

Brothers in Arms.

A TRIO OF HESKET VOLUNTEERS.

As previously noted in these columns, three of the sons of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Bowen, of Heskett, responded to the Empire's call for men to serve at the front. They were Henry William Bowen, eldest son; Walter E. P. Bowen, third son; and James Frederick Bowen, who, while an employee in the Post and Telegraph office at Romsey, enlisted when a few months over the age of eighteen years, and left Australia for Egypt in November last. Henry and Walter had gone previously, and were to have travelled together but, at the last moment, Walter was detained with a number of others to make room for a batch of men who, for official reasons, had to be sent forward. The separation of the brothers was, naturally, a disappointment, and caused Henry especially a good deal of concern. However, in due time Walter reached Egypt, and, through the efforts the brothers made, they succeeded in again getting into the same battalion and company. Then, in September of last year, they set out for Gallipoli in the "Southland," which, it will be remembered, was torpedoed, and Henry, who had, in his letters home, shown much solicitude for Walter, had the misfortune to be numbered amongst the comparatively small number of men who were lost. Walter went on to Gallipoli, and spent fifteen weeks in the trenches there, and, when he returned to Egypt, he was handed his brother Henry's kit, which included a little parcel containing a rich silk table centre, intended as a present for his mother. Mrs. Bowen has since received the article, which has been shown to us, and is certainly a very handsome one, and a beautiful specimen of Egyptian handiwork. Leaving Egypt again, Walter next accompanied the Australians to France, and there, on the field of battle, on Good Friday, he was promoted to the rank of lance-corporal. Meantime, James remained in Egypt, where his knowledge of telegraphy, etc., has evidently proved very useful.

This week we were given the privilege of perusing the correspondence received by Mr. and Mrs. Bowen from these three sons, and must say that the letters do the writers much credit. Full of courage and good cheer, the

lads' only anxiety, plainly, is that for their parents and immediate relatives. Throughout their writings they show their parental attachment and a strong desire to place the minds of father and mother at ease regarding their safety. Walter writes interestingly, especially about France, and has sent home a number of superior souvenir cards of most attractive design and finish. James, however, is the more voluminous correspondent, and his well-written letters are very interesting, indeed. Accompanying one were upwards of twenty little photographs—snap-shots—all methodically numbered and described, and forming a collection which the "home folk" must surely treasure.

Henry's two last letters were dated on 23rd and 25th August, respectively. He hastened in the first to assure his parents that Walter had arrived safely, and then to say that he had taken steps in the hope of getting his brother into his company. In the letter of two days later he told of the success of those efforts, and spoke of their coming departure for the Dardanelles. "Don't," he said, "worry for our safety, as we will take all possible care of ourselves; but it remains with a Higher Hand than ours to guide us on our way." He concluded this, the last letter received from him, with—"May God be with you one and all till we meet again; and if we should meet no more on this earth, we will surely be united in Thy most perfected heavenly kingdom."

Henry wrote from France on March 29th—ten days after leaving Egypt—reporting himself to be in the best of health. The weather was then extremely cold. The trip across was an exciting one, but they landed safely, and then had several days' journey in a train to get to their destination. He described France as a pretty country, and he found it quite a treat to be again amongst a white race of civilised people. Things were quite different to what they were in Egypt. Nearly all the men were away at the war, and only the old men and women were left at home to do the work. Young girls and women were to be seen working on the farms—carting in hay and ploughing the paddocks to keep things going, "and, my word," says the Heskett soldier, "they're no 'mugs,' either, for they can plough as good as the next man." The day before they left Egypt the whole of the Brigade was massed and reviewed by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. "We were," says

Prince of Wales. "We were," says Private Bowen, "reviewed here again a few days ago by Lord Kitchener, and he was highly pleased with us."

Sapper James Bowen outlined his trip under date of December 14th, 1915, during which he wrote no fewer than forty-three letters. "Father Neptune" came aboard during the voyage and afforded the lads a lot of fun. Various places of interest were noted, not omitting the spot where Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. The natives that swarmed round the transport when she anchored provided the troops with a fund of amusement. "Someone threw them a sausage that had been left over from breakfast. One of the 'darkies' caught it and held it by the two ends, and, after he had looked at it, he dropped it and washed his hands carefully. Then he looked up with disgust showing plainly on his face. They asked for garments to wear, and if anything fell into the water they would fight over it." Sapper Bowen met several he knew—Willie Harley, Peter Lauder, Len Ronalds (from Macedon), and others. The voyage was a record one, the captain said, in regard to calmness of the sea, and the behaviour of the troops, and also the speed. Someone, it appears, cut the sail of an Egyptian hawker's boat while the troopship was at anchor, "and," says Sapper Bowen, "I never saw a more frantic or fanny bit of cursing. He tore off his turban and fung it into the bottom of the boat and jumped on it, and tore his hair. He waved his hands in the direction of the torn sail, and then prostrated himself in the bottom of the boat. All the while he was jabbering, and when he had got away he was shaking his fists and repeating his antics."

The snapshots above referred to were forwarded in a letter dated March 19th, and on March 23rd a description of scenes in Cairo was given. The

a well, said to be 100 ft. deep, was passed. Returning to Cairo, the party visited the bazaars, the Blue Mosque (with which they were disappointed), and the White Mosque—where they got their money's worth. It was the most picturesque place Sapper Bowen had ever seen. Slippers had to be worn. At 5.30 the guide asked for his wages, as his day's work was at an end. The party fixed him up, and made for the Y.M.C.A. for tea.

Pyramids were visited, and the Temple of the Sphinx entered—but there was nothing of interest there, except the big, massive stones with which it was built, most of them 16 ft. long by 4 ft. The King's Chamber was inspected, and also the Queen's Chamber, noted for its echoes, and on the way to which a well, said to be 100 ft. deep, was