

LETTER FROM FRANCE

By E. R. GENTRY

Somewhere in France. Sept. 23, 1918. Mr. E. S. Albright, Mt Vernon, Ky. Dear Edgar:

I can hardly make myself believe that it has been more than three months since I wrote and nearly that long since I wrote the letter telling of my 4th of July in Paris, but it is true. Time certainly does get away, being more than six months now since I left home. I have thought of writing often in the last three months but you know things change after you are over here awhile. At first it is all so new and strange that you are continually wanting to unload your opinion of things on somebody and so you just write, but after a few months, you get used to things. You in a way become civilized and the customs do not seem so strange and you decide after all that French people are not so peculiar and there comes a note of music into the language even if you do not understand it and you find yourself sitting listening attentively to a conversation in French and enjoying it, while you have no idea what they are talking about. "Darned" if I believe I will ever learn it. At any rate I have made a poor start in six months. Oh, I can make my words known get a room, order a meal, or ask the price of an article, but when it comes to even carrying on an ordinary conversation, I go straight up. I have taken lessons from all kind of people, including ladies, but to no avail. I eat at the same table with a French interpreter, who speaks good English, and worry the life out of him. He says he may be able to speak English, but has a time understanding "American". The fact is I have a pretty hard time understanding the English man myself and I do not wonder that he finds our language considerably different from that in England where he learned to speak.

I am getting along nicely with my work. Since I wrote you last I have been transferred from the coored building and have charge of the entertainment work in one of the largest huts in France, by that I mean that I plan all the programs, not that I am an entertainer by any means. We have the three moving pictures each week, and one traveling party of entertainers or speakers. This leaves two nights each week for which I must provide local programs and we have some great ones. You know there is no lack of talent in this army of ours and it is the very best. The fact is that in the last three months I have put on shows with talent right

out of the ranks from tight rope and trapeze performers to hypnotists; from Negro minstrels (with real negroes) to Grand Opera, in fact everything that you would see in any first class show in the city and the boys certainly enjoy them and of course there is always the boxing and wrestling to come in as often as we can find time. Our Sundays are given over entirely now to religious programs. At first we had movies or Sunday night, but of late have cut them out and giving them a straight religious service with good music, often having the band or orchestra to play for us, which makes the service very attractive. I am enjoying my work very much and am feeling fine, in fact never felt better in my life, and weigh 87 kilograms, however much that is.

One thing I have not changed my opinion about in all the time I have been here and that is that nine tenths of our boys over here are better off morally and spiritually than they were at home. Let me give you one example, I have seen fewer drunk men in the last six months than in any six months since I was old enough to remember, in fact out of the thousands of men I have come in contact with in that time, I am sure that I have not seen a dozen men drunk. How different that may seem to many of the fathers, mothers, wives and loved ones at home, from the stories and impressions which they have possibly gotten of conditions over here. They ought to remember that France is not a new country and that their boys are not only satisfied but generally contented and happy. What a blessing it would be to the army if the folks back home could just know and realize that, and stop their worrying. They would thereby remove the greatest cause of worry among the boys, because they say to me over and over again that if father, or mother or wife would not worry, they would be alright. Of course there is danger, but that is the least of the boys' thoughts. I am positive that men are thinking more about religion and their duty to God and man than ever before. I am equally positive that they are thinking less about death. In fact it seems that death is the least of their thoughts and seems to have no terror as we have so long thought of it. I dare say there is less real fear of death in our army than in any class of men you could call together back home, and I do not except the Christians, as a class. The boys we get acquainted with come to shake hands with us and tell us good-bye. Off to the front and tickled to death to get to go. Some come back, others never

