

A
A
0
0
0
7
4
6
7
3
5
0

Khaki rulers



By F. H. Cooper.

THE
RUSTICA PRESS
WYNBERG.



Wadi der Gallut



500 3654 21.5.18 1081 Wadi der Gallut H. 4500 Br. 50. H.

500 3654 21.5.18 1081 Wadi der Gallut H. 4500 Br. 50. H.

Handwritten notes at the bottom of the photograph, including a small sketch of a wadi section.

WADI DEIR BA'LAT

The broad white line is the sand bed of the Wadi, and the thinner lines are roads. British batteries were in positions all along the Wadi, and at the horse shore bend marked "Ch. el Babata" the S I F A. had a mortar battery. The German machine has spotted some old camouflages there, but has missed the guns. He has also found some weapons, horses and a camp on the left of the picture.

KHAKI CRUSADERS

With the South African Artillery
in Egypt and Palestine

By

F. H. COOPER

Author of "On Safari" etc.



1919 :

CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.
Cape Town and Johannesburg.

18
11
11
11

To G. H. W.
THE PATIENT GODPARENT OF MY WAR MANUSCRIPTS,
AT WHOSE INSTIGATION THEY WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED.

SRLF
URU

FOREWORD.

This little collection of sketches was written at irregular intervals during the Palestine campaign, and sent back to South Africa to interest rather than instruct the people at home. Fortune favoured the manuscripts at a time when far more valuable documents were being lost every week, and only one of the series was torpedoed en route.

Owing to strict censorship, names of places had in many cases to be omitted; but since this book has little to gain by minor geographical details, I have let the text remain just as it was written—at odd hours in “bivvy” and dug-out.

Herein will be found no succession of lurid battle pictures; for our lives were not always spent in daily conflict with the infidel. But shot and shell and forced march were blended with periods of utter stagnation in soaking rain and oppressive heat, brightened at long intervals by brief spells of leave to Egypt or Jerusalem. In such proportion have I attempted to portray our life in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.

I have to acknowledge with thanks the kind permission of the Editor of the “Cape Times” to republish “Into the Wilderness,” “Where the Sword has Passed,” “An O-Pip in Palestine,” “A Spring Morning in Canaan,” “The Wire Pullers,” and “The Last Crusade.”

“Higgins versus a Horse” is reprinted without any such authority. This tragedy first appeared in the “Palestine News,” which journal, together with its Editor, Staff and subscribers, has, I believe, long since been happily demobilized.

My thanks are also due to Colonel S. S. Taylor for the captured German air photographs.

November, 1919.



CONTENTS.

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	3
Into the Wilderness	9
Where the Sword has Passed	19
An O-Pip in Palestine	27
A Spring Morning in Canaan	37
The Wire-Pullers	45
A Bivvy in Samaria	53
Higgins <i>vs.</i> a Horse	61
Ten Days' Egyptian Leave	69
The Last Crusade	85

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Wadi Deir Ballut	Frntispiece
	<i>Facing Page</i>
Turkish Entanglements on the Sinai Desert near Kantara	12
Artillery Wagon Lines among the Olives	22
A Palestine Wadi	32
Bird's-eye view of a Hill Village	46
Rocks and Ruins in Samaria	56
Camels on a zig-zag road among the Judæan Hills	70
Village of Abud	86

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

Into the Wilderness.



Into the Wilderness.

In times of war—far more even than in times of peace—the strange is soon forgotten in the commonplace. The seedy clerk, who perhaps had never previously handled any weapon of heavier calibre than the air-gun of his youth, finds the sword is temporarily mightier than the pen, and takes to a Lee-Enfield rifle and barrack-room life at first, maybe, with despair and horror. But after a couple of weeks he has shaken down to the new routine, and sometimes wonders how he will ever again pick up the threads of his former existence, and satisfactorily discharge his half-forgotten office duties. And looking forward instead of backward, he may possibly feel a pardonable dread for what the future holds by way of shot, shell and privation. Yet a few days of “the real thing,” and the training camp begins to fade into the haze of distant unrealities, whilst the battle-front becomes the only matter of fact—albeit stern—reality. With fear vanquished, and danger an every day affair, the conditions of a modern battlefield—which appeared so very wonderful in the perspective—rapidly take on such a humdrum and almost homely hue, that the soldier on leave will esteem local domestic and sporting intelligence as far more absorbing topics than his own strange tales of war and wandering. Of those who have earned decorations for valour, it is probable that the majority were vastly surprised to hear they had done anything particularly meritorious, until the circumstances were explained to them on paper.

Now I think the Censor, if he is a person of philosophical mind, must often marvel at the contents of the correspondence that passes through his hands. The first letter of a newly arrived soldier in a foreign land will most likely be full of the strangeness and wonders of the country. A week later the same man will have begun to feel he has lived in that camp half his life, and will merely comment on his fellow creatures and any change in rat-

ions. The topics that would most interest his home-folk—pictures of fresh scenes; tales of strange men and foreign manners:—these, like the poor, are now taken for granted and pass, likewise, quite unnoticed.

So, in writing some account of these new lands in which we now sojourn, I must first and foremost discourse of such things as may be new to those who are left at home, whether or not these subjects have begun to feel as familiar to us now as were once Adderley-street, Park Station or the Marine Parade in the peaceful, far off, good old days of life in the Union.

A retrospect over the last three years seems like reviewing some long-drawn dream—partly nightmare—from which we have not yet wholly awakened. German West, German East and Egypt, each preceded by a lucid interval of home-life, and each with its few bars of sea voyage by way of a short prelude. The overture lasted full four weeks this time, and we were able to realize a long-cherished ambition to travel via the east coast. Although the accomodation for gunners on a troopship is hardly equal to that meted out to first-class passengers in times of peace, we had a not unpleasant trip. Wind and weather were gentle, and at Beira our eyes were gladdened by a ladies' entertainment committee who were kind as they were fair. In a temperature of something like 120 degrees in the shade, we executed a spectacular and most exhausting march through the town and round the suburbs. But the local Portuguese remained stolidly indifferent to the tunics and cord breeches we had donned in their honour, and we began to think the virtue of drill order would have to find its own reward. But there was more solid—and liquid—comfort awaiting us in a cool rest-room for troops, and once more we experienced the practical sympathy of kind feminine hearts towards the exiled soldier in need of hospitality.

Beira ranks as about the most torrid place we have touched, but we were thankful to stretch our limbs again on dry land after the close confinement of our little 3,000-tonner. On our second day ashore we were even hardy enough to play a cricket match, at which—providentially—exceeding low scoring prevailed.

The sand of Beira was the last dust to dull our boots until we reached Egypt. Kilindini and Aden offered us respectively entrancing beauty and massive strength, but at a distance. Flying-fish, exquisite-hued sharks and multi-coloured jelly-fish entertained us by day, and at night the porpoises assumed ghostly, semiphosphorescent forms, and gambolled—mermaid-like—in the transparent waters alongside our boat. Even the Red Sea was merciful and gave us—untrue to its nature and name—cool breezes and a surface of wave-rippled bottle-green and blue. We passed Mount Sinai half covered in clouds, with the yellow coast of Africa on our port. And so we sailed whither the mountains gradually close on either hand, till the land lay in front of us also. And there we disembarked, as hundreds of generations of mariners had done before us from century to century, until modern man dug his eighty-mile ditch through the desert and linked sea to sea.

I fancy we were not the first tourists to receive a rude shock at the unexpected behaviour of an Egyptian winter. We experienced a similar disillusionment three years ago in South-West Africa, when we awoke to our first dawn at Swakopmund—drenched to the skin in a country we had been led to believe was entirely without moisture.

At Suez we stepped off our little floating home of a month, and were packed into a new type of open-air truck. Then we sped through the small hours in a bitter north wind that numbed our ears and noses, and almost froze our minds from the realization that this was indeed the sunny land of the Pharaohs. Even daylight failed to convince us; for we had seen this land before—in the coastal sand-dunes and Namib of Damaraland!

But the first halt translated us to our new environment. Egyptian railway officials held sway at the stations, and blew little fish-horns in place of whistles. Strings of camels plodded patiently over the sandy tracks, while small donkeys, with large natives astride their hindmost extremities, trotted briskly along the road. Every truck and locomotive bore its official number in figures of two designs, and the names of the stations were painted up both in English and in an extraordinary combination of dots and curves that might possibly have been

rendered by a good performer on the flute. Egyptian may not sound euphonic in speech, but it certainly looks highly musical on paper.

This double language tendency quite took us back to the fertile efforts of our own Union train service. Perhaps some day, when we have been promoted to the glory of third-class carriages, we shall learn what "Wait till the train stops" looks like in hieroglyphics. South Africa is not the only country with a bilingual problem.

We duly arrived at our destination, but the name and nature thereof are at present part of the great military secret of which none may tell without incurring the wrath of that gentleman whose armorial bearings are a big blue pencil, a pair of scissors rampant, and a frown sinister for him who offendeth.

And here we tarry till the call comes. Most of our party have already gone forth into the desert, to join the other South African batteries at present engaged in pounding the infidel out of the Holy Land. And let me here put in a few words of excusable pride for the achievements of our little band of Field Artillery in Palestine. Perhaps we should make some allowance for the personal equation in accounts of doughty deeds brought down from the front by South African gunners passing through on their way to the bases. But when we hear our work extolled by the Royal Artillery itself, we feel a comfortable sense of swelling in the chest: it is something to write home about. Especially so, as we are now only a very small drop in the very big bucket of Imperial Forces up here. But we like our little drop, and we believe it is a good and bright one, which will hold its own among the multitudinous drops that almost obscure us by reason of sheer numbers. Decorations have come our way, and with them the inevitable toll of casualties. But we are gaining experience in yet another style of warfare. In fighting for Germany's colonies we were up against great distances, thirst and hunger, land-mines and ambushes, fever and wild beasts. Now we contend with big guns, hostile aircraft, and the wily Turk in positions of his own selecting. It is a long time since the salad days of our



Turkish entanglements on the Simi Desert near Kantara.

Wynberg training, when we used to sing with great feeling (to the tune of Hymn No. 215, A. & M.) :—

“ We are a ragtime army;
We’re going oversea.
We cannot ride, we cannot shoot;
What earthly use are we?
And when we get to Berlin,
The Kaiser he will say,
‘ Hoch! Hoch! Mein Gott! What a wonderful lot
Are the —th S.A.F.A.!’ ”

This is a very different campaign from German West or German East, but there are several points in common, and long treks after a retreating foe are becoming more à la mode every week. We are beginning to doubt whether we shall ever attain to that comfortable, stationary, dug-in warfare we so often sighed for during those hundred-mile dashes on the heels of Colonels Franke and Von Lettow through desert and jungle.

South Africans come as something of a novelty to the British Tommy. In the first place our colour has proved a great disappointment; a dark mahogany tint was apparently hoped of us. Then, again, they were most surprised to find we spoke English. They seemed to expect some language called “African.” So we are really almost tempted to converse loudly in Cape Dutch, and to pose as creatures of a far wilder and woollier type than nature and South Africa have made us. As a matter of fact, it must be confessed, we have found some of the “Home” dialects altogether beyond our grasp up to date! If we ever reach France we shall indeed be “some” linguists, for now we have to forget Swahili and Kikuyu in order to address the local native in a fearful tongue known as “Gyppo.” The Egyptians themselves usually have a few words of English, but their epithets are limited to three or four stock adjectives and a dozen comprehensive nouns. Our newspaper-boy announces his wares every morning with the strange formula, “Very good, very nice, very clean, very sweet! What abart it?”

The “Gyppo” apparently only recognizes one form of vocal music—a brief solo and chorus repeated for mile

after mile on the march. One hears the same weird chants in Mombasa and the ports of East Africa.

Except in his demands for "baksheesh," the lower-class Egyptian is a rather undemonstrative soul. And why one should be expected to shower largesse upon a man who has not even carried one's bag or washed one's shirt seems somewhat incomprehensible. But the hope—and expectation also—of this unearned increment springs eternal in the Gyppo's breast, and is as ancient and inexorable, I suppose, as the laws of his old friends, the Medes and Persians. So far we have not found the native either notably attractive in person or lovable by nature, but no doubt we shall find he has his good points when we begin to know him better.

The currency of the country was at first somewhat confusing, but we have now succeeded in effacing from our memory those once esteemed companions, the mark, the heller, the rupee and the humble cent. Here we deal mainly in "piastres." Twelve of these may be obtained in exchange for half-a-crown, and ninety-seven-and-a-half go to the English sovereign. The pound Egyptian, however, is worth a hundred. The piastre, again, is divided into ten "milliemes," but a five-millieme piece seems to be the coin of lowest value in common circulation, excepting British halfpennies and sundry small coppers of French and Italian origin. Save for the sublime sunsets, and no less gorgeous dawns, the country itself has not greatly impressed us. But we are not even on the outskirts of modern civilisation here, and our daily vista is sand, sky and salt waters. But from time immemorial this has been one of the frontier stations of Egypt, and there are still in existence somewhere a few papyrus pages from an orderly-room register containing entries by a sergeant in the pay of a monarch named Pharaoh Menephthah, who flourished about the year B.C. 1300.

And here we lie encamped by the side of one of the most ancient roads in the world—the eternal highway between Egypt and Palestine. Along this route the Pharaohs led their armies to conquer or to raid, and this is probably the way by which Abraham, Joseph and Jacob came into Egypt. It was called "The Way of the Philistines" in Exodus, and Moses was forbidden to

bring the Children of Israel by this route when they left Egypt, on account of the warlike tribes they would meet round about Gaza. It would also be this track that was followed by Joseph and Mary when they fled with the infant Jesus from Herod's atrocities.

Finally, Napoleon marched out of Egypt along this historical highway in his dream of world conquest, to be held up by Sir Sidney Smith with a handful of men at Acre, and soon after to lose his command of the sea, and with it all prospects of success in that expedition.

