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THE LETTERS OF
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
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The Letters of Alexander Woollcott

Also by Alexander Woollcott

LONG, LONG AGO
WHILE ROME BURNS

Anthologies

AS YOU WERE • WOOLLCOTT'S SECOND READER
THE WOOLLCOTT READER

Alexander Woolcott

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Biographical Introduction

Alexander Woollcott's letters, even on business matters, were always personal, and in a personal correspondence a great deal of knowledge before the fact is taken for granted. We will not attempt to give a detailed biography of Woollcott, or any appraisal of him, but only to supply the reader with a factual backdrop for the letters. Through them, the man speaks for himself.

Alexander Woollcott, the youngest of the five children of Walter and Frances Bucklin Woollcott, was born on January 19, 1887, in Phalanx, New Jersey. The settlement itself, known as "the Phalanx," was the seat of a co-operative society derivative, together with the better known Brook Farm, of the eighteenth-century social philosophy of Charles Fourier. It was an experiment in communal living combining agriculture and industry, and, like all these early experiments, it failed to provide a living for its members. Within a few years of its inception, the Phalanx was taken over by Woollcott's maternal grandfather, and from then on became the Bucklin family seat.

The house was a large, rambling, eighty-five-room structure which was continually swarming with near and distant relatives of all ages who came and went continually. In the years to follow, the Woollcott branch often found it a valuable refuge in times of financial stress.

Woollcott's first two years were lived at the Phalanx. But Walter Woollcott had an errant nature; he seems to have spent a great deal of his life migrating from one side of the country to the other, often accompanied by his family, and in 1889 he took his brood to Kansas City. There Woollcott first went to school. (Half a century later his first teacher, Miss Sophie Rosenberger, sent him one of his compositions she had carefully saved.) His friendship with Lucy Christie (Drage) began there, and his first interest in the theatre was aroused when Roswell Field (Eugene's brother) took him to see *Sinbad the Sailor*. There, also, he made his first public appearance when he took the part of Puck in a Shakespearean pageant at the age of four—and was made ineffably happy forty years later by the discovery of a photograph of himself in the role.

In 1896 the family moved to Germantown, Pennsylvania, and their summers were again spent at the Phalanx. Woollcott went to public school, and it was to his teacher, Miss Sorber, that he wrote the first letter which we have been able to obtain. At this time his friendship with his schoolmate and neighbor, George Smyser Agnew, began—a friendship which went on until his death.

Although the Woollcotts were on the poor side, financially speaking, they were intellectually affluent. During the summers at the Phalanx, music and art were part of the daily life, and Dickens and Thackeray were read aloud to the family by Mr. Woollcott. Woollcott's mother and his sister Julie were definitely of bookish tastes; an evening's diversion often consisted of the reading of Shakespeare, with each member of the family assigned roles. Julie and he spent long hours together; despite the fact that she was considerably his senior, the bond between them was always exceptionally strong, and she had a great influence in directing his early literary tastes. Amateur theatricals were his favorite diversion.

By the time Woollcott was ready for high school the family

had installed themselves more or less permanently at the Phalanx, leaving him to board out during the four years he attended Central High School in Philadelphia. He helped support himself during this period by writing book reviews which his cousin, Miss. Helen Sears, helped him to place in the *Evening Telegraph* and the *Record*. Whenever he had any extra money he betook himself to the gallery of a Philadelphia theatre, where for the first time he saw such stars as Otis Skinner and Minnie Maddern Fiske, who later became friends to whom he was devoted.

Autumn of 1905 found Woollcott climbing the hill to the Hamilton campus overlooking the Mohawk Valley. Edwin Root, a distant relative and an alumnus of Hamilton, was responsible for this choice of college, a choice which had an enormous influence on his whole life.

He was a good student. He won his Phi Beta Kappa key during his junior year; he took an immediate interest in the college paper, and was editor of the *Lit* in his junior and senior years; he founded the first dramatic club, Charlatans. Woollcott was a poor boy who went to a college which, at that time, was also poor. His love for Hamilton was the love of a son who felt the need of caring for his mother, like him in need. When the news that the Carnegie Fund had made the college a gift of a hundred thousand dollars was announced, Woollcott wrote an ecstatic editorial for the *Lit* called "Surely Our Cup Runneth Over."

He became the ideal alumnus; Hamilton always occupied a large place in his heart and he planned for it with love and care. Besides helping innumerable boys pay their tuition at his Alma Mater, he worked assiduously for the Hamilton Choir, which he transported to New York for yearly concerts to fill their coffers; he also founded and contributed to a yearly literary prize; he sent hundreds of books to fill the library shelves. He made substantial contributions to the college itself and served on the board of

trustees for several years. His ashes are buried in the college cemetery next to the campus he loved so well.

In 1909 Woollcott came to New York with his diploma in his hand and got a \$15 a week job as a clerk in the Chemical National Bank, but this was quickly terminated by a particularly virulent attack of the mumps. Upon his recovery he armed himself with a letter from Samuel Hopkins Adams, another Hamilton alumnus, and went to see Carr Van Anda, managing editor of the *New York Times*, who put him to work as a reporter. He seems to have been only a fair reporter; although he loved newspaper work, the limitations imposed by cold, impersonal facts were not well suited to a style of writing which was already showing the earmarks later to become so characteristic. He was therefore delighted when, in 1914, at the resignation of Adolph Klauber, he was appointed the *Times* dramatic critic.

In those days the *New York Times* obviously considered the theatre of minor importance. Dramatic criticism was relegated to a small and inconspicuously placed space in the daily paper, and Woollcott's pay was \$60 a week. It served, however, to allow him greater latitude in which to develop his own particular style, and Woollcott the phrase-maker began to emerge. By the time of the war he had become a well-known figure on Broadway and an influential critic.

When America entered the World War in 1917, Woollcott was unable to get into combatant service because of his bad eyesight. He enlisted in the New York Post-Graduate Hospital Unit, afterwards officially known as Base Hospital No. 8, and went with them to France, where he was promoted to Sergeant. In the hospital he performed the usual duties of an orderly, and he did his unpleasant job well. In 1918 he was transferred to the *Stars and Stripes*, the weekly newspaper of the AEF. His job as its star reporter took him often to the front. On the *Stars and Stripes* were many men who afterwards made conspicuous places for themselves: Harold Ross, founder and editor of *The*

New Yorker; Franklin P. Adams (F. P. A.); John T. Winterich (now Colonel); Stephen Early, Mark Watson, A. A. Wallgren. Woollcott stayed in France until six months after the armistice, still working on the paper.

In the summer of 1919 he returned to this country. He resumed his job as dramatic critic of the *New York Times*, and his first book was published, *The Command Is Forward*, a collection of stories, most of which had appeared in the *Stars and Stripes*.

His vitality at this time was enormous, as was his love for the theatre, and he bellowed his praise and condemnation so violently that he became the most influential critic of his day. Now his reviews were signed, and his eccentric appearance made him a conspicuous first-night figure. He affected a flowing cape, an opera hat, and a cane, and he was definitely the cynosure as he swept down the aisle into his front seat in a theatre. The poses which he adopted at this time were gradually assimilated into the picture of him which remained in the minds of the public, a picture which he deliberately encouraged and which afforded him amused satisfaction.

The next nine years of Woollcott's life were spent primarily in the theatre; he left the *Times* in 1922 for a brief sojourn as critic of the *Sun*, but he was not happy on an evening paper, as he felt that his potency in that position was diminished. When Munsey sold the *Sun* he was switched to the *Herald*, another Munsey paper. In 1925 he went to the *World*, then under the aegis of Herbert Bayard Swope. Here, along with Walter Lippmann, F. P. A., Heywood Broun, Deems Taylor, Frank Sullivan, and others, he helped to make that paper the most exciting of its day.

Woollcott's personality made it inevitable that he should develop both great loves and great hates in the people who made up the world of the theatre. His enthusiasms ran away with him, and his praise often was enough to start a long line at the box

office. His condemnation, sometimes considered injudiciously bestowed, was often a death knell. Woollcott's extraordinary skill in using words obviously gave him power to inflict great pain; people of the theatre were chagrined and resentful at some of the phrases relating to their performances. Many of his warmest friendships, however, were begun because of his praise of hitherto unrecognized talents. In 1924 the Marx brothers, who had played in vaudeville for years, came to New York in a musical comedy (*I'll Say She Is*) which, because its opening was during a particularly busy week, was comparatively unnoticed by the critics. By chance Woollcott attended a matinee, and was so captivated by the antics of Harpo Marx that he re-reviewed the play (a brief notice had already been written by a second-string critic), and his enthusiasm dragooned all the other first-line critics into seeing the show. This made the play an instant success and established the Marxes. Woollcott not only recognized the rare comedy spirit of the four brothers, but discovered in Harpo a quality and charm which made them the closest of friends during the rest of his life.

Woollcott was now living in a reconditioned house on West Forty-Seventh Street, where he approximated, perhaps unconsciously, his earlier communal life at the Phalanx. The other apartments were occupied by Harold Ross and his wife, Jane Grant, Hawley Truax, Kate Oglebay, an old friend originally from Kansas City, and another friend, William Powell. There was a dining-room shared by all and a great deal of informal entertaining. His days were a happy combination of work and people. He lunched daily at the Algonquin Round Table with a group of men and women, still young, who were to become extraordinarily successful in various creative fields. The Round Table in its day was the informal meeting place for F. P. A., Heywood Broun, Brock and Murdock Pemberton, John Peter Toohey, Peggy Wood, Margaret Leech, George Kaufman, Marc Connelly, Deems Taylor, Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker,

Donald Ogden Stewart, Jane Grant and Harold Ross, to mention some of them. This group knew each other intimately; their humor was frequently barbed, and Woollcott took great advantage of his skill in riposte. When his remarks were particularly sharp, it was not unusual for angry words to pass back and forth, with Woollcott likely to be the victor. Many people thought him rude; but it was a rudeness of manner rather than intent. The comedy of insult was quite the order of the day. This did not, however, excuse him in the eyes of many whose feelings were hurt.

The other great social event which occurred with regularity was the weekly meeting of the Thanatopsis Inside Straight and Literary Club, a poker game played each week at the home of a member. Its personnel was drawn from the Algonquin Round Table, and was entirely masculine, with an occasional woman permitted as both dinner companion and kibitzer.

Woollcott's life was full now—the theatre was flourishing and there were often as many as ten new plays to be reviewed in a week when the season was at its height. In addition to his newspaper work, he had become a frequent contributor to magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Vanity Fair*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Collier's*, and he had begun his weekly column, "Shouts and Murmurs," for *The New Yorker*. This informal column concerned itself with a criticism of a current play, a note about an interesting murder (a subject which fascinated him all his life), caustic or favorable comment on contemporary fiction, or just a recounting of an amusing story about one of his favorites. He also found time during these years to do more sustained pieces of writing: *The Story of Irving Berlin* was published; a book about Mrs. Fiske; *Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play*; *Enchanted Aisles*. None of these earlier books had wide circulation.

Woollcott's life had assumed a pattern, adapted to the hours of a newspaper man. His day began at noon at the Algonquin; the afternoons he spent at the newspaper; an early dinner, the

theatre, and then to write his review. Later he would take up again with his guest of the evening; he had supper or joined a group of friends, where there might be a game of bridge, hearts, cribbage, backgammon, or anagrams, any one of which he would play passionately till early in the morning. He loved to gamble; but he played all games with a competitive zest that had no relation to the size of the stakes. Obviously such a schedule left him little time for letter writing and accounts for the dearth of letters from this period.

About this time Woolcott began to feel that dramatic criticism was no longer a satisfactory medium. He had to write too quickly; his style was at its best when it had time to be seasoned; both his truculences and his enthusiasms needed tempering, and he was aware of it. In 1928 he resigned from the *World* with no very definite idea of what he wanted to do.

In the next few years he wandered both here and abroad; twice he took houses in the south of France with friends; he made many trips to England and went to both Japan and China.

On his return he moved from the house on West Forty-Seventh Street and took an apartment next to Alice Duer Miller, on Fifty-Second Street at the East River. Here he thought he would have greater privacy. That this turned out not to be so was, of course, no accident; by this time the pattern of his social life was firmly fixed, and he allotted people small parcels of minutes with the exquisite timing of a busy doctor. A large calendar hung on the wall right above his desk; he could see at a glance what he would be doing every hour of the day for months ahead.

In the summer of 1929 he wrote his first play, in collaboration with George S. Kaufman. *The Channel Road*, an adaptation of the Maupassant story, "Boule de Suif," had a run of exactly fifty performances. Woolcott was not discouraged, but turned to still another field—radio. His first appearance on the air was on an isolated fifteen-minute sustaining program which he called "The Town Crier." It got a sponsor quickly and went on twice

a week; from there it was just a brief time until he appeared on a national network on a program known as "The Early Bookworm," and his voice saying "This is Woollcott speaking" soon became familiar to millions of people. He loved the radio; it opened up a wide and responsive audience, and one with which he felt he was in immediate contact. Fan mail delighted him; his pockets were continually bulging with comments from his listeners, which, like a schoolboy, he read to all who would listen.

Throughout his life Woollcott had a reluctance to see himself tied up too far ahead, and he never allowed even his radio life to interfere with his summers. In 1923, with some friends, he founded a little club on Neshobe Island, Lake Bomoseen, Vermont. In the beginning the clubhouse itself was a summer camp of the simplest kind, with kerosene lamps and life reduced to the essentials. The wooded island covered seven acres and guaranteed complete privacy; the lake water had a balmy quality which made swimming delightful. The club membership, which did not change much during the years, was composed of such friends as Neysa McMein, Alice Duer Miller, Harpo Marx, the Raymond Iveses, Beatrice Kaufman, Raoul Fleischmann, Grace Eustis, Harold Guinzburg, and Howard Dietz. Its pastimes were swimming, sailing, badminton, croquet, and in the evening all sorts of games from anagrams to bridge. Woollcott considered Lake Bomoseen the most beautiful spot in the world at all seasons of the year. He never tired of it and never felt restless; gradually he came to spend more time there each summer, until soon he was living there six months of the year.

But the theatre bug was still in his system. In 1931 his friend S. N. Behrman, author of such comedies as *The Second Man* and *Rain from Heaven*, offered him a part in his play, *Brief Moment*. Woollcott was delighted from every point of view; the character was a mild caricature of himself who lay supine on a couch throughout the play, occasionally exploding into typical Woollcottian invective, and he was continually on

the stage from the beginning to the final curtain. He loved every moment of it.

After the play closed, in 1932, he went to Russia, where his old friend Walter Duranty, then Russian correspondent for the *New York Times*, served as guide. He saw everything there was to see in the Russian theatre, to the detriment, perhaps, of more attention he might have paid the Communist experiment; but he met all the leaders in the contemporary political picture and returned to the United States full of admiration and respect for things Russian.

In 1933 Woollcott again collaborated with George Kaufman, this time in a mystery play entitled *The Dark Tower*, which was also doomed to fail. This was his last attempt at play-writing and he again turned his attention to radio, in which he functioned continually and successfully until his death. By this time his services were in great demand, and he was one of the highly paid stars of the air. His subject matter varied greatly; sometimes he reviewed a play or a book (his enthusiastic praise of James Hilton's *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, for example, made it a national best-seller overnight); sometimes he gave a surprise serenade to some well-known figure (such as Jerome Kern or Walt Disney) with a large orchestra and such guest stars as Noel Coward, Ethel Barrymore, or the Lunts; or he talked of some organization like the Seeing Eye, which was close to his heart. It was part of a self-imposed mission to try to stimulate the public into reading a book or seeing a play he thought worthwhile.

He was also popular as a lecturer, but was never willing to commit himself to a national tour. He chose instead to speak occasionally at universities, where he might, perhaps, influence the minds of the young. In 1933 he gave a series of lectures on journalism at Columbia University, and a little later another series at the New School for Social Research. In 1934 his first best-seller was published, *While Rome Burns*, a potpourri of his magazine writing.

Woollcott's life had by now changed completely from that of his newspaper days. He arose at eight, read his mail, which had become voluminous by this time, while he drank cup after cup of black coffee. If he did not have to dictate a radio broadcast or a magazine article to his secretary, the first visitor would be shown in promptly by nine o'clock. The procession of guests was steady until he went to dine. He was extraordinarily gregarious. A Sunday morning breakfast went on steadily from nine o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. When Woollcott's apartment became overcrowded, the guests often spread out over Alice Duer Miller's more spacious quarters adjoining. They shared so many mutual friends that it became a habit for him and Mrs. Miller to entertain together, formally as well as informally. In the evenings he wandered among his friends, and went occasionally to the theatre. It still held its interests for him and, now that he was no longer a dramatic critic, he was able to pick his fare more discriminatingly. He loved it now mostly for the friendships he had made in it, and he often went to out-of-town openings to see such friends as Ruth Gordon, the Lunts, Katharine Cornell, Helen Hayes, or the first performance of a play by Thornton Wilder, whom he admired above all American dramatists.

In 1936, after eight or nine years of a frantically busy life in New York, Woollcott decided that his Vermont island offered him a much more restful and agreeable routine. He wanted a house for all-year-round use, and Joe Hennessey, who had been running the club for several years, undertook to build it for him. A site was chosen on a ridge overlooking the lake on all sides, and a low, rambling, stone house was built which became his permanent home until his death.

With Woollcott established in his own home in 1937, he became the dominant force on the island to an even greater extent than he had been before. Even here his innate gregariousness, however, forced him to approximate his New York routine

as closely as possible. He ran the island as a benevolent monarchy, and he summoned both club members and other friends to appear at all seasons of the year; he turned the island into a crowded vacation ground where reservations must be made weeks in advance; the routine of life was completely remade to suit his wishes. He decided which guests were to sleep where; late risers were assigned rooms in his own house where the early morning activities of the clubhouse would not awaken them. Others were summarily called for a seven o'clock pre-breakfast dip regardless of temperature.

Breakfast went on all morning, with Woollcott presiding at the table in a dressing gown. Around eleven o'clock there was a croquet game if possible; it was always his favorite form of exercise both physically and in terms of the peculiar competitive quality which this game, above all others, is able to arouse in its players. The Woollcott version of croquet is played with long-handled, heavy English mallets and composition balls which barely pass through the narrow wickets, and to play it well requires skill at a complicated strategy. The course on the island is a tiny plot of rough ground surrounded by woods dipping sharply to the lake, so that balls sent into the woods often required three strokes to get them back into the clear. It was nothing for one game of croquet to last three hours. Passions ran high, including Woollcott's, even when the game was played for nothing.

A secretary was in constant residence, and Woollcott generally worked a few hours each day. In 1935 he had edited an anthology called *The Woollcott Reader* which quickly reached a very large audience. Now he followed this with *Woollcott's Second Reader*. These were, in reality, an evangelistic enterprise designed to make people read his favorites. He did an occasional series of broadcasts, was a frequent contributor to magazines, and he lectured here and there at his pleasure. In the Fall of 1938 he again returned to the theatre as an actor,

this time in another play by S. N. Behrman called *Wine of Choice*, and in a part not too dissimilar to the one he played in *Brief Moment*. The play stayed on the road for three months and had a brief run in New York. It then quietly folded in time for Woollcott to return to the island for the summer.

By now, however, his appetite for acting had been considerably whetted by his two experiences, and when Moss Hart visited the island in 1939 Woollcott suggested that he and George Kaufman write a part for him in their next play. The two playwrights were delighted with this idea, but in the course of their planning *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, it turned out to be not only a play for Woollcott but one about him. He was ecstatic, but cool afterthought made him feel that it was in questionable taste for him to appear in a play in which he himself was the protagonist. In the eyes of most of its audience, the portrait of the self-centered prima donna riding roughshod over ordinary people's feelings was far from flattering. The fact that he, himself, liked it and longed to play it is evidence that he was not unaware of his faults as others saw them. Subsequently, after the play had become a New York success, the temptation became too great and he happily volunteered to appear in the Pacific Coast company. He used the early Fall months for a lecture tour which took him from New York to Seattle and left him in Hollywood in January 1940, in time for rehearsals. He learned the enormous part of Sheridan Whiteside with great ease. He now had his wish so far as his career in the theatre was concerned; he was not only playing a leading part, but the play itself was a big success. And he was in Los Angeles, the home of many of his friends. Harpo Marx was there, Walt Disney, Frank Craven, Charlie Chaplin.

He took a bungalow at a hotel; he had his valet and his secretary with him, and Joe Hennessey was there also. In near-by bungalows were George Kaufman and Moss Hart, Charles Laughton, Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker and her husband,

Alan Campbell; between them all and the demanding role he was acting every night, his life would have been a taxing one even for a man with more vitality than his. When the play finally settled for a run in San Francisco in March, the same life continued, with, of course, the list of friends changed. The average actor spends his mornings in bed, but Woollcott continued with outside activities at the same tempo as though he had not the extra strain of his nightly role on his shoulders. He still arose at eight in the morning to read his mail and his papers, he still dictated letters and articles till noon, and his late afternoons and late nights were taken up by his friends.

Late in April Woollcott had a severe heart attack, his first serious illness since the mumps in 1909. It necessitated his immediate withdrawal from *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and the show was forced to close. After several weeks in bed he was able to return to Lake Bomoseen for a long period of complete inactivity. From this time on his health was a matter of great concern to everyone who cared for him; he never completely recovered from the serious damage done to his heart. The attacks were recurrent; the curtain had begun its final descent and he knew it. Each convalescence found him attempting to return to at least a modified form of his old routine; in the Fall of 1940 he went on the air electioneering for Roosevelt and early in 1941 he was back on the road again in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. By this time he had been forced to realize that there were definite limitations to what his body could stand, but the curtailment of his activities was a constant sorrow to him. The hot breath of war could already be felt and he longed to contribute something for the causes in which he believed so strongly.

In the Fall of 1941, against all medical advice, he went to England, and did a spirited series of broadcasts which the English seemed to find heartening. On his return he gave some lectures in the Middle West in the form of a report on English

morale in a section of our country which he thought needed it. This activity brought on another series of heart attacks which were followed by an operation and a long convalescence, but the Fall of 1942 found him feeling greatly bettered and functioning with all his zest of ten years ago.

He came to New York for the winter and established himself at the Hotel Gotham. He broadcast several times for commercial programs, he was on "Information Please" a couple of times, he wrote a monthly article for the *Reader's Digest*, and he also edited a pocket anthology called *As You Were*, selected to please the men in the armed forces, from which he turned over all earnings to the United Seamen's Fund.

On January 23, 1943, he had a fatal heart attack while broadcasting on a program called "The People's Forum." He died that same night.

To the average man a life devoid of the family relationships which make up the usual human experience would necessarily be an unhappy one; Woollcott found work and friendship, which he inextricably combined, a satisfactory substitute.

His letters show how much his work meant to him. Woollcott loved to work; he sat down to the actual job of transferring his thoughts to paper with infinite pleasure, and if the finished article satisfied him, he rose exhilarated. He was a meticulous worker who painstakingly searched for the perfect phrase. His work did not always measure up to his hopes; he knew it was uneven, but when it was good he was like a small boy who has just found a full jar of cookies. He entered on each job with anticipation, as he always felt that his best work was still ahead of him. He received both critical praise and condemnation. This, we feel, is not the place for either.

His letters also show how much people meant to him. He was unusually sociable and had many more close friends of all ages than the average person: a boy at college, a neighbor in Vermont, a young girl who wanted to write, an agreeable com-

panion on a train, as well as important figures of the theatrical and literary worlds in which he moved. He entered eagerly and with infinite curiosity into the lives of each and every one of them; each was an unfinished serial and he looked forward to every meeting for the next installment. His incredible memory enabled him to follow these lives intimately and with unflagging interest. Retold and embellished with the Woollcottian touch, their stories often acquired romance and adventure to such a degree that the protagonists would hardly recognize themselves.

Friendship with Woollcott was precarious, but this seemed never to serve as a deterrent. He was capricious, wilful, spoiled, and at times moody. He was impatient with the obvious and the trite. These characteristics inevitably brought quarrels. He wrote angry, cutting, and sometimes cruel letters; none of them is included in this collection for the reason that the editors did not receive any. Certainly they exist, but they were withheld by their recipients either because the fundamental relationship with Woollcott was good enough to blot out whatever emotion the letters had originally aroused, or because the attack was so vitriolic that they were unwilling to see it published. Most of Woollcott's quarrels, however, were quickly reconciled. He accepted criticism cheerfully and was never reluctant to admit it when he was in the wrong. He was essentially a sentimental person. He was warm, affectionate, and generous to those he loved. He liked his friends to like each other, just as he wanted them to share his enthusiasm for a favorite play or book.

Woollcott's friends found him gay, tender, stimulating, and steadfastly loyal. These letters are the token of his great gift for friendship.

Beatrice Kaufman
Joseph Hennessey

A Note on the Letters

This book is only a small representation of the thousands of letters which Alexander Woolcott wrote. His correspondence was enormously far-flung; he wrote with no idea that his letters would ever be published; and he kept no copies. To prepare this book, we wrote to his known friends and published notes in the literary journals, asking that his letters be sent to us. It is, therefore, quite possible that some whole groups of letters have escaped us. Some we know are war casualties—close friends such as Walter Duranty and Eleanora von Mendelssohn had left them tucked away in various parts of Europe. Still other friends, Ethel Barrymore and Dr. Logan Clendening, for example, did not save their letters. And correspondence with the friends he saw most frequently consisted largely of notes arranging meetings. Yet we received a generous collection—perhaps one thousand—to select from, and of these we have chosen those which seemed of the greatest general interest.

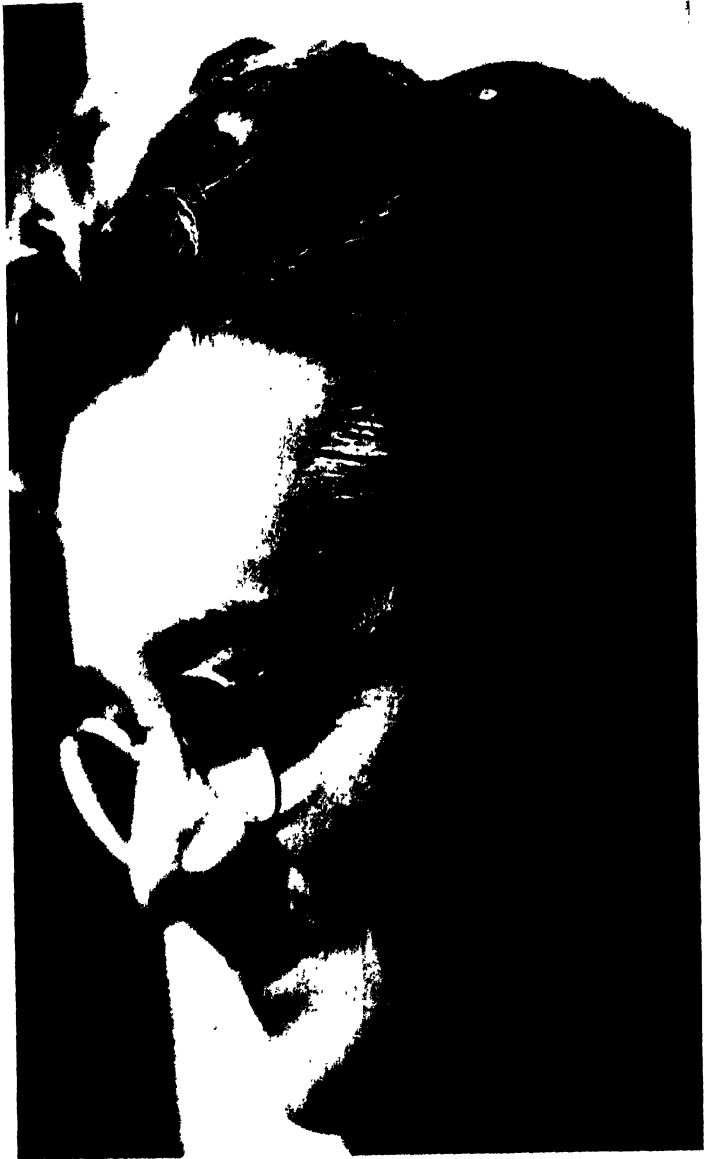
Letters from the period of the Twenties are scarcest; then he was seeing most of his close friends daily around New York and consequently not writing many letters. The preponderance of his correspondence came from the last few years of his life, when his illness precluded his usual activity and enforced a greater leisure. Still, it has been a satisfaction to us that we have been able to represent in considerable detail the interests, activities, and associates of the most important periods in Woolcott's life. We are

grateful to all the friends who sent us letters, whether we could use them here or not.

We have done as little editing as possible. Deletions were largely of material that was repetitious or too personal for inclusion. We have briefly identified people and explained the circumstances of a letter only when we felt that the point might otherwise be lost. In deciding when to supply these notes, we had to remember that what will seem obvious to Woollcott's friends may be unfamiliar to his larger audience. As notes could not be repeated, the reference is usually given only on the first appearance of the name. Readers who do not go through the book consecutively can refer to the index, where the pages on which notes appear are indicated with an asterisk. Similarly, first names or last names used alone in the letters have usually been completed by us only on their first appearance or when they might be confusing. Material in [brackets] has been supplied by us; (parentheses) are Woollcott's.

Woollcott wrote occasionally in longhand, but most of his letters were dictated. We have retained his salutations and signatures, which often followed a personal whim. Sometimes he did not like a friend's given name and arbitrarily assigned him another which pleased him more; other times the names were literary allusions or were used as part of some private game. We have followed chronological order; the groupings by years is arbitrary, for the convenience of the reader.

B.K.
J.H.



THE CREAM OF WHEAT

Broadcasts

485 Madison Avenue
New York City

Office of
Alexander Woolcott

March 1, 1935

Dear David:

These are the facts:

- 1: Departing for Chicago on the night of March 3rd.
- 2: Address until March 20th Hotel Blackstone.
- 3: Lecture at the Convocation at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, on the morning of March 7th.
- 4: Broadcast from Chicago Sunday evening, March 10th. Later the same evening, Thornton Wilder, Gertrude Stein and I will be the guests of some undergraduate honor society for several hours of continuous high discourse.
- 5: March 12th, lecture Northwestern University.
- 6: March 14th, lecture Toledo.
- 7: March 15th, lecture Detroit.
- 8: March 17th, broadcast from Chicago.
- 9: March 18th, lecture Indianapolis.
- 10: March 19th, visiting with the Tarkingtons and inspecting Fester Hall.
- 11: March 20th, lecture Chicago University.
- 12: March 23rd, Signet Club dinner, Harvard.
- 13: March 24th, broadcast from New York City.
- 14: March 26th, visit to Laura E. Richards, Gardiner, Maine.
- 15: March 27th, lecture Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.
- 16: March 31st, broadcast from New York City.
- 17: April 1st, death of Mr. Woolcott, as thousands cheer.
- 18: April 2nd, dancing in the streets; half-holiday in all the schools; bank moratorium.
- 19: Burial at sea April 3rd.

Alexander Woolcott

I

Childhood to 1910

To MISS K. R. SORBER

[Woollcott was ten years old when he wrote these letters to his public school teacher.]

*Phalanx, Red Bank, N. J.
August, 1897*

My dear Miss Sorber,

The Phalanx is just as beautiful as it always was and everything is so very free here.

I just got here last night and then I was so happy.

You know I spent the night in Jersey City. That is a very beautiful place. Parts of course are very busy and like any other city but then of course it has its' pretty spots. A great many in fact.

The catalpa tree's are blooming and makes the front of the house very beautiful.

It has been too hot to go on the hill this afternoon but I expect to spend tomorrow morning there.

I will take the spy glass and then I can see what changes have taken place around the country.

My Aunt Annie has a beautiful dog called Don. He is very intelligent.

I hope you are having a pleasant time. I am.

Your sincere pupil,
Aleck Woollcott

To MISS K. R. SORBER

Red Bank, N. J.
August, 1897

Dear Miss Sorber,

Please don't detest me for not answering your lovely letter. Well I flatter myself I did answer it but I lost it and somehow I let the days slip by.

Do you remember, on the last day of school you read us about the Indian chief, Pontiac and you spoke of Evangeline. Well the other day I got it out and read it and I entirely agree, with you as to it's being fine.

I have just finished the fourth of seven pincushions I am embroidering (dont consider spelling.

I have just had an old tooth out. When I had gone through with the terrible ordeal I laughed.

I have hauled out a basket of St. Nicholass and have been reading them.

We have a lot of company now so I want to go out.

Yours truly
A. H. Woollcott

To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

[The correspondence with his boyhood best friend began when Woollcott was twelve. Their friendship continued all his life.]

Red Bank, N. J.
August 21, 1899

Dear Smyser:

I got your little note from York and I answer it promptly.

My brother Phil and cousin Tod have started to print old plates of people and landscape of the Phalanx. They are very

dear to all of us and so the boys have sold quantities. I have bought several so you will be glad to see them.

The other day three boys, of which I am the oldest, went on our wheels to Highland Beach, fifteen miles. We went the ocean and the river.

I am coming home on September the seventh, I think. I am very anxious to hear what you are going to say to me when I come home. I have a presentiment that it is something about Harriet Pauline. Is it?

I have *nothing* to say.

Aleck Woollcott

To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Philadelphia, Pa.
June 25, 1900

Dear Smyser,

I rode up to Courtland's house today and he says he is coming tomorrow and says he will go to the Gymnasium with you. He received your note. Of course I would not have mentioned the subject to him had I not known beforehand that you had asked him yourself.

My dear Mrs. Aleshine are you going in the pool tomorrow. If you dont it will be exceedingly malocious and i should not admire it in the extreme.

My dear mrs. Aleshine the following is a sample of the ALESHINE and LECKS UNPRONOUNCEABLE and unheard of vocabulary dictionary.

malocious unmusical and noisy
delupititude . weariness and utyritoyjgheirua745n ness
galavonishaw carthinghetreskellness

Mrs. lecks and Mrs. Aleshine are not responsible for the mean-

ing or the spelling of their vocabulary but the above is the most authorized edition of the words and their soul perspirin meanings.

Farewell Farewell

Mrs. Lecks

P.S. It is sweet to be remembered

[The boys had been reading Frank S. Stockton's *The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.*]

TO GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Red Bank, N. J.

July 18, 1900

Dear Smyser:

It was very wicked of you not to write to me before. It was a snipy short letter when it did come but still it is sweet to be remembered. You spoke of a Bert in your letters. Was it H.P.D. From the tune of your letter you seem to be having a good time. I know I am. I have played over three hundred games of croquet since I have been here. I am in a high temper just now having been robbed of my swimming.

When we went there today there were two bulls and about twenty cows bathing. I tried to chase them off but the bulls looked so *feerocious* I decided not to.

I am going off crabbing tomorrow with five other boys about my age. We will be gone from about 8 A.M. till 8 P.M.

When I woke up this morning I was hopping mad to find she had skipped off to Philadelphia for a few days.

I have only been to the ocean once so far but I will pretty soon. I have malaria pretty often so I shall proceed to take a pill.

We take the pill, We take the pill etc.

Oh—Matilda this place is simply littered up with a huge painting which I know would make your mouth water.

The thermometer has been singing the tune of 100° and I have been so cooked, boiled, broiled, baked, fried and poached since the weather that I know all the microbes must be dead.

Have you been to the Y.M.C.A. since I have been away.

I know you must weep so much from pure loneliness and the pool overflows.

Farewell, Farewell,

Alicia

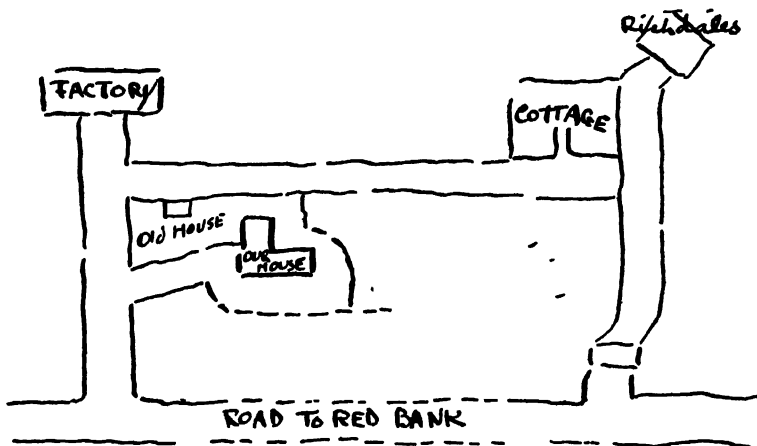
To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Red Bank, N. J.

July 8, 1901

Dear Smyser,

I have been playing croquet all day and am simply tired out. The set is a new one, down at the cottage (Aunt Joe's house, just a little way down the road



This far from scientific map may if you are very brilliant give you a faint suggestion of the situation of the houses.

My dear child, July 22nd is pretty far off but if nothing

unexpected happens, its entirely convenient.

Come to the Phalanx prepared for;

1—Quiet with nothing special to do.

2—Queer people, all very dear to me, but being out in the country and surrounded only by friends they are apt to be much freer than they would in the city.

3—Sleeping almost like camping out but with a bed, room-mosquito canopy & light. I fear that after a lively week at the shore, the Place will seem dull. We can take walks, play (tennis?) & croquet, go swimming or paddling (according to our several abilities and the depth of Hop Brook)—sit in the hammocks, explore the place, play with the baby, visit the Richdales, read, gabble, or do what I do but what will probably be uninteresting to you, listen to the gabble of my assembled relatives. If that doesn't settle you, I'm at the end of my rope.

