

TO "HER" AT HOME

BEING THE LETTERS OF PVT. FRANCIS L. FROST,
A. E. F., FRANCE

I HAVE been doing considerable traveling in connection with my trip abroad, and I am seeing, hearing, and doing interesting things. I remember how you told me that some of the boys complain that they can't write interesting letters because of the strict censorship, while others manage to send regular stories. I can sympathize with the former. Of course we can't write about the big things we see and hear, the things that are counting heavily for the Allies, and that are Oh, so encouraging! But we can tell you at home to hold your heads high when the American soldier in France is spoken of, for he is making things hum, learning all he can, and putting it into use in such an effective manner that France idolizes him; and the latter fact, far from turning his head, is giving him a truer view of what the French mean by *camaraderie*. You should see a bunch of blue-clad poilus—veterans, too—going along a pretty French road, singing a lilting song, a smile on their faces, and the very ends of their waxed mustaches bristling with the unconquerable spirit of France!

The Australians are a fine body of men, too, and they and the Americans get along splendidly. One sees many races of men gathered together to do for the Allies, and it makes one appreciate the fact that this is a world war.

Just now I am in a British Y. M. C. A. hut. It is crowded with Americans, and the atmosphere is distinctly U. S. On an improvised stage is an antique piano, and there is a crowd gathered around it singing rag-time. Just now it is "The Sunshine of Your Smile." Last night there was a concert here, given by some French war workers. A young poilu with numerous service and wound stripes, played the violin wonderfully. There was a 'celloist, too, and a young French girl who sang French, American, and Italian songs.

She sang "Don't cry, little girls, don't cry. They have broken your doll, I know!" She had all the expression of the French, coupled with a fine voice, and she was a real beauty. Imagine the effect on a bunch of American boys. They'd have had her singing all night if possible.

When we marched to camp we had plenty of chance to try out our French with the children, who ran along with us and begged for "un sou" or a collar button. Many of them talk a little English, and if any at all, it is always good. They are serious minded little folk, God knows. But they are happy, nevertheless, and glad to see "Sammée." I have found that it is association with the people that alone can teach us the language. I have to get out of ridiculous situations by writing in French. I did that with one little tot. She gravely scanned what I had written, nodded her head vigorously with a "Oui, je comprends," and then, taking my pencil, went over what I had written, and put in some graves and acutes I had left out, for all the world like a little school teacher. There is one stock phrase that I have learned to rattle off, because it is so handy, *Si vous voulez que je vous comprenne, il faut parler plus lentement*. Then they won't jabber away so fast and one can understand a little of what they mean.

CHEER UP AND "CARRY ON"

I HAVE been reading *Under Fire* too, a queer coincidence, but I was not able to get a translation, so I probably missed the style and got only the narrative. I can understand your desire to be over here under the circumstances you mention. It is but a normal and patriotic wish. But I am nevertheless constrained to set down one fact: No matter what you read about the war—no matter how horrible it may be or how vivid and active an imagination you may have—your mind can only conjure up a picture that falls as far from the truth as evil is from right. You may think I exaggerate. But there are millions of Poilus and Tommies and Sammées who have lived that life and talk about it with

a strange look in their eyes . . . but for you to express a desire to be undergoing these same things—well, I can't say it, but I only hope you understand! . . . Meanwhile, carry on, and forget about coming to France. You say you can "read such things" without a qualm, but there are reasons, as I said, that you can hardly appreciate. So cheer up, Miss Fire Eater, and continue to knit and cheer up your flock of soldier boys by writing your fine letters.

One of the boys in the Unit is sadly afflicted by the wiles of She who sells tickets at the movies here. He speaks no French, and she no English, but there seems to be some kind of language they both understand. Anyhow, a boat ride on the lake was on the program, and the enamoured Sammée "hired" me to go along as official interpreter and boat rower. Well, Barkis was willin', so I went. The thought struck me that I had them at my mercy, as it were. But I didn't take advantage of the fact, of course. I can't describe the situation to you very well, but I did more laughing during that expedition than I ever did before in my life. *Oo, la, la*, as the French say, it was to laugh, all right. Do you remember that picture on the *Post* of an American soldier in France, talking to a French demoiselle, with a dictionary. It's a common sight. The person that drew it must have had experience. Thank goodness, I can carry on a conversation, if not indulge in rhetoric. I can make Juliette understand!

BY MOTOR TRUCK TO THE FRONT

SINCE my last letter, I have changed my place of abode. Our journey was by truck, and as we had several which were in all stages of repair, it was necessary to tow them. Towing isn't a pleasant job, especially for the fellow on the truck being towed, as I found out. All the dust in the world comes a-whooping up into your face and the Lord only knows when the guy that's towing you is going to stop and let you pile up on his rear.

