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STORY OF A LIFE

Wellington To Wellington With Three Wars On The Way

THREE chickens, and a letter from Government House—it was almost worthwhile being ill for that. Other good things happened. Many people wrote kindly letters, many sent the little gifts that become such great events for a patient. But King's Corporal G. E. Smith was most impressed by the three chickens, and the letter from Government House set the seal of authority on his memories.

From a home on the heights of Brooklyn, Wellington, Mr. and Mrs. Smith look out over a spacious view; back over spacious, busy years. Round them they have gathered their family—the older members in photographs and files of letters, the younger ones helping their mother, or bringing up grandchildren.

The story of that family is a story of what the world can do to two unsuspecting ordinary people.

First, it separates them by twelve thousand miles. Young Smith goes to school in Wellington, plays in the open spaces the city had not then filled with factories, falls into the harbour, goes into long pants to ride a horse looking after stock on a coastal station near the Capital City. At the other end of the world a girl studies to be a nurse, and has qualified in England by the time young Smith in New Zealand is wondering how to get to the Boer War.

So it all fell into place, and all the pieces came together. There was a push from the New Zealand corner of the pattern, some impetus from England. South Africa helped to shape it, then Canada, then England again, and France; and now it has all come together at Number 19 Apuka Street, Brooklyn, Wellington.

Smith reported as a volunteer to go with the First Contingent to South Africa, with his own mount. But they were only taking active members of the Volunteers, so he walked along the quay and found a ship bound for Britain. The master of the ship, asked for a passage, discovered that he knew an uncle of young Smith's in England, so he got his passage and finally sailed from Gisborne to Lyttelton where he went for a walk and from outside a pub on the hill saw the ship sailing. But he had all those dates to keep with points on the map of a distant world over the seas—so young Smith caught the ship in Wellington.

The Pattern Takes Shape

Speedily, the pattern of his life began to take shape. In England he met the nurse. After the Boer War he returned to England to be demobilised, and was sent back to New Zealand—without the nurse.

It was proposed that he should break in some land, and make a place for his wife in his own country. When he was ready he wrote to tell her to come. The nurse's mother had something to say. If she was good enough to be his wife she was good enough to come and get.

The same ship was in port. She had sailed to and fro across the world and she came into port just when young Smith wanted her. He sailed for England and was married. This should have ended the story, with a happy-ever-after. But instead of coming to New Zealand they went to Canada. For a while they were separated by circumstances. The young husband drove teams on a railway construction job up around Saskatchewan. When his wife contrived to follow him, she resumed her nursing, this time at a depot of the Royal Canadian North West Mounted Police. The husband was also enrolled.

For a while their story was localised in the Canadian prairie. They remember the captures of criminals, frost, and cold, 160 acres of land to break in, surprise



KING'S CORPORAL G. E. SMITH
The future is less important than the past

parties to which the visitors brought their own food, and a piano if they had one and a waggon to carry it.

King's Corporal

New Zealand was still waiting for the return of G. E. Smith with his wife and, now, his family. They decided to go to New Zealand. But Mrs. Smith wanted to see her mother and home first, so the shape of the story altered again. They went to England on their way to New Zealand and the world swiftly caught them up again in the stream of bigger events. Germany marched through Belgium and the husband went off to his second war.

Of his experiences in the Great War he will say very little. He was detailed for special duties, doing the jobs about which no one ever seems to tell any stories or write any histories. But his pride in the work he had to do is such that he lives with it still—almost, it might be said, lives for it. As a Corporal performing special duties he achieved the rank of "King's Corporal," and now retains this rank as a title not to be exchanged for all the glories of a peerage.

But the story was now being rounded off. It was going to take more than Europe and all its wars to complete the story of young Smith of Wellington. The strange ways of rival nations had broken his journeying between Canada and New Zealand. When the armies fell apart and the world simmered back to peace conferences and influenza epidemics, the Smiths resumed their travels. At last they reach New Zealand. The husband had set off to meet his wife in a world of Emperors, Kings, Tsars, and Kaisers. He began his story while the world looked forward all unknowing to the dramas of a new century.

He sailed out into a world of empires and treaties, and he sailed back home to finish his story in a world of radio, and aeroplanes, and submarines.

The Happy Ending

For King's Corporal Smith the future is still less important than the past. Below him a city is growing and compacting into the flurry of a new age. Around him, a nation is testing the strength of a new feeling of importance. Beyond his view half the world fights bitterly against the other half, all unconscious of the status of King's Cor-

(Continued on next page)



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