

BOYS AND GIRLS

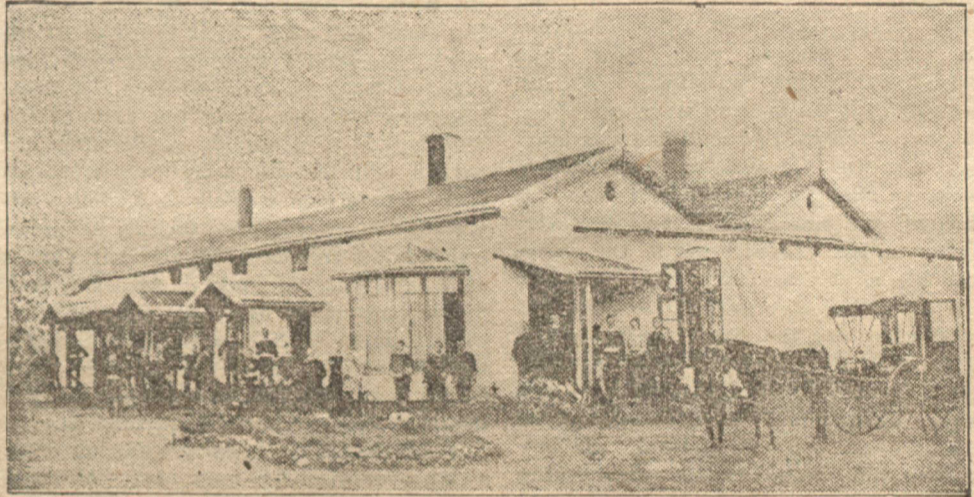
First Report of the Soldier's Home, Wellington

Wellington is situated about one-and-a-half miles from Coonoor. It lies amidst its blue hills with numerous forests of eucalyptus trees. Besides the native bazaar, the Garrison church, the barracks, married quarters, and a few officers' houses studded among the hills, there is little to be seen at Wellington. Dwelling-houses are few and far between. It was therefore no easy matter to obtain a house near to barracks suitable for a Soldiers' Home.

The only house we could obtain was one built by a native. It was built against a bank. It is so frail in structure, some of our friends after we took possession were quite alarmed for our safety, fearing lest in monsoon time we and our house should be washed away! There was no connection in this extraordinary building between the upper and lower parts of the house until we got our landlord to put a wooden stair-case on the outside. The rafters were so slight, we dare not venture to have the soldiers' part above, lest some night the whole thing should come in with a crash! A lady I had known in Soldiers' work in Dublin some years before, rented this building and stayed with me during the first few months in Wellington. She it was who first pointed out to me the need of a home in Wellington. There had been a committee formed in Coonoor and a site had been obtained from Government in the cantonment for building a home, but somehow the grant to build had been withheld. People who knew the need were praying God would send out someone to undertake the work. Wellington is an important place for a Home. It is the Sanatorium of South India for our troops, and besides having one regiment constantly here, for six months of the year hundreds of men from Burmah, Madras, Bangalore, Bellary, etc., etc., come up to the hills, being sent up in most cases by the doctors in order to get up their strength in this good climate. And so it was that while people in Coonoor were praying I was at home waiting on God for guidance. I longed to come to India, but I wanted to be very sure God was sending me. While in this state of mind one day I was talking to a friend, and I told him my difficulty about being sure it was God's will, and he said, 'You have been in India,' (I had worked in the north in a Soldiers' Home for a year and a few months), 'you know the need there—you are able to go,—what more guidance do you want?' From that time I felt definitely led to India. It was hard to dissociate myself from soldiers' work at home and come out, many of my friends being opposed; but the call was clear and definite, and through all the painful 'Goodbyes' he gave peace. So on the morning of October 27, 1898, in the midst of a pour of rain, our carriage stopped at our Wellington Home. It was bare of furniture when we entered except for matting on the floors. I confess my heart sank as I went downstairs and saw the four dark little rooms below. How could they ever be made bright and homelike, and then the chimneys how they smoked! We had not been many hours in possession before little groups of Middlesex men (the depot had gone down for the season) knocked at our upper door. 'We want to

know when this place is going to open,' this was the usual inquiry. My friend and I used, turn and turn about, to take them down the wooden staircase and show them their part. They were kind, and encouraging, said it would be 'all right' when there was some furniture in. They offered assistance and at once took it over as their Home. We used to have little meetings in the rooms while still very bare of

