

SEEING FRANCE FROM A STRETCHER

Dear Ben:

France, 30: 4: '17.

Do you remember how we used to sing off the countries and capitals of Europe in the old public school? I didn't realize then that France was a real country with grass and flowers and trees—and mud—just like Canada. I think I always thought of it as an irregular pink block on a patchwork of paint called Europe. Nor do I know much more of the country now. In the trenches I usually kept too close to the earth to see anything but the mud; when the battalion was at rest I was too busy getting the same gluey mud off my uniform and polishing my buttons to enjoy the beauties of the scenery.

The one trip across the country that is most vivid in my memory is the journey from my little shell hole near Thelus to this hospital. I call it "Seeing France From a Stretcher." Mr.—in the old "High" used to tell us that Goldsmith walked through Europe. Other tourists have used various conveyances. Possibly they saw more of the rural beauty of the country, yet I doubt if their experiences were more interesting than mine.

After I was hit, as I told you, I lay shivering in my shell hole, miserably wet and frightened. Shells seemed to be bursting everywhere. Then came those Heinie prisoners. After fixing up my wounds they put me on a ground-sheet and with one Bosche at each corner we started towards the rear. Lying in the shell hole, I had feared some shell would finish me. After travelling some distance in that ground-sheet I hoped one would. I know my bearers were as gentle as possible but the sheet sagged in the middle so that I lay in a most uncomfortable position, and the ground was so rough that every step produced a jar and every jar excruciating pain. The water-soaked earth was dotted with wounded Canadians, many of whom must have died before stretcher-bearers could reach them. Many, more fortunate, were able to walk back. One of these, whose arm had been blown off, waved the bandaged stump as he passed and shouted, "Hurrah for Blighty."

My Heinies knew no English. They pretended to understand French yet when I tried my Vancouver "High" accent on them they looked puzzled and said "Ne Comprends pas." Strange how foreign languages are neglected in German schools.

After travelling in this manner for what seemed hours, we reached an advanced dressing-station. Here we stopped only a minute. A M. O. and a padre were attending the more serious cases. My wounds, being comparatively slight, I departed having received a cheery greeting.

At the next dressing station I was less fortunate. I was laid on the ground among hundreds of others lying in long rows awaiting attention. It was snowing and I was colder than ever. One by one the fellows were carried into the little dug-out to have their wounds dressed. I longed for my turn to come, but it proved less enjoyable than I anticipated. First an orderly asked me "umpteenth" questions regarding my name, religion, next-of-kin, etc. What a thirst for know-