a variety of languages. The short article 'defending the tactics of the WSPU' in the Fortnightly Review cannot be traced, while
Schreiner’s ‘paper on the Woman question’ became Woman and Labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Address From</td>
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Legend
A typescript only of this letter is available. The transcription here follows this typescript and includes any uncertain dates, ellipses, mistakes and so on.

1: Portlock
2: Nr. Graaf Reinet
3: December 19th, 1910
4:
5: I am looking forward most anxiously to next mail to get the "Votes for Women"
6: & hear some fuller & truer account of the great conflict than the
7: paper wires give us. One letter I got from a woman friend in London
8: this week talks of her wish to shoot Asquith or Lloyd George or
9: Winston Churchill. My fear is that such a thing may ever happen. I
10: should regret it not for the woman’s sake, because if hanged she
11: would not feel it probably, but because I do not feel that brute force
12: - which men men have always applied to us - is no argument, I don’t
13: believe in capital punishment in any form even in the case of a Czar
14: or Lloyd George or Asquith. It is passive resistance, the wrong we
15: endure in a cause, that wins in the long run – as I believe our
16: Indians are going to win in the Transvaal after the long cruel
17: oppression and injustice of their treatment.
18:
19: I am staying here for the summer on a solitary farm high up in the
20: mountains beyond Graaf Reinet, boarding with some friends called
21: Murray. I found out the other day, oddly enough, that Jim Parker, Mrs
22: Murray’s brother is a friend of yours; that it was to his farm that
23: you went near Bethulie? Mrs Murray is a delightful woman & one of the
24: strongest suffragettes in South Africa. She started a branch of the
25: Suffrage League in Graaf Reinet & I spoke at a meeting there last week
26: – but I hate public speaking – I like to write. A little book of
27: mine called "Woman and Labour" is soon coming out. I have just posted
28: the corrected proofs of the book to the publishers (Don’t mention
29: the book till the publishers announce it as he may not like it.) Its a
30: little remembrance from my big book on "Women and Sex" which the
31: British destroyed in Johannesburg during the war. I wrote it out in
32: that little room in Miss Viljoen’s house in Hanover during the
33: height of the war (Boer). It is very fragmentary. It is strange to me
34: why so much of my life should have been thrown away with the
35: destruction of that big book which might have been of a little help to
36: the cause of woman. But all life is a long acceptance of the
37: incomprehensible.

Notation
The book referred to is Schreiner's Woman and Labour, and her 'big book on “Women and Sex”' is the
manuscript preceding it which was destroyed when her house in Johannesburg was badly damaged
during the South African War. The Women's Social & Political Union's newspaper Votes for Women
was edited by Frederick Pethick-Lawrence and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence.

Archive: National Archives Repository, Pretoria
Epistolary Type: Letter
Letter Date: 16 April 1911
Address From: De Aar, Northern Cape
Address To: Jan Smuts
Who To: Jan Smuts
Other Versions

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would be: Olive Schreiner to Jan Smuts, 1 July 1896, National Archives Depot, Pretoria, Olive
Schreiner Letters Project transcription. Please also supply letter line numbers for specific quotations.

1: de Aar
2: April 16th 1911
3:
4: Dear Neef Jan
5:
6: I note that you are a socialist – but I wonder of what kind? It must
7: break your heart to see the attempts made by a little handful of
8: oligarchic white men, who call themselves "working men" to keep down
9: the millions of their labouring fellow citizens! Verily the Farrars &
10: Philipses go into the Kingdom of Heaven before them. At least they do
11: openly confess the doctrine of "Each man for himself, & the devil for
12: us all.” Don’t trouble to answer this – I know how awfully busy
13: you are. I hope you feel physically fit.
14:
15: I was at Lily Kloof the other day; it was at Lower Lily Kloof where
16: you had the fight & the Englishman was killed – Allaman’s-fontein.
17: Curious to think you were there in my old haunts.
18:
19: Love to the wife.
20: Olive Schreiner
21:
22: I don’t know if my book sells well; I hear so from people in England;
23: but have nothing to do with the sales. I sold it to the publishers.
24: It’s better to have sixty pounds sure & in the hand, than the promise
25: of a thousand as a royalty; & then get nothing at all! as with some of
26: my other books. I certainly can’t be one of the meek, for I don’t
27: inherit the earth.
28:
29: The recent bloody outcry on the part of some women here has at moments
30: made me feel as though at least the women of South Africa were not
31: fit for the vote now – but when one comes to consider that there are
32: white men capable of almost lynching an innocent man in the streets of
33: Jo’burg because his skin is black, one sees, as always there is
34: nothing to choose between them. The longer one lives & studies human
35: nature the more clear it becomes that neither intellectually nor
36: morally is any difference between the sexes. The devil man has the
37: devil woman to match him - & so on & on.
38:
39: I gave my husband your message. I don’t understand this de Aar
40: business. It doesn’t seem to me to matter one way or the other.

