

HOME COMING

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inevitable onrush of emotion, the lounge was a cheerful matter-of-fact bustling place, and what with V.A.'s in pink smocks handing round cups of tea and sandwiches and iced cakes, and obliging relatives allocating chairs, emotionalism could for the moment be comfortably shelved. So everybody settled down with a cup of tea and something to eat, and found that for the first time they were talking normally to their newly-returned. Now they could begin to give the headline news from the domestic front, to hold inquests on the letters and parcels that hadn't arrived, and, of course, to find out full details of the progress being made towards recovery. One or two of the women-folk still showed a tendency to dab at their eyes with inadequate handkerchiefs, but the moment they threatened to start in earnest, a cheerful-faced V.A. would be at their elbow offering them the choice of savoury scones or pikelets. And emotion would slink away defeated.

And everybody talked. There are so many things that there isn't room for in letters, and so much had happened even since the last letter had been written. And many of the people present hadn't seen each other for more than two and a-half years. So now they talked, in between the mouthfuls of tea, as there was only this half-hour or so before the menfolk must vanish for another two and a-half years.

The Universal Pronouncement

I joined three uniformed men who were sitting, relatively, at a small table of their own. They looked a little disconsolate. I started unoriginally enough, with the weather. "Lovely sunshine outside. Don't you rather wish you were out in it?"

"No thank you," said the first. "We've just come back from the desert. Had enough sunshine to last us for the rest of our lives." The others nodded agreement.

"Glad to be home," was the universal pronouncement.

"Not that we minded being over there," said another. "Good fun while it lasted, and a good kind of experience to look back on. But we're glad we've got to the point of looking back on it."

All three were happy at the thought of going back to where they left off to go to the war. "I've got a wife and children waiting for me at New Plymouth. My oldest boy will be six now and going to school. He was only four when I went away."

"Won't you be bored going back to the routine of office life? And won't you miss some of the excitement?" I asked.

"No fear," they all replied. "We're too excited about getting home to worry about missing any other kind."

Yes, it was a cheerful gathering. The talk and laughter which had subsided during the speeches of welcome rose up again behind me as I left the hall. I walked out of the hospital into the sunshine, and paused for a moment to look back at the hospital ship.

Two ambulances were drawn up near the gangway, and they were bringing out on stretchers the patients who weren't well enough yet to go to a reception.

—M.B.

PAPER, PAPER EVERYWHERE, BUT NOT A BIT TO WASTE

THE Wellington Waste Paper Depot is tucked away somewhere behind a main street, down a small lane just wide enough for a lorry to pass. Almost the only shining new thing in the whole place is the large yellow sign, "Waste Paper Depot", which directs one into a grey concrete yard, its corners heaped high with bulging sacks, and then through a door into a small office.

Here sits a sergeant of the W.W.S.A. surrounded by the usual office paraphernalia. It is probably her voice you hear when you ring up to ask whether someone can come along and collect your rubbish. Most of her time, she told me, is taken up answering the telephone, but there's plenty of other work for her to do as well, for it is she who supervises the coming and going of the waste paper.

"I'll take you through to see our helpers", she said. We passed through the outer basement. Here, stacked ready to be sent to the paper mills, were piles of magazines and novels—among them I recognised *Eric*, or *Little by Little*—old ledgers and account books.

We passed into the next room. A deep bin ran along one side of the large basement, and into this, from the open space into the street above, lorries unloaded their cargo of waste paper. The waste pile reached from floor almost to ceiling, and overflowed the confines of the bin so that the sorters were standing ankle deep in paper.

I spoke to one of them, a cheerful grey-haired little woman wearing once-white denims and a bandana round her

head. "I come just one afternoon a week", she said. "No, I can't say I find the work very congenial." She picked up a handful of the papers between two gloved hands and looked them over before dropping them into the baling press. "The people who send in the waste paper are so careless about it. Look at that." She pointed to a large box full of carbon paper in one corner. "We ask people specially not to include carbon paper or greasy lunch paper in the stuff they send us, but it all goes in just the same. We get lots of other things, too, tacks and broken glass and banana skins. Our theory is that they just sweep the offices out and send us absolutely everything."

"Yes", chimed in the other helper, busy sewing up a bale of pressed waste paper ready for the mill. "Did you hear about the dead rat we found? That's one of the reasons we wear gloves now". She whistled cheerfully as she turned back to her sacking needle.

"I'm afraid there wasn't very much to see", apologised the sergeant, as she led me back past her little office. I gave an absent-minded denial. My heart was too full of admiration for those women in the waste paper depot who came back to their work week by week condemned to battle not only with lunch papers and vermin, but to fight a continuous struggle against their own housewifely instincts—which would of course suggest the copper fire. Civic responsibility has in them, I decided, reached its finest flowering.

—M.I.

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