My dear Mummy,

I bring you up to date with my travels with a last letter written from France; I go back to London at the end of this week, but whether I shall catch the next mail from there I do not know, so don’t expect anything till you get it. — No time for anything else to come from you, so nothing to answer, unless I comb out your last letter for debatable points, & I don’t propose to do this. Therefore I proceed at once to Chartres, whither Elsie & Kathleen & I & Hemming & a cobber of his called Taylor went last Wednesday. We went on a Wednesday to avoid the week-end crush. as well as being the day on which hard working coves like & would naturally take off; but we arrived at the station to find it almost hidden in singing crowds & the whole train service apparently hopelessly disorganized — a sign board telling you one thing, & every porter or other official you asked telling you others, & none of them reconcilable with anything else. We then realised that it was the 1st August, & that the French as well as the English were accustomed to making themselves acutely uncomfortable on this occasion. Also there were other confusing factors. In this country you often cannot travel 3rd unless for a journey over a certain distance, or on certain trains. We carefully looked out an early train which took 3rd class passengers, performed the heroic feat of rising in time to catch it, get to the station & find that nobody has heard of the train, or that the time-table has been suspended, or that the train has gone, or something has changed its platform — you can take your choice of all these possibilities, as we had to — but that there is another train, not down in any time-table, going ¾ hour later. So we carefully enquire — is this train really going to Chartres? & when? & does it actually take 3rd class passengers in the 3rd class carriages? even to Chartres? Everybody at last agrees that all these things are so, & we hop in. Seats nowhere to be had — notices that standing in the couloirs strictly forbidden — couloirs filled with a singing mass — fat Frenchmen continually getting on with large suitcases — Pardon, monsieur! — push you off your feet & deposit suitcases where you were standing. Train at last so full that even the conductors can hardly get on, but they do & close all the doors & we move off. After standing in this conditions [sic] for 1 ¾ hours, reach Chartres. Produce tickets at gate. “Where’s your supplements?” Supplements? What supplements? “These are 3rd class tickets & you can’t travel 3rd on this train.” By Jingo! we travelled 3rd all right! — Off goes ticket-collector to interview station-master, off go we after him. Great flow of language on chef de gare’s part, likewise Hemming’s & Taylor’s, hands waving all over the place. —, “No, quite impossible! no 3rd class passengers taken to Chartres on that train! Yes, you may have been told that in Paris, but that’s nothing to do with us! Oh yes, I quite believe all you say! But you pay the supplements & then write in a full account of the circumstances to the State & you may get reimbursed.” Well, we can’t stay on the station all day, & even the French of the experts having proved unavailing, we decide to pay up our 2nd class fare. — but each to pay our own with a 100 franc note. No good — the cove has to go all over the station to change the first note, so it looks as if they will have to open the banks to change any more. So we let it go at that, take it all out of the same note, enquire very carefully what trains go to Paris, which of them take 3rd class passengers, & move off, ticket-collector having had immense difficulty in counting out the change, & having said “5! 10!! 20!!!” so often in tones of increasing despair that we thought he would go straight away & cut his throat. So behold us at last in Chartres.

It was a terrifically hot day, but we managed to see the cathedral & one or two other things, which is about all that Chartres consists of. The Cathedral is a fine place, & has the distinction of being built almost entirely in the same style, century. Also that they had the useful rule there as that as it was the church of Our Lady, it was far too sacrosanct to bury anyone in it, so there is a welcome absence of tombs, & you are able to see the place practically unimpeded. The cathedrals here, though badly looked after in comparison with the English ones, seem on the whole to be less obstructed with junk. Certainly none of them have been turned into a stone-quarry, without any of a stone-quarry’s dignity, like Westminster Abbey. Notre Dame in Paris seems even fuller of tourists than the Abbey, but at least the tourists can be cleared out periodically. But the tombs of our undistinguished English dead seem fated to outlast the Abbey itself. Well, anyhow Chartres is a very beautiful dignified place. It has almost a complete set of stained glass windows, all of its own period, except for 8 which the canons took down & threw away in the century, to let in a bit of light, & four or five which the good old Revolution, slightly less destructive than the Church, smashed up in sheer high spirits. Otherwise the fenestrations is about as perfect as anything could be, though I don’t think they have any individual window to touch two or three of those at Rouen. However opinions may differ. My old cobber Henry Adams wrote a book
On Mont Michel & Chartres, as an attempt to interpret the Middle Ages (which I must read some day) in which he reckoned that one of the Chartres windows was the most perfect expression of mediaeval art in existence; at which I can only express my surprise. Of course he was an American, & as is well known, the Yanks have no culture. ([unclear: Latent] aphorism of Hemming’s — “Culture means ruins, & the Yanks haven’t got any.”) — The rest of Chartres is mainly nondescript modern, with the usual superabundant restaurants & appalling smells. They all seem to do their washing in the river in these small towns in France; & the river is generally full of tin-cans & dead dogs. And yet, from the way they bang away at the clothes with bits of board & go over it with scrubbing brushes, you wonder at being any washing left at all. A wonderful place indeed. We had a long chat also with an old cove working on the tram lines (no trams in sight) who had found a couple of old coins & sold them to Taylor for 2 francs; & a large & varied amount of information we got from him, including the facts that the Romans’ use of gunpowder was very imperfect, but that modern guns could shoot as far as 200 yards!, that times were hard, & that the town was insanitary. He then moved off with a couple of cobblers who downed tools as soon as the 2 francs changed hands & it in at the nearest cafe! We managed to catch a train to Paris which took 3rd class passengers, & still more wonderful, left at the stated time; being entertained in transit by the conversation of the Yanks who occupied the rest of the compartment. Recipe to be amused in this way — stick your head into a French paper & listen hard. You can hear anything from what their brothers think of cathedrals (“What’s the use of all this dead stank anyway!”) to the comparison of prices paid for meals in Vancouver & Chicago. A wonderful people.