Notation
The book Schreiner refers to is her Woman and Labour.

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<td>Who To</td>
<td>Henrietta (’Ettie’) Schreiner m. Stakesby Lewis (1891)</td>
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De Aar
May 5th 1911
My own darling
I have just read your letter. Of all the letters I have had about my book it has been the most precious to me. I shall always keep it.
I am so glad you find Blauwberg still good. I am sure the Sanatogen will help also. I am sure the air must be better than most sea side places. I have always had a feeling I should like that side.
Is there any little house not thatched & mudfloored near to you & close to the beach – on the sea – which I might perhaps be able to hire next summer? With me you see its the rank damp vegetation near the sea shore that so very bad. The closer the sea the better for me. I sometimes breathe quite easily at Sea Point walking on the Beach Rd, but when I go back to the houses I am very bad.
One thing that I have been glad of about my book is that so many men have written to me about. You know what a bitter opponent of any emancipation for women old Merriman has always been. I don’t know if you remember his speech when the bill was introduced into the house! My book hadn’t been six days in Cape Town when I got a long letter from him, saying how much he had enjoyed reading the book: how beautiful it was! The only thing was that man was such a brute that my beautiful ideas couldn’t be realized! The touching thing is that the old fellow is always looking up favourable reviews of the book, & wrote yesterday to tell he "was delighted to find a most sympathetic review in the "Economist" - which he was going to send me! It’s quite touching if you knew how bitter he was - he couldn’t even talk of "the woman’s movement without getting in a rage!"
Yes, dear one, you are the only person who seems to have realized how hard it was for me to publish the book - such a broken fragment. I have kept it all these years feeling I couldn’t publish it.
Good night my own darling. It has taken me all the afternoon & evening to write this little letter, lying down for rests between. I have much less angina or acute pain this last year, but my brain & nervous system seems so exhausted.
I do hope so much Blauwberg will keep on helping you.
Your old
Olive
I don’t know if you can understand, that, in a way, it makes me sad when people speak so kindly of my little book - I think if only it had been the whole! - or if I could get strong enough to finish one of my novels! But one must keep on hoping.

Your letter is so precious to me, dear one.

Notation
The reference to 'letters about my book' concerns Woman and Labour.

Letter Reference
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<th>John X. Merriman MSC 15/1911:48</th>
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1: De Aar
2: May 12 / 11
3:
4: Dear Mr Merriman
5:
6: Pray don't trouble about the Economist. I thought you took it & might have it lying about your study. As a rule I don't read reviews of my books, but anything that deals "seriously" with economic aspect of woman's position is always of great interest to me. Merely from the academic standpoint it is a fascinating study, as indeed all economic & financial problems are. I am always longing for a new Bagehot to arise to illuminate the financial problems of our day with his genius, as he did those of a generation ago.
14:
15: I shall certainly get "The Beast" I have just finished Chestertons book on the "Party System," lay awake half last night to finish it.
17: His statement of present conditions is true, but I think he doesn't quite enough see that the fault lies with the people at large. ^Though I have held for 20 years that proportional representation would tend to set things right. ^ It has always been matter of astonishment to me.
21: how not only the lower middle class, but people of the highest culture
22: & who profess to be dominated by the highest sense of honour could
23: submit to seeing brewers & the new rich generally put into the house
24: of Lords & set to govern the nation, without rising as a body &
25: smiting down the Government who attempted it, instead of accepting it
26: as a perfect right & proper thing with smiling calm.
27:
28: Yes, it is sad for those of us who feel our journey is not a long one
29: now, to know we shall never live to see the better time which after 15
30: or 16 years of blood shed struggle & retro-gression will I believe
31: begin to dawn on South Africa. For you there is this thought that you
32: will always be remembered as a man whose financial integrity was
33: unshaded Men will say these things couldn't have been done in the days
34: when Merriman was there to protest.
35:
36: I am going up to the Victoria Falls by the excursion that leaves Cape
37: Town on the 1st of June, with my brother Will's wife & children. It
38: would be rather fine if you & Mrs Merriman were coming too.
39:
40: Yours sincerely
41: Olive Schreiner

