

# THE CONRADIAN

Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society (U.K.)



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# THE CONRADIAN

## Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society (U.K.)

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**“WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO POOR TEBB?”:  
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF CONRAD'S PHYSICIAN**

**Martin Bock**  
*University of Minnesota, Duluth*

Ford Madox Ford's question about the fate of Albert Edward Tebb has not yet been answered by scholars.<sup>1</sup> If Dr. Tebb is remembered by students of modern literature, he probably dwells in the minds of a few Conradians and Fordians as the caricature drawn by Violet Hunt in *The Flurried Years* where he appears as:

The queer, clever, weedy man who stooped so for despair, not laziness. Himself he could not save. But you called him and he came, holding his baggy umbrella in front of him, the flaps of his great coat nearly touching the ground, looking like Santa Claus or the Old Cloak Man bringing the babies. He brought several pre-Raphaelite babies into the world and one of Conrad's. He was a magician, a wonder-doctor, as one would have expected from his quack-like appearance, white-complexioned, blue-eyed, bewildered. ... But how could a man like that make money? He was poor - and likely to remain so. (33-34)

“Tebby Tebb,” as she affectionately calls him, is thus fixed in literary history as a verbal cartoon, an eccentric attendant upon genius. He is otherwise largely forgotten, for biography, as Richard Holmes has recently observed, is drawn towards the celebrity, “pulled, unnaturally perhaps, out of the orbit of the ordinary, the average. ... The ‘minor’ character, the faithful spouse, the loyal companion, the intelligent sensible friend, are so often reduced to footnotes, the unmarked grave at the foot of the page” (18). Tebb appears fleetingly in memoirs and biographies of his friends, “another of the unsung heroes of literature” according to Alan Judd (136), and information about his life and work remains sketchy or approximate.

Born on 11 March 1863, Tebb (as even his wife Bertha called him) was more than a medical attendant: a close personal friend of Conrad and Ford, he saw them through difficult times and ultimately helped keep

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<sup>1</sup> Bertha Tebb to Ford Madox Ford, 25 November 1934, Cornell University Library.

them writing. In his private mental sphere, he was a knowledgeable collector of *avant-garde* prints and first editions, a serious violinist of apparently modest skill, and an early advocate and practitioner of socialized medicine whose patients included not only high-strung artist friends but anonymous members of the working class. During the final thirty years of his life, he moved inexorably to a painful end: his medical practice floundered, his family and married life suffered from tragedy and estrangement, and he died impoverished and institutionalized.

According to John Conrad, his father was slow to gain confidence in medical doctors, and Tebb was among the first Conrad consulted in England (81): Tebb steadied Conrad during the difficult spring and autumn of 1904, when his wife Jessie was ill with a heart condition and suffering from a long-time knee injury. In a letter of 22 March 1904 to Alice Rothenstein, Conrad notes that "the anxiety till Dr. Tebb came was so great that I could not concentrate my thoughts upon anything whatever. The dear man has comforted me greatly" (CL3 125). Over a fortnight later, Conrad wrote to William Rothenstein that "Good Dr Tebb turned up unexpectedly to day cheering us up immensely. He's pleased with the patient's progress" (CL3 131). During November 1904 the Conrads were in London to consult Dr. Bruce Clark, a Harley Street physician and joint specialist surgeon; Borys was ill in bed, and Jessie incapacitated and upset; but Dr. Tebb, according to Conrad, was "putting them right with great success" (CL3 179). The specialist, it seems, botched the initial examination, finding nothing wrong with Jessie Conrad's knee, but subsequent exploratory surgery revealed displaced cartilage. The fallible expert is syntactically subordinated to Tebb, who remains, in a letter from Conrad to Ford Madox Ford, above criticism, though he had initially concurred with Clarke's diagnosis: "The long and the short of it is that he [Clarke] found his mistake. The cartilage *is* displaced and must have been so for thirteen years since her first accident when she was seventeen. That no disease of the bones was set up Tebb<sup>2</sup> (and also Clarke) accounts for by the large quantity of fluid always present" (CL3 184). As Conrad had written a few days earlier, "I trust Dr. Tebb implicitly," and a week after the operation, he would write that he was "anxious to have her [Jessie] under Tebb's care as soon as possible" (CL3 182,188).

