

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT SHORTRIED ANDERSON

It is well known that the autobiographies and journals of persons who occupied positions of little social or political significance often throw more light on the character of their society than those of the noteworthy. A recent most interesting and valuable donation in this category by Miss M. Digges Smith of Wellington, is the autobiography of Robert Shortried Anderson (1833-1874). These reminiscences of a draughtsman-clerk-labourer in two small volumes were probably written with publication in mind for there are several references to the "reader". The text appears to have been based on diaries kept at the time, for the narrative is arranged in chronological form in dated paragraphs which in sections are little more than diary entries. The first section covers Anderson's early life in Edinburgh but from his departure in July 1851 for Melbourne until the diary concludes in January 1859 the record is detailed. From the indirect evidence of a list of dates in the end-paper of the New Zealand volume the narrative could have been assembled in 1861 when Anderson was 28 years old and possibly more settled than before.

The son of an Edinburgh piano maker he attended Deans Street School and Wm. Cairns's Academy. After trying various occupations including a term with a druggist he was for a comparatively brief spell in his real element in the drawing room of an architect where his talent for sketching was encouraged. However he decided to emigrate to Australia and sailed on the *Northumberland* from the Thames on 22 July 1851, landfall in Port Phillip being made over three months later on 2 November.

Some two months earlier the first payable goldfield at Ballarat had been found and Melbourne was already showing the features of a gold rush town. Jobs in the architectural field which Anderson sought were not to be had in the prevailing unsettled conditions. However within a few days he had obtained a position as an assistant in a chemist's shop to be opened on the new Mount Alexander field. The small party of three left Melbourne on 19 November with a dray of stores and six days later arrived at Forest Creek, where they pitched tent. Anderson's immediate duties were as diverse as might be expected but seemed chiefly to sell not beer or spirits but ginger beer, lemonade, raspberry vinegar at 6d or a shilling per glass. His talents as a sketcher found immediate reward for on 29 November he made several drawings which he sold the same day for £3.10.0d and received numerous orders for more from the diggers.

Miners' grievances were quickly ventilated but not as quickly settled. Anderson happened coincidentally to be on the field when the diggers