

THE CITY OF THE PLAINS.

(BY M.H., 'N.Z. GRAPHIC.')



MAN nature has a strange propensity to pick holes in the persons and places of its acquaintance. If anybody has a failing, or any town a disadvantage, that is sure to be the first point of commentary upon the name cropping up. Sydney is, perhaps, the great exception, that 'beautiful harbour' being inseparably associated with the mention of its name. Even Sydney, however, gets condemned on the score of its hot summer nights, while Melbourne is

abused on account of its 'brickfields,' London for its fogs, Wellington for its winds, Auckland for its 'mugginess,' and Dunedin for its capriciousness of chilly showers. If there is a bad point anywhere it is magnified from being the exception into the rule, and if destiny is taking you thither, kind friends do their best to impress upon your

Northern Italy say that no finer vistas exist there than those which can be obtained near Christchurch on any of the exquisitely clear days, of which there are so many between April and October, when the snow is upon the mountains.

Despite its much abused summer sirocco, the climate of the Canterbury Plains is in autumn one of the most charming in the world. The rainfall is only about half that of the other provinces of New Zealand, and the rain comes deliberately preceded by premonitory symptoms there is no mistaking. Weeks, or even months of sunshine, are quite usual, and day after day often goes by displaying a sky of the softest and milkiest of blues undotted by the slightest streak of cloudland. Admitting sundry defects, there is probably no climate more calculated to develop to their utmost the best points of the English race, or to breed a handsome, athletic, and romantic people than that of the region of which Christchurch is the coming metropolis. There is also among its population

superiority over the other suburbs, unless it have a rival in Avonside on the north, which is extending down the chief of the Christchurch streams. There is a tendency in the town to develop eastward into both of these fanboroughs, as they lie in the way to the seaside resorts of Sumner and New Brighton, six miles distant on the open shore. The suburbs which are likely to retain longest their secluded and select character are those on the opposite or south-east side of the city, Riccarton and Fendalton, as they are protected from the invasions of builders by intervention of the public gardens and Hagley Park, which, with the deviously-winding Avon, break the continuity of Christchurch in that quarter. To the north-west, on either side of the Paparua Road, which is the continuation of the main street of Christchurch, towards the ranges, lie respectively the suburbs of Merivale and St. Albans. Southward toward the Port Hills lie the less aristocratic borough of Sydenham. These seven suburbs, Opawa, Avonside, St. Albans, Merivale, Fendalton, Riccarton, and Sydenham enclose the municipality of Christchurch, which extends over a complete square surface of one mile between them all. Each side of it is bounded by a belt a mile in length. On the north, the south and the east the Belt is a perfectly straight road or boulevard; on the west it is the public Domain, comprising Hagley Park and the Public Gardens.

From the railway station, which you enter almost immediately after passing Opawa it is but five minutes' drive to the Cathedral. Though passing through that part where the streets are most broken and intersecting, still a visitor from the three other chief New Zealand towns cannot but be struck at the long peeps and vistas which open up on each side as he goes. Everything seems so orderly and on the rule of square. On alighting at the foot of the Godley statue—a sadly ironical tribute to the memory of the public benefactor—the new arrival finds himself looking directly in at the Cathedral door, and with almost every building or object of urban interest around him. There is



CHRISTCHURCH, LOOKING TOWARDS OPAWA.

J. Martin, photo., Auckland.

mind that you are going to a spot where life will speedily become unendurable.

Thus, when anyone proposes taking up their residence in Christchurch, they are at once apprised of the two facts—'that it is awfully flat,' and 'that the nor-westers are terrible.' The imputation of flatness comes, of course, from the towns of New Zealand, such as Dunedin, Wellington, Oamaru, Nelson, Auckland, Picton, Whangarei, and others which are specially favoured in the matter of variety of situation within and about themselves. Indeed, so common is the possession of a picturesque site all around the coast of New Zealand, that any town possessing what would be held as a very passable location in Europe or America is deemed uninteresting.