Since then we have been on one or two other expeditions — to a play “Vient de Paraitre” (Just Out), a very funny satire on the French literary prize system & the antics of publishers; but in which the dialogue went so rapidly that it was impossible to catch more than a bit of it. It has been running for a year here, but the prizes still seem to be handed out. I heard of one cove with a thirst for literary distinction who put up the money for a prize, chose his own jury, & arranged that it should be awarded to him, as it was. I dare say the passion will work itself out; anyhow the play was good. There are often things running, as well as opera, but it seems so hard to work in anything in the evening these days, except arguments. However we went to see The Gold Rush again last night — the French are mad on Charlot, & have him running in different things all over the place. And two or three nights ago we went up to Montmartre to a highbrow movie place called Studio 28, where they put on some old fashioned magic lantern slides, a gory Chinese film of Love & Passion, some nutty pictures of ordinary things taken edgeways & upside down (not on the proper screen, but on both side walls of the theatre simultaneously!) Some studies in light & shade with cubes & triangles & cylinders continually in motion, an ancient Buster Keaton comedy, & a new French film of Pres’ Fall of the House of Usher — a first rate thing, the best & most interesting film I have seen since the Gold Rush came out. First rate photography too; just one or two palpable fakes wrong. If this ever comes out your way, be sure to see it — plenty of thrills too, & nightmare atmosphere about it. So you see you get a lot for your money at Studio 28.

Let’s see where else we have been — the girls were out with a cousin who owns a silver mine or something, doing things in style, on Sunday: so Hemming, a French called Hébert, a very decent cove & I went to Malmaison, one of Napoleon’s country houses, now used as a museum of the great man. A fearful place! What an utter vulgarian he was! The more I see of palaces, & the material remains of kings & queens & emperors the more I despise them. You would think that the Empire could be summed up in three words: Gold Paint & Plush. The rooms are very small, & you are taken over the place by guides in dense masses by guides who admire most profusely. Everything’s there, from the robes the Emperor wore at his coronation to the handkerchief he held in his hand when he died. There was another thing there that annoyed me — a BATH belonging to Josephine — one of the first in France, said the guide. The first we saw later, at Fontainebleau — this belonged to Marie Antoinette; but the state of preservation of both seems so good, after so many years, that it seems doubtful if either was used much. However Malmaison has possibilities — if all the shutters were painted green, & the inside was cleaned out & thoroughly re-decorated, it would make quite a good country house, if a country house could be so near Paris. Paris extends like London, dirtily & unceasingly & hideously. The grounds would have to be done up too — the French plant magnificent avenues, & lay out magnificent parks, but they don’t know the first thing about lawns — Malmaison is like a park meadow. That is one direction where the English, with all their faults, are supreme — I must & do admit this. (Comment from Daddy unnecessary) And the gardens here, apart from general layout, are pretty poor. Still the general layout, & the fountains, & the trees, are superb.

On Monday we went to Fontainebleau; the woods there are fine, the palace is another museum of junk of all periods, with one or two good things that seem to have crept in by accident. It reminded me of Schonbrunn last year — why is royalty always so horribly over decorated? why does it reach such abysmal depths of vulgarity? Napoleon wasn’t the only one, though perhaps the most ostentatiously ugly — the rest of the stuff is almost as uniformly bad. There are one or two fine rooms at Fontainebleau — but smothered in gilding & admiration. A terrible place. I suppose I must go to Versailles & complete my impressions; but that I believe is just gold paint...
& mirrors — an even more frightful conglomeration. At Fontainebleau the combination of the waitress at our restaurant & the Fontainebleau tram caused us to miss our train; so we had a good walk through the woods for 5 or 6 miles to the station, though it was three [unclear: parts] in the dark. Certainly in the matter of natural scenery the Kings of France did themselves well.

