NOTES ON CYPRUS.

By MAJOR B. W. LONGHURST.

Royal Army Medical Corps.

ALTHOUGH nowadays the odds are long against many members of our Corps being stationed in Cyprus, yet the place is so well worth a visit that some of us may like to run over there on leave from Egypt or Malta. I therefore jot down the following notes for those who may think of doing so. The hand-book on Cyprus gives one a useful idea of the topography of the island: how that it is some 50 miles from Asia Minor, about the same distance from the coast of Syria, and about 260 miles north of Port Said. It is 140 miles long and about 60 miles wide. My object is not to write a guide-book, but to collect together a few notes from personal observation that may be of interest to readers of this Journal.

First of all, how does one get to Cyprus? The best route is via Alexandria and Port Said, by the boats of the Bells Asia Minor S.S. Company, which carry the mail, and run over in two days, landing the mails at Larnaca, and then proceeding to Limassol. Another way is by the Austrian-Lloyd from Brindisi.

The island is interesting, not only on account of its great beauty, but because of its remarkable records in the history of the past.

The derivation of the word Cyprus has been attributed to the Hebrew word Kopher, Camphire or Cypress, mentioned in the song of Solomon, chapter i., verse 14, and chapter iv., verse 13, and also to the Greek word Кипрос. The ancient name of Larnaca, a town situated on the south coast of Cyprus, is Kittim or Chittim, and this is also mentioned quite early in the Book of Genesis, for Kittim was the name of the great-grandson of Noah (see Genesis, chapter x., verse 4, also Numbers, chapter xxiv., verse 24). The land of Chittim is again referred to in the burden of Tyre (see Isaiah, chapter xxiii., verses 1 and 12). These Biblical references serve to show the great antiquity of Cyprus. Most of the great Powers in ancient times appear to have conquered Cyprus. The Island was vanquished by Egypt B.C. 1450, and the Egyptians were followed by the Phœnicians and Assyrians, and afterwards, a second time, the country was taken by Egypt, only to be followed in turn by the Persians, Romans, Arabs, and the Knights Templars, under King Richard "Cœur de Lion." After this the country passed under the Governments of Venice and Turkey, and finally came under British rule in 1878.
Since the British occupation Cyprus has been a military station of some importance, and during the time of the Egyptian war, a fairly large garrison occupied the island; now, however, there is only one company of infantry, and a few details, comprising Army Service Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Army Pay Corps. There is only one Royal Army Medical Corps Officer stationed there at present.

The principal towns are Nicosia, the headquarters of the Government, situated in the central plain of the island, 25 miles northwest of Larnaca; Paphos, Limassol and Larnaca, towns on the south coast; Famagusta on the east; and Kyrenia on the north coast. There are a large number of ruined towns of ancient origin, and the whole country is full of interesting antiquities.

The troops are stationed in an isolated camp of wooden huts on the high ground at Polemedia, 3½ miles inland from Limassol; they remain there during the cold weather only, but as soon as the weather gets warm, the whole of the military establishment (men, women and children) moves up from Polemedia to a most delightful hill station called Tröodos, 34 miles from Limassol, quite close to Mount Olympus, 6,406 feet above the sea.

The population of the island in 1901 was about 237,000, of which two-thirds were Greeks and one-third Turks. The languages spoken are modern Greek and Turkish.

There is a special coinage for the island: the copper piastre being the unit. A sovereign is worth 180 copper piastres. The copper coins are the 1, ½ and ¼ piastres, and the silver coins, the 3, 4½, 9 and 18 piastre pieces. English money is taken by the leading tradesmen. Najem Heuri, of Limassol, is the universal provider, and sells every kind of “Europe goods,” including mineral waters.

Cyprus is not an expensive place to live in, as food is not only good but remarkably cheap, and the house rent is exceptionally low. At Polemedia there are no Government quarters for the medical officer. When I was stationed there in 1904 I paid 1s. 6d. a day rent for a fine bungalow, containing seven living rooms and the usual offices, situated in a splendid garden of about half an acre, planted with the fruit trees that grow on the island; in addition to this there was a coach-house and stabling for six horses. At Tröodos there are excellent officers’ quarters, built of stone, but E. P. tents are supplied in addition, if required, and in such a climate are quite as pleasant as quarters.

There is plenty to do in the way of recreation. On the southwest of Limassol, close by the sea, there is an excellent stretch of
country for riding, good going all the way, straight ahead for five
miles. Near Polemedia there is a race-course and polo ground, but,
owing to the small number of officers in the station, not much use
is made of the race-course. There is every facility for all the usual
out-door games, and at Limassol there is an English club. The
shooting in some parts of the island is good, though in many parts
climbing the mountains after woodcock and partridges is distinctly
hard work. Very fair snipe shooting can be obtained within easy
distance of the camp at Polemedia, and the woodcock and partridges
are not much farther away. There is a large salt lake near
Limassol, and around the banks of this during the winter, snipe
and duck abound. There are also found, at different times and
places on the island, wild geese, frankolins, quail, sand-grouse,
bustard, and any number of hares; all of these afford excellent
sport. There is no large game except the moufflon, the Ovis ophion,
a species of wild sheep found high up in the Tröodos forests;
special permission is required to shoot these, and the best rifle
to use is a sporting .303 with expanding bullet. As the rivers are
all dried up in the summer time there is no fresh-water fishing, but
plenty of sea fishing can be obtained, the principal fish being the
red mullet and the sea bream. Sea-bathing is an attraction, and
good sailing-boats can be hired.

