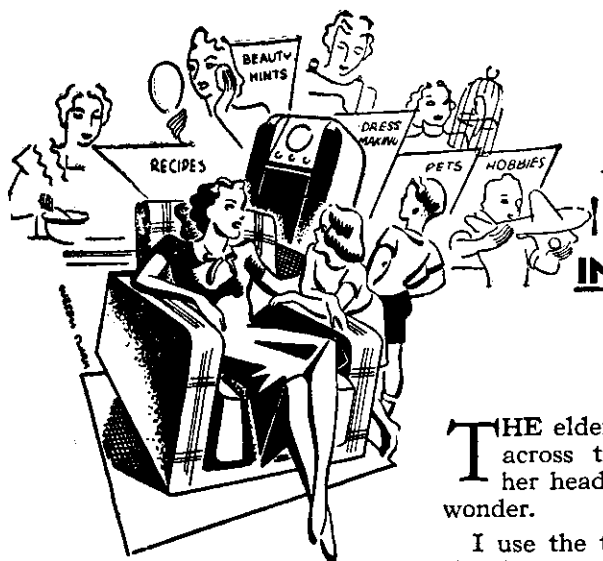


Women and the Home

Radio is the slender wire that brings the world and its affairs into the tiny kitchens and living rooms which hitherto had isolated so many housekeepers in the performance of their duties
—Margaret Bondfield



INTERVIEW

A PIONEER LOOKS BACK

THE elderly woman facing me across the tea-table nodded her head with a faint kind of wonder.

I use the term elderly because she has attained the dignity of seventy-three years. But there the justification ends. Her keen intelligence, her dauntless spirit, the tall, erect figure and scarcely greying hair belie her burden of years.

I saw that puzzled wonder still in her eyes.

"Life to-day," she said, "it is so vastly different from when I was a girl. I hear people complaining of their lot—and I think back on my own girlhood with its privations and its loneliness—its complete lack of leisure and amusement. My life was typical of the working class that helped to build up New Zealand."

In 1854 Alice's father arrived at Lyttelton on the sailing ship "Caroline Agnes." By trade he was a gardener, but he was to set his hand to many another plough; not the least of his achievements being the production of a family of 13.

Many of this large family are now dead. Alice, who is 73, sat facing me now across the tea-table. Her mother, she told me, had lived for 99½ years. At 96, she gave a talk and a recitation over the air. She had lived her life fully.

Alice's early memories were centred round the wilderness of Upper Hutt, where the family first went to live on its arrival in New Zealand. When she was nine years of age, they crossed the Rimutakas and joined the first settlers in Greytown.

Towering Trees

"My abiding memory of Greytown," she said, "was the towering trees, kauri and totara, that seemed to brush the sky. I often used to look up and see fairies dancing among the branches.

Ours was a hard, frugal life. Money, as I remember it, was non-existent. We lived on what we could wrest from the soil, and by exchange in food with our good neighbours. Our meals consisted of camp bread, boiled bacon with water cress and rarihi. One of our luxuries was a pie made from the little brown curly fronds you find in the centre of tree-ferns. Cooked with cloves and sugar, they tasted just like apples."

When Alice had attained her ninth birthday, she took her first position as nurserymaid at the local clergyman's house. While there, she used to pray passionately that some opportunity would present itself of getting some schooling and studying music. The last dream she never realised, but when she was 11 years old, she took another position as nurserymaid to a school teacher's child. In return she received 2/6 a week and some rude kind of schooling in her brief leisure hours. Her salary she never saw, as it was paid to her parents.

Wellington: The sea-front lapped up against Manners Street, which was the popular promenade for the crowds on Saturday night. Bullock teams drove leisurely down Willis Street. The carriages of the well-to-do picked their way through the medley of traffic. Tall, bearded men, and women with tiny parasols and swaying crinolines. A small girl of fourteen gazing at it with awe-struck eyes.

Alice was fortunate to secure a position as housemaid the first day she arrived in Wellington. The pay was poor, the work hard, but it gave her enough to eat.

Later she decided to take up an apprenticeship, but this presented a problem. It meant working for nothing and going hungry in consequence.

