Author's Note

By chance I read a book about a young American who had been by so far the outstanding character of his generation – as scholar, athlete and personality of ambitious charm – that his graduation from Yale in 1957 was covered by *Time* magazine, while his contemporaries selected the jobs he would give them when, not if, he became President. Yet after a glorious start, his career stalled. The book (*Remembering Denny* by Calvin Trillin) was an investigation into what went wrong. The subject ended up committing suicide, and much of his problem seemed to stem from the fact that he could not accept his homosexual desires. Had he been born a few years later, the author implied, he would have encountered no such problems.

The book made me think that young or short lives are more sensitive indicators of the pressure of public attitudes than lives lived long and crowned with honours. The stories of young people who delight parents and friends with their talents have a concentrated significance in their beginnings, and in their premature ends there is a natural poignancy that brutally epitomises the disappointment that is also common but less evident in longer, duller lives.

Three such lives, each done at the length its span naturally required (a third of a life, a third of a book) – that might well seem full enough to take away the sense of 'so what' that would cling to a single short life. And then if perhaps the subjects actually had achieved something interesting and if they were to come from different parts of the century and so have lived against a different public background and thus illustrate the impact of changing attitudes and preoccupations over a long period . . .

This book was originally called *The Artist, the Airman and the Spy*. It is, after all, three separate biographies: the lives of three people who never met. It seemed fair that the title should not only recognise the subjects' individuality but also emphasise the defining importance of work in each man's life.

As I researched and wrote these three lives, various links between the three characters and various common themes emerged, none of which I had known about before I had started. This obviously encouraged the urge towards unity that finds its best expression in fiction, when the events can be shaped and patterned to echo the themes, while the characters can be made, within the limits of their realistic capacities, to behave in a way that adds a further level of harmony.

I tried to resist this urge. Having allowed it to dictate a new title, which stressed the characters' similarities, I wanted to remain faithful to their differences. The lives of real people, unlike those of fictional characters, seem to exert a small but constant outward force away from order. So while I attempted, as gently and as truthfully as possible, to shape the events of their lives into some comprehensible pattern, I tried also to respect their individual energies, which seemed to push in the opposite direction, back towards singularity: the artist, the airman and the spy.

I have occasionally used the words 'England' or 'English' where some readers might have expected 'Britain' or 'British'. This is not because I imagine they are interchangeable, but because I accept that there is a difference.

Christopher Wood

ONE DAY IN the spring of 1921 a beautiful young Englishman set off for Paris to become the greatest painter the world had ever seen. His name was Christopher Wood and he was nineteen years old. Until he took the boat for Calais on 19 March he was working for a fruit importer in the City of London. He was the son of a doctor in the North West of England, and his sudden disappearance to France confirmed his family's worst fears. Although Christopher wore shirts from the best outfitters in Jermyn Street, was well-mannered and polite to his parents, he seemed to have no understanding of middle-class convention. Some combination of circumstances had combined with a fierce streak in his character to make him wild and ambitious. He was determined to be a painter, and the intensity of his desire was frightening to his parents.

Dr Lucius Wood and his wife Clare had two children: Christopher, whom they knew as Kit, and Elizabeth, whom they called Betty. As a child, Kit had his hair cut in a bob and wore smocks. So did Betty. The family was relatively well off; the parents believed in God and the children believed in Father Christmas.

One December Kit wrote:

> My dear father Xmas, I want a new good yacht and I want it to be all hollow inside and gun and a top And Betty a big doll and a gun And I want a very sparp chissel and a good screw driver and a good peaint box and mother wants a nice comfy bed With love from Kit and Betty Wood.

He always knew what he wanted, and in his childhood he almost always had it. His mother was devoted to him and he to her. He would gather crocuses for her birthday on 25 March and she repaid him with her doting indulgence. Clare Wood came from a Lancashire family called Arthur on her father's side, and a seafaring Cornish family called Pellew on her mother's; Kit liked to think that the sea, and boats, were in his blood. Dr Wood was a general practitioner. He was a less demonstrative person than his wife and took a detached view of his son's early enthusiasms. He called him 'Snodgrass' after the would-be poet in *Pickwick Papers*. Next to Dickens, Dr Wood's preferred reading was the Bible.

