

New Zealand Artists.

Annual Exhibition at Auckland—Some Excellent Work.

THE most notable feature about the annual exhibition of the Auckland Society of Arts, which was opened last week by his Excellency the Governor in the Society's rooms in Coburg-street, is the exceptional evenness of the work that has been hung. In past years there may have been some few pictures of outstanding merit, but there have also been more of infinitely inferior quality. The average is much higher, and there is a welcome scarcity of freak canvases. Southern painters are well represented, and the exhibition could not well afford to be without their work. The total number of pictures hung is 550, of which 125 are photographs exhibited by the Auckland Camera Club, and the addition of this section, which is quite new in the history of the Society, is so successful that it is to be hoped that the co-operation will become a permanent feature of the annual exhibitions.

After looking round the walls one might wish for more genre paintings, and more work that appeals to feelings deeper than the imagination, something symbolical of those great truths of humanity which are felt by every man and woman, but which can be expressed only by the great musician, poet or painter—something which most have thought, but which has been "never so well expressed before." This, however, is rather in the nature of an ideal we should set ourselves, and no one would expect much work of this nature in a young country. Art is the last thing which comes to people, and is essentially a matter of evolution, and the painter in obeying his artistic yearning must pass through his successive stages like the nautilus in that beautiful poem of Oliver Wendell Holmes. A word of compliment is the desert of the hanging Committee. No committee has ever pleased everybody. The man has not been born who could satisfactorily answer the artist's indignant "Why is my picture not hung?" and the public's equally indignant "Why on earth have you given that thing wall space?" There is even more divergence of opinion about art than there is about music, because the artist uses material which is more or less familiar to everybody, so naturally everybody adopts the role of critic naturally—with frequent admirable and useful results so long as he pays due regard to the wholesome admonition "Ne sutor ultra crepidam," but, unfortunately, this is not always so—witness the case of a farmer man who, emboldened by his success when he corrected the artist's idea of the way small pigs feed at a trough, floundered on to matters that were not bovine and so was lost. The committee must be congratulated on the success with which they have accomplished a most thankless task. It is a significant fact that there is no "Chamber of Horrors" this year. For this relief, much thanks. There are of course some pictures hung which one might have wished elsewhere, and there is one on the stairway—a Southern landscape—which perhaps should have had a better place, but the unprejudiced person must admit that the work has been done most judiciously.

The Oils.

The honour of having painted the picture of the year will fall by common consent to the veteran artist, Mr. Kenneth Watkins, who has a large canvas depicting the legend of the coming of the Maori to New Zealand—the arrival of the dusky Argonauts after their long voyage over the Great Ocean of Kiwi, from distant Hawaiki, whose identity is now "through tract of years, in mute oblivion lost." The subject has already been dealt with in the well-known picture by Messrs. Steele and Goldie, which now hangs in the Auckland Art Gallery, and no two conceptions could be more diametrically opposed. The Steele-Goldie painting depicts the grim reality of that great migration across the trackless ocean, and the dramatic incident of the sighting of the almost despairing of "Long White Cloud." We have the storm-beaten canoe, and the emaciated forms of the adventurous sailors who had forsaken their sunny homes and followed the wake of the sun in search of the half-mythical land at the edge of the

ocean. We confess that this appeals to us as being more in accordance with the spirit of the Maori Odyssey, but this does not detract in the slightest from the interest that attaches to Mr. Watkins' conception of a less strenuous, not to say idyllic voyage, over peaceful seas. The colouring, especially of the water, is very fascinating, but it is not New Zealand. Rather it reminds one of early morning "by reef and palm," and before the sea breeze has sprung up. The richly delicate shades of blue, green and yellow which Mr. Watkins has used we have never seen outside the tropics, and then only in certain Islands. They are as rare as the tints of a tropical sunset. Mr. Watkins has idealised the scene, but it will not be the less popular for that. If one were disposed to criticise one would naturally suggest that the canoes and voyagers would scarcely be in such good form as the artist paints them. There is a suggestion of wear about some of the sails, but there is hardly a strand of gear out of place, and not a chip of paint is missing. Still, the work is ambitious and praiseworthy in its attention to detail, as well as charming in its facile handling of colour.

Southern Artists.

