I
The Diary
April, 1919

What sort of diary should I like mine to be? Something . . . so elastic that it will embrace anything, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk . . . in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, and find that the collection had sorted itself and refined itself and coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life . . .

II
Anxiety
October, 1920

Why is life so tragic; so like a little strip of pavement over an abyss? I look down; I feel giddy; I wonder how I am ever to walk to the end. But why do I feel this: Now that I say it I don’t feel it. The fire burns; we are going to hear the Beggar’s Opera. Only it lies all about me; I can’t keep my eyes shut. . . . And with it all how happy I am—if it weren’t for my feeling that it’s a strip of pavement over an abyss.
V
Rome
May, 1935

Rome: tea. Tea in café. Ladies in bright coats and white hats. Music. Look out and see people like movies... Ices. Old man who haunts the Greco... Fierce large jowled old ladies... talking about Monaco. Talleyrand. Some very poor black wispy women. The effect of dowdiness produced by wispy hair. Sunday café... Very cold. The Prime Minister's letter offering to recommend me for the Companion of Honour. No.

VI
War
June, 1940

This, I thought yesterday, may be my last walk... the war—our waiting while the knives sharpen for the operation—has taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings... Those familiar circumvolutions—those standards—which have for so many years given back an echo and so thickened my identity are all wide and wild as the desert now. I mean, there is no "autumn", no winter. We pour to the edge of a precipice... and then? I can't conceive that there will be a 27th June 1941.

VII
Parents
December, 1940

How beautiful they were, those old people— I mean father and mother—how simple, how clear, how untroubled. I have been dipping into old letters and father's memoirs. He loved her; oh and was so candid and reasonable and transparent... How serene and gay even, their life reads to me: no mud; no whirlpools. And so human—with the children and the little hum and song of the nursery. But if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child's vision and so must stop. Nothing turbulent; nothing involved; no introspection.

VIII
Last Entry
March, 1941

No: I intend no introspection. I mark Henry James' sentence: observe perpetually. Observe the oncome of age. Observe greed. Observe my own despondency. By that means it becomes serviceable. Or so I hope. I insist upon spending this time to the best advantage. I will go down with my colours flying... Occupation is essential. And now with some pleasure I find that it's seven; and must cook dinner. Haddock and sausage meat. I think it is true that one gains a certain hold on sausage and haddock by writing them down.