At the age of seven, Kit was sent to a preparatory school called Freshfield, where he excelled at games. In 1914 he went to Marlborough College in Wiltshire. This was one of the newer public schools, lacking the history or burnish of Eton and Winchester, but respectable in its way. The aim of such schools was to prepare their pupils for the service of the British Empire abroad, as soldiers, diplomats and administrators, or to ready them for work in the professions at home. Games were as important as work, though neither was as crucial to the school's philosophy as the idea of 'independence': their claim was to turn a boy into a man, even if the evidence suggested he was still a child.

At the moment Kit Wood began his time at Marlborough in September 1914, the world changed. 'The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness,' wrote Henry James, 'is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while making for and meaning is too tragic for any words.' It was as though the history of Europe had been torn up: Erasmus, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Goethe, Mozart, Dante, Montaigne, Tolstoy, Rembrandt, Beethoven . . . their work had no cumulative value any more; it was smashed into fragments that Eliot would try to reassemble in *The Waste Land*. Almost ten million men died.

While Kit Wood struggled to settle in at school, his father went as a medical officer to the Western Front, where he stayed for the duration of the War. While he was away, Kit became seriously ill. The disease seems to have started as polio but then to have been complicated by the development of septicaemia or a similar infection. One of Wood's adult friends thought it had all started with a football injury. In any event he was now forced to abandon the games field: he was unable to do his lessons in class but had to read and write in a lying position. In March 1916 he had to be withdrawn from Marlborough altogether. His mother nursed him at home, and in the long, painful hours of his illness he turned to painting. His love for her, already profound, was intensified by his physical dependence.

Dr Wood was absent from his son's life, except in the occasional letter from the Front. The progress of the War was known to Christopher Wood only from odd glimpses of his mother's newspaper during his convalescence: the 'real' world was kept at his mother's arm's length.

The illness ruined his education. He did not return to school until January 1918 when he arrived at Malvern College in Worcestershire. Like all such schools in England at this time, Malvern was in a state of grief bordering on paralysis. The school magazine that listed Wood's arrival also recorded the award of nineteen DSO's to old boys of the school and thirty-six MC's. There was no artwork in it; there was almost no room for anything but the names of the dead: a total of 457 Malvernians were killed in the War. Teachers of school sixth forms were finding it difficult to keep their nerve when the names of boys they had so carefully nurtured towards manhood and university appeared a few weeks later in the dead and missing columns of *The Times*.

After four years on the Western Front Dr Wood returned to find that his little son had become a handsome, crippled young man. His boyish beauty had remained; he had a short straight nose, a strong jaw and hair of the colour known as fair, though by no means blond, brushed back from the temples where it showed the first signs of receding. He had

a clipped, rapid way of speaking, indicative of a nervous intensity that had developed in him since 1914. He limped when he walked, though he used his cane as much for conversational emphasis as for physical support.

Dr Wood had taken a job on the Earl of Derby's estate at Knowsley near Liverpool. The family lived in a spacious house in Huyton, which was then an affluent suburb. He told Kit that he too should train to become a doctor, but among the changes wrought in Kit by what he came to call 'the War years' was a powerful indignation at anything he viewed as meddling in his affairs. Dr Wood's suggestion was briskly rejected by his son, who told him he had had enough of blood and illness: he had decided to go to Liverpool University where he would study architecture. This had the air of a compromise worked out with his mother: the subject was artistic yet respectable, the university was near home. It was as close to being a painter in an attic as he could yet realistically manage.

Wood viewed it as no more than a means to an end. One of his architectural drawings from the university survives: it is a solid piece of work, correct and craftsmanlike, but on the back of it is a highly-coloured painting of a young woman. His mind was not on elevations but on other plans.

After a year he left university and took a job in London working for an importer of dried fruit called Thornley and Felix. He lived in rooms in Bayswater and his homeward route in the evening took him past the Café Royal, where Augustus John habitually held court. Friends of Wood later claimed that he one day approached the throne with some drawings and that John was so impressed that he arranged for Wood to go to Paris and lodge with his friend Alphonse Kahn, a well-known collector and connoisseur, while he studied painting. It is possible that Wood had met John when he went to lecture to the Sandon Club at Liverpool University and was thus able to reintroduce himself, but it is more likely that the Paris connection was made by a Wood family friend called Robert Tritton, who dealt in Oriental antiques.

