

FIVE YEARS IN THE SUDAN.

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HAVING just read in the Corps Journal of October, 1929, "An Officer's Impression of the Sudan," by Benedict, I have been reluctantly stimulated by the indignation of my brother officers to put pen to paper.

I am only one of many who have spent five as good years as I ever wish to spend in the Sudan; yet Benedict, in sarcasm, states that "He has indeed met people who really like the country." He states that it must be admitted that they are men who are wedded to their work, and who are not tempted by the comforts and distractions and "happy fellowships" of mixed society. I admit that the majority of us are bound up in our work, surely not a thing of which to be ashamed, but I have met very few in spite of it who have not been tempted by the distractions of mixed society.

On the other hand, a thing which Benedict does not mention, and with which he possibly does not agree, is that the society of even a beautiful and intellectual woman comes only a very good second to the thrill of being in a winning polo team or of riding your own horse in a flat race or over a point-to-point. The Sudan is probably the only country where the average officer with average intelligence (*vide* Annual Confidential) and no means, is able to do this.

Benedict describes Khartoum as delightful for a bachelor; green lawns, beautiful trees, the Nile, the flowers, but, by the average Defence Force officer who is fortunate enough to be stationed in the provinces, it is described as a hot place, with too many short drinks, and too many late nights. Khartoum is a very pleasant spot at times, but a place to be avoided, at any rate for the first few years, by anyone who really wants to see the best of the country.

It should, of course, be noted that Benedict, serving as he is with the British Army, saw only a small portion of the country, and none of the real out-station life. I feel sure, however, if he had really known something of the country, he would not have made the remark that melancholy and depression of spirits must be diverted by every means. If, instead of reading Boswell's "Life of Johnson," Gibbon's "Rise and Fall," and the classics, he had read such books as Churchill's "River War," Slatin's "Fire and Sword in the Sudan," Cromer's "Egypt," and the Life of Gordon, in Lytton Strachey's "Four Eminent Victorians," he would have had a totally different outlook on the Sudan. Even the bits of history of the R.A.M.C. in the Sudan, which one can unearth from these various books, are full of interest. One of the most outstanding incidents in Churchill's book is that of the saving of the wounded at the battle of

Omdurman by the late Sir Arthur Sloggett, who was severely wounded when making a gallant dash across the enemy's front in order to obtain reinforcements.

R.A.M.C. officers serving with the British troops in the Sudan can, if they are adaptable, get as good a time as those of the Sudan Defence Force serving in Khartoum. There is as much good sound medical work as in any other station of its size. One unseconded R.A.M.C. officer headed the list of winning jockeys in Khartoum for two seasons. Another was a member of a party which went shooting regularly and got its thousand sand-grouse before the season was half through, and there is tennis, cricket and football for R.A.M.C. officers and other ranks alike.

I should like to give a rough idea of what service with the Sudan Defence Force means, but, not having the leisure, or the basic grey matter to develop the Benedictine intellect, a few notes are all that can be attempted. I can, however, thoroughly recommend it as a really good job for a fairly junior officer, who is keen on his profession; keen on administrative work, and who would like to get the best sport of every variety, without the necessity of private means.

There is a type which is not wanted in the Sudan Defence Force. That is the type which wants to do as little as it can and grouse all day long about an occasional hardship.

A R.A.M.C. officer seconded to the Sudan Defence Force has endless opportunities to indulge in his bent, be it surgery, medicine, pathology, hygiene, administration or any other branch of our profession. He is given a difficult and responsible job of work to do, and is, after he has shown himself capable of the work, left alone to do it. Sport and pleasure march with the most unpleasant of one's jobs, and the attitude of the native mind is a continual and always fresh source of amusement and study. He must indeed be of an abnormal turn of mind who finds that time hangs heavily on his hands.

Sport offers itself in infinite variety. In the Southern provinces almost every kind of big game is found, and the shooting costs the officer and official little more than the energy necessary to follow the game. Excellent fishing is also to be had in the South, and, all over the Sudan, "scatter-gun" shooting is obtainable including wild duck, geese, partridge, snipe, guinea-fowl, sand-grouse, quail and pigeon. In the northern, western and eastern provinces, and also in Khartoum, one's main amusement in spare time is polo and racing, and one has all the interest of buying and training ponies, the latter, to many, giving the greater amusement. Country-breds are cheap and forage is reasonable in price, so that one can easily afford to keep four to six ponies on one's pay. Most other games such as squash, tennis and football are played in all stations.

In the course of one's job, long distances have to be covered and a lot of trekking has to be done. This, according to the type of the country and the time of the year, is done by car, on horseback, on camel or on foot. And

nothing is more delightful than to get in towards sunset, from a long afternoon's trek, and after a drink and dinner, to sit down, pleasantly tired, in front of a colossal log fire, beneath a brilliant, star-studded African sky. If one is so fortunate as to have brought a gramophone through which one can enjoy the strains of the "Londonderry Air," life is perfect, or almost perfect—there is just one thing missing—the "happy fellowship" of a beautiful and intellectual member of Benedict's "mixed society."

I regret that I cannot agree with Benedict's account of the Sudan, and am sorry that he should have left the country with a wrong impression, but, at the risk of being rude, I cannot resist quoting Rutherford, who says :—

"The habit of generalizing without a basis of acts, and of theorizing on vague impressions, affords an agreeable occupation to one who has acquired it, but little instruction to others."



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