

Sunday  
29 Nov.

My dear Hazel,

I am making a start with this letter now, though we will not reach Port Said till for about three days yet. I have already written my "urgent" letters - there is not likely to be anything to add to them before the mail goes. I am getting quite busy now, with scout lectures and extra parades, so I want to write my letters in good time, to make sure of them. I have undertaken to teach French or German, or both, to our company officers. I have not started yet, but it may take a good deal of time and trouble, with no book to work with. It may be well worth while, though, if I can put them under an obligation to me, and in any case I don't grudge the trouble. I am only afraid that I will find them a bit "thick", and that they will expect me to make it easier for them than is possible. The major who lectures our scouts is

unconsciously rather unfair that way. If you are explaining a point to him, you must make it as plain as day before he can grasp it, yet his own lectures are very obscure and tangled, and if you don't remember every single thing, there is trouble.

The Red Sea has kept well up to its reputation for sweltering heat. The last few days have been more trying than the tropics - a more oppressive heat. But today has been a perfect treat - dull, with a strong, cool, delicious breeze, making quite a stir on the water. The effect of the change was rather unexpected, ~~of~~ yet perfectly natural. I instead of feeling revived and animated, we seemed to collapse at the removal of the strain ~~of~~ on our nerves, and I think nearly the whole ship has been sleeping all the afternoon.

We slowed down as we neared Aden, and took a day longer than we expected to complete the run - eight days from Colombo. The place seemed very similar to Albany,

except that the harbour or bay is larger. We remained ~~and~~ at anchor right out near the open sea, about ~~five~~ miles from the town, and got no shore leave whatever. They say we are not likely to get any more leave before reaching England. ~~It~~ was the more disappointing, as the town had a very strange and interesting appearance from the distance, and the few Arabs and negroes who came out in boats were very picturesque fellows. One could imagine the town as a queer mixture of East and West. The land is very flat, running back to lofty mountains and tablelands in the far distance, but just on either side of the entrance there are high jagged rocks or hills. The sand of the desert lay piled high against these rocks, but there were patches of green scrub out in the plain. The town is situated on the edge of the plain, and straggles round one of the rocky heights towards the barracks and forts. This part strongly resembled the pictures of

the rock of Gibraltar. The forts are splendidly placed to overlook a wide stretch of sea.

As we were not able to get ashore, our interest centred in the shipping, of which there was even more than at Colombo. There were a dozen big liners in the inner harbour, against the town, apparently engaged in ~~shipping~~ coaling. Just opposite were a collection of tramps, cruisers and native dhows, and nearest us, half a dozen troopships bound for India with recruits.

We were permitted to lower the boats and cruise round these latter ships. I got two very enjoyable trips, in the morning and afternoon. We went round all the English troopships, exchanging war cries, news, and good wishes. They said sixty thousand Indian troops passed them at Suez, on their way to Marseilles, and a similar force was expected at Aden next day. I suppose you will hear of the exploits of this magnificent army at the front, long before you get this letter. The recruits were

young and pale-faced, mostly from the great cities, but they had already quite a soldierly bearing. They were obviously brought up in narrow surroundings, and had caught an habitual air of wide-eyed wonder. It is one of the few compensations of this war - its great educational value.

Coming amongst these other troops, and hearing of the great events occurring every day, gave us handful of New Zealanders a notion of our own insignificance, but it gave us also a thrilling sense of getting into the midst of things, a quickening interest and a keen perception of grim reality. We saw the "Minerva", the cruiser which had smashed the Turkish forts at Akaba three weeks before, and cheered the "Sydney", of "Ender" fame, as she went dashing by. I saw a chart of the fight between these two, showing the course they steered, and the exact position from which every shot was fired. Unfortunately, it was quite impossible to get a

copy of it.

We stayed exactly twenty-four hours at Aden, and left on Thursday morning. Passing round the Arabian coast was quite uninteresting. In the afternoon we passed close by the little village and fortress of Perim, commanding the entrance to the Red Sea. The Turkish fortress of Hell's Gate, which rumour says we have captured, lies somewhere near this island, but off the course we took. There was a gorgeous sunset that night, over the mountains of Somaliland. Since then we have been completely out of sight of land, and monotony reigns supreme.

One has plenty of time for reflection on a trip like this. Very little sleep seems to be required, and lying on deck on a mattress, under the stars, one sees oneself and one's past life with a curious, impersonal interest. I think I have realised most of my petty faults and failings, and can see more clearly into the future now. One can hardly fail to be stronger and savier, after