All I ask is to have you go away, pleased with the Phalanx and not gossip about any peculiarities you may notice to Justus.

Yours as ever—

A. H. Woollcott

P.S. I omitted in my list eating the fruit which is ripe at the time & exploring the factory.

To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Red Bank, N. J.

July 30, 1901

My dear Smyser,

Your charming letter received. Sunday there were sixteen people at the table. Ivy and Ned [Mr. and Mrs. Root] arrived Sunday about 12 m. Ivy had a little gift to every one on the place from the elder "Mr. Swigger" down to

Eleanor. She brought me a little purse from Paris, with a coin from each country through which she traveled. Olive, Julie [A. W.'s sister], and Mr. Sumner (young Mr. Swigger's brother-in-law) departed on Monday, bag and baggage, mid weeping, and lamentations. (N.B. Mr. Sumner's bag and baggage consisted of a valise 1 inch by 3 inches.) We enjoyed our straw-ride very much. I ate a bag of candy, a bag of peanuts, 2 bars of popcorn, a glass of Huyler's ice-cream soda, a chocolate Milk-Shake, and a hot Frankfurter. We had a lovely ride and the moon was glorious. We sang all the way. We reached home at half past one Sunday morning. I slept all Sunday morning.

Frank Swigger and Mr. Barker went Saturday. We had a frightful thunder storm yesterday. It struck just across the road. I have written to Berry, Waldie, Mamma, and Justus but have had no answers. I don't know what would happen to Phil S. if we had a serious battle because I have to blow out his light and tie his tie. Yesterday evening he went to bed before me but staid in his mother's room because he was afraid to go into his house alone. Have just had some lovely huckle-berry-rolypoly. It certainly is handsome.

Very truly yours
Aleck. H. Woolcott

To *GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW*

Philadelphia, Pa.
May 3, 1903

Dear S—

We will appear tomorrow night (Monday). I am writing as you told me to warn you when the evil was to fall upon you.

I have discovered a new way to discover B's. Give this sum in mental arith. to a person whose B you want. For instance

Lyde. Tell her to think of the number of the month in which she was born, to double it, add 5, multiply by 50, add the day of the month on which she was born, subtract 365, add 115, and then ask her the result, which in her case would be 720, that is seventh month, twentieth day, July 20th, and thus you can find a persons B without their knowing it.

As in case of Mrs. Murphy this would be convenient.

Adieu

A. H. W.

What gorgeous writing.

To *GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW*

*Theta Delta Chi House, Hamilton College,
Clinton, N. Y.
October 2, 1905*

Dear Smyser,

I hope you will pardon the use of the machine but it belongs to my room-mate and as it is a new kind to me I practice on it all I can in order to get the hang of it. Arthur [Richdale] tells me that you were surprised to hear that I had come up here and I realize that I still owe you a letter. But things have gone so swiftly since I have been here that I have only scribbled off a line here and there when I had something special to communicate. Here it is after midnight and I am starting in on a letter to you.

Arthur perhaps told you that I had been chosen as one of the four freshmen to enter Theta Delta Chi this year and I am still trying to realize my good fortune. Until you have actually entered college you can have no conception of what the word fraternity means and I myself am just beginning to understand. Prior to the invitation to join there were box parties, dinner parties and card parties to give the fellows and me time to look

each other over and once I accepted the pledge I moved down the hill and started in my life at the frat house. There are sixteen of us who live here together, four from each class. These live the most intimate kind of lives month in and month out, always together in each other's rooms and partaking in the same amusements. The house is a large one with fine porches and grounds and it is half way up the hill on which the campus stands.

Two ladies act as housekeepers and we all eat together a senior presiding and he always says grace. It is one of the principles of the frat to make it as much of a home life as possible and the house is furnished throughout as a large and fine residence would be. I hope you don't get tired of hearing about these details as I am very enthusiastic and think of nothing else.

We all go to chapel every morning at 8:30 and have a short, opening service. Then every Sunday we have a regular service that is supposed to be non-denominational but the leanings are decidedly Presbyterian. One of the seniors plays the organ, a big beauty that covers the entire front wall of the chapel. For voluntaries he always gives some good music instead of hymns. For instance last Sunday we had the War-march of the Priests before the service and the third movement of the *Tannhäuser* overture afterwards. There is a choir of the eight best voices in the college and we all open by singing a chant. Then there is the responsive reading which is followed by singing the "Doxology" and then the "Lord's Prayer" is given and then the sermon. I don't think much of Dr. Stryker as a teacher but he certainly is the most eloquent preacher I ever heard and he gets his ten thousand a year for that very reason.

We have gymnasium twice a week and do all the stunts to music which makes it partake something of the joys of dancing school.

Here is a coincidence for you. My chief friend here in the senior class is Selden Talcott Kinney of Easton, Pa. and it was

at his father's sanitarium that your very dear friend John Bentley was staying when he was taking the cure that summer they were all at the Phalanx.

I hope you liked the picture of the Victor party. We had them very frequently and Mr. W. always distinguished himself by referring to the nocturne as "Choppins Nocterine."

I will close by telling you about the Roots' house where I stayed the first week I was on the hill. It was built in 1790 for an inn and is altogether the quaintest house I was ever in. Every room is on a different level and there are little alcoves and short flights of stairs everywhere you happen to step. But the thing that would appeal to you is the furniture which is almost entirely colonial from the pictures to the china. Room after room without a single stick of modern furniture in it and I never ceased raving over it.

Tell me all the news and the health reports of the family.

Aleck Woollcott

[The Root family, including Oren and his brother Elihu, was intimately connected with Hamilton affairs.]

To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Clinton, N. Y.

November 24, 1905

Dear Smyser,

Excuse the letter on a typewriter, but I have fallen into the habit of using one, and I manipulate it with speed and ease.

I enjoyed your letter very much indeed: it was the first account I had of your meeting with Helen and Maymie though since then each of the dames has written me a long and detailed account of the whole teekish affair. Maymie is in Georgia much the same as usual, and Helen is still wandering around the old town.

It is beginning to settle down to a good old-fashioned winter as they have it here with 20 below as a common thing and three months of sleighing as a regular occurrence. Our house is about three quarters of a mile from the chapel and is supplied with a set of sleds each marked with the Greek letters of the fraternity. These are taken up in the morning and the boys come down to the house in about one minute. You can slide for a mile and a half without stopping to the bottom of the hill and so far only two broken bones have resulted this year, which is a much better record than usual.

I continue to love it here with all my heart and everything is just ideal. I have several very close friends in my own and the upper classes, and there is always so much to do. We gave a small informal dance here to about fifty people and I was so tired when I crept into bed at five in the morning that I slept until three the next day. The boys invite their damsels from all over the state and girls pack up and come all the way from New York just to attend the Theta Delta opening dance. In February is dance week when the whole week is used in gayety, and our crowd gives a house party, each boy bringing a girl for the week and sleeping in the dormitory to leave the house clear for the girls and their chaperones. There are dances every night and sleighing parties in the daytime and it costs all the boys who entertain damsels just about fifty dollars. So yours truly will go stag.

This sounds as if we never did any work but the course is a stiff one and no shirks ever get past the first term.

Your mother will expire when she learns that I am still sporting my entire summer outfit of summer garb with no idea of donning anything heavier for some time to come. I shall have to buy some winter underwear, tell her, as I thoughtlessly neglected to save the remnants of my last year's stock and the safety pins.

I have made great friends with the old man who owns a

great estate opposite us and has ten dogs and eight cats. I am invited there for dinner Sunday, which is provoking as he is a vegetarian, though happy thought—he may have buns and apple sauce.

I have no particular Phalanx news: Mrs. Root is to have a play go on before Christmas. I have neglected to answer Celia's three impassioned postals that arrived all in one mail. But I really cannot undertake another correspondent when I have so many unanswered letters on hand.

Write me all the news

Aleck

TO GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Utica, N. Y.
June 22, 1907

Dear Smyser:

I suppose you received my postal and now I've found an opportunity to write sooner than I had expected. My friend Hawley Truax, who, if you remember, I said was exactly like you, has a motor here at college and it has broken down leaving me in Utica, stranded on a hot June afternoon. So I am writing to you.

Mother forwarded your letter and I was much interested in all the news, and also much conscience stricken at my long neglect of my correspondence. I don't see why I don't take a brace. I certainly can't afford to seemingly ignore all my friends, yet there isn't half enough time to do all I want to do, and so it's only natural dozens of letters go unwritten.

First of all I've had the play to distract my attention. Since Easter we have been at work on the Sophomore play in which I took the leading girl's part. It was a howling success and we took in a mint of money. I'll send you the special supplement

to "Life" the college newspaper, which was issued in honor of the play with pictures of the cast in it. Since the play I have had four large dances and three teas, beastly hot, but Utica society just wakes up in June when the men and girls are back from college. Yesterday I went to a tea and sweated like a June bride for a half hour and solemnly swore I'll never go to another. Yesterday noon there was a dear little wedding in Clinton into which I butted and besides all this exam week is in full blast. It is hard to shine both in your studies and in gay society.

It's stupid for me to ramble on in this aimless fashion about my gadding here which can hardly interest you. Yet you would love it here, I'm sure. The work takes a lot of time but generally I do my studying on the grounds of the Root House, lying on the grass, two of us, smoking and looking out across the valley, where you can see the tips of the Adirondacks, forty miles away.

I have formed a number of close friends here. I am the only poor guy in the crowd so they take me motoring, to dinners and theatres and I roll around as if my pockets were bulging. My best girl friend is the daughter of the big Grace Church in Utica, and I dine at the Rectory quite often tho I'm sure the rector loathes me as a rank heathen, tho he is nice to me and tells most unrectorish stories when the ladies are not around. But woe is me the fair Katherine sails for Iceland on Wednesday to be in Europe indefinitely, so no more dinners for me at the Rectory for some time to come.

Commencement week begins Monday and will leave me dead as a rag. The larks go on day and night till Friday morning. Monday night there are three dances, Tuesday night there are three dances, Wednesday the Alumni Banquet and Thursday commencement day, Thursday night the Ball which lasts till six in the morning, and then they scatter. I shall cut the ball because of the expense and because I start work at Chautauqua for the summer on Friday.

Do you know Chautauqua, the big summer school on Chautauqua Lake about ten miles from Erie? Well I have some sort of a job there for the summer and haven't the vaguest notion what I am to do. Still the place is beautiful, the lake great and the chances for hearing fine music and big speakers is continuous.

I wish I could have joined the Jamestown [Va.] party which starts from here on the first of July. About a dozen Hamilton Freshmen are going down there to roll chairs on the midway; they get a quarter of what they take in, which will cover most of their expenses. Still the carfare down there will be considerable, and I fancy the chair rolling will be hot work.

I suppose Mother wrote to you and told you what news there is, that Ella Richdale and John Bucklin each have children, only Ella's is born and I don't think John's is yet, that the Woollcotts have done nothing in this line at all yet, that Mrs. Oliver is dead, that Nancy Root is still at the Phalanx growing big and pretty, and always under the firm conviction that there is no one in the world like Bam [the family's pet name for A. W.'s mother], who, as she confided to Aunt Ann, is a fine old girl.

Guy Richdale and June are both in the Standard Oil Company now and both doing well. They'll probably marry in no time.

Tomorrow night the Dramatic Club have a box party at the theatre in Utica to celebrate our success. The play is "Big Hearted Jim" which sounds pretty rotten and I guess it will be.

If you will write me I'll try to answer more promptly.

Aleck Woollcott

To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

Chautauqua, N. Y.
July 21, 1907

Dear Smyser:

Your letter was so duly appreciated that here I am answering within a reasonable time which is quite remarkable. I don't know where Mamma got the idea that I was coming to Phalanx in September. It would be entirely too expensive a trip and so, between the week that College opens and the time my work ends here I shall visit my room-mate Len Watson in his home in Westfield, about ten miles from here on Lake Erie. From there we shall probably go to Hamilton together. At any rate I shall take in Niagara on the way which is near here.

So I guess I don't see the Phalanx before Xmas at the earliest and unless I have some unexpected expenses this year, maybe I can save up enough to go down to Philadelphia Xmas week if you people would put me up for a day or two. I hate to think of not seeing the place again for another year so I shall make a desperate effort to come then.

You needn't sniff at my occupation for the summer. Almost all the waiters at Chautauqua are college men and we get board and room for our pains. All we have to do is to come at meal times, serve our table and clear it away. Then we all select a table and eat our own meal—generally a table in the tents which surround the St. Elmo. There are four boys and three girls and we have a very good time.

My other job, as janitor, requires about a half hour's sweeping every day and I have to take tickets for the occasional lectures and concerts given in the hall—so you see I have most of my time to myself. I have read a whole library since I've been here, wrote twenty-two letters the first week, and go swimming and rowing when it's warm enough.

I suppose that last sounds queer—for I've read how rotten hot it's been in Philadelphia at the time of the Elk's parade.

But it's cool enough here for Chautauqua sits some 1300 ft. above sea-level. It's a great old place with six or eight entertainments every day all free. They have the finest music in Chautauqua of any resort in the country. This is music week and all the big authorities are to lecture on different subjects. There is to be a course on the life of the great composers, and every night they give an oratorio. This being Sunday they give Haydn's "Creation" in the amphitheatre—a choir of four hundred—the quartet and orchestra. You would enjoy it no end.

Last week they had the Prize Spelling Match. New York against the rest of the world. I went in for New Jersey and covered her with glory by missing the first word they gave me.

Write again when you have time and give my love to all your people.

Aleck H. Woollcott

To GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW

*Clinton, N. Y.
November 4, 1908*

My dear Smyser,

I have probably lost your good opinion permanently by my erratic ideas about correspondence, but it is really very hard for me to find much to write about, when Mother tells you all the Phalanx news and the accounts of my own doings would be filled with names that are utterly unfamiliar to you. Howsumever I think of every one I know there in Philadelphia, probably far oftener than they think of me, and unless something unforeseen comes up to interfere, I shall most certainly accept your invitation for the holidays, coming down sometime between Christmas and New Year's.

We are to have eighteen days vacation and that will leave me time to gad about New York a bit, and some time for the

Phalanx and Philadelphia. Marian [Stoll] as you probably know is in Germany, which is too bad as I should like very much to see her. I came very near to going over myself last spring and indeed I threaten to go every once in a while but it doesn't seem very likely just now. Phil Welch wants me to go in January with him, but it would certainly be foolish to have gone this far with college and then throw it up just for a chance to see Europe.

I was in Utica Election night, taking dinner with the mother of the girl whom I hope to marry some day, and she played "Hearts and Flowers" for me. It started me thinking of your mother, and the horror you used to express when she tried that old favorite of yours. Out of this started a train of thought that led to this letter.

I have been doing very little of interest this Fall. Senior year is one of few studies and beyond the editorship of the college magazine I have very little on my mind. Phil Welch and I are very apt to spend the large part of every day together, and that means Utica and the theatres when his pockets are full and my room in the dormitory when they are empty.

I have a great fireplace in my room, with woodboxes which the Freshmen are supposed to keep full, only they don't. Last night the snow was so thick and the wind so noisy that we darkened the room, and lay all evening in two Morris chairs in front of the fire. It is a harmless way to spend a few hours. About ten we sent a Freshman over to Commons for some eggs on toast, candy and cigarettes, with the result that I have a rather sour stomach this morning. It is still snowing and the sleds are out in full force, which will give you a hint as to the climate here.

I don't know what started me thinking of it, but there came into my mind the other day the recollection of Courtland Baker playing priest on the third floor of our house on Walnut Lane. I can see him now, and smell that ghastly odor of incense that he managed to stir up somehow. That house wasn't half bad

and we used to have some pretty good times there. Ask your mother if she remembers how she used to prophesy that it wouldn't be long before we were back in it again, which is rather pathetic now that you come to think of it. As far as I am concerned everything has gone beautifully. I never have had four such wonderful years and I never expect to have again.

I think it is high time that I came back, however, and refreshed my mind a little. I picked up my old birthday book a few weeks ago and for the life of me I couldn't remember more than half of the names in it. I hope I shall have a chance to run out to Germantown and see Miss Wilcox and Miss Montgomery. But it will be vacation time and they are always queer and out of their element when you visit them in their homes.

I don't think there is any recent Phalanx news that would interest you particularly. I am pretty rusty on it for I'm there only once a year at Christmas, and for the life of me I can't remember where all the people are.

You must tell me when the time comes what part of the vacation would be most convenient for you to have me, so that I can make my plans accordingly.

Excuse the typewriter but I use it almost all the time.

Yours as ever

Aleck

To *GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW*

Red Bank, N. J.

July 29, 1909

Dear Smyser:

You would have heard from me before this but I have been sick and unable to write. Two weeks ago I was at Lillian's and woke to find a swelling behind my ears. That suggested mumps. It took me about two minutes to fly into my

clothes and start for the Phalanx. Frances was here for the week and Julie.

I was pretty sick and got worse. By Saturday I couldn't move and had to be lifted from the bed—and then that beastly complication set in and I am still here tho better. Sunday was the worst. Julie in one room undergoing a slight operation and I in my room where three injections and several doses of morphine brought small relief. Mother was flying around in a fine state.

Julie has gone back to New York and I expect to go by Monday.

Your letter reached me all right but my address is 34 W. 12th St. where Phil Welch and Julie and I are all rooming. I'd be glad to see an occasional *Record*.

Affairs here are by no means settled but I think Aunt Julie and Mother will descend into their graves from this place and no other.

Aleck

To *GEORGE SMYSER AGNEW*

THE NEW YORK TIMES
September 24, 1909

Dear Smyser,

It is too bad that most of my plans for coming to Philadelphia never amount to anything. As you see by the above heading, I am located here as a young and hopeful reporter, instead of being on the *Philadelphia Record*, but I nonetheless appreciate your sending me the paper.

I am sorry that you avoided me so carefully when you were in the city. Julie must have seemed a little dopy, though I doubt if you realized that she was so sick that she could hardly stagger. She collapsed that night with a horrible attack of indigestion. I am glad to be here on her account, not that she isn't far better able to take care of me than I of her. She gads around some-

thing fierce, as your friend Bert would say. I did four theatres myself last week: a number of the fellows were in town on their way back to college and I took my last fling before starting work. Miss Atherton was here too on her way to Vassar. She stopped at the Martha Washington and I got passes to go up on the roof where we had several barn dances before we were stopped by the authorities.

It is great up here in the *Times*: we are in the tower of the Times Building and can see all over the city on all four sides. It's great at night and will be fine as an observation ground during the coming week.

I can't tell you how much I enjoy my newspaper work. It will never bring me any money but I love it and that's enough. There have been some gay times this winter. I see very little of Julie who has her friends, interests and work while I have mine. We do meet at breakfast.

There is no news from the Phalanx. Julie, Frances, Uncle Will, and I went down for Labor Day and saw the Monmouth County fair. My first and last Mrs. Giles had resurrected an antique quilt of hers which won a five dollar prize, to her great delight. The plans of the family as a whole will take more definite shape after the first of October and I will let you know the news whenever there is any.

I don't expect to get away for Xmas: it will be the first spent away from the Phalanx since that memorable one in 1907, when I gave a few readings at the Mennonite after the comic opera was given up.

Give my best to the family and let me know how Mrs. Deaney fares. I think she is a greater favorite with Mother than anyone she met in Philadelphia. Oh by the way, Helen Sears [A. W.'s cousin] is to be in New York hereafter. I tell you that you'd better come over. The rats are leaving the old ship.

Yours sincerely,

Aleck W.

II

World War and Postwar 1917-1919

TO MRS. ALICE HAWLEY TRUAX

[During his early days in New York, Woolcott made the Truax house his home. Hawley Truax had been one of his best friends at college. Mrs. Truax was Hawley's mother; his sister Katharine married Lloyd Stryker, another college friend; and his brother was Chauncey Truax.]

New York City
June 9, 1917

Dear Mrs. Truax,

I have not written because I had nothing to add to the news Katharine [Truax Stryker] was able to carry with her to Blue Hill. I do not yet know when or where we are going; the entire unit is a pawn in the war department's game. We think we are going to France and we think we will be there before the first of July. But we don't know and one of us doesn't care. I haven't any idea what I will do—different work at different times, I imagine. As a tentative preparation, I am brushing up my French, arranging to have it spoken to me several hours a day. Roche, whom you met, and Alphonse of the Metropolitan Opera, are helping and I have put an ad in the *Courier* for the services of "un Français bavard ou une Française sérieuse. C'est amusant, n'est-ce pas?"

I feel like a pig to go away leaving my things strewn all over your apartment. I think much of my raiment, shoes, shirts,

etc. might well be bestowed on the City Mission or Salvation Army. Of the books, only those on the lowest shelf are greatly treasured. The rest can go to Malkans if there is not room for them in the celebrated Chest. When the time comes for you to move or whenever they are in the way, will you consult with Julie about their storage, either in a warehouse or at the Phalanx? As for our financial entanglements, I will turn over a lump sum to Hawley on the eve of departure.

If we do not sail next week, I shall try to go to Commencement and to take Hawley with me.

I have bought a rubber life-preserving suit, quite a structure. It fits over me like a baby's crawling-suit, very rubbery and very bulky, so that I somewhat resemble the gods in *The Gods of the Mountain*. It keeps one warm, upright and afloat for days, with a whistle to summon help and a pouch for food, stimulants and light reading matter—*The Atlantic Monthly*, I presume. I tested mine in the Howard plunge and it worked like a charm. Heywood Broun wanted me to stay in the tank for four days as a true test but I declined. He was interested because he was to sail today and I suppose he has. He ordered two suits, one for himself and one for Ruth Hale—now, and since Wednesday, Mrs. Heywood Broun. He goes as correspondent for the *Tribune*.

I will complain to the *Times* about the subscription.

Aleck

To LAWRENCE GILMAN

Governor's Island
June, 1917

My dear Brother Gilman,

The only cloud on the memory of a most delightful evening is the fact that I found no trace of my watch next morning. I remember looking at it in Delmonico's and it occurs to me as possible it may have slipped to the floor

instead of into one of the many new pockets with which I am not yet on intimate terms. It is open-face—an old watch with a back-case of beaten gold. Will you inquire after it in Delmonico's and if, by any wild chance, it is in the pound there, send it to me here and forever oblige

Yr obt. servant
George Washington

[Before Woollcott sailed for France, the New York critics gave him a farewell dinner. As music critic of the *North American Review*, Mr. Gilman was one of the party.]

TO MRS. ALICE HAWLEY TRUAX

Governor's Island
1917

Dear Mrs. Truax,

When you get this, you will know that my days on the land—in this land—are numbered. Thereafter my address will be as follows:

PRIVATE ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
AMERICAN EMBASSY
PARIS
FRANCE
U. S. BASE HOSPITAL #8
FRANCE

It sounds rather formidable, doesn't it?

Everything here on the island has been outrageously agreeable—the men, the food, the equipment, even the drill, strangely enough. I have just come in from an hour of marching and feel as fresh as a daisy.

I shall never cease to be grateful to you for my home of the last two years. I wish I could say it in some way to make it sound more than a mere formal acknowledgment. If it had not been

there, ready and hospitable and sympathetic, when I came back from Baltimore last Christmas, I do not know what would have become of me. You and Hawley will be always in my thoughts and of course I shall write whenever I can. Love to Katharine. Au revoir,

Aleck

To JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

[Woollcott's close relationship with his older sister, Mrs. Charles Taber, is brought out in the letter to Lucy Drage, on page 79.]

On Board an American Transport
[Received September 11, 1917]

Dear Julie,

On what ought to be the last day of our voyage, I have dug my writing case out of the bowels of my barrack bag and brought it up on the forecastle deck in the hope of writing a few letters to be mailed after we reached the land that should come over the horizon before sundown. There is really not much I can say except that I am feeling serene and uncommonly well. I am assuming you will have received official word of our arrival long before this letter reaches you.

I acquired a new typewriter just before we set sail and when—if ever—we are finally settled, I know I shall feel more like writing you. If ever a letter arrives that is full of odds and ends of our doings over here, please pass it on to Mrs. Truax for there isn't going to be an awful lot of time for writing.

We were all so displeased by the unsavory old transport that originally bore us from shore, that everyone grinned from ear to ear when we were rammed and had to be taken off. Our present craft is an immeasurable improvement, and though the huddled sleeping quarters and the unimaginative meals have staggered those who have never roughed it at all, I have emerged quite unruffled after a curious voyage that has really been

mighty enjoyable. You know I haven't a decent minimum of fastidiousness and I have enjoyed every day.

I don't know where we are going or how soon we are to be at work and—as far as I personally am concerned—do not know for sure what that work will be. But I do know that whatever the work, the co-workers will be congenial and everything thus far has been much, much pleasanter than I had any right to expect.

I got the typewriter in the hope that from time to time I might be able to write pieces for publication. It will be some time before I'll know how much if any time I will have for writing and how much if any of what I write will get through. By way of an experiment I wrote a piece for the *Times* yesterday and if, after a while, you should encounter a little sketch on life aboard a transport, you will know more of our trip than I have written here.

Our officers are an agreeable lot with no disposition whatever to lord it over us. Among the enlisted men, there is every variety—a nice miscellany. I have made new friends and encountered old ones. When we were on the old *Saratoga*, I slept my one night on deck and about four in the morning, a captain of artillery went along waking everyone up and sending them below because the ship was about to move out. I came to in time to hear him say “What the hell are you doing here?” and found it was Fritz Burrows who was in college with me. Again, when we came aboard this transport, the first person I met was Bob Hull who was a Theta Delt of my time at Hamilton. He is crossing with another hospital unit.

The crossing has been as calm as Hop Brook—and we have been able to spend practically all our time on deck. We have eaten on deck, bathed on deck and slept on deck—or some of us have. It's rather fun to roll up in army blankets and poncho and go to sleep on the forecastle deck under the stars and it's not half bad to come shivering up at four and stand in front of a hose to get your bath.

This morning I sang in the choir at morning services to the great amusement of the ungodly and now we are all polishing our boots and side-arms and mending up generally to look neat and pretty for the French. This letter will be mailed from France.

With love

Aleck

Next day

P.S. Just a line to say that after as wildly exciting a morning as I can recall, we are all smiling at the land which seems not more than a stone's throw from the bow. I wanted to add too, as a message to Aunt Julie, that Nelson Sackett * is an exceptionally fine fellow, much liked and already designated a corporal. We are the best of friends.

A.W.

* Nelson Sackett is Anna Benson's boy—a Princeton undergraduate.

TO MRS. ALICE HAWLEY TRUAX

With the American Expeditionary Force
September 2, 1917

My dear Mrs. Truax,

I am sitting as I write in the garden behind a house taken over by the YMCA, seizing a free hour for a letter to you. The chief burden of the letter is that I am well and busy and cheeful. If I do not write much more than that, it is not because I have anything painful or sensational to conceal but because a long list of censorship rules makes me falter and I *do* want this note to get through with my greetings. I think the very fact of a censorship cramps one's style, no matter how innocent one's prattle, so I have attempted nothing but postal

cards. Besides, I keep my mind off America and all the folks as much as I can. There is no use being riven by homesickness all the time. But you mustn't forget me.

Some day, when it's all over, I'll take an evening off to tell you of our unforgettable crossing: that should have a chapter all to itself. It seemed pretty good at last to get the first sight of the red sails of the fishing crafts, to see people waving to us from the fields and catch a glimpse of an American flag flying from some housetop. We were an old story to the gamins of the quai when we finally reached our moorings but they were all ready with fruit to throw on board and our first greeting and tribute was a well-meant pear which hit one of our men in the eye.

We were pretty glad, too, to reach what appears to be our quarters for some time to come—a quaint and more picturesque town than ever I saw when I was in Europe before, unbelievably remote in spirit from this war and this century. When we had leave, we would clatter over the cobble-stones to some seamy little buvette for dinner. I remember one dinner that consisted of bread and butter, fried eggs innumerable, salad, plenty of red wine and milk, cheese, preserved cherries and coffee, and the check for the four of us was only six francs. I remember, too, the evening when I disrupted the whole town buying some stuff—*très pratique*—and engaging an old woman to make it into laundry bags for a procession that formed as soon as my enterprise was discovered. And I remember the excitement in a tiny, old imprimerie when I discovered a story in French by O. Henry, author of “Le Chou et le Roi.” I was so agitated at this souvenir d'enfance that the shopkeeper was much affected and kept exclaiming, “Comme vous êtes sensibles!”

Everything was so serene and agreeable there and our hikes along the blackberry lined roads were such picnicky jaunts that I've no doubt it was good for our immortal souls that some of us were transferred to another post for some hard though temporary

duty. This detached band (of which I am one) knows not the day nor the hour where (if ever) it will rejoin its unit and we are too busy to think much about it one way or the other. We had all become such good friends that the splitting up, even if only for a short time, was quite gloomy.

My French has served me well and I can even negotiate messages over the telephone. One of my first assignments was to find, borrow and bear off a frightful old harmonium for the Chaplain, and the French that was shattered on that occasion was shocking to contemplate. I find it flows easily enough and that I can understand even the most voluble.

I have seen few people I knew though just as I sat down to write this letter, a young YMCA secretary blew up and introduced himself as Whitcombe, Hamilton '17. He tells me he saw Tom Orr two months ago in Paris and that Tom was as fat as butter and fully determined to go to the French school for artillery after he had served his time in the ambulance.

I am afraid all this is pretty idle chatter but I'm not moved or encouraged to send you any searching revelations. I'll just add that I'm glad I came and am already satisfied I did the best and most I could. Will you ship this note on to Julie instead of tearing it up. My best to Hawley and Lloyd [Stryker—Katharine's husband] and Katharine. Think of me once in a while and when the war is over, watch out for my knock at the door.

Alexander Woollcott

To JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
September 23, 1917

Dear Julie:

I have had several letters and enclosures from you, and a letter from Aunt Julie—the last dated August 27th—and,

since then, no word at all from the other side of the Atlantic. Our mail comes in bunches, and I am getting hungry for another bunch. I have it in mind to drop you a postal every week, so that you can keep track of me even when I have no chance or mood to write.

I have always hated to write letters until all was tranquil and settled and completed for an indefinite period, but, if I wait for such intervals here, you will not hear from me until the end of the war. If I were to try to tell you what a day is like, I might—with discreet omissions—get away with it, but, by the time the letters reached you, as like as not I would be doing something else, and living a totally different existence. It cramps my style.

I *can* say that, so far, everything has been varied, interesting and satisfying, and I cannot imagine anything happening which would make me regret for one moment that I had come across. Most of the time, I am busy at the desk of the receiving office in the hospital to which a group of us were sent some weeks ago for temporary duty. But I also go out on the ambulances a lot, and have all manner of miscellaneous work—all the way from carrying a coffin for an officer's funeral, to bringing milk and chickens from the farms for miles around, and trying vainly to persuade the old Frenchwomen to gather the wild raspberries that are so thick along the roadside, but which they have scorned for so many years that they don't propose to pick them at this late date.

In the evenings, if we are free, we gambol downtown, to pick up the latest gossip from the front; to talk with men who have been to Paris; to buy chocolate and other less innocent beverages, and to pick up all the rumors concerning the arrival of newcomers from home. The air is full of rumors. Soldiers in transit sit around the little terrace café tables, and tell stories of the death of kings. Paris editions of the *Chicago Tribune*, the *New York Herald* and the *London Daily Mail* are to be had, but

there is nothing in them, and the *New York Times*, by which we all swear, is, at least, two weeks late. You all know much more about the war than we do, and I'm sure you talk about it much more.

Once in a while, we meet old friends as the stream passes our way. The other day, for example, one of the ambulance drivers from a near-by camp dropped in on me with an invitation to a small, but select, Hamilton dinner of five. It was great fun as one of the crowd was a Theta Delt. We sent a post card to Dr. Stryker, and signed our names somewhat unsteadily upon it.

I think I have relished nothing more than my excursion with the mess-sergeant into the country to teach the natives how to clean the chickens we buy from them twice a week. We needed a chicken and some boiling water. The chicken was obtained after we had convinced little François that we would not take the gray one which he was fattening for his father, due back from the front the next Sunday. Then we went into the kitchen of the old house—a very old house that had been a fine *château* before the Revolution. We sat around the smoky hearth, waiting for the water to boil in the kettle swinging over the twigs, while the old woman brought out her red wine, and the old man poured it out. I wanted to explore upstairs, but I was given to understand that it was scarcely clean enough for inspection, and I guess that was true.

These little excursions break in pleasantly enough on our days, which run from 5.15 (“daylight saving” schedule) to 6. We all work hard enough. If you are driving an ambulance or running the operating room, you are happy, and if you are working in the kitchen, or holding raving spinal meningitis patients in bed all night, you are not so happy, but, in the long run, I guess it doesn't matter much.

I am afraid this is all very disjointed, but I write a paragraph every once in a while—between ambulance calls and other interruptions—and the result is confusion. I see by the mail bags

that pass our way that there is some method of addressing old magazines vaguely to the soldiers and sailors in France for general distribution. Any magazines and books—especially books—you may address to me, will reach far and wide. I yearn for *The New Republic*, but I am scarcely settled enough now to subscribe for it. Do mail me a copy now and then.

We hear the Red Cross notice of our safe arrival reached our folks after a week and more of delay. I shall be curious to know when and how the news reached you.

I am very well. I haven't had an hour's sickness since I saw you. The day we landed, I fell on the deck and wrenched my ankle badly enough to tear a ligament, so I rode in state over the ground covered by our first hike, and then got on well enough with the aid of a Sayre bandage.

Goodbye.

Aleck

To *JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER*

Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
October 2, 1917

Dear Julie:

Not your first letter, but your first answer, reached me yesterday, and I promptly acknowledged it with a serial post card. I have now laid hold upon this simple but tasteful stationery to write you a letter, which I shall begin today and finish when I can.

I do not remember whether I wrote and told you that Heywood Broun and Ruth Hale tracked me to my lair, and demanded that I either report at once for a week-end in Paris, or clear the decks for their descent upon me at the hospital; I have fended them off until I can see a little way ahead. A week-end in Paris! That, of course, is impossible. I know how Mrs.

Fiske feels when her friends urge her that it is too rainy for her to bother going down to the theatre. Ruth is toiling on the Paris Army Edition of the *Chicago Tribune*, and they are happily domiciled on the Boulevard Raspail, and she still insists on being known as Ruth Hale. I found her note tremendously heart-warming.

The other day, while we were in the throes of receiving ambulance-loads of patients, I discovered that Lieutenant Lincoln—a much-admired man hereabouts, and, I imagine, an exceedingly competent physician—was from Worcester, and knew the Tabers well.

We are all the time running across traces of home that way. I found one of the ex-members of the *Times* staff, the other evening, embracing the buxom proprietress of a little chocolate shop in town, and learned from him—between embraces—that Phil Hoyt is a captain in the National Army. Think of that!

You must tip me off as to whether my letters come to you in a mutilated condition. So far, none of mine have been scornfully returned by the censor—and no wonder, for I have been insipidly discreet, and evaded trouble by saying nothing at all. You must tell me, too, whether, on receiving the letters which I confide to the post without postage, you have to pay anything. As Bam used to say, "Don't forget to answer that question." Also this one: Was there a postscript about the last day of our voyage on the letter sent you from the ship? [The next line of writing was deleted by the Censor.]

I am afraid that by this time you are quite bewildered by the myriad addresses I have given you. The latest official address is at the head of this letter, and my intuition tells me it will be a fixed address for some little time to come. You must not imagine that I have skipped about France for every change of address. Usually, I have remained stubbornly stationary, while the address changed over my head. As a matter of fact, our crowd is just now scattered to the four corners of the earth, various groups on

detached service doing every conceivable kind of work. I do not know when all will come together again, but I am under the impression that those of us who have been working here at one of the emergency points will be replaced before the week is gone, and so be free to journey back to our own headquarters.

This is really an eventful week. We are ingenuously expecting to be paid off tomorrow. They have a little song here which (to the tune of "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah") runs something like this:

*Every day we sign the payroll,
Every day we sign the payroll,
Every day we sign the payroll,
But we never get a G—D—cent!*

This is spirited but untruthful: We do get paid in sufficient abundance, but we know neither the day nor the hour.

Also, this week, we recover the stolen hour. We rise every day, except Sunday, at 4.15. The clocks say 5.15, but they don't deceive us. Next Saturday, this hour will be formally returned to us while we sleep, and (as we always have an extra thirty minutes sleep by way of keeping Sunday holy) we shall luxuriate in an hour and a half extra sleep that night. These little blessings are much appreciated.

However, you would not think our life very vigorous, I am afraid, if you could share one of the chicken-and-sweet-potato dinners they serve to our detachment (however differently others may fare), or if you could see the dozen Roger & Gallet tubes of shaving cream at present under my bunk, or if you could go to Victorine's with us for chocolate and crème-au-beurres of a pleasant October evening when the work is done.

I got this far with my letter on the 2nd, and here it is the night of the 6th. That impression of mine was fulfilled. I am back at headquarters after an absence of five long, toilsome weeks. The return was accomplished after as fitful a series of starts as that which ushered us from the States. You may remember we

were forever starting. Well, the last two days on detached service were spent in the same way. We were all packed up, even unto our soap and tooth-brushes, for forty-eight hours before the relief arrived, and, in the dark of the moon, we set forth in a train of ambulances for our own post. There is no describing the serenity of this ancient spot with the unbelievable sunsets, and the music of the angelus coming through the twilight. I am mighty glad to be back.