Notation

Letter Reference Smuts A1/194/9/65
Archive National Archives Repository, Pretoria
Epistolary Type Letter
Letter Date August 1911
Address From De Aar, Northern Cape
Address To Isie Smuts nee Krige
Other Versions

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Legend
The month and year have been written on this letter in an unknown hand. Schreiner was resident in De Aar from November 1907 until she left South Africa for Britain and Europe in December 1913, but with some fairly lengthy visits elsewhere over this time.
1: Dear Isie
2:
3: It seems such ages since I had any news of you. My health has been
4: worse the last year & I’ve almost given up writing letters to my
5: oldest & dearest friends.
6:
7: I hope you are all well & happy. Are you still at Irene or have you
8: moved into Pretoria?
9:
10: No One very beautiful thing happened to me this year. My Brother
11: Will’s wife & children are going up to the Falls & he invited me to
12: go with them & paid my ticket like the dear old fellow he is. It was
13: so delightful: the falls were so wonderful & we were all so happy
14: together, & I kept so fit all the way. You must go & see the Falls
15: some day if you’ve not been yet.
16:
17: Give my heartiest greetings to Neef Jan. He must have thought I was
18: mad when he got my note to him some months ago. I misread a word in
19: his letter. He said “I am a Laodicean.” I read it, “I am a
20: ‘Socialist.” I did wonder rather! & thought he meant it as a joke!
21: – so took it that way. I did wonder since when he had been a
22: socialist!!
23:
24: I would have sent you a copy of my book for yourself, dear; but I know
25: you don’t care much for reading books in English so waiting till I
26: got a copy of the Dutch translation. I have only had one copy in Dutch
27: which my husband collared as soon as it came. I’ll send you one as
28: soon as more Dutch copies come. I know you are not very much interest
29: in the woman’s question, but I like to send it you just because I
30: love you. I haven’t been to Cape Town for more than a year & a half.
31: Will perhaps be going to Cape Town next summer. If so do let me know
32: when you pass.
33:
34: Good bye.
35:
36: Love to you all. I expect the children have grown much since I saw
37: them.
38:
39: Thine ever
40: Olive Schreiner

Notation
The ‘my book’ referred to by Schreiner is Woman and Labour.
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<td>Address From</td>
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<td>Address To</td>
<td>Grand Hotel, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who To</td>
<td>Aletta Jacobs</td>
</tr>
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Legend
Olive Schreiner's letters to Aletta Jacobs are part of the International Archives for the Women's Movement collections, to whom thanks are due for access to the microfilm of the Aletta Jacobs Papers. The date has been derived from the postmark on an attached envelope, which also provides the address the letter was sent to. Content shows it was written from De Aar.

1: Dear Dr Jacobs
2: 
3: I hope you will have a splendid time in the Transvaal. I shall always remember your day here, a “red letter” day to me.
4: 
5: 
6: Will you please write to your publisher about that copy of your book
7: ^translation^ which I ought to have got. If he still has it ask him
8: please to send it direct to me here.
9: 
10: Thank you so much for your letter.
11: 
12: Yours with heartfelt greetings
13: Olive Schreiner
14: 
15: I would so much value them if your friend could send me some copies of
16: the snap-shots she took here. They would be a reminder of a happy day
17: to me.

