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Jaffa
From a Canadian Soldier's Letter

AFTER a long period of heavy rain and bitter cold the weather has changed at last. The time of the singing of the birds has come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. For us there is no magic of spring; we went to sleep in winter, and lo! we have awakened on a summer morning; where yesterday great lakes of water were, to-day green grass, sprinkled with unfamiliar flowers, is waving in the balmy breeze. A host of little creatures have arisen with the sun, and crawl, hop, fly, and scurry upon a thousand household duties.

After the weary sand of Sinai; after the dust of Gaza; after the months of fighting, and these latter weeks of torrential rains and biting cold, we lift up our heads in thankfulness and feel that life is good.

If I look out from my dug-out I see the barrenness and desolation of No Man's Land, its only crop the wire, its only furrow a trench. But if I look backwards I see green pastures rolling down to golden sands lapped by a wondrous sea. Yellow broom is growing on the hillside with scent as sweet as on the hills of home; the grass is gay with tulips and lilies and little dwarf sweet peas; and a multitude of wild flowers, strange to me, but how familiar, I love to think, to that dreaming Boy who roamed the fields by flowery Nazareth.

In a near-by lake frogs croak in chorus all night long; sleepy tortoises bask by my dug-out door; swift flashing lizards dart past in the sun; dragon-flies and droning beetles flit through the air.

Through that same soft, warm air there screams, alas, the blasting shell; and the peace of the summer morning is riven by the ghastly rattle of machine guns, or the loud hum of aircraft high above.

You will not have leaped into summer as we have, but we can envy you for other joys. Here are no snow-drops, fair maids of February, cool and sweet in the dewy grass; no trim array of gorgeous crocuses; no yellow primroses on the mossy braes; no scented hawthorn on the hedges; no tiny buds on the trees.

The graves around Jaffa were bedecked for a brief day or two with a wealth of lemon and orange blossom, but these are gone like wedding flowers. So, too, when the angry sun has scorched the grass to brown, and the parched flowers are all withered, and a tortured world groans beneath the flail, there will be sweet pink rosebuds in English gardens, fresh leaves on every tree, and fairy pools of dew each morn on every blade of grass. There will be fragrant heather on the Scottish hillsides, dear homely flowers in tidy gardens, long lingering twilight in the summer evenings, and cool, soft breezes whispering in the night.

Though one is thrilled by the historical associations of Jaffa there is little of interest to be seen. They show you the house of Simon the Tanner, but it is obviously only a few hundred years old, though it is unmistakably in the tannery quarter. In these narrow, ancient streets it is easy to picture the great disciple preaching His strange tidings to a wondering crowd; see Tabitha sitting at her door; see Jonah gazing on the restless sea. What a history! A city before the flood, sacked and destroyed times without number, and always rising phoenix-like from its ashes. Here the stately galleons came laden with riches for Solomon's temple; here Roman legions thundered; here our own Crusaders came full of great hopes. Here Alexander slaughtered and Napoleon betrayed. All its conquerors seem to have razed it to the ground and left desolation and death behind.

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