On the principle of "visitors first," we will refer briefly to some of the numerous works sent in by Southern painters. A prolific and welcome contributor is Mr. C. H. Howorth, of Wanganui, who has nine which are of exceptionally even merit. The style of this painter has

portrait, "Low Tide, St. Ives," is a little bit of the Cornish village which is so beloved of artists, looking towards the Smeaton Pier, with the double row of fishing boats hauled up on the beach, the sort of thing you always think of if you have ever been to this quaint old fishing village, and you come across the name in after days. In this canvas will be found the Christchurch artist's best work. "Grey of the Morning" is a sea piece with the rollers tumbling green to the shore in the early morning with a stiff breeze blowing in from the sea, and the sun hardly risen above the cloud-wrapped horizon, irradiating the scene with an eerie light. "Head of Loch Gail," a Scottish scene, is a nice little bit of work, but the figure study, "Meditation," No. 84, should not be missed by those who can appreciate a really clever bit of figure painting. The pose, lighting and tone are all excellent, and the thoughtful old man with the interesting face, "les yeux fixes sur ses pensees," is the work of a true artist.

One of the finest things in the gallery is "The Crest of the Hill," by Mr. W. Greene, Timaru. The sturdy plough horses have just reached the point where the upland meets the flat, and straining every nerve for the end of the pull as the coulter turns over its fresh furrow of good, brown earth. There is atmosphere in the landscape, and real movement in the struggling beasts, who are well into the collar, as the farmer says. The tone of the canvas is subdued, and suggestive of the time of planting, and the only gleam on an otherwise clever and distinctive piece of work is the ploughman, who is somewhat out of the picture. There are two bits from Essex, by Mr. Greene, "A Shady Pool," with the sunlight flickering through the trees, being a very happy bit of colouring and brushwork.

An attractive picture is "A Midsummer Night's Dream," by Mr. R. Wallwork, A.R.C.A., who has treated Titania's infatuation for Bottom in a decorative style, which reminds one of a popular

awful thrill, that softens into sighs," is romantic in conception, and highly dramatic in effect, the sort of thing that Scott delighted to describe, and people with the children of his fancy. The suggestion of the red tone which is noticeable in certain effects of light in Scotch firs is well carried out. "Top of the Pass, Musten, Norway," is marked by some good brush work, but is rather cold and formal. "Fishing Boats Leaving Whitby," a large picture, is a phase of English sea coast life which has a strange fascination for every man, though he may be secretly able to tell a fishing smack from a collier. An old English fishing town or village is one of the most picturesque sights that we have left in these days when steam has robbed the sea of half its romance (in spite of Rudyard Kipling's poem), and Mr. Madden has caught and transferred to canvas the very spirit of the thing. The sunset hues on the East Cliff with the old town below growing indistinct in the evening mists, and foreground with the fishing boats from St. Ives and Penzance which go round the coast every year, make a scene which has a peculiar charm, especially for colonials, as we have nothing of the kind in these parts.

Just near this picture is a little canvas dealing with a somewhat similar subject, No. 56, "The Cornish Coast," by Mr. Lawson Balfour. It is his only exhibit, and makes one regret that he has not sent in more. Lighting and treatment, which are quite different from Mr. Madden's work, are both admirable, and reproduce the Cornish atmosphere with fidelity. The scene is typical of this interesting coast (which the steam trawler has not yet invaded), with the boats in the bay, the worn stone steps winding up the cliff, and the old-world village at the top, with the centuries-old church tower which is so characteristic of Cornwall.

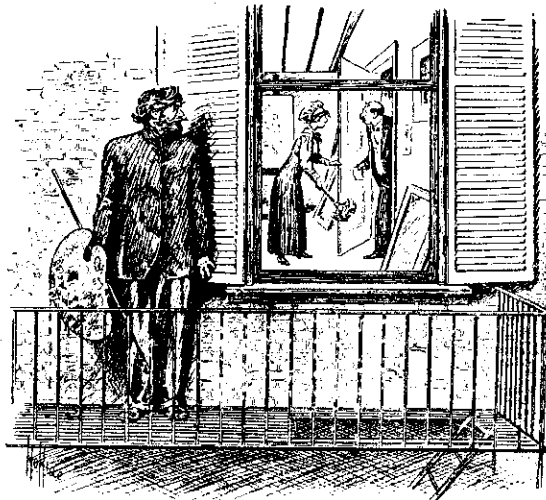
Aucklanders and Others.

