

(Mrs. Robt. Brewster)

Sept. 7th (1915) ?

No 3. Canada Gen. Hospital (McGill)  
Camiers

Dear Mabel

*Order return because family  
managing it = must be urgent*

You would be amused to peek through the fly of a tent and see me sitting up in a camp bed with this pad on my knee! Such a comfortable billet! I have not slept in a tent for forty years. Its a bit breezy, and cold & cramped but snug enough - considering. I crossed yesterday from Folkestone to Boulogne as they sent word the Hospital was full & in good working order. Three miles out from Folkestone we passed close to the Cable boat, the Monarch, potted at 2 am by a submarine, the masts out of water & surrounded by trawlers. They have never got one of the "fast trans. charmed" boats that cross twice daily. Col. Birket, Maj Howard, Billy Francis, (a nephew) & Revere met me in the dock. R. looking so brown & well. The McGill unit (358) is stationed at Camiers about twelve miles south of Boulogne, with six other general Hospitals, all in tents. It is close to the sea, from wh. it separated by sand dunes while behind the Downs rise to about 300-400 feet. In the camp are about 8000 people, so that from the top of the downs the spread of white tents makes a most attractive sight. and far away towards Etaples one can see a second group of tents & huts. The McGill men are so nice, many of them old students & all old friends. They have been here for about three months getting settled & having a very quiet time, as there has been no fighting. Revere is assistant quartermaster and has got into the job very well. He has about 40 men to control & has to do with the supplies &c. He sometimes feels that he should be off in the fighting line & of course if he wishes we shall not oppose it; but he is not much cut out for a soldiers life & loathes the whole business of war. The hospital tents are from India, holding 40-50 beds & the inner lining is of that attractive Cawnpore material of various colors & patterns. Such a nice set of nurses - all from the Royal Victoria or the Montreal General Hospitals. Capt. Law the quartermaster is an old family friend. Next to us is the Harvard Unit with 800 beds & at Etaple is a Chicago unit with the same number. The wounded & sick come from the Ypres district every few days & are the result of the casual fighting (& the ordinary illnesses - now & again a typhoid). I shall make an inspection of all the hospitals in the District. The weather is glorious and we all sat outside the mess tent until 10 pm

Sunday. eve.

We have had a splendid day. Church parade at 10.30 excellent sermon from the Chaplain who explained that war wiped out all sects in camps! Then we motored to a lovely spot Harelot for lunch - Campbell Howard, Billy Francis Revere & I. Nice old inn with tables on a lovely lawn. Then across cuntry to Montreuil sur mer (once, it is now 10 miles inland!) a walled town of extraordinary beauty One wonders not to hear more of it. I never saw such walls & moats & in such good preservation. Revere is devoted to the place as it was at the inn, from which I posted a card to you, that Sterne rested from the first night of his Sentimental Journey. At M. are about 1000 of the Indian troops many in hospital. Poor devils, they look very much out of place. This is no country for them - too cold & wet.

Wednesday eve.

Such an experience! I had not asked to go to the Front as I knew leave was not granted; but the dear old Commandant at Etaple said he would send me: so at 8 am yesterday Col McCrae, who has been thro the whole district & Capt Rhea & I started off. If you look on the map we went north coast to Merville to see a big dressing station and mobile laboratory, in charge of two old friends. Here we saw the wounded brought in from the trenches among them the Speakers son - Maj. Lowther. Shot thro the chest. It was a sad business but the nurses & doctors seemed to know their work, & the officers wards were very comfortable. Many of the men are sent on in the big ambulance trains the same eve. Then to Armentieres which is a great centre & to Nieppe, the Canadian head-quarters, where I saw many old friends. Stationary balloons, aeroplanes, soldiers, camps, billets in farms, brigades of artillery on march - such a scene! In the field next to the chief med. officers house a big new German aeroplane was brought down the day before our visit. We had hoped to be able to go the upper road to Breuil & Hasebrook but it had been shelled  
Bailloul!

letter of Sept. 7th, '15.

the day before & was impassable, so we kept along the second line of trenches & in the eve. saw many returning & going to them. Here for the first time we heard the boom of guns, every few minutes. About 3 miles from Nieppe we saw the bombardment of aeroplanes by the German aircraft guns. The first ~~one~~ was 3000-4000 feet up at the edge of a light cloud, & within 5 minutes 42 shells had exploded near it. We could see the bright flash & then a puff-ball of black smoke, quite circular which gradually increased to about the size of the moon & took 15-20 minutes to disappear. Within half an hour we saw another, much closer - 122 puff-balls could be counted against the clouds, many seem so close, but the aeroplanes sailed about taking the usual daily observations. It was a great sight the most wonderful I have seen. Miles & miles of motor lorries line the roads waiting to go up in the eve. The whole country is alive with troops. The peasants are hard at work getting in their crops, even between the lines of trenches. We visited Hagebrook & on to St Omer the headquarters. Col McCrae has been fighting all thro the district and took us to several spots on which his battery was stationed. Everywhere great square graves - marked with the names of the men of the Regiments. The villages do not look much battered except at one place, just where we crossed the Belgian frontier, but there was scarcely a church standing Except for the soldiers St Owen seems untouched by the war. We passed the big aeroplane camp, just outside the town. We have done about 190 miles & not a mile of bad road, in spite of the heavy traffic

Thursday.

We had an experience last night 11.30 - a big convoy came, 15 steel cars - all beautifully fitted 34 beds in each, nurse & doctors. We went to see the men unloaded. Splendid organization - about 30 ambulances. The men were lifted out 4 in 4 minutes & I got into an ambulance with them, an Irishman wounded in the head, an appendicitis, a typhoid & a bad shrapnell wound ~~after~~. All were smoking! It took 7 minutes to the Hospital & the 4 were in bed within 27 minutes from the arrival of the train. I have been to <sup>Wimereux</sup> Winereaux, north of Boulogne to see the big infection <sup>US</sup> hospital & I shall stay a day there on my way back, as they have all the typhoid & paratyphoid cases of the whole district centered there. Extraordinarily few for the enormous number of men.

*Check name of the return how he added this post script.*

OXFORD 25th

I had hoped to finish & send this off but I got back to a press of work & have been away almost every day. It was a wonderful experience & I wish I could have stayed longer, but I have engagements in Leeds Oct. 1st two addresses, which I have to write within a week. I will send them, when printed - Science & War & Nerve & Nerves. Grace has been away with friends in the south of England, her first holiday for a year. I am very well & very brown. I must send you a copy of my fathers journal and papers which my brother E.B. has had printed here. You will be interested to look it over. It is a private, family affair, not for distribution. R.B. will see in it a good bit of our Clarendon Press work.

How I wish I could be with you at MtKisco. I do not believe this horrid business will ever be over, but we are keeping up our courage  
Love to the darlings & to R B. & Uncle Ned.

Yours affectionately

WM OSLER