

La Cigogne
Mourmelon-le-Grand
Marne, France
February 3, 1948.

Dear Family;

Now begins the second, or home was never like this, phase of our life in France. The devaluation of the franc means that instead of getting 200 to 250 francs to the dollar, and worrying about our blackmarketing, we get 310. Of course, prices are so high that the increase doesn't really mean much, and what there is will probably disappear in inflationary rises, but we feel more prosperous. Also, whatever dam was holding back our packages from home has broken, and they're coming thru with a whoosh. In the last three weeks, we've gotten over twenty packages. You should see me staggering home from the bus stop (I have to go to the station to get them.) carrying five parcels at a time. And so thankful to have them at last I don't care how often I have to do it ! When you can look in your packing case pantry and count five(5) cans of tuna fish, and seven (7) cans of milk, and beans and coffee and rice and dried fruit- why, If I didn't have a sou in my pocket I'd be rich ! I feel so protected, so bulwarked against any contingency, with a stockpile like that to draw on. It's just unbelievable to have so many good things on hand. You know, besides the packages we've been getting from the parents, there have been some lovely ones from Sam and Zoila and from Dora Stern in this batch, which ~~were~~ were so unexpected and so kind of them that it made us feel awfully good. Gee, we know some nice people !

Then there's the weather, which continues- mild, rainy, and amazing. There are tiny leaves on the tips of the lilac bushes. The rose vines are sprinkled with buds that have already burst into growth. When we were in Rheims on our way back from Paris last trip, thrusting itself over a garden wall we saw a forsythia in full bloom. Mme. Logeard's tulips are two inches above the ground. The oldtimers shake their heads and say there was never a winter like it, and have started to plant peas in the still unfrozen ground. They read the papers and see pictures of the snow and cold in the states, and they murmur that the winter has all gone to America this year. At least we have that, they say. Another winter like the last and there wouldn't be any France. But they're careful not to sound too complacent. There could still come plenty of killing cold. February's not over yet, and it's February that they insist is always the longest, not the shortest month of the year, because it's always so cold and nasty. But after that, then March is true spring. Everybody's holding his breath and hoping the weather wont break. Me, I read about fuel shortages and transportation breakdowns, and I know what an awful time so many people are having, but I'm so overwhelmingly thankful that we are being spared that it's difficult to feel even a decent sympathy. Besides, the weather is reported in French papers in such abstract terms that it's hard to think of it ~~xxxxxxx~~ as human suffering. It's just snow. I guess the French reporters feel as much relief that it's not them as I do.

Now as if this wasn't enuf for any family, on top of all the other good things, I have a bonne. Hews and I finally decided I just had to have more help then just Madam Anne doing the washing, so I started asking around. I found to my amazeement that the pay scale is not at all like ours at home. Instead of a laundress being the lowest paid worker, at 30 francs an hour she is the highest. A femme de menage or cleaning woman gets 25, and both she and the laundress go home to eat. On the other hand, a bonne has breakfast and lunch on the job, does six or six and a half full days work a week, and gets paid by the month. How much? Two to three thousand francs. ~~Ne~~ The only trouble is that good maids are scarce all over. The girls don't insist on

anything revolutionary like shorter hours, less work, or higher pay, they just shy away from jobs as bonnes, and the standard of output for a bonne remains unchanged. She does, usually, all the cleaning, cooking, washing, and ironing, on a dead run all day long. Then when (if) she gets thru towards evening, she does the family mending or knitting. The hours vary from a short day -eight to five- to the more usual eight to eight-thirty of a girl who ~~xxxx~~ cooks the evening meal. Usually a girl has one whole day a week off, but often it's only a half day on Sundays. As you can imagine, when I had been here long enuf to learn what the setup is, I decided that a bonne would be well worth the investment, especially as she could stay here with the children whenever I wanted to go to Paris.

I had been inquiring around for about a month when one day the horse butcher's wife (I do think patronne de chevaline sounds better) with whom I had chatted several times, asked me if I needed a femme de menage. Hers, she said, had two days open, and would like to find more work. She had been casting around in her mind, and she remembered that I was an American, but I was ~~x~~ "assez gentile". I smiled and shrugged deprecatingly at that. Oh, yes, she said. There are some francaises who come here who are not at all chic. And besides, now I spoke French ~~xx~~ well. One could understand me. I was properly appreciative of the compliment, but I explained that I was really looking for a bonne. But if the girl was interested anyhow, she could come see me. The girl came. I liked her looks, and put her to work. The afternoon of the first day, she asked me if I would consider taking her as bonne. Working as a cleaning woman, she said, she didn't earn enuf to eat on, even at 25 francs an hour, and she wanted a place as bonne where she would have her breakfast and lunch. I pointed out that there would be plenty of washing to do here. "Ca fait rien." So I asked how much it would be necessary to pay. Two thousand francs a month. For that she makes the beds, cleans the rooms till everything, including the floors, shines with a high polish, does all the washing and ironing and dishes (I preferred to keep the cooking myself.), polishes the shoes, mends the socks, and does anything else I can think of. Only trouble, we like horse liver very much. It's tenderer and milder than beef. And I'll bet the patronne de chevaline doesn't think I'm so gentile now that her good femme de menage is my bonne.

I'm going to Paris again this weekend. Hews and Herbert are going out to Versailles to see the Vander Kemp's, and Hews is very anxious for me to come too. I expect I'll let the children stay with Madame Logeard again and give Solange a chance to grow accustomed to us before I ask her to take sole charge of the children, even for two days.

Report cards in Franc are distributed the last day of a month. All three of the children got reports this month for the first time, which means that Dorothy and Cile now know enuf French to follow the class work and be classified as regular students. ~~ix~~ Reports here give a child's standing in relation to the others in the class, and among twenty-three children, Dorothy stood number thirteen, Cile, seventeen. That's really pretty good for two little girls who didn't know a word of French five months ago, don't you think? You ought to hear them studying. And I do mean hear. The technique of learning French history is to memorize the little summary that is at the end of each chapter, so then you know that the serfs were very unhappy, in the middle ages, and the townspeople were less unhappy. Or who were the kings who led the crusades. They love it. They make up little tunes to memorize the history lessons to, and sing them all over the house. And if they say it well in class next day, they get bon points- a little slip of cardboard that says bon point on it- and when they get ten, they get a little picture of a flower, or a mushroom, or something else just as desirable. But if they miss, they have to write out the little sentence or ~~two~~ three times. All three of the kids work as they never worked before. The tangible, immediate reward is a wonderful thing.

her birthday, with instructions to buy her something. We let her pick out her big fuzzy log, which she considers her present from you. I haven't given her the doll yet. Don't you think I ought to put it away for the next birthday that comes up?

The news of Alfred's death made us very sad. He was always a good friend to Ned & me, & it hurts to think he won't be there when we come back to New Orleans.

~~Frank~~ Gretl and Rolf's story ~~made~~ disturbed me quite a bit. What a pity that it worked out so badly after the years Gretl spent trying to get Rolf over here! What a waste. It's very disappointing.

About the furniture - if it's not too difficult for you, I wish you'd save anything, just anything at all that you don't want from the bedroom set down to the last little straight chair. When we come back, we won't have a thing to start off with, & I'd so much rather not be forced to buy everything all at once. If we have just a little furniture, we can take our time about buying other pieces. I hate to think of that lovely yard going out of the family, but I know you'd be much happier in a small place that's less effort for you. It's wonderful that you sold it so advantageously.

Thanks, pops, dear, for your note. It's always awfully nice to get word directly

from you. I sure wish you all could get over here. We love you - Cecil