Willie was piloting a truck that had no brakes, and he had an interesting job. He broke his tow rope about twenty

times on the trip and of course the whole bunch had to stop. There are many picturesque curves and steep grades on the road we took, and the driver of the truck that was towing Willie was particularly daredevil. He'd go rambling down one of these steep hills, around curves and over bumps, with the dust pouring up into Willie's face. Ten times out of eleven he'd have to slow up for the truck ahead at the bottom of the hill. If Willie was caught unaware, he would smash into the front truck, and if not, the best he could do would be to steer to one side and let the tow rope catch him up. Then both trucks would slough all over the road and nearly upset. Poor Willie was nearly crazy. Every time we stopped, he got out and harangued the crowd, "Honestly, boys, it's hell!" he kept repeating. "Dick up front goes whooping along and how the devil am I going to know when he's going to stop?" But we'd tell him, "Cheer up, Willie, there's a whole radiator and engine between you and the front truck; and you don't have to worry until they're smashed." So every time the train stopped we would gather around Willie's truck and take exact measurements on the angle at which his radiator was bent and figure on how many more smashes he could have before the next one would get him.

By this time it was getting late and we were all dusty and grimy and dry and very tired. But there was a long way to go yet, and go we did, in spite of the faint moonlight which made everything very deceptive. You were never sure whether the truck ahead of you was two feet or a hundred away; and there was one bit of open road, about which the orders were, "Go like hell and don't raise any dust." We obeyed the "go" part, but the dust was not conspicuous by its absence.

The wee hours were coming on as we neared our destination, when the leading truck gave up the ghost for want of gas, with a dying choke, amid the expletives of its crew which he heard all along the column. There are times, as the writer George Pattulo says, when profanity ceases to be profanity and becomes a picturesque art. Thus it was then.

The surplus supply of gas was some way behind, but finally we were ready to go ahead and at last pulled in at the end of our journey sometime before dawn. As soon as the trucks were lined up everyone climbed in back to flop for a few hours until morning, with the ever present "rumble-rumble-roomp" of the "big boys" to lull us to sleep. The next morning—Oh, blessed soap and water, Oh, blessed fried spuds and bacon!

We have become accustomed to the sound of the big guns long since. It is interesting to watch them shooting at the planes Fritz sails over in, to see the little puffs of smoke, where the shells are coming ever closer to him, until he runs for his own lines, or—once in a while, is shot down.

What is left of this town is very nice. But there is a lot that isn't left that must have been nicer once upon a time. Les Boches sojourned here for a while, and got peeved because the French preferred to have them elsewhere. So when they left in haste they blew most of the big buildings sky high, for which act they are suffering right now. In this new offensive Fritz is butting his ivory dome against a defense that is, as the French say, *absolument irreductible*, and last reports say that allied counter attacks are forcing them back. Oh, girl, the Germans have got about as much chance as the proverbial snowball in hell! Just so! As I heard one poilu exclaim this morning as he read the paper: "Oo, la, la! Just look at what those Yankee kids are doing!"

"OH, SO ENCOURAGING"

MUCH boom-boom-boom in this vicinity just now. Also buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z overhead at night. But Fritz, as I mentioned before, keeps pretty well up in the clouds. He doesn't seem to have half the nerve and pep that the Yanks, who are after him, have. More power to the Yanks!

You ask if the Censor won't let me tell of some of the things I referred to which are "Oh, so encouraging." What are they? One thing is the spirit of the boys over here. A million words have been written about it, but none will ever

express it rightly. A civilian, coming among the soldiers, would say he was not aware of it because he heard many complaints. That would show he did not understand the soldier. What soldier is there who does not kick? No matter how good a meal is dished up, he must bawl out the cook. He may kick, too, because he has a certain thing to do. But you'll notice he always *does* that thing well. There is where the spirit comes in. Secretary Baker says 300,000 more of the family reach France each month. Sounds encouraging. Americans in this last offensive have undertaken major operations alone, and have done as well as the best of the Allied troops. Sounds more encouraging, doesn't it? But you know all that. There are many other facts with the same encouraging qualities. But we are not over-confident. We know the hard row to be hoed. We know that when we come home we may have several of those gold service stripes on our left arm. But won't we be proud of them? I should say *yes!* You are beginning to see U. S. boys with two of those same stripes now. I saw several today. I won't get my first until November. I am quite certain of being here that long!