A picture which is attracting a lot of attention is a large portrait of His Holiness the Pope, Pius X., painted by Miss Ellen von Meyern. Both in conception and technique the picture is admirable—good in workmanship and clean in colour. It is decidedly the best canvas that Miss von Meyern has done, and she has received many congratulations upon her work. It may be mentioned that the portrait was painted from material supplied by Father Patterson, who has just returned from a visit to Rome, and who pronounces it a most faithful likeness. There are two or three other smaller pictures by the same artist, including a portrait of Captain Amundsen, but she may be well content to rest her reputation on her large work.

Mr. C. F. Goldie is represented by eight pictures, most of which are studies of Maori heads, in his well-known style. His fidelity of detail, good drawing, and choice of subject appeal to a large following, and this year his collection is quite up to the high standard he sets himself. The models, however, are hardly so pleasing as the old rangatiras and wahines with which he has familiarised us, and for this reason they do not attract one so much as some of his work on previous occasions. In "The Widow," the work is of a nice quality, and "Atana Paparangi" is the portrait of an old North Auckland aristocrat of a type that is now almost extinct. "Night in the Whare" is sure to find many admirers, and is essentially a "popular" picture. A typical mother of the Kainga is lighting her pipe in one of the very few halls that occur in the whare during the evening when the old ladies gather round to discuss the village affairs. The old person's face is strongly lit up amid the surrounding gloom, and the double effect of the lighted match and the reflection on the brown face, the grizzled hair, and the white blouse is skilfully managed.

There are six canvases bearing the name of Mrs. E. M. Watford, whose sympathetic style is so well suited to portraying certain aspects of New Zealand scenery. "In the Clinton Valley" is the most important one, but "Solitude" and "A Backwater on the Waikato" would probably appeal to a wider circle. "Solitude" is particularly pleasing. The glow of the western sky is real, and the knikiteaus, which are so characteristic of some of the lower reaches of the Waikato, are cleverly treated. It is in such scenes as this, and that depicted in "A Backwater on the Waikato," that Mrs. Watford's poetic treatment is most effective.

It is rather strange that some of the greatest animal pictures have been painted by women. Horses, dogs, and cats seem to have a special fascination for them. This year nearly all the ani-



Artist's Wife: Oh! Have you come for the rent? Well, I'm sorry, but my husband has just gone out.

changed since he last exhibited, and changed much for the better. There is more thought in his work, and he seems to be taking a great deal more time over it than in the past. While his work is brushed in freely, it is less theatrical and his colour scale is always pleasing. "Silverstream," a well-known Wellington spot, appeals to us most, and then come "Pastoral Scene, Akaroa," "A Hill Farm, Akaroa," "Graham Valley, Akaroa," and "On the Heathcote, Christchurch." Slightly idealised, they are still quite New Zealand in atmosphere, with the exception of the Heathcote, which perhaps rather suggests England than the harder lighting which is a characteristic of these latitudes. "Diamond Lake, Wakatipu," differs from anything Mr. Howorth has sent in, but we profess to liking him more in the quieter pastoral scenes, in the depiction of which he is so happy. "Rocks at Island Bay, Wellington," contains some good work, notably in the background and the sea, which has almost the Somerset colour, but the rocks are somewhat woolly.

The name of Mr. Menzies Gibbs has always been a popular one on the catalogue, and this year he is represented by four pictures, two large ones and two small, one of the latter being a

picture in the Auckland Gallery of a youth playing with young lions in a field of poppies. Mr. Wallwork has obtained his colour mainly by the introduction of a peacock, whose gaudy tail comes in with good effect. Bottom's knees obtrude themselves somewhat too athletically on the eye, but the picture which, by the way, was exhibited at the 1910 Royal Academy, contains much good work, and marks this artist, who has only been out in Christchurch for a few years, as a man with a style that should do much for Colonial art. He also has a capital portrait of Mr. R. Herdman Smith, which shows much vigour and originality. Other works from his brush are "Ship Repairers," "Fugitives," and "The Novel," but they do not show him at his best.

Another Southerner whose work is a valuable acquisition to this year's exhibition is Mr. J. M. Madden, of Christchurch, who has seven canvases bearing his name, all the subjects being chosen outside New Zealand. The most attractive is "Bellaggio, Lake Como," No. 130, a sunny, bright picture, which contains all that is distinctive in the work of this artist. It looks exceptionally well under artificial light. "The Rift in the Storm," a wild glen in the Highlands, one of those "scenes where savage grandeur wakes an