I had a fearful shock, however. An American mail had arrived just before we reached here—sack after sack of it, and not so much as a card for me. I think some letters must be delayed—not gone astray for good, but delayed. One of the boys who is betrothed to a dazzling vision of a girl, has heard from every one else in the world, but never a word from her! I have had letters from many people in France—newspaper guys and other men on service at various stations—but, from America, no one has been true to me but you. I suggest that you number your letters so I shall know if they are all reaching me. Here it is the 6th of October, just two months since we sailed, and not a letter have I had save yours and those you have forwarded to me.

Every man here has, apparently, come from a family which reads the *Times*, for they have all had clippings from that excellent journal for the 11th.

Au revoir—tout va bien.

Aleck

To JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
Late October, 1917

Dear Julie:

I find the only way to get a letter written in these parts is to start valiantly forth upon it and take it up from time to time until you think the hour has come for it to be signed and entrusted to the Censor. I have started such a letter to you several times of late, but whenever I have come back to it it would seem so dull and peevish. Peevish, because it is difficult to take one's pen in hand without mentioning the uncertainty of our mails, and that it is a subject for sulks. The mail that blew in here last Sunday after a three weeks silence, brought me your letter of October 2nd, a request from the Farmers Loan and Trust that I subscribe to the second Liberty Loan, and a note from Myra Holmes, wanting to know who this John Corbin was. I was afflicted because I had signed, have been in olive drab for three months—been away from America for almost three months, with never a word from the old crowd in town, from Mrs. Fiske and the stage folks, from the Truaxes and the Hamilton bunch. I was enraged because the Farmers Loan and Trust, after cheerfully professing ignorance of the enormous sum I transferred to the Paris Bank, had the nerve to circularize me for a loan to which I had already subscribed over here as handsomely as I could under the circumstances. However I realized that I need not think myself quite forgotten, for I can never feel sure all these far-away friends have not written me again and again. Perhaps some of the letters will show up some day. Those who keep tab on such things by having their letters numbered serially, will get the first, second and then the seventh, in the most disconcerting way. Some who know that many a letter must have been written, will get none at all, or perhaps just a note asking why *they* have not written, when, as a matter of fact, they have written often and laboriously ever since their arrival. I know one boy

who is frantic because his mother has not heard a word from him—or had not on October 6th. I know a young father who is pretty worried because the last letter said the baby was sick, and there hasn't been another letter for six weeks. Then, on the other hand, some are lucky and emerge from the mail distributing with a dozen or so of letters and as many packages. I found one embarrassed young man with enough sweaters to keep the entire AEF comfortably warm all winter. So it goes—all very puzzling and depressing. I would wash my hands of the whole matter, and bend my attention entirely on the absorbing work and the likable crowd around me, if it were not for you and a few others I really cannot banish from my thoughts. All this I started to say yesterday, but it sounded so ungracious to roar with rage about a mail that had, after all, brought me a welcome letter from you. However, you understand.

Anyway, I feel amiable today. I have just received word from the Farmers Loan and Trust that, after all, they did have authority to cash my checks, from the Paris branch, or from another branch in a certain town just an hour's drive from where I now sit. At first they had disowned me utterly, and this gave me a forlorn feeling of being without any outside resources at all—nothing to fall back on in case I should have the bad luck to break my glasses often, or something like that. It was the more of a blow because I am not yet rid of all my "chip-of-the-old block," spendthrift habits of civil life. For instance, I casually order a rather costly edition of *Les Misérables* to be sent from Paris to the funny little book shop in the town here, and then too, I sent to Paris for the score of *Pierrot the Prodigal* which a young chap who is an exceptional musician plays for me once in a while—those dear melodies which produce an exquisite nostalgia, as you can imagine. I can pay for all these little flights,—never worry—but it reduces me to scant funds, so it is a comfort to know that money is within reach, if an emergency should arise. Then too, I am feeling especially amiable because this

morning's post brought me another expansive, warm-hearted letter from Ruth Hale, together with the news that she and Heywood are meditating a descent upon me here this coming Sunday. I will put them up at one of the comic old hotels in this dear old town, and I shall get old Madame Lefeuve to prepare one of her extraordinary dinners with omelette au kirsch (blazing), with veal, perhaps, cooked with mushrooms and chestnuts, most appetizing. "Très, très bon, M'sieur" as she always roars from the doorway while we eat her dinners.

They are making great plans for a Christmas Eve in Paris. I get plans of the apartment on the Rue Raspail with my room all marked with a cross to show where the body will fall in a stupor from overeating; and they swear they have the seats to the opera already reserved. I laugh ironically at such didoes, but, whereas I can't say it will be Christmas week, I *can* say I hope and expect to spend five days in Paris before the winter is over. Our party is already made up, and we shall go to my little old Cornille in the Latin Quarter, and I shall see Wythe Williams and Walter Duranty, and Ruth and Heywood and it will be a real reunion.

I must rush away now, for the mess hall has been cleared for the dress-rehearsal of a vaudeville bill to be given there tomorrow night in honor of Hallowe'en, and for the general amusement of the patients, the personnel, and stray neighbors and other AEF folk who happen to be with us for the moment. I have a one act play in it which I wrote one night last week, and which we have been rehearsing in the x-ray laboratory whenever we had a chance. Schuyler Ladd is playing the leading part. It is called "And Ye Took Me In"—tell Hawley, who will understand and be ever so scornful.

Two days later.

Well, the show is over and was a real success. We encountered our troubles when we brought the scenery into the mess

hall, intending to make a stage out of the mess tables and plant the set on top of it. There wasn't room and we hated to cut down the scenery because it was a remarkably workmanlike set made by an engineer corporal who is serving in France as a carpenter, and who had been a stagehand for twenty-five years. We were in a quandary when the engineers came gallantly to the rescue, offered us their new barracks as a theatre, knocked out the end of it, built a stage in a few minutes, roofed it over, put in the scenery, knocked out a stage entrance, ran up headlights and footlights, strung a curtain, and really gave us as perfect a theatre as you could ask, with perfect acoustics. The Unit is large enough to provide all sorts of talent. One of the men is a costumer in civil life, and the ravishing creation he made out of nothing was unforgettable. Another is an organist of repute and he led the orchestra, recruited generally, and expert enough to step into the breach without rehearsal. The play—my play that is—employed two of the boys and three nurses, and was devised so that the men could appropriately appear in their own uniforms, and was so loaded with local humor that it could not very well help going over. Schuyler was splendid and patiently developed all the others. He is a marvel of good humor, consideration and dignity—one in a thousand, and the least actory actor I have ever known—bar none. Our audience was in high good humor, with the Colonel and the Major in the seats of the Mighty, with a mass of minor officers, with the nurses and secretaries and non-coms filling a good portion of the hall, to say nothing of all the patients who could be trundled down from the wards, and a few favorites from the village, including a hero of the Marne, who was wounded three years ago, and lives now in our town.

I am afraid this letter conveys the impression that we have come over here on a spree, but you should see me unloading freight cars in the pouring rain, or presiding at night as ward-master in a syphilis ward, or measuring dead darkies for their

coffins. I put these in because they sound impressive but I must admit I had the time of my life in the syphilis ward. Then of course the grim work really lies ahead of us, except for those who—or rather some of those who—have gone forward on detached service, much as we did a few weeks back, to be gone we know not how long.

Five days later.

It is just as well I didn't sign this letter, and consign it to the Censor, for in the interval since I wrote the last paragraphs, we have had a flood of letters—one from you, and one from Aunt Julie (very melancholy) and one from Mrs. Truax, and one from Mrs. Fiske—a great rush of letters, entirely restoring our good humor. Then too Sunday morning before the first mess, and while I was racing in extremely fatigue uniform across the courtyard of the Hospital, Nelson Sackett, who was corporal on guard at the moment, came with the news that a lady and gentleman were inquiring for me and in the faint light of dawn, I discovered Ruth and Heywood waiting for me at the gate. They spent Sunday with me and are staying over until tonight. They went to mess with me at noon, went out with us on an ambulance call during the afternoon, dined with me en ville in the evening, and altogether made it a full rich day. It demoralizes me to mix my old self with the new this way, but I enjoyed it just the same. I enjoyed it hugely, and I look forward to seeing them at Christmas time, which is now fairly certain.

All the letters speak of Brother Corbin, but I never read his stuff, not from spleen, but because I would rather not read the *Times* at all. I have no news from the old set around Times Square, except the tidbits Ruth passes on from Paris. There has been a terrific row between Arnold Daly and John Williams, in the course of which, I hear, Daly sent John five closely typewritten pages of insults. He then sent carbon copies of the

letter around among the managers, and one of them is on its way to Ruth in Paris. It is to be passed around here and we are all to initial it and forward it solemnly on its way in the most military manner possible.

Heywood is sending back a story about our play. Keep your eye out for it. *Read the Tribune.*

Much love always.

Aleck

[John Corbin took Woolcott's place as dramatic critic of the *New York Times*.]

TO MRS. ALICE HAWLEY TRUAX

*Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
December 4, 1917*

Dear Mrs. Truax,

Your letter which you began to write me on the 4th of last month and wound up several days later found me here yesterday. It came along with many other letters—a real treasure of a mail which I carry around with me inside my blouse and re-devour every time I get a chance. Our letters come all at once after days and weeks of silence. We hang on to them for days, snatching odd moments to read and reread them. I take mine to bed with me and go through them in the last half hour before taps.

Here was this letter from you and a letter from Hawley sent on from the camp at Allentown. There was a letter from Tom Smith, the agent who handled my stuff for the *Century* and who writes to tell me he is now managing editor of that moribund publication so that he can just slam in any of my stuff he wants without having to ballyhoo for it. A convenient arrangement. Then a brisk little note from Walter Duranty—my old pal of the *Paris Times* office—hailing my advent there at Christmas time.

Then a dear letter from Prof. [William P.] Shepard, two long letters from Julie, two very comforting letters from the Farmers Loan and Trust—who had previously agitated me by mislaying my money—letters from the *Times* office and bit of a Christmas card from Greta and her mother.

This letter of mine to you must serve as a Christmas greeting—not, I hope, the only one to reach you through me for, if fortune is kind, you will receive a modest Christmas gift, an old card case, of no conceivable use in this day and generation but something to leave lying around to prod an occasional memory of one who thinks of you often with the greatest affection and gratitude.

It is true that my letters must necessarily be an uneventful chronicle but, whereas there are hundreds and hundreds of things I might say but would not be allowed to say, still none of those is really of vital importance. I know nothing big and significant about the war that you yourself do not know. The censorship is vexing but it is not really choking back anything worth mentioning from me. Indeed, I am not sure you have not a far clearer view of things from the vantage point of West Fifty-Seventh Street. I think we in our corner see the war less clearly, talk of it less often and think of it far, far less. You have no idea how isolated is each little bit of the Allied armies—how entirely concerned with its own community tasks, pleasures, hardships and intrigues. I remember, when I was back home, that I was amused at the comfort the British correspondents drew from the woe and discouragement of the prisoners they took at Messines Ridge. Naturally enough the prisoners at Messines Ridge felt that the end of the war was at hand. They didn't know anything about it, but from their point of view, it seemed as if the thing couldn't continue another twenty-four hours. And I imagine that a great hospital, splendidly run far back of the Riga front, would feel as if everything were going wonderfully well, even in the midst of a complete Russian rout. So if I were running

some small office in some small hospital on the Western front, all would seem well if that office went well and we would seem pretty badly off if that office ran badly. I can imagine that Hawley's notion of the war will, at any given time, depend on how well his car runs. It really is that way.

I am well and busy—fairly busy with the ordinary coming and going of the hospital and especially busy during the past month with our preparations for the Thanksgiving show which fell to me this time—each of us at all inclined that way must take charge of one of them. The unit is full of talent so that if it were ever possible to count on a rehearsal, the thing would be easy enough. As the major number of the bill, I did a hasty dramatization of Leacock's "Behind the Beyond" with Mr. and Mrs. Audience and a dramatic critic sitting in a box and keeping up a chorus of remarks on the play. It went fairly well and would be fun to do really some time.

We gave the show Thanksgiving Eve in the new convalescent barracks across the road, before a miscellaneous audience of patients (some crazy), visiting colonels and majors, engineers, marines, our own men, our own nurses, French guests of honor and the washwomen from the village. I made an opening address in French that would have agonized Hawley and then stage-managed the rest of the evening, with Schuyler Ladd—you remember the Daffodil in *The Yellow Jacket*—as one of my stars and Bobby Burlen, a side-partner of Walter Wanger's at Dartmouth, as the other. The show made enough of a hit for us to have to give a command performance at the big camp eighteen miles away. That was pulled off last evening. Late in the afternoon I assembled my troupe and we trundled off in ambulances to the next town, where we were dined in state at the Officers Club there and then went out to camp to play in the YMCA before an audience of a thousand men—mostly enlisted men, very keen, very cordial and simply starved for something to laugh at. They gave us a royal reception and things really

went with a bang. I shall always remember the departure of the players by moonlight, when, after gulping down some hot chocolate and gathering our props and costumes together, we piled into the ambulances and drove singing home along the country lanes, arriving long after taps. I enclose an all but invisible snapshot of the dress-rehearsal where I can be faintly seen standing in the box. I write all this with the slight uneasiness that it will seem to you we are all frivolling over here, but you needn't worry about that. Not that there have been any hardships. I haven't experienced anything that could possibly be called a hardship since I landed in France. I have at times had to work very hard and have had tribulations of the spirit—mostly self-made of which I would rather not speak or write till I can see them in some sort of perspective. But life has been far more comfortable than any of us expected and it may continue so for a long time to come. The food has, for the most part, been good—quite good enough. Now and then sugar is lacking or butter but we have plenty to eat and the spreads we can buy for very little in town are simply luxurious. Dinners of partridge and rabbit, beef-steaks and perfect omelettes, patisserie worth going miles to eat and plenty of hot chocolate. At least so it has been with us in our out-of-the-way corner of France and that is all I know about.

I may see more at Christmas time for I am planning to go to Paris to spend my five days leave with Heywood Broun and Ruth Hale. I am dashed by the news that they plan to leave for America shortly after the holidays as his job is done here. He came over to cover the arrival of our troops and that story has pretty well written itself out by this time.

Very likely Ruth will be back in New York before the end of January. I shall ask her to call you up or write to you with an eye to seeing you. She will be able to describe our life here more vividly than I can do by mail. She and Heywood came in upon me one Sunday morning just as I was racing across the courtyard

to mess and they stayed for two days, exploring everything and making friends on all sides. I want Ruth to call on you and on Julie and to tell you anything you want to know. She herself has been far nearer the front than I and can tell you many things I have never seen and may never see. We never know.

Will you give my love to Katharine. Give my best to Hawley and to Lloyd. And to Alethea [Rudd]. I shall try to write each of them before another week is past. Remember me to Mary, if, as I hope, she is still with you. I often think of her and her heavenly puddings. I often think of her with contrition when I make my bed and tidy up my barracks box. Tell her I lie so still in bed that I never take the covers off more than once a week and tell her that I never throw anything down anywhere. If ever I come back, you will find that, whatever else it has done, the army has produced a house-broken Alexander.

This letter has run long enough. I am sending it out pretty close to the anniversary of a very desolate time. I shall never forget how kind and comforting you were this time a year ago and I look forward always to a time when I may come back to you and Hawley.

Alexander Woollcott

To JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

*Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
December 10, 1917*

Dear Julie,

I have postponed writing this for so many days that now I am pretty sure it will not reach you in time for Christmas. I will be lucky if it arrives in time for your birthday. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, many happy returns of the day.

Even if this letter is late for Christmas, I hope at least one

of the two Christmas gifts I have planned for you will arrive before that day. One of them is a useless sort of bag, made from an ancient altar-piece and dispatched to you long since, via Paris. The other will come to you from New York thanks to the machinations of that Carolyn Talcott.

I have a miscellany of small things to say to you. First I must answer your question about Nelson Sackett, who tells me, by the way, that his mother is sending me a book. I don't know what book nor why. Of course I see him daily. The day your letter arrived, I remembered having seen him that morning with painful clearness for he conducted morning exercise in the bright moonlight a little way down the road from the hospital and quite upset me by his solemnity on that occasion. He is in great fettle today for he has gone on the pleasant detail of visiting one of the several debarkation ports and camping there on the lookout for Christmas packages due this unit. I trust some of mine will arrive, for several people have written me from back home telling of things dispatched in my direction and I am hopefully on the lookout. Nelson is an uncommonly nice fellow and very devoted to his mother of whom he speaks in the most homesick accents I ever heard. For a long time he had no luck in getting letters from her and he was terribly low about it but they started to arrive at last and I take it from his manner that they have been coming steadily ever since.

I must send you this extract from a letter from Walter Wanger. You remember Walter was the Dartmouth prodigy who managed Nazimova and was a great pal of mine. He has turned up somewhere in Italy and I have a note from him which says:

"I was sitting in my room today after our first American mail came in—one of my fellow birdmen asked me if I knew by any chance a wayward cousin of his that lived in NY and lately had departed for France. When he said 'Alexander Woollcott' I sneered and admitted that I once had a press agent by that name and no sooner had I said those words of confession than, opening

a letter from my sister, I found the pleasant surprise—your note. In short, what John Corbin would call a coincidence; someone with the original spirit of Roi Cooper Megrue capped the climax by remarking, 'What a small world it is after all.'

(Curtain)

Next morning

Trite, theatrical but effective.

Alexander Woollcott, NY Times

Note. The realism of the story is that your cousin Walter Woollcott's son of Raleigh, N. C., is bunked in the room here—a delightful and nice boy with no weak tendencies toward that evil thing—the theatre!"

I thought this would interest you.

Long discouraging interruption at this point. Letter resumed two hours later.

I was delighted to get Lucy's [Drage] letter which came trailing along some time after the first announcements of it. I fell to thinking of how wonderful she is and what a gift she has for holding on to people no matter how many years and how many miles and how many new interests come between. She puts so much of herself into a letter and herself is so extraordinarily vital that I feel all warmed and thrilled even by a letter months old which reaches me second-hand. She is one of the wonder-people of our life, isn't she? What do time and space matter to such spirits as hers? Send her my love.

I am still hoping to get to Paris Christmas though all manner of things, such as quarantine or a sudden inundation of patients or whatnot might abruptly put an end to our giddy series of Paris leaves. If I go I shall stay with Ruth and Heywood in their apartment while the others of our party go on to the University Union. Ruth has planned all manner of festivities. She has a tree and Christmas gifts waiting for me, she has a room prepared, she has guests invited for a series of dinners,

Walter Duranty, of course, and Wythe Williams and Viola [Williams] and others who are in Paris now. I am desolated by the probability that they will sail for America in January and leave me alone. However, if that befalls as I think it will, I shall ask Ruth to get into touch with you and with Mrs. Truax and tell each of you all it is proper for her to tell of my adventures in the past four months. She can tell you it in an interesting way because she is a gorgeous lady with a heart as big as the AEF. I imagine, by the way, from something she said, that she has written you of her visit to my peaceful haunts.

The other day I snatched a twenty-four hour leave and, in company with a boy I like enormously, I visited the cathedral town near here—I have been there before. In the afternoon, after lunch with Schuyler Ladd and one or two others, I went a-shopping to buy gifts for some of the men to send to their folks and searching all the antique shops for a present for Ruth. I found a most extraordinary Louis XVI fan of ivory and point d'Alençon but it cost 300 francs and I am not as rich as once I was so I left it in the shop. I found some old seventeenth century chessmen of ivory but they seemed purposeless and in the end I went to dinner empty-handed. That night we went to hear Offenbach's *Barbe-Bleue* sung by the local opera company—very passably by the principals with the aid of a chorus of women who resembled nothing so much as the old crones in the illustrations of a W. W. Jacobs story. After a luxurious hot bath we went to our luxurious and virtuous beds and came home next day in the rain. I blush to admit that we caught the train by the skin of our teeth without time to buy tickets and that the ticket-taker accepted our pass as some mysterious authority for traveling free on his road. I imagine the French, in their polite and silent way, are secretly disgusted with the extravagance of the American soldier. It must be hard for them to understand his luxurious way. He may be the merest of buck privates like myself but he has a way of taking the best

room in the best hotel and of preempting the best seats at the opera. We ought not to do it—but there you are.

I never finish a letter like this without an uneasy feeling that you will gain the impression we are all here on a spree. You little know if that is what you think. I tell you the incidents of my hours of ease, but even now I have to work darn hard—had to work sometimes to the point of absolute exhaustion and we are only just beginning. The program at our particular point in the line is a staggering one and the imagination reels before the work that lies ahead of us—just a little way ahead.

I have written giddily to avoid getting on the subject of Bam and the anniversary which tomorrow will bring. But I do want to say that as I think of how enormously sympathetic and hospitable her heart was and when I think of how she shared everyone's sorrow, that it is well she left the world last winter, well she has been spared a time so full of heartache for so many people and sure to be full of woe before the business is through. I find life indescribably poorer because she is not living but I am glad she is out of a troubled world which would have saddened her last years beyond even your great power to comfort and cheer.

And now no more for a time. Don't mind being forty-five and never doubt I will come back to you and spend the rest of my days close to you.

Aleck

TO RUTH HALE

Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
January 12, 1918

Dear Ruth:

This is an arrow shot into the dark for I know not whether you two have set sail for home. I came back from Paris only to be engulfed in such a quadrupling of our work as makes me think the days of comparative leisure are over for good and

all. It left me not a minute for writing—even to you—and then, when I planned to make amends by telegram, I got caught up myself for a few days as a patient in the hospital and never had the chance to send my farewell message to you.

I think after all, I won't try to thank you for your amazing creation of a Christmas, I'll just send my love and my blessings. I think a special providence watched over our party: it would not listen to any of the things that tried to interfere. And let me tell you this last shining evidence. On the very morning I left you and started back to work, word went forth that the pleasant custom of Paris leaves was thereby suspended throughout the AEF for all and sundry—I was only just in time.

I came back to find my bunk buried completely under a stack of accumulated Christmas boxes, and still they come. I came back to find that the ever astonishing David Belasco had started sending me magazines in such droves that I can supply the whole hospital. I came back to find our work piling up to staggering heights (for us) and no end in sight. Heywood's simply execrable story on our little hospital dramatics has begun to arrive from various sources and when I saw to what rank he had magnificently appointed me, I understood in a flash why he had looked so enormously guilty and contrite throughout those halcyon days in Paris long ago. Tell him I don't mind at all.

This doesn't pretend to be a letter and I don't promise ever to write a real one again to anyone till this business is over. But I wanted to report present and I'll do *that* every once in a while. I shan't pretend to be full of jollity and glee when I'm not nor to be bursting with health if I have spinal meningitis. As a matter of fact my present brief hospitalization is traceable to eye-strain and Dr. Devol is in charge of a moody, fractious patient who has nothing much amiss with him and who has not earned the extra sleep and egg-nogs he is getting. You will be thrilled to learn that I have not smoked for two days—the first recess in ten years—and that I'm not finding it particularly hard. Above all,

dear Ruth, I shan't dissect myself again and again to show you the progressive corruption I know is under way in my soul in this ignobling enterprise. Maybe it'll be because I am realizing—a little late—that it really doesn't matter so very much what happens to my dirty little soul.

My love to Heywood and Arthur Hopkins and my best in the world to you. Here's to our next meeting.

Alexander Woollcott

[Note on letter, from Dr. Devol to Miss Hale.]

Dear dear Miss Hale—I want very much to see you. I wish you might be here at "Alex's" bedside—in Ward 3—of course you would have to wait your turn as there is a constant line. He is much better you will be happy to know. With much love.

Faithfully

Edmund Devol

To JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
January 26, 1918

Dear Julie:

This is another scrappy note written as a stop-gap between my last long letter to you and the next. It will be a few pages full of nothing, for I have no eventful things to relate, and no typewriter within reach, and without one it is so hard for me to be garrulous.

Yesterday came your letter of January 3rd, and Aunt Julie's as well, and many others—one from Arthur Hopkins telling me he had sent me the script of *Madame Sand* which I would most tremendously like to see, and one (a very charming one) from Mr. Van Anda telling me the [*Times*] office had sent me a Christmas box. It is one of two Christmas boxes that have failed to

reach me yet—the other sent by the [Brock] Pembertons and that set. The first Christmas of the AEF was bountiful beyond anyone's imaginings—such heaps and mounds of packages, truckloads of packages, something for everybody, boxes from mothers and fathers, boxes from schools and clubs and offices, and boxes for no one in particular. My two boxes from the Phalanx were among the first to appear. They were held, as most of the Christmas mail, at the nearest port, and delivered here on Christmas Eve, so that I got my hands on them only after my return from Paris. It reminded me of that first Christmas at the Phalanx I remember—the one in '95, when we were all very poor and Bam warned me not to expect much, and then was quite overcome because everyone on the place—literally everyone—contributed something to the Christmas of the youngest. You must thank everyone for me. You see Charles' paper before you, and of course you spotted your envelopes.

I am so thankful it was neither of the Phalanx boxes which went astray, and if any of mine are lost to me for good, I hope some other soldier has them rather than the fishes of the deep. There has been a good deal of that I imagine, although each organization had its man stationed for a fortnight in advance at each of the big ports. That was what Nelson Sackett was doing, by the way. Mrs. Sackett sent me a book of essays by Crothers, of whom I heard Brother Burton [Dr. Richard Burton] sing the praises more than ten years ago. Very charming stuff, but I know now what book I would want if I were cast away on the proverbial desert island with the just one book for company. It would be *The Golden Age*, by Kenneth Grahame. I sent to Paris for it shortly after my arrival, and have read and reread it since, and it is the only thing I have been able to read with any pleasure or with any attention for several months past. It is one of the perfect things in our imperfect world.

On my birthday—very timely—came a sumptuous box from Professor Shepard with so much in it that it was evidently

intended for distribution—a dozen pencil-sharpeners, a dozen trench mirrors, etc., etc. I made the acute medical ward and the mastoid ward perfectly happy the night of its arrival.

I think I told you I had been in hospital myself for several days. I escaped as soon as possible, but as I was forbidden any close use of my eyes for several weeks, I elected night ward work as a substitute for my regular job, and have been enjoying it immensely—enjoying the night hours, the escape from the crowd, the sleeping in a squadroom of eight instead of a squadroom of fifty, and, above all, the chance to slip downtown every afternoon for a walk and a dinner. The night men go on duty at 6.30 P.M. and work till 7.30 A.M.—the rest of the day is generously bestowed on them by a grateful government.

Those dinners in the village are unforgettable. I particularly like Mère Cocaud's, an inconspicuous little buvette I stumbled on our first night here back in August. Since then, it has been almost too popular, particularly with some of the draft boys who are doing their dirty, noisy best to make it uninhabitable. But the night workers, dropping in at 4.30 of a winter's afternoon, can get the sole table in the kitchen, right beside the open hearth where, with a single frying-pan held over the crackling twigs, Mère Cocaud can make the most extraordinary dinners of sausage, omelettes, French pancakes and honey, coffee, etc., etc. No matter how many come in of an evening for dinner, they must wait their turn, for Mère Cocaud will not add a stove or even another frying-pan to her stock. Nor can she be induced to make a profit out of us, but keeps her prices way, way down, as in the days before the war. She was a very sad little woman when we first came, talking all day long of her brilliant young son who was killed in the second autumn of the war. There were always a few furtive tears when we tried to talk with her, but the boys have become her great solace, and she is all smiles these days, and never so happy as when every table is full, and she is flip-flopping the crêpes in the frying-pan. A dinner there of

sausages and strawberry jam, crêpes and honey, bread and butter, coffee and milk, will cost anywhere from 3 to 4 francs, and be worth going miles to eat.

Tell Aunt Julie I *should* enjoy an occasional glance at *The Bookman*, and tell Charles I have no photograph in uniform for his collection, and would violently decline to appear in such a gallery. I have not seen much of the war, but I *have* seen a good deal of the AEF, and if I could describe it faithfully, if I could give you a cross-section of the men's thoughts, if I could show you the motives that control, if I could suggest the Sammy's real feelings about France and the French, and the French emotion on the subject of the AEF—why, it would be hard to prevent any previously cherished sentiment about our expedition from dying, or languishing at least, for lack of nourishment. In all events, let's don't celebrate it until it has done something.

(I don't know why this sour outburst at this point.)

I am glad the things came through safely from Paris to you. With Ruth as adviser and purchasing agent, I got some little offerings for you and Mrs. Truax and Mrs. Fiske and Alethea. It was back in November we did it and my memory is a little vague, but I am under the impression that the enamel box was added by Ruth on her own hook to the altar-piece I got for you. Maybe by this time, or rather by the time you get this, you will have seen Ruth. She and Heywood sailed on the 19th. She will have so much to tell you. I wish she and Heywood could come down and visit you for a few days. I wish you could get to know her. She is a most tremendously fine person, and he, of course, is a dear.

I am hating to think of the hard winter you are having and of the hard winters to come. I'm glad I'm over here. I may have my glooms from time to time, but I'm always glad I'm here.

Aleck

To JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

Base Hospital #8, AEF, France
February 14, 1918

Dear Julie:

I imagine it must be a relief to receive another letter from me written on a typewriter, for I have been out of touch of one these last few weeks, and my hand-writing has been abominable for several years past. I have used a pen so seldom.

Of course I am fierce homesick. I think anyone who goes around the AEF with a long face ought to be shot at sunrise, but on the other hand, anyone who is here in this year of grace, and does not feel sad and homesick, must be an insensible clod. There is none such that I have found. Of late, and almost for the first time, I have taken to dreaming myself back in America, but I am no Gogo Pasquier, and I cannot dream dreams worth while, not see the people and the places to which I would rush the first chance I had. The other night I dreamed I was making an uninteresting call at the Agnews. Again I was back in Rittenhouse Street trying on two costly but horrible-looking sack coats that Father had bought in days of greater prosperity, and which Bam was sneaking to me on the q.t. The climax came when I spent one whole dream driving along Grand Street on the surface car, and going to Broadway Rouse's wholesale store (which I never entered in my life) and there purchasing a bolt of foulard silk to be cut up into waist lengths for Christmas presents for my friends. What a dreary business—what a waste of dream power.

You must tell Mrs. Holt that I was amused to see our friend Miss Sergeant in the court of the hospital the other day. She was visiting here with Mrs. J. Borden Harriman who bounced through our otherwise peaceful midst for several days. I don't mind her coming to look us over, but I do mind her preempting the kitchen of Madame Cocaud's so that one night it was impossible to get anything to eat there. Miss Sergeant is the writer who lunched with Mrs. Holt one day at the Cosmopolitan Club

when I was there. The other man at the luncheon was named Stork Younf or Stock Young, or something like that—an Amherst man, who, by-the-way, has dashed me off several business notes under the delusion that I am still at the *Times*. Every now and again, I get a note or letter from someone singularly oblivious of my present state, asking me to review a book or speak this good word for so-and-so I can-do nowadays.

So Miss Sergeant can tell Mrs. Holt many things about our world but not so much as Ruth Hale can tell you. Mrs. Truax, in her last letter, intimates that she can tell pretty exactly where I am, but she never gleaned it, I imagine, from any letter of mine. I have never tried to intimate anything contraband in my letters, partly because I am naturally a law-abider, and partly because I think it is rather sinister practice. However, the news must be pretty well disseminated by this time. I imagine they know in America, and I am sure they know in Germany. One of our village women, whose son is a prisoner in Germany, and has been there these two years past, writes her to advise her to make a lot of money out of the Americans at the hospital, and how he found out we were here the good lady is at a loss to explain.

There is one thing that all our family must keep in mind, and that is that we are a very mobile force, and that a man who enlisted in Base Hospital #8 back in the States may be far, far from it now. The changes have already begun, and I think they will continue soon and rapidly. I doubt if our little group of serious enlisters will hold together long, and both Mrs. Truax and Eva McAdoo will be interested to know (if they have not heard it long since) that even Dr. Lloyd, who established the original Post-Graduate Unit, and came over as its Director, that even Dr. Lloyd and Base Hospital #8 have parted company. Several other men have been transferred to other fields. Three have been commissioned. Others have gone and will go on detached service of various kinds. Many, I think, will get close to the front, and I think most of them are itching to do that.

I am. I would never have believed when I left that I would have been so eager to get up and mix with it. I wish to heaven I were as well equipped for field work as Hawley will be when he gets here. As far as that goes, I don't know a single bit more than when we last met.

I hope to see Hawley when he passes this way, as he is more than likely to do. It will be a great meeting. There are many such—some of them unforgettable. Do you remember my telling you, or rather did I tell you, of seeing Tommy Lee, a Hamilton Theta Delt, 1914, last September, and dining with him in company with several other Hamilton men?

It gave me quite a pang and quite a thrill yesterday to stand down in the hold of a ship bound for home. I had toiled down the companionway to the second hold (oh, memories of our own trip) to help down an awfully nice young Brooklyn boy who is going back minus an arm he had when he came over.

I wonder if you ever saw that paltry account Heywood Broun wrote of our Hallowe'en Show. I got the clipping some time ago, and was much irritated to see he had called me a sergeant. It was this way: He was here back in early November at a time when Colonel Siler named a number of sergeants in our midst, which was nice of him, only the promotions were none of them approved from Paris. Not a personal disapproval, you understand, but a sweeping disapproval of promotions in general at that time. I had been much too canny to mention it myself until it was sealed and approved from on high, but Heywood was not so canny, and he spilled the beans, with the result that Jane Grant addressed me letters with the rank to which I was not entitled. It doesn't matter now, as I was made a sergeant late in January, and still hold that rank at this writing. This is a pleasant distinction, and it has its advantages, but it has its drawbacks as well.

The length of the war might be almost anything you can

name, and we can tell better in the summer. Personally, I feel as if the next few months will see great upheavals, as if everything anyone said or thought or planned or hoped in February would have to be revised and redeclared in June, as if the day of change was at hand, and the world we know on the edge of a maelstrom. This is not from evidence I see, but from things I hear, and, more particularly, things I read, things written back home, for heaven knows we get little or nothing from the appalling journals they publish in English for us in Paris.

I suppose there is enough general information here for this letter to go on to Mrs. Truax of whom I think often and wistfully these days. She writes me letters packed to the brim with the things I want to know, and I am in pretty close touch with all our little set in Fifty-Seventh Street. I feel as if, in order to ensure my getting another such letter one of these days, I would best write her at great length, but when I write such a letter as this to you, my time and writing mood are spent, and if she will realize that I am writing to you both perhaps she will let me off and still write from time to time.

Good night and my love to all of you.

Aleck

TO MRS. ALICE HAWLEY TRUAX

THE STARS AND STRIPES
Paris, Spring 1918

Dear Mrs. Truax,

I am afraid it is a long, ~~long~~ time since I last wrote you and I am afraid this won't be a very interesting letter for it can be nothing but the chatter of one who, for the time being, is leading as unsoldierly existence as you could imagine. I am working these days on the army newspaper and

eking out a pleasant but impecunious existence under the skyline of an old hotel in the Rue d'Antin, just ~~south~~ of the boulevards.

The *Stars and Stripes* suddenly burst into print in February, and from time to time a newspaper man here and a newspaper man there is detached from his command and shipped up to its staff. I had heard there was such a sheet but had never seen a copy when I was requisitioned for the job. As far as I can make out, everyone I ever knew suggested my name but I rather think I owe the somewhat doubtful service done me to an exceedingly decent and energetic officer in the intelligence section whom I met at the Brouns at Christmas time. I say doubtful, for no one can work far behind the lines without feeling restless and dissatisfied and if, as seems tremendously probable to me, we drop back eventually into our organizations, I shall find myself just as inexpert and unequipped as when I first staggered Governor's Island with my unmilitary appearance.

Shortly after I arrived, the door of the restaurant where I was gorging myself swung open, and thinly camouflaged in an officer's uniform, in walked F.P.A. [Franklin P. Adams]. I saluted and fell ~~on his neck~~ and we have had a good many parties since then, one at the Grand Guignol when the few seats occupied were largely occupied by Broadwayites so that it seemed like a first night once more. Où sont les neiges? F.P.A. has his colyum on the paper, of course.

The staff has some pretty good men on it, those first rate men whom the provincial papers produce and who remain little known and underpaid simply because they are not in New York. There is an engineer from the Frisco Park Row, a first rate poet and copy-reader from the Springfield *Republican*, a professional humorist from the *Sun* and *Hartford Times*, etc., etc. One was laying rails, the other keeping the books of an aero detachment and a third wriggling along the ground as machine-gun messenger when uprooted for this detail.

As each number of the *Stars and Stripes* carries our names up in the corner as comprising the editorial staff, I am occasionally run to earth by an old friend and so the weeks have their little reunions. Don Stone and I ran into each other and had a quite unforgettable evening together. I mean I won't forget it. Then today, in blew Baba Engs. You know. Russell's lovely sister. She is a Red Cross woman. I believe orphans are her specialty. She has a party all planned for tonight and perhaps I can go. I have seen and played about with Jack Calder, who is in fine fettle these days and fairly thriving on army life and I hear quite often from Walter Wanger who is an aviation cadet and who will be a first lieutenant in a day or so. Walter is impending on ~~Paris~~ and I shall be glad to see him.

