17 May 1920

My dear Boy Blue,

Just think of my being too busy to write to you! Doesn’t seem possible, does it? Yet for two weeks I have not had a breathing spell. There have been two week periods before this when I haven’t written but it wasn’t for lack of time, rather was I disciplining myself just to see if I could refrain for so lengthy a period. Pal, it feels glorious to be head over heels in work again although I do wish I could have time to write to you.

I’ve really been overworking these past two weeks, driving myself like a steam engine and now I’m dead tired, but it’s a good healthy tiredness that will pass away with a couple of nights of sleep. Here’s what I’ve been doing since I last wrote:

The photographs and line drawings for my Cuban paper reached my hands last week and a statement from E.O.H. that if the paper was to appear in the next bulletin it must be in his hands within three days so that he could turn it over to the Director. Well! I had to write out all the captions for over 30 illustrations; I had to read through the entire manuscript of 80 typewritten pages and compare it with the original ms., verifying all figures, the bibliography, etc.; I had to mount all the plate figures and paste numbers on, etc. All to be done in three evenings after a nine-hour day at the office. It took two evenings to prepare, arrange, mount, and caption the plates and I had only one evening for the manuscript. Pal, you know how I’ve been suffering from inability to concentrate on scientific work; I seemed to have lost my grip. When that last evening came and that entire ms. faced me and I thought of my promise to EOH to hand it in without fail – the inertia of the past two years seemed suddenly to drop away. I had had an exceptionally hard and wearing day at the office and all week I’d been getting only 5 hrs. sleep a night, yet I sat down at that ms. at 6:30 and worked without stopping for six hours. I found that I had left some gaps and I have to write five pages of inserts. I went through the entire paper at one sitting. It required the utmost concentration, for it is the most critical ontogenetic study that I have so far attempted and quite out of my usual line. It was a hard paper to write because of the vast amount of detail incorporated and I had to be careful that all my deductions were accurate. I finished that night at quarter of one and far more than the joy at completing a paper, I felt a deep thanksgiving at finding that I wasn’t the shattered thing I had thought I was. Dear Pal, I guess you can appreciate what it meant to me to know that I still had it in me to grasp a problem and hold on to it till it was completed, to know that I still have the power to do the things I wish to do in science.

This paper is my first important faunal paper and quite characteristically, I plunged into the hardest group of invertebrates first. There have been only two workers of eminence in the country to work on the ammonites: the late Alpheus Hyatt and Prof. James Perrin Smith. They have set the standard of work for biologic studies on ammonites. Not a few palǣontologists identify ammonites in a snap fashion – going all wrong usually – but none have attempted such detailed ontogenetic studies as Hyatt and Smith have produced. Their big contribution to American philosophic paleontology was their insistence on the study of the entire ontogeny in determining relationships and establishing phylogenetic series. Most workers are satisfied in listing a few adult characteristics and letting them constitute a description of the species. That’s the kind of work Stanton turns out, he has been able to earn a reputation because he’s in the Washington machine and because he has worked in a field – the Cretaceous – where no one has yet come to challenge his identifications. But he is not a trained palǣontologist and knows nothing of the philosophic, the biologic aspect of paleontology; he treats fossils as so many pieces of stone, not as the records of the life of the past.

(p. 2) It is an unfortunate thing that with one exception there is no place in this country at the present time where palǣontologists are taught the method of work on ammonites. I have talked to the professors at all the universities in the East and one and all hold up their hands in horror at the mention of ammonites and declare they wouldn’t attempt to identify one, and of course they can’t teach their students much. The only place where one may learn is out in Leland Stanford where J.P. Smith, himself a pupil of Hyatt, gives to his students the details of the Hyatt method. I myself studied everything that Hyatt wrote and became steeped in his principles.

