

to the neighbourhood of their rookeries,* but a goodly number of carrion crows remain and these were scattered in pairs over the plateaux. One sat on a telegraph post and croaked for some time. I noticed that he always raised the forepart of his body before croaking, the sound being emitted with a bowing movement.

Yellowhammers are exceedingly common in this district and dozens roost in the tangled hedgerows. Tree sparrows, greenfinches and linnets were noted, but chaffinches predominate – they are even commoner than the house sparrows.

Skylarks were showering music over the fields and especially when the sun broke through the patches of fleecy clouds. Blackbirds, robins, hedge sparrows, a sparrowhawk, kestrel, green woodpecker, magpies, white wagtail, wrens, marsh, great and blue tits were also noticed as well as two bramblings which settled, as is their wont, near the top of a tall tree in the middle of the wood. Their twanging note attracted my attention.

**Added later:* There is one near Occoches and another at Gézaincourt.

Monday 19 March, Candas

The last two nights – dark and showery – I have heard the cry of migrant curlews passing over this village between 9 and 10 p.m. By the sound I should judge that they were passing in a more or less north-easterly direction. Two peewits flew over this morning and these were also heading towards the north-east.

Thursday 22 March, Candas

There have been intermittent flurries of snow all day. These

swooped upon us as great blue–black clouds rolling up out of a sunny sky, and all of a sudden they would obliterate the landscape with a murky driving swish of snowflakes. Between whiles the sun shone crisply over a bright and charmingly coloured scene – a harmony in browns and blue – outlined with dazzling white the contours of the round-bellied clouds that raced across the forget-me-not sky. An exquisite translucent blue filled the distant valleys and masked the cloud shadows as they moved across the rolling downs, while in the clean atmosphere, the details of the brown and purple woodlands stood out with marvellous distinctness.

Overtaken by a snow shower, I willingly accepted the shelter of a Frenchman's cart on my way home. It happened that the fellow was a sportsman and the conversation soon turned upon birds. He informed me that a few red-legged partridge (an odd covey or two) existed between Outrebois and Le Meillard where the soil was *bief* (clay? gravelly?) – ordinary grey partridges had greatly increased since the commencement of the war. Stone curlew²⁸ were seen occasionally – he *thought* they nested near Villers-Bocage and felt sure they did on the chalky ground near Corbie. There was a big rookery in the Occoches wood.

Saturday 24 March, Candas

My eyes were gladdened this morning by the sight of the first summer migrant in the shape of a wheatear – a dapper male, with a clear, blue–grey mantle.





In the small garden at the back of the château, which forms the HQ of the RFC in Candas, a pair of magpies roost every night in some shrubs. They appear to take not the least notice of the orderlies that are constantly plying to and fro along the path, a few feet below them. Their last year's nest forms a great dark 'blob' near the summit of a tall Lombardy poplar standing near by.

This afternoon a pilot from No. 32 Squadron landed a captured German machine at No. 2 AD – He had shot it down somewhere near Péronne, having wounded the pilot – Prince Frederick Carl of Prussia – in the leg.²⁹ It appears that the Prince made a very plucky attempt to escape and despite his injury started to run for his own lines but was brought down this time, mortally wounded in the back, by an Australian. The fuselage of his Albatross Scout was bright apple green and on each side was painted the hideous emblem of his regiment – the Death's Head Hussars – i.e. a large skull and cross-bones on a black background.

Sunday 25 March, Candas

For my Sunday afternoon walk I turned to the Longuevillette

woodland in the vague hope of chancing upon a wild boar. If disappointed in this respect, I was lucky enough to obtain a fairly good view of a roe-deer – the animal being wholly unaware of my presence although I approached to within forty paces – no sooner did it catch sight of me, than it sped away, with a loud rustling of dead leaves, panic-stricken into the deeper thicket.

Tuesday 27 March, Candas

I returned this morning after an intensely interesting visit to the newly gained ground in the vicinity of Péronne. After dining with Bruce, General Perkins and Pleydell-Nott at Amiens on Monday evening, I went on with them to Cappy where I spent the night in one of the dug-outs that formed the HQ of the III Corps HA.

