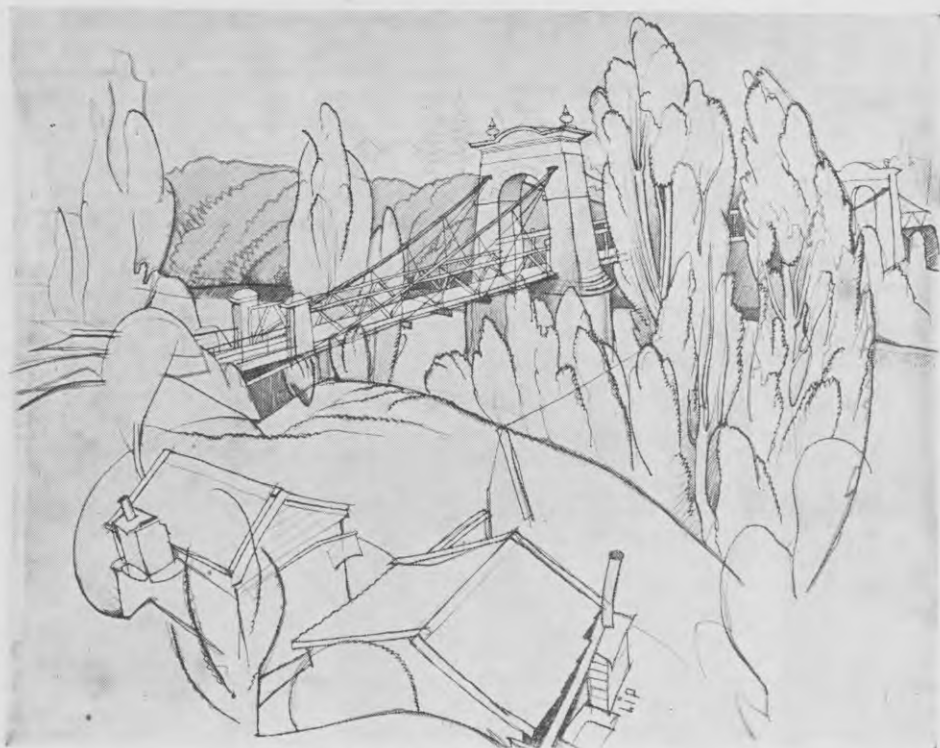


there was no smooth roundness, these ranges pierced upwards and outwards with huge bites and unsymmetrical leaps of rock. Between the peaks and stretching from the foot of one range to the foot of another lay flat dry plains.

The strength and power of the scene brings you to a stop. Looking from even a short distance away there is no sign of vegetation, no tussock or grass, not even gorse or blackberry, nothing more than a solitary stunted tree—it seems to be petrified and lifeless. Through fire-bars of early morning clouds the sun strikes down into a clear hard atmosphere on to rock which is bleached, flayed raw and bare with the heat. In the sunshine this expanse has a blinding brilliance in which there is no leavening of colour, no reds, yellows, or blues: the only relief is from the deep splashes of black shadow where the sun has not yet risen high enough to reach. As far as we can see, for miles,

there is no relenting in the scene, no change or difference: there are no houses or buildings nor sign of human life, and the steel railway track with its bridges and cuttings and embankments, with this heavily puffing engine and long line of trucks and vans, has no significance in this country. It's a land for giants and dragons, not toy clockwork trains.

But close at hand there is life to be seen, especially near the thinly flowing deep-cut rivers and creeks. We were riding in the engine now, and after twisting sharply through steep turns we would run into a straight to find the gullies of the hillsides on either side of us moving and shimmering like the leaves of a tree in a slight breeze. Sloping banks seemed to slide as the rumbling engine came abreast. But the movement was neither wind nor leaves; it was the scampering of rabbits. At times a whole hillside would slither upwards and over its own crown. Even



*On the road from Roxburgh to Alexandria.*