

SOLDIERS' ANTHOLOGY

MIDDLE EAST ANTHOLOGY. Edited by John Waller and Erik de Mauny. London, Lindsay Drummond.

(Reviewed by E. H. McCormick)

THE appearance of this collection is timely. By now veterans of the Middle East theatre, settled—or caught—in the routine of civilian habits, can permit themselves the luxury of regret for the years spent in North Africa. In retrospect the dangers and discomforts of that experience tend to give way before its more pleasurable memories. How direct and simple service life now seems, as compared with the complexities met with at home or in the office or in the shop! How agreeable, by contrast with Anglo-Saxon restraints, the freedom of an old and tolerant society—too old, too tolerant! And, amid the vagaries of a temperate climate, how desirable seems a place where weather does not exist, only for a great part of the year a succession of cloudless days!

This anthology will, then, have an appeal for many who now turn back to the Middle East with feelings similar

to those reserved in exile for home. Through its pages they will experience again the stir and glitter and fabulous contrasts of Cairo. They will see once more the inhuman landscapes of the desert and the kindlier Syrian hills. They will retaste the pleasures of leave in "Alex," the abandon of the periodical "jag," and its morning-after remorse. They will recollect the close intimacies of service life, with their revelations of unsuspected virtues and frailties.

But, it is necessary to add, the collection is not every reader's glass of Stella. It will appeal less to "straight" beer-drinkers than to those who, like a character in one of the sketches, acquired a taste for wartime champagne, white wine and soda-water. Internal evidence and the appended biographical notes suggest that many of the contributors belonged to a small group thrown together in the great military base that was Cairo and celebrated in the last poem of the collection. "From Oxford to Cairo is a long way. . . ." opens one of the stories. Not really so far, we comment, nor was Bloomsbury so remote from Cairo's Garden City. The peculiar flavour of

New Writing rises strongly from the pages of this anthology which might, in fact, have come out as a special enlarged number of that periodical. There are the familiar junks of raw experience, commonly termed "reportage," the curious mingling of cynicism with a kind of religious anti-fascism, the same juxtaposition (sometimes in one writer) of the dilettante and the moralist, with the same indications of haste and prematurity in some of the contributions; and this collection goes even further than its prototype in realising the international pretensions of *New Writing*: it includes work by an Egyptian, a Frenchman, a Pole, an Italian, a South African, a New Zealander, Erik de Mauny, who is the co-editor and in himself a small league of nations—and representatives of most breeds from the United Kingdom.

THIS is perhaps only another way of saying that the selections bear upon them signs of the circumstances and time of their composition. As the editors have pointed out in their introduction, the Middle East in time of war was not

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