The climate of the island is excellent. The winter in Polemedia
is perfect, and the Alpine climate of Tröodos is most exhilarating
and bracing in the summer, for it is over 6,000 feet high. For the
troops there is no hot weather, because, as previously mentioned,
they all spend the summer on Tröodos. Down in the plains near
Larnaca, between the months of June and November, there is
malarial fever; the prevalence of the different types, as worked out
by Dr. Williamson, of Larnaca, being: tertian, 48.47; quartan,
8.03; aestivo-autumnal, 43.50.

Amongst the troops malarial fever is not common; I only saw
a few cases. Very few Anopheles are found near Polemedia, and
I believe none at all at Tröodos. The mosquitoes all belong to the
family Culicide. I have, however, seen many of the true Anopheles
at Periapedhi, about half way between Polemedia and Tröodos.
Enteric fever is rare, and Mediterranean fever almost unknown, and
there are no special diseases amongst the troops beyond those
usually met with in most stations. It is interesting to note that
Bilharzia haematobia and Madura foot are both found in Cyprus,
and in patients who have never left the island. Dr. Williamson
showed me, in Larnaca, a patient suffering from Bilharzia who had
never been out of Cyprus, and also a specimen of Madura foot found in the island. I have still in my possession microscopical specimens taken from each of these cases at the time, showing clearly the spined ovum of the Bilharzia and the *Streptothrix madurensis*. Another interesting disease is that produced by the sting of the female Sphalangi, a kind of ant (Mutilla), which conveys the anthrax bacillus, sometimes with fatal results. Dr. Williamson has described this disease in the *British Medical Journal*, and when I was in Larnaca he showed me several cases.

The poisonous snake of the country is the *Kouphi-vipera mauritanica*. The poison fang is of great length, and is really double on each side of the jaw; each fang is completely tubular, like a hypodermic needle; when out of use it lays flat along the roof of the mouth, and is only erected for the purpose of striking. In repose it is altogether hidden from view by a fold of mucous membrane; when it is erected this becomes tightly stretched over part of its anterior surface, and this serves to direct the poison down the canals in the double fang, and to prevent its escape around the exterior of the tooth. The poison canal commences on its anterior surface near the maxillary bone, and ends also on its anterior surface, a little distance from the point, which, by the bye, is as sharp as a needle; the upper orifice of the canal is in close relation with the end of the duct of the poison gland. In all the mature snakes I have dissected there have been double parallel fangs closely joined together on each side of the jaw, and, in addition, there have been also supernumerary fangs posterior to the original, the same as in the English viper. The poison, evidently, not only travels down the tubular canal in the fang, but also down the groove formed by the close apposition of the two fangs joined together laterally. I believe that this dental arrangement is different to all other viperine snakes. The Kouphi sometimes grows to a great size; it is dark brown in colour, with black bars, the head is flat and shaped like the ace of spades. There are other snakes on the island, but they are harmless. One of these, a very large black snake, is remarkable, as it is supposed to eat the Kouphi, and is in consequence encouraged to live in the neighbourhood of the native houses.

Good ponies can be obtained in Cyprus, the average price being about £8 or £10. For travelling about the island, carriages pulled by four horses abreast are used, on account of the mountainous roads. There are good roads all over the island, and a bicycle will be found most useful, as the roads are level near the coast.
There are many beautiful places to visit on the island, perhaps the most celebrated being in the vicinity of Kyrenia. About five miles east of this town, stands the glorious Premonstratensian Abbey, “De-la-Paix,” or “Belle Abbaye,” the view from which has been described by one of our most noted modern writers, Rider Haggard, as the most beautiful in the world. The romantic castle of St. Hilarion, or Dieu d’Amour, towering 2,200 feet above Kyrenia, is of unknown age and truly remarkable. In short, the whole island is simply teeming with interesting relics of the past, and from an archaeological point of view is second only to ancient Egypt. Near Paphos may be seen the ruins of the great temple of Venus, or Aphrodite, which was built very much on the same lines as King Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem. A curious phenomenon is observable on the western shores of Cyprus, especially near Paphos and the temple of Aphrodite Anadyomene: a very slight wind carries on shore large drifts of white foam, suggesting the landing of the foam-born Goddess. Similar foam has been noticed on the edges of the Larnaca Salt Lake, charged with the eggs and bodies of microscopic insects. This remarkable phenomenon explains the origin of the fabulous legend recorded in ancient mythology.

The best time for the tourist to visit Cyprus is from October to the beginning of May. During the rest of the year the heat is rather too great in the plains for travelling in comfort. There is a good hotel at Larnaca, called “The Royal,” where the tourist can stay immediately on landing, but during the hot weather it is advisable to continue the sea voyage to Limassol, stay there the night, and then proceed next morning by a four-horse carriage, ascending over 6,000 feet, to Tröodos, where there is a new hotel, most beautifully situated, not far from Mount Olympus, and where the climate is always most beautifully cool, even in the middle of summer.