


INTRODUCTORY.

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N the crowded field of periodical literature there may seem but little hope for a new aspirant to popular favour. It is, however, in a crowd that there is always most room. And the promoters

of THE NEW ZEALAND ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE believe not merely that there is space and to spare for the new-comer, not merely that they have fair prospect of creating a demand for their new venture: they believe that a demand already exists.

There comes a time in the history of every colony—at least every colony of British origin—when the new country ceases to be a mere appanage of the old. The offshoot sends down roots of its own into a soil of its own, and, finding there sufficiency of nourishment, no longer draws the sap from the parent stock. The connecting limb, atrophied, decays; the new life “finds itself.” First sign of such new life is a demand for a measure of political independence, sometimes greater, sometimes less, sometimes reaching the extreme of complete separation. That is the new sap mounting—a heady sap which at times intoxicates. It marks the era of “colonialism.”

Foliage, flower, fruit are later to appear. For a period, never shorter than that occupied by two generations and often much longer, the new stock shows no appreciable difference from the old. The era of production is not yet; in due time it will come. Whether the fruit will differ greatly, whether a new and valuable strain will be evolved, is mainly a question of environment. The higher the organism the greater its capacity for variation under difference of environment; but such difference must not be so great as to approach the limit of conditions too diverse to be favourable to development.

The first fruits of the new era, the era of productiveness, may be looked for in poetry and painting, kindred spheres of human activity. These arts are most susceptible to environment. In them first may be found

the attribute of being “racy of the soil,” which is the evidence that the new life has fully found itself, has become self-conscious. Such a period, for many years now, has been reached in Australia, the elder-born; it is already possible to speak of an “Australian School” of poetry and painting. Prose literature, the male child of mental productiveness, needs kindlier conditions. Harder to rear, it repays its rearing by a greater virility. Many generations pass before the seal is set upon the literary aspirations of a people by the consummation of a national prose literature.

The conditions of environment are peculiarly favourable in New Zealand. Pre-eminent natural beauty is there to train unconsciously eye and mind to a perception of the beautiful. Her insular position must assist in the development of a national type—in character first and then in that artistic creativeness which is the outcome of a strongly-impressed character. She has a past, with traditions of a conflict not without its dangers and its honourable triumphs. She has been throughout, and is still, in close contact with a remote stage of human development, receiving alternately the stimulus of repulsion by what in it is savage, of attraction by what in it is romantic, noble, uncontaminated. Less in her favour are, the almost endless diversity of climate—a condition necessarily permanent—the want of rapid internal communication—a want which will as necessarily pass away in due course—and the unduly easy conditions of existence, which may or may not pass, making at present for a certain supineness and disinclination to sustained effort. Signs of the coming of literary power in New Zealand are not wanting; but literary power is not necessarily a literature. Let there be a period of “storm and stress,” and a national literature is certain; without such a period it will still come, but with less of fulness, less of robustness, less of individuality.

Every art, that it may grow to a self-