Alphonse Kahn had taken up attractive young men before,

though there is no evidence that he required them to become his lovers in return. Kahn was an extreme example of a 1920s Parisian type whose money came from international finance but whose interests were in art and patronage. He lived in an astonishing house in the sixteenth *arrondissement* and he invited Christopher Wood to abandon his little rooms in Bayswater and to come and stay with him while he looked for a studio and more permanent lodging.

So it was that the untrained, uncertainly talented Christopher Wood took the train to Dover and crossed to Paris, where few English artists of his generation had previously ventured. The day before he left, as though in symbolic farewell to the life he was leaving, he played a round of golf with Robert Tritton at Woodhall Spa, a seaside course in Lincolnshire.

Christopher Wood was a child of the Edwardian era, born at the last gasp of imperial pomp into a country depicted by later writers, such as Philip Larkin in his poem 'MCMXIV', as crisscrossed with narrow roads and deep hedgerows, with village names from Domesday all grown-over with loving neglect, and patient football crowds with trusting, upturned faces, unresentful of their prosperous betters with their long weekends, grouse-shooting and towering blancmanges.

The England of Wood's childhood was in fact a fearful place, engaged in a battle on all fronts to keep the modern world at bay. Wood's desire to be a painter and his departure to lodge in Paris with an unmarried 'connoisseur' were deeply alarming to his father. Attempts to interest English people in new developments in painting, writing or psychology had all failed: the country not only had little appetite for knowledge of human behaviour, it had no real interest at all in the life of the mind.

Far from being imperially complacent, Britain was worried about its place in the world. After the Boer War, alarmist literature circulated about the poor physical quality of the British young: congested city conditions had produced a generation of stunted, weak, voluble children who lacked in

physical or moral stamina. In the port of Liverpool, Christopher Wood's father saw just such conditions, and came to the same conclusion as the demagogues who suggested that Britain's best way forward was in increased – or as they put it 'splendid' – isolation from Europe and its modern ways.

By denying legitimacy or even publication to many of the ideas current in Europe, the conservative forces of Edwardian England managed to confuse the cranky with the serious by driving both underground. While socialism was emerging as a credible political force, anarchism occupied almost as much public attention. Many people who might have seen feminism as the most important means of social advance were distracted into anti-vivisectionism, vegetarianism or the investigation of the occult. While the country retained some adamantine self-belief, and an instinctive patriotism which found its most poignant expression in the raising of the Pals' battalions in 1915, it was morbidly sensitive to the currents of new thought that were abroad.

And abroad, in the opinion of the middle classes from which Christopher Wood came, was where they should stay. Channels to the continent were few and subversive. Walter Sickert had lived in Dieppe and studied the French Impressionists; Wyndham Lewis had been to France, as had David Bomberg and Jacob Epstein. Ben Nicholson went to Paris in the early 1920s and made some flirtation with abstract painting before retreating into figurative work for the next six years.

Christopher Wood had no historical self-consciousness and was motivated by complicated and utterly personal patterns formed in the period of his illness. He did not see himself as a pioneer, but no amount of ignorance on his part could stop him from appearing to the people he met in Paris as a very curious figure indeed.

Alphonse Kahn's house in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne was dominated by a vast salon with a polished parquet floor and open fires at either end. About the walls were hung paintings by Turner, Rembrandt, Greuze, Poussin, Matisse

and other modern painters that Wood could not immediately identify. Wood's quarters consisted of a beautifully decorated bedroom, with bathroom and lavatory attached. Kahn provided him with meals and helped him to enrol at art school. Wood had wanted to go to the Ecole des Beaux Arts, but it was beyond his means; he signed up instead at the Académie Julian in the Passage des Panoramas off the Boulevard Montparnasse, which had been made fashionable in the 1890s when Bonnard, Vuillard and fellow-painters of the Nabis group had passed through. Matisse, Léger and Derain had added their lustre to the Académie, though by 1921 it had come to depend on visiting Americans.