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<sup>2</sup> Conrad here glosses Tebb as "The Doctor, friend of Will R[otherstein], admirer of Your Grandfather" (CL3: 185).

The only surviving correspondence between Conrad and Tebb, previously unpublished, dates from a year later and reveals a continued close relationship between the London doctor and his patients in Kent:

13<sup>th</sup> Dec 1905

My dear Tebb.

*Severe* in the wire was an exaggeration at the time of my gout. But after you had seen me I had it severe enough in all conscience.

I remained in bed Mond and Tuesday but hobbled down today. Perfect misery anyhow; but I drink whey and take my medicines religiously. To day I have no pain whatever and to night expect to sleep.

Jessie has not been very well since last night. Those nervous symptoms again. She has looked very white but to night (10 pm) she seems better.

Another week wasted out of My life. Seven days without a single line.

Borys has been ordered to bed again on account of his pulse, but Batten<sup>3</sup> says there's nothing to worry about.

I wish we were nearer you. Your abominable journey here on Sunday lies heavy on my conscience yet.

Our friendlies[t] regards to Mrs Tebb.

Always affectionately Yours

Jph Conrad.<sup>4</sup>

Conrad's defensive apology for summoning Tebb from London to treat an apparently mild attack of gout suggests that Dr. Tebb was testy about Conrad's medical nervousness, but Conrad responded with an affectionate confidence in Tebb that proved contagious. When Ford was unable to find a cure for his agoraphobia and neurasthenic symptoms, Conrad convinced him to see Tebb, upon whom Ford would likewise come to depend.

In *Return to Yesterday*, Ford echoes Violet Hunt's recollection of Tebb's eccentric appearance and unconventional medical practice. He describes Tebb as "the most mournful looking man I have ever imagined.

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<sup>3</sup> Rayner Derry Batten (1858-1943) attended the Conrads during his years as a general practitioner. Later in his career, he became one of England's leading ophthalmologist surgeons, vice-president of the Ophthalmological Society, and inventor of the hydrophthalmoscope. Obituary notices appear in *The British Journal of Medicine*, 13 November 1943, 626, and in *The British Journal of Ophthalmology*, 27 (1943): 569-70.

<sup>4</sup> This letter is in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

He was thinner than seemed possible - thinner than myself! He wore extremely powerful glasses that dilated his eyes to extravagant dimensions" (266). The description of Tebb's "medical" cure of Ford is not improbably fictionalized. The scene is consciously arranged and dramatized:

He came into the room where I lay. ... Tebb with his stethoscope in his top hat was like a ghost.

He sat beside me for more than two hours. He hardly spoke at all. Now and then he asked a question. It was as if his voice came from a tomb. ...

After Tebb had been silent for an hour and a half, I said: "Doctor, I know I am going to die. Mayn't I finish a book I have begun?"

"What book?" he asked cavernously. I said it was a life of Holbein.

Half an hour afterwards he said:

"Yes, you may as well finish your life of Holbein if you have time. You will be dead in a month." He said it with a hollow and mournful vindictiveness that still rings in my ears. He told me to go to Winchelsea to do that work. If I was alive at the end of a month I could come and see him again. He went away, leaving no prescription.

As soon as he was gone I jumped up, dressed myself and all alone took a hansom to Piccadilly Circus. You are to remember that my chief trouble was that I imagined that I could not walk. Well, I walked backwards and forwards across the Circus for an hour and a half. I kept saying: "Damn that brute, I will not be dead in a month." ...

At the end of the month, I saw Tebb again. I said triumphantly: "You see, I am not dead."

He answered as mournfully and hollowly as if he were in despair at the falsification of his prophesy:

"If I hadn't told you you would be dead, you would have been dead." He was no doubt right. (266-68)

The affectionate silliness of Hunt's description of "Tebby Tebb" and the melodramatic Gothicism of Ford's "cure" at Tebb's hands should not distract from the plain truth that Tebb was treating difficult patients whose "afflictions" eluded successful conventional treatment. Tebb's "mournful vindictiveness" in predicting that Ford would be dead in a month was apparently just the sort of reverse psychological pampering needed to get his patient back on his feet. As Douglas Goldring remarks in his memoir *South Lodge*, Tebb was "infinitely wise about the ailments of artists" (83).