It is very kind of you not to ask me to put the name of the place I am at under the stamp! We don't use stamps anyhow over here. Besides by the time you got the letter, I should very likely be somewhere else—you bet I'll never be a tourist after the war. And, as you say, when Uncle Sam puts a censor somewhere it is not for us to do any dodging.

A FOREST MEETING

YOU ask me to tell you some of my experiences with the people of France. I had an adventure some time ago that will live in my memory. It seems strange to me now that I can remember so well the details of what I am about to write. When you read it you may understand, however. It is but one of a thousand similar incidents that must have happened in France, incidents that help us to a better understanding of the cause for which we are fighting.

One evening I sought quiet, and wandered far beyond

the outskirts of the town where we are billeted. It was not yet dark, for the days were still long and the evening was full of peace for those who love the silence of forests. I had been following for several hundred yards the course of a stream, and presently I came to a small clearing. It was a spot full of beauty; all around were the tall evergreens, now in the rays of the setting sun casting slanting shadows across the wavy grass of the clearing. The stream found its course around the edge of the little opening, emerging from the woods between two great granite rocks, to gurgle over a pebbly bottom, through the waving grasses again, bordered with blue fleur de lis, to finally disappear once more into the dimness of the woods beyond. Leaning against one of the great rocks, I surveyed the scene with satisfaction. It was just such a place that I had sought for—a place where one might go to read his book, perhaps, or to lounge among the grasses, gazing at the blue sky above and thinking thoughts of things far away; a place seemingly distant from war.

But on this particular evening I was not long alone. Hearing a sound above the murmur of the brook, I turned and saw standing near me an old French peasant who gazed abstractedly across the clearing.

“Good evening, Monsieur,” I said. He responded civilly. A moment of silence ensued.

“It is a wonderful evening,” I said at last.

“You speak truly, M’sieu,” he answered. He regarded me curiously for a moment. “You understand the French a little, yes?” I nodded. Again only the rippling sound of the stream broke the silence. The Frenchman leaned heavily against the rock.

“Yes, M’sieu, it is a wonderful evening. A beautiful spot, also. I come here every evening.”

“You find it so beautiful, then?”

“Ah, yes. But beautiful in a sad way. You see those tall fir trees, and the song they sing when the wind blows, you hear it; you see the waving grasses, and there is music in the brook. And over it all, you see draped the mantle of

the calm blue sky, now shot with gold from the rays of the setting sun. You see and hear all that, yes?"

"Yes, I see and hear all that."

Suddenly the old man's form straightened. His seemed to be the position of a soldier, save that his left arm held out an almost accusing finger, that pointed across the clearing.

"*Regardez, M'sieu!*" I looked, at his bidding, and saw what I had not seen before. Beneath the shadow cast by a long fir tree which stood apart from the rest, I saw what seemed to be three low mounds. Behind each, I saw a cross, and on each cross the round red, white and blue insignia that betokened the victim of an air-raid.

"*Les Boches,*" I said in a low voice.

"*C'est ça,*" the peasant answered simply. "They lie there, my wife, my little daughter, my baby son. And why? *Le bon Dieu* knows, and can we question?" He sighed heavily. "We are simple people here. We concern ourselves with the affairs of the soil. In the spring we plant, and in the autumn we harvest. Our life is full and pleasant. And then we heard one day that it was to be war. Those who remembered the days of '70 said that the Germans were coming to ravage the land again. The Mayor of the town yonder advised us to go to another village farther removed from the frontier. But there was the harvest coming. On it depended our very life. What should we do? Our existence was threatened in any case—we stayed."

THE HUNS ARRIVE

THE old man walked slowly across the clearing and stood looking down at the three mounds. I followed him and stood by, respectfully. For a long time he stood thus with bent head, silent, but it was not hard to guess his thoughts. "There came a night," he said at last, "when a heavy hand knocked on our door, and a German voice demanded entrance in the name of the Kaiser. The wife, clasping the baby boy in her arms, ran for the door behind. I seized my daughter's hand. In a moment we were running silently towards the woods. But the baby's cry was heard by the Germans. A

shot rang out, and the bullet whizzed close by. We ran but the faster. Another shot, and the wife stumbled—then fell—”

The Frenchman stopped speaking for a time.

“Perhaps it was better so. A painless death, before the filthy hands of the beasts could touch her. She was fair, and beautiful, she——, but you know, M’sieu. And the baby boy found his death against her breast, crushed in her fall. I had no need to look twice. I took the little girl in my arms, determined to dash her to death against those rocks yonder, rather than that she should be in the power of those wretches. The Germans came running out of the woods into this clearing and surrounded me—one of them struck at me with his saber, as I raised my arm to shield my little one——”

He held up his arm, and for the first time I saw that he had no right hand.