On Tuesday morning, Bruce had to visit the COs of several battalions as well as the proposed site of the new HQ in Stable Wood (Bias Wood on French maps). It was during the course of this excursion that I first came into actual contact with the horrors of this War – the uncared for dead, lying upon fields, mutilated and disfigured beyond recognition by many months of shell fire. The year-old rat-eaten corpses, the shrivelled dismembered limbs, still booted or clothed, the half-bare skulls – these are not subjects to dwell upon – but they tell their tale of heroism – for surely only heroes or madmen would have attempted to cross that open stretch of pitted ground between those ugly barriers of barbed wire.

A red turban or a printed page in Arabic scattered here and there among the usual debris of the battlefield – shells, hand grenades, rusted rifles and all kinds of trenching tools – proved that the attacking troops, at this point, were French ‘Colonials’. Close to a shallow dip that had once been a lane, and where the attackers had very obviously suffered heavy casualties, I came across a shattered bugle – it did not leave much to the imagination to realise that a last rallying bugle-call, sounded above the intolerable din of the battle, had been suddenly cut short and that the bugler now lay among the blue-grey rags or under a loose scraping of soil.

Today the desolation was complete. Beyond the countless shell holes (nearly all of which were filled with pools of slimy green



water) there once stood the village of Barleux but today it was only a silent heap of bricks and beams, so inextricably mixed with broken crockery and furniture that the whole place looked more like a dust tip than a ruined village.

It is a commonplace platitude to say that modern warfare is devoid of romance. Romance indeed? It seems to me that war is merely legitimisation of murder and (in the case of the enemy at any rate) the sanctioning of all the more brutal instincts of mankind. Is it not murder to place a clock fuse in the Bapaume



town hall so that unsuspecting occupants may be blown up a week later – or a carefully hidden bomb under a plank of the Péronne footbridge to annihilate the first man that crossed? Dozens of such hellish death-traps have been recorded and yet their devisers have no doubt gone away with a perfectly free conscience – nay so topsy-turvy has the world become that I dare say they have carried with them a sense of extreme satisfaction of a good day's work done. For brutal and carefully planned vandalism nothing could have been more thorough than the work of the retreating Hun, and there was abundant proof that he retired at his leisure.

The unshelled houses had evidently been systematically ransacked and then burnt or blown up, while all the bridges had been demolished and the road junctions destroyed by huge yawning craters. But to me the most galling evidence of wanton devastation was the fact that, without exception, the trunks of all the fruit trees had been cut through at their base. The beautiful poplars and elms that formed the roadside avenues had suffered in a like manner, only in their case, a deep wedge-shaped impression had been carefully cut on the inner side of the trunk so that the trees might fall with the first gale, one by one inwards across the roadway. Even the rose bushes in the châteaux' gardens had been ruthlessly hacked to pieces. In short anything that was either



beautiful or useful had been brutally manhandled.

The Péronne museum, like its fellow buildings, was a mere ruin and of its contents only the books remained. These were strewn in heaps across the floor or loosely littered across the shelves – old, uncared-for tomes, inviting the first-comer to help himself. If the empty bottles were any indication, the German troops must have consumed vast quantities of liquor. They were scattered in all directions or heaped outside the officers' dug-outs. In most cases these more or less elaborate dug-outs had been burnt or rendered useless.

In peace time, the gently undulating country between the chalk quarries of Cappy and Péronne is largely devoted to the cultivation of sugar beet. This is evidenced by the shattered remains of huge refineries at Flaucourt and Herbecourt – their distorted machinery and riddled vats being ocular proof of the violence of the bombardment to which the whole country had been subjected. But of all the erstwhile villages visited by us, Biaches was the most complete ruin – it and its long contested wood had been literally wiped off the face of the earth – so much so that had my attention not been drawn to the place I could never have noticed that a village had ever stood on the site. The wood was like a Dantesque nightmare or the fantastic drawings of a petrified forest, for only the torn trunks of the larger trees remained.

And now let us turn to pleasanter topics. Near Cappy itself, I saw numbers of rooks together with jackdaws and carrion crows,



and later a fair sprinkling of hoodies. Tree sparrows seemed quite at home in the chalk quarries and no doubt breed in the crevices of the cliffs when the time comes. Three corn buntings, a few crested larks and many skylarks were also noticed, likewise starlings, common sparrows, chaffinches, magpies, yellowhammers and a white wagtail.

