

# OILING THE DOMESTIC WHEELS

## Reconciliation Is Only One of A City Missioner's Many Jobs

IT all started over the evening paper.

Mr. X went home tired after his day's work and buried his nose in the births, marriages, and deaths column. He grunted that it was a pity poor old Bill had gone—good chap, old Bill. Then he scanned the local and general, glanced through the leader, and settled down with the cable news.

But Mrs. X, too, had been working all day—in the house. She was dying for a chat to somebody.

Silence was broken only by the rattle of the dinner things; the children were in bed. And still Mr. X said nothing.

She couldn't stand it any longer and exploded. "For Heaven's sake, say something! What's going on in town? Who have you met and what's the news?"

Mr. X said something about a tired man settling down to read his paper in peace.

And then, from such a tiny smoulder, came the sparks. There was talk of separation, even divorce. But one of them had a glimmering of common sense and suggested seeing a conciliator—one of the men appointed officially to endeavour to bring reconciliation to estranged men and wives before domestic differences are aired before a judge.

"Now, you two," said the conciliator, "let's get down to facts. How did it all start? What, you stand there and have the nerve to tell me that a few sheets of newsprint caused all this fuss? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves." And the couple laughed, and walked out arm in arm.

Homes are not always upset by such trifling things as newspapers. The in-laws top the poll as intentional or unintentional mischief-makers.

"Mind you," says mother, "I'm only trying to do my best. I wouldn't interfere for the world. It's entirely your affair, but . . ."

Now all this may be taken as a few lines of script from any everyday scene in a conciliator's life. Conciliators are carefully picked men of worldly experience and a healthy appreciation of the

values and the limitations of applied psychology. Not every quarrelling couple embrace on the doorstep; but successes far outweigh failures.

### Seeing the City Missioner

This work, about which the man in the street knows little, is going on in all four centres. To get an idea of just how it works *The Listener* called on the Rev. Harry Squires, of the Wellington City Mission, the other day, for although he cares for boys and girls in financial difficulties and for the derelicts and dead-beats, conciliation is one of the most important branches of his job.

It was not an easy interview at first. The telephone interrupted us half-a-dozen times in a quarter of an hour. One of Harry Squires' replies to a caller was: "Thanks very much; I'll send a carrier along as soon as I can get one."

To us he remarked: "Lots of generous people about but some seem to think I can pick a carrier out of the skies."

The Wellington City Mission is more or less typical of missions in various other parts of New Zealand. It looks after the unfortunate, the people who, through sickness or ill-luck, are up against things economically.

### We Visited "Dumps"

It was started about 30 years ago by the Rev. T. Fielden Taylor. Before that it was just a little mission attached to St. Peter's Church. Harry Squires took charge in 1939 and to-day the mission covers the whole city. With experience of London squalor, Mr. Squires says he has seen nothing to compare with some of the sights Wellington can offer in living conditions. He took us to one or two places he calls "dumps."

We remarked that we supposed they were owned by perfectly decent God-fearing people, who probably drew their rents without a qualm.

Mr. Squires didn't reply. He smiled and said: "Take a look at this dump. Twelve-and-six a week for a bed. Must have been having a party last night."

Three broken beds, with the kapoc spilling over the sides made up the furniture. Nobody was at home and no wonder.

In another place we groped our way through darkness. Sunshine had never entered the place, which was dank and almost evil in its poverty. Obviously the best was being done under the circumstances, but the few miserable attempts at decoration proclaimed hopelessness and despair.

"How will the family benefits recently announced by the Government affect your work?"

"A lot of people to-day feel that, because the State is so liberal, there should be no need for a city mission," replied Mr. Squires. "They may be right in some respects. But a lot of our work is done for old-age pensioners, many of whom have the money but are entirely unable to do anything with it because of the housing shortage."

"These people pay exorbitant prices for rooms and often the mission is the only home in the city they can look to. We run a pensioners' club, open all day, and we give them a hot meal for 4d; it costs us about 9d. We also have a service which helps old people to obtain rooms



RUNNING REPAIRS: A scene in the Wellington City Mission, which provides a home for many boys

where possible, and we also provide a free ten days' holiday at Otaki once a year." He mentioned the work for boys and girls, the clubs, sporting facilities, and the way in which boys on low salaries are looked after until they earn enough to pay their own way.

"Many boys come to us from homes broken up through the mother and father disagreeing, or sometimes because they might have got into a spot of bother," Mr. Squires went on. "They find, I think, a happy life with us. Mind you, there is nothing institutional about the mission. Boys are taught leadership; they serve on committees and take part in administration. We try to teach them self-reliance and to give them a good Christian training."

This year 900 people have gone through the rest camp at Otaki, which accommodates 250 at a time.

We asked if there were any special qualifications.

"Simply a large family with an over-worked mother, family sickness or general disability, causing hardship," was the answer. The charge is 1/- a day.

### Official Support

Mr. Squires made it plain that he looks on the reconciliation of estranged husbands and wives as a vital work. He came back to the subject again and mentioned that he had official backing under the Domestic Proceedings Act in his decisions and actions.

"Of course," he said, "when people just won't be reconciled, it's a case for the magistrate or judge."

While we were talking there was a knock at the office door. A young man wanted to hand the missioner some money. He was thanked and instructed to take it to the man who looks after the accounts.

"What was that for?" we asked.

"Oh, that chap is just back from the war. His wife cleared out while he was away and he just dropped in to pay off a bit of board for his boy."

Advice to the domestically unhappy does not invariably solve problems, as

Mr. Squires readily admits. Some cases take hours or weeks. Not long ago some people in a far North Island town wrote for his advice and offered to pay his fare and put him up if he would visit them. He did, talked things over through the night and believes that eventually their differences will disappear.

For some reason or other—he didn't say which—the most difficult period of marriage is between the second and third years; at least that is his view from what he has seen. Once people get over that, all is well, generally speaking.

### Correcting a Misconception

The talk went back to the boys again. "Just in case there might be a wrong impression, let me quote the following conversation between the warden and a visitor being shown over the hostel one evening," said Mr. Squires.

"He seems a very nice lad—what has he done?"

"What do you mean—what has he done?"

"Well, hasn't he been in trouble or something?"

"Oh dear, no."

"Well, I seem to be under a misconception. I thought all your boys were boys who had gone wrong, or something."

The missioner emphasised that the hostel is not a cheap boarding-house. Its whole purpose is to provide a home for a boy who for any reason needs one.

Towards the end of November the mission will hold a thanksgiving fair, the main object of the proceeds to be the provision of a helping hand to all those in need.

"So glad you looked in; hooray," said Mr. Squires.

We, too, were glad we had looked in, and thankful that fortune had smiled on us to the extent of our being able to take a bus home to a suburb with a garden-surrounded house and a bright log fire to give comfort while writing this article.



REV. HARRY SQUIRES  
Successes far outweigh failures