And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distinct or nearby -- it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling bell of a death knell. He awaited each new stroke with impatience and -- he knew not why -- apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ears like the trust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

You would have received a hundred more letters before now if the Director had not "strongly recommended" I curtail my epistolary efforts. Apparently your nouvelle mere objected to the intrusive and divisive nature of my communiqu**e**s. Well, hard as this is for me to say, she's probably right. So is the Director (he is a good man). You don't need to be troubled by your mad mother. You need to build a new life, a solid life.

As old Goethe wrote, "Wouldst shape a noble life? Then case no backward glances toward the past, and though somewhat be lost and gone, yet do thou act as one newborn."

The leading project of the Scientific Revolution is to give humankind eternal life. We're trying to cure cancer, tuberculosis, and Alzheimer's disease. We can be frank about it.

In field hospitals doctors routinely cut off the hands and legs of soldiers who received even minor limb injuries, fearing gangrene. These amputations, as well as all other medical procedures (such as tooth extraction), were done without any anesthetics. The first anesthetics - ether, chloroform, and morphine - entered regular usage in Western medicine only in the middle of the nineteenth century. Before the advent of chloroform, fourt soldiers had to hold down a wounded comrade while the doctor sawed off the injured limb.

…

Whether or not Project Gilgamesh succeeds, from a historical perspective it is fascinating to see that most late-modern religions and ideologies have already taken death and the afterlife out of the equation…. Beginning in the eighteenth century, religions and ideologies such as liberalism, socialsm, and feminism lost all interest in the afterlife.

I am seventy-three years old, people expect me to say wise things about old age. I don't do that, men of eighty must do that. The Japanese draftsman Hokusai wrote:

Starting in my sixth year of life, I was obsessed by drawing the forms of things. Starting in my fiftieth, I produced a great deal, but nothing that I made before my seventieth year was really worth the trouble. Only in my seventy-third did I at last begin to see something of the essence of birds, animals, insects, fish, and the vital nature of grasses and trees. This is why it is only in my eightieth that I will have registered some progress, that when I am ninety I will have penetrated farther into the deeper meaning of things, that in my hundredth year I will be truly extraordinary, and that in my hundred and tenth every dot and ever line will possess life itself.

I have a neighbor, a boy seventeen years old, I see the passion with which he holds his girl. I think: What a lot you will know when you are a hundred and ten.

You seldom encounter Christians who say nothing about Jesus. That is logical, for his message is: Tell everyone, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And Christians are not alone in having these claims, Muslims are also unfailingly convinced they are correct. As an atheist you can do no right.

Part of my family is vegetarian, I eat meat and must often pay for my bloodthirstiness with mockery. I have become accustomed to being taunted about this by Christians, Mohammedans, and vegetarians. But sometimes there is a chance for revenge.

I'm driving in the car with my vegetarians from Gorssel to Deventer. To the right, I see a cat coming out of the grass on the shoulder, mesmerized by his prey on the far side of the road. I see that he will suddenly accelerate – I know my animals – and will cross the road without any self-restraint. I honk the horn passionately for a long time, I wake him out of his trance, I save his life. The vegetarians haven't noticed anything. The Christians also don't notice that I love my neighbor, to say nothing of the Mohammedans. I myself say nothing about it, because I live without messages.

When the Messianic idea appears as a living force in the world … it always occurs in the closest connection with apocalypticism.

The Messiah … is something that flows in your blood, resides in your breath, it is the dearest and most precious human thought: that salvation exists.

My family traveled everywhere in that battered 1959 Volkswagen van, ballasted by several gray boulders of unknown origin. That rocks would be used to steady the vehicle did not seem strange, since my father was a geologist. What was surprising was that his geologic zeal did not land us in the hospital. Whenever my father spotted an interesting rock formation, he forgot about everything else. The van would hesitate, as if caught in a stiff crosswind, then slowly drift toward the shoulder. "Early Devonian shale sediments," he might mutter, as the van slowly wandered from the road to the shoulder and back to the road again. Turning to the four of us—the van now headed for the center lane—he would wave his hands for emphasis. We learned early not to ask for explanations.

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What miracle is this? This giant tree.

It stands ten thousand feet high

But doesn't read the ground. Still it stands.

Its roots must hold the sky.

O

Were, say, a spanish peasant to have fallen asleep in AD 1000 and woken up 500 years later . . . the world would have seemed quite familiar to him.

Five modern freighters could have taken onboard all the cargo borne by the whole world's merchant fleets. A modern computer can easily store every word and number in all the codex books and scrolls in every single medieval library with room to spare. Any large bank today holds more money than all the world's premodern kingdoms put together.

In 1500, few cities had more than 100,000 inhabitants. . . The most common urban noises were human and animal voices.

Prior to the sixteenth century, no human had circumnavigated the earth. . . Today anyone with a middle-class income can safely and easily circumnavigate the globe in just forty-eight hours.

As I got older, I also found myself agreeing more with Nietzsche, as is no doubt inevitable once your plumbing starts to fail. And I found myself more interested in Elohim, the sublime organizer of the constellations than in his insipid offspring. Jesus had loved men too much, that was the problem; to let himself be crucified for their sake showed, *at the very least*, a lack of taste, as the old faggot would have put it. And the rest of his actions weren't any more discerning, like when he absolved the adulterous woman, for example, with arguments such as "let him who is without sin," etc. All you'd have had to do was get hold of a seven-year-old child–he'd have cast the first strong, the little fucker.

Margarita, without opening her eyes, took a gulp, and a sweet current ran through her veins, a ringing began in her ears. It seemed to her that cocks were crowing deafeningly, that somewhere a march was being played. The crowds of guests began to lose their shape: tailcoaters and women fell to dust. Decay enveloped the room before Margarita's eyes, a sepulchral smell flowed over it. The columns fell apart, the fires went out, everything shrank, there were no more fountains, no camellias, no tulips. And there was simply this: the modest living room of the jeweller's widow, and a strip of light falling from a slightly opened door. And Margarita went through this slightly opened door.

I had no more reason to kill myself than most of these people did. On reflection, maybe even less. My life was marked by real intellectual achievements. In a certain milieu–granted, a very small one—I was known and even respected. Financially, I had nothing to complain about. Until I died I was guaranteed a generous income, twice the national average, without having to do any work. And yet I knew I was close to suicide, not out of despair or even any special sadness, simply from the degradation of "the set of functions that resist death," in Bichat's famous formulation. The mere will to live was clearly no match for the pains and aggravations that punctuate the life of the average western man. I was incapable of living for myself, and who else did I have to live for? Humanity didn't interest me – it disgusted me, actually. I didn't think of human beings as my brothers, especially not when I looked at some particular subset of human beings, such as the French, or my former colleagues. And yet, in an unpleasant way, I couldn't help seeing that these human beings were just like me, and it was this very resemblance that made me avoid them. I should have found a woman to marry. That was the classic, time-honored solution. A human is human, obviously, but she represents a slightly different kind of humanity. She gives life a certain perfume of exoticism.

The importance of Liking Yourself is a notion that fell heavily out of favor during the coptic, anti-ego frenzy of the Acid Era--but nobody guessed back then that the experiment might churn up this kind of hangover: a whole subculture of frightened illiterates with no faith in anything.

you only yolo once.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hgY9JyTCtg>

Durand Jones & The Incantations - Is It Any Wonder?