[Revere Osler to Mrs. Chapin]

No. 3 Canadian General Hospital
(B.E.F. - Camiers)
Dec. 5, Sunday (1915)

Dear Aunt Susie

Just a line to wish you a happy Christmas & to let you know my prospects of the same. I am still with No 3 which nearly a month ago ceased to be a hospital & which has since become a turbid mud hole, rank with unrest and discontent. The canvas hospital proved, as everyone expected, a decided failure, & not only was our 3 months hard work undone by the winds of a night but the ground from being an arid waste of grassless dust was changed in the course of a week to a sea of mud, which was & still is, black, putrid & unwholesome, to sit, sleep or stand in. So after a good deal of hesitation & a still greater deal of corresponding it was brought to the notice of some red hatted, brass buttoned, elegant gentlemen that No 3 Canadian Gen Hospital was undergoing a process of gradual enlizement & would very likely disappear altogether. Orders came to evacuate all patients, which was done immediately, and to prepare to move at a moments notice. A suitable building was found in Boulogne & it seemed evident that we were to make it our winter quarters. All this is now in the days long ago & the red hatted authorities must have forgotten us. It would be an act of heroic kindness to remind them again of our existence & to point out that 30 officers 250 men & 70 nurses have for 5 weeks sat in cold & draughty tents with the mud oozing through the floors & the rain dripping from the roof, without a thing to do but fight the wind & the rain & stoke the smoking stinking braziers. It might also be well to point out to them, though far be it from anyone to complain or insinuate that their ways are not in every way correct, that it is hardly proper & worthy conduct to keep seventy nurses in tents during winter weather while they themselves live in a very nice comfortable house with servants to keep them warm & spruce and a convenient motor car to take them to their work each morning at ten o'clock.

Campbell and I with great difficulty obtained a weeks leave on Nov 7th. We started a day early & succeeded in defeating the authorities in Boulogne & reached Oxford on the night of the 6th. We also came back a day late as the channel was conveniently dirty with mines & need[ed] sweeping. We had a good time & home never has seemed so pleasant in spite of it nearly burning down. Muz, Dad and I consulted about my transferring to a combattant regiment & we came to no decision until I saw Gen Jones who is the Director of Medical Services for the Canadians. He was very much opposed to my leaving the C.A.M.C. & offered me the position of quartermaster in a Canadian field ambulance. I jumped at it immediately because I knew it would satisfy Muz & Dad. I expect to go in a few days, It is no. 3 field ambulance, with the first Canadian division. It's head quarters are I think at Bailleul and I imagine that the work will be all along the Canadian lines. I feel sure that it will prove most satisfactory & I will feel that I am seeing more real service than here at the base.

I wish you could see us here. Some of the officers I think you must know. Bill & Campbell Howard of course & Dr Russell & Dr Little whom you probably remember from Baltimore days. We are all assembled round an old oil can full of hot coak which pours volumes of dismal smoke through a ventilator in the roof of the tent. There are several comfortable chairs & three card tables

which Muz sent from England. There are also two plain tables covered with blankets, a letter box a notice board and two pails. Over all, in my eyes at any rate a mist of impenetrable gloom seems to hang. In an adjacent tent are two long board tables with chairs on eather side. In this we eat 3 times a day. Behind is a shed, built by the Engineers, with a stove & a sink. It makes a good kitchen and turns out daily at least one first rate meal. We all sit round the oil can every day. Sometimes someone goes away for the day, sometimes someone writes a letter & usually two or three couples are playing cards with a pile of sous in front of them. The strange thing is that no one complains. I have explored the country pretty thoroughly & found a good deal of interest. There is little chance of talking french except on walks when one meets peasants on the road, even then they speak a strange dialect of their own. I think there is a good chance of No 3 leading this same life for several weeks more. The Boulogne expedition seems very distant & I am very glad to be getting away & trying the excitement of proximity to our old friends the Germans. It is said that they have unheard of means of dispelling gloom.

I hope you all have the same happy Christmas that we used to have at Canton & that you can forget the war for that one day at least. My best love to all whom I know in Canton.

Your loving

Revere.

P.S. Do you not think that you could stow yourself, Susan, Margaret & the uncles on board the Peace ship which your eminent compatriot is about to launch upon the sea of blood. At any rate give him my love and a split pea for the dove. (May it choak him!)