AKAROA

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Akaroa Heads

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BY

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B. E. B.

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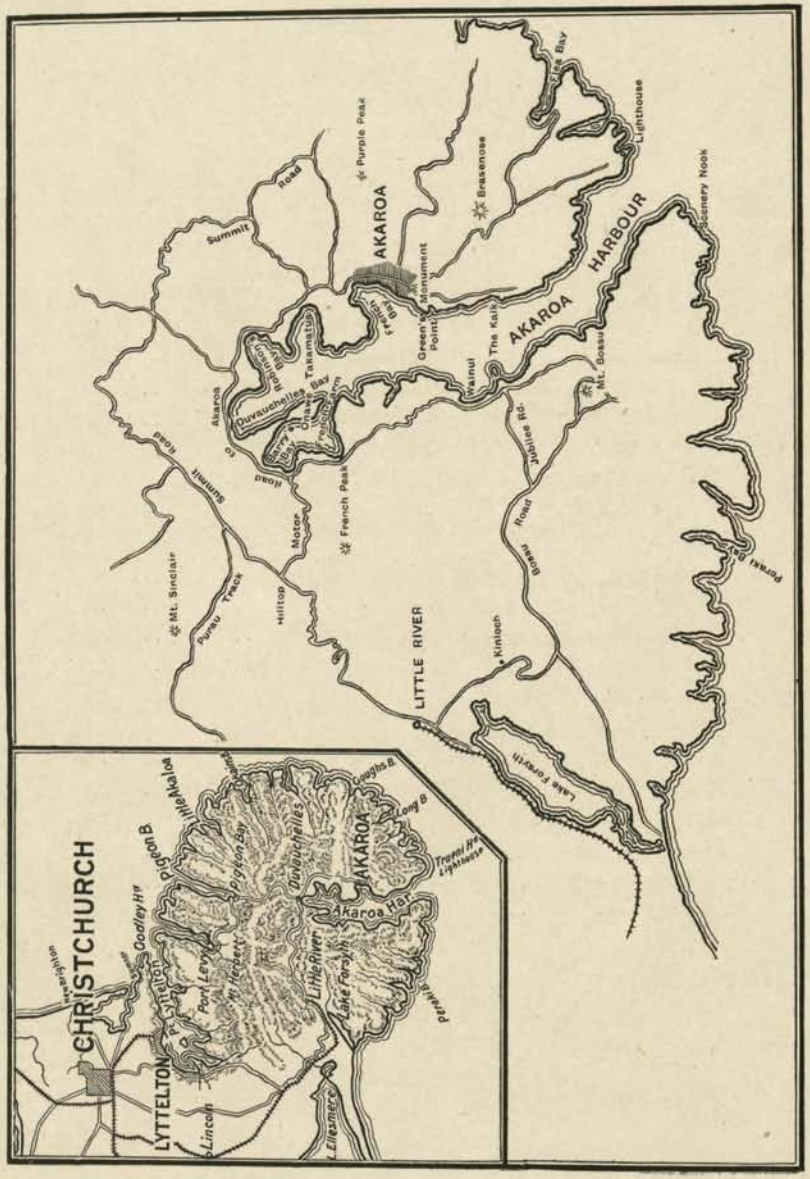


Map of Akaroa Harbour and Banks Peninsula

AKAROA

"High heads of the mountains encircle the harbour
(That parted but pulsing drop of deep sea),
Where, rimm'd with block rocks, in a cove, round a corner,
A little port sparkles with glory and glee:

Fresh with all Ocean, alive with its motion,
Built upon Colour and bulwark'd with Light,
Her happy cheek dipping within the waves' lipping,
Painting their clear blue to clear red-and-white,

There she stands! Nay, advancing upon the waves' glancing
With white wings of ships and with bright feet of boats,
A before-glow of greeting, a message of meeting,
Out-tossing before her—twice radiant, she floats."

These verses always come into my mind at the Hill-top Inn, on the way to Akaroa. For there, sure enough, in a great circle of bold, rocky crests, are the "high heads of mountains;" and there, far below. down at the bottom of the vast green cup of country they enclose, lies "that parted but pulsing drop of deep sea," known to us as Akaroa Harbour. It is completely land-locked, seen from here; it looks only like a great lake, startlingly blue; but, on its left, its eastern side—yes, there lies the "little port," there "sparkles" Akaroa! Who that has once seen it from this distant view-point on a sunny day can ever forget the delicious vision of that little red-and-white handful of houses, nestled away so snugly down there all by itself, amid such immensities of empty green and blue? So cheerful does the little place look, that it

almost seems to laugh; so positive, so clear, does it stand out by its bright water-side, that it makes a mark for the sun to shine on; and, being, with the exception of an isolated farm or so, the only visible human hold in all this multitude of acres, to the sociable mind it gleams and sparkles after still another fashion, and shines up from the landscape like the jewel in a ring.

Not less entrancing, either, is that nearer view, when, after the dozen miles or so, first of descent, and then of waterside, the coach-road brings one at length to the top of its last hill, and again, but this time at one's very feet, the little bright town bursts suddenly into view, its white walls and red roofs all glowing in the afternoon sun, below green grassy slopes all glowing too. You can see the whole length of it sideways from here—just a mere fringe of waterside houses set in trees and gardens, running in and out and out upon, the glassy blue water—

"Her happy cheek dipping within the waves' lipping."

On the right, spreads the harbour's glittering breadth; on the left, the hilly pastures, rising almost from the water's actual edge, run back and up into rocky crags two thousand feet above; and their furthest spur closes the view ahead, and shuts in the place from even a sight of the outer Ocean, like an arm in a green sleeve, kindly but firmly barring in a child from possible danger. There really is something child-like in the aspect of this little Akaroa. How confidingly she cuddles down between the mighty hills and mighty sea! how frankly she looks up and looks out, how fresh and clean her face is, how innocent her air! And then she is still such a mere mite of a town; all told, there are not more than some seven hundred souls in these leafy streets spread out below