come. They seem to regard it a privilege, even though they are all "bumped off" as many of them express it. Several Rockcastle boys I know have been in the thickest of it. So far I have only seen one of them among the "killed in action," Vess Brown, an old school boy of mine I know how hard it must be for his loved ones and the loved ones of any others who may pay the price that the liberty and the defense of Christianity demand, but if they could see and understand, as we do over here and as all will soon understand, they would know that he died in the greatest cause any being, save the Master Himself, ever gave his life for. How I wish our homefolks could realize that it is worth a man's life. Our men are giving a fine account of themselves, but in the words of one of our past leaders "We are beginning to fight," and the Hun who said we would never fight will come to the conclusion as others have in the past, that we will never stop fighting. This does not mean that we are a warring nation. Nor does it mean that our boys will come out of this harden or with the desire and lust for blood that some people seem to think will follow. Far from it. The boys who come back from that hell of death and destruction; shrieking shells, bursting shrapnel; poisonous gas and liquid fire tells us it almost invariably has the opposite effect that it burns the dross from their lives and leaves them purer and better men, less selfish and more considerate of rights of mankind and a closer relation to his God, which can only come through the realization of a Christian service, bravely and nobly performed.

I have heard from several of the Rockcastle boys but so far have only seen four, Floyd Gentry, Will Prakes, Geo. Jarber and Ab Owens, from Mareburg. They are all getting along nicely and making good soldiers, the latter three being in the same camp with me and it is about all the four of us can do to hold down the size camp we have. Of course the Colonel and other officers help us some. I must tell you of what one of the colored soldiers said the other day. One of the Y. M. C. A. girls ask him how he liked the war and he said, "Miss, ah jes likes it so much, I wish I was a baby in my mudders' a'm and a girl baby at dat." Before I left the colored but a great big good natured southern darkey walked up to the counter and bought a package of cakes. As he turned away he said to the crowd standing round, "Dem what ask me for some o' my cakes don' git none. Dem what don' ask me, don' want none". The fellows over here certainly do pull some good ones and I wish I had time to write a book of war stories. Of course there are some chronic grumblers among both white and black; officers and men, but they really mean nothing by it. Its just a part of their every day life. If they do not like the program or the kind of tobacco we sell they "cuss" the Y; if they do not like what they have to eat, and most the time its as good as they had to eat at home, they "cuss" the mess Sergeant and if they get sick, they "cuss" the doctor, but all the same, they always show up at the Y. when they are lonesome, at the mess hall when hungry and at the doctors office when sick. And after all, it is not a bad life over here. None of them ever eat a meal without meat, good white bread and sugar. I have an idea that is more than a lot of you back home can say. Just as they are in the states so they are here, in the best fed, best clothed and best cared for army in the world. All they need is plenty of good cheerful letters from home, full of "pep" and encouragement and if they don't "bring home" the bacon" they will "get a piece of the Rhine" and they will run

"Bill Kaiser" to Berlin just like you see Matt running Jeff in the funny pictures. If this Y. M. C. A., does not send me up front pretty soon, I am going to desert. That bunch of fellows around the St. Mihiel sector are getting to far away from us. While I feel that I am redering the service for which I best fitted, it certainly is a temptation to enlist and join the crowd. I can see Mr. Brown smile, if he happens to read this and say "That's all talk" but you know Marshall Foch said the greatest trouble with the Americans was in holding them back. The Loys go to it, like their daily backs back home, and with so much of that all around you, you naturally absorb some of the courage of the fellows, and get to believe you could really face the Hun without running.

I came into town last night from camp fifteen miles away, got me a room at the hotel and actually slept like somebody, in one of those high French beds just like you used to see at your grandmothers, except that they have a dainty little feather bed over you so light that you feel like it is going to float away with you every time you turn over. I slept so good I think I will take a whole week of it soon. We are entitled to a seven days leave every three months. The soldiers get ten days every four months. I did not take my week at the end of three months, but my six months service will be up on the 9th of Oct. and it is likely that when you get this, I will be climbing the Alps, seeing the sights of Nice and bathing in the Sunshine of Monte Carlo, but do not worry. No soldier in uniform is allowed in the gambling halls during business hours. The great gambling den at Aix-le-Bain, the soldier's leave center has been turned into a magnificent Y. M. C. A. and if the Prince of Monaco turns Monte Carlo over to our government for a leave center, the one there will likely suffer the same fate. I must close. Give my regards to everybody and tell John I will settle with him after the war. I have not received a copy of the Signal since June 7th.

Very truly,
E. R. GENTRY.

