

15 July 1918

Contres
(Wire it thru France)

Dearest Father:

My second batch of mail has arrived. You don't know how exciting that statement is! Again two letters from you and one from Anne, but your enclosures brought it up to a real Christmas stocking. The day any one of us gets home mail, here, is a kind of a spree, and everyone else is envious.

Lots of nice things have been happening lately. I've got a lemon squeezer at last, and, even more wonderful, a real meat grinder, so that we make fruit punch now in about half the time it used to take. And the side posts of my kitchen have rafters connecting them now, and even a few boards over the top for a foundation for the tar paper roof. Also the stovepipe is high enough now, and I've been promised another oven. Also I've been able to get some flour—you can't usually buy it over here at all, but a few friendly sergeants can do a lot. The most encouraging thing of all is my new woman. She is a French woman, not a Belgian as I wrote in my last letter. I keep my fingers crossed and knock wood continually and propitiate the Little Green Gods in every possible way—I'm so afraid I'll find a wasp in the honey. So far there's not the hint of one. Marie is intelligent, efficient, and more than obliging. She lived within a mile or two of the German lines for four years and gave six out of her seven rooms to English officers, for whom she also kept a mess. She used to make soup and things and take them in a baby carriage and a wheel barrow right up to the trenches. All the houses around here are in ruins but hers still stands— or rather, stood when she last heard. Her husband is still in the house, but Marie had to leave because of the gas attacks. She and her children were gassed— I think— anyway the whole family had to clear out, and out of seven women in one ambulance only two lived until the end of the journey. They were Marie's sister and niece, who are both here now. The sister is still too sick to work, but the niece is going to help in our other "Y". Suzanne is Marie's oldest child, a sweet intelligent little girl of about 12½. Then she has three more who died. Pierre and Jean are nondescript little chaps, and Antoinette is not quite a year old yet— born in the cellar under constant bombardment. It used to be a prosperous family; Marie's parents kept some kind of a store and had a servant; now they haven't enough to eat and have to beg clothes from the Red Cross. It goes hard with Marie. She's self-respecting and hates to take charity. Of course this is different, but it hurts her just the same. She leaped at the chance we gave her for work and says she is happy in it. She knows all kinds of useful things. She's going to show me how to make some very simple little cakes her soldiers used to like, and she's full of ideas as to how to improve our kitchen. I was going to get a pipe or make a trough of boards to carry our waste water the fifteen feet to the big hole we have for it, but Marie suggested a trench instead and got a pickaxe to break the hard ground. She pickaxed and I shovelled and now we're all fixed up with a kitchen sink with almost running water. The sink proper is three heavy boxes nailed together, quite near the stove so it isn't any trouble to dip hot water from it, and it is even less to pour the used up water into the trench— and there you are! We've graduated the trench so that it runs right down into the hole. The water problem is a difficult one— we boil every drop we use, and