

Ex-Novocastrians.

Captain R. McNiven.

Readers of the "Novocastrian" will be pleased to hear that our good friend, and ex-teacher of this school, Mr. McNiven, has been doing excellent work with the Anzacs. Shortly after landing on Gallipoli, Lieutenant McNiven received a bullet wound in the arm, which sent him for some weeks to Mudros Island. Returning again to his battalion, he displayed such excellent judgment and coolness that he, with another officer and 14 men, was told off to hold the last trench during the now historic evacuation, and on reaching Egypt once more, he was immediately recommended for a Captaincy. He is doubtless now in France, which country will surely appeal much more to a man with his progressive ideals than did the dreary, dusty peninsula where he first saw the horrors of war. In various letters to members of the school and staff, Captain McNiven has given a vivid account of what he experienced and witnessed. His keen, thoughtful brain seems to see in war little that is not gruesome and barbarous. One striking passage in a letter from him begins, "They talk about the romance of war! There is no such thing! It's very romantic to see——" and then follows a list of unprintable horrors, in which mingle dust, flies, sleeplessness, disease, filth, utter callousness, gruesomeness and death in its manifold phases of abomination. Truly a world cannot be degenerate whose men can face—ay, and even return to—such things.

Since writing the above, we have seen a letter from Captain McNiven, somewhere in France. The following extracts may be interesting.

France, 16/4/16.

We are approaching the fourth week of our tour in the land of the combiens and the il y a's. We are all charmed with the French people, and the welcome we received all along our train journey of three days was wonderful. The petits enfants in particular took the fancy of our lads, and their bigheartedness has never struck me so much as here. The conduct of the men has been only what an Australian would expect of his fellow soldiers and has earned high praise from our own magnificent Birdwood and the G.O.C. the British Army we are attached to. We spent a short time in the trenches here, and after our 5 months without a rest at Gallipoli in the trenches, it is ridiculously soft to spend 4 days in, then 4 days out, and after a few weeks go almost out of the sound of the guns, and at the end of 3 months, a week's leave.

They have water laid on to all the trenches. At our post at Anzac, for the last 8 days we were there, we heard the Turks tamping under the tunnel

we lived in, and our line was on a cliff edge with a 400 feet drop. Our water ration for days and days was a pint a day per man for all purposes. In the village we hold all is desolation. It is a glorious sight to see women hunted out of their comfortable homes, and it is quite evident that the same sporting feeling will never exist between our men and the Huns as it did in the case of Johnno, the Turk. Best wishes to all the boys and girls I used to know. I am gas expert to the battalion. Met Alan Smith in Egypt; his special job is picket officer.

May this worst of all wars soon cease; may Australia soon regain her thousands of brave sons and may our own "Ronnie" return to us safe, sound, and cheery as of yore!
