

Miss G. Walter.
A.A.N.S.

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I embarked on the 9th June, 1917, on the "Mooltan" and came over as a passenger, with three hundred other sisters on board. Nothing exciting happened while we were on board, but the boat was torpedoed just after we left her.

We reached Salonica in August (Letter describing Salonica is attached) and were met by ambulances, and taken to the 60th B.G.H., which was about eight miles from Salonica. We had an Australian Matron and Nursing Staff, but a British Male personnel, but there was no friction whatever between us.

The cases were malaria and dysentery, and the patients responded well to the treatment, although the dysentery cases did not do so well as the malaria. There was a terrible shortage of food, and all we could get was bully beef, and hard biscuits, of which there was never enough. However, all this improved as time went on. There was a lot of sickness, which I believe was on account of the food. Numbers of sisters got malaria, and one death took place. The patients were very good (we only had British patients) and all amusements were got up by the Tommies themselves.

The weather was very trying, because during the summer, it was too hot for words, but in the winter it was fearfully cold and windy. The tents were always blowing down in the night. The orderlies were pretty fair. I stayed there about three months, and was then transferred to the 42nd B.G.H., which was all dysentery. The patients here were given injections of anti-dysenteric Serum, daily for three days, with a light milk diet. Good results followed this treatment.

It struck me as being very funny that before the Hospital was erected, the site was condemned for horses and mules.

During the winter, snow came through the tents, and the beds were often covered. The thinner nurses stood the cold much better than the fat ones, who often fainted from cold.

I was then invalided home, and it took 14 days to do the 4 days journey from Salonica to Egypt, as the Bulgarian planes tried to bomb the ships. We had to stay in Malea for some time, as the "Goeben" and the "Breslau" threatened to shell the harbour.

As we were on our way to Alexandria, we saw the wrecks of the "Osmanish" and the "Aragon", and the bodies of some of the victims floating about. Several English Sisters, and V.A.D.s were drowned, and 200 soldiers were among the victims.

I reached Australia and came over again on the 5th November, 1918, and while crossing the Australian Bight, we heard the news of the Armistice being signed, and there were great rejoicings on board.

We went from there to Egypt to nurse the influenza patients, influenza being very bad at that time. After doing relief work at several British Hospitals, I was eventually transferred to the 14th A.G.H., and remained there for four months. There were a lot of mixed infectious cases there, but most of the patients were awaiting transport to Australia.

Extract from letter, to be added to Miss Walter's experiences.

S A L O N I C A .

Oh! it is hot these days. Day after day, we are bathed in a fulgor of sunshine. There is no escape from it. Not a cloud exists to veil the pellucid emptiness of that awful sky, not to cast a welcome shade between you and the sinister splendour of the heavens. Night comes on, but with it comes no relief. The night air is sultry and oppressive. It is too hot for sleep and the monotonous hum of the mosquito is irritating. Musing over the past, one finds a great change to have occurred in one's mental perspective.

That first landing two years ago, was fraught with so much of interest. One felt almost the enchanted bewilderment of a child on its first visit to an Xmas Bazaar. What a farago of novel sights and strange noises confronted one! There was every nationality under the sun, and every type of costume save the simple string of beads variety.

One was surrounded by a confusion of strange tongues, weird customs and diverse stinks. Children, numberless as the sands of the desert swarmed all over the place, dressed, boys and girls alike, in a motley of rags and dirt - more dirt than rags perhaps, but always sufficiently camouflaged with one of these to render it difficult to distinguish t'other from which. And the cry was "Buckshee Johnny!" It challenged you in the main cesspool or market place; it followed you along the side drains, or alleyways, or out into the less noxious environs of the city; the trees and plants caught it up and passed it on to you in whispers; it searched you out in the secrecy of your private chamber - three in a bell-tent - and you were aroused from slumber by the nightmare of a dirty, stealthy little paw stealing into your pocket, and that awful whine in your ears, "Buckshee Johnny!"

There is something sordid and mean pervading the whole scene, but it is all so appealingly human - those dirty-faced little ragamuffins, the fruitsellers, the money-changers, the boot-blacks, the walking, brass-begirted soda fountains, the famous Salonica porters - those bent old men who carry anything from a louse to a grand piano, or both on their back, the dirty looking priests, the modern dressed Greek ladies, the dirty beggars, Turkish women in loose trousers, women from the harems, veiled in black; the narrow, dirty streets, the white minarets peeping up above the cypress trees; this is Salonica!!

Above you, crowning the crest of the hill, are the ancient citadel, and remains of the wall of the old town of Thessalonica, so redolent of the fame of St. Paul and his epistles; and here, to-day, you gaze upon it, while around it and through it, and all over it, swarms this seething mass of human ants. There seems something indefinable, something vague and mysterious underlying it all, as though everyone were pursuing some elusive quest.

Perhaps the Oriental nature of the scene impresses you, but the feeling grows that here is a book in whose pages, somewhere, is to be found the solution to the Riddle of Life. Is this the "Elusive Quest" of all these peoples? Or do they just accept the "sorry scheme of things entire"? - like Omar:-

"Into the Universe and Why not knowing
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing."

But you must move on - and you come up country, mountainous and corrugated by wonderful deep Nullahs and ravines, until you come to a vast plain, into which one might imagine one might put the whole of Britain.

Again you Marvel! the cotton fields with their pure white fluff-balls, like snow, in the summer sun; the maize so tall as to almost hide a horse and his rider; grapes, figs, peaches, apricots, fruit of all kinds; a profusion of wild flowers, like a gorgeous panoply spread over all, as though endeavouring with rich colourings to hide those ugly stretches of barbed wire; you feel that here is God's garden, with man the only blot in it.

Here surely, Adam and Eve, with but the rays of the tropical sun for raiment, and perhaps a blush or two for ornament, strayed by the shores of the Tahenos Lake, or meandered hand in hand by the banks of the Struma.

But for the serpent, all would have been peace in the dove-cote, and I had not been out here now, Hamlet-like, trying to set the world aright.

I kill every snake I see!!

Two years have altered one's opinion. God's garden is not here! This damnable country, enervating and malaria-sodden, soul-blasting and mind demoralising, is like the harlot who with false graces and charms, lures to destruction. And we have paid her toll in deaths, ruined constitutions and broken spirits.

It is a country of extremes! Either it is so cold as to produce frost-bite, or it is too hot to move; there is either a drought or a flood; either a hurricane, or not a breath of air stirring.

Insects, which at first interested and amused one, are now recognised as insufferable pests. Ants, beetles, grasshoppers, centipedes, scorpions, have taken unto themselves power of attorney over all you possess, yourself included - and I do so object to sharing my bed with them.

Spiders, of countless diverse species and design, delight in crawling along the roof and dropping upon you unawares.

Pour yourself out a drink and a million flies vie with each other for a place on the precarious rim of the cup. Disaster overtakes many, and your beverage immediately becomes an unsavoury decoction of fly-corpuses. There are numberless other God-alone-knows-what varieties of weird, evil-looking creatures, to add to the list, but their occupation in life seems to conform to the common motive, and any spare time is devoted to trying to bite you.

And this is the country that you say in your letter that you "hope to come back to shortly". Have you forgotten the text that time you were in the Church? It was "All things are possible, but all things are not expedient". I would certainly say that if I get out of this country, I should consider it "not expedient" to return.
