

Sunday
20 Dec. '14.

Dearest Hazel,

We have got our New Zealand mail at last - I got one letter from you yesterday, and two more this morning, the last one dated Oct. 29th. There was great excitement in camp, and one parade was cancelled to enable the men to get their letters and read them. We were expecting a bigger mail, but no doubt there will be another before long, and then regular weekly mails. That will be like getting back to real, normal life after a long term of unreality.

Your letters were full of the stress of exam. time. It was horribly thoughtless of me to ask you to ~~to~~ write once a week, but I did not intend you to do so at exam. time. However, I have no doubt you have come safely through the exams, in spite of your modest misgivings, and provided you have a really good rest in the vac, you will be none the worse. I have often had the same feeling that you experienced - longing

to get away from the weary, old-fashioned stuff and tackle something more like real live education. But then my idea of education is just to read and read, and that will never be accepted by the pedants - it might deprive them of their jobs.

That office job you referred to only lasted a few days, and then I threw it up - I prefer the open air. We are getting plenty of the same now, and my chief difficulty when I return to New Zealand will be to reconcile myself to a stuffy class-room. I misled you also about our pay: it is really 5/- a day, but 3/- is being reserved, to be paid in a lump when we return to New Zealand. That will be over \$50 a year, so some of us may return with a small fortune, if we are away long enough.

I am sorry to say that I have not found it possible to keep a diary. The one your mother gave me was stolen somewhere about Albany, after I had kept it carefully up-to-date so far. I could not get any suitable note-book to replace it,

so I gave it up in disgust - the more so because what I had written was really very dry reading, except perhaps for myself. My only regret is that I may forget so much, and the diary would serve to refresh my memory.

The English newspapers which came by yesterday's mail say that the Australians and New Zealanders are training in Egypt, and will go to the front in February. Of course that is only newspaper talk, and not official, but I think it is probably right. If it is, we will be very fortunate in having had a pleasant holiday here, but if we are kept much longer than that, I believe we will get to hate the place. The place is just an ideal one for a course of military training, but there is nothing homely or comfortable in our life. I would give anything to sleep in a bed or eat a home meal or sit in an armchair in a familiar room. There is plenty of fresh air in the desert - in fact it is horribly chilly in the early hours, but the dust is awful when

we are on the march, and the sun is scorching hot at mid-day. There is practically no wind here - I think that accounts for the great heat. Our conditions are being much improved by the erection of dining sheds, which we expect to get in about a fortnight. It will be miles better than pigging in our tents. At first we hoped to get straw mattresses, like the English troops, ~~we~~ but now we are quite reconciled to the sand. I really think I could sleep on the clothes-line ~~or~~ anywhere now. The sand is very dusty - more like clay dust or gravel - so to keep our blankets from getting too filthy, we have to water the floor of the tent, and it sets as hard as concrete. You would think sleep was impossible on such a bed, but we never had any trouble from the first - I suppose because we are thoroughly tired every evening. Our time-table has been slightly altered since last week. Reveille is now at 5.30, breakfast 6.30, day's work 7.15 to 2, with haversack ration, rifle parade 3.30

to 4, and dinner at 5. The alteration was very unpopular, on account of the early rising and also because we either have to get dinner in town - which is very expensive here - or cut our leave short by staying in camp for it. To make up for this, our leave was extended till 10, which makes the evening much better, but also makes sleep a rather scarce commodity. The men don't get in till about 10.15, usually drunk, and don't settle down to sleep till midnight. Moreover, "life" in Bairro does not begin till 10 p. m., and lasts till about three in the morning, so we have men coming in at all hours, corrupting the guard or sneaking through the lines. Nearly twenty men from our company are missing at present, having a few days' "holiday" in town, and there must be hundreds from the whole force. I think it ~~is~~ is perfectly rotten, but popular opinion is in their favour. They have their fling and pay for it, by being "confined to barracks" for a month or so. I don't

know what the better class of Egyptians think of such a lot of brigands.

