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"A GOOD INDUSTRY TO BE WITH"

Better Than Medals

By ETHELYN PARKINSON McClure Syndicate—WNU Features.

IT WAS the final day of his leave, and at last he'd found time to visit the shop. He stood in his mother's office, wishing Mom weren't so cool about things. Taking a hero son in stride was one thing. But you'd think Mom had never heard of Tunisia, or the "Battle of William Carson!" You'd think Alicia Fashion Shop's mail was more important than medals and banquets, reporters, speeches-Sherrill. Especially Sherrill!

"Just think, Morn!" he said. "Until now, Sherrill Ralston was just a rotogravure figure, remote as a star! It's like meeting a fairy princess, when you've never believed in fairies! She looked like one last night, too-in turquoise tulle, all shot with silver stars. I felt a little

Mom smiled. "Of course, William. Things change. A year ago Sherrill was engaged-for the third time. And you weren't a hero, dear, to anyone but me. Besides," she glanced toward the outer office, "I really thought you and Mary Lee had an understanding."

"Oh, Mary?" Bill laughed unsteadily. "Mary's a grand girl, Mom. But one grows up. After all, when you've done things-" He stopped as the door opened.

'Hi, Bill!" Mary said. Bill listened to the familiar talk. The Alicia Fashion Shop had fed and clothed him for twenty years. It had given him two years at law school



"Especially you, Mary."

before the Army interrupted. "Is there much to deliver, Mary?" his

mother asked. "Ten rush orders. And Miss Stanton wants to return the hat she took on approval."

The words brought Bill sharply to attention. "Do they still take clothes on approval, wear them and return them?" he demanded. "They do, son. Did you think the

war would change that?" "We've red cards," Mary said

gravely. "The customers sign, guaranteeing that returned articles haven't been worn."

"It doesn't help much," Alicia Carson said. "Of all the crooked tricks," Bill exploded. "When this blasted war's

over, I'm -going to do something about that-" he broke off. "Don't smile, Mother! I'll run deliveries tonight," he said softly, "the way I used to. Then I'll pick you up here, for supper."

Bill whistled as he sorted the packages. Suddenly he stopped. One formal handkerchief for Miss Sherrill Ralston! A rush! When had Sherrill discovered the place?

Boxes in hand, Bill went slowly into Mom's office. "Mom, I-I-" "Doesn't Sherrill know about the

Bill gasped, colored. "Mom, no one asks what you were before the war. Nothing counts farther back

than a uniform." "Still, everyone is really just what he was before, just what he's going to be afterward. Give me Sherrill's handkerchief, dear. Mary does canheen duty out that way for two hours

before she goes home. Canteen duty. Mary probably knew quite a few soldiers. Possibly some of them had medals, too. He remembered now that Mary hadn't said good-by. He must stpp at the office But the empty room mocked him. Mary had gone. He wouldn't see her again. A queer coldness en-

veloped him. Just after eight. Bill entered Mrs. Carson's office. There he stopped short, his heart pounding. Mary was bending over the cluttered desk "Oh, your mother said you're to run along, Bill. I'm going to close up." Something was wrong, and suddenly Bill knew what. "Mary-" he began, then came toward her. He picked up a red card from the desk. "I guarantee that this article

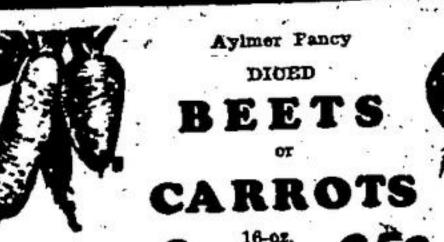
has not been worn . . . ' "Mary," he said, "let's go to supper. Where we can talk." "Until ten o'clock, Bill?"

"I guess I've been a little mixed about what I was fighting for. thought it was medals and-things But all the time it was for Momand you. Especially you, Mary."

He reached for her. "Mary?"
"Yes, Bill?" Her eyes were shining through tears. "Oh, darling

we've been so proud!" It was better than medals. Better than anything! He caught her in his arms. But first he tossed a red card back upon a cloud of turquoise tulle, all shot with silver stars.

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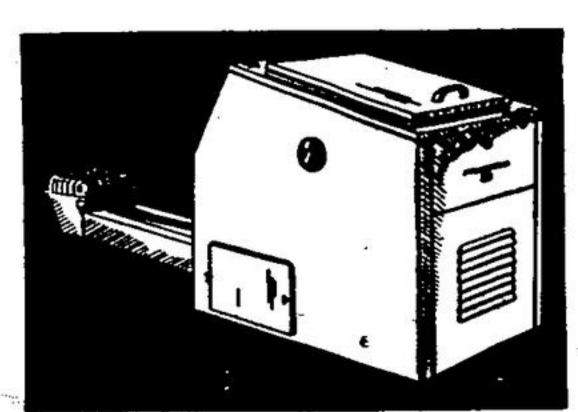
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