In my present paper, I adopted the Hyatt nomenclature throughout and I introduced a new element into the method of study. I made careful measurements of the ammonites throughout their entire ontogeny, calculating all shell proportions, thereby obtaining a most interesting set of data showing the trends in development up to the present time. I have worked in three distinct fields: my dissertation was purely philosophical and it established the method of study for determining the nature of ancient habitats for invertebrates; my second big contribution (I’m leaving out of account my many shorter papers) was on the sponges, a work half of which was devoted to determining the status of mus. types, the other half to the bringing together and arranging in available form all our knowledge on the morphology of fossil sponges and also a discussion of the stratigraphy of the Cretaceous sponge-bearing horizons of Europe; my third contribution is this latest, a paper in pure, descriptive palǣontology. My other two contributions have been used throughout the country as models for their respective types of work. I was surprised to learn that even yet, nearly four years after the publication of my dissertation, it is being used in university seminars as a model for doctoral theses. Not that alone; as a scientific contribution it has had a marked effect on invertebrate palǣontology. In that paper I attacked an interpretation that was universally held, that was accepted in all text-books, and I assembled such an array of data to back up my contention that I won over some of my strongest opponents. Among these was Schuchart (sp?) who most magnanimously came out in print admitting his conversion. The ripples set up in the palǣontological sea by that paper have not died down. Only the other day I received from Australia a paper by a professor in Victoria devoted to the interpretations I had given in my dissertation. My sponge paper in the same way, though to a lesser degree, attracted attention because of the stratigraphic interpretations I had given for the European Cretaceous. And I prophecy that this ammonite paper will make its mark in the domain of pure palǣontology.

‘Tis time to change the subject and to continue with what I’ve been doing during the last two weeks. As though I didn’t have enough pressing matters to engage my attention I suddenly felt impelled to re-enamel all my kitchen furniture. I do it about once every six months to keep it looking beautiful, so for three nights I wielded the point brush and had a dandy time. I had a peach of an idea. You know brooms and mops and such (p. 3) like always look so unornamental in a kitchen, so I bought some Delft blue enamel and enameled the broom and mop handles, the towel rack and all the small wooden objects so that now they look like ornaments instead of blots on the landscape. It’s perfectly wonderful what you can do with a can of enamel in the way of beautifying a kitchen. And I finished the Dutch blue lace edgings on my glass towels and have now started on a set of dish towels. I invented a different edging for each towel and really they are almost too pretty to use.

The very next day after I turned in my paper on Cuba at 12:45 a.m., Miss Farrell told me to pitch in and whip into shape the annual report on imbeciles. Next! So for the last three days I’ve thought of nothing but the feeble-minded and have had everyone in the office furiously gathering data in order that I might generalize and produce the required statistics. I now know how many mental defectives there are in the schools in each borough of N.Y. City, how many classes there are for them, how many have been examined at clinics this past year, etc. etc. If I were so disposed I could give you a spiel on why children are truants and relation between feeble-mindedness and criminality, etc. etc. But I’ll spare your feelings. I’ve been reading rather omnivorously all sorts of reports on the causes of poverty, crime, insanity and imbecility, analytical studies of the mental status of the inmates of various types of institutions, medical reports, articles on psychology and the lord knows what. I read all the literature that comes to Miss Farrell so you can bet I have my hands full. I’ve read up all the statistics on tuberculosis, cancer, insanity and other similar cheerful things. I’m now beginning to wonder how any of us manage to get through life without catching something incurable that will eventually land us in an institution. Pal, I’ll be getting bats in my belfry if I get any “wiser” about social conditions. I already know enough to spoil my sleep for the next ten years.

But I manage to keep my balance and what I hope is a sane and hopeful outlook on life. I read voraciously on other subjects besides imbeciles. Mother always has piles of magazines; she subscribes to the high-brow ones and some of her friends give her low-brow ones. She takes the high-brows and I take the low-brows so that to my lot falls the “Cosmopolitan,” “The Motion Picture Magazine,” “American,” etc. Thus, my reading derived from diverse sources carries me from “The Scientific Monthly” to “Motion Picture,” from “Mental Hygiene” and the report of the S.P.C.A. to “Snappy Stories.” As for books! Mother says I’ll be the death of her because she never can guess what I’ll be reading next. Last week I had a sudden desire to read a Latin essay I hadn’t read in ten years so I took that for my daily train ride. Now I’m reading one of Ibanez’s novels.

