

Modern Auckland.

(Specially Written for the "New Zealand Graphic.")

Who cannot sympathise with the man who becomes reminiscent at the mention of Queen street? As we know it it is by no means a street to be ashamed of; viewed as a whole, and regarded from the artist's point of view. On a vivid summer morn one may look downward from the Wellesley-street intersection, towards the "high masta" and the imperial harbour, and feel the eye kindle at the picturesqueness. It is not necessary to have been born here to appreciate this. One need not be a native of Auckland in order to listen with patience to the man who dwells with pleasure upon the "days that are no more," when the present site of the Victoria Arcade lay under the tide. To have been born at all is to comprehend why that embryonic Queen street has become a memory clothed with so keen an interest for him. To some of us, childhood and youth are represented by other things. Probably we went to school through thoroughfares that had been the scene of historic incident and gorgeous procession centuries before we knew them. Perhaps we had little personal acquaintance with anything but the country; and fell under parental displeasure by taking the most circuitous route home, when the meadows—farthest off—were brown, with yellow primroses, and the violets twinkled under the budding hedgerows.

It must be a peculiar experience to have one's native city grow up beside one; an experience calculated to impress the mind with the mutability of the external. The mushroom growth of more elaborate architecture, the application of electricity, the increased acquirement of showy furniture, the tendency to display in dress, and, above all, the dying out of freemasonry between man and man; all this must minister a very qualified satisfaction to the old Auckland. There ought to be a cure for the super-

ficiality of our modern temper; for superficial and artificial, we certainly are becoming. There is a cure; but it "lies about us" so patiently, and with so much assurance of permanent availability, that we simply ignore it. Yet it is possible to defer the application of a cure until the disease is hopelessly established; then the accessibility of the remedy will not secure to us the slightest chance of recovery. A great part of the antidote to our growing boundedness is to be found in nature; and what a glorious nature we inherit. Set upon the hills as we are, what a wealth lies at our feet, and yet the charge which the poet Wordsworth brought against the English of his day applies with tremendous force to us:

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not."

Why should it move us? We give it no chance with us. And yet we possess a country clothed from coast to coast in an extravagance of beauty. But we have no desire to

"Prove our inward souls against the notion
That we live in or under"

the "wheels" of our rapidly advancing civilization. We are exposed to a danger, which does not exist in anything like the same degree in the old world. We have not the ancient historic background, with its hoary monuments, to keep the tragic and glorious past in our consciousness; and we lose in reverence as we gain in external advantage. In that sense there is almost nothing save Nature between us and flat materialism.

It is a huge blunder. Probably we should give the ranges and the harbour a

little more contemplation if we had reason to suppose that we should one day awake to find them gone from us, wiped out, like the pink and white terraces. The fact that we are gradually diminishing our "power of seeing" them is nothing to us. So we go our way to spend our leisure upon unprofitable, uneducative pleasure, and unmanly and unwomanly display. In the matter of dress we sin recklessly indeed. On this point let Ruskin speak: "A vulgar regard for appearances is, primarily, a selfish one, resulting not out of a wish to give pleasure (as a wife's wish to make herself beautiful for her husband), but out of an endeavour to mortify others, or attract for pride's sake—the common "keeping up of appearances" of society, being a mere selfish struggle of the vain with the vain." While tasteful, fresh attire possesses a distinct moral value, that over-dressing, in which the whole personality is made to subservise the display of the prevailing fashion, has a blurring effect upon the moral sense of the wearer, and also upon the taste of the beholder. And, worst of all, the time which is absorbed in designing all this display is lost to nobler uses.

With regard to pleasure, again we quote Ruskin: "The delights of horseracing, and hunting, of assemblies in the night instead of the day, of costly and wearisome music, of costly and burdensome dress, of chagrined contention for place or power, or wealth, or the eyes of the multitude; and all the endless occupation without purpose, and idleness, without rest, of our vulgar world, are not, it seems to me, enjoyments we need be ambitious to communicate." And all real and wholesome enjoyments possible to man have been just as possible to him since first he was made as they are now, and they are possible to him chiefly in peace. To watch the corn grow and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare and spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray—these are the things that make men happy; they have always had the power of doing these; they never will have the power of doing more. The world's prosperity or adversity depends upon our knowing and teaching these few things; but upon iron, or glass, or electricity, or steam, in no

wise." The old Auckland came nearer to the realization of this ideal than do we of to-day. He could not well be frivolous, coming as a soldier and a pioneer into personal and strenuous conflict with those forces which withstand the founder of Empire. His earnestness gained from the objects which inspired it, and from the difficulties which brought it to white heat, a nobler quality than ours. True it was not a time of "peace," and his harvest sometimes stood in jeopardy from hostile tribes; yet that fact would not render him insensible to the beauty of his ripening corn; rather it would quicken his senses. Our warfare is a more deadly thing than was his; it demands less of manliness, and more of mechanical grinding application; and so is calculated to leave us with a diminished capacity for high imaginings and noble emotions. "The works of our own hands," by which we have surrounded us, only serve to shut us in more and more to the material; and the very contrivances by which great inventors have sought to lighten our toil and secure us leisure, seem to fall of their object. Let us beware, and consider what it is upon which we lavish our manhood and our womanhood. Let us give our sweet transcendent nature its chance with us; and some time, in future generations, we may produce a painter great enough to do our fair land justice; a poet for whom we shall not blush when he takes his place among the singers in the world's greatest modern literature. If not, then we, and the works of our hands, which we have taken into the supreme place in our being, must perish in one final and irremediable overthrow.

RACHEL DEL BROWNLOWE.



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