In between these expeditions we have been to museums, bookshops, up the tower of Notre Dame to see the gargoyles, Rodin museum, & so on & so forth. — Good heavens! it just occurs to me that I have not answered your last letter at all! Later: I now proceed to do so. Thank you for same & for enclosure Bates College & Grant’s impressions. I read these in the News in the days when Harrop sent it to me free in the hope of getting me for a subscriber. Debating tours seem to be becoming a disease, but I suppose they’re all right as long as Bates College foots the bill. — In answer to your question whether I had ever felt homesick — yes, I have, but what’s the use of talking about that? The world is full of things to feel sick about. I wouldn’t mind coming back now that Ern has hopped off; but I had better try to get a job over here first, I suppose, before burying myself. It was two years ago precisely on Monday at midday since I left home, & there I was in the woods at Fontainebleau that afternoon. However I will not go into any philosophical disquisitions on this subject. — As to my goggles, they have only had about four accidents since I left — I do not wish to provoke a fresh argument on an old subject, but I may point out that your average has probably been far higher. — No, I don’t want photographs of myself in early youth. I remember the picture of Daddy & Balfour. However a Forward young man came to take up with a washout like that I don’t know. Someone said that there hasn’t been a progressive movement of any kind in Balfour’s political life that he hasn’t been against, or a reactionary one which he hasn’t favoured; while I always thought that Daddy in those days was a bloody revolutionary, or at least a socialist. F.W. Maurice & [unclear: W.] J Balfour, a funny combination. Or perhaps not so funny. I gather that was a bit of a muddlehead. — The flower girls in London do sell freesias, & most other flowers. A pity you can’t see them sometimes. — It is very cheering to learn that you can now walk as far as [unclear: Falty] Bishop’s Church. Funny how these half-wits flourish. — So Alice Brown has settled on a bloke at last — I hope suitably handsome. — I have duly conveyed your message to Elsie Holmes.

Everything else noted but does not seem to call for special remark, except that (a) it seems to be a habit of these psychology birds, Ern, Fortune & the rest to exploit their theses to a remarkable degree, get an on it, deliver a lecture on it, article in Evening Post, ditto in Journal, — & then I suppose it will be published entire [sic] in England & get two lines of patronage in the [unclear: ], . Nothing like working your ideas for all they’re worth. (b) I notice Daddy is on to another stocktaking again. I hope it is over by now, or that he can get some help. It worries me to think of his being at the same old nightly grind again. And (c) why do you thank me for my letters? They are surely pretty poor & few on the whole to get all that appreciation. As a matter of fact, I have come to the conclusion that writing letters is a whole-time job. If I had Horace Walpole’s time off, I might do a bit at it, & revise them periodically for publication. The easiest way of writing a book anyhow.

Talking of which, Captain Hobson has at last arrived; at least, I have got one copy. It doesn’t look bad, although there are one or two misprints & still some very stupid alterations by Fay. Still it is not as bad as it was, & if I could give it another thorough revision it would be able to stand up on its legs fairly well. I shall be able to send you out one by the next English mail I can catch; I shall try to send it corrected. Or I may possibly leave you to pick out the editorial alterations, as an exercise in criticism. I shall be interested to see if any copies reach independently of the ones I send & if they get any sensible reviews. I might get C.Q.P. to do one in the Dominion! — & I hope that the Spike at least will come out strong, especially as I have dedicated the thing to I reckon my will be at least 4 times as long as this thing, probably a good deal more; so you can see it will be a fairly hefty thing. I shall be back in London next week hacking away at that, if according to schedule.

I had one or two more odd things to say, but I have forgotten what they were. We went to a very interesting museum of Chinese art this afternoon — some beautiful pottery there — also some early stuff about 5000 years old with Maori patterns on them in red & black for decoration. Perhaps Daddy, as a student of anthropology, may be able to explain this. They are also like early Greek stuff. I am getting somewhat interested in eastern art. — The Cluny Museum is another very interesting place here, full of all sorts of junk, old top boots, doors, chimney pieces, china, armour, spinets, lace, & so on. Not a patch on the Victoria & Albert though. The Louvre still unexhausted but exceedingly exhausting. A very fine sunset tonight up the Seine. Mr Hemming & I stood on a bridge, the Pont du Carrousel, & admired & philosophised. Afterwards to a café for café. The cafés are a marvellous institution. I got £10 the other day for the scholarship scheme. Not bad, though not over generous. And so on. And so on.

I conclude with very much love to you both.

And all aunts.