Now, once more, the silent desert hears afresh the tramp of marching armies, the thud of the war-horses' hooves and the noise of the chariot-wheels. And the stars again look coldly down upon the re-enacted tragedy of the wounded, the captive and the slain; on the pæan of the victors and the wail of the vanquished. And we, who have come out into the wilderness, find ourselves wondering if the stars and the desert still laugh together, as through the countless centuries before us, and whisper to each other, "Who comes next?" Or may we dream, unscorned, the dream that we are striking our puny blows in the world's last great struggle for conquest and temporal power and lust of blood; on the last and holiest and greatest of all Crusades?

Where the Sword has passed.

Where the Sword has Passed.

When Israel came out of Egypt and the house of Jacob from among the strange people, they took a somewhat circuitous route to their promised land. Instead of proceeding directly towards the nearest point of Palestine in an easterly direction, the Israelites were commanded to march south, via Ayun Musa and Sinai. This deviation was made for the very excellent reason that the coastal route ran through the territory of a notorious tribe called the Philistines, who dwelt around Gaza, and who were warlike, violent, and the very last sort of people to be voluntarily visited by a rabble of slaves fleeing from bondage, and as little trained in the use of arms as the Egyptian Labour Corps of to-day.

Although Gaza was recently the scene of warfare worthy of its oldest traditions, at the present moment it stands peacefully amidst green acres of sprouting corn. Starting from Kantara late in the afternoon, we sped swiftly over the desert broad-gauge railway between Egypt and Palestine—once the highway of Pharaohs and Patriarchs; the Mosaic "Way of the Land of the Philistines." At midnight we crossed the Wadi-el-Arish, regarded as the boundary between Sinai and Palestine. This is the "Brook of Egypt" that marked the western end of the southern boundary of the Promised Land. We passed Rafa in the early hours. This name in the Hebrew means "Giant." The Book of Samuel mentions that there were giants in those parts and days, and in this connection it is interesting to recall the discovery of a statue of an old bearded man, fifteen feet high, which was found in 1879 at Tell-el-Ajjiel, a few miles southwest of Gaza.

In this district almost every village has some historical interest. Halfway between Rafa and Gaza lies Dier-el-Belah—the old Crusading town of Darum, which was fortified by King Amalrick in A.D. 1170. We stopped for a pre-daylight mug of tea at Gaza. It seems almost

indecent to couple such a trivial incident with the name of a town whose fame echoes down through the ages from the very beginnings of recorded history. To most of us Gaza was merely a Bible name, which we vaguely remembered in connection with Samson and city gates, and which had more recently been the scene of some heavy fighting. I doubt whether any of us even realised that here the Old Testament strong man also met his pathetic death, though I heard several men inquire if the lion and the honey incident—familiarised by the picture on our golden syrup tins—took place in this vicinity.

But there is another mention of Gaza in the Bible; a most striking passage in view of the subsequent history of the town. Among the many transgressions of Israel rebuked by Amos was the slave trade with Edom, of which Gaza from its geographical position would be a natural centre. Hear, then, the prophet pronouncing the doom of this city in ruthless numbers: "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom; but I will send a fire on the walls of Gaza which shall devour the palace thereof." Not only once have those words been fulfilled. Again and again, up to the year of Our Lord 1917, has this city suffered siege, assault and destruction. Yet it has always been rebuilt in due course, and probably ever shall be, for the good and simple reason that fifteen springs in a thirsty land are assets not to be denied. Nor throughout the ages, and under the smiles and frowns of fortune, has its name been ever lost.

In the days of the Pharaohs Gaza was continually being conquered, lost and reconquered from the 16th to the 14th century B.C., as we learn from the annals of Thothmes III., in the 16th, and the records of the conquests of Rameses in the 14th century. Ten centuries pass—silently, but possibly not uneventfully—and we hear of Gaza holding up the progress of Alexander the Great, who was forced to reduce it by a prolonged siege, and was himself dangerously wounded before its walls. In 96 B.C. Alexander Jannæus captured the city for the Jews. Taking advantage of the withdrawal of the Egyp-

tian troops from Syria, he invested Gaza, and after a year's siege, during which the whole surrounding oasis was laid waste, the town itself was taken by treachery. The entire place was then burned, and the inhabitants massacred. For a while the desert claimed the site, but in 62 B.C. the town of Gaza was once more a reality, to be taken this time by Pompey from the Jews and converted into a free city. In 57 B.C. Gabinius rebuilt the town closer to its harbour, when it became known chiefly as a seaport. In 30 B.C. Gaza was granted by Cæsar to Herod, but after his death was again added to what had now become the Imperial Empire of Syria. Then followed an age of great prosperity for the new city, and in the second and third centuries A.D. it was a famous centre of Greek culture and commerce, with superb temples and renowned schools. From 685 A.D. onwards Gaza was reduced to merely a commercial centre of no great importance. Nor did the Crusaders help to restore its past grandeur, for in their time Askalon had become a more important city.

Another thousand years pass, and this time it is Napoleon who wakes the echoes. With 5,000 camels and 8,000 donkeys his army crosses the Sinai desert by forced marches and defeats the Turkish army at El Arish. Then pressing on through Khan Yunis, he finds Gaza defended by the army of Abdullah, and decides to attack immediately, before the expected reinforcements arrive from the Aga of Jerusalem. Once again the city falls to a new conqueror, to mark another milestone in its chequered career.

Lastly—but who dare say finally?—General Allenby and his men wrested the town from the Turk and added one more chapter to its extraordinary history. Surely Gaza is unique among the cities of the world in that she has preserved her name and identity as the centre of a living community throughout so many centuries, under so many dynasties, and in spite of so many conquerors and such hard knocks of fortune. It seems unthinkable that the millennium can ever dawn for this restless and war-scarred city, on which peace has never rested for more than a few centuries at a time. But to Gaza has been given the grimmer pride of infinite resurrection, and one

cannot but believe that whatever the future may hold of shock, assault and destruction, she will arise phoenix-like and serene from the ashes, unchanged in name and individuality so long as there are cities on the earth.

Starting among the salt sands of the Sinai desert, the Way of the Land of Philistines leads the traveller through the verdant cornfields and orchards of southern Palestine. To-day every possible acre is being ploughed and sown; for food is not plentiful where the Turkish army has passed. Everywhere now one sees ploughs at work—very primitive implements, that can hardly have altered a jot in design since the days of Moses, so simple are they of manufacture. These are pulled by camels, donkeys, or the stunted cattle of the country—frequently by a team including each of the trio. The soil must be extraordinarily fertile. Century after century it has been scratched two or three inches deep and yielded a harvest, receiving nothing back by way of fertiliser save what nature has given of limestone, rain and sunshine.

I came to Palestine prepared for disappointment. Somehow I had always pictured it a barren, sun-scorched country, whose glory had long since departed. Well, not quite always, for as a little child I saw the Holy Land with eyes of faith in all its beauty of milk and honey, vineyard and cornfield, flower and butterfly. Yet in my childish fancy I beheld the true Canaan as it now is, and as it must have been in the days of Christ and of Solomon and of the Exodus from Egypt. Perhaps there are other convictions of childhood that enlightened youth names illusions, to become so much the poorer for their loss. Nevertheless, I half dread the shattering of my pictures if I am given a chance to visit the capital, so intermixed in my boyhood's mind became the vision of ancient Jerusalem of Psalmist and gospel with the New Jerusalem of Revelation and hymn-book. To descend from "streets of shining gold" to the sordid reality of filth that covers the stone alley-ways of a modern town in Palestine is a step one hesitates to take out of mere curiosity. Rather let us gaze on the Holy City from afar than see the Via Crucis defiled and Calvary a dump for garbage.



Artillery Wagon Lines among the Olives.

It is in the country that the old Bible scenes stand still unchanged. If the dawn of a new era of prosperity for this land of promise brings—as it must—an entire revolution in the methods of agriculture, then I am glad I have seen Palestine of the darker ages. The economist in us looks on the broad fields and level valleys, and speaks of what might be accomplished by steam ploughs and Massey-Harris harvesters; but the poet and dreamer in our make-up would fain that this might remain for ever the living Bible picture that the centuries have left it, to link the old world of Jesus and the prophets with the hurry and materialism of modern life. For the tiller of the soil puts his hand to the plough to-day in the same manner as he put it twenty centuries ago, and the sower goes forth sowing just as he did when the Great Teacher looked on him and drew his immortal lessons from the simple processes of nature and the eternal mystery of the seed's growth.

Only here and there are wide orchards of oranges and plums, set in straight rows and skilfully pruned and tended by some Jewish or German proprietor—very reminiscent of South Africa. But the figs and olives grow in pleasing disorder from rich pockets in the limestone hills and along the fertile valleys. Gnarled, twisted and hollow old giants, some of these latter, who may have looked on the Crusaders, and whose seedlings will tarry to see a world undreamt of by us or our children's children. And when once the tide of war has swept over these ancient olives, their safety is insured. For an Army Order has been issued forbidding the troops in any way to interfere with fruit trees within the conquered territory, or even to tie a tent-rope or clothes-line on to a branch of such; which restriction comes somewhat hard on the soldier, since in this part of the country there is apparently neither tree, bush nor hedge save of olive, fig or the unfriendly prickly pear. Antique olive trunk also forms very desirable firewood; but we patiently await each day our little fuel ration—drawn from a large supply captured from the Turks. The infidel, it would seem, is troubled by no such scruples regarding respect for honourable old age, and puts these time-scarred veterans through the sawmill without shame. But we will cheer-

fully go occasionally fireless if by so doing we help to save some fruitful old patriarch, and keep untarnished our fair name in this last great crusade.

For by the Way of the Land of the Philistines has come a conqueror who neither lays waste the fertile lands nor desecrates the holy places of the city. It is no longer the raid of a powerful Pharaoh nor a crusading party of English knights out for Saracens' heads and the acquiring of merit. It is the old and bitter struggle of Cross and Crescent being fought this time to a finish, with weapons hitherto unknown, and attended by horrors unforetold in the books of the Prophets or of Revelation.

But where the flaming sword has passed, great peace lies over the land. Along the road stand the milestones to victory—little wooden crosses round some of which the hands of comrades have planted bright "Palestine poppies" of red and white, which are flowers of wonderful cheerfulness, conjuring up visions of English corn-fields in summer.

To-day, here among the hills of Judæa, the guns have for once been silent, and no sound has been heard save songs of mating birds and the cry of the husbandman as he guides his oxen. But along the ancient highway from Egypt there is ever a trampling of beasts and a rumble of wheels—the engines of war which slumber not by day or by night. For the way of the Land of the Philistines there is no peace until many moons have waxed and waned after the final victory. Then once again it will return to the stillness of the desert, to its phantoms of banished centuries and the dead armies of the past.

An O-Pip in Palestine.



An O-Pip in Palestine.

The April moon is climbing over the crest of olive-clad hill that rises steeply above our camp. Awake, ye signalers, from your brief slumbers, and saddle up "Jupiter," the pack-mule. Load the patient beast with telephones, telescopes, periscopes, daylight lamps and reels of cable. Neither forget your blankets; for the good signaller is ever an optimist, and haply ye shall snatch a few odd half-hours of sleep before the battle. Above all, forget not full water-bottles and iron rations; for the way ye tread with safety to-night may, perchance, be hung with a curtain of fire to-morrow, and ration-parties are notoriously pilgrims of the night.

Everything on board? Right! Throw the surcingle over and tighten up the ropes. All present and correct, sir. Walk, march!

We follow the winding bed of the wadi for half a mile in the deep shadow of its mountainous banks. Then, turning off from the wheeled-traffic road, we strike a narrow hill-path and commence our long climb. In the first hundred yards we are held up by the eternal camel transport "somewhere in front." We come to a halt in the middle of a camp of Punjabis, who have only this day come into the line. After spending most of the afternoon in cheering wildly, they are now all squatting round little brush-fires, every man talking and frying "chupatties" against time. All appear excited, good-natured and perfectly happy. We, who have not yet shaken off our natural disgust at being awakened from an early and unsatisfying sleep of one hour's duration, are uncommunicative, somewhat bored and wholly depressed.

But, excelsior! The obstructing camels have somehow been removed from the road, and our climb is resumed. It is as well that the moon illumines the landscape, for strait is the path and precipitous the way that leads to our destination. "Jupiter," the mule, lifts his head

to his twinkling namesake in the heavens and brays a long, heartfelt protest against mountain paths, packs and the Palestine campaign in general.

The night is silent and peaceful as we climb upwards into the bright moonlight. Below us in the shadowed valley the fires and lanterns of a dozen camps gleam. To one man the scene recalls parts of London; another is reminded of the lights along the Reef. The whole prospect is unwarlike in the extreme.

Up and up the path winds its stony course, till at last we reach the crest of a high, lonely-looking hill. But for all its apparent desolation, this solitary hill-top is to provide us with a home for a day and a night, and will, we devoutly hope, afford a more comfortable and abiding refuge than could the most expensive Johannesburg hotel in the same position. For here, behind a low "sangar" of stones and bush, is the object of our midnight quest—the artillery observation post, abbreviated "O.P.," or, in the signalese dialect, "O-Pip." "Jupiter" is unloaded, gives a sigh of relief, yawns profoundly, and is led back, light of heart and pack, to his wagon-lines. We, with our greater intelligence, make preparations for giving the enemy and ourselves as much trouble as possible on the morrow. Telephone lines are laid out and connected up, communications established, necessary improvements to the sangar effected, and everything done that will save movement in the open during the hours of daylight. After which tasks, if there be any night remaining, the signaller may roll himself up in his blanket and snatch what sleep he can between the attentions of solicitous friends at the other end of his lines, anxiously inquiring every half-hour as to the integrity of their cables and the quality of their signals. They will also probably ask, with great cheerfulness, if our operator is having a good night's rest.