We have occasional days off and spend them frugally. One day we wandered through Père-Lachaise and I think you would have smiled at the sight of a bare-headed marine standing with downcast eyes and placing an onion on the tomb of ~~Oscar Wilde~~. Last Saturday, the chill was out of the air for the first time this spring and we ate on a little restaurant terrace across the way from St. Germain des Près. I love St. Germain and have my best times on that side of the river. That afternoon, we loafed interminably in the Luxembourg gardens and acquired great merit by treating all the refugee children to a ride on the most rickety carousel extant.

I would live on that side of the river if the air raids did not make it impossible. If you are caught out in one there is simply no getting back. That shrieking siren and the sound of the distant barrage has no sooner started than every light in the city goes out as if a single hand had turned a single switch. You hear and half feel the panicky scamper around you on the streets as people make for the abris and there's simply no groping your way all the distance to the Odéon. The night of my arrival was the occasion of the worst air raid—the most thunderous and the most spectacular, a great sight if you will stay out of the cellar

and keep your eye ~~on the heavens~~. There have been fewer of them of late and they have been mild and inconsequential. All Paris goes underground when they begin and it's a nuisance if the warning sounds just after you have climbed into bed but no one thinks much about them and the boys are quite taken aback when they get letters from home and find the folks are worrying about them.

Then came the gun but that, too, seems to have lost ~~some~~ of its first fine enthusiasm. The steady blasts from it are no more. We hear it only occasionally and no one even stops what he is doing. "Ah, there, Bertha," or some such greeting is enough of a response. Of course it was very much in everyone's mind at first, particularly after its extraordinary shot on Good Friday. The memory of that overhung Paris on Easter Day and I shall never forget the morning services at Notre Dame with the thought of that slaughter in every bowed head.

We eat in abundance. As far as I can see, everyone in France has all he wants to eat. Butter is rare, bread is rationed and they talk of meatless days, but I am terribly fat. We have to use the bread tickets but that doesn't mean there is any lack of it or any serious inconvenience. The allowance provides a good deal more bread than you want and there you are. Once a month, you must step in at the nearest mairie and get your supply of tickets and that is all there is to it.

If I am due for a long stretch of service on this detail, I trust devoutly that I can work up front. I have applied to be attached to a mobile, field hospital and combine the functions of medical sergeant and *Stars and Stripes* correspondent. Good-bye and much, ~~much~~ love. I cannot tell you how often I think myself back to the apartment in ~~West Fifty Seventh Street~~. I am always looking up toward the ~~Great Northern~~, always hearing you stepping about in your room, and hearing Mary's step in the dining-room. (Please note F.P.A.'s censoring throughout this letter.)

Oh, yes, and now and then a letter thanking Mrs. Fiske for a box. Her Christmas box, which was a screaming mixture of Huneker, soap, dice, cigarettes, Bibles, etc., arrived in perfect condition on April 4. Once she wrote and insisted on knowing what I lacked. I replied, truthfully enough, that I had all the heart could desire except America and tooth-paste. She sent me the tooth-paste—enough to polish a regiment for five years. I hope some of us will get home before that.

Much love
Aleck

(Passed as censored)

Franklin P. Adams, Capt., N. A.



[Cartoon was drawn on the letter by A. A. Wallgren
of the Stars and Stripes.]

TO MRS. ALICE HAWLEY TRUAX

Paris
July 6, 1918

Dear Mrs. Truax,

I have had two days off in the last two months and this is one of them, so you may know I am busy, preoccupied, and therefore—for the moment—not actively discontented, in the sense that we used to say actively ill.

I am becoming, week by week, a passionate enthusiast on the subject of America, something I never was before. I was ever so much more interested in the total cause, and not so very deep in my heart, there were doubts about the record America would make. I used to listen to the boys on the boat and in camp prattling away their easy optimism to the effect that the American would make the best soldier in the world, that an American could beat the life out of any German, that there was something essentially strong and brave about an American, etc. etc. And I used to shudder because it seemed provincial, because I thought there was nothing in history to justify it, because I thought it would sound offensive in the ears of the French and the English, etc. Well, I have been living at the front with the infantry, getting to know the American under fire, getting to know whole rafts of men from all corners of America as I never knew them before, and I do believe with all my heart, there never were braver, gentler, finer, more chivalrous soldiers since the world began. I think I first came to know mine own people in the woods near Château-Thierry.

Of course, it is impossible not to feel all this in the air. I cannot tell you how important, how fine, and how telling was the work done by the men who raced across France and jumped into that battle just north of the Marne—literally did that, leaping from the big camions as they slowed up and fairly running into the fray without stopping to stretch their legs. I can think of nothing I would rather be just now than a private

in the Marines. Not that they were all Marines and not that the most remote and untested of us are not sharing in the exhilarating American popularity which is in the very air these days, so that you felt the tingle of it as you hiked through French villages and caught an expression of it in every wave of the hand from a French window and every smile from an old French soldier.

I drove in from a town beyond the Marne to be in Paris for the Fourth and I shall always be glad to remember I was here for the Fourth. I shall never forget it. You must think of me standing weeping on a chair in the Champs Elysées, too choked to cheer as the bunch went by, some of whom I knew in camp, with the sun on their helmets and a grin on their faces. They marched through a very rain of rose petals. When the poilus came next, with the hortensias showering all about them and a little American flag fluttering from every bayonet, there was no containing us. And all the while, a band either ahead or behind was playing "Swords and Lances"—that march we have heard pilot so many parades around the corner from Fifth Avenue into Fifty-Seventh Street. And all the while overhead, circled and swooped the aviators, dropping roses as they flew, now looping the loop till we were dizzy from watching them, now dropping so low they grazed the tree-tops.

Of late—since May some time, I have been going every week to some part of the front, sometimes dropping off with my pack and living with a company in the ravine, now sticking to a car and covering a great deal of ground. It is fairly easy to get along. France is small, a country of short distances. If you are at the front and must gravitate slowly toward Paris it is no great undertaking. You sleep with the Infantry, hook a ride with an ambulance, mess with some field hospitals, hike a while, make the railhead by nightfall and come on in that way. More often, the staff has a car of its own and scoots all over the country in it.

Recently three of us found ourselves late at night at a French village which is headquarters of one division. We had

not had any sleep worth mentioning and had driven a hundred miles. Besides, the artist who was with me—[C. Leroy] Baldrige and a Lamb of God if ever there was one—was running a fever which worried me a little. The driver—who is French—volunteered some real beds. He went to the town mayor and declared we must have a house to ourselves. The town was, of course, evacuated. He produced a bunch of keys, large enough to open the Louvre, I should have thought, but they merely gave us entry to a morsel of a French cottage on the edge of the town. We each picked a bed—throwing dice for choice—and settled down rather like the three bears. I pried open the shutters of my ground-floor room, and pushed them wide so I could go to sleep watching the roses in the little garden and watching the moon come up over the edge of the woods just beyond. And so I dozed off, only to be awakened by the painful discovery that on the edge of that woods was a French 145, an enormous gun every flash of which lighted up my room and every shot shook me in my bed like corn in a popper. It was a comic sequel to a wild day. I have got used to sleeping through the droning boom boom of a barrage and I can sleep under the steady bang of the Soixante-Quinzes, but this monstrous thing was more than I could bear.

The next day was full of things to remember, including a chance encounter with the Commander-in-Chief who had come unheralded to decorate some men with the Distinguished Service Crosses—seven of them. It was the first ceremony of American Field Decoration and we just strayed into it. The rehearsal of the battalion parade in the green meadow, with an airplane duel going on overhead that ended in a German machine coming down in flames, the music of the regimental band from the edge of the woods and the boom, boom, boom of the cannons, then the arrival of the general and the fine pomp and circumstance of the decoration—I was fairly uplifted and would have been quite happy, except for the misadventure of having eaten some bad meat at the cavalry mess down the road, so that I

maintained military bearing with some difficulty and vomited at every hedge between Montdidier and Paris.

Usually when my friends blow into France, they get hold of a copy of this unprecedented newspaper, see my connection with it and write me or drop in and go out to dinner with me. I have not heard from Lloyd [Stryker] but the other day Max Foster came in and then in blew Phil Hoyt and Roy Durstine, so we have had some parties on the tip top of Montmartre, the part of Paris I love best. I took Baba Engs up there for supper last night and was somewhat embarrassed to have the patronne of the little restaurant where we eat confide to me that one of my friends had been in the other day to breakfast—with a girl.

Give my love to Katharine and Eva and tell Mary to save some bread pudding for me.

Alexander Woollcott

(Censored by) Charles P. Cushing

To RUTH HALE

Paris
September 5, 1918

Dear Ruth,

This is a rainy day in Paris and nothing could be nicer than that.

I have been luxuriating in it through a week's permission, which I was much too discerning to spend at any official leave area. So I am soaked in it just now. This afternoon, on my way from déjeuner, I have been playing with my friend, the sacristan of St. Germain l'Auxerrois, who, as a great treat, took me up the old Norman Tower and showed me his twelfth century psalters, his sixth—no, seventh century chests, his old altar carvings. He told me how once an American had gone off in disgust because

he didn't believe such tales. The sacristan thinks it must be hard for people from so young a country to realize how old things can be. I guess it is. While we were climbing down, we heard the innocent old bell in the clocher that had given the signal for the massacre of St. Bartholomew's eve.

I must say, we fare pretty well in Paris. You can get anything in the world you want to eat except pudding. Sugar, butter, cream, all the little forbidden things are easy enough to get if you know where to go. If you know enough to go to Montmartre—the very tip—so high up that the rules and regulations never reach there. Or to M. Jacques, who has a discreet back room. Or to my petit déjeuner place behind St. Germain l'Auxerrois (a stone's throw from the hotel of the musketeers) where all these contraband things and others (such as café cognac) may be had boldly on the sidewalk. I never knew why this was so brazen till I discovered that the police station was across the way and the place itself the police restaurant.

M. Jacques, who used to run the big hotel in Rouen before the war, is devoted to his clients fidèles from the *Stars and Stripes* and when, in early June, it looked as though all Paris would have to—or might have to—move out, he wanted to go along with us and reopen wherever we set up our presses again. Recently, he has been a bit flustered due to his wife, in Switzerland, having presented him with twin boys—and very triste for three weeks because the closing of the frontier shut off all news from them. I was there the other evening when, at last, the postman brought a letter. Such excitement! Of course, the old postman had to be treated to a drink then and there. The news was good. I was interested because the elder twin is—formally and officially—my godson. I have sent him a spoon of gold and silver from his parrain. His name is Marcel Benoît Dick—le petit lapin. And then Montmartre—Do you know la butte? Gimalac's, or Nini's or Freddie's?—better far any of them than the Coucou where the approval of Julian Street is announced in English by a sign

out front. Such good things to eat and such leisurely service as if there were all the time in the world! Such absurd dogs as gather about your table and ogle you for scraps! At Nini's, if you will keep quiet, you can stay till midnight, playing poker. At Freddie's, there are apt to be songs and recitations. Quite as though the quaint notion had just occurred to him, Freddie will ask the old, long-haired poet to sing Musette's song or a slatternly female, much impaired by opium, to recite something impassioned from Baudelaire. As they have come for the purpose they are not hard to persuade. Afterwards, Freddie, with equal spontaneity, passes the hat for them. Once the place was full of American officers who all fled after the Baudelaire. Freddie consulted me about it. Didn't Americans like Baudelaire? Not American officers, I told him. A great light dawned. "Ah," he exclaimed, "then it is with you as it is with us. All your officers were drawn from the grocer class." Once Freddie announced, with great empressement, that a young American was present who would sing in American and French. We all applauded and shouted "Bravo" and in the midst of this uproar, I discovered that the young American in question was I. I tell you, cryptically, that I rose to the occasion.

We sing a good deal, I'm afraid. The favorite song with all our French friends is

Qu'est-ce-qu'arrive lundi? Lundi Bolles

Oh vous salle Boches, je vous souhaite de même,

a free translation of "Oh you dirty Germans," the soldiers' song which Elsie [Janis] has been singing hereabouts. Then there is the new song the poilus have—of which the refrain is

Two testaments

The old and the new

But there's only one hair

On the head of Matthew.

The verses are all outrageous puns on the numerals. Par exemple:

*On dit qu'y-en-a dix
Distance au front
Neuf à la coque
Huitres-d'Ostend
C'est épatant
System metrique
Saint Sebastien
Katherine de Medicis
Troyes-en-Champagne
Deux testaments
L'ancien et le nouveau
Mais il n'y-a qu'un Cheveux
Sur la tête de Mathieu.*

Elsie loved Montmartre. I have guided so many footsteps there. F.P.A., Grantland Rice, Lee Dodd, etc., etc.—I was led there by Wythe Williams. Paul West usually haunts the Place du Tertre, you know—the place staged in *Louise*. Did I tell you that after looking at my picture, caught by the camera in full war paint with mask and helmet, he said, “Ah, the daughter of the regiment!” I was on Montmartre not long ago with my dear Walter Duranty, than whom no one can have a warmer spot in my foolish heart. As we were skating home in midnight darkness, a polite young lady (who was out shopping, I suppose) linked arms with us and walked bantering all the way to the opera. Walter urged her on me as one passionate as a lion. I whispered to her that he was passionate as a rabbit, which is much more to the point. On leaving, she confided to the stars her private opinion that we were both as passionate as two plates of noodles.

I haven't had much chance at the theatre. Brieux's *Robe Rouge* wasn't bad at the Odéon and *The Cricket on the Hearth* with exquisite oboe music by Massenet. There's an English stock company that has been packing the Théâtre Albert Premier with

Aussies and Canadians on leave—a mighty good stock company with *Smith*, *The Mollusc*, *The Tyranny of Tears*, *Billeted* and *Wanted a Husband*—the last was much mauled about and spoiled to make a play for Marie Tempest as *A Lady's Name*. Nous avons changé tous cela. We were very hilarious during the first performance of *Billeted* when the lovely ingenue dropped her lighted cigarette down the bosom of her gown. It was an agonizing moment and no time for false delicacy. You should have seen her go after it.

The theatres are packed now. So is Paris. There never was any repining all through the anxious spring. No bells were rung when the tide turned, even when the boches were no longer at Noyon. But everyone smiles, everyone walks with a gayer step and all's well.

It seems to me there are twice as many people on the boulevards as there were in June, twice as many people sipping apéritifs at the green hour, twice as many puttering over the book-stalls on the quais. It takes me an hour to walk a block along the quai that starts here below my window. I revel in fearful translations. "M. Britling commence à voir clair." Do you recognize that? I found a French *Trilby*, with delightful French illustrations which, unlike the author's own, were of the period. Also a French *Alice in Wonderland*—would you detect "a bright idea popped into Alice's head" under the disguise of "Une idée lumineuse traversait l'esprit d'Alice"? Dear, dear.

There are some darned good books on Paris which you'd enjoy if you haven't found them long since. The one in the Mediaeval Towns series is the best. E. V. Lucas's *A Wanderer in Paris* is for beginners but it has nice chapters and enchanting pictures. I enjoyed Belloc's *Paris*.

Poor Rufie is to be laden this Fall with business for me. If I have any luck, I'll get a Liberty Bond sent you to dispose of and buy Christmas things for me. Also, before long, I'll send you money to pay my civilian insurance for 1919. Also, I might

send you something to sell for me, all with an eye to raising Christmas funds.

I must copy out for you a Tommy's will, of which I have seen a transcript. It read:

"In the event of my death (cheers!) I leave all my estate (loud cheers!) to my older brother Charles (loud and prolonged cheers!)." .

It was probated—of course.

I never intended to write you such another long letter and never set out to fill it to the brim with Paris. But I have been spending a week's leave in the place. I have been working in and out of it for six months and I love it above all places in the world. The river that flows past my window now is gleaming in the sunset that has followed the rain, and the bridges fade away mysterious in the distance—and no German foot shall ever cross them.

Alexander Woollcott

P.S. I forgot to tell you that on the night I sang at Freddie's—his place looks like a Belasco gesture indicating Bohemianism—I noticed on my way out that the long-haired poet and the opium queen were busy dividing the gate. I burst in indignantly and demanded my third and while they were still uncertain as to whether or not I was facetious, I let them buy me off with a glass of something.

P.P.S. Notre Dame is having a bath. They are scrubbing the old lady from base to gargoyles. Her ancient stone emerges unexpectedly white and embarrassed—like Heywood found nude on Fifth Avenue.

A. W.

(Censored by) *Charles P. Cushing*

To DR. EDMUND DEVOL

*Bar-le-Duc
le 12 Novembre, 1918*

My dear Major,

I was glad to hear from Dr. Trexler and have confirmation of Capt. Pease's report that you had been made a major and I want you to feel sure I will not let it make any difference between us.

I wish everyone at the hospital could have shared some of my recent experiences. I was at the front—isn't it a wonderful place?—till the last shot was fired but I do not mean that.

For instance, not long ago, being out at elbow and thinly clad, with winter coming on, I drove to the commissary at St. Dizier and appealed to the old corporal in charge there for a little raiment. Instead of demanding this and that of me and tossing a salvaged coat out to cover my nakedness, he assigned two darkies to me as fitters and held up the whole line for an hour while he fussed about, getting me oilskin capes, his best quality of leggings, his finest whipcord breeches, etc., etc. I dared hardly question this benevolence lest it would break some spell—but finally he grinned and said, "I guess you don't remember me." I admitted I didn't. "Why," he said, "don't you remember old Cherry, who threw the chocolate pot at the orderly down at Savenay? I was one of your patients down there and you were mighty nice to me."

Now the point of this story, Major, is this—that, as you well know, I was never remarkably nice to anyone and I gather from this and other cases that the least kindness, the least little human touch, warms the heart of these soldiers when they are—as the service records say—"Sk in hosp." I wish, when I was there, I had realized this as I realize it now. But I did not get religion till that great morning in June when I saw the Marines tearing up the road on the way to Château-Thierry.

I have met our old patients again and again. They hail me

from passing trucks. I run into them on the edge of Sedan. Once, I remember, when a kitchen capsized on the first day of the St.-Mihiel attack, it could serve only cold coffee and this was almost gone when I came toiling up the road. The cook stood guard over the last cup. "I am saving it for that fat medical sergeant with the specs," he said, "he took care of me at Base last Fall."

I shall always remember Ward 3 very vividly and the sight of a fashionable New York doctor giving old sickly fretful darkies just as much care as if each and every one were Gertrude Atherton. By the way, do you remember that wretched fellow, Miss Ward's pet patient, with the loud voice and the mitral insufficiency? It seems he called at the *Times* office and regaled my old confrères there with the most startling stories about me and certain very lovely nurses, leaving them with the impression that France had transformed me into something of a blade.

Well, I hope and expect to visit Savenay before the winter is gone and I hope and expect to dine with you in New York before I set forth on the journey around the world that I am now planning.

I have time to write you this long letter because I am waiting at Bar-le-Duc for the arrival from Paris tonight of my new automobile. In it, I am going to the Rhine.

My love to Dr. Trexler, Schuyler Ladd, Red Moore and yourself—these four and no one else.

Alexander Woollcott

P. S. Don't you think the *Stars and Stripes* has been darned good? We have slaved to make it so.

A. W.

TO JULIE WOOLLCOTT TABER

Paris
December, 1918

From: Alexander Woollcott
To: Mrs. Charles Taber
Subject: Alexander Woollcott

I clip a little editorial I wrote for the *Stars and Stripes* for the issue of December 6th—wrote it just about the same time you were expressing exactly the same thought in a letter to me.

Last Saturday I decided the time had come to go to Paris so off I set, driving as far as Nancy. We had to put up at a little town in Alsace-Lorraine for the night and were most royally served at the inn there by one who spoke pretty good English considering he had been a waiter in New York for eighteen years. We trailed through Metz in the dismal morning rain and made Paris at midnight.

I had come in, expecting to straighten out a lot of little things and start back immediately for my beloved Rhineland and for my still more beloved Army of Occupation. But I find they want me here for no end of things—so there will be the old round of editorial conferences and this and that. Still I don't pretend it will not be pleasant to be in Paris—especially to be here through the Christmas holidays—just as I was last year.

Immediately, the business of life accumulates. There are reams of letters, there are cablegrams. Old friends are in town. Telephone messages and this person and that popping up in the mob. Here are two boys from my old tent squad on Governor's Island, up from Savenay to buy glass eyes for the hospital—a pleasant errand. I hear my dear Major Devol (my doctor when I was sick at Savenay) is in town and has been in to see me. Then a most embarrassing letter from Mrs. Truax, congratulating me on the acceptance of my play—which, malheureusement, has not even been written. It was all a joke—or partly so. One

night at Bar-le-Duc when an air raid on the town shut out all but candlelight and precluded more sustained literary effort, I whiled away the time by dashing off some post cards. One was to Arthur Hopkins, the producer in New York, with whom both Ruth Hale and Brock Pemberton are associated and who, I believe, is the best producer in America. I idly told him that after the war I was minded to set forth on a tramp-steamer for a long year at sea—that when I got off I would have a play for him called “World without End” and that then he *would* be ruined. I was highly amused at Coblenz to receive a cable from him saying “Accept play and ruination,” which I thought was a pleasant though expensive jest. You can imagine I was startled to receive a clipping announcing that Mr. Hopkins had accepted the play without reading it, but I rather imagine Ruth started that story going just to be facetious. I think I will have to spoil the joke by writing the play after all. It is all in my mind.

Tomorrow night, nine of the staff will go to Nini’s little restaurant on Montmartre and dine there en famille, with something witty for each as a gift from each of the others. [John T.] Winterich, I know, has already bought a YMCA pin for a foul-mouthed little varlet and he has purchased a second-lieutenant’s bars for the most aggressively private private on the staff.

Next day, M. Jacques—proprietor of the restaurant where we usually eat—will give us a dinner.

I am mailing you today, a copy of the current issue which has a letter to America from me in it and also my story of the Rhine crossing. There is one paragraph in that story at which, I am pained to say, Mr. Wilson is said to have laughed uproariously.

You can imagine how content I am to have Mr. Wilson here and how relieved to feel the undercurrents of intrigue and unrest subside at his coming. I believe he will blow away all the obstructions in the path of a decent peace.

Aleck

III

The 1920's

To A. A. WALLGREN

New York City
November 15, 1920

Dear Wally,

I am passing the hat for Marie Louise Patriarche—I hope for the last time, certainly for the next few years. I want to catch her by Christmas time with the news that her bank account will see her through indefinitely. Please send me a check for any amount between one and one hundred dollars.

I hear you've been married several times since we last met. Why don't you ever write me or draw me or call me up? You remember Chesterton's slogan—"My mother, drunk or sober!" Well, them's my sentiments toward you, old thing.

The other day a girl blew in with a letter of introduction from F.P.A. which puzzled me a little until I discovered that he had given it to her when we were still in Paris two years gone by. It bade me introduce the girl to "everyone in the office, including the Scandinavian." Yet she was a very nice girl.

A. W.

P.S. Saw Father Brady the other night. He asked after you. I told him you were married. He fainted.

A. W.

[Marie Louise was a little French orphan adopted by the *Stars and Stripes* staff, on which Mr. Wallgren was a cartoonist.]

To EDNA FERBER

Paris
July 21, 1922

Dear Ferber,

I never got your telegrams and probably you never got my letter written to Frankfort. However, I cannot remember that it was important. It described my huge 19-cent room at the Hotel Traube and my unbelievable breakfasts of fruit, eggs, toast, echt coffee und cream for 12 cents—all served on a table overlooking the Rhine. It told how I would probably stay in Coblenz until I had caught up with my work—which I did.

I enclose several items for your entertainment. The letter from Deems Taylor (isn't "living like Swopes" a perfect phrase?) will amuse you. The squanderous \$15 referred to is a check I sent Mary in the hope that she could get one of those bags for me—or two.

Speaking of Swopes, I eventually called on them. It was high noon at the Ritz. Margaret was in bed, garbed in pink and altogether too beautiful. Herb was receiving correspondents, being shaved by an imported coiffeur and describing London hotel prices. There were silk stockings and fragments of toast and huge bunches of roses in pleasant profusion, but nothing much to do, so Margaret and I shot craps while Herb talked.

Your note from Carlsbad awaited me at the Hotel when I returned from Carcassonne. When you suggest that anything that befell in Berlin "puzzled" me, you don't know your good old "she-ancient," as the low [Marc] Connelly once called

Your affectionate

A. Woollcott

[Herbert Bayard Swope and Woollcott were both young reporters on the New York scene before the war. Later, when Mr. Swope was managing editor of the *World*, Woollcott became its dramatic critic.]

To *JEROME KERN*

*Bomoseen, Vt.
July, 1924*

Dear Kern,

Confidentially, I am puttering about at present with a biography of Irving Berlin whose story has a strong appeal to my foolish and romantic heart. I need hardly say that I have no notion of trying to turn learned in the midst of it nor do I think that grave musical criticism has any place in the project. But I would, when the thing reaches book form, like to see one chapter that says something intelligible about him as a composer, his place in the history of ragtime, his melodic gift, his place as a maker of folk song, etc.—not gushy, not untrue, not a floral wreath. I think the thing for me to do is to call a witness and I am wondering if you would care to be the witness. If it could take the form of a letter from you to me, the trick would be done.

This is just a tentative inquiry which I will follow up, if encouraged, by coming out to see you when I am back in town late this month.

Yours
A. W.

To *EDNA FERBER*

*Bord S.S. France
le 10th June, 1926*

Dear Ferber,

I am debarking tomorrow at Plymouth, reinforced by a wireless from Irving [Berlin], confirming my reservations at the Carlton and inviting me to dine with him on the night of arrival—carefully ascertaining first, I suppose, that I could not possibly land in London before midnight.

But what I really wrote to tell you was about the shocking revelations into the character of Nancy Woolcott.

She is the twelve-year-old eldest of that Baltimore bevy—the exquisite flower of the flock, the perfect one. I suppose her sisters and cousins have always rather resented her. Now they are getting out a magazine and thus far all of Nancy's contributions in prose and verse have been returned to her without comment. Finally, in desperation, she asked bitterly if she might be permitted to insert an advertisement, and was assured (probably after a hasty investigation of her assets) that she might take a page on payment of 6 cents. Her dignified announcement read as follows:

MISS NANCY B. WOOLLCOTT <i>The Most Charming Woman in the World</i> Call between 2:30 and 3

Well, that's that, and I have no news beyond the fact that [Charles] MacArthur who is with me says he can't get over the notion that he's on a boat and that [Robert] Benchley, wishing to get us something we couldn't get in Europe, brought us a plate of wheatcakes and left it in the cabin.

I don't know when I will reach Paris but I hope to find there a letter telling me when you are to arrive from the South. My elegant motor trip to St. Jean was crushed by the Fleischmann mishap. The kid came out of the operation (double mastoid) all right but their European trip had to be called off.

I have no plans beyond a few vague dates at Antibes for the end of June.

I am going to Scotland in July.

Woollcott

To HUDSON HAWLEY

New York City
May 15, 1928

Dear Hawley,

I am sailing on May 19 aboard the *Roma*, bound for Naples where I will be lodged for a day or so, at least, at the Hotel de Vesuve. My party, which consists of Alice Duer Miller, Harpo Marx and Mrs. George S. Kaufman [Beatrice Kaufman], will then motor up through Rome, Perugia, Siena, Florence and probably Milan and Maggiore, settling eventually at Antibes for the summer.

I am writing to warn you that you may get a telephone message of greeting as I dash through Rome, and to tell you that if you were half a man (admittedly a matter for nice and anxious calculation), you would persuade the Commendatore Oro, or whoever is in charge of the Department of Tours, to put a handsome automobile at the service of so influential a cluster of American journalists for the trip from Naples to the Lakes.

A. W.

To LUCY CHRISTIE DRAGE

[Lucy Christie Drage and Julie Woolcott Taber became close friends when the Woolcotts lived in Kansas City. After the death of Julie, Lucy's memories of her served as an unbroken bond with Woolcott.]

Antibes
June, 1928

Dear Lucy,

When Julie died, I had a strong impulse to jump on a train and go to you as the only person left in the world to whom I could really talk about her. There seemed to be too much to do. The day she died, Billy [A. W.'s brother] himself was taken to a hospital in Baltimore and hung between life and death for weeks of anxiety. Then I think I invented things to preoccupy

me, made a great potter about work to be done, ran round and round in busy little circles, anything rather than sit down and face the fact that there was no Julie any more and never would be again.

I wired you that day that I would write you a letter and here I am at last, in this corner of the Riviera where I have bestowed myself for the next few weeks, sitting down before the portable I have toted across the world, batting out a letter that should be full of the things I would have told you had I really hopped on that train and gone out to see you. I wish now I had done it.

I am glad you did not see her in those agonizing summer months when her sickness first took hold of her, when we were dragging experts to see her and she was trying to walk but couldn't, unable to speak clearly but trying to all the time, shaking so that she could hardly guide a cigarette to her lips. It was cruel business. The experts had some elaborate explanation of the inexplicable phenomenon—a progressive degeneration of the nerve tissue which defeats medicine and eludes surgery. But the ways of the spirit are mysterious and I know that she had just invented a way of getting out of a world that was too intolerably lonely for her without Charles. You could tell that from the peace and satisfaction which settled on her when the invention worked at last, for in the final six weeks at the hospital, there was no pain or distress or trouble. She just lay there at rest in a room that somehow began to look like her, with the yellow roses on the table and the blue silk shawl thrown across the foot of her bed. Day by day the years seemed to fall away from her, cast off like garments she no longer needed. She did not know even me, but she was pleased when it was Paul Robeson's voice on the phonograph and pleased when the nurse would put a gardenia on the pillow beside her. If you bent close, you could hear her say "Sweet, sweet." The lines went out of her face, the gray out of her hair, the pain out of her eyes. Her hair, braided and tied with

little blue ribbons, lay tossed upon the pillow and framed so prettily a face that was the one you saw when she first came out to Kansas City nearly forty years ago.

Toward the end, while she was still talking, all her thoughts ran back to those years and the ones between were forgotten. She talked of the day I was born and of the trip west and of Aldine Place, with Rose Field calling up to your window and making all manner of fun of her because she was so excited over the fact that Frank and Mailie [Sauerwen] were coming. One of the last things she said was that she must find out where Rose Field was living and go to him and offer to keep house for him. One of her last commissions to me was to write you the birthday letter for which she could no longer hold a pen.

She told me all about the day in January when I was born—how, after breakfast, Mother told her not to bother to clear away the things but to go up to the old house and ask Grandma to send one of the teamsters to fetch the doctor. It was snowing and old Dr. Kimball came the seven miles in his cutter. The other youngsters on the place were not told what was up and went to their lessons in Mailie's room as usual. While they were bent over their books, Mailie slipped out and found her father taking a surreptitious drink in honor of so agitating an occasion. She came back with the news and imparted it cryptically by scribbling a line on a piece of paper and smuggling it unseen into Julie's hand. It was a line from *Bleak House* which they were all reading then. It ran something like this: "A young gentleman has arrived whose name is Mr. Guppy." So they always called me Mr. Guppy. I made a stab at it myself but got no nearer than Guffy. Mailie called me Guffy always. The advent of the newcomer was regarded as a family calamity. Aunt Julie told me once that she spent that day crying in her room as the least she could do.

It was of those days Julie talked toward the last. It is then I wish you could have come. I wish you could have seen her

when the sentries we all post to warn us that the world is looking could no longer do their duty. I am sick at the thought of what swinishness and poltroonery and malice the spectators would find if ever *my* guards were dismissed and I could no longer edit myself for my neighbors' inspection. But the Julie that was turned toward you and toward me was the same all the way through—a gentle and gracious and gallant person in the very core of her. There was nothing base in her.

There are just a few of us left to whom it matters. In September Dr. Humphreys died. You remember I was named after him. He was a person of circumstance and Trinity was so crowded for his funeral that I had to stand in the back of the church. In the shadow of the pillar there I watched the procession following the coffin out into the afternoon sunlight—Aunt Eva, bent and old but able to make the journey, and behind her young Eva and her husband and a swarm of grandchildren. And I knew that there were great-grandchildren stowed away in sundry nurseries. And I knew, too, that I could stand in the shadow of that pillar for a hundred years without seeing the end of the procession, without seeing the end of the chapter written by that full and fruitful life. It is so different when a childless woman dies. Julie's chapter is ended. She was perfume, scattered now on the ground. And there is just a small company of us—you, dear Lucy, and a few others, for whom the fragrance of her lingers in the air.

The Phalanx is ghostly now. There are strangers in the little cottage, so that what Aunt Anne used to call the Julie light can once more be seen through the trees. But the big house is mostly dark. When I used to come home at Christmas time from school, I could see it from a great way off through the bare branches of the trees, warm lamplight shining from each of the twelve French windows that looked out across the lawn. Now only two or three windows are lighted.

The last to go was Uncle Will. He had been born there and

did his first toddling in that pretty ravine of which he painted the beech trees all his days. Even when he had to go into exile as an old man and was supposed to be painting landscapes in Florida and California, it was the beech trees he saw with the eyes of his heart and the beech trees that kept showing up in those pictures of his. Aunt Anne took his ashes down into the ravine and buried them at the roots of one of those trees. Then she just carved his initials in the bark of the trunk. That was only a month ago.

So one by one the lights go out. I have had to write you about them. It is because Julie loved you with a surpassing loyalty and tenderness. The miles and the years between made no difference to her at all—none at all. I think you knew that there was always that lamp in her window for you, always that loving kindness in her heart.

Something stops me from trying to say anything of the impoverishment I feel. What a world this would be—what a morning light would shine across it—if all people were like her. I think of that and of many things and I send you her love and mine. I wish I could stand beside you at some window today and look out into the twilight and say nothing.

Aleck

To EDNA FERBER

Antibes
June 2, 1928

Dear Ferber,

I am here leading the life of a rosy, middle-aged dolphin—here alone, though this coast swarms with people I know. Why don't you motor here en route to Grenoble? I think you'd love it.

Love to Julia—

A. W.

P.S. I attended the strike debate in the House disguised as a Liberal Expert and I had tea with Philip Guedalla who looks a little like Channing Pollock. And I won a pound playing croquet with the English at the Duke of Manchester's.

A. W.

To *PETER HACKETT*

New York City
July 15, 1929

My dear young man:

Some decayed old gentlemen whose poker games in happier days used to be enlivened by the occasional presence of your sainted mother before she found something better to do, have, out of an institution known as the kitty, purchased you the enclosed present being under the impression that when you got around to it, you would find it more pleasing than a bassinet or even a gold safety pin.

In behalf of the Thanatopsis Inside Straight and Literary Club, I beg to remain your obedient servant,

Alexander Woollcott

[The gift that was presented to Peter Hackett a few days after his birth, and a few months before the market crashed, was one share of U. S. Steel.]

IV

1930-1932

To BEATRICE KAUFMAN

London
April 26, 1930

My blossom:

Noel [Coward] is the only gamester I ever knew with my own whole-heartedness. We played backgammon or Russian Bank all the way over. I had never before crossed the Atlantic without once laying eyes on the darned thing. The other passengers were mysteriously angered by this singleness of purpose. They would stop by and say: "Don't you two ever tire of that game" or "Still at it?" or, in the case of the German passengers they would merely say "Immer!" to each other in passing. We finally devised an effective rejoinder, merely singing in duet:

We hope you fry in hell
We hope you fry in hell
Heigho
The-merry-o
We hope you fry in hell.

I did not have much luck. Paid for my passage but not much over.

Cavalcade last night. Noel's party in the royal box. A convenient arrangement, with a salon behind it for coffee and

liqueurs and an adjacent room for the occasional relief of the royal kidney.

Adele Astaire and Lord Cavendish in the next box and the Duke of Bedford in his. In fact, everyone on hand with the possible exception of Frances Wellman. The audience gala, much cheering at Noel's entrance, a speech afterwards from the stage. The show very moving. Also a good play. No one had ever told me it was that.

I am lunching today with Jeffrey Amherst, dining tonight with the incomparable Rebecca [West], lunching tomorrow with Mrs. Belloc Lowndes. Tomorrow afternoon, Lilly [Bonner] arrives by plane from France. Program from then on a blank, but probably a week-end at Noel's, which is near Dover and might be taken in en route to Paris.

I must make clear a curious illusion of which I am conscious. If I write a note to either you or George Backer, I feel as if I were writing it to both of you. This note, for instance, will leave me with a feeling of having just communicated with him. I am dimly aware that any message for him I have in mind might reach him more immediately if I were to send it care of Kuhn, Loeb but I cannot be bothered with his endless fluctuations of address and I prefer looking upon you as the nearest thing to a permanent address he will ever have.

As a matter of fact, I have a message for him. Tell him to read Van Wyck Brooks' *Life of Emerson*. I don't think it's a very good book—watery and general. But Backer should read it and when he does he will see why I think so just as clearly as if I were to mark the significant passage for him.

Joyce [Barbour] and Dickie [Bird] are immensely bucked up. He is rehearsing the leading part in the new Priestley play and she is rehearsing for the new Joe Cook show and after ten weeks in that she will go into the new Coward revue. This hasn't a title yet. I suggested calling it "Here's to Mr. Woollcott" or "Here's to Mr. Woollcott, God bless him" but Noel is curi-

ously inhospitable to suggestions from others and he does make the good point that in England it would not mean so much as in the States.

Both Dickie and Joyce look uncommonly well. Joyce has a figure like Lilly's. It makes me wonder if a year of complete destitution would not be good for baby.

A. W.

[The friendship which began when George Backer was in his early twenties continued through the period when Mr. Backer was publisher and editor of the *New York Post*.]