All these names, all these styles of painting . . . and all that Christopher Wood had was his ambition. He needed not only to orientate himself in a foreign capital, but to catch up with what had happened there when he was a child. The principal breakthroughs in painting and sculpture had been made in Paris by Picasso and others before the War. Paris had drawn in artists from all over Europe: Modigliani, Miró, Brancusi, Picasso, Kandinsky, Giacometti, de Chirico, Chagall, but still in England the most famous painter was Augustus John.

Wood never managed to form a clear perspective on the development of modern painting; and his enthusiasms were often contradictory. He admired Augustus John, even though John's work had already degenerated by this time into a succession of society portraits where his undoubted technical facility was not imaginatively stretched. But Wood also came to like Cézanne, Derain, Matisse and other French painters who were more determinedly modern. He compensated for his lack of academic understanding by an instinctive good taste, and a sensitivity to a wide variety of art.

As soon as he was settled at Alphonse Kahn's, Wood did what all well-brought up young Englishmen would have done at this time: he wrote to his mother. Almost every day a letter was despatched from Paris in his hasty, sophisticated hand, its content a rush and slither of names, places, bad spelling and half-understood developments. He negotiated an

allowance from his parents of £14 a month and was grateful to them for giving him 'this chance'.

In matters of the world, in questions of politics and power, he remained vividly ignorant. In May he noticed cars on the streets of Paris being inspected by military authorities and believed this to be a preparation for war; but why, and against whom he did not know. Nor did he care. Compared to Huyton, Paris was entrancing. With Kahn's help he acquired a studio in the rue des Saints Pères, a street that runs at right angles from the left bank of the Seine. His landlord was an Englishman called Middleton, who helped Wood set himself up in reasonable comfort. He painted all morning, and in the afternoon would go to the Académie Julian, where they taught a traditional course of figure drawing. Wood's steady sketches showed a fair grasp of anatomy and perspective. They were not remarkable, but were not intended to be: his aching ambition reluctantly recognised the need for humility and apprenticeship.

In the evenings he left his student life and moved into a different world. Through Alphonse Kahn he met a number of fashionable, rich and self-indulgent people. Paris was both snobbish and democratic in its social life; gatherings might be ostentatious or competitive in their displays of spending, but the guest lists included people whose only wealth was their talent. In June Wood danced with Mme Carpentier, who was anxious about her husband George's next title fight; he watched Suzanne Lenglen play tennis at St Cloud and met Maurice Chevalier; there was an invitation from a young Clemenceau, nephew of the Tiger. Wood was open-mouthed at the beauty of such people's houses and the sophistication of their manners, but he tried to keep a level head. In his sober moments he recognised that it was useful for him to know people with money: they might make further and yet more useful introductions; they might one day buy his paintings.

He spoke little French and was not yet a proper painter. Alphonse Kahn had slipped him through the doorways of various large houses, and Wood's charm had taken him from

there. He was laughably English with his hand-made shirts, his fair hair, his earnest manner; yet he was also eager, reckless, open to experience and, with his limp and his little stick to lean on, poignantly vulnerable.

Through Kahn Wood met a Chilean diplomat called Antonio de Gandarillas, a notorious figure in the beau monde. Augustus John had stayed with Gandarillas and even John, the definition of outlandish bohemianism in English terms, had been taken aback by what he called Gandarillas's 'lurid and fashionable life'. Gandarillas was a man of huge financial resources but erratic solvency who claimed to be related to Catherine of Aragon. He was foremost among many South American *émigrés* in Paris who had used their wealth to patronise insolvent artists before the War. His aunt, Eugenia Errazuriz, had supported Picasso in his early days and consequently retained a direct influence with him.

Gandarillas himself was a small, exquisite man, who looked like a spider monkey. He was exhaustingly, indefatigably social: after parties, he loved food, drink, opium, gambling, travel, art and young men. He had been educated at Cambridge and was, when Wood met him, married with three daughters. Gandarillas's life was not, however, consistent with orthodox marriage, and he saw little of his family. A family portrait done by Ambrose McEvoy in 1918 was reprinted in a book about McEvoy's work in 1923 with Gandarillas painted out and the picture retitled 'Madame Gandarillas and her children'. While he was unquestionably dangerous company for the impressionable Christopher Wood, Gandarillas had an important redeeming quality: he was capable of loyal friendship.

