

THE EARLY DRAWINGS OF DAVID LOW

As Seddon died in 1906 and the drawing is signed "David A. C. Low" this picture was probably attempted very early in the century, and remember, Low was born in 1891. At about this time another N.Z. artist, F. W. Hiscocks, was flourishing, and although Hiscocks was never to reach even the fringe of the fame eventually to come to Low, it was only natural that young David should be influenced by his popularity. Perhaps the independence of Low was even then asserting itself, for the drawing was never completed or published. He must have realised that it was not 100 per cent. David Low.

I have already mentioned two signatures. These early drawings show others. There is "D. Low," a simple "L.," L O W divided between the legs of a caricature, and then the progressive development of the simple Low signature strengthened as the years drew on to the magic symbol of three letters famous to-day as the hallmark of the world's greatest cartoons.

In one drawing in the collection the signature is "Low M.L." signifying, of course, his entry into the pages of the paper that was first to announce his matured genius to London—the *Sydney Bulletin*. This picture is typical of "Bulletinese" of the period and is reproduced with this article.

Low's power as a caricaturist was developing rapidly in his youth. Even at that period he had none of the benevolent frivolity of the London *Punch* school and yet there was nothing cruel (nor has this ever been present) in the terrific truth and humour of his exaggerated portraiture. His sense of observation, even at this stage, was merciless. Also as an enduring example of his thoroughness, we find him experimenting on the reverse side of one picture on W. M. Hughes. Conceivably, in that very pencil drawing, the famous *Billy Book* was in progress of germination.

In one caricature we find him satirising a N.Z. Governor of many years ago. The troops are lined up for inspection and a sorry lot they are, but His Excellency is obviously more interested in making an impression on the crowd that we feel is watching him. Perhaps, the editor handling this drawing feared lese-majeste, for he has reduced the picture, per medium of blue pencil, to a bust, leaving in only two or three of the more presentable soldiers.