

YOUTH HOSTELS

By Lieut.-Commander R. R. BEAUCHAMP.

IF THE Army could be asked collectively at the end of five years of war what it would think of a little walking and camping it would probably reply collectively, promptly, and blasphemously that there was nothing doing. But wait a bit. When you have exchanged the corns on your feet for corns somewhere else, acquired from sitting in your arm-chair, when the elbow that now quivers at the thought of raising a foaming beaker has wearied of that expensive and transitory pleasure—in fact, when the old gratuity has gone west and you settle down to your peacetime occupation with a five-day week and a neat suburban home—then you may think differently. So, when the wanderlust gets you again, you should know that there is an organization whose business is to set your feet on the road on a fine spring morning and to provide good and cheap lodging at the end of each day. This organization is the Youth Hostels Association of New Zealand.

The name "Youth Hostels" does not imply any age-limit. In fact, while the association is re-forming and building again the activities which have lapsed during the war, it is to the more experienced and mature tramper and camper that we must appeal. That's where you old soldiers come in. Boys and girls should always form the bulk of our membership, and they will be the ones who will benefit most. But the organization of a chain of hostels and the setting-up of standards of road courtesy and hostel behaviour will depend on the older members. Briefly, the objective is to make it possible for open-air-minded people all over New Zealand to get about their country on foot (or horseback or cycle) knowing there will be suitable accommodation at the end of every day—and all within the means of the lightest pocket. This is not easy; but it is important. It is an alternative to the cinema and dance hall.

There is a wider aspect, too—that of international fellowship. Our association

will be closely tied to similar bodies which have long worked in Australia, England, Scotland, and America, and on the Continent. Cheap international travel facilities for our members is one of our main objectives. Our Government now gives a rail concession of one-fourth the fare to members—no small consideration if you live in Auckland and wish to explore the Ruahine Ranges or Banks Peninsula.

The work now being done by the central committee of the Youth Hostels Association is—first, the previous hostel chains on Banks Peninsula, the West Coast, and the Oxford district are being re-established and other openings explored; second, public opinion is being mobilized, and tramping clubs and keen individuals up and down the country are being brought together so that we can have the numerical and financial backing without which our work can only be local and spasmodic. Returned servicemen who are keen on tramping for themselves or their children or for other people's children can help the movement. You may live in the country and have huts or shearers' quarters that could be used as a hostel for most of the year. Above all, your experience of getting about the world on your own resources, and your knowledge of the fellowship of desert and road and camp can help the young people of this country.

War Memorial Hostels may interest you. You may think, as we do, that the stone obelisks and fancy gateways which perpetuate the memory of so many who fell in the last war are not the best that could be done. You may think youth hostels may be more suitable.

So keep that army pack and that handy sleeping-bag or tent that the Yanks left behind, and, when you come back, get in touch with the Youth Hostels Association, whose secretary (address, 14 Fleming Street, North Beach, Christchurch) will give you all information.