Christchurch is situated upon a plain. Its position is such as that in which the founders of a potential city in the United States delight, and its design one of the rectangular chess-board principle, followed at Salt Lake and others of the young mushroom communities of the Great West. Like other towns cast upon this plan, it is most commodious for movement, every thoroughfare radiating from or communicating with Cathedral Square as a centre. Thither all business has a tendency to converge and from that point any destination can be speedily reached.

The central artery, Colombo-street, is about four miles in length, starting at the foot of the Port Hills, and running out over the Plains in the direction of the Southern Alps. The Port Hills, which rise to something like 1,200 feet, are easily accessible from the Cathedral in half an hour, and for those who are willing to test the assertion that Christchurch is not unpicturesque, a magnificent panorama of the Canterbury Plains and its snow-capped ranges unrolls itself yonder. Travellers who know the Plain of Piedmont in

a cohesion and a definiteness of tone and purpose more marked than in the other chief towns of Southern Britain. This was originally owing to the Episcopalian and the squatocratic elements, and though these are ceasing to be so prominent, the feeling of corporate pride and *esprit de corps* remains, promising to make Canterbury the Virginia of New Zealand. The stamp of 'Bir' is not obtrusive, and is never likely to become rampant over the face of society upon the Plains, as it will always be tempered by the educational, sporting, and agricultural influences which have obtained such a long start in Christchurch during the impressionable days of its infancy.

Christchurch lies at the junction of the courses of two winding streams, designated, respectively, the Avon and the Heathcote, which discharge themselves into the sea at less than six miles from the town. Sketches taken forty years ago show nothing but a dusty, tussock-tufted moorland with two ditches threading their way at the foot of the Port Hills towards the ocean. Now, on debouching from the tunnel leading from Port Lyttelton through the Port Hills, the eye of the spectator is greeted with a verdant panorama of successive fields, of coppices, of helges and ditches, of great waving lines of poplars, and with glimpses of river scenery not unlike that of the willow-hung Thames a hundred miles above London. 'Quite English, you know,' and more English it grows as the suburb of Opawa is reached, and pretty villas peep out from between the trees over trimly-kept lawns. The only un-English points are the grand expanse of plain bounded in the distance by an interminable wall of snowy-white, and the overarching canopy of cloudless milky-blue. In these respects it is England and Italy in one.

It is the river which gives Opawa its peculiar beauty and

the soft grey Gothic of the Cathedral, the dark grey classic of the Bank of New Zealand, the dark brown domestic of the Hereford block, the red brick of the Italianesque of the Post-office, and the elegant mixed of the A.M.P. Building in its pure white Oamaru stones. Turning about from the Cathedral so as to look past the Godley statue along Worcester-street, he can see near the trees which mark the course of the Avon the red Elizabethan villa of the Town Council, and a quarter of a mile beyond that lie the scholastic piles of the University and the Museum. Behind these lie those characteristically charming 'lions' of Christchurch—the river, the gardens, and the park.

Walking down in that direction to the Town Council building, he catches his first glimpse of the Avon, a tortuous stream on which you are always unexpectedly coming, and which will meet you again further on. Just to the right here is the old Provincial Council House—a sort of curiosity and antiquity in its way, now chiefly devoted to the purposes of the dance rather than of debate. In the hall of the University beyond, you have a very trifling counterpart of some of the fine English college halls or dining halls of the Inns of Court. If you pass across the pretty avenue in Antigua-street into the Museum you will see the largest collection of moa skeletons in the world, and other objects of scientific interest.

Round here extends the best residential quarter within the city, chiefly villa houses with tasteful gardens, and a striking aspect of gentle ease and refinement. It is much the same on the opposite side of the Cathedral in the direction of the East Belt, only in a rather less degree. Those who give Christchurch a reputation for monotony can have an eye for only a certain kind of beauty. To appreciate it one must see its streets towards the close of a calm summer