

CHARGED WITH BEING STARKIE, SIR

(Continued from page 17)

women and children—sobs began to break from wharf and ship, a convulsion of sound. The Maunganui sailed at two o'clock and, when the ship was several hundred yards out in the stream, the sobbing of the women could still be plainly heard, a "fused, wailing sound that outraged nature."

And so came the Fifth Regiment to the land of Egypt. Their camp was at Zitoun, about three miles from Cairo, thousands on thousands of white tents pricking up among sandy hills. There follows here a vivid description of the battle of the Wazza, when hundreds of soldiers ran amok in this notorious corner of Cairo, pillaging, burning, murdering. No one knew how it started, and very few worried about its ending.

But the real thing was at hand. It was in the pale rise of the morning that the New Zealand men were taken off in barges to land beneath the yellow clay cliffs of Gallipoli. A splendid morning sunlight broke over an utterly quiet scene. Four hundred men were lined up on the beach. A man pitched forward—fainted, the others thought. Only a little blue mark between his eyes told the story of the Turkish snipers in the hills. And then opened that ghastly chapter in the history of the war, the chapter in which the names of New Zealand and Australia loom large. Every day burying parties went into No Man's Land to collect the bodies.

From a distance of a few yards the bodies, lying in queer huddled attitudes, appeared to have something monstrously amiss with them. Then the burying party, white-faced, realised that 24 hours of the Gallipoli sun had caused each body to swell enormously—until the great threatening carcasses were three times the size of a man, and their skins had the bursting blackness of grapes. It was impossible to recognise features or expression in that hideously puffed and contorted blackness.

It was on Gallipoli that Starkie got his first wound of importance and he was taken off on the Maheno to Malta. The men left Gallipoli singing Maori waiatas, those sweet, plaintive tribal songs . . . O listening dead upon the hill-sides of Gallipoli and in the deep gullies of the little bitter-tasting bushes!—it is the voice of your country that is bidding you farewell. They are going now, with that music on their lips, to slay and to be slain, in other fields.

Next came Marseilles and the long route marches to Armentieres. Things got pretty hot and all day and night hand grenades, shells, and trench mortar shots smacked into the New Zealand lines. Starkie was in the thick of things:

The front line hadn't been picked out for its looks, not now with the rain of autumn washing the trenches into heaps of slushy mud. And there was a citizen of No Man's Land that the boys didn't like so much better than the Gallipoli flies. Grey as ghosts and bigger than house-cats, the naked mangy rats of No Man's Land crawled into the

dug-outs, and their sharp teeth gnawed through leather, cloth and soap with fine impartiality. When the men turned in at night there would be a rustle and scuttle underfoot, and the loathsome grey scavenger, its lean back covered with scabs, its bright eyes inexpressibly hideous in their eagerness, would slide into the shadows. . . . Out in No Man's Land lay the nobler banquets of the trench ghouls—bodies face downwards in the mud, the lobes of their ears eaten away.

Next the Somme—at first like an enormous picnic, and then such a hell as even Dante himself could scarcely vision. Starkie saw his brother blown to pieces, his best friends killed and left lying in the stinking mud; he went mad, emptied his revolver into a line of German prisoners, flung a Mills bomb into a dug-out full of Huns. He didn't wait to see what

might crawl out of the cascade of mud and brushwood. And then Mametz Wood . . . it was Death who had captured this wood, no other King or Kaiser was supreme there for any length of time.

Later, prison at Le Havre. But perhaps the words on the jacket of "Passport to Hell" can best sum up the career of John Douglas Stark: The extreme crudity of his early upbringing created a rebel spirit reckless enough to have served imprisonment, brave enough to have been recommended for the Victoria Cross, and tough enough to have escaped from Le Havre prison.

To-day Starkie lives in a little house in Grey's

Avenue, that Auckland thoroughfare "garnished with a double row of half-hearted English trees whose falling leaves add to the general shiftlessness." From this amazing book, written by a girl whose name is going to sear across the literary heavens, we can take the closing lines: In New Zealand they are scattered, that most unknown of soldiers—ordinary men—and many of the best among them are too shabby and too harrassed to attend R.S.A. ceremonials. Yet, potentially at least, the returned soldier's desperate desire to fit in again, to go forward and die, is one of the most valuable things remaining in our world; as the link, the friendship between scattered and shabby men who congregate around a thousand little homes like Starkie's, is one of the most honest.

A method of secret facsimile transmission for telephone lines and radio was announced recently by the famous French television pioneer—Edouard Belin. Monsieur Belin, who presented his invention to the French War Department, guarantees that messages, even though they are intercepted by wire tapping or radio reception, will be so garbled that they will be absolutely incomprehensible. It is expected that this system will prevent the leakage of messages in case of war.

Her Name Will Shine

Author of "Passport to Hell"

ROBIN HYDE, author of "Passport to Hell," the book which has already been reprinted four times in England, is a frequent contributor to the "Radio Record." Her story was sent Home under the title of "The Bronze Outlaw," but the publishers, thinking that that title had an unnecessarily "wild west" flavour, decided on the present name. Robin Hyde had a book published last year—"Journalese"—and she is also represented in Macmillan's Contemporary Poets series, her collection of verse, "The Conquerors," having been published by them. This girl will go far.