

Aug. 2-1916.

My dearest Ruth, I've just been too busy to write since the last time — the days all spent up in the front line. We've had endless difficulties over communications. I think on the whole I've done at least as much as anyone has a right to expect so I feel happy about that. The heat has been trying, but I am getting used to it. I always wake up with a gunnysack on my back which contains chiefly a large water bottle & serves also to carry my coat. Really these expeditions aren't so bad; the point is, I suppose that they are of an adventurous nature & that one has companions. It is curious how often I am taken back to the Alps — partly through an association in the code of conduct, or partly I think because of their wonderful cleanliness. I also think of the depths of English Country. Sometimes — (I loved your letter about that) I have been pretty safe since last I wrote; the Hun has been fairly quiet. I came back here three nights ago. It gave me a nasty shock. The place was simply filthy as any place which has been occupied by troops under heavy shell fire. It was more or less arranged that I was to sleep at the bottom of a deep, dark, dank, pestiferous hole — but there I bent the line; I had time to carve out some sort of a hole in the bank of a trench & there lay down hard enough for sleep. Rats were the chief

trouble; this places a intensely infested by them. I
made up my mind then & there to swallow that dis-
gusting pill & I can now look upon them without
much feeling beyond a mild desire to shed their blood.
Luckily they are fairly shy - Still I expostulated
fairly enough when they came to chase my little
hole. The last two nights have been comparatively
luxurious & I am in a fair way to having a very
fine chamber dug deep into the clean clay & cov-
ered as before by two sections of cupola. It will be
a real snug place & I hope there is no lack of wood
& I have some moment to spare. The cupola will
be a much better one than the last. But the
surroundings are ~~so~~ undeniably desolate & dotted
with little crosses. We haven't many dead in the
trenches (at least only one decapitated unfortunate
has so far been discovered below the surface) but
those outside could well do with some roose over
them & the general atmosphere of filth
is an attraction to insects of every description -
particularly to black beetles which swarm every-
where. And yet it's amazing how quickly
we are 'squaring up' & how happy everyone seems to
be. I am happy anyway. The fine weather is

really a great blessing, though it's too hot to work
comfortably. I told you we had lost Mr
Quinn temporarily, but he has since been wounded
by an unlucky shell in his new battery position -
rather a bad wound in the leg I understand - so we
shan't see him again for a long time. And Mr
Olen has gone sick too - with gastritis; I quite ex-
pected when he went off to hospital that he too
would be away for a long time, but I hear now that
he will probably return to duty in a few days.

So the good news has come from Russia - or
rather as I hope a first instalment. We've heard
nothing here since the report of 32,000 prisoners
(Germans as the message said) two or three days ago
and haven't even seen that in the newspapers.

The fighting here is very stiff; we are holding what
we have got & most of our position so far as I can
judge is tactically very valuable - particularly Pozina.
It's a slow business; I'm not such a hero as to refrain
from putting often enough to myself the question 'How
much longer?'

I am getting the most lovely letters from you every day.
Mr Cockerell's visit seems to have been a great success,
I am glad you gave him my pamphlet to read & much

flattered by what his comment: but I'm afraid it only shows that he doesn't know. Poor Sidney, he wouldn't like that. He's still a 'dun' isn't he?

You spoke in your last letter as though you pretended me as never seeing a green tree or field: but that's not altogether the case. The country behind our lines - far enough behind, say two miles from our original line begins to be quite green though uncultivated - there are even two woods I know much nearer than that which still look green, though many trees are broken & dead & the undergrowth has been mostly broken down. The last time I went to visit the field cashier - very dull expedition on uncomfortable motor bike - I went to find him in a chateau ~~the~~ 8000 miles away. It is deep in the country & the trees in the park were well grown & divinely green & dark. I didn't find him there as a matter of fact & came back to another chateau in a village nearer here. This is a perfectly gorgeous house - might be used only if possible a little more restrained. I went up the 'passage' to the front door & saw no sign of the office I wanted - only a spacious hall & beyond glass doors opening onto a garden. I walked in & out through those doors for a brief moment - no surly hall porter to stop me - there actually was a border of flowers leading to a gorgeous avenue. All

was quite unspilt. On coming back through the hall I noticed that general cups were lying about ~~and~~ as thick almost as mustard & cross. I found the field cashier in a much humbler dwelling in the village - but he had a dainty little green garden.

then too I can see good country from our front line - country still unspilt & our guns except for the ruined villages & trees & fields in front - as so it seems. As we have gone forward we have naturally more ruined country behind us than has the enemy.

Thank you greatly for two parcels; one containing tea & prunes. I haven't tasted these yet; we finished the previous lot this morning so I soon shall do so, the prunes I have found excellent in the tins. The other - the butter - came the day before yesterday; it is delicious please tell Mildred.

Now my dear I've shown you have no reason to be miserable about me - because I'm not miserable myself. How much less I dislike all this than those infernal night shifts when I was constructing the O.P. up north - & after all I've never had a narrower escape than the first night up there when a bullet passed between me & a man walking a yard in front.

I can't tell you at the time closest - it has come out
now. But we settled long ago that there's no reckoning
with death. everyone out here who goes anywhere
near the fighting line has narrow escapes, & you may
have a million or a dozen. It worries me sometimes
for you dear one, but we can but put aside the
wooly of imagining evils & trust in God.

My love to everyone.

I shall try & get leave the last week in September
it's always beautiful weather then, & it's the
right season for the hills - but I'm not sure
I want to spend my leave that way. Ah! by heavens,
but I shan't get it; we needn't expect that.

As ever yours lovingly,

George.

