

# HOSPITAL TRAIN

ON a brilliant morning some weeks ago, the train came in early—so early that, apart from myself, there were only three women awaiting its arrival. It was not till somewhat later in the morning that relatives and friends were able to gather in numbers in the lounge of the Casualty Clearing Station to welcome their men back home.

As on the previous occasion when I was present it was a cheerful and matter-of-fact function. The men who had just returned were not the seriously wounded—most were hospital cases now convalescent, and the train journey had done nothing to damp their spirits or curb their delight at being home.

But for many of the returned men, home was still a day or two's journey away. However, as one South Islander said to me, "I've been waiting three years to get back, so I suppose I can live through another twelve hours." So, while their more fortunate comrades allowed themselves to be crawled over by toddling sons and daughters and wept upon by wives and mothers, those without relatives busied themselves philosophically at the billiards table.

And at a safe distance from the billiards table, wandered various small girls with be-ribboned hair or small boys with socks pulled up in honour of the

big occasion, watching the players and waiting till Dad would have finished saying all the things he wanted to say to Mother, and be prepared to take them on his knee once more. His present neglect doesn't seem to worry them, however.

\* \* \*

FROM where I sit I can see six women dabbing at their eyes with ineffectual handkerchiefs, and at least another three surrendering themselves to the delight of having, after all these years, a masculine shoulder to cry upon.

But suddenly a new note is introduced. A hospital official announces in ringing tones: "All men from Ward Three will now be paid." Disentangling themselves from the clinging arms of wives, sweethearts, and children, the men of Ward Three rise as one man and hurry to the door.

Now for the first time the room is comparatively empty. I single out the three women I noticed on the station platform and approach them.

"My fiancé," the first explains. "I haven't seen him for two and a-half years, and when I got a wire to say he was coming I just couldn't believe it! I'm so happy I don't know what I'm doing." She dabbed at her eyes again.

"I got some time off work so that I could see him here, and I'm supposed to be back by now but I'm just not going. I don't care whether I get the sack or not—I just can't think of anything but Charlie's being back. How much longer do you think we'll have to stay here?"

I don't know.

\* \* \*

ON an adjoining couch sat a motherly-looking woman in black accompanied by a small dark-eyed boy. I wondered whether she was the mother or the wife of the young soldier I had seen her with.

"Oh, Doug? No, he's a boy who used to work with us on the farm. We're awfully fond of Doug, aren't we?" she asked her youngest. "My, it was a job getting to that train in time. However, George (that's my eldest—he's twelve) said he'd finish off the milking and I managed to get the first train in and met Doug."

"Is he back for good?"

"We don't know yet, but we're hoping so. We haven't had anyone to help us on the farm since George left. But it isn't only that, he's just like one of the family."

The third member of the platform party was smoking an impatient cigarette. "I wish they'd hurry up and finish with him," she complained. "I haven't seen him for almost three years and now they keep taking him away to be paid or medically examined or something."

"We'd only been married a month before he went away," she explained. "And then he goes all the way to Cairo and hurts his leg playing football and then gets sent back home. It's so silly. If he was going to hurt his leg playing football why couldn't he have done it here?"

I couldn't answer this question, so she continued.

"Everybody said the train was going to be late this morning, but I got there

a good quarter of an hour early just in case. Then I noticed a train stopping at another platform, and soldiers getting out, and I just tore straight over the rails on to the other platform. I didn't care about being fined. I just couldn't afford to waste time going round."

Soldiers had begun to trickle back into the room in twos and threes, and the eyes and attention of my companion had fixed themselves upon the door. This, I felt, was no place for me. Unnoticed by either waiting women or home-coming heroes, I strolled out of the lounge.

—M.B.

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# The Campaign is in full swing— so what?

The journals of New Zealand are taking good notice of the Campaign for Christian Order. Did you see the remarkable references in 'Truth', or in the 'Standard', the 'Exporter', the 'Listener' and in many daily papers? These were spontaneous utterances by those who feel that this Campaign has something to say that *must* be said, and *must* be listened to.

It would be fair to say that the broadcast meetings, the special addresses in the Churches, the booklets, the 'Any Questions' feature have created perhaps the biggest stir that has ever been felt in New Zealand on religious matters.

But what does it all amount to? A flash in the pan? Is this a momentary excitement which will pass away without having made any lasting difference to anything? It depends on you.

The Campaign can have no result except *through the thought and action of individuals*. It is no use standing outside the Churches and criticising—or even praising. You must get *in* and play your part. God is looking for allies in His perpetual struggle with evil. Will you offer yourself?

You will find help in the fellowship of your Church, and inspiration in the special activities of the next few weeks. Be in Church next Sunday.

## It all depends on God and God depends on ME

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