Notation
Aletta Jacobs and Carrie Chapman Catt were on a world tour from July 1911 to July 1912 and in South Africa from mid August to late October 1911; they were in Port Elizabeth in late August 1911. Jacobs' Dutch friend Nettie Boersma accompanied her on her visit to Schreiner in De Aar in late August 1911, just before they went to Port Elizabeth, and Boersma took the photographs which Schreiner refers to. Schreiner’s comment about a translation refers to the one Jacobs made of Woman and Labour, which appeared in Dutch in 1911 as De Vrouw En Arbeid Amsterdam: Von Kampen.
Dear Ed,

I'm sending you another copy of my book. I think the mystery is solved as to what becomes of all the things I post. I sent twelve copies of my book to England, & except Ellis & Alice Corthorn no one seems to have got them. I sent one to Isabella Ford & one to Bob, but neither have written to say they'd got them. I sent a copy to General Hertzog too in this country which he's never got. I have been in despair & written to the general post office to complain. Now it appears (Cron has just found it out) that Cron's little office boy - who always takes the letters & parcels to the post has been robbing him right & left. He's taken money to the tune of 10 or 12 pounds in small sums, & has made a system of selling the stamps in the post office. Cron says he has no doubt he has taken my parcels & letters for the sake of the stamps on them! I suppose he thought he wouldn't be found out if they were sent so far away as England. Please ask Isabella & Bob if they got their copies. I can't send them any more because all my copies are done.

I am working hard at my little garden. Gardening is such a passion with me. I've been reading a most fascinating book on Education in Greece — by a young Cambridge man called Kenneth Freeman, who is dead. The Greeks were so wise in making the learning of poetry one of the great methods of educating young children.

I wish we had a library here. The kind of books I want to read are...
nearly always expensive books.

Good bye. Your old pal,

Olive

I wish you could see my little niece Ursula Schreiner who's just gone to Cambridge. She's such an interesting girl 19 years old. Ever since she was a little child she's had such a curious instinctive hatred of in-justice. The other day she got in a railway carriage & a poor shabby old man got in, & the guard bullied him most unjustly. She at once took up arms & wrote a letter to the paper to defend him. She's very reserved & one doesn't

^get to know her soon - like the elder sister.^

Notation

'Another copy' refers to Woman and Labour. The book referred to is: Kenneth Freeman (1907) Schools of Hellas London: Macmillan. Cronwright-Schreiner's (1924) version of this letter is incorrect in various respects.

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Legend

This letter has been dated by reference to its location in the archive sequence.

1: De Aar
2: Sunday night
3:
4: Dear Mr Merriman
5:
6: Thank you very much for your letter. The woman question, as you know,
7: lies so near to my heart I can't dis-cuss it with any one.
8:
But I am delighted you should have found matter for interest in my little book. What pains me is that in it I have only dealt with a small part of a great human question, which cannot be rightly grasped unless all its sides be seen.

I have just been reading the delightful autobiography of my dear old friend Sir William Butler. It never sinks to vulgar personal detail, & yet through it all beautiful, childlike, genius-ful spirit of the man speaks. I had a long letter from him written just three weeks before he died. I was going to answer it on the day when I heard of his death. It was a comfort to me to realize that even had I answered it the day I got it it would not have reached him in time.

Have you read a novel called "The House of Mirth" by Edith Warton? It is a curiously interesting book, as being the life of a typical female "Parasite," written not with any sermonizing interest, but simply, & one might almost say unconsciously produced, as art. It is a type from which one shrinks so strongly, & yet for which one feels so much pity, as the out come of unhealthy social conditions.

I hope you are going to enjoy a long good rest after what seems to have been a very trying time of labour. You have done invaluable work this session. For me, I see a long 12 or 15 years of a down hill path for this country; when, having learnt some terrible lessons with regard to the treatment of our fellows brown or black - such as England had in her Boer war only on a much larger scale - the path will slowly begin to ascend. I do not see how studying the attitude of the majority of white men in this country the most terrible crimes & mistakes can be avoided - as you say, one fears to speak lest one bring things nearer. When I hear people talk of the absolute necessity of an exterminating war with the Basutos & dark races generally because they are so rapidly becoming socialized & skilled workmen, & if not crushed now will never be crushed; I am always reminded of a visit a friend of mine paid to Milner before the Boer war, when he stuck his hands on the arms of his chair, & said, "It is now or never! They will become too strong for us if we wait!" How often is man's "now", God's "never"!!! They talk so much of the far seeingness of business men, & "men of the world"; but it seems to me often they are the blindest things that walk the earth. Their gaze is fixed with such intensity on the bit of earth just under their feet, that they fail to see the yawning precipice towards which they are slowly & surely moving.