18 May 1920

“Dear Pal, It’s simply wonderful to have recuperated so completely. I have come out of and (words blacked out) almost as completely as though it had never been. I find myself in times more alive and awake than I ever was, and really that isn’t necessary. My mind is so alert and active, so full of schemes of things to do next that it tires out my body. I go from one task to another with an insatiable desire to do and do and do. I’m accomplishing a tremendous amount in all ways, just going through things like a streak. But it agrees with me: my health is superb – not an ache or a pain, no headaches or nerves or blues, and as for tears! They too are a thing of the past, for there’s no longer anything to weep over. I enjoy such peaceful, restful sleep that six hours suffices to refresh me and I wake up every morning so gay and happy, glad to greet another day, glad to be alive. There isn’t anything worth mentioning to worry over, and I haven’t any particularly knotty problems to solve. There isn’t anyone else I can share my joy with because no one else knows (words blacked out) so please don’t mind if I bubble over a bit. I just must tell someone how happy I am but you’re the only person who can understand the full significance of the contrast between this year and last – so do let me chatter – you dear old comfort.”

(p. 4) I have achieved a spring suit!!! I’m so tickled with myself. You know it’s been years since I had one and of course I couldn’t possibly have afforded one this year. You’ll remember that I bought one for Edna last spring. She didn’t wear it much because she tired of it quickly and also she tore it badly in two places and otherwise abused it. She never wore her clothes out she always just tore them to pieces. I surveyed the remains and thought something might be done with them, so the tailor cleaned the suit and then fitted it to me and he was able to eliminate both of the torn places. It is practically as good as new and several persons have spoken about my “new” suit so I guess it doesn’t show what its past history was. All it cost me this year was $12.00. So imagine your Pal in a fashionable Fifth Avenue suit! When I bought it I told Edna to get just what she wanted. Her tastes were extravagant but she did pick good material and of course she couldn’t wear anything that didn’t come from Fifth Ave. So, although the price I had to pay last year rather staggered me, I’m now profiting and I have a much better suit than I’d have thought of buying for myself. Only trouble with it is that it’s too stylish for comfort. The skirt is ridiculous. I used to laugh at Edna every time she wore it because it’s so narrow and if I weren’t hard up I’d never torture myself with it. I just can’t walk naturally – I’m jerked up at every step like a dog on leash. But I didn’t have much choice. I’ve been wearing a black velvet skirt for months; it was beautiful material when new but it was gradually losing its nap and it looked for all the world like a black cat with mange.

I’ll return to the suit presently but must digress for a moment. Did you by any chance see Mary Pickford in the film version of “Daddy Long-Legs”? She takes the part of Judy, an orphan, and is first shown at the orphanage. She and the other children go on strike against the monotonous diet of prunes which they have to endure. While she is on her hunger strike she retires to the garden to meditate on the emptiness of her tum and she earnestly sends up the following prayer:

“Dear God, please send me something to eat. P.S. No prunes!”

Now to return to the suit. When it came from the tailor I felt like saying “Dear God, received one suit with thanks. P.S. Please make it a new one next time!” For it did strike me funny to wait so many years for a suit and then to acquire it by such devious methods – almost, as it were, by inheritance.