If his bedside manner and personal demeanour were unconventional, Tebb's medical training appears conventional, unusually thorough, and impressively "academic," although not academically distinguished. According to school records, Albert Edward Tebb entered Guy's Medical School at the age of seventeen, during the 1880-81 academic year (*Pupils' Returns 1880-81*). Evaluative "remarks" in the hands of his various professors indicate that his attendance was regular, and his performance was noted as "good" or "very good," even "v. g. i." (presumably, "very good indeed"). Records in *Guy's Hospital Reports* show that he won no prizes or scholarships other than "obtaining third-class honours in Obstetric Medicine" in 1891, some fifteen years before he would use those award-winning skills to deliver John Conrad.

Tebb's medical training was unusually protracted in spanning eleven years (1880-91). His course work at Guy's, which might typically be projected to take three to four years, extended into a fifth year; and his clinical appointments or hospital practice, generally done in the fourth and fifth years, occupied Tebb in his sixth though eleventh years of medical study. His course work was apparently drawn out by an initial slowness to dissect and a later habituation to it. Since dissection was an integral part of preparation for medical examinations, his first- and second-year examinations were postponed until 1885 and 1886. Tebb also delayed sitting for the exam for the Conjoint Diploma - Member of the Royal College of Surgeons and Licensate of the Royal College of Physicians (M.R.C.S. and L.R.C.P.) - for many years considered the examination for general practice. With the Conjoint Diploma, Tebb could have begun his medical practice, and in fact his name makes its initial appearance in the *Medical Directory* for 1890, suggesting that he may indeed have begun seeing patients. But Tebb continued with his hospital appointments at Guy's and afterwards pursued more prestigious university degrees, the M.B. (1891), B.S. (1891), and M.D. (1893), from the University of London. Finally, he studied hygiene and received his Diploma in Public Health in 1893 from University College. The range of clinical appointments and number of degrees is quite unusual. Even in a prestigious medical school such as Guy's, fewer than ten per cent of the members of Tebb's "class" took the M.D., and fewer than half of this percentage would have his spectrum of Guy's Hospital appointments and academic degrees.

The surviving correspondence from Tebb's years as a medical student and young practitioner does not reveal the reasons for the length

of his medical training unless, perhaps, indirectly. For only two of the fourteen letters in the Tebb Autographs in the Brotherton Collection at Leeds University Library refer to medical matters at all. The autograph letters from this time (1880-95) that Tebb preserved, and presumably valued, are generally from correspondents involved in the arts: musicians, print dealers, publishers, and men of letters, among them Arthur Symons.<sup>5</sup> Tebb's interest in the arts presumably developed during his childhood and adolescence in a well-to-do family. Tebb's father, Robert Palmer Tebb, was a successful estate agent - surveyor, land agent, and auctioneer - in a family-run business. As early as 1881 when Tebb entered medical school, his father (then 46) was already retired with a private income. At that time, the Tebb family residence was "Belalp" at 5 Crystal Palace Park Road, a stately brick home adjoining the park and the third house from the top of the hill where the Crystal Palace then stood. In such comfortable financial circumstances and with his father's indulgence, Tebb could pursue his medical career at a deliberate pace and also nurture his interests in the arts. But as we can surmise from his relative poverty as an adult as well as from his father's will, Dr. Tebb benefitted little from his family's wealth aside from having a leisurely education and receiving one-sixth of his father's estate. After his father's fatal heart attack at the age of

