

## A LETTER FROM EGYPT.

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### VISIT TO THE CITADEL AN EGYPTIAN RACE MEETING

Trooper Guy Woodward, writing to his parents from Zeitun Camp, Cairo, under date February 12, says:—

When I wrote last we had practically been ordered to proceed to Palestine, but since the Turkish attack has practically ceased and they are in full retreat, it has been decided not to bother with them, and the consequence is we are still here and completing our training.

We were all of us glad of the chance of seeing Egypt, with its old monuments and historical interest; but now every one is heartily sick of the ceaseless sun and hot days with intensely cold nights. Our training has been slackened up a great deal lately owing to the fact that the doctors complained that the men though willing could not possibly stand the strain we were undergoing. All hands practically had to go to hospital on one complaint or another, but during the past fortnight since we have had more rest and less strenuous work, the general health has improved wonderfully.

Last Tuesday week the reinforcements arrived from New Zealand, all well and happy. Their horses are good, but not better than ours, and you should see my black "Emperor." He has never been out of action for a single day, and is a splendid walker and well up to my weight. Our horses do not get fed on chaff now, in fact they have not seen chaff since the first fortnight. They eat a native chaff called "Tibbin," made of small maize stalk shredded; crushed barley, bran and maize are mixed with it. They are fed five times a day to keep them up to their work. First thing in morning at 6.15, dinner 12.15, evening 4.30; hay at 8 o'clock, and another feed at midnight. None of them are fat; but they are very hard now and they certainly require plenty of feed when all the work is over soft sand—very heavy going.

On Sunday last in the afternoon three of us went to the citadel—the oldest fortification now standing in Egypt, and went through the wonderful mosque there, said to be the most elaborate in Egypt. The citadel was built nearly 1000 years ago by an Arabian conqueror of Egypt, Saladin, and has been several times besieged. It was ruled by Saladin's successors until a great Turkish ruler Mahomet Ali again conquered it. This Khedive built the mosque we saw, and you will notice in the postcards I sent originally three tall minarets, representing three mosques. The tallest of the three is that of Mahomet Ali.

On passing through the huge gates of the mosque one enters a huge courtyard paved in colored parquetry of strange and quaint design. In the centre of the courtyard, as is the custom in every temple, there is a huge font. This particular one is connected with an up-to-date water supply now and has a large number of silver taps at which every believer must wash himself thoroughly clean before he enters the inner temple. The guide showed us the old source of the water supply, a huge well no less than 242 feet deep. One can shout down the mouth and hear echoes apparently down in the nether regions. The old Egyptians had some wonderful method of pumping this water into a huge cistern which occupies the whole of the outer courtyard, and over which the floor was built. Our guide could not explain the system they used, but it must have been very wonderful. This washing font is covered by a large rotunda arrangement of beautiful, elaborate designed stonework in colors; and the top is occupied by a tower which contains a clock presented to Mahomet Ali by King Philip of Spain, and which still keeps most accurate time. By this clock all the services are held, and the Mahommedans point it out with considerable pride. By the way, we had to wear huge sandals over our boots when we entered the mosque, and it is quite the contrary to custom to allow anyone to enter with boots on. All pilgrims leave their sandals or boots outside the door.

Passing through other magnificent doors one enters the inner temple, and the first view of this one was wonderful. It was about 300ft by 150ft wide, or rather more if anything. The floor was entirely covered by a huge Turkish pile carpet of a rich crimson color. The roof, supported by four huge pillars, and the centre of the dome just 200ft from the floor. The walls and pillars are entirely faced with beautiful white alabaster, and at the corners of these pillars when a match was held behind them, one could almost see through them. The lighting is provided by beautiful stained glass windows in the daytime, and by 365 separate electric chandeliers or clusters at night. These clusters representing the days of the year. A huge chandelier in silver hangs in the centre, and is a masterpiece of cut glass work, and pendants which reflect every light and movement in the huge room. This chandelier was presented to Ma-

homet Ali by King Louis XIV., of France, and cost thousands of pounds.

Next one was struck by the wonderful ceiling; it is designed by concentric semicircles working outwards from the huge centre dome. The painting and carving of these ceilings alone is estimated to have cost over £50,000, and one small semicircle done recently cost £2000. There are inscriptions from the Koran worked into all these designs and the names of Mahomet Ali and all his descendants also appear. In the eastern wall in each mosque there is a huge semicircular depression or niche which they use as an altar, and every believer must face this when of prayers. Inside there are three separate pulpits or desks. One from which the Koran is recited, not read remember, as every priest must know the entire Koran by heart. This is the most elaborate, and is inlaid with gold, silver, ebony, and ivory in a most wonderful manner and does not contain a single nail, nothing but wooden pegs hold it together. The second desk, not quite so good in design, is used for sermons, and the third for special feasts, I imagine conversions, etc. In a separate transept, behind superb carved ivory screens, one sees the casket containing the mummified body of the builder. This casket is a work of art in itself, and something similar to the Koran desk in design. This temple would occupy a writer for a whole week, and I personally could find new interest in it every day for a month, but time is limited, and its very cold. One's thoughts could not but go back through time and space, and I thought of the tales those walls could unfold of life and death. It was I think the most interesting sight I have seen, and later we went through another temple older still, outside the citadel walls. I shall try to tell you about it next week. This citadel was besieged by Napoleon about 100 years ago, and the walls of the temples still hold the cannon balls he fired, with no damage to them. Napoleon removed many of the magnificent inlaid doors of the temples and presented them to the "Louvre" at Paris. Perhaps I may yet see them there.

Our troops now have a weekly half-holiday on Saturday, and yesterday I made one of a party to go to the Khedival Sporting Club's race meeting, at Gizerah, just across the Nile from Cairo proper. The horses are of course all Arabs, and are the finest boned and proportioned and colored imaginable. They have lovely eyes, manes and tails, and they do move prettily. The betting is on totalisator odds in two different ways. You may back a horse to win

outright, or you may back him for a place, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd. The investments are in 100 or 20 piastre tickets, £1 Egyptian, or 4s odd. In the event of winning in the straight out bet the odds are much greater than place betting, usually, although the two divs are worked out separately. For instance, yesterday in the last race the first horse paid 1119pt for 20pt on 1st, and only 120pt for 1st place. Sorry to say that I did not back him, but I backed the 2nd and 3rd horses for places, and made a few piastres. Had a very enjoyable day at least, and after paying all expenses had lost about 40pt, or 8s odd on the seven races. It is an education to watch the French people at a race meeting; their extreme politeness, vivacity, and neatness are truly marvellous, and the womenfolk seem to grow into their frocks, and sure one sees the latest in fashion and powder and paint.

met Captain Twistleton, Tom Mossman, Albert Pritchard, Herbert and Jack White, and many other old pals. Desmond Mossman came out from England with the New Zealanders from there, and is now attached to the 3rd Auckland Mounted Rifles of our Regiment. Most of the Gisborne men are attached to the 12th Otago Mounted as Divisional Cavalry, but I believe they have been split up a little.

I met Mr Bremner the other day; he is with the 2nd Canterbury Mounted, and has been all the time since we landed. He's a fine old fellow, and is certainly doing his duty.

I am perfectly well, and fit; but I do want a change again. The canal business seems to be practically over, although one would never be surprised to hear of another attack at any moment.

