

Report From

(Continued from page two)
 prunes." There is rich farmland and little else for miles around, and it takes more time than my schedule allows to get much of anywhere—twelve hours and three train changes to reach the Pyrenees, for instance. Agen has some small industry, a big railroad yard, a section of the slow, green Garonne, endless rain, and is altogether a pretty drab looking place. Nor can I say much for its stuffed prunes.

To continue in this lachrymose vein: Physical is the only kind of Culture that's thought much of, it would seem. Every day or so there is a "match de boxe" or "de rugby", but the concerts have been: a Chopin specialists who was fair to middling, a twin-sister team which I avoided, and another pianist whose efforts were merely distressing. We've seen some Racine and Corneille which—had the actors not been so serious about it all—would have been rattling good melodrama; and the movies are generally such gems as "Lassie la fidele" and the "Les Filles du docteur March."

I spent a good part of my first weeks at the Ecole Normale in finding out what I could about the school—a rather arduous chore, since most of the explaining was done by the Senorita, a dour but kindly old Spanish political refugee who is assistante d'espagnol and whose French accent is second only to mine. We put in some grueling hours, but I've finally gathered that the place is Lot-et-Garonne's small size equivalent of North Carolina's E. C. T. C. There are both boys and girls here, 18 to 22 or so, all of them considerably more intent on passing "Pedagogie A et B" than on improving their English or learning about the U. S. A. That, and the fact that I'm something less than an inspired teacher, makes it a little difficult to get much accomplished along the lines set up by the Institute—Sing "America," I was told—but my classes usually degenerate into my sitting and looking at the students rather helplessly while they just wish I'd

go away.

There is another American girl in Agen, Mary Farrington of Montana, who is the English assistant at the girls' lycee; and at the boys' lycee, a walking caricature of an Englishman—hyphenated last name, an idea that American men's neckties are just this side of immoral, a yen for cricket and crumpets, and so on. We get together now and then to speak the mother tongue, for the three of us are obviously regarded as curiosities by many of the local citizens and it gets a bit lonesome at times.

The people here are difficult to meet, or even to know. By devious means we are beginning to get acquainted with some, though. There's the old cure, for instance, who invites us occasionally to enjoy his cog au vin, aged Armegnac and long, involved, usually pointless tales. He's a ruddy, cheerful soul; obviously not one to forego the good things of this world so long as the Next is not imminent. Then there is Monsieur Guye who, having read all of Faulkner, looks at me somewhat askance since he learned that ah'm from the South; and Mile. Bourdil, who likes to laugh at my French, and her amateur bull-fighter friend. And several other less picturesque types who have been a help.

My real problems are along other lines. The coffee here, for example, and the language, and—let's face it—the plumbing. All other inconveniences fade into insignificance beside these.

The coffee has almost succeeded in disillusioning me about the delicacy of the French palate. If I thought anyone would believe me,

I'd say that Mr. Welfare's worst moments never produced anything like it. Lest my friends become too alarmed about my well being, though, I hasten to add that I am sustained by my private hoard of Maxwell House.

The language difficulty exists chiefly, I keep telling myself, because of the accent of this region. Surely I never heard anything like it in Dr. Jordan's class. Also there are a number of pretty essential phrases that I didn't glean from "French Literature of the 17th Century." The people here are quite patient, though, and speak to me slowly and distinctly—as to a not very bright but harmless child of six—so I'm making some progress.

The plumbing is another matter and I won't go into detail. Suffice it to say that after these four months I am more than ever convinced of the essential hardness of the French people.

And now, lest you think I am disenchanted with this business, let me assure you that even the afore-

mentioned problems are minuscule compared with the compensations. Christmas, for instance, Mary and I and a couple of G. I. Bill students from England and Denmark went to Italy. None of us spoke Italian, but we got along famously with the aid of a little phrase book which went into such detail that we could have said "Please put pommade on the ends of my moustachio", had the occasion arisen. We had about five days in and around Nice, five in Rome and four in Florence. Of course we did all the regulation things—visited Monte Carlo and Cannes and saw the Colosseum by moonlight and stopped at the Keats-Shelley house in Rome and ate pizza and drank chianti. There were other things, though, that made the trip one I'll not forget for awhile—like walking around Florence at night when all the windows were shuttered and the only noise was the clattering of horse-drawn cabs along the crooked little streets, and time seemed to have turned back a goodly number

of years. Or like seeing the breath-taking little fishing villages along the Mediterranean, away from the glamour of the tourists' Cote d'Azur.

Then, come Spring and a surcease to this rain, there'll be some trips, to places within weekend reach, cahors, and the prehistoric caves of Les Eyzies and a few others; and I'll have a week at Pentecost for the Pyrenees or more of Provence. I'll do the best I can with Paris in our 15 day Easter holiday, and when school is out there'll be about seven weeks left in which to visit the Alps, Switzerland, maybe Germany, then England. That's more than I can do properly in such a short time, but I aim to try.

