

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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HOSTELS WANTED.

Auckland Union, aided by its auxiliaries, has opened a Hostel, and several other Unions are taking steps towards securing premises to open a Hostel. The need for these "Homes away from home" is great. The following letter, which appeared in the "Evening Post," Wellington, some time ago, does not overstate the need:—

You are afraid you are ignorant of what I mean? Then, I'll tell you. Here they are, these our dear sisters. They work for a "living." Very right and proper, too. Yes, they would be the first to say so. If they work very well they get, say, 5s a day, perchance as clerks in the Savings Bank, or any other Bank, or maybe in an office. If they happen to "live" in New Zealand's chief city—Wellington—where is the seat of her Legislature, and where are gathered together the citizens voted into place and power by the Dominion, to look closely and carefully after her interests, if they—our dear sisters—happen to live in Wellington, of course away from home, this is how some of them live. They, two of them, generally, together hire a room, a single room, probably a back room, in a home where the tenant, finding it difficult to make both ends tie, "lets" to "business young women engaged during the day." There are others in the house, also "business young women," so that it is to all intents and purposes an unregistered "lodging-house." In the room, some 12ft. square, if they are lucky in finding a "large" room, are generally

two bedsteads known as "hospital" beds, that is to say, they've no spring mattresses, but are laced with wires similar to a mouse trap or bird cage. On top of the wires is a thin "bed," a pillow, and somebody's blankets. If the room own a recess, a pair of curtains are hung up, attached to a shelf, in the underpart of which some dress-hooks are screwed. This is the double "wardrobe." There's no fireplace in the room. There is a dressing chest and a glass in the room. One chair—the second "sister" stands, or sits on the bed. For this room the two "business" girls pay twelve or fourteen shillings the week. Washing is done in the bathroom, not in the bath. The health inspectors are far too busy to trouble about the water supply in such crowded districts as "let" rooms. Twenty-five minutes to run out two gallons of cold water, and all the household waiting to wash faces, let alone bodies, in the bathroom.

"Why doesn't the tenant ask the landlord to see to the matter?" What! Don't you know the answer, in Wellington and Auckland? "I dare not; he would put up the rent half-a-crown a week." "Is he poor, then?"

"Poor!" with a laugh, "he's one of the richest men in the Waikato." In this room, twelve feet square, sleep and "breakfast," "tea," and "dine" on Sundays, two of our dear sisters. It's all they have to come to when the day's work is done! See them then removing hats and jackets, and getting ready for "tea." Hesitantly one of them makes her way to the kitchen, taps, and with

her poor little teapot in her hand, asks politely—so politely—for boiling water.

"Yes, it's just boiled; I've turned out the gas!" And so she pours it on the leaves and carries the pot into the "home" where the two cleverly contrive to get a tea! How they manage to cut the bread, how they find room for the plates, how they endeavour to cheer each other up and make light of all the wretched makeshifts, they never tell! The meal finished they "wash up," by permission of the owner of the home, in the sink, and then retire from the kitchen to spend the evening—how? By the aid of an indifferent light they manage to cut out and make some garment, probably a smart blouse! Tired with the day's work their young backs are bent—they've no comfortable chairs—and their young eyes strained in their endeavour to thread their needles and take up stitches, until bed time, and then . . . bed . . . in a stuffy room, into which the stars look, but which the wealthy women, the "other sisters" of New Zealand, overlook.

We have seen the one-room homes of London; we have heard the vaunted boast that this New Zealand is a "free" country; we have been told that there are no "poor" here; and we look, and reflect thereon. In London of the hundred thousand one-room homes, there is a population of nearly seven millions; in the greater number of these places whole families are together, or at any rate several members of a family in each, but in New Zealand the girls are alone, or with total strangers, and, moreover, they come from a different class to that