Dawn breaks with unexpected calm. The signaller is a privileged and confidential person, but he is not let into all the strategic secrets of the great. Still, we had been led to believe something would happen in the early hours. But there is absolute silence save for the carolling larks. In front of us stretch fields and crags rising towards the Turkish strongholds on the next range of

hills. Just beneath us is spread out a complete picture of the parable of the sower. Here, along the hard, bare mule track, is the wayside where the fowls of the air devoured the seed ere it had long fallen. Yonder are the stony places—flat ledges of rock with only a sprinkling of sun-scorched soil upon them, sufficient to start growth in the corn, but incapable of supporting the tender young life. There, too, are the thorns, growing in peculiarly dense little thickets, through which no blade can hope to penetrate to the light. But over by far the greater area below us the corn springs green and lush from the lime-enriched earth, giving promise of a hundredfold harvest.

Our reflections are cut short by a short, sharp order: "Battery action!" "Battery action!" we shout down the 'phone, and from the distant gun position the telephonist repeats, "Battery action!" Then follows a string of highly technical orders—the target, angle of sight, ranging section or gun, variety of shell, corrector, elevation, and interval between shots—each order passed from observing officer to signaller, from signaller to battery telephonist, and thence to battery commander. Here the orders may undergo some alteration and addition before he gives the final commands to the battery sergeant-major to be submitted to the section commanders and "numbers one" on the guns themselves. It may sound a long process on paper, but in reality it is only a matter of seconds. The infantry will testify to the extraordinary rapidity with which their "S.O.S." calls for barrages are answered.

The last order we pass down is, "Report when ready to fire." We do not have to wait long for the answering, "Ready to fire." "Fire!" we send back. "No. 1 gun fired," comes the battery reply almost instantaneously, outstripping the report of gun, which reaches us some moments later. A few seconds afterwards we get, "No. 2 gun fired," followed by a second report. We watch steadfastly for the bursts. Twenty seconds pass—it seems a long time for a little shell to keep in the air—then a white puff suddenly appears half-way up the hill on which our glasses are focussed. A little later there is a second puff from 300 yards nearer us, at the

base of the slope. That is our "bracket"; the intended target lies somewhere in between the two bursts. Our officer's calculations are almost completed by the time two dull thuds come back to us from where our shells have dropped. To shorten the bracket and find the exact range is the work of only another two or three shots. Our target being a human one, and therefore liable to err and stray off the landscape, there is no time to lose. "Two rounds gun-fire," is the next order. Twelve rapid, regular, spiteful cracks speed as many little devils of brass and steel on their deadly errands. The Turks scatter in confusion, and dodge behind the nearest rocks. But several fall, and in the clear morning air we can plainly make out, through the telescope, a couple of stretchers being brought up as soon as the fire has ceased.

It sounds, perhaps, a cold and calculating system of dealing out death, but let it not be supposed that we sit and work out mathematical problems in serene impunity. The enemy has as good an idea of our O.P. positions as we have of his—better, maybe, since he has used some of these himself before his last retirement. Thus it is only natural that each side does all it can to put the opposing observers off their stroke. A rushing, crescendo whistle is the first intimation that we are to be favoured by some attention from the opposite side, after which we receive "pip-squeaks" and 5.9 "hows," with great regularity and considerable accuracy. It is quite an exploded (in every sense) theory that a man cannot hear the approach of the shell that hits him. We can, at any rate, all testify to spending many most unpleasant seconds listening to that gruesome, swelling wail which heralds the shell that bursts a few yards beyond, short of, or a little to one side of our persons. Your first belief is that every shell will hit you. After some practice, however, the other extreme is attained, and a comfortable faith in your invulnerability begotten. The soldier must of necessity acknowledge some supreme spiritual force—be it called God, or Providence, or Luck—which presides over his career and guides his actions. The miracles and "strange coincidences" that are taking place every day in the firing line, altogether upset

the theory of an evenly balanced and coldly exact law of chances. Thus, when Johnny this very day obtained a direct hit with a live percussion shell on the front and frail protecting wall of our sangar, and failed to dislodge one single stone, it seemed to us—and our little party included such experts as a colonel of artillery, a battery commander, and a bombardier of signals—contrary to all the rules of ballistics that we should be there at all to discuss the phenomenon.

The enemy's gunners, happy no doubt in the thought that they have obliterated us from the map, proceed, by a series of diabolical flukes, to drop high explosives a few hundred yards behind us, all along the line of our cable. A sudden break in the conversation on the 'phone announces an equally sudden break in the wire. We toss up with my lucky 5-piastre piece who shall sally forth to effect the necessary repairs. I win and stop behind—till the next "dis." (signaller's abbreviation for disconnection) when I creep out with 'phone, pliers and insulation-tape, feeling that peculiar loneliness which comes to the only man moving in the open on his particular sector of enemy target. In five minutes I reach the spot where a 5.9 has left a wide, jagged crater on the rock, and at the same time has nearly removed twenty feet of our cable into the adjacent bushes. While searching for the broken ends I discern a huddled-up form lying motionless across the line a little further on. But "the wire first" must be the signaller's motto, for the lives of hundreds may hang on those few thin twisted strands of steel and copper. I join up the fractures, "tee in" with my 'phone, and find, to my relief, that I can call up both terminal stations.

Our communications are once more unbroken. Now for the casualty. This turns out to be an Indian signaller with a piece of shell in his chest and despair in his heart. He had apparently, and most unwisely, been following up our line in the vain hope that it would lead him to his destination, but it will be hospital now for some weeks, poor fellow. Finding a camp of his fellow countrymen half a mile on, I collect a couple of stretcher-bearers by means of an impromptu bioscope performance, which might be entitled "The Dying Gladiator," from

which the Indians gather that I am either wounded in the head or have sunstroke. Having made it fairly clear, however, that the original character of the piece is lying somewhere out on the horizon, we begin to understand each other, and soon reach the damaged signaller, lift him up carefully and pack his apparatus at his feet on the stretcher. He, at any rate, has cause to bless our "dissed" line, but I resist the temptation to exchange telephones (he has a nice new outfit) on that account.

Back, then, along the lonely, rock-strewn track to the welcome shelter of the O.P., with its cheerful human company and three more or less solid walls. Our batteries have been shooting well; the infantry have gained their objectives; the lark sings in the sky above, and the Colonel smiles below. All's right with the world, so open the bully-beef and circulate the water-bottles—we will feast. Chop off, too, a piece of treasured biltong, straight from the Cape, and hoarded for such occasions. It will bring back old memories of farm and veld, while we drink the toast of "Absent Friends" in strong and ancient tea.

The afternoon wears on. Johnny is still rather worried about the success of our artillery observation, and has another systematic shoot along the crest in search of prey. But beyond covering us with disintegrated limestone, making a horrid smell with his high explosive, and generally frightening us with the squeals of his shell-splinters and nosecaps, he altogether fails to interfere with our daily round and trivial task. Nevertheless it becomes firing work sitting by the hour through the experiments of the other side's gunners. When one can be up and doing, this sort of performance is far pleasanter.

The sun sets in golden splendour over the sea. For a few minutes the roar of the guns is hushed, and as in Tennyson's midnight garden of roses and lilies, "there has fallen a splendid silence" on the flower-decked battlefield. But our rocky hilltop is no place to indulge in sentimental musing. "Jupiter" awaits us impatiently under cover of the ridge; it is time to pack up and return to camp. The Colonel signifies his approval of our day's operations by passing his flask of the real stuff



A Palestine Wadi.

round—all round—for the O.P. is a wonderful leveller of rank and station, and even a general finds it difficult to be really haughty to the man with whom he has just shared the explosion of a German howitzer shell.

In the gathering dusk we set out on our weary descent. As we tramp over the terraced ledges, green with young corn, and through acres knee-high in white lace-like blooms, the still of the peaceful evening melts into our souls. The end of the day brings to each of us different thoughts and memories. But every heart beats to a common longing; each mind is focussed on one set purpose; for all of us one bright light gleams out at the end of our journey—supper!

Sufficient unto the day have been the thrills thereof; to-morrow it is someone else's turn to sample the joys—and other things—that pertain to an O-Pip.

A Spring Morning in Canaan.

A Spring Morning in Canaan.

It is not an easy task to write of war on a spring morning in Canaan. The larks are pouring out their passionate lyrics from high in the heavens; the butterflies flit from blossom to blossom; while over the whole earth is spread such a canopy of wild flowers that even the unemotional soldier pauses on the march, spellbound at such magnificence and profusion. Surely Solomon in all his glory was shabby beside these. Half the choicest hot-house flowers of the world seem to have been scattered here by nature, and the entire contents of an old English garden are crowding each other for space to raise their heads to the sunlight:—poppies, tulips, marguerites, marigolds, salvia, cyclamen, hollyhocks, honeysuckle, thyme, cornflowers, scabious, anemones, oxalis, orchid and lily, with a hundred other lovely plants and grasses, unite in weaving the sublime carpet over which we daily tramp.

In no spot more than here does the idea of strife and slaughter seem more utterly incongruous. In South-West Africa the interminable desolation of the Namib begot in one a species of restlessness that harmonized with military operations. Nor were the dark jungles and dismal swamps of "German East" without their suggestion of cruelty and death. But in this fair land on an early summer morning one's thoughts instinctively turn to a picnic-basket, some clover-matted terrace beneath a shady rock, a good book, and a day spent in dreams and idleness. Bayonets, steel helmets and khaki in general appear obtrusive barbarities, and one becomes aware of an intense yearning to change from Bedford cord breeches into cool white flannels.

But in the clear azure overhead are the first evidences of war—little fleecy balls, clouds "no larger than a man's hand," but fraught with the power of instantaneous destruction to airman and machine should the calculations

and imagination of the terrestrial gunner for once have both proved without error.

But the plane comes through safely and returns to its hangar. The "all clear" signal sounds, and quiet is restored. For an hour there is peace on our immediate front. Then a battery of field guns just to our rear turns on a few rounds of section fire at some patrol or working party that has caught the eye of a watchful observing officer. The 18-pounder is of all guns the most startling and nerve-jarring. If you are unfortunate enough to be camped just in front of a battery of these, you will find yourself constantly jumping forward with the sensation that someone has cracked a big whip just behind you, simultaneously firing off a pistol in your ear.

But the enemy patrol has probably found the firing no less unpleasant than we have. It scatters and takes cover behind the nearest rocks. The reports cease. The observing officer makes a note, "party dispersed," or "result satisfactory," for his evening report, and scans his field of vision for another target. The tranquility of the spring morning is once more unbroken.

Summer is coming. We know this because it has appeared in orders. Also we have been issued with drill shorts and tunics in place of the serge of winter, and helmets are again our headdress. But up till now the spring has been as capricious here as in England, and there are days when we pile on all spare clothing, draw a greatcoat over our naked knees, and crouch in our "bivvies" waiting for the day-long April shower to cease.

We have a bond of sympathy with our comrades over on the Western Front in the quality and tenacity of our mud. We can hardly believe that even Flanders produces an article of finer texture or of higher specific gravity. The poor camel hates wet weather. Possessing a smooth pad evolved for negotiating soft sand, he slides about drunkenly on the slimy roads, and in rainy weather we spare him as much as possible. But he is an indispensable beast, especially in the dry season, and with a

square "fantazie" of water slung on each side of his hump, he represents the "Gungar Din" of the E.E.F.

There is a little Egyptian mule, too, that is a wonderful worker. This breed is uniformly white, and always presents a smart, well-groomed appearance. Very different is the poor little "gyppo" donkey—the patient slave of every native family. Unbrushed, untidy and scarcely larger than a big dog, he is usually almost hidden under the load that is imposed upon him by an inconsiderate—though seldom actually brutal—master. Yet he steps out briskly under two huge water-jars and a fat native, and somehow survives. I hope the S.P.C.A. will take an active part in the reclaiming of this land to civilization, and that poor shaggy little "Neddy" will have a few of his grievances redressed.

The native himself is the most phlegmatic person on earth. While we are all breathlessly watching an air-fight, he continues to squat near the cookhouse, his eyes rivetted on the steaming "dixie," awaiting his chance of unconsidered trifles of "mungaree." He wanders with his women folk round such unhealthy spots as artillery observation posts, oblivious or regardless of danger, crying his ever-welcome wares of juicy "oranchees, big ones!" For the most part he apparently has no feelings either good or bad. I cannot imagine him leading an infantry charge, nor yet a panic. When a high explosive shell bursts within a dozen yards of the ambulance camel he is leading, he merely glances at the crater and passes on. He has brought the philosophy of "kismet" to a fine, concrete factor of his every day life. We Christians as a rule are only able to attain to this happy state after a long and severe course of hostile bombardments.

In Palestine nature is not such a pitiless "fractireur" as she was in her delectable jungles of East Africa. For the greater part of the year the climate is bracing and pleasant, albeit uncomfortably moist at times. Wild beasts, except for the lugubrious and nocturnal jackal, do not trouble us—a fact we greatly appreciate when repairing broken telephone wires out in the wilderness at midnight.

Neither do insects—the ubiquitous English house-fly always excepted—torment us. Although one can find robust scorpions of divers colours under every other stone, these alarming creatures love complete solitude, and only occasionally does some restless adventurer among them hazard an expedition into one's blankets or pillow.

The most conspicuous denizen of the soil is a large, black, shiny millepede which develops a length of from four to eight inches. He is absolutely harmless, save for the unpleasant odour he emits when handled, but loves human society in the cool seclusion of a well-made dug-out, and persistently forces his company upon us. As he walks over a newspaper the sound of his reputed thousand footsteps is rather terrifying, and at first causes the suspicious sleeper to prepare to receive snakes. The millepede shares with the camel a strongly developed taste for discarded orange-peel.

Flies—as might be expected in a land where the ancients gave the title of “Prince of Flies” to the evil one—are, if anything, a trifle more pernicious and persistent than elsewhere. However, I think the coastal strip of sand-dunes in South-West Africa between Walfish Bay and Swakopmund will easily hold pride of place among the fly-ridden districts of the world.

