

## J. M. Nickerson Writes About France

Roosevelt has been criticised by some over-zealous admirers of the classics because of the prominence of the personal element in his writings. The first person singular appears twenty times on one page of his "Winning of the West". It is doubtful that this should be accepted as an evidence of the egotism of the author, as the critics claim. He had a story to tell and he told it in his own way, and where he figured therein he said so. If, in what is said here, I seem to be subject to such criticism, it is because I write from the personal viewpoint. This affair in France was so great, and the part played in it by the Americans so big, that no one can attempt to discuss more than a phase of it, and it is folly to attempt more.

It has been noticed that most returning soldiers have little to say of their experiences. While their failure to discuss their personal parts in the "big show" can rightly be ascribed to diffidence it is also hard to talk with them of conditions they met with in the army and overseas. This is largely because most of them are so glad to get out they want to forget what they have been thru and also because to complain appears to them to savor of weakness. But—there are nearly a million men yet to come home from France with every prospect of it being a long time before the last of them sail and if some of the fortunate wearers of red chevrons do not "speak up" no one will, for the men in France are gagged by a censorship which seems to them to be maintained for that purpose. The enlisted man of the A. E. F. may be wrong in thinking he has grounds for a grievance—he may be wrong in the opinions he has formed concerning some things he has encountered in his "foreign tour"—but there were two million in the A. E. F. when the armistice was signed and they are practically unanimous in thinking they have a grievance.

In the first place the men think there has been undue delay getting home. It is impossible for anyone who has not been there to conceive of how much these men desire to go home. They are in a strange land, and in the worst possible position to view that land favorably, separated from their home land by three thousand miles of water, and with mail service now six months after the cessation of hostilities, infrequent and vexatious. Without any incentive to take an interest in what they are doing they are performing a monotonous routine knowing that they are only "marking time" until the orders arrive to embark for the U. S. A., and they are practically one man in wanting to go home. They are prone to discuss the figures showing the number of troops landed in France in the summer of 1918, and to speculate on the reasons for the inability to move men west at half the rate. They may be wrong in their opinions—there are probably valid reasons why men could not be returned as fast as they were sent over—but the men of the A. E. F. are not convinced. They see President Wilson remaining in Paris month after month with not much tangible accomplished, except that the longer we remain in Europe the more are we committed to a policy of taking part in Europe's affairs, they know not that the National Army does not have to be demobilized until four months after the President declares us at peace with Germany, and they have a strong belief that a small colored gentleman is lurking in some wood-pile. They are probably wrong, but that doesn't alter their opinion.

J. M. NICKERSON

( Continued next week )