Akaroa, looking South

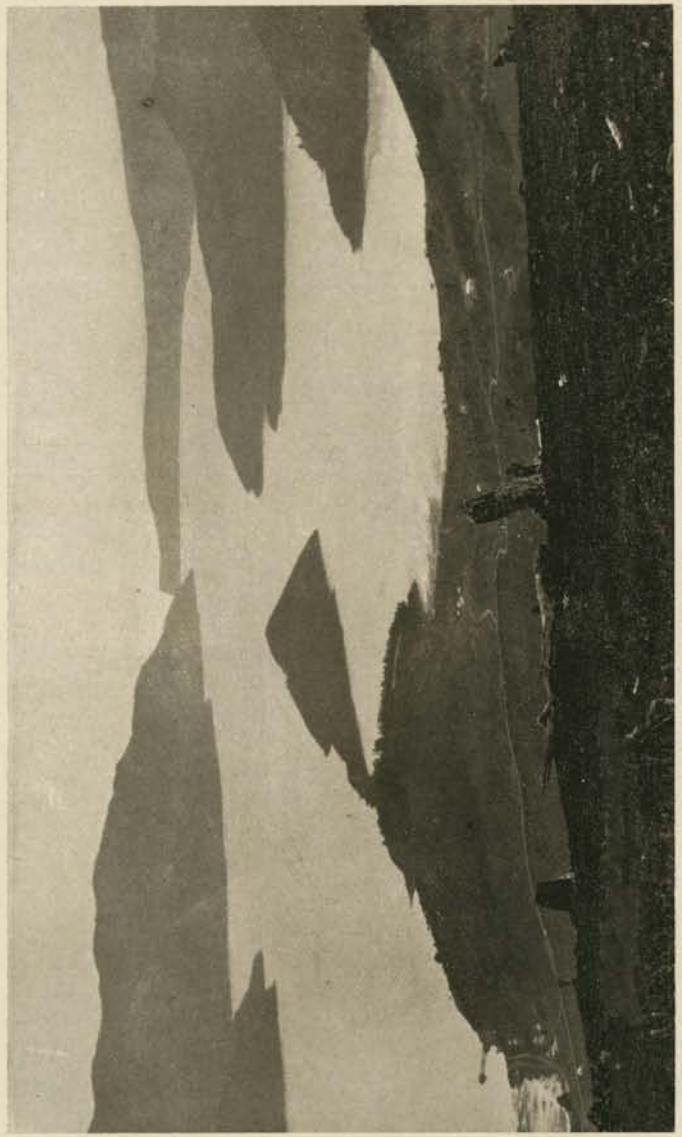
us. One of them, the main street, runs right through from beginning to end of the narrow flat along the waterside; but the buildings along it have grouped themselves into two distinct camps, and are divided by a bright little crescent of beach and water, and a hilly spur that overhangs the road. The nearer is the older—the "French end"; and it contributes a little church belfry to the view, and a little jetty, and a wide green playing-field, set with lofty poplars. The further, the "English end," has the main wharf, and another jetty, running from it out into the water; it rises hillwards, whereas the French end is flat; and where it terminates, on the sea-forbidding spur mentioned above, a hillside house stands boldly forth out of dark trees, with something of the picturesque look of a presiding castle. And that is all you can see in this bird's-eye view—and pretty well all there is to see. We will come to detail later.

Little though she is, however, and infantine though she looks, there is no place in New Zealand that has more varied and picturesque a past. Take her Nature story first—and there is a romance, if you like! For Akaroa Harbour, this soft, serene bosom of blue, with its necklace of little bright bays and pastures, was once the site of an extremely active volcano. Yes truly—

"Once, where these waves lie blue, there lashed
Red waves of furious fire!
The smouldering, shaking Earth they gash'd,
Spat wrath at Heaven, assail'd and gnash'd
Themselves in pent desire.
Till....with ceaseless corrosion, expansion, explosion,
With riving and striving, the Forces of Flame
Carv'd out and completed a way for wide Ocean,
And into the crater cool sea-water came!"

All this happened ages and ages ago, of course....Do you remember the old Maori legend of how Maui fished up New Zealand from the depths of the sea, and how, when liberties were taken with it in his absence, this "Fish" of his indignantly flapped itself up and down (which is why New Zealand is such a hilly country)? Well, no bit of its body would appear to have felt more agitation that did Banks Peninsula that curious, elliptical knob that juts out so suddenly from the flat Canterbury Plains, on the east coast of the South Island; and at the southern extremity of whose deeply-jagged coast, Akaroa Harbour makes as it were but the deepest gash among many. For the Peninsula is all corrugated country, just a succession of one long ridge after another, with a succession of deep valleys in between. The extreme height of these spurs, which ray out seaward from a kind of central spine, is between two and three thousand feet; they run smoothly down for miles toward their furthest tips, of dark sea cliff a few hundred feet in height; they are covered in these days with grass—sheep feed by the thousand on their rock-ribbed sides, and their paddocks of cocksfoot make of the Peninsula a granary, famous throughout Australasia. The deep valleys they enclose are grassy also, at their upper end; further down, they contain often some little settlement; but the seaward end is always a rocky bay, and frequently a miniature fjord, thrusting its narrow azure gulf for miles up into the hill's green heart. Climate, configuration and soil combine to make of the Peninsula one of the most fertile parts of New Zealand; it is certainly one of the most picturesque; and no part could well be more peaceful.

Yet its largest "fjord," Akaroa Harbour, which is nine miles long, is the crater, as I began by saying, of one vigorous volcano, and Lyttelton Harbour, at the



Akaroa Harbour, showing Onawe

Plains' end of the Peninsula, is that of another. All the long spurs were originally smoking lava-flows; the bays and fjords are just the spaces left between them, the piled-up hill-crests are volcanic rock, and the purple sea-cliffs mainly made of scoria. Nor is this the only chapter (which can hardly have been the first, either) of the Peninsula's adventurous history. Born of fire, there is evidence that she next underwent the baptism of water; and disappeared, by gradual subsidence probably, beneath the surface of the sea. Kelp, I suppose, grew then upon the slopes now clothed in cocksfoot; fishes swam about the rock-crests, and the valleys were deep cups of crystal water instead of crystal air. For how long? Since that was not the end either, as we see; but whether suddenly or slowly, shaking off the sea's hold upon her, up again rose this adventurous bit of Earth, like some brown Venus from the blue, and re-asserted her right to "a place in the sun." Gradually she wove for herself a rich robe of forest, and the birds came to her; but the sea still kept its hold upon her, by means of a long blue finger laid in the folds of her green robe here and there. And then, long after, came her next great experience—Man!

Whether Man, as the Peninsula first saw him, was Maori, is not known. There may have been earlier inhabitants; but we have no actual evidence. The Maoris, however, came about 400 years ago, from the the east coast of the North Island; and thereupon, except for those occasional feuds that spiced the brown man's life, the country seems to have become a Maori Arcadia. To quote Canon Stack: "It was a very pleasant state of existence; there was a variety and abundance of food, and agreeable and healthy occupation for mind and body. Each season of the year, and each part of the day, had its specially allotted

work both for men and women. The women.... besides household duties....gathered the flax and tipalm fibres, and....worked them up into a great variety of garments.....The men gathered the food. and stored it.....They cultivated the *kumara, hue, taro,* and *karaka*; fish were caught....and cured. Wild pigeons, *kakas*, Paradise ducks, and mutton birds, were cooked and preserved.....Netting, carving. and the grinding and fitting of stone implements.... occupied the old men. They beguiled the long winter evenings by reciting traditions and genealogies, by repeating poetry and fairy tales, and by songs, dances. and round games."

