

## A NEW ZEALAND POET

Mrs. I. M. Cooke (Marieda Batten)

IT is only very occasionally that our little band of New Zealand sweet singers receives a new recruit. This is somewhat surprising, for New Zealand is most happily circumstanced in many ways. In scenery as romantically beautiful as that of Italy, Switzerland or Norway, and in educational advantages equal to those of the Old World, our environment leaves little to be desired. Yet there is great hope in the quickening of spirit perceptible everywhere around us, and we may look forward to an outpouring of melody such as usually follows periods of prolonged strain and world stress. And it will find a warm welcome in a country like ours, where the audience, fit though few, makes up in culture what it lacks in number.

It is particularly pleasing to sponsor a woman poet in a journal that is woman's exclusive own. Mrs. Cooke, of whom more will be heard in the literary world in the future, is a native of Reading, Berks, England. Her parents brought her as a child to New Zealand, and she lived in Wellington until nearly fifteen years old. Then her family settled in Taranaki, where she married, and on her husband's retirement from business five years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Cooke went to reside in Wellington.

"I was educated at the Wellington Girls' High School," she told the writer in a delightful chat. "Then I became a pupil teacher under the Taranaki Education Board, and later under the Wellington board, but resigned owing to ill-health. After a long rest at home in New Plymouth, I began teaching music, and continued it until my marriage. About eight years ago my two girls and I went to Gisborne to visit my mother, and, her health being feeble, I took over her pupils and stayed in Gisborne for three years.

"Until I came to live in Wellington, those three years in Gisborne were the happiest of my life. The Gisborne people were so friendly and warm-hearted, the beautiful, isolated little town by the sea made a strong appeal to me, and it was while I was there that I discovered my ability to rhyme. I had always wished to write, and had been slightly successful with short story writing, but this discovery gave me new hope, and altered the trend of ambition. All my spare time was spent in writing verse, and in three months my first little book was published—'Star-dust and Sea-foam' (Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs Limited). It bristles with faults; for at that time I knew nothing of the rules of prosody, but had it been the most perfect poetry ever written, it could not have yielded more delight to me. To my surprise, the press notices of that faulty little book were astonishingly good and encouraging. Here was the proof, I thought, that there was something more in life for Woman than house-keeping, dress and trivialities. And Fancy made flights into realms of wonderful achievement. When I returned to New Plymouth, where I had unlimited leisure, my delight in verse-making grew. I read and studied all the poetical works available, and gradually realised that there was something very wrong with my own verse.

"I did not know what it was, for I was a stranger to metrical laws. I had written my verse only by ear. Then seeing an advertisement offering instruction in short story writing, I wrote to the advertiser, describing my needs, and decided to take a correspondence course from him on

Prosody. Although I never met my instructor, 'E.M.S.'—and to this day do not know whether he was "Mrs." or Mr.—he became a dear friend.



Marieda Batten

N. Carter, Gisborne, photo.

Mrs. I. M. Cooke, author of "Star-dust and Sea-foam," "Maori Love Legends," "Love-life," a "Sonnet Sequence," and numerous short poems.

When the course of instruction was ended, we continued our correspondence and exchanged views upon life, religion, philosophy and art. Since

## FAREWELL

Pass on, Beloved, pass on, pass on,  
Once thy soul spoke to mine,  
But now its voice is mute, Beloved,  
And silent is my shrine.  
Yet it was sweet, O passing sweet,  
To be awaked from sleep,  
But I would slumber once again,  
For when I wake, I weep.  
I blame thee not, O my Beloved,  
For silence deep and drear,  
The echo does not blame the sound  
That called it gently here.  
And if the cadence of thy voice  
Has lost the mystic charm,  
That caused my soul to love again,  
Thou needst not feel alarm.  
I shall not weep when thou art gone,  
Not thine alone the fault  
That something from our love has fled—  
But let me guard its vault.  
To see thee try and always fail,  
To list for music gone,  
Is worse than death itself to me,  
So Love, lost Love . . . pass on.

MARIEDA BATTEN.

then I have written numerous stray poems. Last year the Wellington Competition Society selected a poem of mine entitled "I Wonder" for recitation, and to me it was most interesting to hear the different interpretations of it.

"SOMETIMES I am asked when I write a difficult question to answer, because I have no set time; mostly when I can.

"Others ask me how I write, and I am reminded of Victor Hugo's words, 'The writing of poetry is either easy or impossible.' Sometimes an overheard remark will yield an idea for a poem, frequently music or a beautiful scene will awake the

craving to write. One has to be in the mood to write poetry, but it is difficult to decide what circumstances produce the mood. Excitement invariably does. At times I am so disgusted with my inability to write as I wish that I vow I will try no more. But the writing of verse has so subtly alluring a charm for me that invariably I try again. When I see my own work in print I never can realise that I wrote it. I wonder if others experience this feeling.

