

Machinery does nearly everything from field to field-kitchen. But it still needs sharp eyes and quick hands to pick out discoloured and broken peas.

very speedily. "Is it true?" I asked, "that a very small flounder could be quick-frozen, kept for years and shipped to London, then be thawed out and swim down the Thames?" He hadn't heard that fish story, he said. But his assistant, who knew something about how fish stayed alive in frozen streams, reckoned it ought at least to be tried.

Turkish Baths for Cabbages

Green flakes, which I was assured, were dehydrated cabbage and would again be indistinguishable in taste and appearance from fresh cabbage by the time they reached the dinner plate, were near-by pouring into tins. ("There's a whole 45lb. crate of cabbage in every 6¾lb. tin and, believe me, nothing lost—not even vitamins—except the water.")

Following up the process in reverse I passed the drying "tunnel" and the steam "blancher" which is a sort of Turkish Bath that "inactivates the enzymes"—enzymes being the "some-things" (nobody would be more specific) that cause change and decomposition in food.

Then, past the mechanical peelers I met the manager right under the miniature Sydney Bridge along which the fresh-stripped cabbages roll in. "You've seen only 15 per cent of our output so far," said he, steering me forward to the fresh-packing floor. "Though we seem to be called a 'dehydration factory' all over New Zealand, 85 per cent at least of the vegetables we send to the Pacific go fresh and arrive fresh. Canned, quick-frozen, and dehydrated foods are all 'subsistence'—stuff for the landing parties."

Girls with Knives

The general mechanisation seemed scarcely to have reached this end of the factory. The floor was piled with small mountains of vegetables dumped straight from the lorries, stacks almost as large of rejected outer leaves, and a back row of cases being wired or nailed for the refrigerated train to Auckland. Only knives, sheathed in the waistbelt when not in use, seemed to assist the scores of women and girls, half buried in the busy confusion. But this was all first impression. The "overflow" tables indeed worked standing, but the central bench was a most ingenious contrivance of

belts which brought each girl's cabbage to her stool and carried it off again in her own time—the strippings into a waiting lorry, perfect vegetables into the Pacific crates, and those she rejected as not quite fit to stand the long hot voyage, out to the coring-machine and the dehydrator. "Collapsed" and blemished vegetables that could only infect others if exported were thus given surgical treatment, dried, and saved.

Despite this salvage system, I had, as every visitor must, to comment on the great heaps of waste. "But no wonder," said a forewoman. "Think how much you lose on every cabbage in your own kitchen and then multiply it by millions. We pack about 1½ million pounds of cabbages and carrots every week here. The week before Christmas week we packed over 2 million pounds. The office says we do 2,500 crates of cabbage and 1,500 crates of carrots every day. With the 2,000 extra cases that they pack in the Internal Marketing Division itself in Auckland that means 6,000 cases a day."

The manager suitably received my parting congratulations on his machinery—some from America, some locally-made to his specifications. But it was over his staff that he grew enthusiastic. "The best team of girls we ever had! They make their work together a social event and are always ready to put in extra time when we are rushing to fill a ship. There are 'permanent casuals' whom we send a bus round the country hereabouts to pick up for week-end shift work and sudden calls. Many of them are housewives who do the job mainly as public service—though the overtime pay, of course, is also not unattractive. Then there are our permanents—some of them girls manpowered from shops and offices who thought they would hate the job, but don't now they are here. They live in the Americans' camp, a very cheerful community, and seem to enjoy the recreational facilities and the countryside."

"What! Are the Americans still there?"

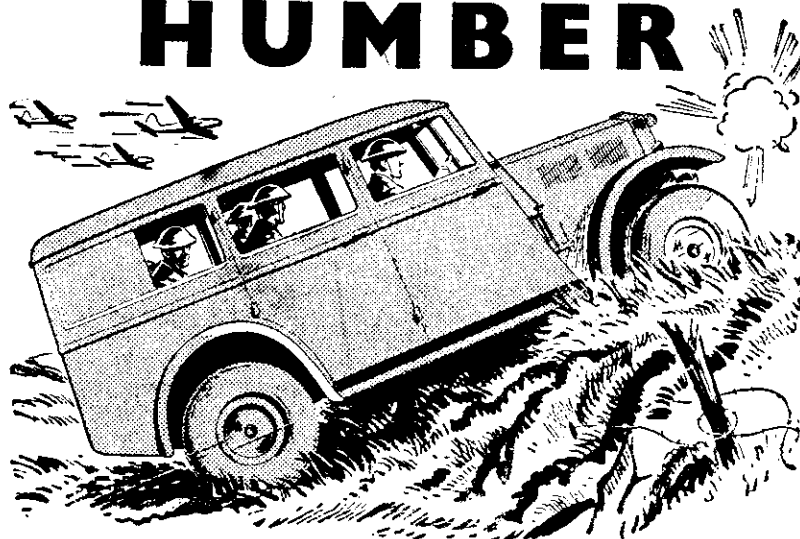
"No, only the camp they built. Do you think if they were we'd need to man-power anyone!"

—A.M.R.

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