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<sup>5</sup> The Tebb Autographs indicate that from his late teens Tebb was becoming a serious amateur violinist. He preserved an 1881 letter from J. H. B. Dando, which suggests that Tebb had written to the violinist inquiring about Dando's lowest fee for lessons, whether receiving lessons with a companion would reduce the fee, and whether it was necessary to furnish his own instrument. A year later, Tebb also corresponded with John Bishop, a translator of several books on the life and work of Stradivarius and other violin makers. Bishop's rather testy letter responding to Tebb suggests that Tebb had put to him some rather difficult or abstruse questions about timbre and acoustics of the violin, and he may have also sought Bishop's opinion regarding a particular instrument. In 1885 Tebb corresponded with J. B. Paznauskui, a London violin virtuoso, although whether the interview Tebb arranged was to apply as a pupil or appear as an admirer is unclear. Tebb's letters indicate that in the 1890s his interest in the arts broadened to include a desire to collect fine prints. In 1893 Tebb corresponded with C. J. Middleton Wake about prints by Dürer and Rembrandt and, more generally, the process of print-making. Two letters in the collection (dated 1895) are from Frederick Wedmore, who showed Tebb some Whistler lithographs and with whom Tebb apparently stuck up a friendship. The Autographs also contain a letter from Arthur Symons, answering several questions about Odilon Redon. In subsequent years, Tebb developed an extensive collection of Redon lithographs as well as prints by Beardsley. Other letters of this time are from men of letters (including the poet Thomas Woolner), London publishers, and booksellers.

72 in May 1907, an office was maintained in London by the trustees of his estate until 1911. His elder brother, Robert Hadley Tebb, for a time operated a historic pub, then called Gray's Inn Tavern, at 19 High Holburn in an office building once owned by his father. Until the 1930s Robert Hadley Tebb maintained a residence on Knightsbridge Road adjoining Hyde Park and a country house, variously called “The Old Vicarage” and “The Old House,” midway between Marlow and fashionable Henley-on-Thames.<sup>6</sup> From all appearances, Tebb's older brother eventually inherited the bulk of the family wealth.

Tebb's departure from his upper-middle-class upbringing and his abiding interest in the arts shaped his medical career during the 1890s and the first decade of the century. Tebb settled in Hampstead and on 19 December 1898 married Bertha Mary Carr (née Stobbs), a widow five years his junior. The Tebbs began housekeeping at 226 Finchley Road, the residence where Conrad and Ford would have known Tebb, and where Ford recuperated in 1905 from his presumed neurasthenic breakdown. Tebb's later residences in Hampstead are conspicuous for their proximity to homes of the noteworthy. The Grove Cottages, where he and his family lived for most of the century's second decade, were within a hundred yards of four famous houses: Abernethy House, where Robert Louis Stevenson once resided with Sidney Colvin (Colvin 144); Fenton House, once inhabited by the musical and literary Burney family; the home of George Du Maurier, the famous London actor and stage manager; and the so-called Admiral's House of local Hampstead lore, on whose roof Admiral Matthew Barton periodically emerged from retirement to fire two cannon, mounted there to mark occasions of public rejoicing, especially those prompted by great naval victories (Barratt, II 66-67). (It has been speculated that Dickens got wind of this Wemmickian ritual.)

If Tebb was attracted to Hampstead for its historical significance, he developed close friendships with the contemporary writers and artists who lived there. In addition to Conrad and Ford, he was well known to other members of Conrad's circle and the arts community. Olive Garnett,

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<sup>6</sup> See 1881 Beckenham Village census records, Bromley Library, Bromley; Last Will and Testament of Robert Palmer Tebb, 14 May 1907, Record Keeper's Department, Somerset House, London; *The Bromley Record and Monthly Advertiser*, No. 588 (1907) vii; *Post Office, London Commercial Directories*, 1908-11; *Metropolitan Borough of Holborn Rate Book*, 1905, Holborn Library, London; *London Post Office Directory*, 1935.

in her unpublished autobiography "A Bloomsbury Girlhood," mentions Tebb numerous times, not only in his capacity as a physician but variously as a member of a luncheon party or as a playgoer (478, 510). And, although he is not remembered in William Rothenstein's voluminous *Men and Memories*, Tebb was a close mutual friend of Conrad and the portraitist. When Conrad offered The Pent to Rothenstein in summer 1906, he had first offered the farm to the Tebbs, who could not accept his offer (CL3 337). So too, one of Will Rothenstein's closest companions at this time was likewise a mutual friend of Tebb's, George Calderon, with whom Rothenstein would often walk on the Heath (Speaight 222). Like Rothenstein, Calderon also opened his home, Heathland Lodge in the Vale of Health, as a gathering-place for artists. And like Tebb, Calderon had wide-ranging interests but seemed to move on the fringe of greatness.

