

Extract from letter from Lieut. W.
Barker (London Office), Egyptian
Ex. Force, dated 5th Aug., 1918

"We are now having a little leisure time a few miles behind the lines, and our boys are having a real good laze after some eight months of fairly hard work. You would like the spot we are bivouaced in: plenty of fruit to be got at hand, an old Roman swimming bath renovated, where we all splash about each morning and evening, and now our mineral water plant is going we can get sodas, ginger beers, etc., almost *ad lib*. Our sports were held a day or two ago, and the Indian boys gave us a lot of their war dances and native sports. To-morrow is another great sports day, mule, horse, camel, and donkey races, so we are having quite a gay old rest this time before going back to business again. The little Ghurkas and our boys are warm pals; also the big Sikh is popular with the Tommy. The whole countryside at present (in the hills we are still) is teeming with fruit, and all are ripe these days! Even now in August the countryside is quite green, of the light green seen at home in spring. We are supposed to be in a malaria district now, and have been issued with mosquito nets, but up to now our Company have been very free from it, probably the nets are protecting us. We wear shorts in the day, but just before sunset we have to change into trousers (long), also as a protection against the malarial mosquito. Rations are better now, and water more plentiful.

"Things are good now in France, and let's hope you will get another autumn's pleasurable surprise from our little army here in the hills—it is quite possible. I'm keen on my rose from Damascus still, although I shall have to trek to get it.

"I have just received Bulletin No. 17, and was very sorry to read that Legros, of the French Office, had been killed in the last enemy push. The Bulletin makes very interesting reading to those of us who would otherwise be quite out of touch with the fortunes of our friends on the Continent.

"We are back again in the line, but things are quiet just now—a little shelling and a few Taubes to annoy us, otherwise quite peaceful. Rations (food) are good and fruit is plentiful, but we are short of water and get about one cup of tea morning and evening, and a third cup of water for washing.

"I have been watching the farmers of the district doing a little threshing in their crude fashion. The ripened wheat up in the hills has the pale appearance of oats at home. The ripened grain is either cut with the sickle or torn up by the roots. The sheaves are carried to the threshing floor by men, donkeys, horses

and camels. The straw is slender and short, and the grain small but extremely hard. The threshing floor is a circular piece of specially prepared ground about 30 or more feet in diameter, and usually in an open space. The outer edge of the floor is surrounded by big stones. The sheaves are opened and spread over the surface. In some parts the primitive method of driving cattle and donkeys over the straw is still in vogue, but a threshing board is more often used. The board is oblong in shape and has on its underside a number of stones (hard) let in to its surface. Oxen are yoked to it, and walk round the miniature circus ring from morning until evening. The broken straw, chaff and grain is then heaped in the centre of the floor and the process is repeated until the ring will hold no more. The winnowing process is equally antiquated. The farmer waits for a breezy day, and then with the aid of a wooden pitchfork he starts to separate the heap of straw, grain and chaff. He tosses the mixture in the air and the wind carries the chaff away. The straw is deposited quite near, and the grain falls at the feet of the winnower. Mixed with the grain is a good deal of husk, and in order to separate them a shovel is requisitioned and the same process repeated. Foreign matter is removed from the grain by means of a sieve—a wearisome task. Gleaning is still observed out here to-day. Usually the fields are very carefully gleaned by the farmer and his servants, but in order to satisfy his conscience and religious scruples a small part of a field is set aside for the gleaners."



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