Taken all round, the Palestine campaign is a good one comparatively speaking. Rations—the first consideration when judging such expeditions—are varied and plentiful. Mails—another all important factor—arrive with a regularity as refreshing as it is unexpected after our experiences in East Africa. Boxes of comforts come from the Cape Province and other committees with delightful frequency and bring us, among other good things, the tobacco we of the Union love—our Arcadia Mixture, the one and only “Magaliesberg.”

Johnny Turk, aided and abetted by the Boche, sometimes makes life rather too eventful with his guns, howitzers and bombs. He is particularly vindictive to our observation posts and telephone wires, and we probably give him good cause for annoyance.

But in between the strife, when the earth returns to her normal condition of rest and quiet, we find the world very fair and this country a place of extraordinary beauty and interest. Nevertheless none will rejoice with a greater joy at the advent of peace than we crusaders. Even in this land of miracles the end of the war seems too dazzling a prospect to be seriously contemplated. But when that great event does become more than the tantalizing dream resulting from a day of shell-fire and a supper of toasted cheese, then the fastest "hush-boat" will be all too slow to speed us on our long, last journey to the south.



The Wire-Pullers.



The Wire-Pullers.

Among the many and various patrons of the orchestra stalls on a modern battle-front, there is probably no class of soldier who has killed less Germans directly, and more indirectly, than the artillery signaller. As a rule he carries neither rifle, bomb nor bayonet, but depends—insect-like—for his safety on concealment and protective mimicry; failing which, he works patiently in the open and, if he has time to think of it, invokes the great joss Luck—aided by a tin hat and box respirator—to ward off the mineral wealth of the Fatherland that bursts above his head and the chemicals floating down the breeze. The first lessons of war for him are those of concentration and comparative values. The shriek and roar of high explosive, which naturally compel the undivided attention of a man's innermost soul, have to be eliminated as mechanically as the wireless instrument can be made to cut out all senders save the required one. In the mental silence of his imagination the faint call of a "buzzer," or the still, small voice of the battery commander from miles in the rear, must boom out like a bell. Than this art there is no greater triumph of mind over matter.

The artillery signaller's life is a treble one, alternating between battery, observation post and wagon-lines. For a week at a time he migrates to the second, with an officer and a few companions, seeing life—and, incidentally, a good deal of death—through his field-glasses. When the Boche discovers his hiding-place, life becomes, in the words of the poet, one d—d thing after another—the "thing" varying in diameter between 75 mm. and 42 cm. It is then you may see the forlorn signaller pathetically raking among the ruins, trying to find just one recognisable fragment of telescope to hand back to Ordnance with his indent for a new one. So he usually evolves a philosophical outlook on troubles, and is not given to worrying over the unavoidable. Being the

mouthpiece of the forward observing officer, he is a somewhat responsible person, since a slip of memory or an error in one figure of the range or deflection ordered may start 30 seconds' fiery death towards our own front line, instead of the enemy's, before the tragedy can be seen and stopped. An S.O.S. barrage call misunderstood or delayed has before now lost a battle. But such mistakes occur but rarely, and where the signaller, gun-layer, or "number one" has once erred, he generally fades from the horizon for a season, and will be found repenting at leisure among the fatigues and lesser joys of the wagon-lines or ammunition column. There are many unforgivable sins in the Army, of which none is more heinous than a mistake. Second chances are not encouraged in the front line.

The signaller's life is somewhat different from the average soldier's, for he is not quite as other men are. In the first place his hours are different, since he does shifts all round the clock; his work is different; and if he has passed his exams., and is lucky to boot, his pay is considerably different. Consequently, after some months of active service, he develops into a type apart. He wears an air of efficiency, resourcefulness and imperturbability, together with a spice of independence, gleaned from constant association with the commissioned ranks. Incidentally, he is privileged to warn off any stranger, of any rank, from obstructing his post—and to risk the consequences should it happen to be the Divisional General, C.R.A., making his tour of inspection. Taken all round, the signaller who has been through a few months of the real thing is usually a self-reliant, cheery soul, and has, moreover, some interesting tales to tell.

The science of signalling has of necessity become rather ent and dried on the Western Front. There the telephone has become supreme, and the cables—if intended to survive terrific bombardments—are buried several feet under the ground whenever possible. But here in Palestine, with its peculiar type of warfare, the signaller has far more scope for variety and imagination. Frequent use can be made of visual communication by means of flags, heliograph, and electric lamp. In the laying of



*Bird's-eye View of a Hill Village. From a captured German air-
photograph. The small black dots are Olive trees.*

cables, too, the country itself affords unlimited problems for the wire-puller. The first object in laying out a line is to ensure its safety, and the disasters that beset a wire are legion. The neighbourhood of roads and camps is fraught with constant danger by way of hooves and wheels. Grassy slopes are threatened by grazing animals; dry bush by fire; and in the vicinity of observation posts even the best laid lines seem to exert a fatal attraction on the enemy's shells. Only those who have been called out at midnight to repair a distant break in a line among the Judean hills during the rainy season can fully appreciate the supreme importance of making the original cable invulnerable. Orders state: "Lines should be laid in as inaccessible spots as possible," and bitter experience has confirmed the goldenness of this rule. No longer do we sit at ease on the telephone wagon and un-reel wire to be left lying a few yards from the roadside. It is a far better policy to spend four times as long on the job and hump the heavy cable-drums by hand over rocky hilltops and along the edges of precipices. Where there are sufficient trees, the wire is hooked over high branches, well out of reach of terrestrial menaces. When a wadi has to be crossed, the cable is spanned from bank to bank; and provided the wire is sound and the two ends are well secured, one can count on that section as the safest part of the line. Such a line, running over ground unfrequented by man or beast, "treed" through woods, spanned over ravines, buried under paths, and lying behind the cover of protecting rocks and slopes where it traverses shelled areas, repays almost any amount of initial care and labour.

The signaller, in consequence, takes great pride in the particular line he lays, and is apt to become somewhat jealous of anyone else patrolling it and attempting a few improvements. He frequently reposes such faith in his handiwork that he will resolutely refuse to believe it is vulnerable save by shell or grass fire. Such an one is A, who finds one day he is unable to call up B, for the simple—but unsuspected—reason that a poor Indian of untutored mind, lacking a headstall for his charger, finds a heaven-sent fathom of brand-new, bright red, rubber insulated, copper centred, D 3 steel cable stretched be-

tween two olive trees. A gets through to B by another exchange, and tells him to attend to his direct line. B replies that he has been calling him on his direct for the last twenty minutes. A remarks, "Nonsense," or words to that effect. B swallows the insult and has another try. A then requests B to see if his connections are all right, and B suggests that A's earth-pin requires damping. A declares nothing is wrong at his end, and scathingly reminds B that his switchboard was at fault last time there was similar trouble. Long-suffering meekness not being a strong point in the signal dug-out, B does not turn the other cheek, but passes an ironical remark about one of A's men who was discovered trying to speak to the O.P. on the officers' mess 'phone. A, in tones of great acidity, reveals an older and still more pitiable scandal. B, although at the safe distance of two miles from his opponent, is at heart a man of peace, and quietly suggests sending a linesman out from each station to search for the break, to which A replies that there can't be anything wrong with the line. B says, "Why not?" A retorts convincingly, "Because I laid it myself," and then buzzes "M Q" (wait a bit) while he dashes out at an Indian cavalryman ambling along the road with a remarkable contrivance of shiny D3 cable round his horse's head. On being interrogated as to its source, he explains—with appropriate gestures—that it came from Baluchistan with him and has been in the family for years. A repeats a mixture of Zulu, Swahili and Egyptian, together with certain remarks he once heard an army sergeant addressing to some conscripted recruits on parade, and returns to the telephone to tell B that as a matter of form it might be as well perhaps to send a couple of linesmen out on the wire. B agrees, and in ten minutes A's man finds the severed ends, calls up A for some spare wire, and B to announce his discovery. When the two stations are eventually connected up again, B becomes genially and aggressively talkative, but A has found some important duty to attend to elsewhere. He has lost another cherished illusion; his super-line has displayed a fragility and unreliability of which he had previously believed only Army bootlaces and Japanese matches capable.

But woe betide the owner of a line that skirts camel-camps, grazing-grounds and tracks of any description. For him there will be no settled peace of mind or body by day or by night. The lives of hundreds sometimes hang on one thin strand, and wires have a habit of waiting till the most critical moments for their worst caprices. Even in the quietest times the signaller seldom enjoys a whole night's rest, for there is his two or three hours' shift at the telephones to be done by dim candle light, as well as his day duties. Chief among the blessings of peace to which he looks forward are long, unbroken nights of unlimited slumber. During advances and in times of stress the signaller is one of the hardest-worked men in the field, when you will find him on horseback or foot, covered with telephones, cable-reels, flags, lamps and helios. Wearing a gas-helmet, he makes a very fair impersonation of Father Christmas, and he is generally as hard-worked, and frequently as cheerful. On these occasions his life is brightened by considerable variety and rather more opportunities for earning glory—and dodging shells—than the gunner or driver.

During the peaceful interludes of standing camp he enjoys comparative leisure, when once his communications are established in good working order, and the preliminary fatigues have been accomplished. In contrast to other ranks, who can only leave the gun-pits for the briefest periods, the signaller is encouraged to go forth and patrol his lines as often as possible. An early walk on a spring morning over the hills of Palestine, with the cuckoo calling and the earth a carpet of brilliant blossom, is a very delightful form of duty—in fine weather. But the task of finding a fracture two miles away on a line that runs consistently through ploughed fields of clay and lime, with the rain falling in torrents and no prospect of a change of clothing on return, is not a comfortable one. In the winter months wireless telegraphy has its points.

The telephone is perhaps the most prosaic implement of the signaller's art. There seems far more romance in the little blue and white flags, or in the dots and dashes that flicker from his distant night-lamp like amorous

firellies. But the real poetry of signals lies in the heliograph, whereby the old sun's rays are collected, reflected, and flashed to the exact position of a station, maybe many leagues distant. Under favourable atmospheric conditions, with sufficient high land for sender and receiver, messages have been transmitted nearly a hundred miles in South Africa with the helio. We had heard not so long ago that the days of visual signalling were past, but in German South-West, German East, and in this hilly, sunlit land of promise, constant use is being made of the helio., electric lamp and flags, the latter frequently in conjunction with a powerful telescope.

Wireless telegraphy is now universally used for directing artillery fire from aircraft, the ground station answering either by daylight electric lamp or by using strips of white-painted cloth laid on the ground to form various signs and letters. With its unique scope for observation, aerial co-operation has become invaluable, and every artillery brigade now possesses its own wireless receiving instrument and trained operators.

Other methods of signalling vary from the red and green lights of the front line infantry to the claxhorn of the aeroplane, each with its occasional and lawful occasions. But it is the instrument officially known as the "telephone, portable, D Mark III." that bears the heat and burden of the day, together with its attendant and indispensable wire-pullers.

A Bivvy in Samaria.



A Bivvy in Samaria.

A scorching north wind, direct from Asia Minor, puffs softly and sullenly over the bare rocks, and stirs the olive trees to a reluctant whisper. From the branches overhead a green-winged cicada scrapes out its strident chirp hour after hour with exasperating persistency. Occasionally the 18-pounder battery behind us looses off a couple of rounds with startling violence, as if to protest that the guns, at any rate, are not affected by the general langour that lies over the land. For the long Palestine summer afternoon has begun. Six hours hence the sun will be sinking, we shall be supping (if not on duty), the Turk will probably be putting over a little evening hate, and there will be abundant signs of life and energy. Till then we will quietly perspire in the shade—reading, writing, swatting flies, sleeping, dreaming of seas and rivers and long, cold drinks; doing nothing or anything that will take our minds off the weather and the probability of another two years of war.

On the European fronts the soldier lives in a subterranean dug-out. On our African campaigns we used to build dry grass "bandas." In Palestine we dwell in shapeless little homes, the chief ingredient of which is a square of fairly waterproof canvas, known officially as a bivouac-sheet. To this centrepiece the proud owner attaches whatever he can annex by way of odd pieces of sackcloth and matting. The resulting hovel is known briefly and affectionately as a "bivvy." There is no difficulty about the erection of a strong wall, if such be desired; for this is a country wonderfully rich in rocks and pebbles. It is not surprising that David selected a sling when facing Goliath, or that the children of Israel were addicted to stoning their prophets, with such a wealth of suitable jagged metal always to hand. Nowadays, if one's neighbour is singing too loudly and out of tune, or if the aeroplane-sentry refuses to reply to a civil

request for the time, one instinctively reaches for a fragment of limestone and hurls it towards the offender. My own enamelled mug, and my "half-section's" tin-framed portrait of a fascinating lady of the chorus, are both tragic monuments to this fatal Holy Land habit.

Here and there, dotted about the hills, we find solitary, dome-shaped chambers built of broad slabs of rock, thickly roofed over with earth and grass. These curious little dwellings, at once suggestive of ancient hermits' cells, keep remarkably cool and draughty, even in the hottest weather. Near our present camp are two such primitive "bivvies." We have avoided them since the time when one of these proved the tomb of a big Dutchman, who was in the habit of cooling off in this tempting cavern, and contracted pneumonia. But when we lie sweltering in the outer heat, the temptation to enjoy the cold draught is as hard to resist as are ices at a dance. Fortunately, however, we live in the vicinity of a spring of clear, sweet water, that drips from a limestone grotto high up the hillside and—since the R.E.'s came along—now trickles through an iron pipe down to a trough in the bed of the wadi, where it rejoices the passing mule and camel to the verge of intoxication.