In a letter to Ford Madox Ford, written late in his life, Tebb distinguishes George Calderon as one of his "particular friends" and recalls especially the sonatas for violin and piano that they often played together. Percy Lubbock was apparently in the audience at one concert at Heathland Lodge and reviews the performance of Calderon and an unnamed, error-prone violinist (not improbably Dr. Tebb):

It was a generous sight to see him, especially when he was joined in a duet by a like-minded friend, attacking the fortress of a difficult piece of music. "Storming a sonata" is how his action is described by one who often watched it; and indeed he could cast himself upon Beethoven or Tschaikovsky with the impetus of a party of escaladers. The friend might falter and stumble before the climax; George looked straight ahead, unwavering, carried the composer's most bristling defences and crashed upon the last chord in triumph. Nothing deflected him; it is remembered that once, when the piano rocked under his assault, the lamp that stood on it tottered and lost its balance; but George, tackling the key of seven sharps with one hand, had the other ready to catch the lamp and replace it without missing a beat. (139)

Whether or not Tebb is Calderon's "like-minded friend," the portrait of this unnamed violinist, who was undeniably inspired but fell short in execution, is an apt metaphor for one side of Tebb's life. He moved in a circle of fairly eminent men and women, always just outside the spotlight.

The other side of Tebb's medical career - and what might be thought of as its second phase - suggests that he cared little for celebrity,

since the generosity he showed to writers and painters was also extended to the working class. Indeed, Tebb's geographical situation at the time of Conrad's nervous breakdown in 1910 may be thought to symbolize the divided allegiances in Tebb's life and career. As one exits the gardens of the Grove Cottages, where the Tebb family then lived, the houses of the famous Burneys and George Du Maurier lay about a hundred yards to the right. The same distance to the left stood the Mount Vernon (later the North London) Hospital for Consumption. Tebb's interest in public health, social medicine, and the epidemiology of diseases of the working class extends far back into his years as a medical student, since his last academic degree was not the M.D. but the Diploma in Public Health.

Tebb's social convictions were reinforced by personal tragedy. In *Return to Yesterday*, Ford mentions rather mysteriously that Tebb "could cure all his patients, but he had at home a child he could not cure. It was a most tragic story" (266). The child was Tebb's first-born son, the namesake of his grandfather, Robert Francis Palmer Tebb. He died in childhood of chronic basal meningitis and asthenia. The chronic rather than acute nature of the illness and the secondary cause of death, asthenia, suggest that the boy suffered a great deal and wasted away. As described in medical texts of the time, basilar or basal meningitis is a particular form of tubercular meningitis or hydrocephalus, usually acute, and involving a swelling of the meninges at the base (Osler 301; Roberts 1231). The disease was thought to be caused by earlier tubercular lesions, and the symptoms are indeed extensive and horrible. When the screaming and pain subside, the patient lapses into a pathetic stupor, loses control of bodily functions, and dies in convulsions or deepening coma (Roberts 1233). Dr. Tebb, the "wonder-doctor," was unable to cure his son, Robin, who died in 1913 at the age of ten in the Home for Incurable Children in Swiss Cottage, not far from Hampstead. The inadequacies of medical science can hardly, in such circumstances, remain entirely distinct from a sense of personal and professional failure. To make matters worse, it was thought during Tebb's time that "Hereditary predisposition can be traced in many cases; and under these circumstances unduly forcing the mental faculties in young children may help bring out the disease" (Roberts 1231). Given the etiology of this disease, Tebb may have felt himself to have been both the transmitter of his son's critical illness and his unsuccessful healer.