Our nearest neighbor in Wellington is an old man called R. Stewart, who keeps a coffee shop. The soldiers love to visit Stewart's and get a cup of his good tea and a 'yard of his Tamil' (home-made cake). 'Stewart is getting too independent, he is,' one of our first friends said to us before we opened the home,—'he does not put so many eggs in his cakes now, as he did when the depot was up.' Fear-

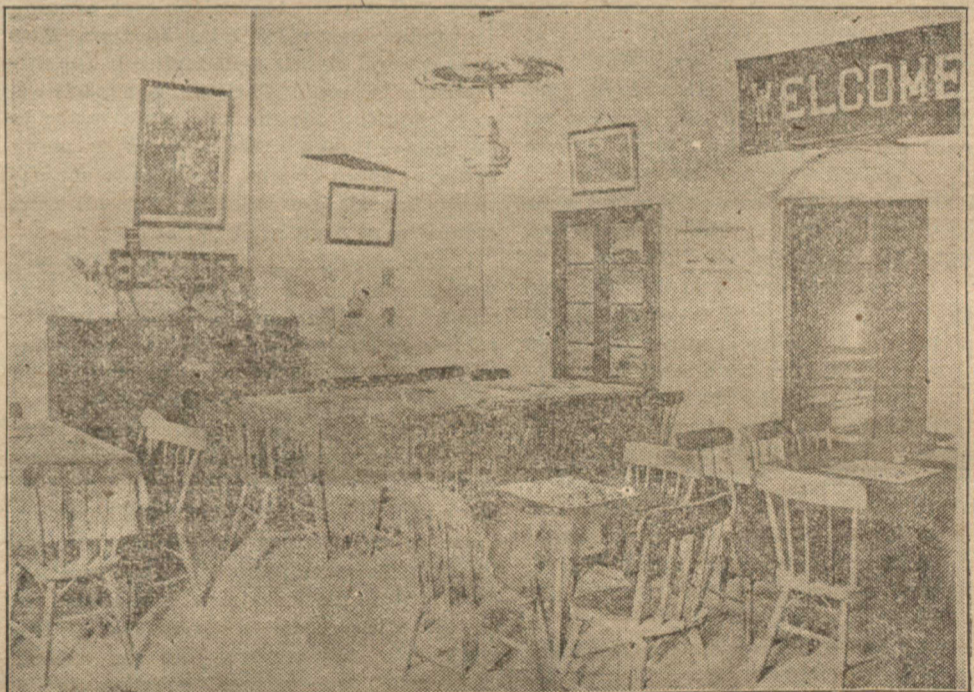


SOLDIERS' HOME, WELLINGTON, NILGIRI HILLS, SOUTH INDIA, Opened October 27, 1898.

furniture. I remember one true old friend trying to encourage us in these early days by telling us how in his company he knew one or two, who had been professional burglars in their civilian days, 'Whenever the Home is open they are coming down.' We tried to feel very glad, but we could not keep our thoughts from wandering to our locks and bolts, which were of the frailest. What was my surprise just a few days ago to find out that one of our brightest conversions, a man being daily taught of God—a Middle-

ing lest we should in any way be thought to be rivals in business we asked Stewart to undertake our bar as a branch of his own business, but he (wise man) said it took him all his time to attend to his own affairs! Not the least important part of a Soldiers' Home is to give the men plenty of good, well-cooked food at the lowest possible rate. We have come through various experiences with regard to our coffee bar, but God has undertaken in this branch of the work also.

One day, after a few months of quiet



CORNER OF THE READING ROOM, WHERE COPIES OF THE 'NORTHERN MESSENGER' GO.

sex man—had been in his earlier days a burglar! We prove in this work again and again there is nothing too hard for the Lord.

In a little more than a fortnight after we arrived we were able to open the Home, and it did not take long to fill our four rooms. We got a Middlesex man in his off time to look after our Refreshment Bar.

hard work in the Home, we had a visit from a warm friend of soldiers.

She said 'you must buy a piece of land and build a suitable Home on it.' When I said 'where was the money to come from,' she said, 'To start you I will give you £100.' This seemed to come right from God himself, and I always look on this dear friend as being the one who really