TO BEATRICE KAUFMAN

Kyoto
April 22, 1931

Light of my Life:

I cannot tell you how often I have rejoiced that you were not with me on this curious expedition. I could not have gone through with the necessary ceremonies—dropping repeatedly to my knees, scraping the floor with this old forehead, eh-eh, with your unamiable eye upon me. It is difficult enough, God knows, for me to eat with chopsticks. Inevitably a few bamboo-shoots fall off onto my long-suffering lapels. But with your eye on me, they would have *all* fallen off. Then you would have been so disagreeable about my arrival at the Imperial Hotel—me getting at once into pajamas and receiving deputations in the Campanile manner, with no conspicuous difference except that I take tea now instead of coffee and the Gideon Bible in the room was in Japanese. When Mr. Hyashi came and bowed low and said he trusted I would find equally enchanted aisles in Japan, I just thanked my stars that none of you crude people was within earshot. When finally I went into dinner and the orchestra

struck up the "Dance of the Hours" (on my word of honor) I had a dreadful moment of feeling that you at least had a spy on the job.

I have had such a swell time since I started and, in this one week in Japan, gone through such eye-filling and beguiling hours that I keep thinking it can't last. Today I've been trundling around Kyoto in a rickshaw, fairly beaming with contentment. Perhaps the misadventures and misgivings will set in when I go down to Kobe on Saturday and embark in a noxious and unseaworthy little Japanese boat for a four days' sail across the Yellow Sea to Tientsin where Yuan will meet me. Something will have to go wrong soon or I will get apprehensive. My luck has been holding so long.

I sat down here tonight with the notion that I would recount my various adventures, some charming, some hilarious. I had it in mind to describe the entrancing supper that Kikugoro, the great Tokyo actor, gave me at his house the night I left Toyko (the Lunts will really have to do better by me from now on) and the speech I made to two hundred girls at a school and the arrival here in Kyoto in time for the cherry-blossom festival. But instead I'll save it all up until I get back and then find everyone walking out on me after the first five minutes. I'm already a little sore when I think how nobody's going to listen quietly to my relentless travelogue.

Your parting gift, which must have involved the denuding of several orchards, was gratefully received at Seattle. And that about clears matters up except for an impulse to report how fond of you I am. From time to time my heart dwells on that fact. Occasionally it will occur to me when I am dropping off to sleep on the other side of the world. Then it smites me with such intensity that I should think it might easily light a lamp in your room—thereby, I am afraid, catching you at all manner of mischief.

I'm off to Osaka now to see the marionettes and a few

good temples. Yesterday I saw a fervent Japanese gentleman standing, in the frosty twilight, under a sacred waterfall. He wore a suit of tasteful underwear and prayed aloud with chattering teeth for the good of his immortal soul.

Hoping you will soon take similar measures I remain

Yours respectfully

A. Woollcott

[Henry Yuan is the son of Yuan Shih-kai, the first President of China. He was sent to the United States to be educated, and went to Hamilton College, where he and Woollcott became acquainted.]

To HERBERT BAYARD SWOPE, JR.

[Herbert Bayard Swope, Jr., was a schoolboy of sixteen when Woollcott wrote this letter to him.]

Kyoto

April 22, 1931

Son of Heaven:

I would address this to the school at Riverdale but I suppose you are seldom there. It is intended as a line of thanks for those expensive groceries with which you so agreeably showered me on the eve of my departure. They sustained me all the way to Seattle where the business of speeding me on my way was taken over by your aunt Phyllis's father [Mr. Blake]. He is a tall and imposing creature of whom I could catch only glimpses in the flurry of my final arrangements, which included everything from buying some garters to a brief dash to the local chiropodist. He (the chiropodist, not Mr. Blake) was from Oneonta, N. Y., and makes shoes for Babe Ruth, whose bunions, I was credibly informed, are just like spurs.

Well after that, there were a dozen days on the boat, devoted to much reading, some writing and the minimum of typhoid injections. I enjoyed the voyage so much that I felt outraged when

we lost a day en route. I am aware that this was no special bit of fraud. Indeed, it's quite the usual thing. I had merely forgotten about it.

We had a rather interesting murder on board. An Indian traveler in the steerage dropped dead fifteen minutes after buying some soda pop. As he weighed 300 pounds, it was a little difficult getting him up the companionway in order to drop him overboard—feet weighted—into the deep. His bride was inconsolable for as much as half an hour but thereafter perked up and flirted around hopefully. Her charm for me was somewhat impaired by the circumstance that, in her front teeth, a gold spade and a gold heart had been skillfully inlaid. Of course no one breathed an official suspicion of murder, as it would have meant inquests for the next ten years.

I have never enjoyed traveling in a country so much as in Japan. The meals in the Japanese homes and restaurants, rather than in the foreign hotels, delight me continuously. I am afraid they would revolt one who has been brought up to look at every edible twice and then spit it out. I have particularly relished two dinners I have had here in Kyoto, sitting up at a little counter of spotless, new unpolished wood and taking my food direct from the hands of the chef, an expert who is tastefully attired in a suit of durable underwear and who works with an immense gravity, occasionally interspersed with sudden shrieks of falsetto laughter, usually inspired by my maladroitness with the chopsticks. And even your sainted mother would relish the custom of starting the meal with a face-wipe with a soft, moist, perfumed, hot face-cloth, brought by a pretty girl who kneels beside you while you tidy up for dinner. And certainly she would approve the gargle which was supplied—pitcher, cup, spittoon and all—as the final course of my dinner last night at Osaka, where I had gone to see the famous puppet theatre.

As for your sainted grandmother, I don't like to say anything or to inquire what Oriental colony there may have been in

Far Rockaway, but it is extraordinary that about one out of every three young Japs I meet are the living image of your uncle Bruce.

I bid you au revoir.

A. Woollcott

To *LILLY BONNER*

[The Bonner family consists of Lilly Stehli Bonner, her husband Paul, and their four sons; Woollcott's long friendship with them was unusual for him because it embraced the whole family. He spent much time at their home in Locust Valley, Long Island, and later visited them during their long sojourns in Europe.]

Nara, Japan
April 24, 1931

My dear Lilly

You have had your sweet revenge. Never had I thought to see the day when I would long for those splendid, capacious, substantial two-tined forks of yours. But it has come to pass. When I am crouched on a silken cushion beside a lacquered tabouret, trying (while the little waitress kneeling beside me titters with ecstasy at my efforts) to convey to my lips a morsel of bamboo-shoot dipped in gravy and mashed radishes and have only chopsticks to do the trick with, then I eat my words—the bamboo-shoots having fallen by the wayside. And there can be other difficulties. For instance, the little waitress will lift the sake bottle with a pretty inquiring gesture and I bow and say thank you at which, with a regretful sigh, she puts the bottle away. It's like the equivocal French *merci* and I must get the intonation wrong. But the real hardship is these damned chopsticks. I have abandoned my diet as a work of supererogation. I can lose weight just by the process of elimination which my lack of dexterity forces upon me.

But I've never seen so enthralling a country. Every waking

minute entertains the eye. For sheer delight, I offer you this ancient and quiet town—so quiet that I hear all the bird-calls in the countryside and the rattle of a distant cart somewhere and the occasional boom of the gong at the Temple where some pilgrim must have paid 5 sen for the luxury of calling Buddha's attention to his prayers. I practically spent the day feeding rice-cakes to the sacred deer who drift by thousands through Nara and whose attentions, when they suspect you of concealing rice-cakes on your person, are even moister than Paddy's. It was a benign spring day and it seemed as if all the school children in Japan were out on the highways on a picnic. Sometimes I saw them trudging along through a very snowstorm of cherry-blossoms. I invaded one Temple at a time when about two hundred girls were at prayer. Their shoes were ranged outside and how they ever get back into the right ones, is beyond me. Perhaps they don't. They were all about six years old each. Henry Bonner would, I am sure, have risen to the occasion and asked for more.

Tomorrow I am going over to Kobe for a four-day sail across the Yellow Sea to Tientsin in what will probably be a horrid little boat. But Yuan and [John] Thomason have been wiring greetings and I look forward to Peking where I should be well established a week from now.

I found it hard to believe it was only four weeks ago last night that I heard Toscanini conduct the Ravel music, I listening from a vantage point which gave me a superb view of your back in that black dress. If memory serves, you were wearing what I hope (in case we ever have to hock them) were emeralds. I trust you do not mind if I drift around the Far East with a pleasant memory of the nape of your neck etched on my heart.

Tell Paul that getting only one drink of sake is rather a hardship because it is served in a cup so tiny that compared with it the offerings of eye-dropper Bonner seemed like the gigantesque libations of a medieval baron.

Au revoir. I'll see you around the end of June if the fates are kind—to me, that is.

A. W.

TO LILLY BONNER

New York City
July 2, 1931

My dear Lilly:

Here I am, safe home and feeling singularly bereft. I know now exactly how Stefansson must have felt when he came out of the Arctic regions at the end of 1915 and heard for the first time that the world had been at war for more than a year. The news that you have departed these shores greeted me at San Francisco and in Hollywood I caught up with George Backer who told me it was all true. I do not think until then I had stopped to realize how inextricably the Bonners—root and branch—had grown into the fabric of my life. I had been looking forward all the way back across the Pacific to the moment when I would reappear on your horizon and had been getting down to brass tacks on my old and then still unrelinquished idea of taking a house in Locust Valley. Well—that's that. Or, at least, for the present, that is that.

As to coming over to Saint-Cloud, I have every intention of doing so between now and the end of the year. The exact time would be determined by the schedule of my work. After three fallow months, I am due just now for some weeks of steady writing. By the middle of August I should know what if any radio work I must do in the Fall and whether I would have time, before starting in, to take a quick trip across the Atlantic. I would really like to do none at all for then I could come over in October which would be perfect.

From everyone I hear only regret at your absence and

admiration for the way you managed the exit. It seems to me among the probabilities that you will live to look back on that departure as the beginning of a better existence but the whole chapter is one too involved and too abundant for me to dabble in it. I move we postpone the subject until I have a free afternoon and can settle down to it.

My adventures in China were soul-satisfying and one of the rare treats you cannot escape by trans-Atlantic flights is the evening when I sit down and tell you all about it. Also the elegant keepsake I brought you from Peking must wait a while, although I might find someone going your way to deliver it for me. I know that the Fatios are leaving this evening but they will land in Naples, go to Switzerland and Sweden and not reach Paris until September.

Aleck

Next Day.

P.S. F.P.A. has been muttering over the telephone about a letter from Paul I was to read, and I held this open on the chance that I would find it in this morning's mail. It hasn't come yet, so I will wind this up without having read it. Tell him I know how unsettling it is to give up any job which has become a habit, and which had, through many years, absolved one from the anxious burden of choice. But tell him that the task of picking up each day and making it with his own hands is a good job, too, though more exacting. I know very few people equipped with the rare talents needed for leisure, but Paul does happen, I think, to be one of them. I include some snapshots taken of an oblivious backgammon game, which was staged at the [Kathleen and Charles] Norrises beautiful ranch, to which I transported Harpo [Marx] and [Harold] Ross when they met me at the boat in San Francisco.

Miss Ryan tells me that I owe Paul \$5.50 on silk sheets made up to complete an order, but as he owes me \$25 for reck-

lessly betting against me in the matter of the sex of an impending baby, I will thank him to send me his check for the balance at once. All of which sounds very light-hearted and jolly, and it ought to, for that is exactly the way I feel. I have no sense of separation, but rather a strong belief that somehow, somewhere, I will see much of you in the next forty years. If you were not practically illiterate, I could rely on you to know that the last paragraph of *Great Expectations* runs as follows:

I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her.

A. W.

To LILLY BONNER

New York City
July 22, 1931

Dear Lilly:

As I suppose you already know, it's a girl at the F.P.A.'s. Esther came into the hospital Monday and attended to the matter within two hours. The whole thing makes a sucker out of me, but there were no bets. Incidentally, Paul is a menteur and pouilleux bâtard when he says he didn't bet me that little Miss Stehli would be a boy. Frank was here till all hours last night watching [Harold] Guinzburg and me play backgammon, and trying to screw up his courage to the point of calling his daughter Persephone. I pointed out that she would be known as Phony, and am myself recommending Rachel.

Broun's revue was staged last night, but it so smelled of failure in advance that I couldn't make up my mind to attend

it. The reviews this morning are written with a kind of crushing kindness.

I am having Holliday send you Wells's *The Science of Life*. This impulse has been forming ever since I vanished for five days in the Yellow Sea into the enchantment of its fifteen hundred pages. I thought then how simple, everyday biology had been left out of not only my own education, but that of pretty much everyone I know. I think that's because we are brought up by schoolmasters, and schoolmasters are classicists. I doubt, for instance, if either Reache or Manfred knew any biology worth imparting. I then progressed to the point of thinking it would be a grand idea to present your spawn with a first-rate microscope, and that you could get some biology teacher in one of the Long Island schools to come for two hours once a week and start the kids off on a little laboratory work for which the material abounded all over the place. I wish to God someone had done something like this for me. Then I would have gone into high school and college with the ground to some extent prepared for the very meagre amount of planting such institutions usually give. What I had in mind was the liberal application of a corrective to the still strong monkish influence in our schools and tutorial systems, something to give a boy the rounded mental equipment that a man like Wells has. Well, I don't know whether the great migration has shot this plan all to hell, but anyway, I think you will get a good deal of pleasure out of *The Science of Life*. Everything except the section on genetics I found easy enough reading, and my only fear is that you already have the damned book. In that case, I shall be too irritated!

Life at Sands Point seems to be much as usual. I find it pleasant, distracting, and singularly unnourishing. It is no way to live.

On the way back, the boat put in at Honolulu for twelve hours. I thought a good deal of Sibyl [Lady Colefax], noted

that the beach at Waikiki was not any larger than the Stehli riparian rights (or wrongs) on Oyster Bay, and bought a copy of *Time*, in which I read with mixed emotions the story of Ralph Barton's suicide.

Well, I was gone only three months, but in that time you had migrated, and Belasco had died, and Ralph had killed himself, and everyone had taken up Culbertson.

A. W.

To LILLY BONNER

August 26, 1931

Dear Lilly:

I am trusting this to the mails with what I can remember of your address, for I am writing from Hawley Truax's place in the Berkshires and I left my address book behind me in New York. I am on my way by motor to the Tarkingtons in Maine.

There is to be one final expedition before I settle down at the Campanile—a house party at the island, consisting of Beatrice, Backer, Harpo, the Guinzburgs, and, I hope, the Dietzes. I plan to herd them there on September 11th, and stay three or four days, it being part of an old notion to see what a Vermont September was really like. A pretty successful island party was wound up without casualties a week ago—the Ives, the Fleischmanns, Neysa [McMein], George Abbott (we now call Neysa's place in Port Washington the Abbottoir), Alice [Duer Miller], Harpo, and myself. It was a part-time arrangement for the Fleischmanns, who kept making disastrous trips to Saratoga, but as Charlie Brackett would rush over from Saratoga, this evened matters up. Ruth [Fleischmann] stayed on the island only long enough to complain a good deal about the beds.

As for my plans, I shall have to confess a secret shame. I

am resuming the Shouts and Murmurs in *The New Yorker* with some September issue, but with radio people and the like I have been arch and hard to please because it now seems likely that I will go on the stage—just once and get it over with. It seems that Katharine Cornell has leased the Belasco Theatre for three years, and will inaugurate her management by producing there, in October, a comedy by S. N. Behrman called *Brief Moment*, in which Francine Larrimore will star, and in which there is a part Behrman wrote with me in mind. This character is a stout, indolent and unamiable creature who spends a large part of the play lying on a chaise-longue and making an occasional insulting remark. After a good deal of palaver, it looks now as if I would surely go into rehearsal with this, and even get as far as the week's tryout in Washington on October 12th without being fired. I suppose that if I were still in the cast when the play opened in New York, I would have to play it for at least four weeks. Perhaps it would work out so that I could come over and spend Christmas with you. All this is so uncertain, even now, that I have not spoken of it to anyone around here, but having sworn to announce my plans to you, I can at least confide to you what's afoot.

The new Marx picture is to open next week, and Harpo has taken a penthouse in East Fifty-First Street for six months. The brothers (or rather, three of them at least) jumped into Heywood's show for two nights, ensuring a profitable week for that somewhat anxious venture. They did it for nothing, and were solemnly presented with three of Heywood's paintings in full view of the audience. Groucho said it was bad enough playing for nothing.

Alexander W.

P.S. Speaking of beds at the island, they have found a new name for the big double-bed in the front room on the ground

floor. It is comfortable but noisy, and lets out a tell-tale groan if you move in it. We now call it the informative double.

A. W.

To A. A. WALLGREN

Washington, D. C.
November 6, 1931

Dear Wally,

Your amiable letter soothed and assuaged the tedium of my recent exile in Detroit. It makes me proud to think that you sit in your little suburban home reading from my works. I can almost picture you in your arm-chair with your feet up and your lips moving. What embarrasses me is a secret conviction that you then turn to the other communicants of Old Swedes' and say: "There's a man who has a lovely prose style and once in Paris, during an air raid, he got drunk and took off my shoes for me."

A. Woollcott

To LILLY BONNER

New York City
November 20, 1931

Dear Lilly:

Well, I'm just a fool. Here I am sold down the river in so many different directions that I practically have no private life. If you could see me dictating breathless* prose while brushing my teeth in the morning, and correcting proof while applying grease-paint in the dressing-room, you would have some rough idea of my present demented state. After the opening at the Belasco ten days ago, I had reason to believe that you were getting reports from Neysa, Miss Ryan, et al. I don't know how I can supplement these, except by letting you know that we seem

to be something in the nature of a hit. At least we are doing a lively business—uncommonly good business in a season when most of the plays are dying like flies. Next, it has occurred to me that it might amuse you to see the script, accompanied by a complete set of the photographs of the production. These will go forward to you within a day or so. I had thought by this time to know what I, myself, would be doing. But I think it will need another two weeks before we can make an estimate on how long the play is likely to run, and when I know that, I can come to some conclusion about how necessary I am to it, if at all, and whether I want to go on playing it for months. My sense of freedom in the matter is somewhat tinged by the circumstance that I own a small but tender fraction of the production, and would a little prefer that it should not lose money. Of course, I'm having a robustly amusing time, and am really quite good in the play, thanks to the fact that it is an actor-proof part which fits me better than any suit I ever had did.

One advantage of my present visible preoccupation is that I don't have to go to any parties at all. The only exception in the past two months was that annual birthday party of the Krock-Kaufman-Fleischmann aggregation which brings together, by the arbitrary accident of birth, people who would not normally go within ten miles of one another. I moved from the demi-tasse right into a car and drove back to town, but the occasion did have its compensations.

It is barely possible that before the winter is out, you will get an invitation to dine with Elsie DeWolfe (Lady Mendl to you). I am very fond of her, and enjoy her company enormously. She is a really fabulous creature. She fed me before the play on Wednesday night with Lanson 1914 thrown (or rather poured) in for good measure. But she is leaving for Paris in another fortnight, and I have filled her head with the importance of getting you and Paul to come and see her. You will probably hear from her. Paul can play around with Sir Charles.

Well, dear, the call boy (who happens to be a girl, by the way) is announcing the overture, and I must go down and conceal my breaking heart under the eternal mask of the clown. In another two weeks I will be full of information about this business of my visiting Vaucresson. I hear rumors of the suggestion that I accompany the Duer-McMeins on their projected exploration of the Nile. I must impart to your private ear a resolution made several years ago never to travel anywhere with anybody except my dear George Backer, who is incapable of minding my acerbities because, in his vagueness, he doesn't even know I'm present. He is, incidentally, so ill as to alarm me. They wanted to operate on him for appendicitis, and found that a six-weeks course of treatments to reduce an enlarged liver, etc., would be necessary first. I suppose he will be operated on early in December. Much love.

A. W.

* I dictated "deathless," by the way.

To LILLY BONNER

*New York City
December 4, 1931*

Dear Lilly:

Elsie Mendl is sailing back home to Versailles this Saturday, and she carries with her (unless she has forgotten) a small gift from me to you. I cannot make up my mind whether it is a Christmas present or just something in between times. Perhaps if you really get it, and I don't happen to come to life in time to send something else, you would better call it a Christmas present. You can tell Paul that I felt fairly bitter when I examined his catalogue at Dutton's the other day and saw that he was offering for sale the first edition of *The Whilomville Stories* which I had given him for Christmas two or three

years ago. As I had paid two dollars and he is asking thirty-five, I feel that its sale at this price will involve an unearned increment in which I ought to share. The whole episode gave me a good idea. I am having that rug you gave me for Christmas last year exhibited in Sloane's window as part of the Alexander Woollcott Collection of objets d'art. I am asking a thousand for it and will give you half of what I get.

I have been busy as hell, and have had time for nothing except one hurried trip to Newark to see Maude Adams play Portia, and to become involved in a local squabble which has, I think, left none of the Swopes except Ottie speaking to me.

A. W.

TO ALFRED LUNT

New York City
December 14, 1931

Dear Alfred:

There was such a mob backstage last night, and I was so trampled under foot by the *Mourning Becomes Electra* company, that I had no time for the civilities beyond telling Henry Travers what I have been telling him for years—that he's just about my favorite actor, who never fails me whate'er betide. In the confusion I found myself out on the street again without attending to one matter that was on my mind. I wanted to hunt up this man [Eduardo] Ciannelli, whom I do not know, and tell him how beautiful I thought his performance was—especially in the last act.

When your grandchildren (on whom you have not yet made a really effective start) gather at your rheumatic knees and ask you what you did during the great depression, you can tell them that you played *Reunion in Vienna* to crowded houses, and enjoyed the whole depression enormously.

A. Woollcott

To PAUL BONNER

New York City
December 30, 1931

Dear Paul:

I was delighted beyond measure with my Christmas present. I think that, after all, I must own up to something I have always thought myself free of—the lust of possession. I know that when you had this book it created a mild flicker of interest in me, but certainly nothing comparable to the one I began to feel as soon as it was lodged here under my own roof. By the way, without any intention on my part to accumulate a library that is anything except a work-shop, mine is growing insensibly in value. This Fall Constance Collier gave me the first English edition of *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* inscribed by the author “to Ellen Ellen Ellen Ellen Terry.” The copy has a certain evidential value just now when Gordon Craig is setting up a tiny clamor to the effect that Shaw had not, as a matter of fact, made much impression on Ellen. I would have to testify she thought so little of this brain-child of his that she casually bestowed it, inscription and all, upon a boy friend. And as Constance Collier carried the boy friend off from under her nose, the book, in the whirligig of time, came into my possession.

Life hereabouts seems very congested. I myself cannot get to see the few plays that are worth seeing, and would not have seen the one big hit in town, *Reunion in Vienna*, if they had not given a Sunday night benefit for the unemployed. It is a good comedy made enchanting by its performance, particularly, I think, by Lynn [Fontanne], who plays with a kind of exquisite delicacy that can't even be described. I don't know whether you've heard anything about the play, but it is a reunion of an exiled Hapsburg who returns from driving his taxi in Nice, and after an interval of ten years sees once again the safely ensconced matron who had once been his mistress. The meeting is electric. He sees her in a mirror, turns slowly around, scorches her from

head to foot with his eyes, circles silently around her, comes close, lets his hand play over her bosom and buttocks, then slaps her in the face and gives her one long, exhausting kiss. All that time she never speaks, never moves a muscle, but when he straightens up again, you can see that she is swooning inside. Everything about her has wilted in the heat. The lady sitting in the seat behind me kept up a helpful causerie for the enlightenment of her companion. At this point she said, "You see, she ain't responsive."

There's another scene I think you might like to know about. It's the one where the returning Hapsburg has his first encounter with the old beldame (played, of course, by Helen Westley) who runs the restaurant where the reunion is effected. He can be heard speculating idly as to whether she still wears her old red flannel drawers, and at an opportune moment lifts the skirt to see. The glimpse of Helen's behind incarnadined in flannel is a nightly joy to the Guild subscribers. The other evening, unfortunately, even Helen knew by the gasp of the minor actors on the stage that she had forgotten to put them on. One saw the thing itself hung with shreds of old Jaeger like some Doré conception of the Inferno. Alfred came out of his catalepsy at last unable *not* to speak the line which was then due. It was, "Well, thank God there is one thing in Vienna that hasn't changed."

I have had it in the back of my mind all along that I would be able to crawl out from under the debris of my life along about the middle of March. If it should turn out that by then I would be well and solvent, I want to take ship for Europe, roughly dividing the next ten weeks between London, France and Spain, not necessarily in the order named. I'd like to motor in some part of France I've never seen—the Aveyron or the Dordogne. I'd like to have a look at Spain, which I have never seen, and I'd like to spend a week in London with Rebecca West, and Jeffrey Amherst, and Noel [Coward], if he is back

by then, and Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, and Siegfried Sassoon, if I can break through his door. Recently Henry [Stehli] wrecked my peace of mind by suggesting that Lilly would bounce over to America after the flight from Egypt. I do hope that you or she will write me before she departs, telling me just what her plans are. It would be too sickening if we were to cross on the Atlantic. Also, tell Lilly that I am doing up a bundle of choice reading matter in a shawl-strap, and Alice [Duer Miller] has promised to transport it in return for the privilege of sampling it en route. I think you are all going to have an enchanting trip, but I am too involved in this venture at the Belasco to be able to get out in time to join you. Besides, the damn thing has so gutted my calendar that unfinished work is piled high around me in crushing quantities.

A. Woollcott

To LAURA E. RICHARDS

[Mrs. Richards, the daughter of Julia Ward Howe and Samuel Gridley Howe, was in her eighties when Woollcott began to correspond with her. He had recently read and reviewed her memoirs, *Stepping Westward*, and this was a reminder of the pleasure her early stories, including *Captain January*, had given him. This friendship continued until her death, at the age of ninety-three.]

New York City
February 9, 1932

My dear Mrs. Richards:

I do not aspire to enrapture posterity with another Shaw-Terry correspondence, but I must write you once more if only to withdraw "paw." I am now quite sure that you do not paw, though perhaps you pounce occasionally.

Then if you don't mind, I should like to say something about the word "rubbish." I must tell you that it is an old

trick of mine to snatch, when venting some great enthusiasm, at any chance of disparagement in order to lend credibility to the bouquets I am tossing. It is a kind of back-pedaling, I suppose. As a matter of fact, the other books are all vague to me. I suppose I avoided most of them because they were written for girls. They came along in that time of my life when I read ravenously. We lived in Germantown, outside Philadelphia, and in order to get enough reading matter to last me over Sunday, I had everyone in our household (including the cook) become a subscriber to the Germantown Library, which was the lovely eighteenth century Wister Mansion set in a park. This gave me jurisdiction over four cards. I used to set forth with a small hand-cart (actually) and come home heavy-laden except on the several occasions when, coming of absent-minded stock, I appeared at the library with the letters which my mother had given me to mail, and only then discovered that, in passing the box at the corner of our street, I had posted the library cards. This misfortune used to infuriate me to tears. I have no idea which of your books I gobbled in that period but after nearly thirty-five years, I seem to recall an impassioned young woman who was dedicated to the slogan, "Cuba Libre," and also a family group named Basil, Merton and Susan D.

I can report one thing to you. No. 8 Bond Street is still standing, but No. 23 is gone. However, it must have gone recently, for the passerby can see the traces of old rooms and stairways left like scars on the wall of the building still standing next door.

One thing I looked vainly for in *Stepping Westward* and that was some allusion to Kate Douglas Wiggin. I thought your paths would have crossed somewhere in Maine. She was a great and a dear lady, and we were neighbors for many years, and I think of her often. The first letter I got in response to the *Stepping Westward* review was from her sister, Nora Smith.

And you yourself tell me there is something else you left

out of the book. So you wish now that you had "put in another story" and then add: "No matter." No matter? I am livid.

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Woollcott

To LAURA E. RICHARDS

New York City
March 15, 1932

My dear Mrs. Richards:

I seem to have accumulated a number of things to tell you. As soon as I have reported my delight in your letters and my immense gratification at the valentine, I can settle down to the business of the day. To begin with, I take it that I need not spend too much time disposing of that somewhat blurred stencil comprised in the word "sophisticate." It is used as a classification stamp on the work of all of us who, through inertia, continue to function in New York. A fair analogy would be the comic-journal notion of yesteryear that all little boys in Boston had enormous, dome-like foreheads and wore spectacles. I am under the impression that it was Gertrude Atherton who first printed this label for wide distribution. Well, the tales I could tell you about Gertrude Atherton! She didn't live in a tree with an affinity. That would have struck her as too humdrum.

You see, I am not a book reviewer at all. For too many years I was a dramatic critic, a post nicely calculated to rot the mind. After my flight from Times Square, I invented this page in *The New Yorker* where, as a kind of town crier, I can say anything that is on my mind. The trouble is that there isn't often much on it. But every once in a while I have the satisfaction, which is the breath of the journalist's nostril, of hearing bells ring all over the country. Then I know that I have had the good for-

tune to say something which a lot of people had wanted to have said. Said *for* them, that is. This happens just often enough to keep me going. It happened in the case of the piece I wrote about *Stepping Westward*. At the risk of seeming vainglorious, I must (because, after all, they are your affair, not mine) report some of these reactions to you. I do not think there has been a day in the past two months when someone has not written me about that piece. More often than not the note takes the form of someone thanking me for reminding him or her of *Captain January*. I get descriptions of angry hunts through the bookcase until the mislaid copy is run to earth in the spareroom closet. Then follows a fond reunion with a few tears for the story's sake, and for the sake of days gone by. I have received several stern letters from followers of Hildegarde. The lovely Anne Parrish tells me that she still reads them for the peace they bring her. I never knew Hildegarde, but at least her wallpaper seems to have made a vivid impression on her contemporaries.

As for that small express wagon in which I used to trundle a five-foot shelf home from the Germantown Library, I have been trying to reconstruct its contents. I make out a list for myself and it sounds implausible. I suppose it is because it underwent such violent fluctuations in the years from nine to fourteen. But I think if I could go back and stop it on any one expedition, I would find incredible variations in a single wagonload. There would be candid juvenilia written for the slower-witted boys, sandwiched between books that I could and do read now for pleasure. But I think that even at the time, I knew there were those among my favorites which were good in a sense that the others were not. I think I knew, when first I read them, that I would always like *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Little Women*, and Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age*, and Howard Pyle's *Robin Hood*, and *Captain January*. Mixed in with such treasures, and pretty much at the same time, was a good deal of addiction to Harrison Ainsworth and to Charles Reade. But above all, and

through all, and to this day, my dear Charles Dickens. My father started me when I was ten by reading *Great Expectations* to me. I still think it is the best of the lot. I had read all except *Bleak House* by the time I was twelve. Later I took on Jane Austen, and one of the reasons why I am not particularly well read today is because I have spent so large a part of the last twenty years rereading Dickens and Jane Austen. I remember Shaw admitting once to me that a concordance of his own writings would reveal the Dickens allusions as running four to one against any other writer. He told me it was a kind of shorthand, and I realized that that was what it had always been with us. If I had not known the people in Dickens as well as I knew the neighbors, I wouldn't have understood what the family were talking about half the time. My grandfather lived to be eighty-eight. Toward the end he relinquished all jurisdiction of his acres, but kept his eye on the hollyhocks, and we would know the chickens were at them by the sight of him hobbling down the steps, brandishing his cane and shouting, "Janet, donkeys!" I understand that I, myself, arrived on this scene when all the boys and girls in the family were at lessons. The tidings were clandestinely conveyed to my sister on a slip of paper which contained a sentence from *Bleak House*, the book in which they all happened to be immersed at the time. The sentence was: "A young gentleman has arrived whose name is Mr. Guppy." For some years thereafter, I was referred to in the family as Mr. Guppy.

Well, I must run now.

Alexander Woollcott

P.S. Since we're talking of favorites and the vice of rereading, I might add that the best of all biographies, to my notion, is Trevelyan's *The Early History of Charles James Fox*. I always keep a few copies on hand for distribution among the benighted. I have just been reading an advanced copy of the excellent memoir

which the present Trevelyan has written about his father. In one of the letters printed in it I notice the old man referring to the time when he, too, "commenced author." I suppose I ought to know where that phrase came from, but I don't.

A. W.

TO ROBERT BARNES RUDD

New York City
March 24, 1932

Dear Bob:

Your word reached me too late. I had already indignantly returned the drawings to him. Total strangers all over the country dump scripts of plays, novels, short stories, poems and the like on me all the time. The accompanying letter always asks if I would mind telling them whether it would be a good idea sending them to *The New Yorker*. I should think it would be so simple to send them direct and find out that way. When I sold "The Precipice" to *Young's Magazine* (or, perhaps, *The Black Cat*), I do not recall that I first mailed it to the editor's laundress to find out if she thought the editor would open the envelope when I sent it to him.

I can find no record that *Guy Domville* was ever published, but I have a notion that Thomas Beer would know if a manuscript copy were anywhere available, and I am writing to ask him. I remember reading in something of his an account of the disastrous first performance.

Speaking of John Aubrey, I have just been rereading the lovely Strachey piece about him in *Portraits in Miniature*. The realization that I will never have another book by Strachey to read gives me such a sense of impoverishment as I have never known before in reading the death notice of some writing fellow. There is a fine preface on Aubrey by his new editor, John Collier,

the young man who wrote *His Monkey Wife*. Aubrey was new to me, but that is only because Bib was my last attempt at a teacher of English literature. I have been trying to find a diagnosis of the peculiar twinge of pleasure that I get from such a first-hand witness as Aubrey. Take this passage, for instance, in the profile of Ben Jonson:

In his later time he lived in Westminster, in the house under which you passe as you goe out of the churchyard into the old palace; where he dyed.

He lies buried in the north aisle in the path of square stone (the rest is lozenge) opposite to the Scutcheon of Robertus de Ros, with this inscription only on him, in a pavement square of blew marble, about 14 inches square,

O RARE BEN JONSON

which was donne at the charge of Jack Young, afterwards knighted, who, walking there when the grave was covering, gave the Fellow eighteen pence to cutt it.

I suppose the twinge is a response to the evidence that anything so casual and unpretentious could have become, by the mellowing of time, so momentous. I know that kind of twinge keeps me in a constant state of pleasurable agitation when I read those somewhat kindred favorites, *The Fugger News-Letters*, and *Private Letters, Pagan and Christian*, edited by Lady Brook (or Brooke). There, if you like, are two absolute essentials for the browsing room. If they are not there, something must be done about it at once. If you do not know them, I cannot bear it. The best letters of the latter collection are the Christian ones, particularly those of the Bishop of Clermont, who was a seventh century fellow. You must read his account of a week-end at Arles, and of his dinner with Theodoric.

I was amused that you listed *Salvation Nell* only as an afterthought. I always associate it with you, and I am not sure we didn't see it together that Christmas vacation when I was

lodged for the night at your house on my way home from college. I probably made you buy the tickets, but perhaps we both made Hawley buy them. However, the association derives from that action of the impressionable Alicia who, as you will recall, was so affected by the play that, between the acts, she tore the corsage of violets from her bosom and thrust it into the tambourine of the Salvation Army lassie in the lobby. Sheldon roared with delight when I told him about that years ago.

I last saw Mrs. Fiske in San Francisco in June—just for a few moments in her dressing-room. I found her playing there when my boat put in from Japan. Then we were both in Cleveland in October. It was the week *Brief Moment* opened, and I was a great local success due to the fact that, in the fearful acoustics of the Hanna Theatre, the critics could hear only me and the prompter. Arriving in town on that Saturday to resume her interrupted tour in some dreadful play, she sent a note around to the stage door saying: "Dear child, many, many congratulations." Then, at Christmas time, her maid sent a note to the Belasco Theatre saying that Mrs. Fiske was too ill to pick out a book for me this Christmas, and adding: "But she bids me tell you there will be another Christmas." But there will be no other. I feel inexpressibly poorer.

Of course I loathe Gordon Craig with intensity. I have never known anyone so overweeningly pretentious with so little to show for it. His book goaded me into two pieces in *The New Yorker* some months ago. One of them was reproduced in *The Era*, a London newspaper, under the simple heading: "New York Critic's Bad Lapse in Taste."

A. W.

P.S. Good God. What a long letter.

TO CHARLES MACOMB FLANDRAU

[Flandrau's *Viva Mexico* and *Diary of a Freshman* were among Woollcott's favorite books, which he constantly urged others to read.]

New York City
March 31, 1932

My dear Mr. Flandrau:

By sending you the accompanying pamphlet (the printing house in the Middle West which published it without leave shut my mouth by giving me fifty copies), I have a chance to thank you for your letter and to report that Copey [Professor Charles Townsend Copeland] and I talked about you a few days ago when I made a pilgrimage to 15 Hollis. When I tried to find out from him why you wrote so infrequently, I discovered I was treading on difficult ground. You see, he hasn't written much either, and he would prefer that the subject should not be brought up.

I had a copy of *Viva Mexico* with me when I went to Japan a year ago this time. A young Japanese scholar named Osamu Yamada borrowed it from me with a promise to send it on to a young Swiss friend of mine in Basle. It has since been rapturously acknowledged. You will say I am like one of those women who come up to a lecturing author thinking to please the poor wretch by saying: "I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed your book. I have lent my copy to everyone I know." Poor Kate Douglas Wiggin used to lament with genuine emotion that she was the most *borrowed* author in the world.

