

away.

But it is not the duty or routine of this Main-guard that makes it peculiar, for in that it is the same as, or very similar to, all other guards studied over the Empire "on which the sun never sets." In this plain old building there is something quite unusual in barrack-rooms, and very interesting to such as love the British Army and treasure its records.

For nearly a century British regiments have done sentry-go in front of the old portico, and British subalterns have watched the hours away in the room above, in stock and shako, in kilt and rifle-green, in a long procession, from the coatee of the twenties to the latest smart serge of 1901. And long ago some officer, finding the time hang heavy on his hands, and having in him besides a turn for sketching, bethought him to draw upon the bare yellow-washed wall of his ungarnished room a picture in colours.

Man is an imitative animal, and the next officer, yawning between his rapid excursions down his little staircase, probably thought he could do as well, or better, and he too left his handiwork upon the walls; and as years rolled by there grew up a custom, now firmly established, for every regiment serving in Malta and doing Mainguard duty to leave behind a remembrance of itself in the shape of a sketch on the walls, in pencil, chalk, or paint. Thus now, instead of plain unlovely walls exists this quaint irregular patchwork of pictures, well known throughout the Services and to those who use this highway to the East. Some of them are comic, some graceful, some highly finished, others left half done, almost all are clever, and many very interesting, from the tales and legends attached to them.

It would be impossible to describe them all, but some of them cannot be passed without comment. The first that greets you as you mount the stairs is a very striking life-sized figure of the officer of the guard in the act of rushing down the staircase in response to the sentry's shout of "Guard, turn out!" This picture was done in 1881 by a talented young officer of the Royal Sussex Regiment, who afterwards exhibited in the Royal Academy; the figure wears the uniform of that regiment, and, seen from the narrow doorway, looks really like an officer coming down. On the left-hand side, between the door and the verandah, in the big sitting-room, is a long narrow picture inscribed "The Nile, 1884-85." It shows a boat, loaded up with boxes and baggage, and containing two dishevelled men and a dog. The boat is being towed up a rocky rapid stream by five patched and tattered soldiers, representing different branches of the Service; the man at the helm, steering with a well-worn broom, is of course Lord Wolseley, and the whole is a clever allegorical reminiscence of those hard-fought early Egyptian campaigns, and the struggle to get up the Nile, when Highlanders were known to patch their kilts with old biscuit tins, and officers were glad to drink cocoa made strong, to cover the taste of dead camel in the water.

Near the window hangs an overcoat upon a peg, so well



ONE OF THE WALLS AND PART OF THE DOORWAY.

*The work of many hands.*

done as to produce the illusion that it is a real one, though the paint is getting rubbed and worn, it has hung there for so many years. At the fireplace is another sketch, evidently by the same hand—a bracket, with a cap and tumblers on it, calculated to deceive the unwary. A head of Gladstone, in pencil, done by Harry Furniss; a small sketch, doubtless from personal experience, of the Archbishop's carriage disappearing down the street, while the breathless guard presents arms to empty space; an excellent full-length portrait of a general of past days, whereby hangs a tale, all appear on one wall; and opposite is an oval picture of the head and shoulders of a sentry of the 98th wearing the old-fashioned shako, carries us back to pre-Crimean days. But the most remarkable feature of the collection is without doubt in the smaller front room, the work of some genius with a taste for making one's flesh creep. Low down on the wall of this little room are two wonderfully realistic and gruesome representations of human skeletons, full sized and grimly hideous, one lying stark and still, the other rising up in fear of the demon who approaches him. The shroud, the bricks, the correct articulation, and the fact of the drawing being done in a curious vault-like recess in the wall, all contribute to a very weird and bizarre effect. In this room also is a picture of what is somewhat irreverently styled a "pickled monk."

Under one of the churches in Malta there used at one time to be shown a number of embalmed monks, dried up and shrivelled, dressed in the habit of their order as they lived, each in his own recess, grim and gaunt, waiting through the ages the last trumpet call. This ghastly exhibition was closed to the public many years ago, but not before the artist in horrors had transferred a very truthful counterfeit to the Mainguard

walls. In this room is shown an accurate presentment of a window open, and through it peers a small but malevolent devil, the peculiarity of this picture being that under certain circumstances of the light it becomes so realistic as to be absolutely alarming!

As well as all these works of fancy, the regiments have also left their crests and badges, more or less ornately executed, with the date of their turn of service. On one of the doors is the white goat of the Welsh Fusiliers, and near it the latest contribution, the St. George and the Dragon of the Northumberland Fusiliers Militia, called to Malta in 1900 because of the Boer War, and with the West Kent and the North Lancashire the first Militia to serve in Malta since the Russian War. The Staffordshire knot of these giments of that county is there, as well as the Cross and Thistle of the Camerons, the Irish Rifles' Harp and Crown, and many another honoured badge and motto. Every care is taken to preserve the pictures, but time and the climate are telling on some. So well aware are the authorities of the value of this fresco collection, that one of the statements signed by the officer of the guard on giving up his twenty-four hours' watch and ward is, that he leaves the drawings on the walls in the same condition that he found them, and it would go hard with any rash person who tried to interfere with these precious relics.



*11 hrs. Copyright.*

*Forbes Carter.*

SPECIMENS BY EVERY REGIMENT.

*Another part of the walls.*