I hope your health keeps good; & that we have many long years of your work still before us.

Yours sincerely

Olive Schreiner
Notation

Letter Reference | Letters/515
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Archive
Epistolary Type
Letter Date | 13 April 1913
Address From | De Aar, Northern Cape
Address To
Who To | Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys Davids nee Foley
Other Versions | Cronwright-Schreiner 1924: 323-4

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Legend
When Cronwright-Schreiner prepared The Life... (1924) and The Letters of Olive Schreiner (1924), with few exceptions he then destroyed the original letters in his possession. When Olive Schreiner’s originals can be compared with his edited versions, his versions are severely shortened, and/or inaccurate in sometimes minor but sometimes major respects, and/or are combinations of a number of original letters. The status of ‘the Cronwright-Schreiner letters’ is therefore that they are artefacts of his editorial practices, rather than being ‘Olive Schreiner letters’ as such. Consequently, where original letters which appear in The Letters... have been traced, they appear in the context of the appropriate archive collections and not as ‘a Cronwright-Schreiner letter’. In addition, where a version exists as one of the Extracts made in preparing The Letters..., the extract version is provided because usually longer and in other ways closer to the characteristic writing practices of Schreiner’s original letters. The remaining ‘Cronwright-Schreiner letters’, of which this is one, are provided for the sake of completeness, because they give clues as to where Schreiner was resident at different points in time, and indicate some of her activities. However, they should be read and used with considerable caution for the reasons spelled out here.

1: To Mrs. Rhys Davids.
2: De Aar, 13th April.
3:
4: Your P.S. about Trojan Women is most strange to me. If it is a sign of
great minds to think alike then we must be very great! because what
5: you say is the exact expression of my thought on reading Trojan Women
6: a few months ago. One of the most wonderful things in all literature
7: to me is the appearance of the "Parasite" Helen on that scene of
8: woman's suffering and anguish - “She comes through them gentle and
10: unafraid: there is no disorder in her dress.”
11:
12: I value your P.S. on this matter so much I am going to fasten it into
13: my copy of the Trojan Women. The reading of Gilbert Murray’s
14: translations of Euripides lately has been a revelation of joy to me.
15: The wonderful thing to me is that any man could have written of women
16: as he does. But genius has no limit of sex or race. It’s curious to
17: sit here in this little house in the karroo veld and feel that perhaps
18: the thing nearest to you in the world is the brain of that old Greek
19: dead now these two thousand years. We who can’t read Greek should be
20: so grateful to Gilbert Murray for giving him to us. I’m so glad I
21: didn’t die before I had him.
22:
23: In a way my little book Woman and Labour is very sad to me. I shall
24: never look at it or touch it again. Only that little verse of
25: Tennyson’s in my dedication to Constance Lytton is one to me always
26: beautiful and fresh. The book is such a broken fragment. The first
27: part of the whole book, which it seemed to me might have been of a
28: little use, was the part dealing with the new moral code which must
29: come into being if men and women are to associate freely together on
30: equal terms. A "new chivalry," an unwritten code of honour more
31: binding than any law, must grow, making many things, not deemed
32: criminal now, as criminal as men and women in the past have deemed
33: rape and sedition, and, with the rising up of the new code, the
34: present ethics of the ball-room and the music-hall must slowly fade
35: away. Such works as Wells’s New Machiavelli illustrate the ghastly
36: condition which arises where the old laws of relation between the
37: sexes are broken down and a high code of perfect Truth, openness and
38: loyalty in all sex relations has not taken its place. But one need not
39: grieve that one’s own little world has been lost, because such a law
40: is writing, and will and must write, itself in the hearts of the
41: noblest men and women and spread slowly from them to others.

Ends/