This was as well for Wood, because before long Gandarillas had more or less adopted him – as curio, protégé, and lover. The arrangement had an element of convenience for both men – Gandarillas gained a beautiful pet, Wood could eat – but it was underpinned by a constant affection.

Wood meanwhile continued with his studies. French girls, he complained, had large stomachs, but still on the whole, he drew women better than men. One of those he depicted

was Maria, Duchesse de Gramont, a friend of Gandarillas's who sat for some sketches. The Middletons lent him a bath for his studio, and since there was a bedroom there, he was able to make 54 rue des Saints Pères his official address, particularly in letters to his mother. In fact, when he moved out of Alphonse Kahn's house he frequently spent the night at Gandarillas's house in the Avenue Montaigne.

In July Wood was invited by a couple called Whitaker to go to their twelfth-century villa outside Florence. It was a handsome place, formerly the property of the Medicis, though the party stayed only a week or so before decamping to Riva on the shores of Lake Garda in search of cooler weather. Here he met and befriended the Russian painter Michael Sévier, who gave him his first set of oil paints. Apart from feeling uncomfortably hot, Wood registered the sensations of abroad in mainly visual terms. In late July he noticed some political unrest in Italy, but he had no interest in its causes. What he did record was a macabre incident in which two young men of about his age, who had been to dine with his party the night before, were kidnapped by terrorists and tied to the main railway line to Rome, where they lay for two hours before a train came through and cut them to pieces. The incident made a troubling impression on Wood: he never quite forgot it.

He arrived back in Paris in September. He had saved £35 in Italy, but had somehow managed to spend it on the way back and now found himself broke. He lodged briefly with a friend called Billie Shields and then with Adrien Drian, a portrait painter and decorative artist about whom he became enthusiastic: Drian was only thirty-five, but he was making, Wood could not help noticing, £5,000 a year.

In the autumn Gandarillas came to his rescue. He financed a small flat at 11 bis rue Balzac, just opposite the Carlton on the Champs Elysées, and enrolled him in a second art school, La Grande Chaumière. Wood rededicated himself to his work and was commissioned to paint some posters for the dress designer Edward Molyneux. This was a social commission, since Molyneux was one of the people he had

met in the autumn season of parties, but it was the first time someone had shown any faith in his ability.

Wood was caught in a number of conflicting currents. Some evenings he would be in the company of such dubious figures as Lady Drogheda, Countess Lasocki, Princess Radziwill or Lady Idina Gordon who, though better educated, were not essentially different from what later generations came to know as 'Euro-trash'; on other nights he would be alone in his little apartment. He was still only twenty, and he found that Paris could be a harsh and unfriendly place. His dedication to his work provided a daily, albeit fitful, continuity.

At the end of 1921 Wood returned for Christmas to Huyton, which he detested. His parents wanted to know what his 'plans' were and he told them that they had not changed: he wanted to be a great painter. He had no practical details to offer them, so escaped from the stifling atmosphere of the suburbs as soon as he could and took the train to London. Gandarillas was staying at his house in Cheyne Walk and was happy to put Wood up for a few days. He introduced him to Augustus John, and Wood was thrilled. Whatever the limits of John's painting, he was still a heroic figure to aspiring English painters. Wood's enthusiastic account of the meeting, incidentally, suggests that he had not previously met John at the Café Royal or anywhere else.

Wood also met Ivor Novello, Lady Diana Manners, Gladys Cooper and a Chilean painter called Alvaro Guevara who took a strong physical liking to him which he managed to choke off only out of respect for Gandarillas. Wood did little work. He sulked in his bedroom overlooking the Thames. What was annoying him particularly was his mother's suggestion that he take a job designing dresses for Edward Molyneux: this was not the kind of thing great painters did. Back in Paris he wrote to her extremely fiercely to point this out. He asked for her trust and promised that one day he would repay it; Clare Wood, who could deny him nothing,

wrote back a conciliatory letter and the matter of Kit's 'future' was temporarily put on one side.