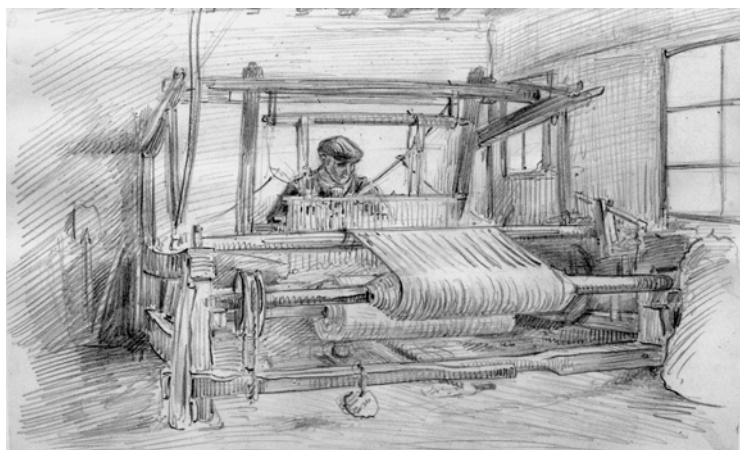
The neighbourhood of the trenches was too destitute of vegetation to be very 'birdy', but I saw a few crows and a kestrel or two, and some skylarks were singing overhead.

Further back where the ground was covered with un-gleaned corn crops or withered grass, grey partridges were common enough, as were the more ordinary species. A fine great grey-backed shrike, when disturbed by the passing car, perched upon one of the abandoned German field-telegraph posts.

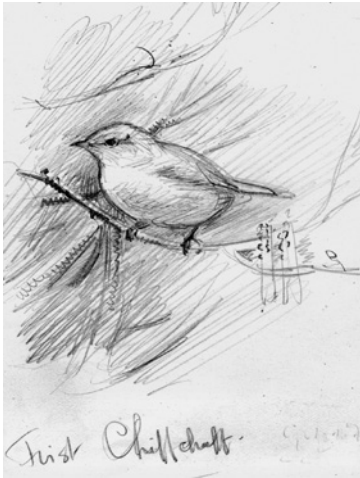
The marshy valley of the Somme looked very pretty today, with its yellow reed beds, pollarded willows, tall poplars and wide expanse of water reflecting the blue of the sky. An open sheet of water opposite the site of Biaches was thickly spotted with wildfowl – the majority of these appeared to be coots but there were quite a lot of tufted ducks as well, their broad white flanks being very conspicuous. On the whole coots seem very abundant in this district. A few moorhens and a couple of wild duck must be added to my list, as well as a mistle thrush and linnets. I thought I saw two corn buntings east of Amiens, but we whizzed by in the car at too great a rate to be sure.

Wednesday 4 April, Candas

After a snowy night – for winter still seems with us, so backward



was in every way typical of this part of France – a bricked floor, a few chairs and, in one corner a large *armoire* supporting a row of ornamental plates, comprised its principal features. Through the doorway I saw their wooden bedstead and the inevitable big-beamed loom – for all the poorer folk in Candas make sack cloth. This is very apparent on walking up a street, for on such occasions, through the open windows, one constantly hears the busy click-



clack of the flying shuttle.

This evening, when I returned with my sketchbook, I received the hearty welcome of an old friend and was hailed as 'Kamerad', and patted on the back with almost embarrassing fervour.

The tide of war has twice swept past their cottage and yet their peaceful peasant life has remained undisturbed. Exempt in 1870 and now, of course, far too old, Dumetz must have stood and watched the armies of three nations march, day after day, through the muddy streets of his little old-world village, usually so sleepy and silent.

Sunday 8 April, Candas

Easter Sunday – the first real spring day we have had – warm and sunny.

Curiously enough, only last night I remarked that I had neither seen nor heard a chiffchaff. Today one was threading its way through the leafless boughs drifting northwards – moving ever northwards towards the land of its birth. Occasionally the bird made a halting attempt to sing, but the voice was weak and broken and on the whole it seemed too busily engaged in searching for food to be vocal.³⁰

A single migrant meadow pipit was noted, also kestrels soaring