

It was the recollection of the candle shades at a house for her farm unit that gave me the idea. The French people say "You Americans are so practical". That seems to impress them very much. All in all, I belong in a class of things - folding umbrellas, and stove, and my ink tablets and pocket carpenter shop and things like that. The simplicity of our boys and their general good conduct causes much comment. "They are like children, these Americans," I hear quite often when there is a ball game on, or races, or something. I am trying to find some general "American" spirit among the soldiers - it is not often one has a chance like this to see so many different parts of our country represented. Miss Dunn said we were too big a country to produce a type, but I don't feel so sure. There is something very much alike in most of the boys; something certainly not French nor English nor German nor Italian. I can't quite put my finger on it though. It's something like a capacity for play, and yet that's Anglo-Saxon. It has something to do with simplicity too, and something to do with alertness and eagerness. Maybe I'll know better when I've seen more. They're splendid men. I've never been so proud of my country as I am right now. I said something like that to a couple of them this morning and they replied "We've never thought so much of American women as we do over here". - "Then quality meets."

One of the most impressive daily occurrences here is "Standing retreat". I don't just know what that means but at 5 o'clock the bugle sounds and there's a short drill - not a big line just small groups scattered about the town. After that the band plays first the Marseillaise then the Star Spangled Banner, and every soldier within hearing whether he's in the drill or quite alone stands at salute until both are over. It's absolutely quiet all through the town except for the music. I get thrills every time. It's the same at the regimental service on Sundays. It ends with the two airs and every soldier at salute, absolutely motionless. I like our regimental service. It's out of doors in our Grove. There's a bandstand at one end covered with hunting and the Allied flags. The men march to the Grove and then break ranks and form a big semi-circle around the bandstand - I'm usually somewhere in the middle of them. A lot of French people gather around and chatter right through everything. The chaplain leads the singing. We begin with a lot of songs - always the Battle Hymn, America, and Columbia, the God of the Ocean, then Onward Christian Soldiers and sometimes some other hymns. The rest of the service varies, sometimes there's just a sermon and a prayer, sometimes more, but it's always good - the chaplain is fine - and it always ends with the Marseillaise and the Star Spangled Banner. We sit on the ground for the sermon and my such a dusting of dried grass as there is when we stand again. Can you get the picture - it's a good one, mostly brown - karkle and brown hair and hands and faces - lots of clean, splendid boys in a huge semi-circle. The band on the stand - the Chaplain in uniform standing in front - the French people on benches or standing at the fringes and lots of French children scattered all about among the soldiers - in little groups - right under the bands and everywhere. Our boys play a lot with the children. It's not at all an unusual sight to see a tall soldier with a tiny girl in his arms, or a little boy clinging to his hand. There's one lieutenant I often see - a huge man - and he almost always has some children somewhere about him. I sometimes wonder how good it is for the children - the men give them so much chewing gum and candy. I guess its about all they get though so I don't believe it hurts them.

I've just reread this and I feel apologetic, but I'm not going to apologize any more for my letters. They have to be about trifles because my days are full of them. If you want thrills read the papers or one of the thousand and one war books. If you don't like stupid letters you needn't read them, but they're the best I can do. Contres is dull - that's just why there is so much need for a Y here. It's a pretty important place though for our boys go right up to the trenches from here. However even if it were exciting it probably wouldn't do you any good for the excitement would get censored out. There isn't any though and I should think the soldiers would find it pretty stupid. Personally, it isn't stupid at all. I love the work better every day and I am happier in it. I'm beginning to feel more at home here now and so things run more easily and I feel as though I were surrounded on every side by friends - American and French, big and little, - everyone is kind to me. That doesn't make me think any less often about you all though.