Unfortunately, after this idyl of "uncivilized" life had lasted for two or three centuries, one of its customary battle-axe interruptions had a horrible sequel, and brought it all to an end. Te Rauparaha, the fierce chieftain from the North, arrived on an errand of vengeance, and subsequently wiped out almost the entire Maori population, at Onawe, that curious "jetty of lava" that divides the head of Akaroa Harbour into two bays. Of those taken captive, some later on came back—were even brought back, Canon Stack says, by their Christianised captors; but, for whatever reason, they never regained their old numbers on the Peninsula; where there seem to have been but a few of them living at the beginning of our next chapter of its history—the European occupation.

Whalers, of course, had early made the acquaintance of this deeply indented coast with its fine harbours, and in 1835 one of them, a Frenchman, Captain L'Anglois, coming to Akaroa, was so enchanted with it that he coveted it for France; arranged terms of purchase with the Maoris, and on his return home formed a company to colonise it. An old ship of war,

Le Comte de Paris, was lent him by the Government to take out his settlers, and a frigate, *L'Aube,* under the command of Commodore Lavaud, was dispatched to protect them on arrival. The *Comte de Paris,* with 65 emigrants (six of them Germans), and plenty of seeds and vines, although no stock, left Rochefort in France for Akaroa in the spring of 1840, and arrived there also in the spring, but an Antipodean spring that was nearly six months later! The frigate had

The Monument at Green's Point, and H.M.S. "New Zealand."

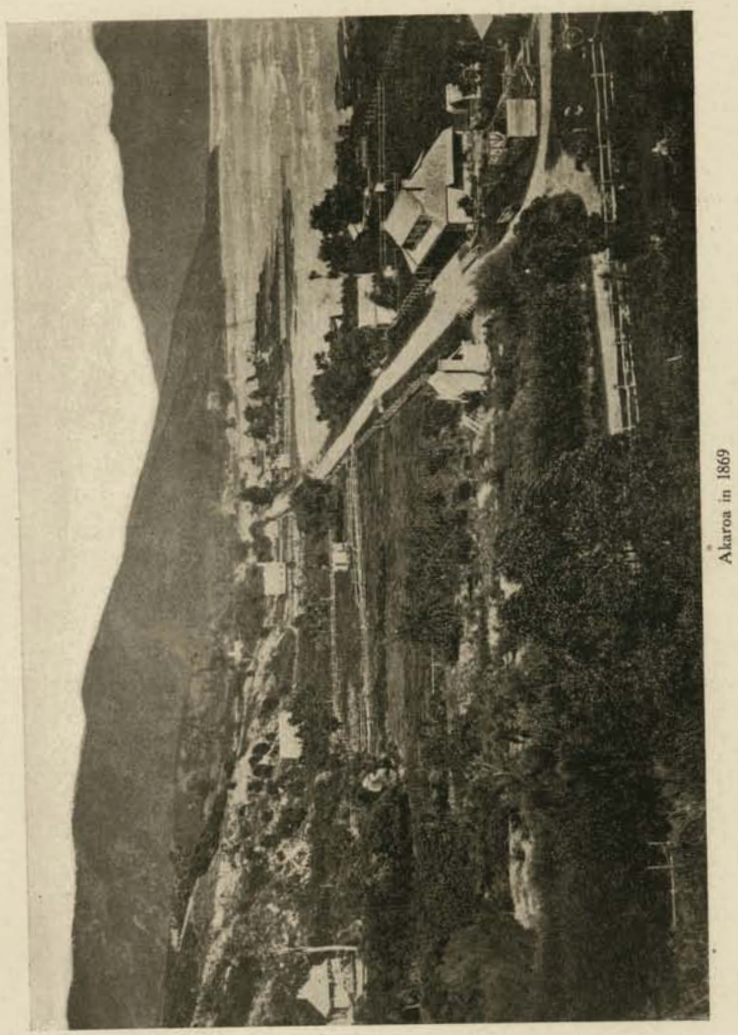
arrived too, just a day or so previously; but—only a few hours before her, another war-ship had also come up Akaroa Harbour, H.M.S. *Britomart*: and the flag she flew was British. The new emigrants, too, as they were towed past what is now called Green's Point, close to the township. perceived, floating from a new flagstaff there, the Union Jack. It was just a little bit of boasting, they were assured, on the part of some English whalers;

the August sky was bright and blue; the great green trees came to the water's edge, and the birds were singing—the innumerable birds of those days. They thought no more about the flag, but, delighted with their arrival and their prospects, hastened to set up their tents on the flat (where the office of the *Akaroa Mail* now stands) and claim each his promised five acres. Not until years after did they know that they were living, not in a French but in an English Colony.

Now, how did that happen? seeing that it was not until the next year, 1841, that New Zealand became a British Colony? Well....! The trouble about history generally seems to be, first, that you may not have all the facts, and next, that you may read them wrong. We used to have a fine old gossipy legend about the secret of French designs on Akaroa being surprised out of a too-convivial Lavaud in Auckland, and the Britomart racing accordingly helter-skelter down the coast on British business—of "grab." But competent authority now assures us that we must give that up, in favour of a deliberate settlement between the French and English representatives; and surely we may welcome the exchange—seeing that it bears witness to the good sense of both nations, and saves the honour of our own. One wishes that all rival "patriotic" claims could be adjusted with the same amity, and the like excellent results; for there was never any trouble between French and English at Akaroa.

For many interesting details of these early days, the reader may be referred to Mr. Jacobson's graphic *Tales of Banks Peninsula*; and perhaps the writer of these lines may be permitted to mention also a little sketch of her own,* *Grandmother Speaks,* and a poem,† *Early Days,* of which the material was gleaned

*In "Brown Bread. †In "Shingle Short."



Akaroa in 1869

at first-hand from two women who had had fifty years' Peninsular experience. Life in those "early days" was very easy and simple in some ways, and in others not quite simple, and not easy at all. There was

"No mail, or school-house; there was neither church nor store,
People lived in pine-wood *whares*, with pine-sawdust on the floor;
....Always dress'd in dungaree, never had new boots,
Lived on pig and pigeon, *kaka*, fish, and roots.