“——And then there was a blinding flash, a roar as of many thunders. And I knew no more. Look, M’sieu!” I looked, and saw a deep depression in the otherwise level surface of the clearing, as a shell hole, but now all grass grown. “Some German aviator must have blundered,” the peasant said. “Those beasts were sent to their last rest by the deadly dew dropped from the curse of their own making. For their evil, a sudden death—far better for such as they, the torture. And here I stand, unfit for service while France bleeds again——” he held up his handleless arm—— “condemned to labor only in the fields while brothers and comrades know the trench. This in my youth!”

“Youth, M’sieu?”

“Yes. How many years do you think I have?”

I looked at him—his gray white hair, his bent form, his wrinkled face.

“Sixty?” I ventured.

“I will be thirty-eight next month, M’sieu. Now do you understand the meaning of the word *Revanche*!”

“There are a hundred million people across the seas, M’sieu,” I said, “who know these things. The sons of your Sister Republic are coming by the hundred thousands—will

come by the millions. I make no idle boast, M'sieu. But America has found an idealism from which she will not swerve. Our President has said that 'the day has come when America has the privilege to spend her blood and her might for the principles which gave her birth and the peace which so justly she cherishes. God helping her, she can do no other.'"

I will never forget those evening hours in that little clearing. Every detail is impressed indelibly on my mind. And think how significant that meeting was in one way. Suppose another German aviator could have looked down on that clearing that day. What would he have seen? He would have seen an old man, bowed down with grief, over the graves of his loved ones, typifying the challenge to humanity thrown down before humanity by this "heaven born" master who claims his power from God! And to that challenge he would have seen the defiant answer of a free people, symbolized by the presence of the simple soldier in khaki, who wore the uniform of the Army of the United States of America.

THE SPIRIT OF *camarades*

NO, it is not strange that the French and Americans become such good *camarades*. It is a case of mutual appreciation, hard to describe.

Right across the street from the school house where we are billeted is a "*Caves du Midi*"—a place, most informal, where a one time French soldier sells wines and beer. I have struck up an acquaintance with him, more on account of his tales, than of his wines—to tell the truth, this French red and white wine gets my goat from looking at it. His idol is America. America, he says, has solved the problem of world freedom, and if it hadn't been for her, France would be German now. He is quite old, and shows the effect of his turn in the trenches. It was the loss of one eye that gave him his discharge. After going scratchless through Verdun, he later fell from a horse and lit on a tree trunk. If that isn't

tough luck I don't know what is! That is the kind of thing that will happen to me, I suppose.

I haven't seen Bairnsfather's *Fragments from France*. I have seen human fragments, pathetic enough in appearance God knows, but Oh, so cheery! How little a thing a mere broken arm is beside some of them, and I thought I was feeling bad. More and more it is brought to us on how vast a scale things are done here. What is the future historian going to do? As you say, all this is a wonderful experience for a boy of twenty, and I am thankful that I can do what little I can.

HOW'S ATLANTA NOW?

The War Face of the Great Southern City

By DUDLEY GLASS

ATTLANTA is taking the war seriously but not tearfully; she is sorry it had to be, but joyous at having a part in it. She sent her boys away with silken flags flying, and she is devoting herself now to taking the boys from other towns into her heart and showing them that she loves a soldier. There is no mourning in Atlanta, though the gold stars have replaced the blue on many a service flag in the windows of her homes; there is only rejoicing that the Americans are pressing on toward the Rhine and the hope that the Allies will make no peace until they have carried the flag to Berlin.

It is Atlanta's way to meet great situations joyously, exuberantly, and to "carry on" with a song. Atlanta will never admit that she can be injured by fire or flood or pestilence. She has accepted the hardships of war with a grin of good-humor; she has taken the profits where she could, though they have been few, for there have been no great war contracts here. She has given to the Red Cross and the Red Triangle; she has subscribed to the Liberty Loans; but she declines to be down-hearted.

I have heard visitors from the East say that we Southerners do not realize we are at war; that we are pursuing our daily lives just as in the years before the name of Belgium loomed large on the world map. But those Easterners did not know us. We have been in the war since it began. Our boys were filtering into the fight through Canada long before the Lusitania was sunk. We were watching the career of Kiffin Rockwell, of Atlanta and America, as he piloted a French airplane when the flying game was young, and we honored him and envied him the sacrifice he made.