If it be true that a man's home is an index of his nature, then there must be some remarkable characters among us. Certain it is that bivvies vary in design with each different temperament. There is the true old conservative who never evolves anything more brilliant than the conventional inverted V pattern, though such building material as unconsidered lengths of hessian and palm-leaf matting lie at his feet, and sand-bags, stone walls and sheltering flat rock faces are to be found free, gratis and "bukshee." The opposite extreme of architect is the type which goes to tremendous pains to make itself a home from home. In the bivvies of such you will find raised couches cushioned with grass, ration-box chairs and cupboards, rows of clothes-pegs, and possibly a picture gallery. One of our number—tell it not in Gath—has even borrowed a bulb from the signalling lamp, and with a series of telephone dry cells has attempted an electric light installation. My own humble abode is modestly illuminated by a string emanating

from a tin of bacon-fat and odds and ends of tallow, which gives forth a weak light together with a strong smell.

As with birds and insects, the nesting habits of bivvy-builders vary from the absolute solitary to the highly sociable. Occasionally one comes across a cluster of canvas and branches, representing half a dozen or more inhabitants sharing a common roof, but each possessing his own particular corner, just as certain of the finch family conduct their housing operations. More generally, though, we live in ones, twos and threes. Personally I was cured of the gregarious instinct after occupying the door position of a bell-tent containing seven other signallers during the rainy season. Each man, as he came off duty at night, would first tread on my chest and then wipe his feet on my blankets. Since then, so far as sleeping arrangements are concerned, I have found that the life of a hermit has its points.

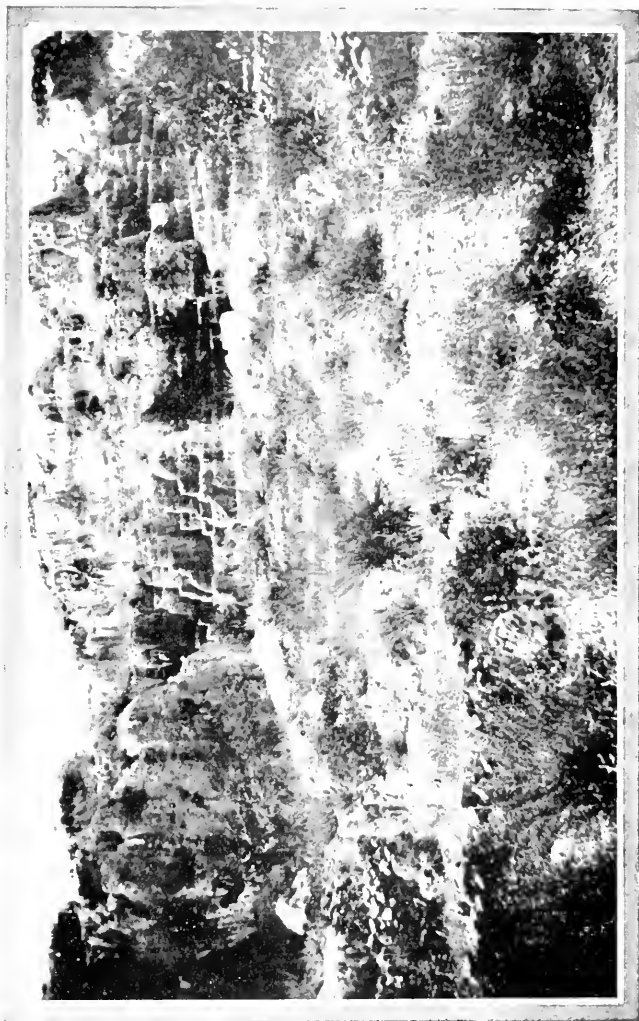
My present cell, where nearly four months of the summer have been spent, is pitched under a spreading olive tree on one of the countless terraces that climb the steep bank of a deep wadi. On one side the next terrace forms a three-foot wall, and on the other side a low balustrade of limestone slabs gives privacy from the footpath beneath without hiding the ever-fresh view of the opposite bank of the wadi which rises some thousand feet in verdant steps of olive, fig and corn up to its rock-crowned summit. At each end I have erected a loosely built stone wall, that will not turn aside the lightest of welcome zephyrs, to act as pillars supporting the blanket roof of a miniature "stoep." By the front door a little garden of green maize and millet—self-sown plants culled from the roadside—breaks the monotony of parched brown earth, and is the admiration of the Staff. Inside, lining the wall, a row of maiden-hair ferns grow luxuriantly in jam tins, and are, I suspect, much coveted by the Officers' Mess. The Adjutant shall have one when he gets me English leave.

The natural rock formation has supplied a bench for my visitors, as well as a washing-stand outside my back door. Nor am I alone in my glory; for a nest of tiny

brown ants work quietly in one corner, and with immense labour remove biscuit-crumbs and the corpses of swatted flies. Down a perforation in the limestone a pair of little mason-bees have found the home they were looking for, and toil with exemplary energy throughout the hottest hours of the afternoon, bringing in honey and pollen for their young. Casual vagrants, such as long millepedes, glow-worms, sundry large beetles and an occasional "praying mantis," seek lodging for a night and then push on. A hairy brown spider, who abused the laws of hospitality by occupying his host's pillow and biting him on the nose in the early hours, was pursued by speedy nemesis. The sins of this assassin, moreover, had to be visited on to his spouse, who was found skulking in my library—a particularly foolish place in which to hide, as the entire stock of books (3) is in constant circulation. Huge scorpions, too, are unpleasantly frequent pilgrims of the night, delighting in flannel shirts and soft raiment.

On this roving life one clings desperately to anything that savours of permanency, and however glad we may be to move forward again, we shall feel a real wrench when we pull to pieces our little homes of so many weeks, in which we have somehow serenely survived the sun's heat, the maddening flies and the shells of the Turk. There is something pathetic about the deserted skeleton of a camp—the walls and ditches, pegs and wires, that yesterday went to make the home which is the Englishman's castle, whether he is living the life of a barnacle or of a butterfly.

Centuries hence, perhaps, learned antiquarians will speculate on the origin of these solid but meaningless low walls and roofless cook-houses that will probably survive on deserted hillsides. Perchance our rough handiwork will be classed as contemporaneous with those moss-grown ruins which at the present day lie strewn about on the wadi bank above us, whose glory has passed into oblivion along with their architects and history. Haply—by some strange but not unknown freak—the colloquial name of our abandoned dwellings will outlive the knowledge of their construction and



Rocks and Ruins in Samaria.

nature, and they will become the cromlechs and middens and stonehenges of Palestine. Let us dream, then, of achieving immortality for our art in the vision of a thirtieth century audience thrilling—or yawning—to a lecture by some future president of the Royal Society, entitled, say, “The Origin and Use of Bivvies in Ancient Samaria.”



Higgins versus a Horse.

Higgins versus a Horse.

[This little story is not strictly true, though you may meet with wild-eyed drivers who will swear to experiences equally startling and no less tragic than the following narrative.]

Higgins, as a little boy, had loved horses, especially the shiny, spirited kind that dance along sideways, and the big, thickset chargers on which troops of jingling soldiers would sometimes ride by in the street. All through his sallow, callow, clerking youth he used to envy the cab drivers and butcher-boys their congenial, equine careers. When the war broke out, relentless fate, assisted by a persuasive sergeant, indicated to Higgins his great and obvious opportunity. He enlisted as a driver in the R.F.A., and at last had a horse of his very (temporary) own to look after, not to mention several odd mules and heavy draught animals of doubtful origin and uncertain temper. Thrice happy Higgins!

Let us draw a veil over the two years that wrought such havoc in the dreams of a life-time. Suffice it to say that in four and twenty months Higgins' address was "somewhere in Palestine," still a driver in the R.F.A., for the good reason that he had found a month's notice in writing insufficient to terminate an Army contract for duration and six months. Alas, the light had faded from Higgins' life! His love had proved false. Horses, instead of things of beauty and joys for ever, had become unmitigated nuisances and perpetual horrors. Higgins realized that chargers, when brought round to an officer ready saddled, clothed and in their right minds, may seem delightful creatures. As objects to be incessantly groomed, fed, watered, harnessed, drilled and lived with on terms of closest intimacy, they are apt to become—as Mark Twain put it—like a white elephant round one's neck. Higgins now hated horses in general, and his own off centre-wheeler, "Horus," in particular, with all the

strength of an affectionate nature. This noble beast—its name a relic of its master's short leave to Egypt—was headshy, gumshy, workshy and sulky, except at such times as it was pleased to assume a playful, Dervish-like abandon.

The first time Higgins rode it, he was wearing what he termed his "war-savings" spurs, in which tinkling sixpenny-pieces replaced the usual spiky, but silent, stars with which spurs are issued. Horus, who knew how to appreciate kindness, would not be kicked out of a funeral walk for all the silver sixpences in the world. Moreover, he had recently listened with interest to an Arab pony discourse on historical events in the Holy Land, and easily persuaded himself that he could distinctly see an angel with a flaming sword standing in the way. His sudden and realistic petrification act would have convinced Balaam himself.

Next day Higgins went for a lonely exercise ride, with a tin-opener lashed on to one heel. There seems little doubt that this ruse took Horus completely by surprise, no less than did the latter's subsequent manœuvres astonish Higgins. For ten crowded seconds some berserk ancestor of Horus took over the performance, and the curtain fell—along with horse and rider—in the yawning crater where an 8-inch howitzer shell had left its foot-print in the sands of time. Here, among these solemn surroundings, Higgins first resolved to encompass the death of his dumb comrade. For one crimson minute he handled the tin-opener fondly, searching over Horus's neck for the printed line along which to cut. But though Horus might perchance one day enter a bully-beef tin, as yet he bore no trace of the label.

On stable-picket that night, under the eastern stars, Higgins gave himself up to calm, dispassionate thought. He reflected on the many deaths a horse may die in Palestine from purely natural causes. Even now the sick lines were full; but Horus was rudely robust, had no food fads, and was emphatically not of the fragile, gazelle-like type. Then the great idea came to Higgins, and he smiled loudly in wonder at its simplicity. Of all ills that horse-flesh is heir to, sand-colic is the most easily contracted. In the desert regions every animal wears its sand-muzzle

day and night between feeds. Higgins still had an hour to complete his picket. He walked quietly up to Horus, softly singing an hymn of hate, and removed the leather muzzle from off his head. Horus immediately celebrated his freedom by biting his left-hand neighbour on the eye-brow, and licking up his own bed, which analyzed roughly $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. dirty tibbin, 5 per cent. thorns, 5 per cent. black ants and $82\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. coarse sand. Higgins and Horus were both delighted, and collaborated in scraping together a fine, solid heap of grit to hasten events. Horus devoured about half, and then handed his keeper a neat kick on the knee to signify repletion. Being of a strong, silent nature, Higgins merely returned the caress two-fold. At last there seemed to be springing up a complete understanding between master and employed.

The following morning Higgins looked hopefully for some signs of his charger's impending decease, but Horus appeared rather fresher than usual. At each feed that day a few handfuls of river-sand were quietly slipped into his nosebag. On afternoon parade Higgins waited expectantly for that collapse of the hind quarters which is one of the first symptoms of colic; but Horus was in unusually good form, and accomplished the difficult feat of hopping over the pole of the firing battery waggon in full harness. Though puzzled and balked, Higgins came of hardy stock that was slow to own defeat. He knew that strychnine and arsenic in small quantities may be highly beneficial, and concluded that sand might be equally so. It was clear that the dose must be increased. Thereafter Horus' nosebag positively bulged five times a day, and he browsed on dry river-bed by night. Higgins began to acquire the reputation of a man who was keen enough to steal feeds for his horses. Nor did Horus fail to show good results for the extra bulk he was consuming. His cavities filled out, his jagged edges rounded off, he became exhaustingly playful, and began to wear a fat, comfortable, sanctimonious expression.

The Adjutant was so impressed by this sudden metamorphosis to graceful curves that he decided to transfer the horse to the officers' lines, and deliberated whether he would give him to the Padre, to whom he owed money,

or to the Colonel, whose bridge I.O.U.'s he held to the value of some thousands of piastres. Finally, he resolved to consult Higgins himself as to the merits of his steed. Higgins, wildly elated at the prospect of a long, last farewell to the latter, was taking no commercial risks.

"'E's a real bewt, 'e is, Sir," he exclaimed in answer to the Adjutant's enquiries. "'E's too good for a gun team; ought to be rid by an officer and a gentleman like yourself, Sir, 'e did ought to."

"And how," asked the Adjutant, "do you account for this horse's splendid condition, when all the other animals in the Brigade are growing poorer every week?"

"Care," replied Higgins. "Care and lovin' affection, Sir. Many a night 'ave I laid awake, thinking 'ow I could vary 'is diet a bit. Loved 'im like a pal, I did, Sir; but I always knew 'e was too good for me. And beg pardon, Sir, but might I be allowed to get trained as a signaler——?"

"My good man," quoth the Adjutant, who possessed a very pretty wit, "it seems to me that horses—not Morse—is your strong suit. I have decided to give this horse to Captain Meekly, our Field Chaplain, but I shall allow you the privilege of continuing to look after the animal upon which you have lavished so much attention. No,"—noticing Higgins' emotion—"I don't want a word of thanks, my man. You can go now."

That afternoon the Padre inspected his new groom, watched him feeding Horus, and spoke at some length on the subject of kindness to dumb animals in general, and to officers' chargers in particular. Later in the day Horus untied, without much trouble, his rein, strolled over to the officers' mess, and devoured a couple of sand-bags from the walls, causing a general collapse of the building. Higgins was hastily summoned and reprimanded.

The next morning, being the Sabbath, Horus broke his headstall, entered the empty Church marquee, and consumed half a dozen khaki-covered hymn-books before the Padre arrived on the scene. Higgins stood silent under

ten minutes of righteous indignation, after which he was told to go and cut grass with which to satisfy the healthy appetite of his horse.

The same evening Horus, finding both his rein and his headstall baffled all attempts at freedom, successfully pulled up the entire picket-rope and walked into the Colonel's tent. He was observed to emerge thence a few minutes later chewing a magnificent pair of buff riding-breeches, with the picket-rope dredging out a portable washing stand, a pair of silk pyjamas and one embroidered carpet slipper.

