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Letter from Ceylon Kingston to his mother, dated December 11, 1918

Ceylon S. Kingston

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Y.M.C.A. Dec 11, 1918

My dear Mother:

This is letter number 4. I wrote in England to John and twice from Paris. This letter I shall send through the French civil post. I can do so where I am. I could not do it in Paris.

I am at Lamarche, a little town about 20 miles south of Neufchateau. There is a French Foyer here in the service of which I am. So far my work has consisted in teaching English words and simple expressions to some sixty of the enlisted men who want to know something of the English language. I shall also have some similar work among the officers. Probably that will be on an individual basis.

There is a camp of American engineers a short distance from the town who are getting out timber. They cut a lot of trees and now they are cleaning up their work getting ready to go home. Most of the men are negroes but the officers are all white men. There is an American doctor (Capt. Archibald) in the camp. A few miles away is a large American hospital. American and French troops are scattered all through this country. There are some British but they are moving out.

All the Americans are anxious to go home. They are just as eager now to go home as they were eager to get over.

I am staying in a French home for now. In fact I was quartered upon the lady just as a French officer would be put into a house. I have a good room. It is neat, well furnished, the bed is wonderfully comfortable and the room is the only cheap thing I have found in France. It costs a franc and a half a day. This is the French officer's rate.

I get breakfast here and eat my other two meals with the French sous-officers. This is in the Vosges region. It is a country of hills or little mountains. But it is not rocky. The elevation is only about 1000 feet in the valleys.

There is now snow and it is not cold in the least. It is damp, rainy in a mild way, the roads are muddy and the streets are worse. The hardier vegetables are still in the gardens. They say that they get deep snow at times. There is a good deal of timber in the hills — mostly oak and birch. There is also considerable game. One of the Americans shot a wild boar recently.

Food is not so expensive as in Paris. The commissary sergeant who buys for the Americans told me yesterday that he was paying about 50cents a pound for dressed pork and about 28 cents for dressed beef by the carcass.

Some of the rigs that one sees seem old. I saw the other day a log being hauled on a wagon by a cow, a bull, and a horse all hitched tandem and a second horse was

attached independently to help in the steep places.

I was told in Paris that I could enter the French service and if I thought I could be more useful or if I did not like it I could be transferred to the American. I have not made up my mind yet. I will give this a fair trial first.

As I think I wrote you from Paris it is likely that I will be back in the Spring. The end of the war has altered the War Service enterprises and when the time comes, just like the army we will be ready to go home.

From what I have seen I like the French people. They are kind and polite. They have a beautiful country. They do some things better than we do but the average American to whom I have talked feels as did the colored man who said: "If I ever get back to New York the Goddess of Liberty will have to turn her head around if she wants to see me again."

As the Goddess of Liberty stands looking toward the ocean the man's meaning is clear.

I have an excellent outfit in the way of shoes and clothes. One needs woollen socks and underclothing because while it is not cold the French use very little fuel and their houses are not warm in the American sense.

I caught a cold when I first came but I am well now. I have lost some flesh but I feel very well.

You had better use the #12 Rue d Aguesseau address as I might be transferred to some other point.

I hope I get some letters before long. I think constantly of Canton. Do not worry about me. After all this is pretty much a vacation try after a long term of years of work.

Affectionably,
Ceylon

The good lady of the house (her husband is a Veterinary) every afternoon puts a hot water warming arrangement in my bed. It is as warm as toast when I get in. So you can see the French have some advantages over us.