However, this leads me at an ambling gait to the report that when I set sail from Kobe to Tientsin, I could not resist sending you a note. As the address had to be sketchy, it seemed doubtful, at the time, that you would ever get it. I merely felt obliged, for old times' sake, to exclaim at my first encounter with the Japanese: "What a wonderful little people they are!"

Then I could describe Harpo Marx's delight in the story of your old horse from *Loquacities*. But perhaps you know not Joseph and would not care that you had pleased him.

Alexander Woollcott

To BEATRICE KAUFMAN

London
December 8, 1932

Beloved friend: (that is the way my hurried notes from Mrs. Belloc Lowndes begin)

It is all so confusing. I mosey over from Berlin and find the Bonners—the bankrupt Bonners—most exquisitely ensconced. A lovely house with a hair-raising butler and five maids and a Rolls Royce. And I dine there the first night and not far down the table sits your own personal George, immaculate in a white tie and wasting gems of small talk on a Mrs. Leslie. And I come back to my hotel and learn from my mail that you think there's a chance—just a bare chance—that George *may* come to London next week.

George, whom I encountered the next evening chez the [Raymond] Masseys and the evening after that at the Savoy grill, is in a mood so benign that I think you should be alarmed. I hear he not only took all Paul's plays to read but that he *volunteered* to. At this writing (11 A.M.) he is toying with the idea of casting Paul as the doctor [in *Dinner at Eight*]. This would please Lilly and annoy Dickie [Bird] a good deal. But George just beams in a saint-like manner.

I even hear that he has offered to buy into the American rights of the new Maugham play which Rebecca [West] and I went to see the night before last and which we considered (to put it conservatively) Godawful. Seeing Rebecca again is my great delight. She is now extraordinarily beautiful, having gone over to some doctor near Vienna or Dresden and lost eleven and a half pounds the first twenty-four hours. Address furnished on request.

My immediate calendar runs something like this:

Today: Lunch with Mrs. Belloc Lowndes.

Tonight: Dinner with Lilly, then *Words and Music* with Lilly, then all to supper afterwards at the Savoy with Jeffrey.

Tomorrow: Lunch at the House of Commons with Cazalet and a dinner party with Rebecca at the Bonners.

Day after: Lunch with Robert (*Brief Moment*) Douglas and dinner at Rebecca's with Clive Bell.

Next evening: Dinner at Lady Colefax's with George and, I suppose, Edna [Ferber].

Following evening: New play with Dickie (I mean I am to be with Dickie, not the play).

Following day: Lunch at the Jardin des Gourmets (dear, dear) with that Mr. Bailey who writes the Reginald Fortune stories and dinner later at the Bonners.

Etc. Etc.: Lunch with Lady Ravensdale Thursday, dinner that night with Mrs. Lowndes and the Charles Morgans, dinner on the 20th with Lady Iddesleigh.

So you see. The same old jig. And this is the odd thing about it. I allotted myself a month of the fleshpots in London as a kind of reward for all I would have to endure in Russia. The trouble is that I had a delightful and continuously satisfactory time in Russia, so that by rights I ought now to be undergoing something pretty grim in the penitential way. I don't quite know what to do about this. Maybe God will do something about it.

As for Russia, I don't think I want to chatter about it in this fashion. I will save it up and tell you all I know, which is a good deal.

When I come back, you can climb on my lap and go through my pockets to see what Nunkie has brought you. Some comfit or trinket, I'll be bound.

I love you, my dear.

A. W.

[See note about Lady Colefax on page 161.]

To CHARLES LEDERER

[Mr. Lederer, then a young protégé of Woollcott's, has since become a successful Hollywood writer.]

London
December 31, 1932

Son of Heaven:

I am sailing home aboard the *Bremen* on the 15th. This will compel me to observe my own birthday alone on the high seas. I will be forty-six. Getting to be a big boy now.

I think you might grace the occasion by writing me a letter of such date that I would find it waiting for me in New York—a letter telling me the news of your health, present plans and the state of your immortal soul, which last I consider, without much warrant, my peculiar care. Also news of Harpo. I do not even know what continent he is now adorning. Also news of Charlie MacArthur and family.

I have seen so many earls and countesses lately that a glimpse of one so ignobly born as yourself would be refreshing. Have seen nothing of dear, dear Lady Cavendish, who once sat on this old knee. But that was when she was Adele Astaire. I understand she gets along famously with her mother-in-law, the Duchess of Devonshire. Has the Duchess saying "Oke" already. Then I suppose I should tell you about Lord Redding's recent marriage to a woman some forty years younger than himself. The *London Times* account of the wedding ended, unfortunately, with this sentence: "The bridegroom's gift to the bride was an antique pendant."

A. Woollcott

V

1933-1935

To *JEROME KERN*

Washington, D. C.
February 22, 1933

Dear Jerry:

On New Year's Night I was finishing up a week-end in a superb old place in Kent, since closed by its defeated family for lack of cash to keep it open. The younger son of the house is an incredibly charming young country squire, who was married the other day to that lovely stepdaughter of Wodehouse—a marriage made in heaven, I should say, and likely to be blessed in Kent, for the young folks were moving into one of the farm-houses to go right on with the horses, the vegetables, and the orchids.

However, we were fiddling with the radio when we tuned in on the Holland station, and what should we hear but music pouring from the finest instrument fashioned by nature in our time. And what should he be singing but the lovely song you wrote with the notion that he should sing it!

But I am writing to assure you no jury would convict if you wanted to join me in murdering Eddy Duchin. At least, until further details are available, we might begin by murdering him. It is his orchestra that plays the Brunswick record of "Egern on the Tegernsee," and the idiot who sings that melting and lovely song never took time, even with the hint the rhyme gave

him, to learn how to pronounce Tegernsee; and then, just to make things harder, he gets another line of the song wrong. "One more light," he sings, instead of "One light more." As soon as I find out who this singer is, I am going to drag him out on a cement sidewalk, take him by the throat, kneel on his stomach, and pound his head on the hard surface until it cracks like a melon. Then it will be your turn.

My God, Jerry, what a time of years it seems since Julia Sanderson was singing "They Wouldn't Believe Me," and Marion Davies was just a nobody in *Oh Boy!* Things move so fast in this age that when they revived *Show Boat* last spring, and everyone spoke of it as such a dear old classic, I began to have you confused with Elgar. It was reassuring to have you bounce right back with a score I like even better. Or at least a show I like much better, because it is *all* of it good [Kern's *Music in the Air*]. Indeed, I never have seen a musical play so well acted. Never in my life. The casting and direction are miraculous. Irving [Berlin] tells me that should be your credit. Is he right? [Walter] Slezak's performance is Godgiven, but so is that of the old girl who sings "Egern on the Tegernsee." And the one who plays the prima donna's maid, and the young woman with the sweet voice who looks like Mrs. Gilbert Miller and plays the publisher's secretary. And [Harry] Mestayer is superb. Generations of the very blue blood of the theatre entitle him to make that magnificent speech, which he does to my heart's content. I do not even mind that he mispronounces his key word. Or, at least, I do not mind much. Do take him aside and tell him he is a magnificent actor but that it is *not* pronounced "ameeteurs."

And Al Shean, Jerry. Do you know about him? He and his sister were children of an old German musician named Lafey Schoenberg, who played the small towns of Hanover for fifty years, traveling from one to the other in a cart, and who died in Chicago at the age of one hundred and one. When they came to

this country Al went to work as a pants-presser, and the sister made lace in a tenement. Al was known as the fastest presser south of Rivington Street, but he had a passion for singing swipes. He was always organizing quartets and being fired for practicing in the can during working hours. Once, when a whole quartet was fired it went right into vaudeville as the Manhattan Comedy Four. This success inflamed the sister. It was too late for her to go on the stage, what with her five children and all, so she decided *they* must, and then pushed them into the theatre, although they and the theatre both resisted strenuously. Of course you know they are the Marx brothers. When their star went into the ascendant in 1924 the Gallagher and Shean partnership had broken up, and Mrs. Marx was faithless enough to think Al had better go into the ginger ale business. And now look at him. Playing so legitimately. Playing so beautifully. She would have been so proud and happy.

Well, I guess I am just an old fool about *Music in the Air*. I haven't been a third time, but that is because circumstances have sequestered me here for several weeks. I did rush around again to see it the night before I left town. Several times I found tears pouring from these old ducts. Very likely it was from fatigue. Or perhaps I had a cold.

As I write this letter, I find myself working up into a mood that will not be satisfied until I have done a war dance on *Music in the Air* in *The New Yorker*. To assist me, will you rush me, if you can, the name of the criminal who sings the Brunswick record, so that I can put him on the spot? Also, if it is not too difficult, will you have someone at the office send me here a transcript of the speech Mestayer makes from the orchestra pit?

While I was in London, under the most engaging circumstances, I received as a gift from the relict of Alice Meynell a Dickens item which I have reason to think must be new to you,

and which I shall be glad to let you see if you want it. I could send it to you by registered mail.

Well, God bless you and keep you. Keep you going, I mean. I would not go so far as to call you a sight for sore eyes, but I would call you a boon for sore hearts, and there is not your like in all the world today.

A. Woolcott

To EDNA FERBER

Washington, D. C.
February 23, 1933

Dear Ferber:

Speaking of [Jules] Bledsoe, did you ever hear of his misdeed in Lancaster, Pa.? He was in the cast of *Deep River*, an American opera which Arthur Hopkins produced in one of his more bemused interludes. Arthur was so absorbed in the task of trying to prevent the members of the cast from becoming operatic on him that other details escaped him—such as the fact that the music wasn't very good, and that the young romantical New Orleans hero was being played by an Italian Jew from Frankfort who spoke an English strangely resembling Sam Bernard's.

Anyway, Arthur was determined that none of the singers should attack their arias by turning head on to the audience and letting them rip. Perfect docility in this matter marked all the rehearsals, but when they opened in Lancaster, Bledsoe sniffed the audience. It was an old-fashioned stage with an apron. Turning, he walked forward to the footlights, squared his shoulders, threw back his head, and emitted his song. Arthur was embedded in a packed audience, oblivious of them, forgetful that the rehearsals were over. At Bledsoe's defiance, he half raised from his seat and ejaculated, "The son of a bitch!" A woman sitting in front

of him turned around and muttered angrily, "If you don't like it you can get your money back." "I wish to God I could," said Arthur and stamped out. It seems the woman was wrong, by a margin of \$120,000.

My meditative seclusion here is interrupted only by occasional debauches with Arthur Krock, Alice Longworth, Cissy Patterson, the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate and House Committees on Agriculture, Russell Owen, Pat Sturhahn, and a few relatives.

Be sure to order in advance a copy of *The Werewolf of Paris*, a magnificently monstrous book which that sinister ruffian, Johnny Farrar, is going to publish late in March.

Remember that your heart is God's little garden.

A. W.

To THORNTON WILDER

New York City
March 11, 1933

Dear Thornton:

I wish I already had the house in the country I'm going out to look for today. Will you come and stay a month some time? A winter month, I think. The point is that if you are reading *Great Expectations*, I ought to be in the next room so you could come in from time to time and report that you have just met Mr. Pumblechook and Herbert Pocket and Trabb's boy. And I could tell you how Shaw (mistakenly) points to Estella as proof that Dickens *could* paint a real heroine. Estella, he says, is Mrs. Patrick Campbell to the life. Which is the wildest nonsense, but shows what he thinks of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Did Ruth [Gordon] ever tell you of that luncheon in our villa when Shaw talked about Stella Campbell for an hour and a half until Mrs. Shaw was driven to beating a tattoo with her

salad fork as a way of warning him that she couldn't stand another word on the subject?

I think I am taking Ruth to see *The Cherry Orchard* Wednesday night. I would love taking you, too, if you wanted to come along. Anyway, send me back *Cosette* as it's my only copy.

A. W.

To BEATRICE KAUFMAN

Neshobe Island, Vt.
May 31, 1933

Beatrice:

You must come here some part of this and every summer. It is my favorite place in all the world. I am simply exhausted from buttering so many griddle cakes and can write no more.

A. W.

To LILLY BONNER

New York City
September 13, 1933

Dear Lilly:

It was to me highly exciting to hear your voice coming out of Surrey, that peculiar soprano chirp which you reserve for the telephone and "Au clair de la lune." I shall soon indulge myself again in the luxury of hearing it. It seemed to come from just around the corner, and I had a feeling that I ought to be hurrying to Locust Valley to sleep under the uproar of the play room and hear about your troubles with the oil burner and join with Frederick in idle speculation as to whether Mr. Backer would or would not come.

The play, at the moment of writing, is called *The Dark*

Tower, and should go into rehearsals on October 23rd with George [Kaufman] and me directing jointly. I do not know who will be in it, but there is talk of Margalo Gillmore, Louis Calhern, Ernest Lawford, Margaret Dale and others you wouldn't know. The leading part, which is as yet uncast, presents certain unusual requirements, and during the next six weeks I suppose we will try out a lot of people in it. My own candidate is Henry Clapp Smith, and on Saturday night he and George and I are meeting secretly at the Music Box and rehearsing one or two scenes as a sample. This is heavily confidential and should not be mentioned in any letter you may be dashing off to the folks at home.

It has taken me over two years to recover from the painful experience of having Locust Valley shot from under me. I have finally pulled myself together, and on October 5th will open a country estate, nominally my own, but really held in partnership by Beatrice, Sam Behrman and myself, and open to all our friends who feel like paying so much a night. Such a pity that you and Paul never thought of this. Joe Hennessey will be in charge and we shall have eight months to experiment. We have taken an enchanting house at Katonah until the first of June.

I enjoyed the week-end at the Backers. They are living for the present in the old Mortimer Schiff house in East Norwich—beautiful grounds and an interior of stupefying ugliness. I had Adele's room, a dainty boudoir about the size of the Pennsylvania Depot. There was a great coming and going of Berlins, Fatios and the like, and all passed off pleasantly.

I suppose you want to hear the latest Swope story. Burdened with Gerald Brooks as a croquet partner, he became so violent that Brooks agreed to do only what he was told and thereafter became a mute automaton, a condition which Swope enjoyed hugely. Brooks never moved his mallet or approached a ball without being told by Swope: "Now, Brooksy, you go through this wicket. That's fine. Now you shoot down to position. Per-

fect!" And so on. Finally, before an enthralled audience, Swope said: "Now you hit that ball up here in the road. That's right. Now you put your little foot on *your* ball and drive the other buckety-buckety off into the orchard. Perfect!" It was only then, from the shrieks of the onlookers, that Swope discovered it was his own ball which had been driven off.

The stream of passersby is unmoderated. Tell Sibyl [Lady Colefax] that Thornton Wilder came in last night all chuckles. The other day we heard an uproar under my window. It was Alice Longworth discovering that I lived here and dragging Wild Bill [Colonel William J.] Donovan up to see me. I am lurching tomorrow with William Gillette. The Lunts arrive from Genesee Depot tomorrow afternoon. They sail on the *Bremen* for Stockholm, Helsingfors and Moscow before returning to London in November. Then Egypt and then London again.

I vastly enjoyed a visit from Mrs. Pat Campbell last week. She came here to dinner, bringing with her a snow-white Pekinese named Moonbeam. In her little black velvet vanity bag, in addition to her powder-puff, lipstick, handkerchief, small change and letters from Shaw, she had a chicken bone with which to feed him after his performance in her play. We talked about her book of memoirs, which was published ten years ago, and I objected to it only on the ground that she had kept the reader in ignorance of her most salient characteristic—a disposition to make devastating remarks. She denied ever having made any in her life, but I would not hear any such nonsense. Why, I said, even in the book the cloven hoof shows occasionally. "Ah!" she said. "But that's on the foot that's in the grave now." At eight o'clock I put her in a taxi, and she and Moonbeam went off to the theatre. An hour later, when I was going out myself, the doorman told me apologetically that the taxi driver had come back in a state of considerable frenzy when he found she had paid him in what was not really legal tender. I made good the deficit by redeeming two shillings, which are on my desk as I write you.

Harpo calls from Hollywood to say that he will be here in two or three weeks, and after perhaps another two or three weeks, will go on to Europe, taking his harp with him and giving performances by himself in Vienna, Budapest and possibly Moscow. Recently he shaved off all his hair and is, I am told, a singularly repellent object. The other night Winchell announced that he was secretly married in January to a Miss Susan Fleming. Harpo denied this, but not, I thought, very vigorously.

I think you must arrange to come here in January. Let Paul take his safari, or his mufti, or wallah, or whatever it is called, to the Sudan. You hop on a boat and come here under an assumed name. I will give you my apartment, where you can hide from all the Stehlis and Bonners, and run in next door to Alice for meals.

Alexander W.

P.S. By the way, I am starting broadcasting tonight. Wednesdays and Fridays at 10.30, Columbia Network, national hook-up, sustaining program, topical broadcast. It's a thing I have been wanting to do for years, and now they are letting me try it. After a month of experiment, I ought to be pretty good. I am so frantically busy this week that I ought not be writing you at all. And I darkly suspect that I have dictated this letter over my breakfast coffee as a means of limbering up before tackling the broadcast.

A. W.

P.P.S. Alfred [Lunt] just rushed in and out—hysterical because he has lost his passport.

To THORNTON WILDER

New York City
September 18, 1933

Dear Thornton:

I am chiefly writing to tell you that the Ben Hechts have, on the Palisades at Nyack, one of the most unbelievably desirable houses I ever stepped into. The other night I lay in Ben's bed and wished him dead, and that his inconsolable widow would go to Cyprus for five years so that I might rent her house. It is vastly improved by the fact that the Hechts themselves are in Los Angeles and have given the place to Master Charles Lederer. I have decided to break it to him that you and Alice Miller and I are coming up on Saturday to spend the week-end with him. You could sit all day in the gazebo and look down the Hudson toward the sea. Twenty houses down the main street of Nyack dwell the MacArthurs. Charlie MacArthur will by then have arrived from Hollywood, Helen [Hayes—Mrs. Charles MacArthur] will be full of her rehearsals for *Mary of Scotland*, and we will see something of that somewhat different house-guest, Miss Ruth Gordon.

We can wrestle about the book over the week-end, but I should warn you you are likely to be thrown over the Palisades. I am inviting readers of *The New Yorker* to give me a title, but I suspect none of them will be as good as the one Lederer has just devised. He suggests "I Told You So." I am also running the letter I got from Nora Waln's daughter. I think I showed it to you. It is my guess it will escape from its present flimsy fetters and have a life of its own in the anthologies.

A. W.

[The final title, *While Rome Burns*, was suggested by one of the readers of *The New Yorker*. The note from Nora Waln's daughter, defending her from his strictures on *The House of Exile*, ended with this sentence which Woollcott often repeated: "My conclusion is that you are not a bad man but a too hasty one."]

To FRODE JENSEN

[The full story of Woollcott's relationship to Frode Jensen, a young Dane who became a doctor in America, is told on page 305.]

New York City
September 26, 1933

My dear Mr. Jensen:

Your nomination of a title is on file. It will be duly considered and doubtless rejected. What delights me far more than your knack for naming a book is the evidence in your letter that you are not going to Jefferson after all. My acquaintance with that medical school was both sketchy and out of date, but even so, I had an uneasy feeling you were heading in the wrong direction.

Both for Grace Root's sake and your own, I wish you would feel that this flat of mine on the East River is a place to which you can come any time you feel, as I know newcomers to New York must sometimes feel, that you need a neighbor. As a sign of good faith I hereby give you my private telephone number, which is Plaza 3-0199. If you will call any morning after nine o'clock, you will track me down. Since I am not making this offer as a matter of form, I hope you will have an unburdened feeling that you can make use of it whenever you want to. As I grow older, I become acutely aware that I have few privileges as valuable as the occasional privilege of being of service to people like you.

Yours respectfully,
A. Woollcott

To FRANK SULLIVAN

[The friendship with this fellow-columnist began on the New York World.]

*New York City
December 14, 1933*

Dear Frank:

I should like to dine with you Monday evening. I think that old room at the Plaza is closed evenings but the other room is pretty nearly as good. What do you say to meeting me there or at the chez Pulitzer, where a cocktail assemblage seems to be scheduled for that evening. Telephone here and leave word tomorrow. I shall be rushing around the Atlantic Littoral on sundry trains and boats, but don't envy me too much, for this life of ceaseless fame and adulation has its drawbacks just as your own obscure one has.

A. W.

To LYNN FONTANNE and ALFRED LUNT

*New York City
February 1, 1934*

My dear children:

I have started so many letters to you only to get interrupted by this treadmill which, with indefatigable energy, I seem to have constructed for myself. My life as a broadcaster, which completely enthalls me, also leaves me so little time that, except for an occasional trip to the water-closet, I do nothing else. I submit to this the more cheerfully because I know it will all end the first of June when I go off to Vermont for four months. Until then the radio will keep me on a short tether and anyway I start next week a series of fifteen lectures at Columbia University which would not let me get very far away.

I did have some thought (Noel may have told you) of writing Sibyl a letter beginning something like this:

"Dear, dear Sibyl:

It is hard on you, for I can imagine how they must be pestering you all the time, but it is a great relief to us to have the Lunts out of America. I don't mind Alfred having a touch of the tar-brush, or Lynn being seventy-six if she's a day, my dear, but their habit of lying in a stupor and clad in nothing but rather soiled loin-cloths in the middle of Fifth Avenue did play hob with the traffic. Their excuse for this rather degenerate fatigue was that exhausting season in Design for Living. I keep telling them they should have played a repertory of Macbeth, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra and Le Cid. This would have left them feeling fresh and invigorated. Or possibly dead. In any event and etc., etc."

I say I thought of sending this to Sibyl (and enclosing a carbon for you) but it seemed upon reflection a laborious jest. And, anyway, that now famous incident still mystifies me. As it has come to me second- and third-hand, it just doesn't make sense. There is a missing piece in the puzzle.

Of *The Dark Tower* I can report only that it was a tremendous success except for the minor detail that people wouldn't come to see it. Yet it really was a kind of success at that. I mean that we enjoyed it enormously and it seemed to be attended with great relish by all of the people (without exception) whose good opinion I would respect and therefore want. Then, thanks to the movie rights, it brought me in rather more money than I am used to getting for the same amount of work. George Kaufman seems to think that Gilbert [Miller] is going to do it in London this spring. On this point I am skeptical but [Rudolf] Kommer is at work on the translation for Vienna and the Scandinavian rights have just been applied for and Random House has published the play and altogether the episode baffles me. If all this befalls one who writes a flop, what happens when one writes a success?

Since I seem to be reporting on my own activities I might

add that I bounced around the other day and wrote and played the leading role in a movie short. It was a speculative response to a man's suggestion that I make a great string of them. I am to go around and see it tomorrow but I go without much interest as I cannot imagine any offer sufficiently tempting to make me go through another such day. It was, I think, the dullest and most exhausting day I ever spent. I did think it would have the compensation of novelty and that I could at least extract some copy from it, but by noon I was so numb with fatigue and so indignant at my own stupidity in becoming involved in such nonsense that I never knew what happened during the rest of the day.

I have so much to tell you. If you will come to the island on your way home I will tell you about Harpo's return from Muscovy, about Lilly Bonner's birthday which we are celebrating tomorrow, about that hulking young prodigy [Orson Welles] who is off touring with Kit Cornell, about my ripe romance with Miss Cornelia Lunt, which is the delight of my declining years, about Bob Sherwood's expulsion of Mary [Sherwood] from his bed and board, about my pretty brawl with Edna Ferber, who has announced to the world at large that she is "weary of the tyranny of this New Jersey Nero," about certain overtures of forgiveness from Kathleen Norris which embarrass me because of my guilty knowledge that the offending article is already incorporated intact in the book I am publishing next month. I could tell you how Master Charles Lederer was evicted from the Warwick (Alas, poor Warwick!) for non-payment of room rent and how, when the manager went around to throw him out, he was peculiarly annoyed by a message that the defaulter was even then shopping at Cartier's. Oddly enough, this was true. He was designing a Christmas present for Alice Miller; a breast-pin in the form of a scarlet letter A.

The other evening when Lilly and I had succeeded in escaping from Paul, we both agreed that you two were the only people in the world we enjoyed as much together as apart. It's

just as well perhaps. I enclose a few oddments from my mail. You might send them on to Romney [Brent]. I hear that you are a prodigious success and it must be fun for you both and I should like to know, please, when you are coming home.

Duckey Dee

To *ALFRED LUNT* and *LYNN FONTANNE*

New York City
June 7, 1934

My dear children:

Well, it seems I didn't come over after all. My expectation of coming was always slight and I found as the time approached that I couldn't manage even a flying trip. You see, after letting myself get involved in an imbecile congestion of overwork I really cracked up rather badly and decided from the depth of my bed at the Medical Center to lead a new life. This involved four months of relaxed and serene existence in Vermont and I have been busy clearing the decks for that purpose. Taking off weight by a new and rather hazardous medication, which is part of the program, has already progressed so far that I am probably in better physical shape than you have ever found me. I have already lost more than thirty pounds and intend thus to dwindle with dignity until there shall be no other word for me but lissome. Lissome my children and you shall hear—

In that entrancing letter you wrote me you spoke of coming direct to the island from the stage door of the Lyric Theatre and though I take it that was only a gesture, I shall at least go through the form of telling you that I shall stand for no such nonsense. The island is my favorite spot in the world but that is partly from habit and association and I would not think of allowing its charm to be subjected to the strain of having it

visited by two people whose minds were all intent on getting to Genesee Depot as fast as their legs would carry them. I will not have you flopping around in my lake thinking all the while how much you would rather be in that new swimming pool of yours. It is my hope and expectation to stay at the island at least until the middle of October and it is my great hope that both of you will come and visit me there some time late in the summer or early in the Fall. Just now it is undergoing prodigies of renovation. I am putting in electric lights, refrigeration, new beds and a score of other things, and all out of my own pocket, to the great and unfeeling delight of the other members. But what of it, I say. Didn't I just get my share of the cool \$100 paid down for the Czechoslovakian rights of *The Dark Tower*? While in this mood I bought me one of the new Chrysler cars. And Pip, my coal-black French poodle, has been taking lessons on the dirt roads of Westchester County on how to go motoring without throwing up on the upholstery. A kind Italian gentleman named Angelo undertook for a small consideration to take him out every day in the station wagon. Well, all this is a foreword to a series of casual excursions around Vermont during the summer whenever I get restless at the island or whenever it is visited by people I don't much like. There will only be three jobs I will really have to do. Those are three lectures on journalism I am going to give at Bread Loaf. Bread Loaf is the summer school of Middlebury College. It is on a small mountain top overlooking Lake Dunmore about fifteen minutes drive from the island. I think the notion of doing something equivalent to teaching in Vermont will appeal to my deep and unsatisfied neighborhood instinct which has been starved. The great excursion will come a little later when Lederer arrives from the coast (I mean Charles, not Francis) and with him at the wheel and Pip in the back seat we will repair to Kennebunkport for a visit to the Tarkingtons.

Helen [Hayes] has been replaced by Margalo [Gillmore]

in *Mary of Scotland* and will leave in another fortnight for the coast. Charlie [MacArthur] and Ben [Hecht] are in ecstasy as moving picture producers in Astoria (it is their naughty and admirable aim to destroy Hollywood). Ruth Gordon's son is now a feature of the American scene. Guthrie [McClintic] has just bought a play written by Beatrice Kaufman and Peggy Pulitzer. Edna Ferber has just unnerved Jack Wilson by renting his Connecticut house for the summer. Kit [Cornell] will shortly wind up an enormously successful tour which has made a pot of money and taken her to seventy-one different cities this season. The best current joke is an anonymous one by whatever person described *The Shining Hour* as the English *Tobacco Road*. When, as I wrote Noel, the *Times* inadvertently billed the new Arch Selwyn production " 'Cora Potts' without Francine Larrimore," it was Howard Dietz who exclaimed, "What a cast!"

I am not sure whether this story by a young Englishman named James Hilton [*Good-bye, Mr. Chips*], for which I have been lustily beating the drum, has yet been published in England. It comes out tomorrow as a small book and on the chance that you may not have seen it I am sending you a copy by the same mail. I feel it will take me a week of listening to catch up with you. After a lot of adding and subtracting I would be inclined to say that the past year has been the most generally satisfying one I have ever spent. The chief flaw in it was that you two who are both most dear to me were flourishing so far away.

Alexander W.

To NOEL COWARD

Bomoseen, Vt.
August 11, 1934

Dear Noel:

Your little pencilled scrawl filled me with a great and unexpected longing to see you. I had heard about your illness in the most belated and roundabout fashion. Your Mr. Lunt mentioned it in a hurried letter, breaking it to me gently by saying that you had almost died and then going on laughingly to matters of more real interest to him. As a friendly and endearing note from Temple in the same mail had failed to mention your indisposition at all, I was then at a loss to guess how serious it might have been.

I am considerably upset about this course of action pursued by the fourth and a half Earl. With the exception of Mrs. Stanley Baldwin and two or three articed clarks living near Liverpool, the entire citizenry of the British Empire has written me with great enthusiasm about *While Rome Burns*, all explaining that they had borrowed their copy from Earl Amherst. This would seem to indicate that thanks to his lordship's lavishness all sales of the book in England and the Dominions had been rendered unnecessary. I hope the little bleached son of a bitch fries in hell. As there now seems to be no hope of your buying a copy, I might as well send you one and will do so when I return to New York in October. In the interval I am happily ensconced on my island. I get news of the outside world in the form of telegrams which are telephoned from Rutland to a boatman living on the shore who takes them down in a firm Spencerian hand and gives them to his son to bring over to me in a motor boat. This makes my favorite occupation guessing what the sender really intended to say. Thus, when the Lunts recently threatened to visit me, I was thrown into an agreeable state of agitation by a distracted telegram from Alfred which said that Lynn was "too ill to take Johnny." Her condition seemed, indeed,

desperate. I enclose a clipping which will show you that we here in the colonies keep up with your work.

By the way, put an order in at Hatchard's for a copy of a new novel by Charles Brackett called *Entirely Surrounded*. It is to be published by Knopf on August 27th. The scene is our island and all the characters will be painfully recognizable. Neysa [McMein] comes off best. The portrait of Dorothy Parker [Mrs. Alan Campbell] is the most astonishingly skillful and the owner of the island is a repulsive behemoth with elfin manners whom you would be the first to recognize. He is named Thaddeus Hulbert and makes his first appearance playing backgammon with an English actor at a party. He calls a passing redhead to his side. I quote:

"The fat man clapped a plump, well-molded hand, with dice in the palm, against Henry's copper-colored hair, rubbed it back and forth. 'Now I double; do you take it?' 'Uncle Thaddeus is in wine,' the fat man's opponent observed in clipped British accents. 'I take it, Duck.' Henry had seen the speaker's tired, eager, charm-furrowed face behind footlights: Nigel Farraday."

It is a charming book; and now, my blemish, au revoir.
A. Woollcott

To LYNN FONTANNE

Bomoseen, Vt.
September 25, 1934

Dear Lynn:

Thanks for letting me see these Graham Robertson letters. Anything he puts down on paper, even when he seems to do it most casually, acquires at once an incomparable and unmistakable bouquet. Of course everything he said about the movies warmed the cockles of my heart, but even so I don't

think he goes to the bottom of the matter. I think that even if the scenes and furniture subsided the result would still be essentially dissatisfying. There is something false and ugly in the very idea of a talkie. There is something inherently and permanently outrageous in a talking photograph. It is like that exhibit which won the first prize in The Bad Taste Exhibition held in New York a few years ago. It was a Venus de Milo with a clock in her stomach—obviously offensive but undebatably so. It just was, that's all.

I am just back from a flying trip to New York but already my days here are numbered. I shall creep back to work more unwillingly than ever before in my life for this is the only place in the world I really like. I seem destined to return. When the club acquired the island a number of years ago, the original owner held out for himself a small plot in case he should ever want to build a house on it for himself. This summer, either as a threat or out of pique, he actually started to build the house and at least got the masonry done—it is a small stone cottage with a huge fireplace—before he paused dramatically for breath. In that pause I bought him out, so that now the month of October will be spent in finishing his job and when I come back next spring I will find a house of my own ready for occupancy. As long as the club continues to function happily I shall use it in the daytime as a studio where George Kaufman can write his plays and Alice Miller can type out her profitable serials for *The Saturday Evening Post*. There will be two bedrooms in it where we can tuck away at night those guests who peculiarly resent the island custom of getting up noisily about seven o'clock. Those of us who are hardy enough to favor the sunrise swim always emerge in the morning with a great deal of clatter and there has been some snarling about this from those who prefer to remain unconscious until noon.

Graham's letters have set me to thinking about him as I do a good deal. One of the games I play with myself as I lie in the

sun is to select the five pictures which I would like to own and have in my own house. Even if there could be only five, one of them would certainly have to be the Sargent portrait of him when he was such a young man as I wish I might have known. He assures me that that young man and I would have got on together famously and I suppose he knows.

I start broadcasting on October 7th, sponsored by Cream of Wheat. I don't know how I shall enjoy being served out every Sunday night with a cereal as if I were so much cream and sugar. It is peculiarly ironic that I should thus be helping to sell a product which in my new austerity I may not indulge in. My net loss to date is fifty-five pounds. This alteration of contour has driven my tailor to the verge of madness. By a rather neat trick he is turning all my coats into double-breasted ones but out of each pair of trousers they are having to remove enough cloth to outfit half the unemployed.

I am going to be in Chicago on October 25th, a fleeting trip that will leave me no time to come up and see you.

Alexander Dee

To ROSALIND RICHARDS

New York City
October 20, 1934

My dear Miss Richards:

This is a secret and confidential communication which I am trusting you to answer on the sly. As I gather you know, I am doing a weekly fandango on the radio. I am of two minds how much I object to being served with Cream of Wheat but there is no other way to get a good hour on a nation-wide hook-up. In these broadcasts I am having considerable fun serenading my ten favorite Americans. I have

done Mr. Tarkington already and next week we are going to do Irving Berlin and after him Walt Disney and Charles Chaplin. We get the victim's permission and ask him to tell us what song he would like to have sung under his hypothetical window. I am writing you to tell me, out of your knowledge of the lady in question, whether your mother would be more pleased than annoyed if I were to visit upon her one of these honest but conspicuous and reverberant attentions. Will you consult your own judgment and advise me privily at the address on this stationery?

I cannot begin to tell you how much I enjoyed my visit to Indian Point. I consider that all the years I never knew Mrs. Richards were just years wasted by one of destiny's monstrous mismanagements.

There is some palaver to and fro as to whether I should or should not lecture this winter at Bowdoin. I don't know how the matter stands at present but it does sound to me like a good chance to come up to Gardiner for a dish of tea.

Yours sincerely,

A. Woollcott

To IRA GERSHWIN

New York City
November 10, 1934

Ira Gershwin:

Listen, you contumacious rat, don't throw your dreary tomes at me. I'll give you an elegant dinner at a restaurant of your own choosing and sing to you between the courses if you can produce one writer or speaker, with an ear for the English language which you genuinely respect, who uses "disinterested" in the sense you are now trying to bolster up. I did

look it up in my own vast Oxford dictionary a few years ago only to be told that it had been obsolete since the seventeenth century. I haven't looked up the indices in your letter because, after all, my own word in such matters is final. Indeed, current use of the word in the seventeenth century sense is a ghetto barbarism I had previously thought confined to the vocabularies of Ben Hecht and Jed Harris. Surely, my child, you must see that if "disinterested" is, in our time, intended to convey a special shade of the word "unselfish" it is a clumsy business to try to make it also serve another meaning. That would be like the nit-wit practice of the woman who uses her husband's razor to sharpen her pencil. The point of the pencil may emerge, but the razor is never good again for its peculiar purpose.

Hoping you fry in hell, I remain

Yours affectionately,

A. W.

To ROSALIND RICHARDS

New York City
November 19, 1934

My dear Miss Richards:

My plans are jelling beautifully. The Town Crier wants to serenade Mrs. Richards on the evening of Sunday, December 9th, and as I know precisely what she would like to have sung, I need not bother to ask and therefore need not even tell her she is going to be serenaded. We could make it a surprise party and I know just how to do it if you will trust me and act as a fellow conspirator. All I would need would be some kind of last minute telegraphic assurance from you that she would be listening at nine o'clock.

I had a most pleasant visit (and some good sherry) with your brother at St. Paul's. That is a lovely pencil portrait he has

of Mrs. Richards on his wall. I besought him to have a photostat made of it so that I may have one. I hope that you will prod him about this in the course of time if he forgets.

And in the meanwhile, mum's the word.

Yours sincerely,

A. Woollcott

To *HAROLD K. GUINZBURG*

[From 1934 on, Woollcott's books were published by The Viking Press.
Mr. Guinzburg is head of the firm.]

New York City
November 19, 1934

Dear David:

I suppose some statistician in advertising would be able to tell anyone how many households see both the *New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune* on Sundays. But even without any more evidence than that of my own senses, I would, were I a publisher, regard the use of the same page ad in both book sections as proof positive of somebody's laziness and lack of resource.

From time to time I will thus send you hints, for I am always glad to do anything I can to put the publishing business flat on its ass.

Yours with great affection,

A. Woollcott

To MALCOLM COWLEY

[Mr. Cowley was then, as he is again, one of the editors of *The New Republic*.]

