

Bethesda, Thursday, Nov.17, 1949

Dear Family,

I've decided to write you a family letter so I won't have to tell you both twice about Laurence John's latest feats and remarks. The most important thing is, as I told you, that he has learned to write a couple or three words on the blackboard so that a charitable person will know what he's trying to get at. His words are "DOG", "CAT" and "BEAR". He is also capable of writing "COHN" but he doesn't remember how to spell it, whereas he can write the other three words without asking about the spelling, and when you ask him "How do you spell Bear?" he will occasionally tell you out loud, if he's in the mood. At other times (and especially when I want to show him off in front of other people) he will say, "I won't tell you! You'll have to guess!" which is naturally annoying. He knows all the letters of the alphabet, and spends a good deal of his time at breakfast reading off the letters on the cereal boxes. He doesn't seem to be ready to sight read as yet—that is, read whole words by the "look of them" at a glance. But it is hard to tell, because so often he tells me "I can't do that, I'm only a little baby puppy!" and runs off barking. However, I take that to mean that he honestly doesn't feel ready for more learning.

I took him to see a doctor the other day, because he had developed a bad cough that kept him and us awake nights. I had previously called this doctor in one day when he had an earache, and after the initial mighty struggle to get him to show himself at all in front of the doctor, he took an inexplicable liking to the man. This is the first time in his history that he has displayed anything except fear and dislike for the medical profession in general. I can't tell you what Doctor Norton has that none of his colleagues had, but there you are. Laurence himself remarked after the departure of Doctor Norton (who is not a pediatrician), "Now wasn't he a nice man? He has such a beautiful Nash!" In any case, although I called Dr. Norton in the first place only because he was the only one available at that time, I've decided that the boy has elected to choose his own physician and I don't propose to change now that he has chosen. The other day William and he drove downtown and on the way Laurence pointed to a house on Georgetown Road and said, "That's where my friend lives." William thought he must be referring to one of his little playmates at school, but the boy explained that it was his friend Doctor Norton's house, and that he was too big to go to Lady Isabel. You could have knocked William over with a feather. Well, we went over to Dr. Norton's house the day before yesterday, and they got along fine. The doctor overlooked the unintentional slight inherent in Laurence's opening remark, which was "We came here to get some medicine to make me better, and not to see you, just for a visit." He also kindly ignored the scorn that the boy heaped on him when he was measuring his height, asked him if he was wearing high heels, and was answered by a withering, "Only ladies wear high heels, Doctor!" Laurence, in his turn, willingly did what the doctor asked him to do, no matter how foolish he thought it. I was interested to see what he thought about Laurence's feet, which need corrective wedges, and the doctor accordingly asked him to take off his shoes and walk over to the other side of the room. "But I walk fine! And anyway, my feet might catch cold if I take off my shoes." But on polite urging, he did what was required of him. Later on, Dr. Norton asked him if he thought he could swallow a large gelatine capsule full of medicine. "How large?"



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I have to see it first." Respecting the boy's caution, Dr. Norton produced a sample capsule for his inspection, and the boy said with relief that "That's not too big. I can swallow that. With a little water." Laurence told him that he thought the sulfa he had given him on the occasion of his earache was "very good medicine. It tasted very delicious, like chocolate milk." They parted friends, but Laurence told me afterwards that he didn't like Dr. Norton quite as much this time. He liked him better when he came to our house, driving his Nash.

The other day while I was upstairs and he was downstairs playing in the kitchen, I overheard a fascinating monologue, which went something like this: (He had a stick in his hand, and was lashing out with it, apparently) "Clang clang, crashy-crash! Don't hit me, Mr. Stick! (the sound of milk bottles being violently assaulted) I'm hitting you because you are hiding there like a ghost, said the stick in a very rude manner. I haven't done anything to you Mr. Stick, said the ghost bottle, it isn't fair for you to hit me in that rude, rude way! I'll break and cut you all up in pieces. Crunchy crunchy crash! I'm going to hit you and hit you because your'e rude yourself, so there! You are hiding behind the door like a ghost, and that's a WERY rude thing to do!" I was so beassed by the monologue that I let it go on for sometime before coming downstairs to see what damage had been done. Fortunately the bottles were empty, and the stick too small to break them. If you can stand the pace, Laurence ohn is a most amusing character to have around the house.

He has once more become interested in Moley and Ratty, so daddy as well as all his sitters are now reading The Wind in the willows again. He is through with ust So Stories for the present apparently, though he still goes around now and then mouthing phrases from Rigling; "W're than oriental splendour!", and "The world so new and all" are the ones he prefers to mouth right now. He says them over and over to himself, for the sheer oy of hearing them emerge on his tongue, and will sometimes put himself to sleep saying them. He is also perplexed but delighted with a phrase from one of the hymns he insists that we sing to him at bedtime- Infinite Love. "I'm an infinite dog, and infinite little puppy dog, ust as infinite as I can be!" He has decided to call bread "pow-wow" from now on, and is inventing other words for a new language to be used on the numerous occasions when he plays the part of a dog. "Puppy wants some pow-wow! fow-wow, pow-wow!"- and the conversation degenerates into giggles.

We went to a cocktail party at the home of Mrs and Mrs. W. Tapley Bennett last night, and had a most en oyable time. Mr. Bennett is in what used to be CPA and is now MID, which will of course explain everything. I think the latest change in initials is a change for the better, really, because the division deals with Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean area. It is the one of which Tom Mann has recently become an important member. Well, we had a good time but couldn't go out an have a hamburger afterwards as we usually do because we are very, very low on funds. Funds havd been getting lower and lower recently, and we have decided to call a halt to all borrowing from the bank account, so as to have a reserve fund in case of necessity. Christmas is going to be rather puny.

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Speaking of funds reminds me that I received a delectable check for twenty ripe red dollars from the American Foreign Service Association "in token of appreciation for my article". It came just in time to prevent the life blood being squeezed completely out of my poor little private bank account. A small thing, but my own. I am beginning to have grave doubts as to whether I should submit my next article to the F.S. Journal at all, sad to say, because although William and I both think it is really far cleverer than the last one, I am afraid it might be misunderstood by the occasional outsider who once in a blue moon reads the magazine. It is, as I have told you, called "The Well Stuffed Shirt," and is a sort of satiric manual of manners and morals for aspiring Stuffed Shirts in the Foreign Service. We're a little worried for fear someone might take it seriously and say "See there! I always said they were a bunch of cookie-pushers and four flushers!" Actually I'm pretty sure that we can count on no one outside of the Service reading the Journal at all, ever, but you never can be completely sure of anything. If I can't change the article here and there to make it more obviously peculiar, I'll have to shelve it, however reluctantly. I wasted an awful lot of time on it, too, even if I did have a good time wasting it.

We are going to the Manns' new house tomorrow night for dinner, and to the home of some Fletcher School friends of William on Saturday night. Our plans for Thanksgiving haven't settled yet, due mainly to the fact that although we'd like to have the Parkes over here (we went there last year) we hate to start looking around for Turkey Money. Ah well, perhaps Laurence can shoot us a wild turkey out in the woods, or play retriever and bring one back in his mouth.

I've just finished reading Churchill's "Their Finest Hour" and am now able to start reading Fraser's "Golden Bough", which I've been intending to read for ages. I started a few pages yesterday and it sounds wonderful, so I can hardly wait.

Much love,