

WHAT TO DO? WHERE TO GO?

*When Soldiers Ask Questions The W.W.S.A.
Information Bureau Often Knows The Answers*

BY this time many members of the Clerical Division of the W.W.S.A. will know that the asking of awkward questions isn't the prerogative of those members of the CBS staff who conduct Information Please sessions. For, eight weeks ago, the W.W.S.A. Clerical Division opened at the Wellington Railway Station an Information Bureau for members of the armed forces, and since then they've been hard at work answering questions from nine o'clock in the morning to eight and nine o'clock at night.

Last evening I strayed past the bureau at about six o'clock. There's a notice board outside which gives information about Church services, transport, and current entertainments, and a black-board on which appears the names of those for whom messages are left. On the other side of the counter two young women were on duty. I asked them about the Bureau.

Arranging Hospitality

"I suppose the most important information we give is about accommodation," said one. She showed me a notebook in which were listed the names of public and private hotels and their tariffs. "We're able to tell them roughly how much each place will cost them and then they can choose between them. But in many cases we're able to arrange private hospitality for the week-end or even longer. That's the service we're proudest of. You see many of the boys don't want to stay in hotels—perhaps some of them are from the country and prefer to be somewhere more homelike, or perhaps they just want to get away from other khaki-clothed shapes for a while."

Alternatives to Drinking

"And do you arrange hospitality for members of the fighting services of other countries?"

(Continued from previous page)

blankets, coats, hot water bottles, etc., if possible. A teaspoonful of sal volatile in a little water or hot tea, coffee, or hot water may be used to stimulate. Send for medical help.

What You Need

Well, then, this is what you need to have on call:—

For wounds: Bandages—One triangular and several one-inch and two-inch bandages. Lint—Plain sterilised, 4 oz. packet. Adhesive plaster—1 yard or less. Tincture of iodine or Friar's Balsam—4 oz. of either. Disinfectant—Lysol or Dettol, a small bottle.

For eye injuries: Castor oil, 1 ounce.
For burns: Salt, 1 ounce. Tannic acid or Gentian violet jelly, one tube; or vaseline and eucalyptus; or codliver oil.

From household stocks: Aspirin, safety pins, scissors.

Not a very big list; one that won't make more than a tiny hole in the purse, and yet will be very useful when the call comes.

(Next week: "For and Against Cooking," by Dr. Muriel Bell).

"Oh yes, we do that, too. I agree with Major Kirk's recent statement that New Zealanders should do all they can to show the Americans what New Zealand homes are like. It must be horrible to come to a strange city and find there's nowhere much to go and nothing much to do but dance and drink. And very often they find the drinking part difficult. I know we had lots of inquiries from Americans: 'Say, sister, where can I get a drink after six o'clock?'—inquiries which we weren't able to answer. I feel that the provision of private hospitality on a nation-wide scale is the only way of preventing 'Let's go and have a drink,' from being almost the only answer to 'What shall we do?'"

"I agree with you," I said. "And what other questions do you get besides the one about drinks after six?"

"Quite a lot about entertainments. We have the list outside, but we often get consulted about which is the best show in town. And often we help people who have, say, two hours in Wellington, and want to know somewhere to go.

"Human Interest" Problems

"Do you ever get problems of the Dorothy Dix variety?"

"The nearest we've got to that is

arranging pen-friends for lonely soldiers. We've done that quite often. But there's quite a lot of human interest in this job. We often help to bring people together. One day a soldier arrived in Wellington and asked if we could locate a relation of his—he knew the name but no address—whom he hadn't seen for twelve years. We did some frantic ring-up and in the end the happy soldier was borne away by the long-lost relative. On another occasion some one rang up to ask if we could please give Private—a message, and told us he would be coming off the Palmerston North train. We enlisted the aid of the railway loud speaker, and to make quite sure one of our girls tackled almost every man in uniform till she found the one she was looking for.

Aid For a Bridegroom

"But perhaps our most exciting task was helping a young soldier to get to Martinborough in time for his own wedding. He was to have caught the rail-car, but it was full up and they wouldn't let him on. He was frantic when he came to us. However, we looked up all sorts of time-tables and found that he

could get a service car to Featherston and a taxi from there. We haven't yet heard whether he got there in time."

