

## BACK FROM THE WAR.

### QUIETLY WELCOMED HOME.

Three of the boys whom we sent away to the war with all the fervor of patriotic enthusiasm returned home by the Zealandia this morning, and though the occasion of the day of mourning precluded anything like a public reception, they were not allowed to land without receiving a hearty welcome from our Chief Magistrate, Mr Townley, Captain Winter, the head of the volunteer forces of the district and other citizens. The returning troopers were Messrs. T. Trotter and Graham and Gordon Johnstone. Of the three, the former looked rather the worse for wear, though Troopers Johnstone have probably had the severest experience, having been stricken with racking rheumatism, dysentery that eats the heart out of a man, and malarial fever. Trooper Trotter has come through the war without an ailment or a scratch, and he is able to laugh at its hardships. Schooled to roughing it at Westraian diggings and in bush life in New Zealand, it was no hardship for him to undergo the roving experiences on the veldt, and although the work has generally been hard and the tucker none too certain, Trooper Trotter has come through it smiling, and he shows his appreciation of it by stating that he is going back again with a few weeks, after he has seen his Gisborne friends. "To settle down?" we inquired. "Well, the trouble is," he replied, "that you cannot settle down. That is the worst of it. One is wanting to be always on the move and in the excitement. One day this week I went to a ram fair at Hastings. Now I used to be rather fond of such gatherings—I was a pretty good hand amongst sheep—but, dear me, it seemed to be the tamest thing out." From which it may be inferred that Trooper Trotter is anxious to get back into the firing line again. Malarial fever has sent him home; in fact, Lieutenant Hughes said the other day that no man required to stay in Africa more than a year to preserve his health. And Mr Trotter has been a full year away from here, having left with the Second Contingent from Wellington on January 2nd. He was with them from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, and from Pretoria to the Portuguese boundary, and in many a "scrap" and engagement on the side-tracks since then. The severest experience, he says, was at the Klip river, before they got into Pretoria. He was one of French's column in the rush on Barberton, but though that read well in the papers, he says it wasn't much, for there was practically no opposition. Mr Trotter had the good fortune to keep the one horse that he obtained in Wellington throughout the whole campaign, which was a

great matter, for many poor fellows who lost their horses and had to tramp for days, anxious to keep up, lost all the fun of the game. The fact of his keeping his horse speaks well of the care he must have paid to his animal, and questioned about this, the trooper admitted that it was necessary to "commandeer" a bag of oats whenever you could to keep the poor brute alive. As to hardships, he says they were not so many, after all. It was wonderful how they were fed, and to see the splendid organisation that kept the army supplied. Mr Trotter will possibly seek a commission to secure his return, but in any case he is anxious to get back. He believes there will yet be a good deal of desultory fighting, and the boys who are going out, he says, will really have the toughest and most hazardous work of the campaign, for they will get all the dangers without all the incidental glory and excitement of a big engagement. He is glad to be back amongst his many old friends, if it were not for the incessant conviviality necessitated, and when we hear that Trooper Trotter was singing "Life's Dream is O'er" at a concert at 2 o'clock this morning on the Zealandia we sympathise with him.

From another source we hear that this same Trotter, "Tommy," as he is affectionately termed by his pals, was the life of the camps wherever he went. A Gisborne gentleman just returned from Australia states that over there he met many returned men from all the colonies, and when asked if they knew Tommy Trotter, the reply was invariably that everybody knew him. Next to Roberts and Kitchener, and a few more of the generals, he was the best-known man in Africa.

Troopers Johnstones' experience has been of a different order. Not so strong physically, and having a great deal of roughing it to do, their health failed to stand the strain, and while they accompanied the troops through most of the slogging work of the campaign, they had eventually to knock under and come home invalided. Asked what were their feelings, locking back on their trip—pleasant or otherwise—the reply was indefinite. One of the brothers said that he did not think they would try it again, and he fancied that there were few of those who had really experienced the hardships of war who would wish to do so. Though they were splendidly treated in hospital, hospital life in Africa is not a picnic. Their severest engagement was at the Klip river, where they lay for six hours a chain or two in front of their guns, which were firing over their heads, and if a shell from the latter fell

short, it did damage to our men. Several were killed and wounded, and Trooper Graham Johnstone received a nasty knock from a bit of spent shell, which made a pain sore between the shoulders for a fortnight or so. The Johnstones accompanied the troops from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, thence to Barberton, and back by way of Koomati Poort. They have seen much service, and although still weak from the effects of their illness, have undoubtedly gained both in physique and experience from the campaign. They have, we doubt not, worthily represented their Queen and country at the front, and the district will honor them for their service.

The welcome extended the returned men this morning was purely informal. There will be a public reception of a hearty nature when the other men come back.

The Johnstone brothers, we may add, are on furlough for six months, being on full pay. They are commanded to do no work, and to take every care of themselves, so as to regain health. It is possible they may be sent to Rotorua to recuperate.