"But, chew and get the full taste out of everything you've got,
And you're maybe just as well off with a little as a lot:
....Ay, sunshine, seashine, freedom an' content,
Bless those bare old Bay days! Light enough they went!"

The arrival at Lyttelton of the Canterbury Pilgrims, in 1850, naturally accelerated the settlement of the Peninsula. Saw-mills were set up in its thick Bush (wherein people were often lost in those days); clearing and grassing proceeded apace. We are a little disposed to quarrel with our forefathers now for their policy of ruthless Bush destruction, but I have heard at least one of them grow mightily indignant at such criticism. "If *we* hadn't cleared the country, how d'you suppose *you* could be living here now?" he would demand, with a subtle effect of scorn at our soft ways.

And so, by degrees, we arrive at our pastoral Peninsula of to-day, and at an Akaroa with but little left of its romantic "French affair," beyond the memory, and a faint, persisting, "foreign" fragrance, very sweet to some of us. In the family names of many of the inhabitants we find it—*Lelièvre*, for instance, *Libeau*, *Etéveneaux*, in the names of the main streets—in *Lavaud*, *Jolie*, *Balguéri*;

in the tall poplars, that vividly recall those long, white, poplar-bordered roads of France; in the acacias, the tall old almonds, and the walnut groves. There are olives, too, and figs, lemons and orange-trees, in some of the Akaroa gardens; grapes ripen still on certain walls and banks; and over one fence that fronts the sea, a Judas-tree drops from its leafless boughs in spring, upon the passer-by, blossoms just as purple, just as pea-flower-like, as those that grow in Southern France—or in Italy for that matter; indulgent in this as in other things, Akaroa is no purist in her "Continental" charm. Indeed, I am not certain whether it is not really one of the Swiss-Italian lakes that she most resembles—especially when she lies basking gaily in the sunshine of some morning in early autumn; when the deep blue of the sky is a little softened, and the bronze of the hills empurpled, by a breath of haze, and there is a smell of ripe fruit in the air. Or walk up the Kaik Road to the little Catholic cemetery, and look down through the spruce-tips, at the broad, gleaming water, wholly enclosed in verdant hillsides, sprinkled with cows whose hides make rich spots of colour in the clear sunshine—and you might almost as well be looking at a bit, say, of Lake Geneva, particularly if your eye should be curious enough to spell out some inscription, half-obliterated on certain old wooden slabs within the sacred ground, and find the words are French.

"Fille chèrie, ange bien-aimée,
Repose dans les cieux!
Souviens-toi de nous!"

says one, whose date is 1865, and whose dilapidation makes one wish some pious antiquary dwelt in Akaroa to make such relics of the past his care. On a summer's evening, all redolent of roses and of new-mown grass, with a great white moon rising over the

hills across the water, and women gardening their graves, the tenderness of the whole scene, and of the Old-World memories it evokes, grows almost too poignant to be borne. Yet precisely that note, of yearning, loving, sweet reminiscence, too dreamy and far-off to be exactly sad, is one of the characteristic charms of Akaroa to any who know the Old World.

The actual Akaroa is to-day a clean, prosperous, orderly little borough, extremely healthy; I do not know where else one sees a more plentiful proportion of round-limbed, rosy little ones, or of hale old folk. Thanks to the prevision of its founders, the place is well-endowed with public lands, so that the municipality can afford to supply it with such luxuries as public baths, and electric light. Several schools and churches and halls, a post-office, library and reading-room, court-house, bank, and butter-factory, provide its tale of public buildings, and if in appearance these are hardly worthy of their noble natural environment, that is scarcely the fault of the borough. Our national architecture has not yet evolved itself (how could it, in scarce seventy years?), and most New Zealand towns at present make one thankful that the timber of which they are chiefly built is a perishable substance, which in the course of thirty years or so will give us the chance to try again.

Of the two wharves at the "English end." which we noticed in our bird's-eye view from the hill, the shorter is sacred to fishermen and the litter, always so pleasant to the sense of a sea-lover, of nets and rope, cray-pots and tar-kegs; while alongside the other, once or twice a week, a coast-wise steamer may be seen, taking aboard Peninsula cheese and grass-seed, or discharging a freight of flour, sugar, drapery, etc.; for the railway is 20 miles away at the other end of the coach-road, and our air-ships are not yet. When they

are, I suppose we shall lose that picturesque relic of old days and old ways still to be seen lumbering slowly towards the wharf with tall loads of plump grass-seed sacks—I mean the bullock-team.

Beyond this wharf, the waterside road, with its border of twinkling *ngaio*-boughs, runs on, past the fine boat-house, to Green's point, and its obelisk commemorating that first hoisting of the British flag on the Peninsula. So coaxing, so indulgent, is the

Bullock Teams

"allure" of this green and leafy way, twisting in and out along the scalloped shore, with grassy banks and the hanging woods of the Domain on the one side, and splashing ripples and shining pebbles on the other, that, particularly if you happen to pace it when the stars add their twinkle to that of the *ngaio*-leaves, or moonlight curls bright in the ripples, you see at once that you would have had to have the bright idea of calling it Lovers' Walk yourself, if it had not borne