At "office" the next day Higgins was awarded ten days' sand-bag filling and an additional two hours' grooming each morning. From the adjoining horse-lines Horus bared his yellow teeth in an enigmatical, Odol smile.

Higgins is now a broken, but unrepentant, man. Should he ever recover a little of his old spirit, he will probably attempt to remove the battery sanitation man by means of powdered glass poisoning, with a view to snatching his desirable, horseless job.

Ten Days' Egyptian Leave.



Ten Days' Egyptian Leave.

There are two great events for which every good crusader waits in faith and patience. One is the end of the war; the other is Cairo leave. The former, he is cheerfully aware, will not occur in his lifetime. The latter he may reasonably look forward to with a certain amount of justifiable hope. Unless some big "stunt" is impending, there is nearly always a small percentage of men from each unit away on leave. There would be more, but lack of funds deters many from making the pilgrimage over-often. For Egyptian leave without cash is as bald as faith without works. Not that one need hoard a hundred sovereigns for the purpose, but something between ten and twenty pounds Egyptian is desirable if one is to see life and send home a few souvenirs as well. Of course you can spend without effort twenty times that amount, but unless you are on Australian rates of pay, or have private means, or have been lucky on the crown and anchor board, it will take you all your time to accumulate the above mentioned ten pounds.

Provided, then, that the Battery Sergeant-Major sees no just cause or impediment; that the Adjutant, likewise, is not unwilling; and that the Orderly Officer and Battery Clerk between them have been persuaded to disgorge some fifteen hundred piastres over your pay-book, you spend a whole day "poshing" up your bottoms, boots and badges. Half a day on the road and a night in the train will make them look far worse than after a week in action. But everyone affects the pre-leave "posh," and it serves as a sort of thanksgiving ceremony. Moreover, it gives immense pleasure to the Adjutant as he inspects the leave party and says, with the dignified solemnity begotten of twenty-five years in a sinful world, that he hopes we will enjoy our leave and avoid —but who are we to risk censorship by reporting verbatim the words of the Staff?

One develops an uncanny popularity prior to going on leave. Men whose faces are quite unfamiliar press wrist-watches upon you, evidently expecting them to reappear in two weeks' time swept and garnished as to the works, and with new glasses. Officers and sergeant-majors humbly bring pieces of silver and ask if you "will be good enough" (ye gods! And from an S.M.) to buy thin shirts or photos or razor-blades for them. You feverishly scribble more and more items on your list, and vaguely wonder if you will have time to see the Pyramids with only ten days at your disposal.

Eventually you ride off in a calvacade—mules predominating. The railway station at Ludd is your destination, but that is twenty miles off, and a certain little ceremony has to be performed before the soldier is held to have attained a fit state of purification to enter Egypt. The night is therefore spent in the little German agricultural colony-village of Wilhelma—which, incidentally, Johnny Turk is addicted to bombarding at odd intervals with some wonderful long-range guns of his. But there is usually some variety entertainment taking place in the ex-beer garden, and there are pleasant eucalyptus avenues to stroll in, together with some narrow but deep little trenches into which one can bob when the upper earth becomes unhealthy.

Early next morning you set out for Ludd, but ere that town is reached, a turn to the left is taken, and passing through the fields you head towards what used to be an olive-oil refinery in the good old days before the war. Now the place is called "The Lyceum," and on a kind of heraldic escutcheon over the entrance hangs a picture of the presiding deity of this temple, true to life, complete with eight legs and a beak. Under this strange device some classical scholar has inscribed the legend, "Nemo me impune possessit." All of which is very beautiful and correct.

Here your clothes go into a steam-engine, and your person is purged like hyssop under a shower-bath in which creosote is present in painful quantities. After which you go out into the midsummer sun, contract a dose of East African fever, and so towards the railway-truck, where you proceed to collect a fresh supply of the



Camels on a zig-sag road among the Judaean Hills.



little bedfellows you were officially supposed to have shed at the Lyceum. But none of these minor troubles worry much now. You are out of the front line and well on your way to the blissful eternity of ten days' leave.

There are, however, still a few purgatories to be negotiated before Cairo is reached. First comes the "Divisional Rest Camp" at Ludd, where you may tarry for a day or two before the R.T.O. sees fit to entrain your contemptible little party. But supposing you are lucky enough to be given an empty truck that evening, you will find yourself nearing Kantara early next morning. Kantara before the war was merely a railway-station along the Suez-Port Said line on the Suez Canal, plus a badly plastered mosque and a few mud-brick hovels. During the Turkish attack on the Canal, the desert sands of Kantara were furrowed by sand-bagged trenches and barbed wire entanglements. Now in this spot there is an immense white canvas camp where khaki-clad men swarm like ants, and where acres upon acres of all manner of stores lie piled in classified dumps. Kantara is the southern terminus of the Desert Railway line, and likewise of the Desert pipe line, through which the sweet waters of the Nile are pumped up to the dry outposts of southern Palestine.

On the strongly worded testimony of hundreds, I can safely assert that only the most rabid base-wallahs ever learned to love Kantara. Imprimis, there is an unpleasant purgatory there known as "G.B.D." Mention these three letters in the presence of any Khaki Crusader, and he will shudder and probably make use of uncrusaderly language. "General Base Details" is a camp to which one is sent after coming off long leave, or out of hospital, or at the conclusion of a signalling, gas, cookery, battery-staff or any other course. Here you wait in durance most vile till a sufficiently large party for your particular unit has been collected. This may take a fortnight or a month or more—possibly less. In the meantime the busy brains of several sergeant-majors are devising all manner of unpleasant duties for you. If there are no more cook-house scraps to carry to the incinerator, and they have found someone else to guard the Turkish prisoners down at the Canal, there is always some wash-house or crossroads

that one can mount guard over; so roll up your blankets and prepare for twenty-four hours' abomination of desolation. My own opinion is that G.B.D. is a clever invention for making us think twice before we seek admittance to hospital, or contemplate any temporary desertion of the firing-line.

But the man "proceeding on short leave" can usually avoid this detention, if his papers are in order, by merely hanging round the station till his train comes along.

My companion and I had determined to visit Alexandria first, spend a couple of days there, and then journey to Cairo. But as there was no train for "Alex." the day we arrived, we decided to spend the afternoon in Port Said. The railway hugs the western bank of the Canal most of the way on the one side, whilst a huge sheet of water stretches to the horizon on the other side. Port Said did not enchant us. It seemed chiefly the abode of touts of all sorts, who insistently and familiarly urged their merchandise—varying from postage-stamps to human souls—at every street corner and shop window. It was a very hot day, which did not make the local perfumes any the sweeter. Weary of the Oriental, we wandered out along the breakwater that protects the mouth of the Canal. Passing the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the creator of this wonderful waterway, we walked steadily northwards over the concrete blocks, till we judged we must be nearing Europe. Still the end of the jetty seemed no nearer, so we abandoned the attempt, returned to Port Said and so to Kantara, where we spent a comfortable night rolled in our blankets on the sand.

Next morning we travelled in third-class luxury on the Egyptian State Railways to Alexandria. It was most restful riding rolling-stock instead of mules, and we duly appreciated the change. We lunched off hard-boiled eggs and rolls—the traditional fare of the traveller in Egypt—loudly proclaimed by the vendor as "very clean, very sweet, good for the belly." They may have been; but we have our doubts about the lemonade we subsequently purchased at Ben Ha.

Alexandria was reached at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and our first thought was—not of the glories of ancient Egypt, but of as modern a bath and feed as could be

found. And having fed, we sallied forth to find a suitable place for the next meal. Cast not the eye of scorn upon us, gentle reader. We were merely doing what every other British globe-trotter does on his travels. But the stupendous courage generated by a holy war emboldens us to put things in their true, undistorted order of importance. Moreover we discovered a delightful little French restaurant, thanks to a long-lost friend we met, who possessed a very nice taste in such matters, and I fear that first civilized dinner for a year will remain a greater reality than most of the historical monuments we beheld next day. There was thick soup, and fried fish, and some jolly little cutlets with three vegetables and plenty of gravy, all on hot plates. There was a fruit salau, and several bottles of real English beer, and clean serviettes, and a French waiter in evening dress. Was it possible that this could be no dream and purchasable at 12 piastres a head?

There are sundry places of amusement for the visitor in "Alex." The most popular form of entertainment is the beer-hall chantant. You pay for your drinks, whilst the hall and the chantant are thrown in for nothing. As might be expected, the beer was usually more sparkling than the programme, though the items of a robust lady singer, known briefly and affectionately as "Seraphina," were always well received. She was one of the few artistes who could successfully pit her powers against the jingle of glasses and the roar of masculine conversation.

There are other places that unfortunately cannot be ignored when writing of the night life of Alexandria—and Cairo and Port Said; streets where human creatures sit by the doors of little rooms and sell, for no great sum,—themselves. One visits such a street just once, mainly out of curiosity and prepared to feel disgust. We came away with feelings of pity predominating—pity for those poor painted, tinselled women, whose attempts to appear alluring and desirable vary from the ludicrous to the pathetic. Surely no sober man in his senses could find delight in such; and yet—but we have set out to write a comedy, and must not invoke the tragic muse.

Next morning we were up betimes. There are two ways of spending army leave. One consists of unlimited lazi-

ness, and among its joys are late sleeping, breakfast in bed (5 piastres extra) and gentle loating all day long. The other method is the life strenuous. You rise early, set off immediately after breakfast sight-seeing, continue in the same all the days of your leave, and accomplish in a week what the peace-time tourist finds exhausting work spread over a month. We chose the second system. After all, this was our one golden chance of seeing something of Egypt, and in the bottom of our hearts we had a sneaking presentiment—perhaps we are over-optimistic—that in the dim future there was a time coming when war should be no more, and all the beds, breakfast and laziness we could desire should be ours. Therefore we maintained an almost military standard of early rising throughout our leave, often with great reluctance. But our virtue found its own reward, and the multitude of things we saw was so great that eventually we had to request our guide to recall each day's doings so that we could record them on paper for future reference.

And here crops up the question of guides. A large percentage of the male population of Egypt would appear to be guides by profession. Quite a number of these assert they were guides to King Edward, to Lord Kitchener or to Mrs. Asquith. They will tear each other to pieces for the privilege of guiding your insignificant person, and a mere glance in their direction is taken as an indication that their services are required. Unless you are both wary and firm, there is a danger of finding you have seemingly engaged five or six cicerones. We were fortunate both at Alexandria and Cairo in our selection, and secured middle-aged Arabs who were very dignified in their way and gave us excellent value for our money in a land where the entire populace is out to suck the stranger dry.

I have forgotten the name of our old Alexandrian guide, but he was undoubtedly a hard worker. We boldly decided to attempt all the chief guidable sights of the place in one afternoon, and we succeeded. First to Pompey's Pillar, described in the guide-book—written by a native scholar of Alexandria—as “The largest block of granite in the world, as far as researches have proved. It is 98 feet and 9 inches high and about 29 feet and 8

inches in circumference. It is surmounted by a beautiful Corinthian capital and its colour is red with dark spots. This strange pillar was first ascended by an English skipper, who scaled it by means of a kite and a rope. Napoleon Bonaparte, in 1798, ascended it by the same means as well as Admiral Smyth. It is reported, also, that an English lady, Miss Talbot, breakfasted and wrote a letter on its top which is 16 feet and 6 inches in diameter."

But the name, unfortunately, is incorrect as, "Pompey's Pillar is erroneously called so as it was formerly thought that the head of Pompey was buried beneath it. Researches brought to light that a prefect of Alexandria erected this wonderful column in honour of Emperor Diocletian in 297 after Christ." Another cherished illusion gone, and we were to lose many more before we had seen all the holy places of Cairo—and Jerusalem.

The place of perhaps greatest interest to the sight-seers of Alexandria is the Catacombs of Kom el-Shogafa. These were once a huge underground honey-comb full of tombs containing ancient Egyptians, and the author of the guide-book was apparently so overcome after a visit to this gloomy hypogeum that he could not trust himself to write an account. He has therefore suborned one, "My friend, Mr. Ghali Yacoub," who—"contributed the above paper after our joint visit to this wonderful tomb. Our descent into the bowels of Alexandria was very pleasant and instructive. We saw the many things enumerated and described in detail in the above contribution, and felt the strange feeling this wonderful tomb of the rich Alexandrine incommensurably imparts to its visitors."

We probably felt still stranger feelings, as on the day of our visit something had gone wrong with the electric light which has been fitted throughout the Catacombs, and we had to make shift with candle-ends. The place lost nothing in impressiveness thereby, and I stuck closely to our guide. It would be a most unpleasant spot in which to get lost.

The remainder of the afternoon we spent in visiting the mosques and the Græco-Roman Museum. I would gladly

indite a guide-book about all that we saw, but are not these things written in the little red volume of Mr. Khoori, price 10 piastres?

The following morning we journeyed by tram to the beautiful Nourha Gardens, where there is a small zoo, a band on Sundays, iced drinks and other attractions. It was very hot, and we were in the painful predicament of having to wear steel helmets, which had been our only head-dress since the recent Palestine push. We had very nice caps in our possession, but the military police threatened us with awful penalties when we rashly appeared in these. Eventually we took the matter to the Provost Marshal of Cairo, who was a merciful man, and signed a form exempting us from metal hats. Meanwhile the crowd seemed to find the greatest interest in our unusually warlike appearance.

We left Alexandria that afternoon, and reached Cairo in four hours, passing through the extraordinarily fertile valley of the Nile. How these rich, alluvial, irrigated fields make the mouth of the South African "dry land" farmer water! Three luxuriant crops of maize and corn in a year, and a fresh deposit of rich, black mud on your land each summer. The war has been a godsend to the "fellaheen"—and the merchants—who are obtaining army contract prices for whatever they can produce.