In January Gandarillas took him travelling to the Low Countries, where Wood had a chance to see paintings by Rembrandt and Vermeer. He was struck by the devotion of the people at prayer at Bruges and vowed that one day he would paint exactly what he had seen. His mother was anxious that he might be drifting away from the Church of England, but she need not have worried: it was the aesthetic not the spiritual aspect of Catholicism that had caught his eye.

When he was back at the studio in the rue des Saints Pères and once more attending his courses at the Académie Julian, Wood reflected on his first year in Paris and admitted to his mother that it had been very hard. He had, he told her, come close to suicide.

'I have felt lonely, terribly lonely,' he wrote. He had 'felt the lack of my Mother and home and sometimes had to do on very insufficient money . . . Paris to a young boy who knows nothing can be hell.' He was not in Paris for the rest of the year. Gandarillas took him to Menton in the South of France and thence on a long trip round the Mediterranean. Much of it was financed by Gandarillas's luck at the casino in Menton; the journey was unplanned, but gathered shape as it progressed. For Wood, as always, its purpose lay in self-education. In April they were in Tunisia and he painted a watercolour of a Moorish street which showed the early signs of a distinctive talent. It was in his use of colour that Wood first began to progress: he had clearly looked at the early paintings of Picasso, as well as those of Matisse and Derain, and learned a certain boldness.

Wood's twenty-first birthday arrived on 7 April 1922. Events had moved so quickly that he needed to pause and take stock of his position. His ambition to be a great painter was intact; the longer he worked at his painting, however, the more he understood how far he had to go. On the one hand he had to cherish his ambition, he had to keep it burning and not allow the pleasures of his new life to extinguish

it; then again, he was forced to recognise that he did not yet have the technical means to convert his ability into pictures. He had simultaneously to feed his ambition and to keep it dormant.

One of the ways in which he managed to keep this awkward balance was by enlisting his mother. His great painting, when it came, was to be in honour of her. ‘Some day,’ he wrote, ‘I hope to repay you for all your great love and kindness and the great care you took of me when I was ill. I never forget.’

Wood, who was a quite guileless correspondent, expressed with dramatic simplicity the equation that was at the centre of his creative process. His love for his mother and his gratitude towards her were genuine enough; but by equating his projected success as a painter with the ‘repaying’ and honouring of her, he cleverly insured his artistic ambition against failure or decrease. His love and gratitude would never fade; and now his will to paint was equally eternal. He did not make this connection from some cold-hearted calculation, but he possessed at an unconscious level the ruthlessness that art requires.

From Tunisia, Wood and Gandarillas travelled to Taormina in Sicily, then at the height of its unspoilt fame as a resort of astounding beauty, accessible, physically and financially, only to the few. Each day Wood rose early and left the villa they had rented to go down to swim in the pink shadow of Mount Etna. The return climb of 800 feet gave him an appetite for breakfast of eggs, coffee and cherries in the garden. Gandarillas would now have risen to plan the day’s enjoyment and would take coffee with him beneath the trees. In the morning Wood painted and Gandarillas read. After lunch there was a siesta, then more painting till the daily Italian lesson at five-thirty. In the cool of the evening Wood wrote to his mother. Then there was dinner laid on a little white table beneath some cypress trees on a terrace surrounded by Roman mosaics. Dinner was always an event: one day Wood was awoken by the main course when Gandarillas put two live lobsters in his bed during his siesta.

Afterwards they sometimes had the town orchestra in to play for them and sometimes they read French. It was a time of almost unimaginable *douceur de vivre*, yet it was in Taormina, Mrs Wood later claimed, that Kit really began to paint. While his travels with Gandarillas took him away from his studies they also introduced him to sights, colours and scenery that were beyond the range of other students. In Taormina he painted a plate of lemons directly from above, as though he might see right through them into the plate. The perspective was actually less interesting than the brilliant yellow he achieved in the fruit.