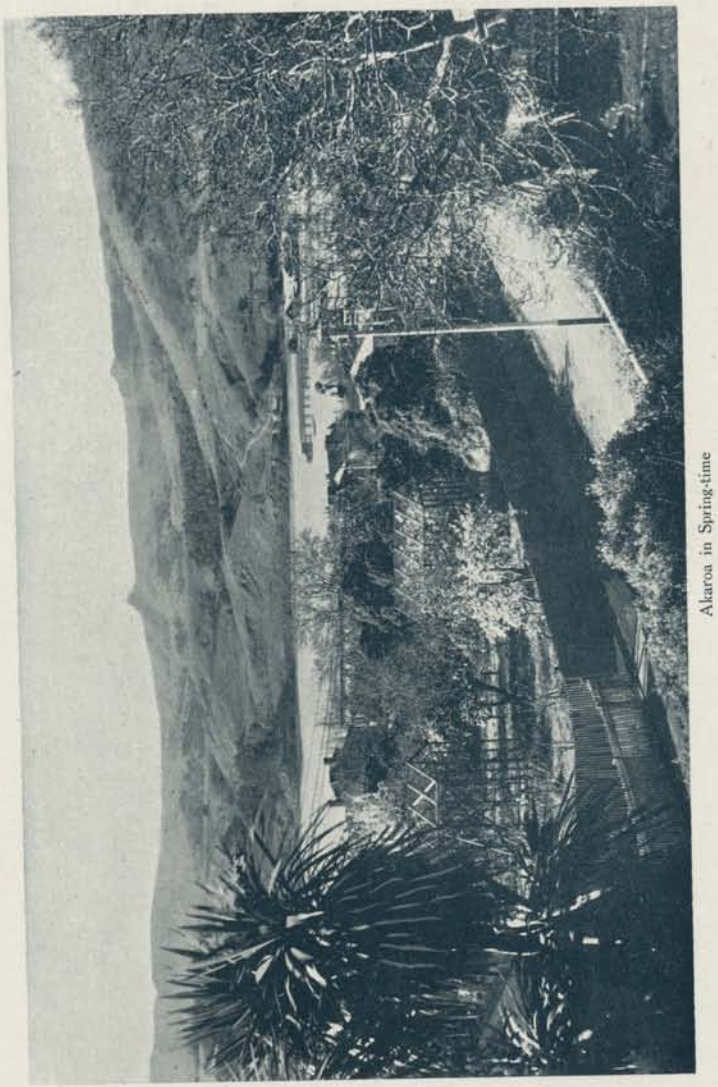
that name for years already. Lovers' Walk goes on to Green's Point; and that ends our waterside. But the waterside is not quite the whole of Akaroa. From it, there run up towards the craggy hill-crests three deep, steep valleys, green gashes in the broad, tawny slope. Each of these has sides of velvety pasture, dotted with tall native trees, and bits of Bush; and each has a little clear creek dancing down it, under a tangled covert of bright-glancing evergreen vines. Up

An Akaroa House

these three valleys—Gréhan, Balguéri, and Aylmer's—the town has spread a little way already, and covers the harbour end of them with a tapestry of gardens and orchards, out of which the painted walls, gables, and attic-windows peep with a picturesque effect not too common with New Zealand cottages. The municipal authorities have understood how to conserve the beauty of these valleys while yet making use of their streams for lighting and watering; and at the head

of Aylmer's, a waterfall, not great, but very charming in its silvery Naiad-like slenderness, and the cool seclusion of its leafy grot, makes a delicious refuge on a sultry day.

Higher yet, the bare, mighty ascent, darkly tufted here and there with the shelter-trees of some lonely homestead, goes surging and sweeping backwards and up, for five steep miles or so, to the broad shoulders and castellated peaks of the great crater-rim that stands between two and three thousand feet above Akaroa, and keeps her in such safe shelter. The names of the principal crags paint their colour rather aptly—Purple Peak, and Brasenose; the uplands themselves are generally sunburnt and tawny: but in spring the new grass turns them into great billows of the freshest possible green, bright and vivid as the green of emeralds—acres and acres of emeralds all melted together, and softened to a texture tender as that of flowers. Then, like a pink-and-white flower herself, Akaroa lies embosomed in them, for all her orchards are in bloom. Peach-blossom, plum-blossom, snowy pear and cherry, apple like a child's cheek, and, more delicate than apple, the exquisite flower of the quince, take on faithfully in turn the task of making and keeping her all through spring a bower of mid-air bloom. The lacework of the poplars does its part; so do the blossoming hedgerows of hawthorn, and of golden broom. The new green silk of the willows glistens, that of the oaks fairly glows, in the crystal October light. The sweet breath of growing grass, of resin, of young leaves, of fruit-flowers, steals out upon the sea-breeze; the birds sing and sing (native *tui* and *makomako* alas! far less numerously than English thrush and blackbird, chaffinch and goldfinch); the creeks warble. Under the blossoming boughs, too, all the gardens are coming freshly into



Akaroa in Spring-time

flower—the cottage-gardens of Akaroa, that line every lane, and everywhere repeat, each with its own variations, the general theme of artless loveliness and effortless growth. If there are few that show signs of strenuous cultivation, there are none where no flowers grow. An easy informality is the rule, and the prose of cabbages and beans and peas (if prose it is? think of the shell-like curves of a cabbage and the scent of blossomed beans!) mingles quite naturally with the poetry of the flower-plots, filled to overflowing with the old-fashioned blossoms that always seem the most poetic of all. Columbine, and stocks and pinks (the plain white ones that you can never beat for fragrance, and the fine-lady ones with the claret border), wallflowers and tulips and polyanthus; gay turbans of ranunculus, rosy "lady's-locket," purple "honesty," "jug-lilies," so purely white amid such great green leaves (*Arums*, towns-folk call them); snapdragons and larkspurs, springing up into the air like little fountains of the liveliest crimson and the freshest blue—all these, and many more riot gloriously next to new-leaved currant and gooseberry bushes, and delicious lilac all freshest purple or white. October in Akaroa side-streets takes one back to English villages in early June. Next comes November; and then this little flower-town puts on her diadem. and her necklace, and her bracelets and girdle—all of roses! It is "roses, roses all the way"; over the fences, over the houses, over the lanes. Trees of all kinds burst into bunches of pale, old-fashioned "Seven Sisters," clambering everywhere, and filling the warm air with their distinctive breath—sweet, with a touch of aromatic tartness; the hedges are festooned with the shell-pink, loose-petalled roses of Provence. which have taken as kindly to this Antipodean soil as did the Old-World emigrants who brought them; one great

old "Cloth of Gold" shows a stock as thick as a vine, and covers not only the wall but most of the roof of the fortunate cottage that owns it—or that it owns?—and roses red and damask and white and pink, bloom in the gardens so lavishly, so freely, so happily, that it makes one happy to see them. And nowhere do they look blither and more at home than in the little cemeteries, which, with their insistent twining and wreathing over fence and cross and railing, they convert into real rose-gardens, reminding one in the sincerest, sweetest way, that there really is no death anywhere—only change of form.

"Yon tomb, see! all blossoms,
All roses this cross.
So breathe, my lamenting!
So bloom, O my loss!"

In early autumn, tall yellow sunflowers greet you as you enter the long main street; the gardens are full of rich autumn colours, purple and crimson, orange and gold; and the overhead boughs are full of fruit. Peaches glow in the sunshine, apples shine in the shade; the plum-boughs are hung with great oval drops of amber or purple, or puce, the nectarines with ruby balls; the tall pear trees are often so thick with fruit that its tint eclipses that of the leaves, and the trees turn into spires of pale green instead of dark.

