

Sept. 17 1940

Dear People,

This is anniversary time, for us. A year ago today I came back from Bordeaux ostensibly to get the rest of my baggage, actually to see Jamie J. once more. Then there were the anniversaries of our births, of our going to Bordeaux on that ghastly nightmare train, of our parting in Arcachon (ah me!) and, incidentally, of this “maudete guerre”¹. Deary me, in spite of everything, things are so much more peaceful for us now, although I have come to believe that real peace inside out, is a myth. “Something is bound to turn up just as things become quite lovely and calm. Eliza crossing the ice, only she never gets to the shore.”² What a fine opportunity to turn out stoic philosophy on a mass promotion scale

To avoid unpleasant trains of thought, I’ll tell you about Schmitdy [sic], our personal aviator-soldier friend, who was here last night retelling the tales of his voyages, coral atolls in Tahiti, a number one boy in China, the modern way of hunting game in Uganda, frozen feet in Iceland, air raids in Madrid, the Balkans in 1920, Italy in 1921, the comparative cold of Finland and northern Manchuria, the heat of Indo-China enough to make a Sequoia Gigantica want to dig up its roots and travel. Schmitdy pleased me by liking Spain, war or no war. He said he had quite a time deciding to leave Tahiti, after ten months spent all over the islands, but he made it! He went on a trading schooner with “Jim” Nordhoff (? spelled).³ But he always keeps his little one room furnished “Chateau” in Montparnasse to come back to after the wars. Quite a type.

We went to the Flea Market Sunday, then visited a bistrot⁴ – with – music situated near the Market, where men with caps and women with babies come to divert themselves of a Sunday. All very atmospheric.

Sept. 19

I got our ration card yesterday. They really aren’t generous: 60 grammes of meat (aprox $\frac{1}{8}$ of a pound) 4 times a week, 25 grammes, i.e. about an ounce, of butter or lard or margarine per day, an ounce of cheese daily, 100 grammes of bread. We are to be among the privileged this winter, for we’ll have meat, butter, oil, concentrated milk etc. from America. The milk card will only allow the sick, the very young and the very old to partake of milk. I should imagine it is like this all over Europe. Our Japanese friend just went to Berlin, and said it was worse there; I know it’s bad in Spain, Hollande, Belgium, unoccupied France. What a world. Thank God for a good rationing system, without which a few would inevitably grow fat at the expense of the many.

I made myself a kind of Dutch bonnet out of a stiff woolen cloth, and a scarf to match. I cut out my own pattern on newspaper first. It is nice and warm, as well as pretty, and allows my coiffure to show on my forehead, like this:



¹ **Maudete guerre**: French ‘cursed war’.

² **Eliza**: reference to the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852). Eliza must cross the semi-frozen Ohio River to escape slavery. In the novel, she and her baby reach the shore, though with much hardship, and are helped up the bank into Ohio.

³ **“Jim” Nordhoff**: “Charles Bernard Nordhoff (February 1, 1887 – April 10, 1947) was an American novelist and traveler...” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Nordhoff, accessed 2017-11-25). He lived for many years in Tahiti, and though I have not found any references to his owning a schooner, he wrote extensively about them in (among other works) *Faery Lands of the South Seas* (1921) with co-author James Norman Hall. Nordhoff is best known for co-authoring *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1932), also with James Hall.

⁴ **bistrot**: bistro. A small restaurant or bar. Both *bistrot* and *bistro* are accepted French spellings.

I am terribly, terribly pleased with myself because it is so beautiful! With the scarf, it cost me forty francs. I still can't sew on buttons successfully, however!

My prof. from Swarthmore, Jacques Schérer, is "de retour"⁵ from the army, having escaped quite simply from prison camp (about four out of our very limited acquaintance with Frenchmen have done so, with greater or lesser degrees of adventure), and he has invited us to dinner Friday. He is teaching in a girl's Lycée⁶ now, and says he longs for the informality of Swarthmore.

The more we know our neighbors the more we like them. Pierre (who, it appears, has quite a reputation as poet & novelist, according to M. Schérer), is a charming man, and Mme. Florence knows many fascinating secrets of cuisine. She has promised to photograph me, and I am sure if she does they will be the best photographs I've ever had, because she is an artist. I should like to send you Pierre's exercises in English, which he has entitled "A funny man's journal." They are written in a beautiful style, full of imagination.

Today I am making split pea soup and apple sauce. I have invented a fine soup made from lettuce, dandelion greens, salt pork and potatoes, of which I am justly proud. Deary me, one has to be inventive these days in France, because almost everything you can think of is unobtainable, including all canned goods, cereals, rice, spaghetti, noodles, and so on ad infinitum. It is fine training for a cook How all this must bore you!

I just re-read *The Jungle Book*⁷ and now I am enjoying a very good French novel *Le grand Meaulnes*.⁸ The dearth of English books is improving our French, but say what you will there is no literature as rich and varied as English. I more or less just woke up to that fact, but it is a fact. One gets a hint of it when one notices the extraordinarily large number of translations from the English that are to be found in French bookstores, and translations from other languages certainly do not abound. The output in English must be twice as great as the production in any other language. Of course, I don't know about German. By the way, I am now bitterly regretting the fact that I only took one year of German.

Over here we aren't giving England very great odds for success. How awful to think of, those bombardments in London!

I just got a post-card from a nice little girl, aged 9, whom I took care of one day while her mother went out. She and I both enjoyed ourselves enormously, so in her card little Claude says she "embraces me 1000 times, as well as mousieu (spelled wrong)⁹ Jones." While she was with me, she drew me a very fine and graphic picture of a first Communion scene, which I should like to send you.

We have been listening to the English news on the radio at our neighbors. To my surprise, it is exactly the same news as we get here, only presented in a radically different way, needless to say. It seems to me that the English propaganda is much better than the German, but that is hardly news, since by all accounts it was the same way during the last war.

This afternoon I am going to get my coal card. There is a card for everything except breathing now, but it is the only way. How simple and primitive life is in America!

⁵ **De retour**: French, 'back again'

⁶ **Lycée**: French equivalent of American senior high school.

⁷ **The Jungle Book**: by Rudyard Kipling (1894).

⁸ **Le grand Meaulnes**: (1914) Romantic novel by Alain-Fournier (pseudonym of Henri-Alban Fournier) 1886-1914.

⁹ **Mousius**: misspelling of *monsieur* 'mister'.