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BRODHEAD

Mrs. William Francisco died at her home here Thursday of last week at 4:30 in the afternoon, after a few days of intense suffering from influenza and resulting pneumonia. Mrs. Francisco before her marriage was Miss Floy Tharp, daughter of Mrs. Bettie Tharp. She was a member of the Christian church and up to the past two or three years was active in church and Sunday school work, and was a mighty good woman. She was ever ready to help those in distress and always administered to those who needed her services. On the following day at 2:00 p.m. her remains were buried in the Christian church cemetery after short services by her pastor, Elder L. N. Bowling. On Sunday afternoon at 5:30 the son of this good woman died with the same disease and his remains were buried beside his mother Monday afternoon at 2 o'clock. John Farris was about 13 years old and one of the brightest boys in town and had many friends among his little associates. Besides a heartbroken husband and father, the two are survived by a mother and grandmother, and two little daughters and sisters respectively and a host of other relatives. Sympathy goes out to this heartbroken mother and to Mr. Francisco in this sad hour, but words of sympathy can only help to soothe the pain that death has brought to them, leaving them all broken up, and making their days sad and lonely. At 4:30 o'clock last Friday afternoon Miss Martha Woodall died at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wood-



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all, with Spanish Influenza, and her body was buried at 2:00 o'clock Saturday afternoon, after short services at the grave by the Rev. A. J. Pike, in the Christian church cemetery. She was a fine little girl and had many friends among her associates.—J. Douglas Martin, son of Mrs. R. S. Martin, and a splendid business man, died Tuesday afternoon at 5:45 o'clock. He, too, was a sufferer of Spanish Influenza. He had also been a sufferer for many years with asthma and hay fever. His father, the late R. S. Martin, died about two years ago, and Douglas took over the Tobacco Manufacturing Plant and continued the business in a very successful manner, and had shut down the plant a few months ago, after he knew he was subject to be called into Army service at any time. Douglas had many friends and no young man in our town will be missed more. He was a member of Brodhead Lodge of Masons. His mother, two brothers, Virgil and Dick Martin, and two sisters, Miss Isabelle Martin and Mrs. Byron Owens, survive him. His remains were buried at the family burying ground about two miles from town Wednesday afternoon at 2:00 o'clock after short services at the grave by Eld. L. N. Bowling. The bereaved ones have much sympathy.—News reached us late Wednesday that C. A. Wheelon was dead at his home in Lancaster. J. W. Proctor, father of Mrs. Wheelon, was called to his bedside early Wednesday but only reached him a short time before he died. Mr. Wheelon lived here for a number of years, but moved to Lancaster a year or more ago and has been following his occupation, that of barber, since casting his lot there. His body was shipped here Wednesday night and will be buried with Masonic honors, but at this writing we are not informed as to the exact time or place. Besides his widow he leaves three little children, father and mother and other relatives to mourn his loss. We deeply sympathize with the bereaved ones in the loss of an affectionate husband and father.—The influenza epidemic is still raging in and around town, and before this letter appears in print a number of

deaths will have been reported, as at least five or six persons are now just hanging on to life by a very brittle thread, and no chance held out at all for some. Very few homes have escaped this terrible disease and while there are fewer new cases in town it seems to be spreading fast in the country and a large number of new cases are daily reported.—Mrs. J. M. Adams got a message Wednesday that her brother, a Mr. Skirvin, at Dry Ridge, was in a dying condition and she left immediately for his bedside.—O. R. Cass took Mr. and Mrs. Wheelon to High Bridge, Wednesday, sightseeing. They are visiting their daughter and other rela-

tives here from Kansas.—Mrs. J. W. Masters left for Williamsburg, Monday, on account of the illness of relatives—Miss Maude Bishop tendered her resignation to the Board of Trustees of the Graded and High School here Tuesday and left for Caneyville where she has a better paying position. It seems to us that there is little use for some teachers to enter into contract, except for their own benefit, for they regard it as a mighty little thing to break it. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Bishop left at the same time; just where they went we are not informed. They lived at Somerset before moving here a few weeks ago.

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