In Taormina Wood read the letters of Van Gogh, and they left a deep impression. He had seen Van Gogh's work on the walls of Alphonse Kahn's house and greatly liked it; now he discovered that the work was produced by someone he described as having 'a beautiful mind'. He began to believe that the nature of an artist's work was determined by his moral character; and this assumption, however doubtful, fitted into his previous equation of his own success with the honouring of his mother.

While Wood placed a kind of superstitious value on his mother's affection he was happy to disregard his father altogether. He had rejected the values of Huyton and all the dullness it entailed; he came increasingly to equate his father with the forces of tedium and small-mindedness that he must escape at all costs. This was a selective view of his father, just as the elevation of his mother was unrealistic, and ignored the fact that it was his father who was paying the £14 a month. Wood, however, was not searching for a mature or a consistent system of values: he was trying to be an important painter. He believed whatever helped.

From Sicily he and Gandarillas travelled to Athens, where they hired a car and driver to take them into the mountains. This proved to be a more hazardous undertaking than they expected. The roads were not properly made, and the young driver struggled to control the car. About 50 miles north of Athens he missed a narrow bridge and plunged them into a marsh beside the road. Nobody was hurt, but they were stuck

30 miles from the nearest village. Wood and Gandarillas stayed by the car to guard their belongings while the driver set off for help.

As they were sitting by the bridge, a young Greek soldier came by. He was on his way home from the war against Turkey – what war or why it was fought, Christopher Wood neither asked nor cared. The soldier stayed to help them, and when the driver returned with some horses they were able to pull the car free and continue their journey. The next day, on a mule track, they came across a dozen eagles devouring a dead horse; one of the birds removed an entire haunch and flew off with it. The eagles were unperturbed by the sound of the car, and Wood had to fire a revolver to frighten them away. He did not explain how or why he came to have a gun with him. They proceeded by pony and spent the night in a hut belonging to a goatherd, where they dined off chicken, goat's cheese, figs and wine. They were so badly bitten by mosquitoes in the course of the night that they dosed themselves with quinine against malaria the next morning. At this stage, Gandarillas began to feel the want of fine linen, chateau-bottled wine and other necessities of life in the *seizième*. The expedition was cut short: they returned to Athens and took a boat to Constantinople.

Christopher Wood was everything Gandarillas wanted in a travelling companion: bright, appreciative, light-hearted, but sufficiently absorbed by his work to be independent for large parts of the day. In Constantinople he produced some accomplished watercolours and marvelled at the city itself. More trouble, however, was waiting for them in Smyrna.

If Wood and Gandarillas had taken greater interest in public events, or even if they had bothered to find out something from the soldier who had helped them in Greece, they might never have gone south to Smyrna in the first place. Under the treaty of Sèvres in 1920 Greece had been given Smyrna, and by 1922 the Greek army was trying to push its way up the Aegean coast. The Turks, however, had found a leader in Mustafa Kemal (Kemal Atatürk) with no regard for treaties and a committed hatred of the Greeks. He drove

their army back into Smyrna, and then did what any Turkish leader would have done: massacred them.

Wood and Gandarillas, restored by their civilising stay in Constantinople, then found themselves in the middle of the slaughter. Wood viewed it with a kind of feverish detachment, though now he had a particular reason for it: he and Gandarillas had both contracted malaria. Wood's temperature descended from 106 degrees just in time for him and Gandarillas to catch the last available boat out of Smyrna. The Turks moved in the next day and killed everyone in sight, including the staff of the nursing home.

Even this sweaty brush with death provoked no more reflection in Wood than the comment that 'this fellow Kemal Pasha is a dreadful menace'. On the boat to Athens they shared a cabin with the governor of Lesbos, who smelt, and Prince Louis Alphonse, the shifty brother of the king of Spain, whom they ditched on arrival.

The pleasure cruise was now further protracted by the need for convalescence. Karlsbad in Austria had a pleasantly hygienic, Northern ring to it after the terrors of the Aegean; and Gandarillas planned a route that took them through Venice, where Wood could look at the paintings by Veronese, Tintoretto and Titian. He repaid Gandarillas's consideration by describing their brief stay in Venice as the most wonderful night of his life.