"Before I knew 'E.M.S.' 'Maori Love Legends' had been written, and, acting upon his advice, I revised and re-wrote the book; but it was not published until 1920, by Messrs. H. H. Tombs and Co., Wellington. In April of that year Miss Hardinge-Mahby produced 'Maori Love Legends' as a costume recital in the Concert Chamber, Wellington. It was a wonderful experience for me. With characteristic kindness, Lady Liverpool invited me, as the author of the book, to sit with the Vice-regal party, and spoke of my work with understanding interest and appreciation. Later, the Legends were again produced in aid of the Y.W.C.A.

"Before the publication of 'Maori Love Legends' I had written a sonnet-sequence, entitled 'Love-life,' which aimed to show my ideal of a wife's love. It was published during 1918 by the Australasian Authors' Agency, Melbourne. The Press reports of this little book were unexpectedly good; one critic actually calling 'Marieda Batten' a true poet! 'Love-life' was written while Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett-Adamson were visiting us, and he and I used to discuss each sonnet as it was finished. As he is a writer, and has the gift of kindly criticism, I respected and appreciated his opinion, and many happy hours we three spent in the sunshine discussing his and my verse and kindred subjects. He would sympathise with me for having been 'bitten by the poetry bug,' and whenever I saw him would ask me humorously if I had a sonnet concealed about my person.

"SOON after my first book was published I met an Englishwoman who was touring New Zealand. I asked her what she thought of our country, and she replied that she was entranced with its beauty, but shocked to find that, although we New Zealanders lived in so beautiful and romantic a country, we had not produced a poet. I was too astounded, and I hope, too modest, to inform her that I had ambition in that direction; so I simply agreed with her.

"In everyday life, as far as I know myself, I am just an ordinary woman, who all her life has walked with Sorrow; fond of the society of interesting friends; interested in every form of Art; possessed of some appreciation of humour; beneath the surface incorrigibly romantic; trying to cling to her ideal of life, but frequently failing; to sum up, she is just a human being, and not a scrap more interesting than any other human being.

"My poetry is my sanctuary, my *Garde Joyeuse*. If through my poetry I can help others, especially women, to recognise the beauty and the meaning of life, to learn the lessons Sorrow would teach, to realise that in spite of hardship, suffering and grief there really is a mystic Intention that is Love Absolute; in my opinion, I shall have achieved success."

## SOCIAL DOINGS

(Continued from page 10).

vey largely upon the list, but within the past two years or so they have naturally been decreasing. Still there were a few on this occasion—a purely Dominion decoration, I believe—and there were also two nurses, Miss Cumming, of Wellington, and Miss McCallum, of New Plymouth, who received the Royal Red Cross (second class). Lady Jellicoe was in black satin, with beaded panels and diamond ornaments. Among the relatives of those who were honoured were Lady Pomare and Miss Pomare, Miss Coates, Mrs. Molesworth Tolhurst, and Mrs. T. Young, Lady McGavin, Mrs. Manning, and Miss Carncross. The Prime Minister and Miss Massey were present.—DOROTHEA.

## NELSON.

THE Nelson United Services Association recently enjoyed a most interesting and instructive lecture by Brigadier-General Richardson on the history of Military Service in New Zealand, in the Masonic Hall. Some of those present were Mesdames Thoms, Hume, Weeks, Keith, Barr, Sidney Gibbs, Sclanders, Misses Sclanders, Grace and Wright.—FLAMMETTA.

## CHRISTCHURCH.

AT their home at Carlton Mill Road, Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Beswick entertained a number of friends at a delightful dance. The billiard-room, with softly diffused lights from gaily coloured Japanese lanterns, was used as a ballroom; a large marquee was furnished as an additional drawing-room, and supper was served in the dining-room. The hostess wore a beautiful gown of blue brocaded velvet, richly patterned with vari-coloured flowers, and Miss Beswick wore a becoming pink georgette frock with crystal bead embroidery. Included amongst the guests were Mr. and Mrs. Algar Williams, Major and Mrs. Hutton, Mr. and Mrs. John Montgomery, Mr. and Mrs. Godby, Mr. and Mrs. Morris Gresson, Mr. and Mrs. James Deans, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Deverell, Misses Hester Gould, Nancy Beadel, Helen Rich, Barbara Cowlshaw, Sybil Johnson, Rita Gibson, Betsy Reeves, Dorothy Bowden, M. Teschemaker, Fanny Fox, and Messrs. Peter Johnson, Cracraft-Wilson (2), W. Cowlshaw, C. Bridgeman, J. Courage, Hawkes, R. Blunt, D. Cotterill, T. Robinson, B. Boys, Nicoll, B. Dalgety, and Dr. Bevan Brown.—ISOBEL.

## NOTICE TO OUR READERS

In future issues of THE LADIES' MIRROR it is intended to discontinue the publication of social notes from various centres, but to enlarge the interest of this section of the paper by making it more a pictorial review of interesting personages and doings of the month—of special interest to women.

To this end, the editors of the paper will be glad to receive photographs of weddings and engagements, and of any woman whose recent activities, whether purely social or more directly relating to achievements in public life, music, art or literature, would be of general interest to the readers of the paper.

Owing to the exigencies of space, the editors respectfully request contributors to consider whether the photographs they send are of sufficient general interest to justify publication.

Photographs can be returned if desired, and in all cases should be accompanied by the name and address of the sender, and brief particulars of the subject of the picture.