

PR82/8

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Dear Mr. Reeve,

14-8-16

This morning I saw an extraordinary spectacle. In a 20 acre paddock 'somewhere in France' men and women representative of 12 different countries were cutting corn. I would like to send you along a picture; but, as you know, c'est defendu to possess a camera ~~even~~ in these parts. Men from all the States of Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, India, Ceylon, West Indies, and other distant parts were busily engaged assisting the local men and women, and boys and girls to gather the harvest.

France is assured a rich harvest - <sup>what</sup> come/~~it~~ may - thanks in a great measure to the manner in which the British authorities have aided her. The resources of the country were sized up a few months ago by the Military authorities of France, who, never for a moment, have lulled themselves into believing the end of the war is in sight. They were satisfied with all they saw; but the problem ~~wh~~ ~~that~~ perturbed them was that of labour. All the young farm hands of France were holding rifles in the trenches and the people on the farms were not capable of carrying out the work of gathering the harvest. The British authorities then stepped in and offered to provide so many thousand men - all more or less skilled in agl. work - to be used as they farmers desired. The offer was gladly embraced by the French, who were given to understand that not a sou was to be paid to the men.

These were the chaps I saw this morning. ~~and~~ They worked at great speed, and although there were several barrels of French beer and wine standing on the outskirts of the paddock I did not see <sup>men</sup> ~~the men~~ visited <sup>them</sup> until dinner time arrived. Then they sat round in groups and I will guarantee that never before has such a babel been heard in a corn field. The old farmers were delighted to see the men happy and the sight of thousands of little bundles of corn in all parts of the fields pleased them still more. This sort of thing is going on all over France to-day. It does not seem to be much of a rest to a man, perhaps, to be sent to cut corn; but there are few men in the trenches who would <sup>not</sup> jump at the chance.

Apropos of the forthcoming harvest I may mention that thousands of French homes were made happy this week by the receipt of news from fathers, brothers, relatives and sweethearts, who are incarcerated in German camps, that they were now being issued with a ration of bread. One large loaf of bread a week per man ~~may~~ not excite the palates of those who are still fortunate enough to be taking 6 course dinners; but it means a lot to the poorly-fed, badly housed and wretchedly clothed men of France. ~~As seen as they received~~ Cheerful letters home thanking the French Govt. for ~~their~~ intervening on their behalf. ~~arrived~~ this week from the prisoners, and prayers of thanks were offered in all the churches.

What little bread the French soldiers have received in Germany up to the present has been of the black variety, and mouldy at that. German Censors have not objected to prisoners asking their connections to forward bread, or to words of protest against ~~their~~ the treatment they are receiving. Photographers are allowed entree to the prison camps of Germany, and copies of those which have come to hand depict not the chic, buoyant Poilu, who marched away two years ago, but a meagre, underfed French soldier whose ~~sky~~ thread-bare sky-blue costume ~~touches where~~ fits where it touches.

The friends of these men have forwarded parcels galore from the time of notification that they were prisoners; but the proportion of the parcels that reaches the soldier is about one in ten. It is alleged that the plumpest men in Germany to-day are the persons who constitute the guards on the Camps.

Yours sincerely  
H. J. Bond