

CUS417/55.66

G.P.O.

(Lady Osler to Mrs. Chapin)

[Oxford] Nov. 13th (1915)

Dearest Sister

I didn't write any one by today's boat - I am sorry - I almost never miss Saturday do I? - I sent you a letter by Wednesday I think - We had a wonderful week with Campbell & Revere - they left this morning at 11. And were to cross on the officers leave boat at 3.30. We have just heard they have been detained in Folkestone for the night. There has been a terrible storm but sometimes when they are attacking Ostend & below with Monitors the Boulogne Harbour is closed. Otilie has been dining here and we have tried in vain to get them by telephone - Revere went off a new man - so cheery & bright - He went to London & had a long talk with Gen Jones of the C.A.M.C who said they wished to keep him with their Army & if he wished he could be transferred to a Field Ambulance Corps - probably No 3 - now at Bailleu[1] - which you can see on the map back of the line being held by Canadians. He accepted & will probably go up in ten days - & act as Quartermaster - he will 2 weeks instruction - We feel that the McGill people gave a good report or Gen Jones would not have offered this. It is an active life - & of course when the Division is in action - most important as they move wounded from dressing Stations to Clearing Stations - & have improvised resting places on the way when necessary. I will let you know more when I know more. At least we can have ten days peace of mind - Knowing the boy is happier in his conscience; until he moves on. He looks perfectly dear - All his clothes were cleaned - New breeches & spurs - His kit will be very small - now - but his requirements are very few always. Otilie was radiant and now looks the picture of love and despair. C - was enchanted with the children. Muriel is adorable and so merry & bright. C & Otilie spent one night in town for shopping and a play - but hurried home the next day - Now I must tell you a terrible disaster that has happened to us - Our dining room was completely destroyed by fire yesterday morning at 3.30!! Isn't it awful? In the midst of it Revere said "Oh - I wish Aunt Sue was here." At 3.30 - I woke with the smell of smoke - hesitated & then got up. When I reached the hall I found it full of smoke - I flew down stairs - opened the dining room door - black smoke poured out & flames were rising from the side by the fireplace - nearly to the ceiling - & as far as the dining table. I closed the door & jammed the rug against it - rushed to the telephone - called the fire brigade - by then Willie came down the stairs - I tore up - shook Revere, told him to fly & tell servants - then rushed to get my clothes on. I stood on the steps & yelled "fire & police" at the top of my lungs - In the meantime Revere had brought down two basket trunks & they were packing books into them. The servants took 20 minutes to dress - came down with wrist bags & gloves - hats & furs on. Bateman & her sister were perfect trumps - worked like slaves - Parsons calm the others did nothing - The firemen took 23 minutes to come - The sitting room was so full of smoke one could not go in - In the meantime I rushed into the Griffiths Garden & under their windows & got them to come help with books - then the men & Engine came. Said "Good Evening, have you a fire" - I said "don't waste time with chemicals - get a hose at once" - They carried one into the cellar - cut a hole through the asbestos ceiling & in three minutes the flames were out. Then a hose through the door up the back stairs - then they broke the windows in the sitting room - Never did you see such a sight - in five minutes more the ceiling would have burned through & all Willie's treasures gone - no books are burned except the Century Dictionary in the dining room - the gateleg table some chairs - all the pictures on that side & the big sideboard are burned to a crisp - & the rugs & curtains. The other things are standing but I hardly think can be repaired -

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(Lady Osler to Mrs. Chapin, Nov. 13, 1915 - 2)

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You know the furnace stands under the dining room - And the Ceiling of the cellar over the furnace is asbestos. The flue was here when we came And the furnace pipe went into it. Thursday Evening I spoke to Henry about having more hot water by 10 o'clock & instead of telling me the coke had not come - he piled on coal - Evidently a spark of coal started fire on some soot - And there must have been some cracked or defective bricks through which the flames reached the beams of the dining room floor. Of course the firemen said it had been smouldering a long time but I don't believe that & am sure it happened between 9 P M Thursday & 3.30 A M Friday. It was all over by 5.30 & the men had a good meal. Willie of course went to bed after he saw the fire was out and books safe. It was simply a wonderful Escape, for books and people. W.O & Revere went to town the next morning & We got the consulting room turned into a dining room. The magazine tables in the drawing room & the consulting room table in the window in the Library - The Insurance men came & I hope we can get plenty of damages to do it over. The Chimney will be repaired first so we can have the fire as it has turned very cold and we are half frozen.

Monday Eve 15th I am afraid you can hardly read this scratch but I can't rewrite it. Willie Archie Malloch and I are in our improvised dining room. I dashed to Cambray and borrowed table & sideboard there were four extra chairs in the hall - We are Comfortable - Archie is busy with inoculations making ready for a Red + Hospital at Palermo probably. We heard from Revere & Campbell & they were leaving Folkestone Early Sunday morning - I have been busy with work men all day - all the business being left to poor me. They found that one beam was in the flue with only 1 1/2 inch covering And Evidently [the] heat of the coal that Jackass put on - heated it up & combustion took place - The furnace will now be moved & keep the dining room cooler in the summer as a portion of it has to be kept on for the bath water. We hope to have some heat in a few days - Plants [have] been moved to the Griffiths & Wrights Greenhouses as it is quite frigid. People have been so kind - & full of sympathy - calling up to ask how I have stood the shock. Others got more Shocked than I - the firemen for instance & Ethel, the idiot - When I saw her with gloves in her hand I shook her out of her fur and veil & made her set to work. Henry is beneath contempt & I have not spoken to him Even (don't dare). Fortunately no one took cold - Good night - I hope I will have no more horrors for my next letter. If you think she could read this please send it to Marjorie And ask her to send it to Miss Nicols - I have so much to do I can't write them all - Harry Wrights wife is coming this week with the baby - not here but to London on their way to Shorncliffe. The Jack Oslers are at Marlborough. Jack is in Camp near there and Nadine with her baby in the Hotel. I hope they will come here one Sunday and have the Christening I am Godmother if you please -

I am really ashamed to send this

Affly

Grace.