In Cairo we dwelt at a real hotel, and fared sumptuously. We had looked forward keenly to a soft bed apiece, and we got all we wanted of softness, and a bit more. The hotel mattresses were of the feathery, sinking sort, such as you still find in old English inns, and may possibly appreciate in frosty weather. In the middle of the Egyptian summer a hard, bare rock is vastly preferable. We cast off all the bed-clothes, lay as near the edge as possible, pressed our feet against the cool iron frame, and so slept.

The next morning we decided on a walk around previous to any definite plan of campaign. It is very essential to keep moving in the streets of Cairo. If you pause for a few seconds, you are immediately beset by touts and beggars of all sorts. Even at a slow walk you are continually harassed by guides, shopkeepers, bootblacks,

walking-stick vendors, postcard sellers, donkey boys, curio dealers and mendicants—faked and genuine—with the most repulsive afflictions as their stock in trade. There were once some very clever people called the Israelites who, having lived among the Egyptians for some years, eventually succeeded in despoiling their hosts. Since then the latter have been getting their own back on every stranger who sojourns in their land. Cairo has earned its livelihood from the tourist for years now, and as the population is large, competition is bound to be very keen. If you were able to convince a retailer of Cairo that British shopkeepers just sit in their places of business, quietly awaiting customers, he would regard those tradesmen either as benignly mad or as the feeblest sort of fools. The Egyptian trader believes in words rather than deeds, and has brought the arts of persuasion, supplication, importunity and intimidation to a fine science. Unless one is an expert assassin, it is useless to lose one's temper and attempt violence. That sort of demonstration merely collects a crowd, and consequently either the mob or the Egyptian police will have your blood. The natives of Cairo are for the most part a good-natured lot, but they strongly resent personal assaults, except when they can do the active part themselves, with an isolated European as assaultee.

We therefore patiently endured the ordeal of the streets, merely lashing the most annoying cases with our tongues. There is a useful Arabic word "escot"—meaning "voetsak"—which when shouted with determination, and embroidered with a few English words of endearment, is quite effective with the small boy class. By these one is hailed respectively as "Captain," "Sergeant-Major," "Corpora," or plain "Johnny," according to the prospects you appear to offer for plunder.

Having wandered round a part of the city and got thoroughly lost, we boarded the tram for Heliopolis, the élite suburb of Cairo. The Egyptian trams are all single-deckers, and the swiftest we ever sampled. The line to Heliopolis is laid railway-fashion most of the way, and a terrific speed is attained. Tram fares, however, are wonderfully cheap, and half a piastre will take one a rapid half hour's ride. Nevertheless the Cairo tramways should

pay handsomely, for the seating accommodation is only a small part of the capacity, and there are always dozens of natives clinging on all round the edges. A conscientious Egyptian tram conductor must lead a very wearing life.

During the afternoon we secured the services of an honest-looking guide—one Abdullah—to whom we agreed to pay a fixed sum, in return for which he undertook to accompany us to all places of interest included in a programme suggested by himself; to pay all incidental cab and tram fares, entrance fees to tombs and mosques, all gratuities and baksheesh, and even to provide a substantial cold luncheon the day we visited the Barrage. Abdullah fulfilled his contract nobly, and entertained us, free of charge, with his historical narratives, tales of adventure and native fairy-stories. His ideas of Egyptology comprised a wonderful distortion of accepted beliefs, interwoven with his own private opinions and those of the more imaginative of his fellow guides. None of Abdullah's theories could ever be blamed to any books he had read, and he made no secret of scorning the official catalogue in the Egyptian Museum.

We commenced our adventures with the Pyramids of Ghizeh. These have been one of the wonders of the world since the remote date in the fourth dynasty when they were built, and I shall not attempt to describe them. The tram takes one as far as the Mena House Hotel, at which point a crowd of camel-drivers and donkey-boys fight for your body. Abdullah seemed to command some respect, however, and we were given a choice of mounts. We naturally plumped for camels: next time we shall take donkeys. The camel, expostulating, kneels to be mounted, and rises to its feet in about five jerky motions, flinging its rider alternately backwards and forwards. It hates being worked, and protests loudly all the time. It bites when an opportunity offers, its teeth are dirty and its breath smells. Nevertheless it is the indispensable mercantile marine of the desert.

The traveller does not get much opportunity of silently reflecting on the wonder and grandeur of the Pyramids and Sphinx. When the camel-boys are not trying to sell you ancient Roman coins, they are belabouring their

beasts; for the sooner they push your party round and rid themselves of your superfluous though profitable persons, the quicker can they return for the next train-load.

We had our photographs taken with the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Cheops for a background. We were not given time to decide whether we were willing, or to fix the price. We were merely ordered by a voluble foreigner to pose on a certain patch of sand, our money was collected, and the deed was done. Abdullah, mounted on a white donkey, lent local colour to the group. Incidentally he knew everyone in Cairo, including the desert photographer, and guaranteed the safe delivery of our pictures.

We visited the interior of the Great Pyramid, but Abdullah stopped outside. Apparently the Pyramids are the business speculation of a native sheik, who keeps a specially trained band of robbers to conduct tourists into the dark interior. In contrast to the Catacombs of Alexandria, there is no electric light in the Pyramids, so the guides make a fat profit out of lighting magnesium wire in the King's Chamber and other spots of great interest. They charge sixpence for each ignition, and limit the flash to two or three seconds. My particular guiding star had learnt off by heart some formulæ bearing on the Pyramids, and sang them out in a high, monotonous recitative. I hated him more than any other Gyppo I ever met. He has probably been killed by some short-tempered and deserving Australian ere now.

In a dark corner of the King's Chamber crouched a fortune-teller. It must take a very morbid nature to pry into the future amid such gloomy surroundings. I would recommend an electric torch, or a few inches of one's own magnesium wire, for the interior of the Pyramids, together with a shirt of mail in case of any natural resentment on the part of the native Lucifers.

On the way back to Cairo from the Pyramids we visited the Zoological Gardens, which are situated in magnificent grounds. For a small baksheesh to its keeper the hyppo was persuaded to open its mouth to the full extent, and the result would have made a splendid shell-proof gun position.

The following morning we rushed through the Egyptian Museum, the Khedival Library and the Arabic Museum—each of which should rightly be given several days for inspection—and also visited the famous bazaars, where one is persuaded to purchase wonderful scents, “amber” cigarettes, silk-stuffs and brassware. In the afternoon we were shown several of the finest mosques, which we reached via the real native quarter, driving through the narrowest of cobbled streets. Then to the tombs of the Mamelukes and of the present royal family, and through the weird “Dead City”—where whole streets of stone-built houses are tenanted only by graves of the departed—to the Citadel with its magnificent mosque of alabaster, built, it is said, by the grim old Sultan Mehemet Ali on the scene of the massacre of the Mamelukes. One is shown the spot where Emin Bey made his legendary leap over the battlements to escape the slaughter. As there is a drop of some hundred feet at this point, one is reluctantly compelled to believe the less picturesque version of the story, in which the Bey wisely absented himself from the Sultan’s treacherous levée, having been warned at the last moment, and so fled into Syria.

We were fortunate in arriving at the Citadel about sunset, for the view from the southern ramparts at that time is world-famous.

Next day we journeyed by steam-boat up to the Barrage, that colossal dam of a hundred and thirty arches, thrown across the Nile at the head of the Delta where its Rosetta and Damietta branches unite. In addition to the interest of this great feat of engineering, the Barrage gardens are a most delightful spot, where one may wander over the shady lawns and speedily forget the war. Abdullah, too, furthered the spirit of peace by providing an excellent cold collation.

Having enjoyed a fairly lazy day, we decided to spend a strenuous evening at “Luna Park,” the Earl’s Court Exhibition of Cairo. Here we endured—and survived—the scenic railway, the joy-wheel, some nightmare performance of sitting on a mat and dropping over a twenty foot precipice without damage save to the shattered

nerves, and various other tests of courage. V.C.'s seem much easier of attainment since we visited Luna Park.

On our last morning of leave we drove by "gharri" to Old Cairo, once the site of the camp of Amru, the general of Caliph Omar, but now chiefly large mounds of rubbish. There are several places of great interest in the vicinity, the first being the Mosque of Amru. This is called the oldest mosque in Cairo, though there are very few remains of the original structure. It still preserves, however, the design in which it was built—a copy of the Mecca Mosque—and is held in the greatest veneration by the Cairenes, who call it "the Crown of Mosques." Here one may see a marble column which the devout believe to have been miraculously transported from Mecca to Cairo. The pillar being at first reluctant to move, Caliph Omar struck it with his whip, in proof whereof we were shown the outline of the thong in the veining of the marble.

Then there are a pair of columns between which a lean man could barely squeeze. These are known as the "Needle's Eye," and only men of the highest integrity were able to pass through. The story goes—and sounds quite feasible—that Ismail, seeing at a glance that his portly form would not stand a chance, had the columns conveniently bricked up.

There are two other pillars, not mentioned in the guide-book, but of considerable interest. These are only two or three feet in height, and are of red "bloodstone," supposed to possess powers of healing when moistened. The stone appears to be a hard, polished granite of some sort, but the tongues of ailing millions have worn a pronounced groove on each column.

This mosque is regarded by the people of Cairo as peculiarly their own mother-church, and a prophecy, implicitly believed by the devout, predicts the downfall of Moslem power whenever the mosque shall fall into decay. It is here that a universal service of supplication is held, attended by the Khedive and principal officers of State, when a tardy or insufficient rising of the Nile demands divine intervention.

We also saw the Nilometer on Roda Island, where, not so long ago, the rise of the river was measured by the-

Egyptian government officials, and the fellaheen taxed accordingly. No doubt a few more inches were announced than the Nilometer actually recorded, judging from what we know of oriental methods of taxation.

On Roda Island we were also shown the spot where Pharaoh's daughter found Moses. The place indicated is a smooth, concrete buttress, and we looked in vain for the bulrushes.

There are a thousand other sights to be seen in and around Cairo, varying considerably in interest and authenticity, but one can buy excellent guide-books that tell of these things in a far more precise and collected manner than can be hoped of the bewildered soldier on short leave. Abdullah and the guide-book were at variance throughout, and Abdullah's theories were usually more picturesque if less accurate. He took a great fancy to us, called us his "dear friends," and thought we were quite the best gentlemen he had met. Before we finally settled up and took our leave, my companion suggested giving him an extra five piastres by way of gratuity. I felt convinced that Abdullah's dignity would scorn any such baksheesh over and above his contract. But he swallowed the insult very gamely, and no doubt would not have shied at any other small coin in addition.

On Egyptian leave it is a matter of speculation whether your time or your money will vanish first. By careful adjustment we made a dead heat of it, with just sufficient milliemes to keep us in hard-boiled eggs and "cakes very clean, very sweet," on the return journey. Hard was the railway truck and rough the blankets after our smooth sheets and feather beds. The return to the army and an endless war gives one a nasty, sinking sensation. Nor, as you drag your weary limbs into camp two days later, is there any comfort in the exultant greeting of the Battery Sergeant-Major:—"So here you are, Gunners Smith and Jones: just in time for stable picket to-night!"

The Last Crusade.

1000

The Last Crusade.

In the far-off days of peace, before ever we learnt the dreary rudiments of warfare, we—who are yet but camouflaged civilians—used to picture the soldier's life on active service as dreaded periods of savage horror broken occasionally by happy, restful weeks spent in safety behind the battle-line. From the very commencement of our personal experiences, however, we found that the soldier's existence was a stodgy pudding in which spells of actual conflict with the enemy were welcomed as plums of rare variety. These might certainly contain some skins and pips of death and pain, but this curiously was a fact that seldom or never worried any of us. It is the galling monotony and humdrum fatigues of training camp that worry and madden—the months when we feel the war is standing still while our best years pass by us as we sit apart in the wilderness. But with the shrapnel bursting overhead, and the bullets swishing past, we know at any rate that things are moving one way or another.

