



WHAT WILL THE CHILDREN, WHO SAW THE QUEEN SO CLOSE, REMEMBER?

## TO LOOK AT THE QUEEN

**A**UCKLAND, these last few weeks, has much resembled a house being got ready for a Christmas party. Such a tidying up, such a cleaning, such a re-furbishing, as never was—all for an occasion whose kind many of us have never seen before, and most of us, likely, will never see again.

It was fun, getting ready for the Queen. We had the usual agitations, of course: I imagine these were common experience all over the city, certainly on the North Shore they provided steady staples of conversation. Were the old Plunket Rooms by the Devonport ferry going to be dismembered and removed in time? (To which some of us added: "Why take them away at all? They've been part of Devonport for forty years or more.") Were those heavenly scented stocks, those coloured perfumes along the east side of Victoria Road, going to be over before the Queen saw them? We enjoyed them—you saw passers-by with their shopping baskets pausing, sniffing, looking about them in pleased wonder, all through that hot spell in November—but perhaps she

could not. And the pohutakawas—were they going to be at their best from December 23 onwards? We also had inward prayers about the weather which, heaven knows, is all too apt to let us down badly, at this time of the year. We were, in brief, torn between two irreconcilable hopes: that the Queen should see us as we really are, and also at our best.

SO it went on, our days a bustle of Christmassing and other preparations, our nights, too, sparking with busyness. Along our little pocket of the waterfront, which most resembles a fishing village in Old Europe, members of the local pipe band ardently practised on fine starlit nights, forbidden the house, but moaning out their heart-plucking melodies under the hedge by the road, to the startlement of strangers. The Flowers of the Forest were a'wede away along before December: then to our relief the pipers became more merry, attacking The Dashing White Sergeant or other toe-tickling tunes with gusto and abandon. Attuned they might be, but would they be ready? We

doubted it, hearing their native bagpipes wild as we went along late at night to the milk bar, or returned across the domain.

Would we all be ready? That was the point. Well, some of us were and some of us were not. The scented stocks were almost over, the Plunket Rooms were only half removed, and still standing in a waste of torn timbers, when Q-Day dawned: but the pohutakawas were out, had burst into their holly-berry reds a few days earlier. And some of us who mourned the passing of the flowers consoled ourselves with these misnamed Christmas trees: for the Queen will have seen many stocks in England, but pohutakawas she has never seen before.

Now she has arrived, and seen both the worst and the best of us. The day of her coming could hardly have been worse: it was, like so many Auckland summer days, chilly, windy, and wet. We raised our loyal cheers from North Head, Mount Victoria and otherwheres, into a Deep Depression: standing beneath skies of plummy grey with hardly a feather of sun, sopping earth and

rain-flattened grass underfoot. The rain fell off our eyebrows into our mouths, ran down our ankles into our shoes, as we cheered the Gothic in: and we were all too excited to care.

FOR the arrival, which could have been flattened into mere formality by the weather of Auckland, was saved by Auckland's little boats. Like the little boats of Dunkirk, they snatched a glorious victory. No one, surely, who stood on North Head as we did, and watched the Queen's yacht come in from far away out on the Hauraki Gulf will ever forget the gaiety, the beauty, the dashing exuberance of those little craft around her. They not only made the picture, they made also, we hope, an atmosphere which will follow the Queen wherever she goes in New Zealand: they created that air of warm unforced friendliness which is New Zealand; and by doing so they cocked a healthy snook at officialdom.

For officialdom, in its unwiser moments, had been very busy telling Auckland's yachties how they should behave in their own element; telling them not only where they should sail their craft, but also what they should wear while doing so. It was deemed "desirable" that the usual easy uniform of old shirt and shorts, fisherman's cap or battered hat, should be replaced by the unnatural togs of a millionaire yachts-

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