In winter, unless it should happen to be very wet, and even then the place dries quickly, one may spend the day out-of-doors almost as pleasantly as in summer; indeed, in some ways Akaroa is more agreeable in June than in January, if holiday-makers only knew it. Roses bloom in the open even in mid-winter; the bright green valley-lanes are sprinkled with pale purple periwinkle stars, and in July and August with

the kowhai's airy gold showers. The Domain keeps unchanged by the season its lovely labyrinths of

"Verduous glooms and winding mossy ways,"

sloping down to the harbour, and framing delicious vignettes of it between glancing laurels, and spiry, spicy manuka and pine. The little gullies of native Bush (praise to those who had the public spirit to preserve

The old Blockhouse in Akaroa Domain

it!) shelter friendly little fantails and velvet-headed "Jacky-Jacks" with primrose waistcoats; and the great oaks beside the old block-house, that relic of unrealised fear of the Maoris in the very early days, lift gigantic mounds of gold-brown leaf, untouched by wind or frost, almost till the young green is due.

Day after day, it always seems to me, whatever the season, one can wander about Akaroa getting ever some fresh pleasure for one's sense of beauty. It is

a place full of pictures; pictures that are poems. There is always the Harbour, to begin with; one is for ever getting some new vision, some different conception, of that great sheet of living water, dropped so deeply within its hills, invaded by so many grassy, tree-tipped headlands, coaxed into so many little bays, rich with so many reflections. Generally, it is calm, and lies all softly radiant, looking like some tremendous sheeny azure jewel, shot through with

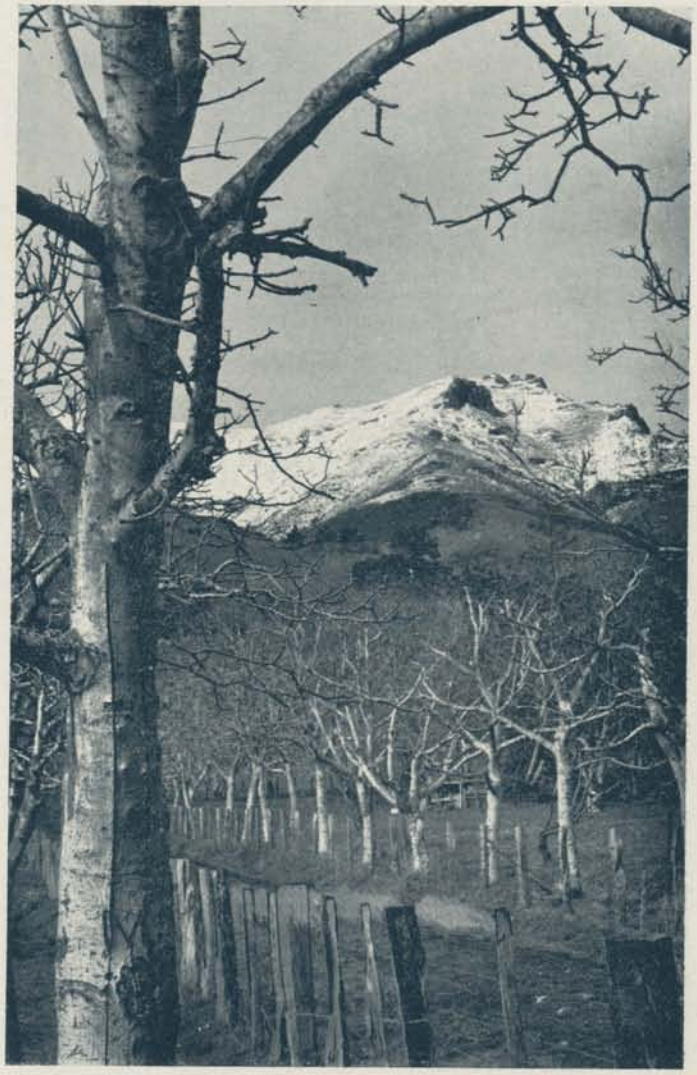
In the Domain

shadows, and quivering into purple translucencies. But neither its colour nor its calm has much chance of growing monotonous; like all sea-things, it is a creature of change. At almost any moment, its setting may alter; so sensitive are these hills to light and shade that a changed sky means a changed country, and I have seen white mists in a few moments magnify the hills into mountains, and certain glooms frown them almost flat; while as to the surface of the water,

In a Harbour-side Garden

its blue of course can be laced into white and ruffled-up in a second by wind, or clouds can dull it into grey. A still, grey day gives it one of its most enchanting aspects; for it then lies dreaming under a veil of grape-like bloom; and mirrors so perfectly reflections so motionless that you almost stop breathing as you look, for fear of disturbing all that peace. In winter, it can turn, under a sky of lead, to a looking-glass of steel—in an ivory frame, if snow is on the hills. At night it is delightful, when the borough lights fringe it with cressets of gold, and drop long quivering golden shafts deep into its liquid blackness, while, perhaps, the ruby or emerald eye of a steamer shows alongside the pier. Or go a little way up into the hills, on a "blue day," and let the Harbour smile up at you in that enchanting way it has, when it peeps from the end of a gold-green valley through bronzy walnut-boughs, or maybe blue-gums, and fairly charms the heart out of you, if you care for smiles and colour.

Then there is Brasenose; best seen, I think, in the afternoon, and from certain seaward pines just beyond the Domain. There, on a summer day, with the hum of bees and wash of waves in one's ear, and the good warm pine-breath freshened by sea-breath, one can lie in luxury and let one's eye travel slowly across the foreground of dark, leafy shade made by the Domain tree-tops—then up long, long ascents of grass, first green, then tawny, then grey with rocks—till it comes to a wonder-struck full stop, on the burnished mass, the brassy glow, of the summit. Seen in the full, unshadowed sun, and against the stainless deep blue fire, of a true Akaroa sky, these barren rocks of Brasenose, fire-fused in their origin, burn still, with a subtler flame, and crown hillside and harbour and little harbour-town with a great altar to Light. In his admirable guide-book, *New Zealand*, Mr. James



Mount Brasenose, Akaroa

Cowan tells us that Brasenose was regarded by the Maoris as a dwelling-place of the gods, a sort of Olympus, presiding over Akaroa; and in the mists that so often softly enwreathe it, they imagined the spirits of their beloved dead to float. On a perfectly clear day, when every inch of him is so utterly possessed by the light that he seems as it were to break out of mere solid mass and substance, into a sort of ethereal fiery bloom, it is not hard to conceive of Brasenose as a spirit himself—a courageous spirit, standing up there, bare and brave, far away from all the trees and blossoms and shelter of the valley, and kindling his nakedness into glory. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help" —the Psalmist would have loved Brasenose.