Boy Blue, I suppose you’re wondering when I’ll stop talking nonsense and get down to brass tacks. I’ll endeavor to fasten my attention on worthwhile topics for a page or two. To be serious, Pal, I want to tell you about the Mus. Last week Matthew gave a paper before the N.Y. Acad. and I went because I thought it would give me a good opportunity to speak to him. I had been thinking the matter over and it seemed to me that I wasn’t exactly a good Pal to drop the Cuba question. Now that you’re not on the ground it’s up to me to keep the ball rolling and see that your material isn’t forgotten. After the meeting I got my chance to speak to Matthew and we walked over to the subway together. He was very pleasant but I derived little encouragement from him. Evidently there is no intention to divert any of your salary to the Cuban work. He said that the President has so many schemes for all available funds that it seemed unlikely there’d be any money for your material. He spoke much as EOH had done before him about you’re making enough in oil work to carry on any scientific investigations you might be interested in. Altogether he acted as though it were your private concern more than a Mus. matter although he expressed the formal interest etc. etc. Pal, why don’t they see that you have something big in Cuba? I’m disappointed at the attitude. After all it just gets to individual effort and sacrifice to accomplish things. So I thought I’d begin this week devoting Saturday afternoons and as many Sundays as possible to cleaning the specimens. I wish I could work on them at night because I’d gladly give 3 hrs. an evening, but the preparation of the specimens must be done by daylight. I don’t know how my plan will work but I hope to have some results to show you when you return. I want to start in now while I’m earning money otherwise which enables me to have enough to eat, for if I face another jobless summer my health may go to smash as it did last summer for lack of food and then I’m no good for scientific work.

(p. 5) I didn’t realize quite how dear to my heart is the Cuban problem until the other day when I received a paper from Roig from the Cuban Dept. of Agriculture. I held my breath and opened it expecting to see Jurassic ammonites all figured and described, but to my joy it was only something on the Pleistocene. But I knew then how much I wanted the problem to be ours and not someone else’s. I believe that the publication of this first paper of mine will act as a deterrent to keep anyone else from venturing to put forth any hastily prepared, superficial descriptions of the Jurassic fauna and it will probably keep Roig from rushing into print.

The last publication list of the U.S.G.S. had a set of fine papers of interest either to you or me, so I’ve sent for all of them. One is a professional paper by Prof. Pack on the Geology and Oil Resources of the Sunset Midway Oil Field of California. If your calls ever summon you to California you’d probably want the paper. Gilmore has published one which I know you’ll want describing a large reptilian fauna from the Torrejon, Puerco, and underlying Upper Cretaceous formations of New Mexico. The fauna consists mostly of turtles including 29 species (16 new) and fragmentary dinosaur remains.

Two books on oil geology have just been published and I think you ought to begin to assemble a little collection of useful books. One you may know is Hager’s “Practical Oil Geology” published by McGraw-Hill. The other is new and I’m sure would be of value to you. “Geology of the Mid-Continent Oilfields” (Kansas, Oklahoma, and North Texas) by T.O. Bosworth, formerly of the Geol. Survey of Great Britain. It has the geology of the region as a whole, structures, character of oil, maps, etc.

Pal, don’t you think it’s a dandy scheme while you’re off wandering over the face of the earth for me to keep tabs on the literature you’d be interested in? Just remember what an addition to your Cuban report was that article on “Petroleum in Cuba” which you almost certainly wouldn’t have come across. Literature accumulates so fast that if you isolate yourself from it for six months you feel at sea when you tackle it again. I’ll keep my eyes open for things for you if you’d like – you know I’d love to.

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12:10 A.M. May 19.

I finished the above lines at 11:00 P.M. and went to bed. I was just passing off to dreamland when I was aroused by the violent ringing of my downstairs bell. I jumped up, turned on the light and saw that it was just on the stroke of midnight. And then I knew what the insistent ringing of the bell meant. I said to myself it’s the cablegram from London. It was indeed and I just must finish up this letter tonight.

You dear, dear wonderful boy! I knew you’d win. Maybe that’s why I’ve been so happy lately, I felt so confident of your success. I’m afraid I won’t be able to sleep a wink tonight. I’m so excited. It’s just glorious and I’m so so proud of you. Do hurry home and tell me everything about how you did it. They certainly came to a quick decision but how could they help it with such a convincing report and with you to persuade them?

So you’ve really caught a rainbow at last Boy Blue. I’m so glad, for with all my heart I wanted you to have it. I cannot write any more just now – it’s one of those occasions when feelings lie too deep for words. There was an indescribably thrill in that single word “successful” borne to me through the marvelous throbbing oceanic artery which joins England and America and which makes us seem very near to each other.

Good night my Pal. May you have continued success at every step in the big venture.

Your very proud and happy Pal.

Marjorie Daw