Stale Buns and Water

"I often look back now and wonder how we did manage to exist," she said. "We lived chiefly on stale buns and water. A few of us lodged at the Friendly Society Hostel where beds were 4/- a week and breakfast fourpence. Many of the girls would work through the day with nothing to eat at all. Hunger was a chronic state with us."

Alice was eventually forced to give up her apprenticeship and return to service. At one position she filled at Lower Hutt she used to walk in to Wellington every Sunday to visit a friend. Once, passing the Armed Constabulary Fort at Ngahauranga, she was shocked to see some of the men boxing on the Sabbath. At 19 she was to marry one of them.

"A Crazy Quilt"

"My life, looking back now, seems like a crazy quilt—full of different patterns. I have done so many things: nurserymaid, housemaid, cook, upholsterer and carpet machinist, basket and perambulator maker, shirt manufacturer, barmaid and hotel manageress. A night nurse at a mental asylum. Volunteer nursing throughout the influenza and infantile paralysis epidemics. An officer in the Women's National Reserve during the last War. Adopted two children, reared and educated them—purchased my own home. Have suffered bitterly and been happy—and have come through it all."

To-day, at 73, this remarkable woman is still holding down a job as custodian of a public rest room, where she has been for 14 years.

She is ageless. She combines the hardy spirit of the pioneer with the enlightened and progressive living of the present. Life, at 73, is returning her some of the delayed dividends of those long, fighting years.

She belongs to the undefeatable.

Fashion Notes For Summer

As always, it is the details of an ensemble which make it smart or unusual. On simple summer frocks strike this effect by choosing buttons and belts which startle, or include some handwork or fine stitching on your frock.

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For something bright and attractive wear plaids in gingham. Some plaids are vivid in colouring, others are muted, but there is a wide range in this serviceable and attractive material.

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Summer skirts are all made on full lines. There are lovely fabrics which lend themselves to these soft lines, and also many styles from which to choose. Full skirts, when properly fitted, do not widen the figure, but allow you to move fast, and make you look younger.

No Dress Problem

"Was dress a problem in those days?" I asked.

"Well, not really," she said. "We only had the choice of two materials—winsey and linsey-wolsey. We wore large sun-bonnets and stockings with red rings like a peppermint stick."

When she was 12, Alice moved on to Marlborough where she became nursemaid at a station home. Here her salary was 7/- a week. The other girls told her of the splendid opportunities offering in Wellington, and when she had £3 saved, she set out to try her fortunes there.

She arrived at Wellington Station with only 6/- left in her purse. She drew a picture for me of that early

These Should Interest You:

"So You Are Going to Travel?": Mrs. E. McKellar. Monday, January 20. 4YA, 7.13 p.m.

Talk by a representative of the St. John Ambulance. Tuesday, January 21, 2YA, 11.30 a.m.

"Summer Tour: Still in the West of Ireland," by Diana Craig. Wednesday, January 22, 2YA, 10.45 a.m.

"Cooking by Electricity": Miss D. McStay. Wednesday, January 22, 4YA, 11 a.m.

From The ZB Stations

"You be the Detective": From all ZB stations on Mondays at 9 p.m.

Nutrition Talk: (Dr. Guy Chapman and Marina), 1ZB, 12.45, Monday, January 20.

"Song Hits of To-morrow": (Reg Morgan), Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3.30 p.m. from 2ZB.

"Songs that Inspire Us": From 3ZB, at 6.45 p.m. Thursday, January 23.

"For Ladies Only": From 4ZB, at 4 p.m., Thursday, January 23.

Talks by Major F. H. Lampen, on Thursday, January 23:

"Just Homes." 1YA, 11 a.m.

"Just Memories." 2YA, 10.45 a.m.

"Just on Being a Guest." 3YA, 11 a.m.

"Help for the Home Cook": Miss J. M. Shaw. Friday, January 24. 3YA, 11.15 a.m.

"Cooking by Gas": Miss J. Ainge, Friday, January 24, 4YA, 11 a.m.

"A Few Minutes with Women Novelists," by Margaret Johnston. Saturday, January 25. Featuring "Charlotte Bronte," from 1YA, 11 a.m., and "Some American Writers," from 2YA, 10.45 a.m.

"The Morning Spell: Byways," by Mrs. Mary Scott. Saturday, January 25. 3YA, 11 a.m.