At his foot, in the Domain, there is a certain glade of *manuka*,—"maiden-*manuka*"—loveliest of all our shrubs; and if you want quite a different picture, you can stand on the brink of that, and look down into a sea of flowers. Late December, or early January is the time. The little valley is full to the brim with long delicate sprays of snowy blossom, slightly flushed here and there with pink, and all poised waiting in the air, like the lifted arms of a thousand virgins. A little breeze runs up from the sea, and then all these arms sway as if the virgins were dancing; nothing was ever more graceful, more lissom, more innocently joyful. At the end of this valley of blossom are the blue wavelets of the harbour, dancing also; and the fresh sea-air is strongly aromatic with a sweet myrtle-like scent—a true New Zealand summer-scent that breathes up from bough and blossom to the basking turf above, where small gold-brown butterflies dance over the yellow shamrock-cups.

Or take a creek, and follow it a good way up. My own favourites are near the old Maori *kaik* (South Island for *kainga*), two or three miles along the coast

seaward; but almost any creek will do. Bright little clear brown creature! prattling, babbling, down in the depth of the gully it comes,

> "Down through the dreamy, magical dusk,
> Perfumed with clematis, myrtle and musk;
> Laving pink rootlets thrust from the brink,
> Giving the Robin and Fantail to drink.
>
> "Here quick through a channel, there smooth in a pool
> A volley of crystal....A column of Cool!
> Tucked into nothingness....Sliding out
> Through a smother of snow to a sliding spout."

And how it plays with an adventurous sunbeam!

> "Rollicking, frolicking, brother with brother,
> Tossing and tumbling over each other;
> Tickling the twilight with glimmer and gleams,
> Pranking the leaves with a pageant of dreams
> (Vivid, evasive), of brightness and beams!"

It is always animated; it has a dozen moods in a minute, and all of them charming; one could not wish for a more entertaining companion; and if it leads you unconsciously on and on right up into the hills, so much the better! When people complain, as some do, that Akaroa is lazy, I always feel that perhaps she may be a little, bless her! but if so, with her usual indulgence she holds an antidote in either hand—hill-climbing and sea-faring. One can go up Brasenose, or up to the Summit Road, that runs right along the crater-rim from Akaroa to the Hill-top, with the most glorious views—down upon the Harbour on one side, out upon the ocean on the other; one can ride over to Le Bon's Bay with the mailman; or walk out to the lighthouse at the Heads; or cross the Harbour to little green Wainui at the waterside, and travel up and over the hills above it, to Peraki on the outer

coast. Or one can simply take no road, but just follow a creek—up out of shrubs and shade to tawny slopes smelling of sun, with a brave little ribbonwood or fuchsia tucked into the creek-side, and great grey boulders beginning to crop out; sometimes into a tragic wilderness of old burnt Bush—logs and stumps shining silver-grey in the sun, or charred to furry blackness; sometimes to tussock, streaming and shining in the sunny breeze—there always is a breeze up here;

Why the Mail-bag was late

for "life," only some browsing sheep, and probably a hawk sailing solitary round and round; in "grass-seeding time" a row of men with bent backs, cutting steadily with sickles the self-sown harvest, whose steep and rock-strewn acres no machinery can tackle; or, a little later in the season, one or two men threshing out the seed with a flail. Until, still following up the creek, its gully becomes first only a fold in the hills, then a dimple; and the water vanishes to a mere

dampness of the turf, or perhaps a tiny drip-drip beside a tuft of fern or clump of white everlasting-daisy; and, on looking up, lo! nothing more but a mass of rocks between you and heaven. The air is racy, the light both intense and immense; all kinds of limits seem to have left you of themselves, and your spirits have risen with the altitude. How good it is to get a free view! to see right over the hills instead of into them or up to them, and beyond the land-

Cutting Cocksfoot Grass

locked harbour to behold the open sea! Instead of luxuriance, softness, detail, everything up here speaks of space, liberty, strength; everything is large, and very simple; everything shines and is frank—sea, sky, earth, air, and one's own mind, to match. It is a fine enfranchisement in all kinds of ways, to make a bit of an effort and get up out of Akaroa into its hills. They are not alpine, scarcely even sub-alpine; but they are noble, they are friendly, and they set one

at large in ways, and to a degree, that no words, but only experience, can tell. One feels no laziness after a day with the summits; but an intense exhilaration first, afterwards a lively contentment, a sense of light and air, of freedom and purity in one's inner self—that is what one brings down from them.

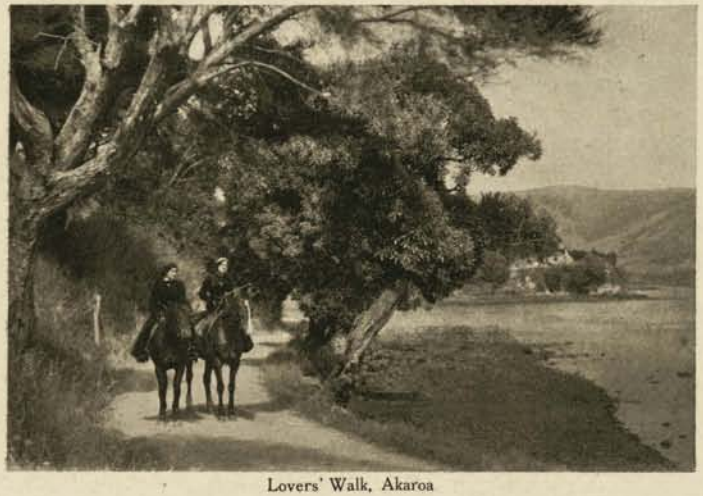
Or, if climbing does not suit you, and you are anything better than the very worst of sailors, take a boat, and leave the waterside for the water. The Harbour is nine miles long, full of fish, if you care for fishing, and full of beauty whichever way you look. Akaroa herself, seen with a foreground of water, and a background of tremendous slopes and summits, reveals anew the charm of her little bright face, and the promise of all her possibilities; the head of the Harbour is fringed with bits of settlement each in a bay of its own, and with all kinds of pleasant picnic-places; but it is seaward that the unsuspected treasures lie. As one rounds Green's Point, and the Heads begin to open out, the spirit of things changes. The door is opened, so to speak; and an air of adventure springs up. The coast becomes more and more rugged, particularly to port; great cliffs of black rock break in upon the pale slopes of clay and waving *toé-toé* grass—cliffs four or five hundred feet high, glistening with trickles of water. The strong swell dashes into the caverns that honeycomb their base, and swirls the tangled growths of giant kelp into tresses that suggest the head of a monster below; even on a calm day there is something savage in the water's strength, and something violently inhospitable about the cliffs and caves; something chilling and terrible about the gloomy grandeur of the place, that strikes a note hitherto quite lacking to Akaroan experiences. A gully hard by filled with greenery of almost tropic luxuriance—Nikau Palm Gully, by far

the farthest southern limit of the *nikau*—softens the landscape and reassures the timid heart; but the savagery is there; splendid to see, very bracing to contemplate.

