

Monday, August 22, 1949

Dear Manma,

I should have realized you wouldn't understand why I hadn't been able to write during those two weeks. Nobody who hadn't been there to see the bedlam would have been able to appreciate the impossibility. I am all behind on my correspondence as a result of it, and have about three people to whom I should have written long letters quite a while ago. Out of the question.

This summer has danced by so quickly I can hardly believe it is just about over now. First it was that cocktail party, then it was the HCoovers and going to your house, then it was anie's arrival, and it is ending with a bang now. We have been painting our house, finally, and did it ever need it! William painted the front only, but that also entailed repainting the shutters and the wood trim. I have done the shutters in what is called "French Grey", and since they are still wet I don't know how it will look up, but it may turn out nicely. The color looked much darker on the chart than it does on the shutters, so it turns out that the shutters are just about the same shade as our living room walls, which is not what I had intended. I wanted the shutters to be several shades darker than the living room walls, but with about the same grey-blue effect. Time will tell, and at least it will be an unconventional color to paint them, rather than the same old green or blue. It takes an awful lot of time to do all that. I still have quite a bit of the wood trim to do yet, too. The front of the house looks a hundred percent better already, though. When we have all the painting finished I'll have to put my mind to the problem of buying Laurence Ohn's winter school clothes. Getting him to agree to giving up his blue jeans is going to be some problem. He has become so passionately attached to them that we never need to spank him. One hint to the effect that he will have to wear his shorts if he isn't good practically always brings him around to good behavior. I know we shouldn't do it, but it's so effective we just can't help it. I'll have to buy him long trousers for winter, whatever else I buy. He won't stand for shorts, that's sure. "People might see my legs!" he shouts in real agony. What next?

Mr. Lobenstine has told William that even if his wife doesn't send her twin boys to the Lady Isabel school she will be so anxious to have the car all the time that he is sure she will agree to take Laurence Ohn to school mornings and bring him back. William will fetch and carry Mr. Lobenstine, so I won't feel like a heel. I hope it works out, because I'm beginning to feel that nursery school would do the little boy a lot of good at his present stage of development. Mrs. Lobenstine hasn't come to Washington yet. I'll have her over to dinner practically the moment she arrives, to butter her up. He is the new Peruvian desk officer.

Every once in a while I get that harrassed feeling, and I've got it now. I have the feeling that I'll never get through all the tasks I have in front of me, and that things will keep snowballing till I won't be able to take care of them at all. At least the house work is a lot easier since the dishwasher and the disposall. By the way, the disposall now works beautifully. We had the plumber in once more, and this time he fixed it so that it works perfectly all the time. The garbage can has been relegated to the cellar. Don't let anyone ever tell you a dishwasher isn't a wonderful thing, either.

Laurence ohn's progress: He has been going to the Dentist now for three weeks. His first visit was with me, and he merely looked on and investigated everything. The second time I had my teeth cleaned (no cavities!) and then, so did he! After his teeth were cleaned he had a florine treatment, or whatever its name is. He sat up there in the chair like a man, was excellent about keeping his mouth wide open, delighted in spitting things out into the little fountain, and worked his own water into his own cup. After each mouth rinsing he would say to the dentist, "All wight, you may turn on your mechanism now. I'm weady!" People came in to admire him- the nurse, the other dentists etc, in the office. He was proud of himself, and I was proud of him also. It was all the more surprising to both me and the dentist, since I had gloomily prepared Dr. Freitag for the worst, by telephone. I had anticipated having a screaming, heel kicking young man on my hands, but instead he was as cooperative as could be. He objected politely to the "gurgling machine" which keeps saliva out of the mouth, but accepted the dentists apology graciously, merely exacting a promise from him not to use it again. The second time we came in he was merely having his second treatment, which was over in a very few minutes. Dr. Freitag asked him if he would come into the office by himself, and the boy said he would. "Don't come in, mamma. I have to be alone with the dentist." He was the hero and wonder of the neighborhood when he came back from Downtown, having been to the dentist and emerged with three little circular cotton pads as souvenirs, two of which he kindly gave away to Coit and Betsey. They all three chewed them industriously for half an hour or so. I'm sure the whole neighborhood will be only too anxious to go to the dentist from now on.

There have been several interesting minor remarks from him lately: When we asked him to help us clean the shutters, he said "All wight," "I'll twy," in a resigned manner, and he did try for ten minutes or so, then came to us and said "As a matter of fact, I'm afwiad your little boy isn't very good at cleaning things." It was too true! Then yesterday he came to me and said, "I'd like to tell you something. It happened in the Meleney's basement this very day." "What?" "Betsey said a cruel word to me." "Oh dear, that's too bad. What was the cruel word?" I enquired without a visible smile. "She told me to stop it, that's the cruel word she said to me!" I was surprised at his sensitivity on the matter, because the words "stop it" are bounced back and forth between the two children ninety times a day.

Beginning about a month ago, the boy has developed a positive delight in what he calls "sad songs". He asks me to sing him a sad song whenever he is feeling sleepy or sorry for himself. He lies in my arms and urges me to sing "the one about when Chrysler was born" (which is O Holy Night) or what he calls the Night Song which turns out to be "esus Loves Me", or The Day Song, which is Onward Christian Soldiers. I hope this means he has finally developed an immunity to hymns, but I don't know, because while anie was here she sang that gay old English ditty, "Among the leaves So Green-Oh!" and he burst into hysterical sobs even as he begged her to go on singing. It's one of the strangest phenomena I've ever witnessed.