Tebb almost certainly met with many cases of tuberculosis during the early years of the twentieth century when he was a Medical Officer of

Health (c. 1902-20) at the Hampstead Provident Dispensary, located close to the Hampstead Workhouse. It is possible that he took the post to provide a steady income to supplement the modest one generated by his private medical practice, but that supplementary income would have been slight, indeed, given the nature of provident dispensaries, which were charitable institutions that arose during the years of industrial expansion in the nineteenth century. Generally sponsored in their inception by wealthy patrons or "honourary subscribers," the dispensary would become self-supporting when enough "free members" subscribed, paying small fees regularly when in health (often one penny per week for an adult and a half penny for a child) in order to receive medical services when ill. Provident dispensaries aimed to encourage foresight and independence in the poor working classes. To make this system financially feasible and self-supporting, staff physicians were paid very little - in the mid-nineteenth century often no more than a few shilling per year for each dispensary member who signed a physician's patient list (Jones 14-15). Clearly, Tebb would not join the staff of a provident dispensary to add substantial income to his practice; as his subsequent medical posts and research show, Tebb was interested in providing care for the working classes and was particularly interested in studying the epidemiology of tuberculosis in factory workers, the disease that indirectly took his son's life.

The second decade of the century marked the beginning of Tebb's research and practice in tuberculosis but also the decline in both his medical practice and, apparently, his family's general well-being. During the war years, following Robin's death, the stability of the Tebb family appears to have declined. By 1915, Tebb, his wife, and two surviving sons, Christopher and Cuthbert, had moved two doors away, separating themselves from the cottage they had occupied as a larger family. During spring and possibly the summer of 1915, Tebb was temporarily the Resident Medical Superintendent of the National Sanatorium at Benenden, Kent. Hospital records of that time indicate that he accepted the post in a locum capacity on the recommendation of the departing Medical Superintendent, who sought a position elsewhere as Tuberculosis Officer.<sup>7</sup> Tebb requested a fee of seven guineas per week with board and quarters. Whether his wife and sons accompanied him is uncertain. The

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<sup>7</sup> Minutes of Council Meeting, National Sanatorium, Benenden, 21 January 1915 and 15 April 1915, Benenden Hospital, Kent.



position, even on a temporary basis, was one of considerable responsibility. The National Sanatorium was a newly constructed facility with approximately two hundred beds, and the institution represented the latest trend in providing efficient and effective medical care (*BJT* 7 81). The Sanatorium was a natural extension of Tebb's work at the Hampstead Provident Dispensary, for the National Sanatorium was predicated on the principles of socialized medicine and sponsored by the National Association for the Establishment and Maintenance of Sanatoria for Workers suffering from tuberculosis. The Benenden Sanatorium was funded entirely by Post Office workers' subscriptions, few of which exceeded a shilling (*BJT* 5 67). The sanatorium also focused on cases of tuberculosis, a disease in which Tebb had a personal interest and that he would research during the next half dozen years on behalf of the Ministry of Munitions.

Tebb's work for the Ministry of Munitions was conducted in the Welfare and Health Section, specifically, in the Medical Research Subsection. From publications and documents housed in the Public Record Office, we know that Tebb's research focused on the relationship between working conditions and the health of factory workers. The results of his research were jointly published with Captain Greenwood by the Medical Research Committee of the Great Britain National Health Insurance Joint Committee. “An Inquiry into the Prevalence and Aetiology of Tuberculosis among Industrial Workers, with special reference to Female Munition Workers” (1918) offers a detailed record of Tebb's observations in November and December 1917 of the working and living conditions of factory workers in Birmingham (44-58). Tebb's report records the contrasting working conditions - ventilation, heating, use of space, sanitary conditions, and so forth - in recently built and older industrial factories. The report reveals few surprises in concluding that the most recent rise in the incidence of tuberculosis in women was possibly due to the rise in the number of women working in poor factory conditions during the industrial war effort.