Only a little further, and we are out upon the open sea, between the Heads—that to port not more than some three hundred feet high, and crested with the light-house, while, about a mile away, the opposite promontory rises black and stern to a height of about five hundred feet. Not far beyond this latter, down the coast, is a most curious bit of naked ruddy cliff-scenery, almost theatrical in form and colour, and known as Scenery Nook; but really I think it is rather the whole splendid coast-line, endlessly indented and fringed with rock, that makes the great attraction of a coast-wise cruise. On a fine day, when sea and sky are "cut out of a single sapphire," when the little waves flash, when the foam is bright white, the rocks are bright black, and headland after headland grows fairy-like and visionary down the miles and miles of coast, the experience is as gay and gallant as any I know—the world is a brave brave place, and there are no impossibilities anywhere! One's head is up and all fates welcome.

From such an expedition, whether to hills or sea, one comes back into the shelter of Akaroa full of fresh zest and fresh perception. Here she is, the little Lotus-land! lovelier than ever, and how gentle! like a kind green lap to rest in. Perhaps it is now that one becomes most conscious of that subtle charm, her graciousness; a rather rare charm in New Zealand. Nature with us is mostly on the heroic scale; while man's performances are still crude—tabernacles of tin built among the ruins of the Bush. By some miracle, here is a nook already, as it were, *mellow*; its setting noble, certainly, but not more than sizeable,

and itself already free from all signs of struggle. all untidiness of transition—fit for the Muses. fit for dreams! This perhaps is why it is so favourite a haunt of the newly wed; its sense of harmony enhances theirs; and then, this seclusion, this peace. these winding lanes, these kind, leafy recesses, these roses, and this moonlit sea that is so like a lake—all these were clearly made for them; while as to the human inhabitants, friendly and "let-live," no doubt they



Lovers' Walk, Akaroa

have long since come to look upon a pair of lovers as natural to the landscape. And do they lend it no charm in return, these "happy hearts in tune"? Surely Eden was the gladder for the presence of adoring Adam and ecstatic Eve; and I have met brides and bridegrooms in Akaroa whose joy and consequent good-will positively lit up the sunshine and helped the little waves dance!

Nor is it lovers only who luxuriate in what one may call the sympathetic temperament of the place. Many

feel only its gentleness, its lulling quality—"Good spot for a rest!" they say. But others discover in it a kind of stimulus, which magically frees for them their finer qualities of brain. Most of all, perhaps, is this the case with people whose aesthetic susceptibilities are keen. Seldom do they find Akaroa enervating; on the contrary, there are days of hers when merely to breathe such air, look into such a sky, realise such colour and such light, seems to them

"Pompey," the old pet Penguin, on the beach

reason enough for life, and sufficient occupation all day for more spirit, as well as senses, than they possess. What an appeal, too, she makes to the imagination, the love of contrast, and the historic *flair*! One looks out on the tranquil blue harbour, and remembers its mother, the volcano; one surveys the delicious velvet foldings of the hills, and considers the irresistible powers that have moulded them. What amazing spades dug this green garden! what tragedies produced this

tenderness! And then, this tenderness, how fresh it always is, how sprightly! and what a "delicate air" has this little country-lass! The very leaves of the trees, again—do they not build a perennial bridge between the Old World and this New?—Ah! so, alas! of late, have human lives! brave blood of Akaroa was spilt without a grudge in the far gullies of Gallipoli, and as I write is being given as freely to win back freedom for the fields of France. Or one need but ask a question or two of the folk who have stayed at home here all their lives, and lo! the curtain is up, and the human drama is in full play—all the pains and passions at full blast under the fruit-trees, jealousy walking in the streets, worry that like the waves can never keep quiet, and graves beneath the roses. Yes; but roses over the graves also, thank God! kindness common as green grass, peace paramount, and, in the human as well as the natural aspect of things, everywhere

"Beauty as undeniable as pain!"

Whether Akaroa will ever become a great industrial centre one may legitimately doubt. She will grow, of course. As the years go on, she too will go on climbing toward the peaks, and the sides of her three valleys will be clothed with houses; let us hope with many a green space saved among them, and many a pine and poplar still aspiring. Air-craft will solve all her present difficulties of transport, and go cruising in and out the long spurs like giant dragonflies; while the water-side will probably carry then only great public-buildings, and may they be as beautiful as it deserves! But, if Akaroa can develop along the lines of her true genius, it will surely be less to commerce that she will be devoted, than to the arts. It is of her nature, as of theirs, to give, not to get; all research

Newton's Waterfall, Aylmer's Valley

and invention asks a quiet sanctuary; and natural beauty is often the nurse of ideas conceived, it may very well be, in the storm and stress of the outer world, but needing a safe home for perfect birth. A studio, study—laboratory, oratory—that is what one would like Akaroa to be, next, if one could offer Life the hint. Life, however, generally has her own plans!

Let me close with one last little memory-picture of Akaroa as she is. It is early evening in mid-spring.

Milking Time

The gardens are leafy, but the roses are not yet; it is pink-time, blue and white fleur-de-lys-time, tulip-time; and there are round little green apricots laying their cheeks already against the old grey timber-fence. In the Domain, the oaks are golden-green, and the blackbirds singing Vespers; while the spruces tower up, "lit with Spring's candles." The air is very still, but racy in quality, and so lustrous you can all but see it; for, behind yonder dark hills across the harbour,

the sun is setting. The sky knows it, for its serene high blue, quite pale, is rosied all over with little petal-like clouds; and the Harbour knows it in its sleep, and passes softly in response out of grave violet and unsmiling purple into a lovely, tender blush. There is a twinkling of cow-bells, a distant lowing of cows and bleating of calves; for it is milking-time. Down over the tender springing grass of the pasture above, sprinkled a little with daisies and dew, here comes a young father, with a full milk-pail in his hand, and a drowsy little maid upon his shoulder. Higher, the uplands glow broad and far in the rich light, and Brasenose stands a-fire....Till one looks down again at the water, and lo! where is its rosy dream? When did the glamour leave the air? A star peeps out between the manuka-tips... The peaks have put out their flame....Not a bird chirps, but one can hear now the little "lap-lap" of waves on the beach. There is a spice of wood-smoke; wonderfully pleasant comes the thought of a fir-cone fire and of supper; and one turns homeward, with a sigh of deep content.

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