

March 22 1917

My dearest Ruth, This is a queer quiet world with never a sound of war where we used to be shelled daily. I wonder what you are making out of the Hun retreat. The papers talk as though we were pushing them back in desperate haste; but that is not the case here. We are following in a most leisurely manner; I don't know whether the infantry are in touch with the enemy now, but they were not two days ago. Of course the bridges over the Somme were all blown up except the foot bridges; they were prepared with nasty tricks; a sort of loose straw matting laid along them & under that concealed breaks so that one would fall nicely into the water - hardly worth the trouble one would have thought; and much worse than that some form of booby trap - an R.E. officer was blown up in one yesterday. Booby traps of many

kind seem plentiful enough. Personally I proceed with extreme care in the recovered land and never touch anything without precautions. But all that I don't much mind. Péronne makes me angry. Hardly a roof left there - all the best houses badly damaged. Of course a lot of that was done in earlier stages - some no doubt by the French themselves. But Hun 'frightfulness' has done a lot too. The first thing I noticed on entering the town was a house on fire in the most mediaeval part & evidently a great number more had been similarly dealt with. Anything more lovely than Péronne must have been. I can hardly imagine - it still has a queer charm from its mere situation; it stands rather like Rye only less so on a low long hill, the river winding all round; the houses (renaissance as after is mediaeval) must have been almost unique as a collection of architectural specimens containing hardly any modern

This meal for to-night desert one. My thanks for a parcel of sausages, tongue, salt squashes. Great love to you always, Robert Birk. Go bring George

vulgarity - one can tell that much ~~though~~ in spite of  
the mutilation. But Lithgow, Gen & I, when we were  
out two days ago - we had quite a long walk about 20  
miles - saw frightfulness which disgusted me even  
more than Persone - everywhere fruit trees were  
lying on the ground, wantonly cut down all covered  
with mud for no military reason that we could imagine.  
It just fills one with unspeakable rage to see such  
things, & drives away every feeling about the enemy  
except the desire to destroy them. A village we entered  
on a main road had been razed to the ground, though  
its existence less than 20 miles from St Quentin could  
make absolutely no difference in a military sense.  
All the cross roads have been blown up by mines & have  
craters from 30 ft deep upwards - there's some sense  
in that; but in this village where the church  
walls are built by two roads, the explosion naturally  
blew down the east end of an otherwise unspoilt church.  
I suppose one couldn't expect any enemy in a great hurry  
to blow up each road in a different place instead of the  
cross roads, but the Hun was in no great hurry & it  
wouldn't have cost him much trouble. Another pre-  
caution one can see the point of is the cutting down of  
trees along a road: but it's not a pleasant sight to see  
rows of trees lying across a road.  
But the Hun country was a pleasant surprise in one way -  
the general ~~appearance~~ appearance was fresh &  
unspoilt. Of course it hasn't been fought over  
recently, but apart from that they seem to manage  
to make less mess behind the line than we do - I  
mean mess for horse hies, camps, dumps etc -  
but perhaps we weren't quite far enough back to judge.  
It will be nice when we go on to live in (unstrafed)  
country once again. The roads where they haven't been  
blown up are wonderfully good. I can't say I feel nice

It certainly looks like  
I expect this should be  
the retreat  
by the  
this very faintly  
going to fight