

## Homecoming

THESE boys are back, and one more worry over  
With brothers, sons and lovers safe at home;  
Yet there are those who henceforth and for ever  
Must wait for footsteps that will never come.

YES, some there are who went away as proudly  
Whom bitter times did not so kindly guard;  
And Though its voice is never raised as loudly  
We know that there is bitterness as well as pride.

SO now, though banners wave in acclamation  
For those who fought and won, is it not apt  
To shed our tears in lamentation  
Of those whom tears no longer can corrupt?

FOR wars, like life, have double-sided ledgers.  
And neither joy nor grief can stand alone;  
And heroes dead are heroes still, and brothers  
Are brothers yet, though tears alone remain.

—A.V. (12-7-'43).

## TWENTY HOURS IN A TRAIN

### —And a Steam-heated Welcome

YOU can carry them for 20 hours on a long and uncomfortable train journey, but they won't grumble: they're so glad to be home again.

I came to Auckland through Monday night and all day Tuesday in the train with men of the 2nd N.Z.E.F. Maybe you'd think there would be a lot of noise, card-playing, drinking, loud laughter and story-telling. No. The men were quiet. No rowdiness, not much excitement: just Auckland men sitting back waiting—to get to Auckland.

Here are some impressions.

WELLINGTON, Monday morning:

Auckland men clambering out of port-holes to get ashore—officers shut their eyes—to walk on Wellington pavements, to look in Wellington shops, to visit friends, in short, to be back in New Zealand as quickly as possible, in spite of the order to stay on board until the time for their particular train to leave.

I followed them about the Wellington streets. Here was one small chap rushing straight from the ship into a florist's shop. He came out with a bouquet of daffodils. Five hours later I saw him again. He was still clutching his bouquet of daffodils, but in the meantime, he had been to a few other places, and was not rushing about so fast. Again, much later, much wearier, much colder, I saw him on the Palmerston North station—still clutching his daffodils. And, at last, on Tuesday evening, there he was in the bright glare on the Auckland station: I lost him in the crowd as he disappeared with his daffodils. I wonder whose daffodils they are now?

YES, at Paekakariki the boys could buy tea, etc. But at Palmerston North the buffet was closed. So one of the welfare organisations will be on deck with hot drinks and sandwiches, I thought. Sure enough there were three women handing out tea.

"What organisation do you belong to?" I asked them. "We don't belong to any," they said, "We just thought we'd do what we could do for these boys." They were the proprietors of a small restaurant in the town.

DAYLIGHT, Tuesday: Here and there a group of people on a veranda, waving a welcome. Later, a

whole playground full of school children cheering themselves hoarse and jumping with excitement.

Ahead of me there was a man who seemed to grow more silent and more solemn as we travelled north. I watched him. I wouldn't say he was exactly worried, but he was nervous and on his toes. He got up and sat down again. Put his things together and put them away again. His station came after Ohakune (tea, coffee, pies, sandwiches). He got out on to a crowded platform, and I stood near him. He looked slowly and methodically through the crowd; and then again. The train was just going and I was climbing aboard.

"You looking for someone?" I asked. "Well, I rather thought my wife might meet me," he said.

I got on the train, and he was still looking as we drew out.

INTO Auckland, evening: Yes, the men were on their toes all right. Suddenly, a piercing shriek. And then, all through the station yards, on every line, engines big and engines little took up the tune, hoot-hoot, whistle-whistle, full steam up, valves full open, the greatest noise you ever heard in your life—a steam-heated welcome from Auckland's engines to Auckland's heroes.

And then—Auckland's men and women welcoming their sons and husbands and brothers and sweethearts back home. A great welcome.

—B.

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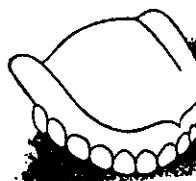
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