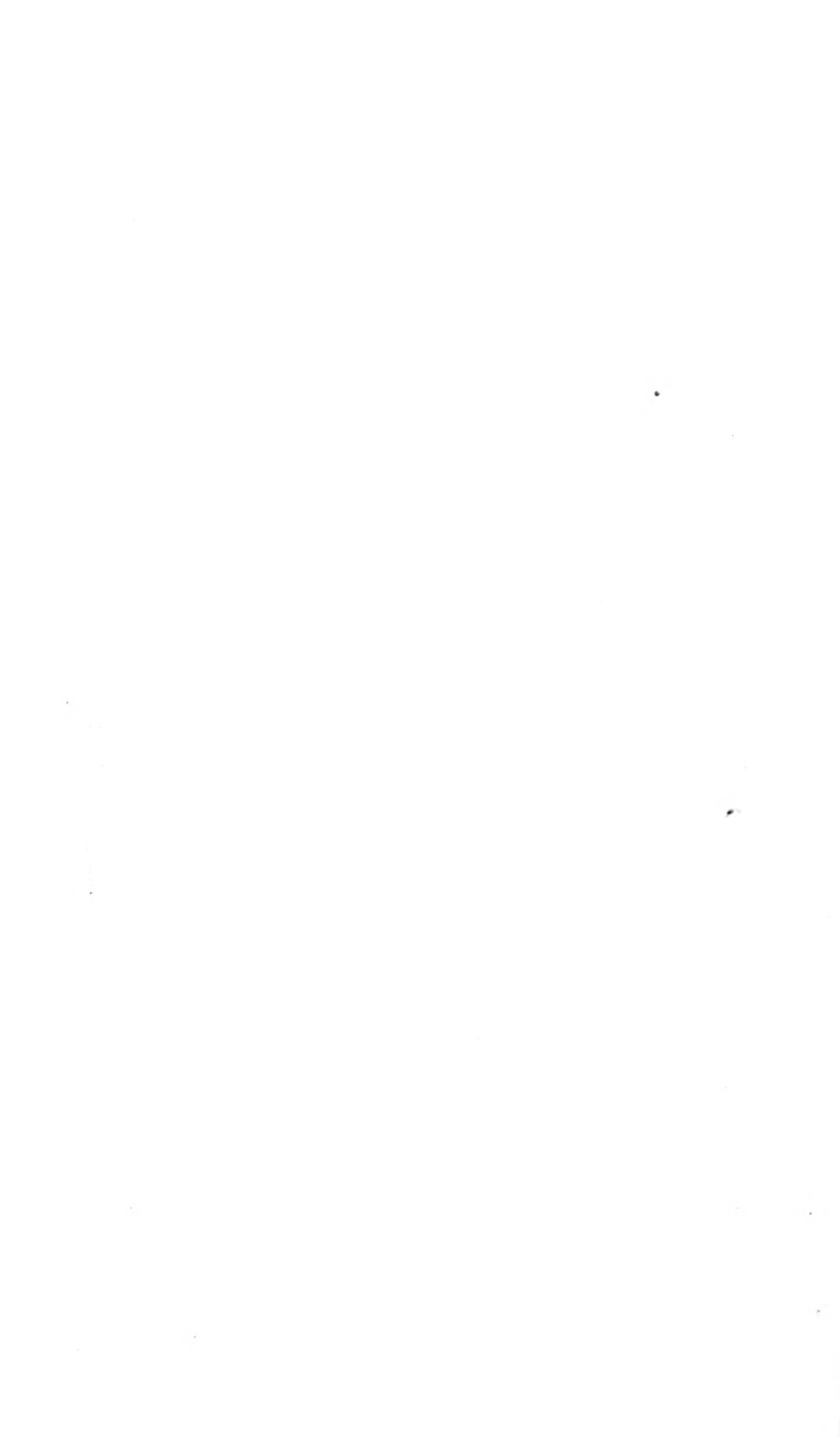
For five and a half months we had lain comfortable, semi-contented, and fairly secure in one of those steep, deep wadis which the ages have carved through the limestone hills of Palestine. We had begun to acquire the "here-for-duration" feeling that soon possesses any unit occupying the same position for more than a few weeks. A little reasoning proved to our dissatisfaction that the British Army in Palestine would not attempt any further big forward movement. Gaza had been necessary, however dear the effort might cost. Jerusalem had meant much to the prestige of the Allies, and our front lay with a comfortable margin to the north of the Holy City. The enemy's line, as far as we knew, was a strong one, and the few tentative nibbles we made at it in the central hilly portion proved that Johnny Turk had improved the shining summer months by constructing formidable defences and planning an artillery and machine-gun bar-

rage that would make things very unpleasant for any attacking infantry. Thus it was only reasonable to suppose that beyond occasional raids no further push would be attempted, and we therefore decided that the war would be won on the Western Front, and that we should remain where we were until our campaign had been finally settled by the stroke of some statesman's pen.

Towards the end of August we were told our batteries would be moving out of the line for mobile training, "calibration," and incidentally a few days by the sea to the north of Jaffa. By the 1st of September we had discarded all surplus kit and the accumulated comforts of twenty weeks, and having packed our remaining "lares et penates" we moved out towards the west. From the very start of our wanderings all movements were effected after dark. Unknown and vaguely defined roads are difficult both to find and to follow, and many a wrong turning was taken and many a wagon came to grief in unsuspected holes and ditches. But fortunately, with nearly every unit—especially among the Colonial troops—there will be found one or more of those natural scouts, born with a compass and plotter in their head, whose sense of direction and locality seldom errs. By the inspired guidance of such an one we reached the sea-shore at midnight, and with much labour and weariness parked our guns on the slopes of a sand-dune. Summer holidays in the Field Artillery are not altogether rest cures. But a change it certainly proved, and we found sea-sand in our food welcome after the limestone grit of the interior. Moreover, we bathed our horses and ourselves in the briny at the mouth of a most refreshing river, such as we thought only existed in the imagination of the early pioneers of the Promised Land. In the meantime our guns made mysterious nocturnal excursions up to the front line, and registered a few rounds the following day on innocent bushes and hillocks in the enemy's territory from the shelter of camouflaged pits. The next night the guns and their crews would return and wonder what it was all about. That high-sounding process known as "calibration" covered a multitude of mysteries. Our chief speculation at the time was whether we would return to our old snug position in the Wadi Ballut or



Village of Abud: public bier in foreground.



would take up a new position on our divisional front. There was no prophet sufficiently bold or mad among us to foretell that in less than a fortnight the firing-line would have migrated—if it could then be said to exist at all—some fifty miles or more to the north! Our suspicions were hardly raised even by the disappearance of a small party of signallers we sent out into the desert, who returned not to the ark.

We left the sea and struck inland again, hoping our travels were nearly over. For another five days we lay under the ancient olives in the land of the tribe of Dan, our bivvies well concealed by the leafy branches. At this point the authorities began to take a great interest in extra kit and surplus equipment. Everything savouring of superfluity was collected and dumped. Our nice cool sun-helmets were forfeited, and tin hats—which are much the same, from the point of view of comfort, as inverted heavy iron saucepans fresh from a stove—became our only head-dress. These were all signs of the times, yet we were almost as blind to such as the Jews of old. The fact that our supposed indispensable gas-masks were also handed into Ordnance rather neutralised the prospect of battle.

Once again we packed, saddled up and took the road—not to the north as we had expected, but westward ho! whence we had but lately come. For the first time our suspicions became convictions. The Regimental Sergeant-Major had lied to me concerning our destination to the extent of ninety degrees of the compass! That night, although we were still several miles from the line, there were strict regulations enforced on the subject of smoking and lighting matches. We finally halted at 2 o'clock a.m. (or 0200 as the Army cautiously calls it), and ran the guns and wagons into the leafy undergrowth of a eucalyptus plantation. I was Acting Quartermaster that night, and at once set out again to draw the morrow's rations from a temporary roadside dump a mile distant. Everything had to be issued or rehidden before daybreak, and we just managed it. As the east brightened, I crawled under a wagon in my blanket among the dewy gum leaves—redolent of dear, distant South Africa—and enjoyed one hour's deep slumber before sunrise.

In spite of abundant natural concealment, elaborate precautions were taken to hide the slightest hint of our presence from the enemy. We only moved out from our leafy cover when absolutely necessary, and then in ones or twos. No fires were lit, but we boiled our billies of tea over little tins of a smokeless methylated compound specially issued to us for the occasion. Although our horse-lines were situated in an orchard of well-grown orange trees adjoining some large irrigation tanks, all daylight watering was done by hand with buckets. We were mildly amazed at this excessive caution so far from the foe, but at that time we did not realise that there were thousands and tens of thousands like us to be moved about the country without showing a trace to arouse the oriental and easily tickled suspicions of Johnny Turk.

One day among the gum trees was granted to us, and once more we hurried on by the light of a growing moon. At midnight we pulled into our final positions, unlimbered the guns, man-handled them into their pits, and sent the teams back to the woods. My own work lay in the signal dug-out, where we found our lost party from the sea had laid out a very complete duplicate system of cables from group headquarters to batteries. Throughout the next day an almost uncanny calm lay over the land. The usual spasmodic rounds were fired by the guns that normally occupied that sector, while all around us battery jostled battery with seemingly startling obviousness, but in reality practically invisible from aloft under their grass-sprinkled rabbit netting. An unflagging air patrol, in addition, frustrated any photographic proclivities the other side might develop during the day.

The evening and the night that followed were of exquisite eastern softness, but somehow the world seemed to palpitate with the restrained tension of the morrow's thunder and passion. Zero hour was 0430, and exact to the second the whole line of our massed artillery burst into roaring tongues of flame. The enemy at first seemed stunned by what was occurring and lost a valuable minute or two before he got his own barrage down. By that time the first wave of our infantry was over the top and away, and the remarkable events of the day had commenced with a flourish.

Five o'clock found our advance party of signallers galloping over the battle-field behind the Colonel, while the noise of the bursting shrapnel drowned the roar of our own guns, and the smoke of high explosive hung like a curtain all around. Our cross-country ride became a fox-hunt, with the Colonel as M.F.H., the Sergeant-Major as huntsman, the fox rapidly disappearing over the northern horizon, and innumerable ditches and fences provided by trenches and entanglements. Over our own front line, across half a mile of no man's land and through the Turkish defences we rode, and still only halted for brief spells to take our bearings and seek news of the position. The only question we asked each other was, "Where is Johnny?" His guns were certainly in vivid evidence, but at the rate we continued to advance it seemed we must soon ride down even his heavies unless he had some lightning transport available. As a matter of fact the enemy made no attempt to save many of his guns, and left them with their sweating crews still serving the pieces till our infantry came along and took possession. But his lighter artillery—the "pip-squeaks" and field howitzers—did some good shooting in a forlorn attempt to stem the overwhelming tide of British troops. Our own field guns moved rapidly forward soon after the commencement of the initial bombardment, and took up more or less open positions whenever they could find good targets. We actually had 18-pounders in our front trenches when the stunt started, and some of these were put out of action with direct hits from the minute their flashes were spotted. The surviving guns made life miserable—or extinct—for the retreating Turks at point blank range, and did horrible execution with shrapnel.

The whole programme worked like clockwork, except for such incidents as the infantry reaching certain points ahead of the time our barrage was due there, and being cleared back just in time. The splendid "foot-sloggers" were out to overrun everything, and the time-table was sometimes in danger of being included! Our advance was far too rapid for cable communications to keep pace with headquarters, and the situation was governed solely by a very carefully prepared scheme, moderated by dispatch-riders and visual signalling. Our own artil-

lery group had a cable already laid to the front trenches, and a small party of our signallers went over the top soon after the infantry, with the object of extending the wire immediately behind the advance. But they were badly left at the first ditch, and to complete the failure of that line Johnny dropped a couple of shells across the earlier portion, and thus cut short its youthful career as a means of communication.

Our batteries had to use whatever observation posts came nearest to hand, and to send down orders and corrections by flags—a practice always unhealthy for the flag-wagger—until temporary wires could be hastily laid out.

By midday the enemy had moved northwards six or eight miles, and was doing as much as a badly surprised and half demoralised army could to defend an elaborate but uncompleted system of trenches he had intended to have ready two months later. In front of most of these were no barbed wire entanglements, but the rows of spiked iron standards stood ready hammered in. Even thus, this line was an unpleasant barrier, commanding a broad stretch of absolutely open country, and our infantry suffered their heaviest losses at this point. A little distance beyond lay Et Tireh, which we remember chiefly by the Turkish machine-gun bullets and corpses which were all the village had to offer us, the local water-pump having been thoughtfully dismantled before we rode in, parched and begrimmed.

That was the northern limit of the battle of the Plain of Sharon, so far as we ourselves were concerned. From that point we became a reserve division, and halted to await orders, while the battle-front surged forward for a few days at a pace only exceeded by the lightning dashes of South-West Africa. It became a battle of cavalry, aircraft and armoured cars. Australian and Indian horsemen, together with yeomanry from the English counties, followed right on the heels of the retreating army, and occasionally by encircling movements entered villages in the line of route before the enemy could reach them by road. Our aeroplanes meanwhile were bombing the transport wherever it was thickest, and thus blocking the whole retreat in a most effective manner. The ene-

my's air service was conspicuously absent on our part of the front. I believe our armoured cars actually drove into one of the Turkish aerodromes and machine-gunned the planes as they were getting ready to fly off. There are some fantastic tales of the deeds of our airmen and cars which may or may not be strictly true. A certain bold pilot is reputed to have descended for minor repairs, and to have re-ascended with a Turkish general lashed to his lower plane on one side, and a sack of rations as counter-ballast on the other. Certain it is that a beaten foe, bent solely on escape, offered scope for many unorthodox—and hardly credible—enterprises on the part of his victory-flushed pursuers.

The enemy's intelligence service broke down altogether, and his left hand became virtuously and totally ignorant of what his right hand was doing. One of his aeroplanes, bearing important dispatches from the north, alighted gracefully in the aerodrome at Nazareth, and was promptly pounced on by our cavalry, who had been there for a couple of hours. There was also an interesting revolver duel between four Turkish staff officers, who were attempting to get away in a motor car, and a party of Australian Light Horse. The latter won.

By some remarkable insight our intelligence had satisfied themselves that no gas would be used by the enemy in this battle, and we did not even carry the respirators in whose use we have suffered so many hours instruction and suffocation. The Turks, however, were evidently not so confident about our intentions, but we noticed the first articles of equipment to be discarded in their flight were their German gas-masks.

From the very start we were conducting large parties of prisoners back to the cages ready prepared for these pets. By the end of the second day our captures ran into tens of thousands of men, hundreds of guns, with carts, wagons, munitions, and supplies as the sand of the sea in number.

And so the tide of battle rolled over the Plain of Sharon up into the coasts of Galilee. To-day our hosts have entered Damascus. For our little brigade this campaign has seemingly ceased. We are one of the reserve divisions—left behind to fill some gap that never opened

for us. Even the sincere enologies of the infantry on our pioneer work of the first day taste almost bitter in our mouths. We had prayed for weeks of the changes and chances of a great push, and behold, we find ourselves in Alexander's plight—weeping because there are no more worlds to conquer on our limited horizon. Two days after charging through fire and smoke and the smell of battle, we were peacefully occupied in a scheme of rigid training—gun drill, driving school, early morning battery manoeuvres, the cleaning of buttons, boots and leather (known as “posh parades”), and a general state of Potchefstroom in Palestine—without the week-end holidays. After the thrills and glamour of that first day's fighting, an awful depression and war-weariness has settled over us. Though we cannot but rejoice at the victory won, we are not happy. We want to be in the thick of the strife right up to the end. Any old battle-front in Asia, Europe, or Africa will suffice for us, if it is decreed that the last crusade has been fought in Palestine.

But most of all we long, as we have never hitherto longed throughout four long years of toil and turmoil, for the end of it all; for that promised but unthinkable time when war shall be no more. In our hearts is ever echoing that universal plaintive chorus of Egypt and the Levant,—

“Kham lelo, kham youm?”

“How many nights and how many days?”

THE END.

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 746 735 0

