DECEMBER DAYS IN GALLIPOLI.

A QUEER INFORMAL TRUCE AFTER THE RECENT STORM.

FIRST EFFECTS OF THE OPEN ROAD THROUGH BULGARIA.

(From Mr. H. W. Nevinson.)

ARMY HEADQUARTERS, DECEMBER 14.

So here I am in the well-known peninsula once more. And after the hotels and coffee-house babble and third-hand news of Salonika it is a strange relief to inhabit dug-outs again in the midst of trenches, while the bullets go singing overhead into the sea, and the flash and boom of the guns by day and night show how close the enemy stands and how little need there is to search for news of him or take information from other people.

It is about ten weeks since I went away, and there are changes, of course. Roads have been made such as the old Turkish Empire never dreamed of, even in her spasms of reform. Hillsides, then covered with prickly oak and aromatic shrubs, are now converted into burrows for men or muddy lines for mules. A rocky promontory on which I used to build my brushwood hut is now quarried away and lies in the sea as breakwater. Cliffs which only goats had climbed are now headquarters for brigades, and the desert has ceased to be deserted, though it is far from blossoming like the rose.

A Tremendous Storm.

Much of the change is due to a tremendous storm about a fortnight ago. It came with a south-west wind that rose to a hurricane in half an hour and brought with it an irresistible deluge of rain. In a few minutes the men were drenched to the skin, dug-outs and trenches inundated, the contents of sandbags washed out. Pools formed behind barricades and swept them away by the weight of water. Men were drowned in the rushing torrents, and the bodies of Turks rolled down the steeps together towards the sea.

Then, of a sudden, the wind swung round to the north and fell upon the wrecked and inundated scene with icy blasts. Snow fell fast. The surface of the pools and mud froze over. The men's greatcoats, being soaked through with rain, froze stiff upon them. Men came down from the lines numbed and bemused with the intensity of cold. They could neither hear nor speak, but stared about them like driven bullocks. Many of our men took advantage of the situation among the enemy, but some who remained in the trenches could not pull the triggers of their rifles for cold. Some saw the Turks standing up on their firing-steps and gazing at them over the parapets, and still they could not fire. Overcome by common affliction in the face of nature's power, they stood up and gazed back upon the Turks. Many were "frost-bitten," some have lost their limbs, some died. The Turks suffered even worse. Prisoners said they had no blankets, no covering at all beside their greatcoats. Both on them and us the winter did its worst. Then it suddenly turned mild, and ever since the sea has been calm, and the sun gleams through thin and passing cloud. But the storm has left its trace in wreckage along the shores, in sticky mud that will not dry along the low-lying trenches, and in British and Turkish graves.

An Informal Truce.

That community of human nature between men who are there to kill each other was lately shown here again by an interval of friendliness, as often in France. It seems to have begun by the wagging of a Turkish periscope over the sandbags. One of our Australians (it was at Anzac) wagged his periscope in answer. Then Turkish hands were held up, moving fingers together in the Turkish sign of amity. Presently heads appeared on both sides, the few words that could be understood were said, cigarettes and fruit were thrown from one side to the other, and I think it was on this occasion that a note, written in bad French, was thrown to the Australians, saying: "We don't want to fight you. We want to go home, but we're driven on by the people you know about" (*i.e.*, the Germans, one may suppose). Then signs were made that an officer, perhaps a German, was approaching. The heads disappeared, and bombs were thrown from trench to trench in place of fruit.

For both sides use many kinds of bombs now, and probably the bombing, which hardly ever stops by day or night where the lines are close together, as at Anzac, is the most general cause of death. Bombs thrown over-hand like cricket balls (at least four species), bombs lobbed underhand on a wooden frame, bombs fired from various kinds of mortar (some very like the demi-culverin of old days), bombs attached to rods and projecting from the mortar's mouth, bombs flung from catapults such as old Romans might have made—all are used by both sides now in the hope of killing unknown men in the trench a few yards away.

It is very seldom now that the man to be killed is seen. Once, it is true, the order was given at Anzac not to fire either bomb or rifle or gun for three days unless the enemy should show himself. At last the Turks, wondering at the silence, began to pour over the parapets. Then a few—about a hundred—crept out. One gallantly rushed forward and sprang into the front Australian trench. I saw the place where he was bayoneted. Many of the others were shot as they ran back.

Munitions Through Bulgaria.

Unhappily, there can be no doubt that within the last fortnight the German connection with Gallipoli through Bulgaria has begun to tell. One hears of batteries of 12-inch howitzers, 11-inch howitzers, and 9.2-inch guns being seen upon the way, and the rumour is probably true, or something like the truth. About the increase of big-gun ammunition and the superior quality of the ammunition and the gunners themselves since the gate through Bulgaria was opened there can be no question. One felt the difference at once both at Suvla, Anzac, and at Helles; perhaps most at Helles, where the big guns firing across the Straits from positions on the "Asiatic side" near Troy have been particularly volcanic during the two days of my stay.

But turned upon Anzac the Turks are known to have seventeen guns in one position alone—the so-called "Olive Grove," about a mile inland from Gaba Tepe. The men attribute every shell from this direction to "Beachy Bill," because it generally bursts on the beach, but the guns are of different sizes. Last Friday we watched some of our warships pouring their great naval shells into that Olive Grove, but I don't know with what effect upon its olive branches.

The Lancashire Men.

The Turks are believed to have about 120,000 men in action on the peninsula still, and, I suppose, about 25,000 in reserve as before. To hold such forces on the position is, no doubt, a great service, and the knowledge of that service is the encouragement our men receive in their continuous peril and the harsh and monotonous labour of their daily life. Living and sleeping in trenches, with little cover, little relaxation, and no really secure retirement; bombing and receiving bombs; mining and counter-mining; "humping" ammunition, water, and food up rocky slopes and slippery cliffs; living on the same good but tedious rations—so week by week the work has continued since I lived among it two months ago, with little outward change.

Many have gone, many have come, but the old 29th Division, the 11th, the Yeomanry Division, with its Scottish Horse, the well-worn Royal Naval Division, the 42nd with its Lancashire men still in their old front line, and many more, besides the Australians and New Zealanders, that I will not mention too exactly—all are still standing to their posts, and with a cheeriness almost incredible. "Fortitude, not courage," said Napoleon, "is the first essential for a soldier."

A Monument of British Fortitude.

Two more points, just to show how cheeriness is possible even under these conditions. At Anzac they are compiling a Christmas magazine (they almost called it "The Anzac Annual"), and contributions of verse, prose, and drawings pour in upon the distracted editor much as though he were sitting in a Fleet Street office instead of a cavern in a cliff. It is nearly in order now—verses and all,—and will be published in London, where we must all wish it well, if only as a monument of our race's fortitude.

And again, last Saturday a brigadier general (one of that most serviceable and responsible class of officers) conducted me round some new lines he had himself designed in a very exposed position. Crawling and scraping along firing trenches is a thing one may grow tired of, but that brigadier's enthusiasm banished all thought of weariness or refusal. So round and round we went, enthralled at the ingenuity of every twist and turn, while he cheerfully exhorted each man we met to shave every day, to wash his shirt, and "keep his end up." For that brigadier loved his trenches as a mother loves her child or an artist his work of art, and I am sure that, if ever the war should end, he will reconstruct them, like Uncle Toby, in his bowling-green, or have the bunkers of his golf-links dug upon their design.