

A Fascinating Account of Early Colonial Days: "Station Life in New Zealand"

ONE of the most fascinating accounts of early colonial life, Lady Barker's "Station Life in New Zealand" has just been reprinted by Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd. It is the story of a woman's activities and observations while living on a Canterbury sheep run in the 1860's. Early exploration had opened up the middle west, past the plains and the foothills, and the roving pioneers were beginning to settle down permanently, building homes and bringing their wives from Britain to share their isolation. Lady Barker married in England and came to Canterbury as a bride, and her letters home were collected to form "Station Life in New Zealand". A resume of the book is given here by Helen Paine, Rural Sociologist, Department of Agriculture, Wellington, for interest in Lady Barker's story has recently been revived. "Station Life in New Zealand" has great value as a record of the social and historical background of the Canterbury settlers, and as such is very readable.



[Photograph by H. P. Hill, reproduced in the "Weekly Press", Christchurch, March, 1911.
Lady Barker.

A HAZARDOUS journey from England was the common experience of most of New Zealand's pioneers. Lady Barker emphasised the worst aspects of such a voyage in the opening chapters of her book: "... and oh, the monotony of that time!—the monotony of it! Our decks were so crowded that we divided our walking hours, in order that each set of passengers might have space to move about." The people kept up their spirits with concerts and plays, and it seems to have been these amusements they remembered long after the miseries of the storms and crowds had been forgotten. Nevertheless, the moment they landed was one for which all the travellers were grateful when they realised that their weary days and nights at sea were over.

Most ships stopped for a short time in Melbourne, and here Lady Barker marvelled at the rapidity of growth in the new town, but she scarcely had time to look around before she embarked again for New Zealand. The most dangerous and difficult passage in the whole voyage was across the Tasman in a small mail steamer; they landed at Nelson and Wellington before coming to the end of their journey and disembarking in Lyttelton. Almost as soon as they landed the passengers set out on the last lap of their journey and crossed the hills to Sumner and on to Christchurch. Lady Barker could find no complaint of "any coldness or want of welcome to my new home", and as soon as she had rested she determined to enter into the social life of the thriving town. "Christchurch is a great deal

more lively and bustling than most English country towns, and I am much struck by the healthy appearance of the people. There are no paupers to be seen; everyone seems well fed and well clothed; the children are really splendid."

First View of Station Life

Station life began at once for Lady Barker—not at her own home, but at Heathstock, 65 miles north of Christchurch, where she and her husband enjoyed a holiday for their first few weeks in New Zealand. While staying at Heathstock she was warned not to expect to find its comforts the rule, in case they gave her "a very erroneous impression of station life". In the letters of this period she describes the delight in things around her—a delight which seems to have been intensified



[From the 1900 jubilee number of the "Weekly Press", Christchurch. The Christchurch of the 1860's which Lady Barker described as "a very pretty little town, still primitive enough to be picturesque, and yet very thriving: capital shops, where everything may be bought; churches, public buildings, a very handsome club-house, etc." Oxford Terrace and Gloucester Street are in the foreground and the Triangle to the left.