And in the meantime I'd like to hear from you and your gentle readers.

Best wishes to all,
 "Waldo"

Margaret Raynal, '48
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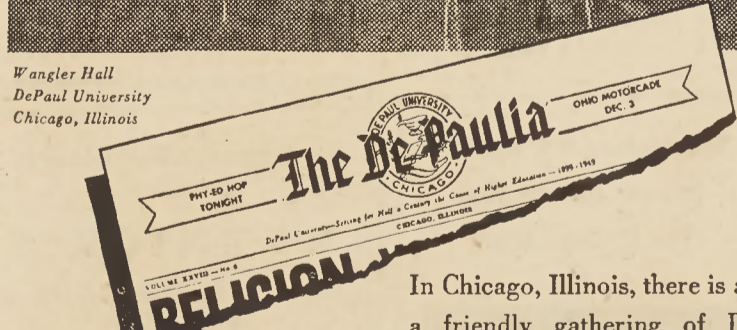
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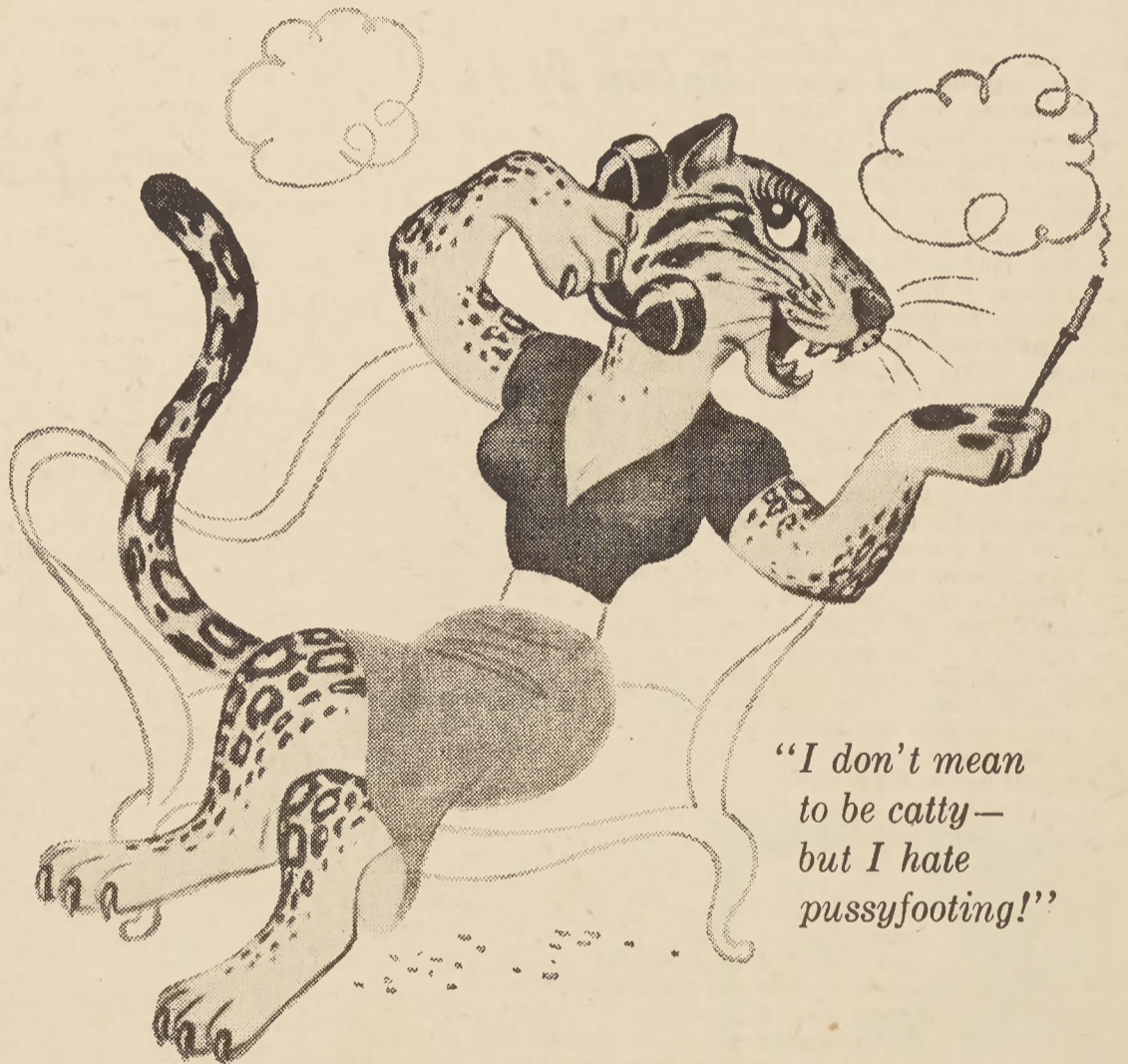
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Number 13...THE OCELOT



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