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My dear Mother

I told Sarah when I wrote last night that I would answer your very kind letter which went to her first and which she opened and sent to me, claiming that all my correspondence is hers, ^{to read} but at the same time allowing me similar rights over her own. The arrangement is perfectly satisfactory to me as Sarah is such a wonderful little person in my eyes that whatever she says is right, and if we should ever have a difference which I think almost impossible (10 months) I will have to refer to you for a ruling and am sure you will give my case a fair hearing.

I look over our two months in England as the happiest in my life; we have been able to be together a great deal and I don't think Sarah has been lonely as she makes friends wherever she goes as well as finding a few old ones and has also taken quite an interest in Hospital work. She has been fortunate always [mainly due to her own effort in getting in with very nice people to board with and writes me that her land-lady in Oxford will do almost anything for her. I am most fortunate in having such a likeable little person for a wife and while I worry a little about her being alone in England yet know she is very well able to take care of herself.

We have now been over here three weeks and at once come right up to front and are now comfortably settled in billets about 3 miles from German trenches. I am not permitted to mention the name of any place but we can see all that remains of Y. from the hill at our farm house. We are very comfortable and at present allow new and horses are under cover and the officers have a nice room in farm house. My servant has made me a very good bed out of chicken netting stretched over a frame and my "Wolsley" bag on that makes a most comfortable resting place. The house is old and when there

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is a bombardment going on the glass rattles in all the windows, and hardly a day goes ~~back~~ by without a cannonade of some kind. Our work does not keep us in or near front line trenches like the infantry but we have to know their locations and how to get to them so as to be able to act as guides to new troops coming up as reinforcements in case of trouble. This is very nice as it keeps us in touch with the sections of the front for which our Division is responsible.

Aircraft of various kinds are continually above us, German as well as British although the former have to keep up as our anti-aircraft guns get them if they don't. I have not seen one brought down although several of my men have. The Germans now have an armoured bi-plane which flew over us day before yesterday very low and which our guns hit but could not bring down. They say it carried 2 machine guns and 5 men.

I had about 20 - 3" drumps (big German hammer shells) burst very close to me about a week ago. One hears them coming 5 or 6 seconds before they hit which gives you time to lie down in a ditch and unless they actually hit you, you are pretty safe. They dug holes about 15 feet across & 6 feet deep and shut the mud up 80 or 100 feet in air. My brother had a really big shell hit near his battery which made a hole 40 feet across into which a two story house could go. It is really surprising however, how little harm these shells do unless they make a direct hit.

We are much struck by the way the Belgian women work. They do most of the work in fields, ploughing, raking, etc etc as well as tending stock & cleaning out stables and are now thrashing. They seem stronger and harder than our women while the men (what few we see) seem small & slight, but of course the best are away. Dogs also do a lot of work. I saw a woman harrowing this afternoon with a big horse, which she was helping to pull.

a small harrow. Dogs also run in a large wheel in every farm
 home and provide power for chaffing & churning. They are kept
 tied up and carefully fed. The Holly over here is very
 beautiful in nearly every hedge; I will enclose a little
 sprig. One can hardly imagine we are so close to firing
 line as farms are all being worked even right up to the
 trenches and they are having a wonderful harvest. You
 see little children playing along roads that are shelled every
 day and their mothers sitting at doors or working in gardens
 or fields nearby. They have become so used to it and take their chance.

I wonder if Sarah sends you her copies of my diary letters,
 perhaps you might find them interesting. I send her one copy as
 well as one home and one to my brother who, I am glad to say, is
 now only about 7 miles away. I rode over to see him on Sunday
 and had lunch. We passed through a beautiful little town
 all shelled to bits. It is only one of a dozen around here
 within riding distance. They nearly all have beautiful old
 churches which are utterly destroyed; in this case however
 they had not been able to ~~put~~ ^{knock over} the steeple which still stood
 although hit in 7 or 8 places. These old churches have very thick
 walls.

Sarah sent me such a nice letter from Frederick to read, and glad
 he finds the dog companionable. Andales as a rule are most
 devoted to their masters.

It hardly seems a year to me since I was in Westchester about
 this time ~~a year ago~~. I have told Sarah I thought she ought to spend the
 winter with you in U.S. but she feels she would rather remain in England
 and will leave it to her to decide. I feel you must miss her very sadly and
 can never thank you for the sacrifice I know you made in getting
 her up. Please give my kind regards to Percy & F. Leach. You affectionately
 S.H.