Once in Karlsbad they consulted medical opinion. The doctors prescribed arsenic injections to counter the effects of malaria, castor oil to make Wood's hair grow where his head had been shaved, and iron for his newly diagnosed anaemia. The recuperation should be completed in the mountains, they advised; Wood told his mother that this definitely ruled out Huyton.

Gandarillas also wrote to Clare Wood from Karlsbad, telling her that she need have no fear about Kit: so long as her son was in his company, whether in Paris or abroad, he would make sure he lacked for nothing. It was a charming and strategically well-judged letter, which drew a friendly response from Mrs Wood. Meanwhile Kit wrote to her again

and said: 'I am enclosing to you a letter for Daddy which I wish you to read first and if you think it will ease matters should be glad if you will give it to him, otherwise tear it up.

'Remember this, that I do not wish in any way to reproach him for his curious ideas but merely to put things quite straight as they stand from one man to another. For now, although you probably never realised it, I am become a man and have to a certain extent developed during this last year.

'It hurts me to think of him being ill and worried, for at the bottom of my heart I love him, but have I, during the last few years, been able to show it?

'I shan't say more except that I love you dearly and I hope that we shall reach a good understanding.'

Wood was a slapdash writer, but there were certain suggestive phrases: Dr Wood's 'curious ideas' . . . 'I am become a man' . . . his father 'ill and worried' . . . his recognition that his mother might think it wiser not to pass the letter on to his father but to 'tear it up'. Yet somehow it is hard to believe that Wood chose to tell his father that he and Gandarillas were lovers. He could sufficiently have emphasised his independence without distressing his father further. Gandarillas's letter to Clare Wood spoke only of friendship, and it would have been foolish of Wood to jeopardise the good feeling it had engendered for the sake of some cleaving to the 'truth'.

Although he was a doctor and, thanks to his years at the Front, a man of considerable experience, Dr Wood was not the kind of father to welcome the news that his son was sleeping with another man. Homosexuality was one of the areas in which Britain had most determinedly ignored the developments of European thinking. To Dr Wood, as to most other Englishmen, the most famous instance of homosexual activity was still the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde. A writer called Edward Carpenter had proposed ideas about the instinctive nature of homosexuality in *Homogenic Love* (1896) and *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), but they were not generally accepted in England until they appeared, only slightly updated, in the pages of a report prepared for the

Home Office under the chairmanship of a Yorkshire schoolmaster called Jack Wolfenden in 1957. Havelock Ellis's great work *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* tackled the problems in 1897, but the book was considered depraved and could only be published in America. It did not appear in England until 1935.

In any event, Christopher Wood, despite his passionate, unguarded nature, had a strict Edwardian delicacy. Even at their most jocular his letters had no vulgarity and no mention of bodily functions, sexual or otherwise. The most significant line of his letter is the plaintive one: 'At the bottom of my heart, I love him, but have I, during the last few years, been able to show it?' Lucius Wood's part in his son's life was marginal, but its small tragedy was shadowed in that sad, half-stifled question.

From Karlsbad, Wood and Gandarillas returned at last to Paris, stopping en route at Munich (where they found the wooden seats in the opera house uncomfortable because they had grown so thin), Leipzig and Nuremburg, then known only as the birthplace of Dürer.

At the end of November Wood met his mother for a few days in London and introduced her to Tony Gandarillas. Clare Wood was a good-looking woman who appeared at least ten years younger than she was; nevertheless she was a provincial doctor's wife whose chief concerns, as she expressed them, were curtain fabrics and the shortage of domestic help. Gandarillas was one of the most worldly men in Europe. The meeting, however, lubricated by his charm and their common dedication to her son, was a great success. It was followed by a further cordial exchange of letters.

In London Wood also saw Augustus John, whom he continued to admire, believing him to be 'very refined and a gentleman to his finger tips'. Back in Paris he effectively moved in with Gandarillas in the Avenue Montaigne, though there was some pretence that he lived in a small hotel nearby. They had been through the wonders of Taormina and the trials of Smyrna together; whatever might happen to their sexual feelings, they were now bound close in affection and

friendship. On 28 December they went to the evening service at the classical church of Saint Sulpice, the 'cathedral' of the aristocratic Faubourg St Germain. It had been a tumultuous year.