"We jot the more interesting things down in our diary," said the other helper, showing me a long black book. There were notes about the sewing on of buttons ("Yes, we do emergency mending," said my informant), the lending of books and golf clubs, and brief records of what the imagination could expand into "human interest" stories of meetings and partings and wartime romances.

The Unrecorded Things

But I thought rather of the things unrecorded in the diary, the long hours spent in answering, or waiting to answer, the same old questions of when buses go somewhere and when boats go somewhere else, of what's on in town to-night and how can I get from here to where I want to go. Or, worse still, of the hours when nothing happened, when the station was cold and draughty and you wanted to get home to your dinner and your book, but you waited on till the scheduled hour because it was just possible that there might be a soldier or a sailor or an airman who might want to know something you might be able to tell him. But as I wasn't wearing a hat to take off I just said, "I think it's a very fine idea; having this Information Bureau," and left it at that.

WHAT THE AMERICANS LIKE

DO not wait for somebody to ring you up and tell you that there are men in port. Come to town, take these men to your arms, to your heart, and to your home, and you will be doing the work of a Good Samaritan." This was the plea made by Major J. R. Kirk, M.B.E., speaking at a luncheon held in Wellington recently under the auspices of the British - American Co-operation movement, at which he urged that New Zealanders should take the initiative in offering hospitality to visiting members of the American forces.

However, before we start making these wide-open gestures with hearts, doors, and arms, let us consider what, apart from Dorothy Lamour, the average young American wants. According to Miss Lorna Akroyd, chairman of the Wellington Spinners' Club, he wants to dance, and particularly to jitterbug. "Last time the American ships were in," said Miss Akroyd, "we turned on a special Monday night session for the American boys. Usually we're only open on the week-end. And they certainly appreciated it."

They Like Clean Faces

"We found them most appreciative and very polite. They told us that New Zealand girls were pretty cute and that it was a change to see clean faces. (We realised afterward that this meant faces comparatively free from cosmetics.) Most of them thought New Zealand was slow because you couldn't get drinks

on Sunday and the picture theatres and cabarets weren't open, but an American doctor whom I met said that he thought it was a marvellous idea having clubs for men of the services. In his part of America they are unheard of; instead the wealthier members of the community contribute to a fund which buys cabaret and theatre tickets and distributes them among men of the services.

"And the Americans were certainly a social success as far as we were concerned. I think we'd all learned to jitterbug by the time the show finished at 10.30."

* * *

"I THINK the best kind of hospitality to offer the American boys is good food," said Mrs. Learmont, organiser of the Y.W.C.A. Forces Hospitality Club, in her rich New Jersey accent. Mrs. Learmont, who came to New Zealand from New York only a year and eight months ago, is well qualified to speak on the subject of hospitality for Americans. "The trouble is that they're used to a different kind of food from what we get here, and they probably won't feel very happy in a restaurant. That's why private hospitality is a good idea."

"Of course there's the important question of what to drink. Americans don't drink tea in the afternoons the way you do here—it's always Coca-Cola over there. I've been thinking that our club had better get in a case or two for next time the Americans come here."

"Apart from the food they need companionship," went on Mrs. Learmont. "They need girls to talk to. Yes, they're mostly keen on dancing. And I think Major Kirk's suggestion that taking them sightseeing is a very good idea. You needn't use up petrol, however. They'd be tickled to go places in trams. They won't ever have seen such tram-routes before."

"We'll be pleased to see them here any week-end, though we can't turn anything special on for them unless we know beforehand that they're coming. There were a few round last time a ship was in, and they joined in with the others dancing on Saturday and playing ping-pong and checkers on Sunday."

"What do the Americans think of the New Zealand girls?"

"Several of them told me that they were much harder to 'chin the breeze with' than the Australian girls. Which means that they're not so easy to get casually acquainted with."

"And what did your girls think of the Americans?"

"They said some mighty nice things to me about them—possibly because they thought I'd be pleased. But my experience is that they get thrilled about them even before they actually meet them."

"Don't you?" I asked.

"Yes," came the rich New Jersey accent, "but I married a New Zealander."

—M.B.