My dear Spencer,

This morning I received your letter mailed February 1st, it was addressed to Mother also, but she has not had a chance to read it yet because I am still in the office.

After Mother and I received your letter written from Chatham at Christmas time, telling us about things that you had found wrong in Kent, we telephoned Granny (as Granny told you) because you had said that Granny had suggested you should write us, and, therefore, we knew that Granny knew about your difficulties. Our conversation with Granny was helpful to us because it always helps to discuss things personally; also, Granny told us that she was sending us copies of letters written by Father Chalmers and we have been in hopes that these might help us find a solution to your problem. As a matter of fact both Mother and I have refrained from writing to you directly on the subject because we felt that we should know as much as possible about it before writing, and we hoped that Father Chalmers' letters would supply this knowledge. Unfortunately these letters have not yet arrived; nevertheless, we don't want to wait any longer in writing to you; above all we want you to know that we have done much thinking and discussing about what you have written and that we fully understand and appreciate your problem.

There comes a time in everyone's life when one begins to realize that things are not really either completely black or completely white and that, on the contrary, the truly black and truly white things are the exception rather than the rule. One finds that most things are, in reality, grey - some a light grey, others dark, almost black - the same as those that are light grey are almost white. You, of course, know what I mean by this simile: prior to the time in everyone's life (I purposely say everyone, because the few exceptions that exist are people who just don't grow up - they remain children all their lives) to which I have referred, the people of one's acquaintance are either heroes (pure white) or villains (pure black) - the same way as the characters in the old-fashioned melodramas, which were, after all, written for pretty simple-minded audiences. When I say "people of one's acquaintance", I have in mind those that one knows only slightly or those that one reads about - not one's every day friends, brothers and sisters, etc., but people such as for instance Churchill, President Roosevelt and General McArthur, whom one considers as entirely white, while others such as Hitler, Laval and similar characters are considered as entirely black. Now, I daresay that even a sterling character such as Churchill must have some traits that, to his intimates, detract a little from the pure whiteness: perhaps he is rough and impatient with his servants, so that, to them, he looks only light grey. On the other hand, such a pitchblack character like Laval may, at one time, have helped an orphan through College and, therefore, may only be a dark grey. Then, of course, there are the exceptions (very few) such as our friend Chavin Domenech who is, doubtless, as "white" as anyone can be - what is, in Spanish, called "una santa" - and, as an example of blackness, Hitler, in whom I cannot conceive even a ray of whiteness.

What I have been trying to convey is that nothing in this world is either 100% perfect (that, as you well know, is a redundancy) or 100% bad, and that holds particularly true of humans and human institutions. After all, the expression "only human" is based on recognition of the fact that whatever is human is imperfect.

Your own problem, the faults and deficiencies which you have found at Kent, is a sample of what happens in the world at large. One has high
expectations of things and of people, seeing them entirely white — and after closer acquaintance one finds that there is quite a bit of darkness, so that the true shade is a light grey and one is, quite naturally, disappointed. Usually the erroneous original belief that the thing is white, and the consequent disappointment, are caused by inexperience with such things; only as time goes on does one reach the point where expectations are not set too high.

February 19th. I was interrupted here and have been unable to continue until today.

Day before yesterday came your letter mailed January 22nd, which cheered Mother and me considerably when we read it; it was written a day or two after you had a heart-to-heart talk with Father Chalmers. However, after reading it, we noticed that it had been written before the one mailed on February 1st, to which I started to reply in the present one. In other words, your talk with Father Chalmers seems, at first, to have made you feel better about the whole situation but, a few days later — a little over a week — your original dissatisfaction seems to have returned to plague you.

It is very understandable, and to your credit, that you should be shocked by the filthy-mindedness of some of the boys; I am sorry that I must tell you that there are many such boys and that they are to be found in all schools. I cannot, of course, assert this on first hand knowledge because I don't know the boys of all schools. But, in my checkered youth, I was in thirteen schools in three different countries and my experience was exactly the same as yours, and starting at the same age. Father Chalmers is right when he says that the boys are that way because they think it is smart; among a high percentage of boys of a certain age group that sort of thing is considered smart, and this seems to carry on from generation to generation without anybody having been able to stop it. I suggest that you avoid boys with that tendency, without appearing prudish about it so as not to give them cause to single you out for their perverted ideas of what is smart. What you write about the "thought" which one of the boys wrote in your Year Book is indeed disgusting; what is more — it is stupid and tactless and I regret, with you, that your memento of your first year at Kent should have been so stupidly marred.

You also tell us about other deficiencies that you have come to notice at Kent: poor food, carelessly prepared, and lack of attention in case of illness or accident. Referring, first, to the latter matter, it does seem inex-usable that Peter should have been neglected so long before receiving attention for a broken bone; sometimes it requires something like that to happen to awake the authorities to the fact that something is wrong and to make them correct a bad situation; of course, that isn't much help to the unfortunate victim or to his family and friends.

Regarding the food — that, among the several unsatisfactory conditions which you report, is possibly the one where I do not sympathize with you entirely. My reason is that it is obviously impossible to prepare food in such quantities and, at the same time, have it retain the quality one would expect at home. The large quantities also have to do with the "strangers" that one finds in bread or elsewhere: I want you to know that, even at home, I have found worms and snails in salad and, just last Saturday, lunching at a posh Yacht Club, I got a biscuit with a fly in it (the fly was dead). Similar things will be found wherever food is prepared in large quantities, such as ships, schools and in the Army. If I were you, I wouldn't become too concerned about this. The matter of all the boys simultaneously getting the "trots" is something else, and I am glad to hear that it was investigated; let's hope that they find the root of the trouble.

February 22nd (Washington's birthday). Here I was interrupted again, but this time I hope to be allowed to finish. At last we got Granny's
letter written soon after we had talked with her and transcribing a letter from Father Chalmers, which he wrote right after his talk with you. Granny also wrote that your grandfather had written you and sent you some war savings stamps. I trust that you are filling an album of these, so as to add to your bonds which, by the way, are in the I.T.T. safe in New York. I also trust that you have written your grandfather to thank him; you should know that he is not at all well off and that sending you these stamps is a real sacrifice to him. He, of course, wants to get to know his oldest grandson and I want you to be sure to write to him.

Father Chalmers writes that you have expressed the desire to become a priest. That is not unnatural and I can understand your feelings in the matter; nevertheless, I want you to give it very serious thought, for which you have, of course, ample time since no direct step could be taken in that direction for some years to come. Before taking such a decision definitely, a person must have a full realisation of the personal sacrifices that priesthood entails and must have the invincible conviction that his strength and firmness of character will be sufficient to produce the continuity of his devotion, against all outside influences, for the length of his life — which may be quite a long time. Good priests are most unusual and outstanding people. Sometimes I think it is better to be a good straight Christian than a mediocre priest.

Mother and I were very pleased about the nice things that Granny told us in her letter about your manners and behaviour, and about how well you looked after the "three old ladies" while in Chatham. I congratulate you on this; it shows that the stuff you are made of is good.

We have been somewhat concerned about your marks; please knuckle down to the studies and show us that you can implement the quality of your brain by some concentration on matters of importance — that is to say, constructive concentration, or what is commonly known as "grinding". You will find that so much of one's time, throughout life, must be devoted to that activity that it is quite important to do it well.

Spencer, old boy, this has been a long letter but it had to be, because I had a lot of things to tell you. Keep a stiff upper lip and your head straight and remember "bien faire et laissez dire".

Much love from all of us,

Your