New York City
December 7, 1934

My dear Mr. Cowley:

I was deeply interested in your informed and sagacious piece on Proust which you were good enough to send me. But I am puzzled beyond expression by the following sentence: "But Mr. Woollcott, being so eager to have the job well done, should have done it himself or come forward with a better translator." Quite aside from the fact that no public notice was served about the fearful dearth which led to Dr. Blossom's selection as translator, I am puzzled by your implied conception of a reviewer's function. It recalls the happy, far off days when, as a dramatic critic, I ventured to regret in print that a prima donna had, throughout the premiere of an operetta, sung firmly off key. Her ringing riposte was a public statement to the effect that she would have liked to hear *me* sing that role. Of course, she wouldn't have liked it at all. People are so inexact in moments of stress.

Yours sincerely,
Alexander Woollcott

To MISS K. R. SORBER

[The first two letters in this collection were written to Miss Sorber.]

New York City
January 4, 1935

My dear Miss Sorber:

Of course I remember you and most gratefully. In my first day at school I was clapped into Miss Montgomery's class and after the first recess lost my way and

showed up in your room instead. This was a terrifying experience but you were so sympathetic in steering me to where I belonged that I looked forward to being in your class the following year. I remember when in one report you gave me excellent in every subject except penmanship, which you reported as "fair but improving." Later it deteriorated in so marked a manner that I now use the typewriter exclusively.

Since you already have a book of mine, I send you an inscription to paste on its flyleaf.

Alexander Woollcott

To DOROTHY PARKER

New York City
February 7, 1935

My dear Dorothy:

Your letter was a source of great delight to me, except in one particular. You say nothing about when you are coming back. Even if you continue to be the pet of Hollywood for years to come, won't there be intervals when you might visit us here?

I, too, have not been idle. I am working anonymously (hysterical laughter) in the new Hecht-MacArthur picture [*The Scoundrel*] of which Noel [Coward] is the star. My previous experiences under the Klieg lights had seemed to me unbearably tedious. Once in Brittany, for several weeks, I was ward master in a base hospital and carried bed pans to *and from* moribund Negro stevedores. I found my foolhardy attempts to act for the camera somehow more degrading. But it did seem likely that, with Charlie and Ben directing in their cockeyed fashion and Noel fluttering about the studio (his name in Astoria is "Czar of all the Rushes"), it might be fun. It seems I was wrong about this,

but, as they won't need me more than four days all told, the damage is inconsiderable. At that, I did extract a wintry smile from one episode. Did I ever tell you about Owen Davis directing his first play, which was called *Through the Breakers*? He had asked an agency to send him over eleven actors but no one had told him he was at liberty to comment on their work during rehearsals, so when it grew unbearable he would dismiss the company for lunch and then gumshoe after the individual members on the street, whispering his criticisms to them singly. As a director Charlie is tempered by a similar diffidence. After I had said one line ninety-seven times and begun to forget what it was, he walked past me and ventured a criticism out of the corner of his mouth. What he said was that he thought my reading of the line was "just a bit too violet." But in consideration for my somewhat exaggerated sensitivity, he spoke so softly I thought he said my reading was "a bit too violent." In subsequent renditions therefore I tried to subdue somewhat my too virile manner and, as I watched him out of the corner of my eye, he did look a bit frustrated.

Professor [Robert Barnes] Rudd has just passed this way on his annual visit with a good story about one of his sophomores who, in an English exam, was asked to compare *Moll Flanders* with some contemporary novel. He elected to compare it with *Penrod* of which he thought more highly because the story of *Penrod* exhibited a more wholesome home life.

Alexander Woollcott

To HAROLD K. GUINZBURG

New York City
March 1, 1935

Dear David:

These are the facts:

- 1: Departing for Chicago on the night of March 3rd.
- 2: Address until March 20th Hotel Blackstone.
- 3: Lecture at the Convocation at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, on the morning of March 7th.
- 4: Broadcast from Chicago Sunday evening, March 10th.
Later the same evening, Thornton Wilder, Gertrude Stein and I will be the guests of some undergraduate honor society for several hours of continuous high discourse.
- 5: March 12th, lecture Northwestern University.
- 6: March 14th, lecture Toledo.
- 7: March 15th, lecture Detroit.
- 8: March 17th, broadcast from Chicago.
- 9: March 18th, lecture Indianapolis.
- 10: March 19th, visiting with the Tarkingtons and inspecting Foster Hall.
- 11: March 20th, lecture Chicago University.
- 12: March 23rd, Signet Club dinner, Harvard.
- 13: March 24th, broadcast from New York City.
- 14: March 26th, visit to Laura E. Richards, Gardiner, Maine.
- 15: March 27th, lecture Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine.
- 16: March 31st, broadcast from New York City.
- 17: April 1st, death of Mr. Woollcott, as thousands cheer.
- 18: April 2nd, dancing in the streets; half-holiday in all the schools; bank moratorium.
- 19: Burial at sea April 3rd.

Alexander Woollcott

To COLONEL WILLIAM J. DONOVAN

["Wild Bill" Donovan, now a Brigadier General and head of the Office of Strategic Services, won his first claim to fame as Colonel of the famous Sixty-Ninth Regiment in the first World War.]

New York City
May 1, 1935

Dear Bill:

Incidentally, the editors of *Fortune* recently had what seems to me a brilliant editorial idea. Wishing to have a candid and detached profile of George the Fifth written for their magazine, they found it impossible to get one from any Englishman and in desperation sent Archibald MacLeish to London to get the material. It was part of their project that his manuscript should be annotated, however sarcastically, by some representative Englishman. And that these marginalia should be presented to the reader together with the original text. For this purpose Winston Churchill was enlisted but his word-rate for this patriotic service proved so ruinous that he was abandoned as a collaborator.

The idea, however, is still a good one. And often in reading a book I have wished I could absorb it with certain corrective annotations. Such a book is the one called *Road to War* by the same Walter Millis of the *Herald Tribune* staff who wrote *The Martial Spirit*. In *Road to War*, which is the May choice of the Book-of-the-Month Club, Millis writes a chronological history of the factors which, working between 1914 and 1917, involved this somewhat startled country in the Great War. It is an illuminating and disturbing book which I would like to read aloud to half a dozen men in order to elicit their instinctive comment on it. I would, for instance, like to have a copy annotated by Newton Baker and another copy annotated by you.

Perhaps some day after you have read the book, as you inevitably and reluctantly will, you may come to dinner with me and tell me over the coffee cups the thoughts it wrings from you.

In the meantime, I remain your humble if somewhat recalcitrant servant,

A. Woollcott

To W. GRAHAM ROBERTSON

[As a painter, scenic designer, writer, playwright, and collector, Mr. Robertson figured in the world of Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt. Woollcott saw him on his last visit to London in 1941.]

*Bomoseen, Vt.
August 1, 1935*

Dear Graham Robertson,

From the wealth of data given above you may learn where I am spending the summer, as so often before, in a healing torpor. Ours is a pine-clad island a mile from shore. In summer it looks like a green tea-cosy, in winter like a birthday cake. We are always finding arrowheads on our island—left behind since the days when Vermont was so spunky a possession of the British Crown that it declared its independence fourteen years before the other colonies and so small a one that nobody—not even George the Third—noticed the defection.

My friend Pip [the black poodle] has always had a strong sense of private property. Last year any stranger was met at the dock by Pip and ordered to leave at once. But this year he even objects to rowboats and canoes from the mainland if they venture merely to encircle us. This keeps him pretty busy and he is exhausted by nightfall, but, singlehanded, he has created a valuable legend in this part of the country that we keep three bloodhounds to repel invaders.

All of my neighbors who cherish French poodles owe their interest in them to Booth Tarkington's various accounts of his dear Gamin, this many years dust in some such apple orchard as your own. Tarkington himself swore he would never own an

other—too much of an anxiety in these days when motor cars whiz past on every road. Then last Fall, when he found all his disciples so happy with their poodles, he weakened. Now a chic and engaging black clown named Figaro is the focus of the Tarkington household. I stopped off to see the two of them when I was lecturing in Indianapolis in March and already Figaro was so elegantly accomplished a gentleman as to make my Pip seem—by comparison—a country bumpkin who had never had any advantages.

All through luncheon Figaro sat in his cushioned window seat looking pensively at the leafless trees and thinking, I am reasonably certain, of squirrels. But the arrival of the coffee (carried in by a coal-black gentleman named, I am glad to say, Ethelbert Gillmore) was apparently a signal. Anyway, Figaro came mysteriously to life and stared expectant at his master, who asked if he were feeling pious. It seems he was. Or at least fairly pious. He did rush to the wall and plant both forepaws on a chair which stood beneath a primitive Italian Madonna, but his mind was not really upon his devotions and he kept peering round at us as if more interested in earthly rewards. Reproved for such half-hearted orisons, he then buried his head deep, deep between his paws, so that he became—from the tip of his tail to the now invisible tip of his nose—a woolly arc of contrition. "Are you a miserable sinner?" Tarkington asked. A faint moan came from the woolly arc. "Are you"—much louder this time—"a miserable sinner?" A considerable groan from Figaro. "*Are you a miserable sinner?*" This final repetition elicited a very wail from an humble and a contrite heart. "Amen!" at which cue Figaro came bounding from church and was rewarded with a cracker.

Mr. Tarkington now writes me that he is teaching him to blush. It sounds like a stiff course. I shall drive over to the Maine coast in September to investigate the progress being made.

When next I pull myself together, it will be to do a piece

on "The Brotherhood of the French Poodle." There must be a place of honor in it for your Mouton, whose grave I have ceremoniously visited and whose portrait is part of a canvas which will again be one of my best reasons for a visit to London next spring.

But the main purpose of this letter is to report that I have heard from the Lunts all about their temerarious proposal that you visit America, of all places. From dependable spies I hear that their *Shrew* is a sumptuous delight. When it reopens in September for a trial flight before the New York premiere, I shall go out on the road to see it, so that I may tell the country all about it when I resume broadcasting in October. If and when you do come to America, I hope to have due notice, so that I may be on the dock when your ship comes in and help create the illusion that ours is an hospitable country.

Alexander Woollcott

To MRS. OTIS SKINNER

Bomoseen, Vt.
August 2, 1935

My dear Mrs. Skinner,

I think you would have enjoyed—or at least been struck by—the sight of me at breakfast Wednesday. I had come in from swimming and was at table alone, using bits of toast to scoop up that incomparable honey and weeping steadily because once again I had come to the great healing last chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*. It always chokes me up and fills me with a love of mankind which sometimes lasts till noon of the following day.

Tell Mr. Skinner I enjoy having *The Fight* and that his signature has not changed an iota since he gave me his autograph when I was in school. That collection began with the

signature of Anna Held, with whom I was infatuated. I used to write the most seductive letters to get them. I remember assuring Mary Mannering that I was her old admirer (at fifteen, to be exact) and well-wisher. I am not sure whence I got that archaic locution. Out of *Richard Carvel*, probably.

I enjoyed your visit to my dear island.

Alexander Woollcott

To D. G. KENNEDY

[This young Hamilton alumnus first caught Woollcott's attention through an amusing fan letter. Woollcott replied, and from this beginning a firm friendship evolved.]

*Bomoseen, Vt.
August 16, 1935*

Dear Gerry:

As for the island, I shall be here intermittently throughout September and perhaps you and Folley could stop off on your way back to school. If this should prove feasible you might telegraph on to find out if I am here. On receipt of such a telegram I would not leave unless I were going anyway.

I enjoyed your letter, with its familiar accent of hero worship faintly tinged with contempt. Even so, I could not be stirred out of my torpor to answer it were it not for the fact that I have news which I wish you would transmit to that Brazilian beauty who will run the Theta Delt house next year and whose name I cannot spell. Jerome Kern, made irrational by the broadcasts of the Hamilton Choir, has decided to send his favorite nephew to Hamilton. This nephew is a seventeen-year-old tot, six feet and one inch in height and reputed to be handsome, wholesome and sufficiently prepared to get into Hamilton. I should like to have the Theta Delt get first look at him. Will you see that that Rio rascal communicates with me on the subject?

Hoping that your yellow gloves have become somewhat dimmed with the passing of time, I beg to remain

Yours fraternally,

A. Woollcott

To HAROLD K. GUINZBURG

Bomoseen, Vt.
August 16, 1935

Dear David:

I enclose two letters. The one from Rebecca [West] I would like to have back by return mail. The other one can be thrown in the scrapbasket.

I am in receipt of your instructions (conveyed by postal card specifically transmitted by the S.S. *Bremen*, you dirty roscher) to report all matters to you on your return. I have no specific news beyond the fact that I have recklessly committed myself to another broadcast series beginning October 6th, and my entire day is now spent in dreading the necessity of quitting this island as soon as that.

The amiable [Marshall] Best seems to be taking *The Woollcott Reader* seriously. I wish I could have a talk with you or with him about it before I have to start work on my part of it, about which I feel some perplexity. What I am trying to do is to find some unity in the collection and I can't even begin to look for it until I know what the collection is.

All this discussion by mail will be unnecessary if you happen to be coming this way in the near future. I wish you could forget your mischpokah and business and come on the receipt of this letter. What looks like an entrancing aggregation will be coming and going throughout the week. But from the 24th on until Labor Day there is at least a threat of our being too crowded for comfort. Of course I could always make room for you in Beatrice's bed, and I suppose you won't mind eating in

the men's toilet. You could defeat this ugly prospect by getting here first and helping me repel invaders, but between now and the 24th I can offer you Neysa, Harpo, Lederer, Beatrice, Irene Castle, Dr. [William] Mann (head of the Washington Zoo) and the Lunts. The Lunts will occupy my house on the top of the hill. Perhaps you could arrange a design for living with them.

Letters about "WRB" [*While Rome Burns*] continue to trickle in, including one this week from a reader in Berlin who took dignified exception to one incident in the chapter called "The Sacred Grove." Chap named Hanfstaengl. Incidentally, in a correspondence with Earle Walbridge of the Harvard Club Library, I had recourse to the abbreviation employed in the preceding anecdote and it only made matters worse because he thought I was talking about William Rose Benét.

My badminton has improved. Nothing to boast about yet. It's like the triumph of an idiot child finally learning to say boo.

A. W.

P.S. I am nuts in a quiet way about *The Circus of Doctor Lao*.

P.P.S. Harpo was caught by M.G.M. as he was getting into the plane today. He will be held up another ten days. This means the congestion will be less grievous and you can come any time, but the sooner the better for me.

To FRODE IENSEN

Beverly Hills, Calif.
November 20, 1935

Dear Frode:

I should have written you after my agreeable visit in Winnetka, but there seems to be an incredible amount of business to do, and words from me on this trip will be few and

far between. I approve highly of the Leonards—I think the old man is a good deal of a darling. You will have to take an entire summer off each year to teach him how to pronounce Frode.

I am glad to think that you are keeping an eye on Eleanora [von Mendelssohn], who has had such lousy luck that I can't bear to think of it. Fortunately for me, I haven't time to think of anything. There are more old friends of mine in this corner of the world than I had suspected—more, in fact, than I like, because I want to spend my time, if possible, with Chaplin, Disney and a few others whom I came out to see. I have had a long dinner with Chaplin, an enchanting visit with Disney, a congested cocktail party at Dorothy Parker's (at the peak of which Marc Connelly decided to tell me in a loud voice that my article on him in the *Ladies' Home Journal* was the meanest, cruelest and most malicious thing that had been done to him in fifteen years). And now tonight I am off to dinner with Dashiell Hammett, who shares my ideas, if not my feelings, about the Lamson case. Commander Brown is off playing tennis with Harpo's Susan (I think Harpo would better hurry back), and we are all going off Sunday evening to attend divine services under the guidance of Aimee Semple McPherson.

What day do you leave for Chicago?

A. W.

To PAUL HARPER

[The agency Mr. Harper represented handled the Cream of Wheat account which sponsored Woollcott's radio program.]

New York City
November 22, 1935

My dear Harper:

This is an answer to your official letter of November 22nd in which you announce that:

"The Cream of Wheat Corporation is unwilling to continue the broadcasts after December 29th unless you will agree to refrain from including in your broadcasts material of a controversial nature which, in our opinion, would be offensive to individuals or groups in the radio audience."

This paragraph would be unintelligible to anyone who had not previously read your letter of November 14th in which you transmitted this message from Mr. Thomson and Mr. Clifford of the Cream of Wheat Corporation:

"They went on to say that they preferred that you didn't make any more caustic references to people like Hitler and Mussolini as there are large racial groups who are apt to be antagonized by these references."

Now, in these broadcasts the Town Crier has for several years been freely reporting his likes and dislikes on the books, plays, pictures, prejudices, manners and customs of the day. In undertaking such an oral column, he could not with self-respect agree in advance never to take pot shots at such targets as Hitler or Mussolini. Or, for that matter, at any other bully, lyncher or jingo whose head happened to come within shooting distance. If he did embark upon a series thus hamstrung in advance, his own interest in the broadcasts would so dwindle that they would deteriorate in short order.

I am entirely in sympathy with the viewpoint of Mr. Bull and his Cream of Wheat associates. If they think an occasional glancing blow antagonizes old customers or drives away new ones it would be folly for them to address their advertising to such an audience as I might assemble. It is my own guess that the allusions complained of have no such effect. It would seem to me as reasonable to expect every crack at Hitler to send all the Jews in America rushing to the grocery stores to stock up with Cream of Wheat. It would be as reasonable to assume that the [Sir John] Buchan broadcast (which Mr. Bull so highly

approved) with its hands-across-the-sea, England-and-America shoulder-to-shoulder theme, alienated from Cream of Wheat every Irish listener and all those whom Mr. Hearst and Father Coughlin have industriously filled with a distrust of the English. It would be as reasonable to fear that the November 10th broadcast, which you yourself loudly applauded, may have so infuriated the Scotch that they all reverted to oatmeal in a body. I have said enough to make clear what a blank check I would be signing if I recklessly promised to omit all controversial material. Before each broadcast, you see, there would be so much honest disagreement as to what material was controversial. The irony of this impasse lies in my own suspicion that it is these very elements which most promote interest in the series. The only reason I don't indulge in them oftener is because I believe they are more effective when infrequently used. They lend the series salt, provoke discussion, whip up attendance and enlarge the audience. The sponsor is therefore most worried by the broadcast which serves him best. At least, that is my guess, which may be as good as Mr. Bull's but need not be any better. And after all, it is his business and not mine.

I have overheard enough of the experiences of other broadcasters to suspect that it would be difficult to find anywhere among the big national advertisers a sponsor who would be as considerate, liberal and agreeable as the Cream of Wheat people have been throughout all our dealings. This would seem to indicate that the Town Crier is unlikely to find any other sponsor willing to meet the terms he must insist on so long as he uses the now established formula which inevitably represents him as one citizen leaning over the fence and talking freely to his neighbors. And since all the good time on the great networks has been pre-empted by advertisers, that in turn would mean I must drop out of national broadcasting altogether, which, as you know, would be a solution entirely acceptable to me. I would merely be driven back to the comparative privacy of the

printed page where, in my own opinion, I belong and where, at long last, I might get some writing done.

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Woollcott

P.S. By the way, in your final paragraph you say that I have "declined to accept any restrictions made by the sponsor" in my choice of material. When you wrote that sentence you must have been either absent-minded or disingenuous. I told you yesterday that I had no objection whatever to letting your representative cut out of my script any joke, anecdote or phrase which, in his opinion, was either coarse or suggestive. If you still do not recall this promise, [Leggett] Brown may be able to refresh your memory.

One other point. You yourself asked why I should ever need to introduce controversial matter into a broadcast since I could so easily let off steam in the various publications to which I can always contribute. Unfortunately, this suggestion is impractical. I find the weekly preparation of the next broadcast and the consequences of the preceding one so time-consuming that when I am broadcasting I am unable to do any other kind of work. I haven't even time left to write a post card to the folks.

A. W.

TO THE EDITOR, WORLD HERALD,
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

San Mateo, Calif.
December 19, 1935

Dear Sir:

May I not, as the late Woodrow Wilson used to say, call your attention to an editorial which appeared in your issue of December 9th under the caption "The Woollcott Menace"? It has found its way out to me here in San Mateo, out in the

great open spaces where men are menace. And as it reiterates a frequently repeated allegation, I am experimenting, for the first time in some years, in the luxury of answering it—for publication or not, as you see fit.

It is the substance of this editorial that as a recommender of books over the radio, I take advantage of a nation-wide network to further the sale of soft, sentimental works. "Marshmallows" was the term employed. Since this series of broadcasts began, I have cast my oral vote for the following works:

Paths of Glory, by Humphrey Cobb

Life with Father, by Clarence Day

North to the Orient, by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Valiant Is the Word for Carrie, by Barry Benefield

I Write as I Please, by Walter Duranty

The Woollcott Reader, an anthology of seventeen authors ranging from J. M. Barrie to Evelyn Waugh.

In addition to these there have been brief parenthetical bursts of applause for

Death and General Putnam, by Arthur Guiterman

Mrs. Astor's Horse, by Stanley Walker

It is quite impossible for any literate adult to think that this list represents pink publications for pale people. If these be "marshmallows," then I am the Grand Duchess Marie.

What interests me in this instance is the apparent lack of journalistic conscience manifested by the editorial I complain of. If that editorial was written by someone who would think of that list as so many marshmallows, it was the work of a fool. If it was written by someone who was not even familiar with what books I had recommended, it was the work of a knave. Neither alternative is agreeable for a colleague to contemplate. Of course, there is always the third possibility that your editorial writer is a nicely balanced mixture of the two.

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Woollcott

VI

1936-1937

To *FRODE JENSEN*

Santa Fe, New Mexico

January 8, 1936

Dear Frode:

You might begin telephoning the apartment along about the 21st to see if I have come back. You will have to move fast if you want to catch me before I go away again.

As for the ceremonies planned for Winnetka on September 12th, I think you would do well to find someone else to stand up with you. Whether you can lure Hennessey and Brown to the midlands at that time of year you can discover only from them. I have no idea where they will be in September or by whom employed. I have no idea on what continent I will be in September.

Even if I were to be in or near Chicago on September 12th I would strongly advise against your engaging me as best man. I can tell you right now what poisonous thoughts I would be thinking all during the ceremony. I should be wondering whose love of display and whose servility to fashion had ordained a church wedding with flocks of ushers and bridesmaids for a young couple for whose life immediately thereafter such a parade would be a grotesquely inappropriate inaugural. I should be thinking how much better the money thus squandered could

have been spent by any young couple upon their immediate necessities. I should be wondering whose interests were being consulted instead of those of the bride and groom, the only people whose interests ought to be consulted. I should be thinking that if you and Deb [Deborah Leonard] had slipped over to Middlebury and been married with the legal minimum of witnesses, how much more grace and dignity that wedding would have had. If you have read thus far even your slow Scandinavian mind must have taken in the fact that I think church weddings are vulgar and stupid. They seem to me as much out of date and as essentially useless as a banquet photograph.

Having thus brightened your day and suspecting that if I am the best man you could think of, your plight must be pretty desperate, I remain,

Yours with deep affection,

Alexander Woollcott

To *FRODE JENSEN*

Chicago, Ill.

January 15, 1936

Dear Frode:

I doubt if my stern letter distressed you unduly. I did have the notion that you might show it to Deb and that she might show it to her father and that—possibly—a great light might then dawn on him. This would have extricated you young people from a burdensome mess and I still think it's worth trying—at least if Deb is with you and me in this matter. Maybe she herself wants to wallow in orange blossoms, roto-gravures and sweaty ushers. However, I realize that there are factors involved in the problem of which I know nothing and which—from a distance—I cannot sufficiently take into account. So I will say no more.

After all, as you both must dimly suspect, you are my joy and pride and no good or ill fortune can come to you without my sharing it. I may even so far forget my preferences as to attend the repellent ceremonies you are planning, but I cannot possibly decide that question until you finally tell me when they are to be held.

I shall arrive in New York in false whiskers on the morning of Monday the 20th, but don't tell anyone.

Your affectionate uncle

A. Woollcott

To MRS. NEWTON D. BAKER

[Mr. Baker was Secretary of War under President Wilson.]

New York City
February 3, 1936

My dear Mrs. Baker:

When I first went abroad in the unsuspecting spring of 1914 I was a saucer-eyed young journalist sent by the *New York Times* and bent on storing up all kinds of impressions against the time when I should be old enough to sit in the sun and remember. Among my great occasions was an invitation to have tea with Barrie in his mullioned aerie in Adelphi Terrace. I went there intending to note Barrie's every syllable for subsequent relation to my grandchildren. I was so excited by the sheer eventfulness of meeting him that I talked a blue streak and in the two hours and a half I was there he never got a word in edgewise. I will say that once or twice he tried to interrupt, but I struck him down.

I suspect you will find something vaguely familiar in this episode. For a good many obscure reasons, at some of which you could not possibly guess, I was enormously exhilarated by the household in which I found myself on the 19th of the

month just past. If I were a real neighbor and could come in once in a while this would subside to manageable proportions. The irony of it lies in the fact that, of the deficiencies in my life of which I am most acutely and hungrily aware, one is the need to have more contact with minds like Mr. Baker's. Such contact would give me the refreshment, correction and stimulation I am most desperately in need of. And what do I do when I get a chance to sit at his feet and listen? I know what I do. I drown him out. I drown him out and I shout him down and perform on trapezes and, like the man in his own very bad story, forget what I came for. By the way, you tell him the best variant of that is the helpless little boy who went to the druggist. "What's the matter?" asked the old apothecary. "Did you forget what you came for?"

"Oh, yes," said the boy, much relieved, "that's it. Camphor."

I often find myself thinking what fun it would be to live in a town of two hundred people provided I could name the two hundred—name the editor of the paper and the priest with whom I would talk over the affairs of the parish and the atheist with whom I would play cribbage at the corner saloon. Mr. Baker could have any job in that town he wants.

Will you tell him for me that in 1934 Ian Colvin wrote the second and final volume of the life of Lord Carson which had been left unfinished by the obnoxious and self-slain Eddie Marjoribanks. Tell him also, please, that among the jobs I hope to do when I go to London on the 20th is to persuade the publishers of the *Notable British Trials* to put out a volume which would contain the complete record of the Archer-Shee case. You might also tell Mr. Baker that I am counting on his sending me not only Mr. Wilson's commutation decisions in the four capital cases during the war, but, if possible, the memoranda on which he based those decisions.

I have had the translucent paper-cutter and ruler outfitted

with a new and unsullied glass. I now brandish it so effectively that I am more like Mrs. Fiske than ever.

Yours sincerely,

Alexander Woollcott

To *LADY COLEFAX*

[Lady Colefax's hospitality greatly increased Woollcott's enjoyment of his trips to England, as before the war she was hostess to many figures in the literary, political and artistic worlds. Now she has turned her salon into a canteen.]

On Board S.S. Manhattan
April 10, 1936

Dear Sibyl,

This shall be posted at Queenstown to tell you how kindly and how fondly I am aware of the part you play in making any visit of mine to London something to enjoy at the time and long afterwards when I am old and can only sit in the sun and remember. You have a great talent for friendship and I count myself fortunate in knowing you

Alexander W.

To *LUCY CHRISTIE DRAGE*

[Lucy Drage's daughter, Betty, with her husband, Fred Harvey, was killed in an airplane crash a few days after she disembarked from the *Manhattan* in New York.]

New York City
May 13, 1936

Dear Lucy:

It was only at the last minute that I decided to come back on the *Manhattan*, which left Southampton on the evening of the 9th. I had been planning to return on the *Aquitania*

which left the day before, but my chief objective overseas was a meeting with J. W. Dunne. He lives down near Banbury in Oxfordshire but was staying with his mother at Montreux throughout the winter and was so late in returning to England that I could visit him at all only by staying over a day. I had rather counted on spending most of the return trip on the *Aquitania* in the company of Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, an enchanting old woman who is a great crony of mine. However, my friend, George Backer, would be returning on the *Manhattan*. He and I came down from London to Southampton together for the midnight sailing.

My eyes were hardly open next morning when the assistant to the Chief Steward popped in with the gracious announcement that I was to sit at the Captain's table. I am much too old a bird to be caught by that bait any more. Sometimes I have to work up the theory that I am hard at work on something and must be left undisturbed to read throughout dinner. Thereafter I always have to keep the title of my book out of sight for fear it will be discovered that my researches are in detective literature. But this time I had Backer for an excuse. We would be eating together, I explained. Much shocked, the assistant retired. When news of my recalcitrance reached the Chief Steward he came in personally to repeat the invitation and, as a special inducement, offered the information that I would be sitting next to a Mrs. Harvey, the daughter of an old friend of mine. I replied that Mrs. Harvey might desert the Captain and sit with us if she wanted to, but that I was much too irregular and unsocial a traveler ever to sit at the Captain's table. I was afraid this might seem a trifle churlish so I sent around a note to Betty's cabin asking her to have cocktails with me in the bar that evening.

I had seen her only once or twice and that so many years ago that I wasn't sure I would know her and kept inspecting every youngish woman who came into the bar. But when Betty

herself arrived, there was no mistaking her—very lovely looking and radiantly healthy and particularly attractive to me because of her beautiful walk. She was being indulged by the line with a large, hideous sitting-room all to herself. And everywhere she carried her new dog, a tiny three-months-old Australian terrier, so small that it could stand on my cigarette case and so fierce that it repelled all invaders. Its name was Sophia. Poor Sophia; I see that the newspapers mistook her for a monkey.

Betty and I became great friends at once. She used to call me every morning and demand that I come around to her cabin for coffee and every evening I used to carry her away for coffee and liqueurs after dinner. This used to annoy the old Captain tremendously. He didn't like this at all because he liked Betty. He wrote me quite a desolate note about her. He had implored her not to fly.

Betty and I had long talks together. She told me so much about you and her father and Charley and Charley's wife and Charley's baby and David—not so much recent things as things long ago, her troubles with Charley and the cures she had taken him to, her close bond with David and the time when she went to Pomfret to see him and found him in trouble and got him out of it (he had been caught smoking, I believe, and was going to be expelled and Betty saw the headmaster and burst into a torrent of old Christie tears and got him forgiven). I take it she had no great respect for or confidence in Charley's marriage and was skeptical about his and its future. I gathered, too, that she had always adored her father and that everything he had ever said and done was the most tender memory to her. What she thought of Fred Harvey I have no notion. Not the faintest. But you were the great enthusiasm of her life. I gathered as much from a hundred things she said to me and from what she said to other people. I am not inventing this to comfort you. Indeed you must know I am not. You must know how much she admired you and how she felt about you.

She was a good deal of a surprise to me. I cannot remember now where in some past years I had picked up the notion that she was superficial and scatterbrained. Instead I found her wise and grave and realistic and extraordinarily perceptive. I did, however, get the impression that this was a new phase of her, that she was but recently matured, that if she had a real serenity it was something she had recently achieved. From things she told me and from things she didn't know she was telling me I gathered she had been through some storm, with tormented, twitching nerves and the like, but that she had come out of all that as a person comes at last out of fever. She was clear-eyed and composed and enormously in possession of herself, as if she knew just where she was going and how to get there. I found myself enjoying her company and admiring her profoundly. As you know, this is no polite afterthought. I am so glad I wrote you that note on her last Saturday. You must have found it in your mail on Monday morning if you saw your mail on Monday morning.

The last morning she and Backer and I loitered together in the sun of the open deck as the ship waited at Quarantine and then came slowly up the Bay. After we docked, I did not see her again because she was planning to leave her maid to pilot the luggage through the customs while she herself departed immediately with Fred to whatever hotel he had picked out. She went off with my telephone number in her purse and, just before she started West, she called me up. I was not in, but my maid took the message. Mrs. Harvey was leaving and wanted me to be sure and send her the address of my camp as she wanted to wire me and tell me when she was coming to the island. You see, it had been all fixed that she was to visit us this summer in Vermont.

Alexander W.

To LADY COLEFAX

New York City
May 14, 1936

Dear Sibyl:

Along with this same mail I am sending you a copy of a novel Charley Brackett wrote about the island. I can't for the life of me remember whether you ever saw it.

However, I am writing you now for quite another purpose. I am in some slight embarrassment because I happen to be privy to the secret of a Christmas present you are going to get. And it is my notion that it might be a convenience to you to know about it in advance. After some irresolution I decided to tip you off. But you need say nothing about it and must be as surprised as one o'clock when the time comes. In brief, a half-dozen of your American friends, fearfully annoyed at the prospect of not seeing you for a long time, have decided to give you for Christmas (instead of a pair of candlesticks or even book-ends) a trip to America with all expenses paid, including three weeks of debauchery in New York. It is our idea that you would best enjoy cashing this check some time after the Christmas holidays. January, perhaps, or something like that.

I would throw in as one detail the promise of a dinner party for you at my new house but I cannot at the moment of going to press tell you precisely where that will be. The offer for the house I want has been made and is now in the hands of the Surrogate and some sort of decision may be handed down even while this note to you is on the Atlantic. I find one is extremely vulnerable when, as rarely happens with me, one happens to want something a lot.

By the time this reaches you I will have shifted my base to the island for the summer. My address there, as you know, is Bomoseen, Vermont. I still think often and gratefully of the

good times you gave me when I was last in London. I set great store by my friendship with you.

Alexander W.

P.S. I have gone onto a heroic diet in an effort to keep my weight from becoming a peril and an inconvenience so I couldn't munch on those chocolate pebbles of yours even if I were in London. But what about that enchanting aroma as of burning pinewood that greets the guests as they step across the threshold? How is that produced? Is it some kind of tea that you have smoldering in the umbrella stands? If so, how and where could I get some?

To LADY COLEFAX

Bomoseen, Vt.
July 8, 1936

Dear Sibyl:

One of my favorite people in all the world seems likely to come to England for several months in the Fall. I am so anxious that his visit should be happy that I shall have to repress from motives of common sense and economy an impulse to go over and manage it for him. His name is Robert Barnes Rudd and you would be simply enchanted with him. He was a classmate of mine at school. While I was starting work on the *Times* to learn my trade he went to Merton for three years. Now he is a professor of English literature at our college and is the somewhat surprised father of five incredibly beautiful children. Being slightly insane, he and his wife and all five children are sailing for Marseilles in August and will stay with her brother who has a farm near Pau. Once they are all planted there, Bob will leave them flat and go on to London for the weeks between early September and Christmas. I suppose he will go down to Oxford for a while for old time's sake, but mostly he wants to stay in London and do some reading. His sole problem will

be financial. I assume he will have to live on next to nothing at all, but he is used to that. I know he will want to call on Graham Robertson for he too belongs to the brotherhood of the poodle, and you are just the person to see that he is in on one or two experiences that would provide pleasant memories for him to take home with him. I will have a greater notion of what these might be before the time comes and I will write you again.

Alexander W.

P.S. I have been having a debauch of reading, including a colossal life of Andrew Johnson, the wretched man who was shot into the presidency by the assassination of Lincoln and who was the chief victim of the post-war hate which always takes the naïve human race by surprise. In the persecution of Johnson, one of the chief villains was a corrupt and flagrant Congressman who was later Grant's running mate in the next election. And why am I telling all this to you? Because his name was Colfax—Schuyler Colfax. He was known as Smilar Colfax and appears to have been a good deal of a louse. I thought you would like to know.

To MARGARET MITCHELL

Bomoseen, Vt.
August 7, 1936

My dear Miss Mitchell:

I have just finished reading *Gone With the Wind* and found it completely absorbing. Its narrative has the directness and gusto of Dumas. I enjoyed it enormously. I was almost through it when I said to myself: "God's nightgown! This must be the Peg Mitchell who wrote me once about the little girl who swallowed a water moccasin and the tall man in

the wrinkled nurse's uniform who thronged the road from Atlanta to Miami." Is it?

If your royalties have begun to come in, kindly send a large share of them as per the enclosed instructions and oblige

A. Woollcott

To *RALPH HAYES*

[Secretary to Newton D. Baker during the first World War.]

Bomoseen, Vt.
August 8, 1936

Dear Ralph:

In the matter of the coming election, I will attempt here only to report that I, myself, intend to vote for Franklin Roosevelt. I was driven into his arms through the peculiar repulsiveness of his opponents. In 1918 I had some misgivings about the course Woodrow Wilson was taking, but at that time, and immediately thereafter, one had to go along with him in order to avoid even seeming to reinforce such swine as Henry Cabot Lodge. The crowd that has been grooming Landon seem to me indistinguishable from the element that gave us Warren Harding. As you know, I could have wished another than Franklin Roosevelt to have been nominated in 1932. Now I devoutly hope he will be re-elected.

A. Woollcott

To *MRS. HENDRICK EUSTIS*

Bomoseen, Vt.
August 10, 1936

Gruesome Grace:

The island is perfect now, and I can't help thinking that any time you spend flouncing around Hollywood

will be just so much wear and tear. I am able to report that Beatrice's chairs will have arrived before the week is out and that the Duchess [A. W.'s black shepherd dog] has had a bath, a quasi-public affair in the shallows of the lake in the manner of the late Susannah. She appeared to enjoy it, and I must confess to a marked improvement. Her reputation on the mainland has advanced by leaps and bounds due to the decision of a boatload of assorted females to land at the point. The Duchess decided they shouldn't and attacked in so startling a manner that they were all half drowned trying to get into their boat and launch it at the same time. You never heard such shrieks. An arena full of edible early Christians must have sounded something like this.

Black Neysa is becoming a tough baby. She rackets around with the boys a good deal and has even developed a habit of charging down to the shore and mewing at passing motor boats in what she imagines is an intimidating manner.

I stopped off at chez MacLeish on my way back. Your health and whereabouts were publicly inquired after. I think they will be up here soon—perhaps this week, more probably during the week of the 17th.

