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# HARDY'S

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"Hundreds of schoolchildren marched through Hamilton to-day"

## The Pied Piper of Hamilton

(Written for "The Listener" by LAURA M. NOBES)

I HAVE just witnessed a scene which makes me think that the Pied Piper of Hamelin has changed his address to Hamilton, New Zealand. Perhaps he likes the Waikato "deep and wide, which washes the walls on the southern side." What a poem Robert Browning might have written if he had been in Victoria Street this morning!

Hundreds of schoolchildren marched through Hamilton to-day, each bearing a bundle containing clothing for the "Save the Children" campaign. I have seen numerous parades during the past few years, most of them in some way connected with war, but this was the most moving.

It would be easy to write a dozen paragraphs comparing the happy lot of the children of Hamilton and other New Zealand towns with that of 45,000,000 unfortunate children in the United Kingdom and Europe, but that is too well known to need stressing. Just let us say that the children of Hamilton are among the most beautiful and the best-cared-for in the world. If an aeroplane were suddenly to swoop out of the clouds and zoom over the rooftops, there would be no shudders in the playgrounds of Hamilton, only happy healthy shrieks of delight.

Everybody knows the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Something about the scene in Hamilton this morning reminded me of that old story. Probably never before had Hamilton had an opportunity to see such a mass congregation of its children. They came together from far and wide, in laughing groups of twos and threes, in big roistering crowds of a dozen or more, and in pairs, a big sister holding the hand of a small brother. Every street and almost every house contributed its quota, and every child, even the tiny five-year-olds, carried a bundle of clothes that would shortly be worn by children on the other side of the world.

CHILDREN make enthusiastic workers when roused, and the teachers of these Hamilton children, and the organisers of the campaign, must have

done a good job. Two scouts had constructed a hammock between their bicycles which contained enough garments to clothe a small orphanage. Those children who could not spare clothes of their own canvassed the neighbours, and many a set of small garments that had been put away for years was taken out of its mothballs. The story is told of a little girl who went into the city's largest drapery shop and asked for one of the garments on display "for a poor little girl in Europe." The article was priced at considerably more than the sticky 6d she proffered, but the assistant saw the manager, and it was a very pleased child who went out of that shop.

The morning of the procession dawned fine and sunny. The children began to assemble early, and by eleven o'clock there were thousands of them, girl guides, boy scouts, junior Red Cross workers, Girls' Life Brigaders, the representatives of half-a-dozen other organisations, and hundreds of ordinary schoolchildren. Led by bands the long procession of bundle-laden children straggled off. Each section carried a banner indicating the name of the school or organisation represented. The National Film Unit must have seen a story in it, for its cameraman was there. At one of Hamilton's theatres the long procession was augmented by hundreds of children from the Young New Zealanders' Club. With the children three and four abreast the procession was perhaps half-a-mile long, and it took approximately half-an-hour to pass by. At the terminal point each child threw his bundle on a huge heap, and then went home. That was all there was to it. It may not sound very exciting, but to me it was.

BY a strange coincidence, on the evening before this unique procession the cables stated that the statue of an unknown child, commemorating the thousands of children killed in Europe during the war, had been unveiled in Prague. It is a sad commentary on our civilisation, but somehow when you think of things like this procession you do not feel quite so bad.

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