Tebb was engaged in at least two other projects during the closing years of the First World War. A “Report on the Metabolism of Female Munition Workers” in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society* for 1919 (published in 1920), indicates that the project's success depended largely on the relationship that developed between the managers, munition workers, and Dr. Tebb, who is specifically cited for building trust among the various parties:

one of us (A.E.T.) had already spent some time in the shops, had won the confidence of all the shop managers and of a great many of the charge hands, and was popular with the operatives, who, encouraged by him, volunteered much more readily for the tests than might otherwise had been the case. (63-64)

One is reminded here of the confidence that Conrad had expressed years before in the "dear man," in "good Dr. Tebb." If Tebb had the ability to inspire much-needed trust in his nervous and hypochondriacal artist friends, he developed a more calm acceptance and trust in Birmingham's factory working class. Tebb's interest in working conditions extended to other research projects. The 1917-18 Welfare and Health Section Report concludes that "A special investigation was also made by Dr. Tebb into the atmospheric conditions of iron-ore mines in Cumberland for the Subcommittee of the industry presided over by Mr. Anderson, controller of iron ore" (4). Bertha Tebb's letter to Ford suggests that Tebb worked for the government into the 1920s, presumably as long as his own health permitted.

Bertha Tebb's letter to Ford, written in autumn 1934, is a rather summary answer to Ford's query "What has happened to poor Tebb?" - a question that suggests that most of Tebb's old friends had lost track of him after 1919, when he apparently applied to Conrad for a loan of £50 (see Najder, 592 n.189). By 1922, the Tebb family had given up housekeeping due to the progress of Tebb's arthritis, a condition that must have brought his London medical practice to a close. During the early 1920s, Tebb lived in Marnhull, Dorset, in a cottage called Tapsays, which commands a view of the church and graveyard that Hardy used as a part of the setting for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. For several years, Tebb served as the Medical Officer and Public Vaccinator of the Marnhull District. In the later part of the 1920s Tebb alternately received treatment for his crippling affliction and worked periodically on research for the government. During this time, the Tebb family appears to have separated, though judging from the tone of his wife's letter, without acrimony. Tebb lived during the later 1920s (c. 1925-29) with his sisters, Evangeline and Julia, in Purley, a wooded suburb south of London. As Tebb searched without success for employment,<sup>8</sup> Bertha and her two surviving sons lived

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<sup>8</sup> A. E. Tebb to Humbert Wolfe, 27 March 1925, Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

outside Paris at Meudon Val Fleury where she was the matron-housekeeper for a boys' school; and during the late twenties, she made five voyages to New Zealand, escorting large parties of emigrating women on behalf of the New Zealand government.

After her working days, Bertha Tebb retired to Hingarston Cottage, Marnhull, where Tebb joined her in 1930, "at last quite an invalid." But with its lack of conveniences, cottage life apparently proved insupportable, and the Tebbs moved first to Richmond and then back to Hampstead to a flat at 18 Heath Hurst Road that overlooks the back of Keats Grove. Tebb's deteriorating health obliged his wife to bring him back to his alma mater, Guy's Hospital, and eventually to the Royal Hospital for Incurables, as she wrote to Ford:

I did this on my own initiative[;] it was the best thing I ever did, for lonely and proud as we were duly becoming, a crisis in his health threw us, in this way, back into the world of human fellowship. All this time, be it understood we were v. poor, just living on our Annuity since 1930. There he came in touch with Dr. John Ryle, a good man in every sense.

But it was Humbert Wolfe who helped me; as he has done twice before. Tebb is in the Royal Hospital for Incurables. West Hill. Putney S. W. 15. permanently. Lord Penrhyn, solicited by Wolfe, had Tebb admitted without any expense, canvass or formality. He went there a year ago. Christopher visits him twice a month. He *there* has every imaginable comfort and entertainment such as he is able to enjoy. The newest books, interested & charming visitors.

Years ago he & I worked hard for 2 years, writing letters, for votes, & eventually got an old governess of the family into this v. hospital!

The irony of it! But I, who have knocked about this world have long been aware that these & such-like "Institutions" are now the *homes* of a very different class - to wit, the new poor.

Half of Tebb's Annuity was forfeit, contingent upon our not living together! He really spends v. little money there, & I am able *fast* to feel that if I may last out till the end of the lease of this cottage in Jan. 1937, I shall have had enough of life.

He has a jolly little loom, & is making an attempt at strips of tapestry, quite good, they say. A lady took him in her car to have lessons. Really, I believe he never, for years has been so comfortable, with his male attendant, & warmth & good food.

He can walk a little, but when with me of late, had several momentary lapses from consciousness & fell. Mentally, very alert, & more genial & humourous than heretofore. Rheumatoid arthritis of