

# An American Artist in New Zealand

**A**MONG the memories of New Zealand that Charles Hopkinson, the eminent American portrait painter, took away with him, were two from Wellington—the extraordinary beauty of the harbour and its surroundings seen from Lowry Bay, and a portrait by John Singleton Copley in an Eastbourne home. Copley (1737-1815) was a famous American painter, born in Boston, where Mr. Hopkinson comes from, and among his subjects were some of the great figures of the Revolution and the early Republic. Mr. Hopkinson was quite excited to find a Copley, "and a particularly good one" in this corner of the world, and, he added, "in the right setting."

It was explained to him that appreciation of Wellington as a beauty spot was not altogether universal in New Zealand, but his opinion was lyrical. He was staying with his son-in-law, the High Commissioner for Canada (Mr. A. C. Rive), who lives at Lowry Bay across the harbour, from which you can see the whole expanse of the water and the noble circle of hills. And Wellington has enjoyed one of the best summers and autumns in its history. Mr. Hopkinson was entranced by the beauty of sea and hills. "An artist could be happy spending the rest of his life painting in this country," he said. To the old complaint that there wasn't enough atmosphere in the New Zealand landscape; that outlines were too hard, he wouldn't listen at all.

"You don't need atmosphere to paint. An artist's business is with light and shade, colour and form. Look at the glorious light you've got here, and the shadows on the hills. Look at the steep bold hills, the very ribs of the country. And your bush—its characteristics. Its different from our American forest. The trees are bunched together, and their

tops make a picture new to me, a series of domes. The shades of green are fascinating."

When we talked with this American painter he hadn't seen much New Zealand painting. He had been struck by the contrast between the scenery in the Marlborough Sounds, as viewed from the air, and the pictures he saw in a show at Nelson. The hills of the Sounds were bold, dramatic, challenging, but the pictures were in the quiet English tradition.

## Trends in America

What were the trends of painting in America? he was asked. Were artists still intent on painting the life around them, capturing the ways of American life? Mr. Hopkinson said "the American scene" had been well exploited. It must be remembered there were many American scenes owing to the great variety of conditions in the Union. But there was a distinct movement now for abstract painting, that is, non-representational. There would be no recognisable object in the picture. Pattern and colour were everything. There were whole exhibitions, both temporary and permanent, of this sort of work.

An old-fashioned painter himself, he enjoyed looking at a certain amount of abstract painting at a time. There was a sense of order in it which made the composition and design of representational painting seem disorderly and careless. Pattern, of course, wasn't new in art. It was a characteristic of the Old Masters. Take Tintoretto's huge picture of the Crucifixion, in Venice—"It's the only Crucifixion that has moved me. It's crowded with detail, but the pattern is masterly and obvious when looked for to be enjoyed, and nevertheless the whole effect is highly dramatic. To illustrate. Look at that picture over there. Can you see a pattern in it?"

This was a very ordinary picture of a men's dinner-party on the wall. One was making a speech, and the others, in evening dress, were grouped round, some sitting, some standing. The interviewer said he thought he saw something.

"Well," said Mr. Hopkinson, "let me show you on paper." He took a sheet of paper and drew a rectangle corresponding to the picture and then, using only lines and shading, put in masses of dark, corresponding to the groups in the picture, leaving a certain amount of white. The result was roughly two triangles and a small rectangle of dark—no figures, no furniture, just black and white. "Now, there's your pattern. Substitute some interesting geometrical shapes for these very rough components, and you have your abstract picture. There will be

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