

20-28 October
St. Romaine.

Dearest Father:

I can't tell you how many times each day I write these letters - in my mind! Dozens of things come up every day I long to tell you all about, but it simply can't be done; I've neither the time nor energy for the reams it would mean. I'd like to tell you all about the country, we're surrounded by vineyards and its grape picking and pressing season. Funny little high wheeled carts go by every evening, loaded with time worn barrels brimming over with grapes, and traveling presses anchored first by one barn, then by another. I've seen the presses work, but not the human presses the soldiers tell of. Lots of them say they're going to swear off "vin blanc" now they've seen it made. They say the peasants get right into the grapes and tread them knee deep in good old Homeric fashion, only bare feet are so much more poetic, here they get in shoes and all! I would like to see it.

Some of the vineyards have turned a gorgeous red - almost like home - a few big white birches between here and St. Aignan are yellow. That's about the only sign of October as we know it. The noons are hot still, but evenings and nights pretty cold, its hard to dress according. I'm pretty comfortable though in two pairs of woolen stockings and high boots. Its often warmer outdoors than in for the fuel question is a serious one and an unheated house gets pretty cold. I've a fireplace in my room and by dint of begging and stealing I've managed a fire some evenings and most mornings so far. I'm in about the only house in town raised from the ground - my front steps are about five feet long I guess - so I'm hanging on to my billet in spite of a leak in the roof that drips just below the foot of my bed. Its just a question as to whether its better to have your share of dampness come from above or below!

As you may gather St. Romaine is a pretty primitive little place, most of the houses look, literally, hundreds of years old - heavy crumbling stone with great rafters in the ceilings and moss-grown, red tiled roofs. Its picturesque, all right, often as I pass some especially good scenic effect I catch myself looking for the villain or the heroine to take the center of the stage, and I pinch myself to make myself realize I'm really living here, all by myself. I never quite get over the queerness of it.

I guess it was a pretty dirty little town before we arrived. Its hard to tell stables from houses even now, but one thing the American Army is doing for France is cleaning up. The sanitary squads get busy everywhere. I wonder if it will have any lasting effect on the people. I doubt it.

All this preamble because the last week has been so busy I don't know where to begin about it. Perhaps last Sunday was the highest light; the day the newspapers announced "Germany accepts Wilson's conditions". My word! The papers arrived unexpectedly at about four o'clock that afternoon - such a mob as we had! There were only about 50 papers and every man in town wanted one. We sold all but a few and posted those on bulletin boards so everyone could read. The selling was lots of fun, but hectic. I can become "hard-boiled" and keep the boys in a single line when its a question of chocolate, but when its papers - and such papers, I wouldn't even want to try, so a mob stormed the counter and we worked hard to fill their eager hands. Change was impossible, some paid five centimes, some 50 - no one felt it mattered.

Afterwards I got out and wandered around the town. Little groups of boys were all over, discussing which would be the first troops moved and what ship they'd like to take home. I stopped and jollied with them and we hashed probabilities and got thrilled and shook hands all round and had a general jollification.

That evening there was the usual Sunday evening service in the tent, held by the Chaplain who belongs here. Not Chaplain Gilbert I'm sorry to say. This one, Proehl, means well I think, but he folds his hands trinitarily before him and drops into an artificial voice and delivers commonplaces. Its always trying but that night I felt I couldn't stand it. Not one stir of enthusiasm did he give or get. The tent was full because the boys were waiting for chocolate (they usually leave it about half empty when he begins to talk!) I waited until he'd left then I jumped up on the counter, where I could see every man in the tent. I said