Leggett Brown tells me he is devoting some of his time to preparing Hollywood for your arrival.

A. W.

To STEPHEN EARLY

[Woollcott's friendship with President Roosevelt's secretary began when they were on the *Stars and Stripes* together in 1918.]

Bomoseen, Vt.
September 10, 1936

Dear Steve:

This note is a sequel to our talk across the luncheon table (you paid the check) last February. I am now seeking your sober advice as to whether a Roosevelt broadcast by me—let us

say a fifteen minute declaration of my reasons for thinking the country would be best served by his re-election—would be so valuable a contribution that I ought to make it despite my several private reasons for wishing not to do any radio work this Fall at all.

And if you do think I should thus do my bit, please tell me how and through whom I should make the offer. Here is my perplexity. I am reluctant to seem fussy and self-important but after all the whole point of my letting out a peep is the fact that I am reputed to have a considerable radio following. I don't want to enter in at all unless the offer is considered important enough to insure some preliminary drum-beating in order to assemble at least a part of that audience.

I think if I'd been lost like Stefansson in the Arctic for several years and returning, had heard only the arguments against Mr. Roosevelt, I should have decided, on the strength of them alone, to vote for him. I had heard those same arguments before—the same words from the same people. Then they were launched against Theodore Roosevelt and later against Woodrow Wilson. The last time they were triumphant they ushered in normalcy and Warren Harding.

A. Woollcott

To RALPH HAYES

*Bomoseen, Vt.
September 28, 1936*

Dear Ralph:

You should have received ere now evidence aplenty that your letter posted to this address came to hand. I can't be pried loose from this hide-out before the middle of October. After that, I shall go into winter quarters at Sneden Landing,

having sold my flat to Noel Coward in one of my recurrent spasms of dislike for New York.

I read Mr. Baker's piece in *Foreign Affairs* with tremendous satisfaction, plus considerable exhilaration. He has the best prose style of any living American and I doubt if he realizes it or cares much. I sent five copies of the issue to sundry friends, but I hope it will soon be available as a modestly priced book. This is so obvious a publishing project that I assume it is even now issuing from some press, but you never can tell and on the chance, I suggested to my own publishers that they try to get it. That's the way Little Brown got *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*. It had caused a small sensation in *The Atlantic* but no one had thought of making a book out of it.

Well, I must run now and look up "pixilated" in the dictionary.

A. Woollcott

P.S. On October 20th I'm going to do a broadcast telling why I'm voting for Roosevelt. The real reason is as persuasive, I should think, as any I could manufacture. I want to disassociate myself from the swine who, almost in a body, are out for Landon. Some good men are out for Landon. All the heels are.

To STEPHEN EARLY

New York City
October 20, 1936

Dear Steve:

Something—possibly your stepping on High—produced immediate action. At least I am now scheduled for WABC on Tuesday, the 27th, 10.45 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, and announcements to that effect are already going out over the air

and will, I assume, be printed in the radio programs on Sunday.

I wish I might have spoken sooner only because I must now give the impression of one who took the precaution to wait and pick a winner. Judging from all I hear in this neck of the woods, anyone who rushes out now to declare himself for Roosevelt is a little like someone having the impertinence to "discover" a neglected little work like *Gone With the Wind*. Aside from that, I shall speak for your chief with the great enthusiasm I really feel.

After Election I shall be in Washington for a few days during the fortnight of Noel Coward's engagement. I have known him since he was a shabby youngster in his teens who either ate at the expense of some rich wage slave like himself or didn't eat at all. It is part of the ritual of the American theatre that old Uncle Woollcott should go down on these occasions and hold his hand during the tremors of a try-out. I shall also be there collecting a hundred dollars from Alice Longworth, who will owe me same after the returns are in on Election Day.

Good luck, and God bless you.

Alexander Woollcott

To LILLY BONNER

New York City
October 31, 1936

Dear Lilly:

My immense enjoyment of the new *Hamlet* here was complicated all during the first half of the performance by my agonized inability to think who it was [John] Gielgud looked like. It was about the middle of the Closet Scene that it came to me. In every detail of feature, walk, voice, manner and what not, he is the spitting image of you.

Then I must tell you about my tremendous enjoyment of

the hunting season this year in Vermont. It's the first time I've ever really enjoyed a hunting season. It was pretty bad when all the nimrods began arriving the last of September. The island was carpeted with pointers, and these Daniel Boones stood around hefting their guns in the familiar manner I find so fatiguing to watch. Then, when the first came, they went out each morning at dawn and came back late at sundown with not a Goddamn bird. It didn't lessen their discomfiture that I named them the Audubon Society. Finally, at the rate of about one a day, they did accumulate four partridges. These were hung high on the wall of the house outside the kitchen door against Thursday night's dinner. Thursday afternoon the cook went to pluck them and found that the Black Duchess, my shepherd dog, was just polishing off the third. She's now known all over Vermont as Woollcott's bird dog.

The Black Duchess and my cat, Black Neysa, will be coming down to live with me in New York this winter, as I have sublet Hope Williams' apartment in Gracie Square for three winters. This is part of a program which includes the purchase of half the island from the club, and the converting of my little stone shack into a big, nine-room, all-year-round house, from which I expect, in due time, to be buried.

But why, as they say in the kind of plays usually backed by Paul, am I telling all this to you? Because, obviously, I want you to write me the real lowdown about Wallis Simpson. Instinct tells me that the public guess is all wrong, that the real story is importantly different from the one surmised. I chiefly hope that the King will be happy. He has that in him which makes many people hope this. I saw him only twice, but I feel an immense good will for him. But tell me all about it as confidentially as you wish—what has happened, what is happening, and what is going to happen. Write me at 10 Gracie Square.

Alexander W.

To DR. A. P. SAUNDERS

[For many years Professor of Chemistry at Hamilton College.]

New York City
November 19, 1936

Dear Percy:

I have just sent a book to you called *Ferdinand*, but that is not the point of this note.

Eckstein, who is like no one in the world except Chaplin and who, though he will be forty-six on his next birthday, is a gnomelike and tiny creature suggesting a frost-bitten twenty-two, is, all told, as enchanting a fellow as ever I saw. I took him down to Washington so that I might see him at the zoo with Bill Mann. Some time I must tell you about how he and the birds began talking to one another at a tremendous rate the moment he crossed the threshold. However, I am going to try my luck luring him to Hamilton to get a degree and you shall have him in the garden in June.

But this is the point: I have it in mind to give a small dinner party for him in New York when he comes back from Cincinnati three weeks hence. The date will be the 10th. I would make it a dinner of no more than eight and in composing my list of guests I haven't got beyond him and Anne Parrish. I am writing to inquire what chance there is of your being able to get down here for it. I could, of course, give you lodging for the night, as I have a guest room here.

Alexander W.

P.S. Hennessey has gone up to Vermont to select stone for the new house. He is also under orders to bring back my cat, shepherd dog, music-box and binoculars.

A. W.

[Woolcott did not know Dr. Gustav Eckstein, Professor of Physiology at the University of Cincinnati and friend and biographer of the Japanese scientist Noguchi, until he read Eckstein's book, *Canary*. He was fascinated by the personal quality of the scientist's relationship to his birds, and wrote to him about it. A strong and continuing bond then developed between them.]

To LADY COLEFAX

New York City
November 23, 1936

Dear Sibyl,

As for independent sorties and projects while you are here, that's your own affair, but you mustn't expect me to be sympathetic with them. You know I think you do four times too much, not only for your own good but for the full enjoyment of the things you would do even if you did much less. As I have to struggle with the same deleterious tendency in myself, I am alert to all signs of such folly in others. I do deeply feel that you must need some rest while you are here. That's why I roared with enraged disapproval last night when Lynn timidly suggested that you might like a brief triumphal tour of Hollywood. It seems likely that we all will be here when you come, for I think even Alice Miller will be back from the Coast by then and that the Lunts will still be doing such business with *Idiot's Delight* as to have found no excuse to go on tour. I myself am certain to be here because on the 5th I start broadcasting again and will have to be in or near New York every Tuesday and Thursday for some time to come. You will be here in time for my fiftieth birthday on the 19th, although I think it likely that I shall actually spend that day or part of it in Washington, as it is the eve of the inauguration. Since Washington will be intolerably congested at the time and since our great public occasions are rigorously lacking in the spectacular, I shall resist with my last ounce of strength any proposal of yours to come along. Noel, of course, will be in a dither with his new plays, which open here tomorrow night, and even John Gielgud will, I think, still be playing Hamlet. His final weeks are announced, but that is all eye-wash. When Leslie Howard presented a competing Dane, the press for Gielgud was even better than when he had opened himself, and as vast multitudes had apparently waited to see which Hamlet was the better bet, they are now

going in droves to see John's. Leslie's was embarrassingly bad—a monotonous and rather pretty schoolboy reciting pieces taught him by his governess.

As the time approaches and I shall have to act on some of your communications, I must insist that you typewrite them. I know you think that my comments on your handwriting are fretful and spoilsport, but some day I shall succeed in convincing you that I have never been able to do more than guess at what you were trying to say. It would be a pity if I guessed wrong on some crucial matter like a date or an address. As the time approaches I will let you know what your New York address is to be and you can always get in touch with me if you will remember that my cable address is ACKIE, New York.

A. W.

P.S. The sum and substance of the above, in case you forget, is that if you don't have a good time when you are here I shall be bitterly disappointed, and if you don't take it easy, I shall bash your head in.

To LAURA E. RICHARDS

New York City
December 12, 1936

My dear Mrs. Richards,

My delighted encounter with "Tom the Pigman" at breakfast yesterday morning also served as a reminder that I must report the collapse of all my plans to get to the State of Maine this year. All my notions of what I would do after the middle of October went awry in the excitement of the campaign. The Republican tactics drove me into Mr. Roosevelt's arms and I was in a lather until I could get on the air and ring my bell for him. I have since had withering comments from a neighbor

of yours [Booth Tarkington] in Kennebunkport who professes to sympathize with this rush of mine to the aid of an imperiled cause and ventures to hope I will come up in the spring unless the President gets into trouble again.

Meanwhile, I seem to be leading a sufficiently violent professional life to need a New York headquarters and its address you will find duly engraved at the top of this writing paper. I am busy now putting together the contents for the second *Woollcott Reader* and in general trying to clear my desk so that I can begin broadcasting in January. It is to be every Thursday and Tuesday evening at seven-thirty.

I went to Anne Sullivan Macy's funeral and as long as I live I shall remember the sight of Helen [Keller] coming up the church aisle after it was over. Her secretary, Polly Thompson, a Scotch woman and as fine a person as ever drew the breath of life, was weeping beyond all control, and as they passed the pew where I sat I saw the flutter of Helen's hands as she sought to comfort her. I had not seen any of them nor heard from them since spring. They sent me word at last only because just before she lost consciousness for good and all, Mrs. Macy tapped into Helen's hand, "You must send for Alexander. I want him to read to me." They were together forty-nine years. I cannot imagine them apart.

Under separate cover I am sending you a book called *Canary* which is the present apple of my roving eye. If you like it, I will write and tell you all about the astounding little man who wrote it. Also—because it's just your dish—a book called *Ferdinand*.

Alexander Woollcott

To LAURA E. RICHARDS

New York City
January 23, 1937

Dear Mrs. Richards,

My fiftieth birthday found me toiling in Washington, but after the broadcast there was a small birthday dinner (without cake) given by young Joe Alsop of the *Herald Tribune* staff. He is a grandson of the late Mrs. Douglas Robinson and, therefore, a cousin of Alice Longworth and of Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt. He looks like the late Count Fosco and, although he went through Groton and Harvard, he comes extraordinarily close to being what I should call an educated man. Anyway, he gave this dinner for me and Alice Longworth and Rebecca West and, to my delight, Mrs. Winthrop Chanler. We talked about you and she said she had had some of the sherry, and I found her delightful, but I am still faithful to you.

I did get the brochure. It's just up my alley. The song and dance I do on the subject is usually limited to attacks upon the people who nick the edge of a good word by trying to use it for something it was never intended for. It's the transpire-happen, prone-supine, imply-infer group that I have in my mind. Indeed, I am thinking of doing a broadcast about it, calling upon the people to rise and kill off all those who use flair under the impression that it means knack or talent or aptitude.

I meant to write you a long letter about Dr. Eckstein, but I have been discouraged by two things. First, I had really said my say in the magazine piece I sent on to you and, second, my best story on him needs too much pantomime to tell in a letter.

Alexander W.

To ARTHUR HOPKINS

New York City
February 15, 1937

Dear Arthur,

I think it was those two hundred banquets I had to attend during my novitiate as a reporter on the *Times* which gave me a neurosis about public dinners. I would not have believed that I could attend one in any capacity, even as a guest of honor, and have so pleasant an evening. This, I realize in retrospect, was all due to you. It also dawned on me that most of these people, from Henry Hull to Helen Hayes, came not because the dinner was for me but because you had asked them. As that was why I came, I can not quarrel with their motivation. I feel we have written another chapter in a long and still far from finished story about two neighbors—you and

Yours affectionately,

A. Woollcott

To DAVID McCORD

[Author, and editor of the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*.]

New York City
February 15, 1937

My dear David,

This is a tardy acknowledgment of your *Notes on the Harvard Tercentenary* in which I did the required reading and some more. From afar I followed that observance with an envious and admiring eye.

I find I shall be in Boston on the 26th as I have promised to speak there for the Seeing Eye. I don't know where the meeting will be held, but I do know that I shall be lodged at the Ritz and after my show and theirs I am having the Lunts for supper. I would be glad to have you, too. If, as seems improbable, you want to go to the Seeing Eye meeting, let me

know and I will have a seat sent to you. I think it's to be at Symphony Hall and I doubt if it is open to the public.

In a quiet way and on good but scanty evidence, I have a tremendous admiration for President Conant. This is based partly on what I hear about him, partly on things I know he has said and done, and partly on the glimpse I had of him that night when he rose superior to all ineffectual turmoil at The Signet dinner. Do you suppose that if I lingered over in Boston on Saturday the 27th and Sunday the 28th or even Monday the first, I might have a chance to call upon him and talk to him? My reasons are two. One is that I wish I knew him. The second is that as a trustee of Hamilton, where for use after next year we are going to need a new president, I should like to ask him to keep us in mind and to suggest one or two men whom the committee of trustees could interview and meditate upon.

A. W.

[The Seeing Eye, which trains dogs to help the blind attain physical independence, was the institution nearest to Woolcott's heart. He lectured about it, broadcast about it, and contributed to it generously from his own funds.]

To MRS. HENDRICK EUSTIS

New York City
February 23, 1937

Puss Eustis,

I wonder if it can be possible that, behind this poor mask of disgust and under a steady barrage of abuse, I have ever really succeeded in concealing from you the fact that I look on you as one of the most enjoyable companions and the most admirable human beings it is my good fortune to know.

Print *this* in the *Journal* and see what it gets you.

Your lovesick

Pickwick

To MARGARET MITCHELL

New York City
March 19, 1937

Dear Margaret Mitchell,

Well, that's the most tantalizing paragraph in your letter of March 4th—the one in which you said you were sending me the work of another Georgia author. I am driven to ask whether you did actually send it.

As you may suspect, the new books go squealing through here like pigs through a slaughter house. But I have elaborate devices for singling out the ones I'm going to want and I'm pretty sure that no such opus has gone through as the one which you make sound so alluring. I've been slightly hampered by the fact that you told me everything about it except the title and the name of the author. If, even so, you did send it and it has eluded me, I may kill myself. I can't begin to tell you how startled I was to learn that Atlanta isn't on Eastern Standard Time. This has thrown my whole sense of American geography into confusion. I'm still holding on pathetically to a conviction that it's in the South.

Speaking of the South, there came this week from Birmingham in Alabama the most gratifying letter my earnest efforts have ever elicited. A woman named Vance reports that her Negress cook asked permission to listen to one of my broadcasts. When it was over she said, "There's voodoo in his voice but glory in his tales." I'm arranging to have this embossed on my professional stationery. I've often thought of getting out a pink glazed professional stationery with photographs of me in various roles the way character actors do. In my time I've played Puck and Henry the Eighth, which is quite a range.

If you're reading anything at all these days let me recommend *Of Mice and Men*.

A. Woolcott

To HARPO MARX

New York City
March 24, 1937

Dear Harpo,

This is the reminder I promised about Helen Keller. She and Polly Thompson will sail April 1st from San Francisco on the *Asamu Maru*. For two days ahead of that they will be at the St. Francis Hotel. If you have it in mind to send flowers, remember that for a blind person one flower that smells like all get out is better than the most costly bouquet which may be merely something to look at.

[Charles] Lederer is here having his tooth pulled and pacifying MacArthur, who strikes me as being at the half way stage between Lederer and John Barrymore. I have pointed this out to Lederer. He didn't care for it.

Have you read *Of Mice and Men*? Just your dish. Just your length. Beatrice, as you probably know, has bought the dramatic rights. I'm in on it with her. One of the characters is an amiable and gigantic idiot, so tender that he has to fondle everything he likes and so clumsy that he eventually breaks their necks—mice, puppies, rabbits, tarts—whatever he happens to be petting at the moment. I tried to get Broun to take this part and he was very hurt.

I've forgotten what you look like. I guess that's a good break for you, at that.

The Prince Chap

P.S. Come to think of it, Helen would prefer a bottle of bourbon or scotch to a mere bouquet any day.

A. W.

To MARGARET MITCHELL

New York City
April 3, 1937

Dear Margaret Mitchell,

You're just goading me on to tell that story of the elevator. I wrote it years ago for *The New Yorker* and it was my first encounter with folklore. In that version the scene was an elegant Southern home with the scent of magnolias in the air and the crunch of wheels on gravel. It was a hearse that came by and the driver with the livid face took off his top hat and looked up at the window and said, "Room for one more." It was those words issuing from the selfsame face (but this time the face of the man operating the elevator) which, in a department store up North the following winter, led her to recoil in the nick of time.

I have since learned that that elevator has been crashing steadily since the late Eighties. It crashed at A. T. Stewart's in New York and the rescued girl was none other than Lucy C. Lillie. But you are too young to have known *Harper's Young People* when Mrs. Lillie was writing for it. So am I, for that matter, but I was the youngest of five and any kid knows best the books his older brothers left around the house.

More often than not there is a hearse, though I, too, have known the man to carry the coffin. There's always a hearse where, as it does periodically, the apparition visits the chaste precincts of Randolph-Macon. It is a hearse that's heard on the cobblestones at Dijon and the crash occurs afterwards at a hotel in Paris. In America the face is usually livid with a scar across it. As you get past the Rhine—the story has long had currency around Warsaw—the man is distinguished by a shock of scarlet hair, crowning a face the color of a fish's belly. Very pretty.

This past summer when you came roaring back into my quiet life, did I tell you my adventures with the legend of

Sherman's missing one fine house on his march to the sea because the family ingeniously succeeded in hiding it from him? I inquired about this in a broadcast a little more than a year ago and received volumes of assurance that the house stood near Chattanooga, Vicksburg and Atlanta, but suddenly from a most interesting source I got confirmation (once removed) from Sherman's own lips. Did I tell you about that? And even if I didn't, maybe you are a wee bit tired of William Tecumseh. You must tell Mr. Marsh [Margaret Mitchell's husband] of the bitter complaint I heard on the lips of Mrs. Lloyd Lewis. She said (with a snarl) that she had lost her husband in the Civil War.

A. Woollcott

To CYRIL CLEMENS

New York City
May 10, 1937

Dear Mr. Clemens:

I shall be very happy to receive the Mark Twain Medal and shall feel that I am in very good company.

After an examination of my credentials for a place in the Mark Twain Society, I can find only one item. Having always traveled light through this world, I still own, at fifty, only one object which I also owned when I was ten. That is my copy of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer!*

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely
Alexander Woollcott

To DR. GUSTAV ECKSTEIN

[See note on page 174.]

New York City
May 19, 1937

Dear Gus,

I expect to be at the island and visitable there by anyone proposing to convert it into one of the Canary Island group on the following dates:

May 28—31, inclusive

June 4—7, inclusive

June 18—21, inclusive

Elegant time in Canada. Plenty of exercise getting up to drink toasts to the King. General condition greatly improved. Lingering protests and portents from the alimentary tract. Sounds and signs of mutiny down there. Another yip out of that region and I'll give it something to worry about—a few Welsh rarebits and some strawberry shortcake.

Yesterday at two-thirty New York time frantic calls from Omaha where the Lunts had encountered a mayor who forbade their show unless they made some sixteen deletions from the text, which has since been referred to by some New York scrivener as "Idiot's Delete." Lynn had written a statement she wished to make to the public before the rise of the curtain but I denounced them both as poltroons not fit to be trusted with a play by Sherwood or anybody else if they didn't have the gumption not to play at all. This advice entranced them so they told the mayor to go to hell and he collapsed at once. The play was therefore given last night as written. I shall get the details by air mail. But you may have read all this in your funny little local newspaper.

Meanwhile, the Omaha *World Telegram*—a newspaper of which I know nothing beyond the fact that it once printed an editorial called "The Woollcott Menace"—has wired for permission to print the somewhat tedious and sententious broad-

cast I did last night. I refused, but offered to give them in its place a few opinions of my own on their mayor. That's the situation at present.

My love to your mother and "Big Gus" and Mrs. Wehner and "Wisdom Tooth."

A. W.

TO SOPHIE ROSENBERGER

[Miss Rosenberger was Woollcott's teacher when he was in the second grade in public school in Kansas City.]

*Bomoseen, Vt.
August 28, 1937*

My dear Miss Rosenberger,

Is this my Miss Smoot—the one who taught the first grade in the Franklin school when I matriculated there in 1892? I remember my Miss Smoot as a formidable woman who subjected me to my first public disgrace. And it was unmerited. At least I was innocent. "The woman tempted me." You remember when we were all made to sit at attention, each with his hands clasped in front of him on the desk. This was a way of keeping us out of mischief. Once Miss Smoot gave that order because she wanted to go out of the room. I never would have thought of relaxing if two little girls in the front row hadn't turned around and giggled at me. Then one of them thumbed her nose at me. I did not know the significance of this gesture but I felt that it called for a reply, so I unlocked my hands and was thumbing *my* nose just as Miss Smoot walked in the door. I was made to stand out in the hall for what seemed several years but I suppose was no more than half an hour. I remember my agony of apprehension that one of the grown-ups of twelve or thirteen from Aldine Place would pass up or

down the stairs at that time and report my outcast state at home.

Well, that was forty-five years ago and here is Miss Smoot taking baseball lessons in New York

Alexander W.

To FRANK SULLIVAN

Bomoseen, Vt.
September 1, 1937

Dear Frank,

Can you come up here some time this week and stay for a meal, a night, a week, or until October 20th, when the water will be shut off? At this time I can easily provide transportation. After September 9th, I shall still have a car but my chauffeur will have resumed his classical studies at Hamilton. I don't think you would enjoy having me drive you.

Alice Miller (with a small flock of satellites) is scheduled to arrive Wednesday, bringing (I believe) Dan Silberberg.

My piece on Jack Humphrey (very good) has gone in to *The New Yorker*. The reason I am telling all this to you is because I have decided I must start work today on a book and writing to you is as good a way as any of postponing parturition.

A. W.

P.S. I've ordered one of my ten privately bound two-volume editions of the Ackie Reader sent you. It will arrive shortly after the 10th.

A. W.

[*Woollcott's Second Reader* was published in November 1937. The nickname "Ackie" was also Woollcott's cable address.]

To LAURA E. RICHARDS

Bomoseen, Vt.
September 1, 1937

My dear friend,

Yes—as you asked me on August 9th and here it is nearly a month later before I answer—I am still faithful but I see no prospect of my getting to Maine much before mid-November when you will be at Gardiner. For all I know, you may be there already but on the chance that you aren't, I am sending this to Indian Point. As I may have told you, I am in the throes of building me an all-year house here on the island, one fortified against the slings and arrows of a Vermont winter, and here I expect to make my base from now on, lingering this year until the end of December, but making one or two expeditions in October and November, including one that will take me to Mr. Tarkington's doorstep and yours.

I have sent for *A City of Bells* on your say-so, but have not so much as looked inside it yet. Indeed I have been reading only what I had to in preparation for *Woolcott's Second Reader* which is to come out in November and on which I am even now getting in my last licks. Some of the things in it you will like.

Earlier in the summer I did look inside *Harry in England* and, even though it was meant for the very young, found myself reading it all through with interest and pleasure. It was a happy idea to have Reginald Birch illustrate it.

Two or three years ago he came to call upon me, a figure of somewhat frayed elegance, very dapper, charming and gallant. On the fiftieth anniversary of *Fauntleroy*—it came out the same year as *Huckleberry Finn* which served as a happy corrective—I mentioned in a broadcast how all the little boys in America had to be rigged out by their mothers in Fauntleroy get-up. All except me, who had to importune my parents for a Fauntleroy costume. At the first sight of my huge bullet head with its five cowlicks rising out of that lace collar, the whole family went

into gales of inconsiderate mirth and promptly ordered the entire regalia given to the laundress's little pickaninny. Whereupon, hearing this or hearing about it, Birch did a water-color sketch of Fauntleroy at Dorincourt Castle, golden curls, velvet pantaloons, huge mastiff and all, with only one variation—my face in the place of Cedric Erroll's. The effect was singularly sickening.

I shall be free in the Fall to come moseying along the road to Maine because, beginning on October 1st, I intend to blow myself to a year off—a year free, that is, from long-term contracts, radio programs, magazine commitments and the like. I expect to twiddle my thumbs and, in the good, old medieval phrase, make my soul. If, as I expect, I also write a book, I hope it will be a good one.

I am taking a huge interest in this house which is the first one I have ever had. I was two when my folks started their migrations and what with this and that I've never settled anywhere since. The house is stone with many fireplaces and bathrooms of such marble elegance that they are already the scandal of Vermont. I was in the midst of selecting a name for it when with one horrid accord all my friends started calling it Glamis, for reasons which I fear will not escape you.

My salutations to your husband and your daughter.

Old Faithful

To DR. GUSTAV ECKSTEIN

*Bomoseen, Vt.
September 10, 1937*

Dear Gus,

A most extraordinary thing has happened. Frank Lloyd Wright, filled with a noble grief because I had let Hennessey do my house for me instead of getting him to do it, sent me a

letter of forgiveness together with a notice that he was at least sending me something to put in the house. In due course I began to get notices all along the line that a valuable package would be awaiting me at the express office in Castleton. It turned out to be a set of Hiroshige prints—fifty-three of them, starting at dawn from the bridge in Yedo and ending up at Kyoto in the sunset. Frank writes me thus: "When the series of views was made by Hiroshige, eternity was now. I think it is destined to endure longest of any graphic masterpiece whatsoever. In it a unique civilization lives for posterity. But for this record by a native son, that civilization will have vanished before long."

Frank says that there are only seven complete sets in the world and this is one of them. Such a gift embarrasses me. It seems to me this set should be given at once to someone equipped to enjoy it. Shall I leave it to you in my will?

Even now, even before the sugar-maples have begun to turn, each day is enchanting. Do you remember in *Tennessee's Pardner* how the newspaper accounts of the hanging told what the prisoner wore, what he had had for breakfast, and who was there to see him hanged? But none of them mentioned "the blessed amity of earth and air and sky."

Today there came a letter from Thornton Wilder, full of his adventures backstage at the Comédie Française and visiting Gertrude Stein in the Ain. Then he picked up Sibyl Colefax and carried her off to Salzburg for four of the Toscanini concerts. Much sitting around beer gardens with Erich Maria Remarque. Nightly dinners at Schloss Leopoldskron with Max Reinhardt and Fräulein Timmig. Great proposals that I join him for Christmas in Zurich. But I would rather be here. I would rather be here than anywhere in the world. I was never so sure of anything as that I want to lie back for a year and be quiet.

I suppose you will be coming here when it best fits in. I think if you can stay only one week I would like best to have you see that first or second week in October when the coloring

is likely to be its most brilliant. Yet if you came earlier, you might find Noel here (he and Neysa come on the 22nd) or young Alsop returning. But then Anne Parrish is coming some time, too, and Percy Saunders will be driving over from Clinton and none of these would entertain you as much as the pup would. He's as big as Pip now and his four feet, which have thoughtfully anticipated the size he is going to be, make his tread sound like that of the stone-footed gods in Dunsany's *The Gods of the Mountain*. The other evening he patiently chewed his way through an electric insulation. His immediate reaction to the shock was to send out a whirling spray of urine and to fill the island air with banshee wails that could be heard as far as Rutland.

My furniture came last night at sundown. Odds and ends that I have picked up all over the world without ever meaning to at all. This will be their last resting-place as far as I am concerned. I may not stay but they will. They came across the lake after the wind had gone down with the sun—came on trip after trip of a barge made by putting a raft on three rowboats lashed together. Tomorrow and next day the floors will be waxed and all this duffle slips into place and by the end of next week your room will be ready. Are you bringing Pawley?

Alexander W.

To FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

[Woollcott was an admirer of Mr. Wright, the leading exponent of modern architecture in America.]

Bomoseen, Vt.

September 15, 1937

Dear Frank,

I don't know quite what to say, which is not a characteristic difficulty. It isn't enough to call the Hiroshige portfolio a handsome gift. I'd say that of a bowl of chrysanthemums or

a case of wine, which would both be gone before Christmas. So I'll just say that it is a gift drawn to the scale of the giver and let it go at that.

Since the prints came, I have already made the journey three times. I hope to make it next under the guidance of Dr. Gustav Eckstein of Cincinnati. He's the minute and astonishing teacher from the medical school there, who once wrote a play called *Hokusai* and is best known, I suppose, as the biographer of Noguchi. Are you ever in Cincinnati? You must go to his laboratory where a tribe of canaries has the run of the place. I wonder if you have read his book *Canary*. On the chance that you have not, I shall send it to you this week. Eckstein will be coming this way for a visit during one of these Fall weeks when the Vermont hills are in their glory.

The house has turned out to be one I would show you without embarrassment. It is a one-story house of stone, built on two levels and, like one I once saw in Wisconsin, running along the crest of a hill like a vine. It was built by an amateur—a crony of mine who engaged no architect and no contractor. The result is astonishingly right—right for me and right for its setting.

I was born in a frame house with eighty-five rooms in it. This belonged to my grandfather and at the time when I was born it hadn't been painted since before the Civil War. Come to think of it, it hasn't been painted yet. Vines kept it from falling apart—a protective outer coat of white-grape and trumpet and wistaria and crimson rambler. For a long time it was the only home I knew. I was homesick for its sloping green when as a kid I was exiled to the dust of a hot Kansas City street. All through my school days I hurried to it for every vacation. The returns which remain most vivid to this native were the ones which each year began the Christmas holidays. I would reach the station five miles away in the early dark of a winter afternoon, hire a smelly hack and drive home over the ratty roads. It

would be too dark to see where I was at any time, but I would know by the hoof-beats on the bridges. Finally there was the last bridge but one and I would know that in another moment, through the leafless trees, I could see the house itself—the twelve French windows down the front all lamplit because the tribe would be homing for Christmas. Not since then have I had any feeling of attachment for any place until I found this island. I get something of the same sweet sense of homecoming when, two miles down the road, I take the left turn at Castleton Corners.

I began coming here seventeen years ago and have come more and more ever since. At last I realized that I was spending more time here than anywhere else, so it seemed sensible to make this my base instead of New York. Hence the house and Eckstein coming to see me and the Hiroshige prints to be kept in a place of honor.

I have decided that I can't thank you enough for the prints so I shan't even try. My obeisances to your wife.

A. Woollcott

To D. G. KENNEDY

*Bomoseen, Vt.
September 15, 1937*

Dear Gerry,

You're in some confusion of mind. It wasn't I who thought you ought to go and get a writing job; that was you. I was the one who thought that you might better practice law and write on the side—write something every day on the side—write something every day on the side for a year or two without necessarily any thought of its ever being printed. I have a distinct feeling about people who think of writing. It is this. If anything can stop them it is probably no great loss.

I'll be here without a break until the 20th of October and

then again all during the early part of November. If your present occupation leaves you any leisure days you will, of course, always be welcome here. This might go without saying and won't be said again.

Al [Getman] is coming with Louise for the week-end of the 25th and 6th and then coming back again alone for the first week in October.

A. W.

To DR. GUSTAV ECKSTEIN

New York City
October 31, 1937

Dear Gus,

On Thursday I was lunching with Alice Longworth in her suite at the Ritz when the desk phoned up that there was a telegram for me. It was your affable message from Cleveland. The only theory I can construct is that you had forgotten I was at the St. Regis and guessed I might be at the Ritz. It is a hotel I have never stopped at and seldom frequent; it was the first time I had lunched there in seven years. The telegram came during the hour I was there. Seen from your end, there may be some simple explanation of this, but on the face of it it looks like an instance of clairvoyance which might be filed for reference with the extrasensory boys at Duke University.

I speak my piece for La Guardia early this evening and will be lunching on the island tomorrow. I am having Dick Wood send you two photographs he took while you and Kit [Cornell] were there. I was glad to hear that you had dropped off and visited the Saunders' household at Clinton. I will be expecting to hear how you found Ruth Gordon on and off.

A. W.

To DR. GUSTAV ECKSTEIN

Bomoseen, Vt.
November 22, 1937

Dear Gus,

I grieve for you about Polly [a macaw]. You will miss her beyond all telling.

On the chance that you may be eastward bound, I write to report that I will be at the St. Regis in New York from the 30th until the 4th—with one day's absence, the 2nd—when Jack Humphrey and one of the Seeing Eye dogs and I are to do our act at the old Academy of Music, the shabby cavern where I heard my first symphony (Fritz Scheel conducting the "Pathétique") and my first opera (*Faust* with Pol Plançon) and from a seat in the vertiginous topmost gallery caught my first glimpse of Mrs. Fiske. The play was *Mary of Magdala* and she wore high heels and stood on her toes because she was unhappy about being short.

I'm to eat my Thanksgiving turkey at Kennebunkport along with Booth Tarkington and Kenneth Roberts, who linger on the Maine coast long after every other house in their colony has been shut up until another June. And even as I set all this chatter down I keep thinking of Polly and remembering that Millay poem which begins "Listen, children. Your father is dead" and ends with the lines:

Life must go on.

I forget just why.

I can't believe I've known you less than thirteen months. It's ridiculous.

A. W.

To CHARLES LEDERER

Bomoseen, Vt.
December 6, 1937

Dear Master Charles:

I started to write this on a typewriter but these old fingers have lost their cunning. There are three things I hope you will do for me.

(1) Remember that you are to sign up Harpo and Irving [Berlin] for a radio benefit to be held some time in March or April. What I want to do is to nail them and the Lunts and Kit Cornell now. Then I can go ahead with my negotiations and round up the rest of the cast as the time approaches.

(2) What is the correct name and present address of that Riskin or Ryskin or whatever whom you brought to Gracie Square for a little gaming and to whom, on the eve of his sailing with you, I sent a charming check which he never cashed and may never have received?

(3) I have an idea I wish you would present to Harpo—but only if you yourself are sympathetic with it. It is based on my belief that we who know him have seen an even better show than the public has ever had a chance to see. I wish that just once he could appear in a picture all by himself and governed only by *his* taste and *his* imagination. As this would present many difficulties both personal, professional and financial, it is my idea that he should do a short—or three shorts—just for the hell of it. Just for himself, or for that matter, just for me. I can envisage it as a combination of Benchley and a Disney symphony. You or Benchley or MacArthur or all three could write it for him. Why not?

(4) Are you still interested in trying out that play with me? I advise you to answer candidly.

A. W.

To LAURA E. RICHARDS

Bomoseen, Vt.
December 6, 1937

My dear Mrs. Richards,

A wily dealer in second-hand books has just filled up the gaps which yawned in my old file of *St. Nicholas*, with the result that last evening when I should have been at work on a piece for *The Atlantic*, I sat reading a delightful serial called "When I Was Your Age," which escaped me at the time of its publication because I was brought up on *Harper's Young People*. I cannot begin to tell you how I enjoyed the picture of Laura reading poetry to old Margaret in the feather room.

Just about the time you were committing that account to paper, I was writing my first letter. Or rather dictating it. It was addressed to one Celeste, who was my first love. She never answered it but when next she came to see me (forty-two years later) she had it with her. It had been written on July 3, 1891, and contained, among other items, the vainglorious announcement that I had sixteen torpedoes, twenty-three cents and a verbena. Its other details brought suddenly to life a forgotten and uneventful day long ago in the house where I grew up and a resurrection so abrupt and so accidental had an effect on me as disquieting as if some dislocation had turned back time itself. The process of memory is pleasurable for me but here were things which I had altogether forgotten so that they came back like ghosts and left me feeling haunted.

I treasured the Binyon verses.

You won't hear from me at Christmas because I've sworn off Christmas. How about some sherry for your birthday?

My salutations to the Skipper and the resident daughter. I wish I lived in Gardiner.

Alexander W.

To FRANK SULLIVAN

*Chicago, Ill.
December 17, 1937*

Dear Frank,

While you (or so they tell me) are being rheumy in Saratoga Springs, I am being weak-minded in Chicago—and will still be here on Christmas Day. I won't get back to the island until after the first of the year.

I thought you would like to hear about the telegram just sent by the printers on a small-town Connecticut newspaper to the foreman of the composing room on the occasion of his marriage. It consisted of one word—"Stet."

A. Woolcott