You might infer from all this that I am in a gloomy state of mind: methinks I have made the same ~~of~~ apology and explanation before. Personally I am very well content, but I am burning with Puritanical regret that most men should be what they are. In proof of my own well-being and happiness, I might give you a glowing description of one of our scouts' outings in the Oasis, a big stretch of fertile country to the ~~west~~ north of our camp. The camp is due north of Cairo, and the desert lies to the east and west, but to the north there is this Oasis, wonderfully fertile land and thickly dotted with villages. We generally fall in with our companies at 7.15, and the last few days we have been out in the desert with them, but for the week before that we went out every day, in patrols of seven, just rambling round exploring the country. It is irrigation time now, and you have

to stick to the foot-paths which divide the fields - there are no fences - or else follow the bridle-tracks along the banks of the canals. There is a canal about every mile or less, and any number of foot-paths, which are raised a foot or so above the level of the fields. The fields themselves are divided by ditches into little areas about ten yards square. The water is allowed to flow through these ditches, and practically swamps the fields, though there is no water showing through the young green crops. The chief crops are maize, sugar and rice, also alfalqua (fodder), cotton, millet and plenty of date plantations. The landscapes are wonderfully beautiful, and the villages picturesque but filthy. The country folk are honest and obliging, very different from the riff-raff of bairo. The head of the village generally comes out in state to greet us, and their perfectly dignified bearing is quite embarrassing. They must live very plainly, for the cake which they bring us as a special treat is awful stuff.

I have not really seen much of

cairo yet, and nothing new since I wrote last. I have been to town several evenings, but it is impossible to find the way anywhere at night, and we generally keep to the centre of the town. We have a good chance of sight-seeing this afternoon, but it is too hot to bother. Besides I can't get anyone to come and see the things that are worth seeing. They all think old buildings and monuments an awful bore. I am hoping to get about with Hall-Jones, but our regiments have been doing different work all the week, and I have not seen him since ~~the~~ Monday.

I had a trip to the Pyramids last Sunday, but ~~we~~ did not enjoy it much. In fact I was thoroughly disillusioned. Of course it was something actually to see the pyramids and the Sphinx - the wonders of the world, but it was really much nicer to see pictures and imagine them. We went groping and crawling through the largest pyramid in charge of a filthy ruffian of a guide. It was fearfully stuffy and dirty, and all there was

to see was an occasional chamber, where royal mummies were originally placed. Then the Sphinx has its nose broken off, and is so defaced by the stress of time that it has lost all expression. As for the tombs which are scattered all around, they are ~~so~~ absolutely devoid of interest; all the carving has been removed from the walls, and they are empty. We had a terribly hot climb to the top of the largest pyramid; then a bad meal at an exorbitant place after waiting forty minutes to be served. Gabbering, cheating, quarrelsome guides, donkey-men and sellers of gaudy post-cards and sham curios - the whole outfit was disgusting.

The British flag was hoisted here on Friday, and Prince Hussein, uncle of the late Khedive, was proclaimed Sultan of Egypt. There was no demonstration of troops, for fear of raising a riot, and half our force is being kept ready for emergencies - confined to camp, and paraded every half-hour. But the whole thing has passed over very

quietly, and I think the Egyptians are all very glad to see the last of Turkey. The extracts I have seen translated from ~~native~~^{Arabic} newspapers are very favourable to England. There are flags flying everywhere, and the people have been more than usually cordial the last two evenings. The quietness of the country, of course improves our chance of being relieved from garrison duty here, and surely we are needed at the front. At present one would almost think that Germany will win.

I am hoping for another letter from you tomorrow, or perhaps more than one. I would like one also on Friday, for Christmas, and another for New Year, but that is too greedy.

Good-bye, my darling. I love you, my Hazel, and I will love you always. With many thanks for your great goodness to me, and with heaps of good wishes from

Cecil.

P.S. I sent you a souvenir of Cairo the other day - a poor affair, but soldiers are poor. Please mention if you get it safely, as I entrusted it to the bookseller.