

BEHIND THE GREENSTONE DOOR

I said that money-making in England was fast becoming an impossibility, that every kind of trade and profession was already full to repletion; that under the present constitution things would not improve, but grow daily worse, and that my own private constitution was not adapted to the climate of my native country. I went on to show, on the other hand, that immense fortunes have been made in New Zealand; that the land was sparsely inhabited, and, therefore, indifferently explored; that I was certain sooner or later to discover a goldfield or a diamond mine—the latter by preference.

WITH these words an immigrant named Samuel Ciall White introduced himself to the Auckland public of 1894 in a humorous article called "Why I Came to New Zealand," published in *The New Zealand Graphic*. White wrote several more articles for the *Graphic* during the next 18 months, as well as a poem, sketches and short stories of considerable merit and originality. After January, 1896, his name disappeared from its pages. Who was he and what happened to him?

The articles he wrote included "Emotions of An Emigrant," a sequel to "Why I Came to New Zealand," and a speculative essay called "Things in Heaven and Earth," relating mankind to a mythical race of moon-dwellers. His fiction included "The Yellow Dwarf," a story about a gold mine in the Thames district; "The Man Who Went North," a macabre story describing the fate of a man who violated a Maori burial ground in the bush; "From a Northern Gumfield," a story about the Hokianga district; "An Author's Model," a fantastic literary tale; and "A Martyr to Circumstantial Evidence," a sardonic story of crime and punishment in a rural New Zealand setting.

Although these articles and stories are unusually well written for locally-contributed material in the Nineties, they give no clue to the identity of the author except that he knew something of gold-mining operations—though that could apply to most of the population of Auckland Province at that time, for the pages of the *Graphic* were loaded with gold-mining news—he knew something about Maori habits and customs, and had visited the gumfields of North Auckland and had probably lived for some time in a country town, perhaps on the Thames or at Hokianga.

White also published in the *Graphic* in 1894 a poem about the disastrous wreck of the Wairarapa on Great Barrier Island. The full title of this poem is "In Memoriam, Monday Morning October 29, 1894." It is, with its opening line, "Too long the sea had hungered for her own," very much a poem for an occasion, yet it in one respect is the most important of the pieces White wrote for the *Graphic*, because it provides the first definite identification of the author.

Six years later, in July or August of 1900, a small cardboard-covered book containing 28 poems, appeared in New Zealand's bookshops. It was printed by the Brett Printing and Publishing Co., Ltd., of Auckland, and each copy was numbered and autographed, indicating that the cost of publication had been met by the author and his friends. It was entitled "*Patriotic and Other Poems*," by Wm. Satchell, Author of "The Other Inmate," etc. The title was followed by a note that "the majority of these verses are reprinted from 'The

Sydney Bulletin,' 'The N.Z. Herald,' 'The Auckland Evening Star,' and 'The N.Z. Graphic.'"

Included among a number of bush ballads, sonnets, and poems about the Boer War, is "In Memoriam," which had appeared in the *Graphic* over the signature "Samuel Ciall White." In *The Bulletin Reciter* (a collection of *Bulletin* reprints published in 1902) another of the poems in the *Patriotic* volume, "The Ballad of Stuttering Jim," appears over the old signature, showing that Satchell did not confine his use of this pseudonym to the pages of the *Graphic*.

William Satchell is remembered today as the author of *The Greenstone Door* and other New Zealand novels, but little is known of his early periodical writings while he was working as a journalist in Auckland during the Nineties. It was a commonplace for literary journalists of that time to write for different periodicals, and often for the same one, over two or three pseudonyms, and Satchell may have had a special desire to keep his identity secret at that time. "Samuel White" is a name he made up by reversing his own initials, but there is no obvious reason for the introduction of the middle name, "Ciall." It is interesting to note, however, that six further poems in the *Patriotic* collection also appeared in the *Graphic* during 1894, not as the work of "Samuel Ciall White," but over the initials "W.S." Four more by "W.S." which appeared in the *Graphic* were not reprinted in the collection.

A further study of the weekly numbers of the *Graphic* during these years reveals two short stories by "W.S.," which can reasonably be taken for Satchell's work, although neither has a New Zealand setting, or is of the same quality as the "Samuel Ciall White" stories. They are "A Singular Guest," which appeared in February, 1895, and "A Feminine Burglar," in the following year. Once the possibility of alternative pseudonyms is accepted, several more stories published in the *Graphic* during these years look like Satchell's work, from similarities in style, subject matter, and nom-de-plume.

Who, for instance, was Warwick Simpson, who wrote the short story called "A Serious Affair," published in September, 1896? And who was William J. Stewart, who wrote "The Prodigal Son" in December of the same year? Who were William Sage and William Scott, who wrote stories in the *Graphic* during 1897 and 1899? Although these stories cannot be positively identified as Satchell's work, they are all written in a similar manner, and deal mainly with literary and social life in London during the previous decades, as did "An Author's Model," "A Singular Guest" and "A Feminine Burglar."

Remembering also that two of Satchell's novels, *The Land of the Lost* and *The Toll of the Bush*, have their settings on the gumfields and farmlands of



WILLIAM SATCHELL
He never found his gold-mine

North Auckland, it is possible to suspect from similarities in locale, and particularly from parallels in the handling of the material and in the style of writing, that such further *Graphic* pieces as "Polly, a Bush Sketch," by J. Eman Smith, and "How the Colonel Went Home," by Collet Dobson, may also have been written by Satchell. The latter in particular appears to be almost certainly his work.

Finally there is the question of the serial that Satchell is reported in the 1940 edition of *Who's Who in New Zealand* to have contributed to the *Graphic* in the early Nineties. There is no serial bearing either Satchell's name or an identifiable nom-de-plume, but perhaps the closest possibility is the historical novel *Utu*, dealing with the life and death (at Hokianga) of the French navigator Marion du Fresne, which appeared in 1894 over the signature "Tua-o-Rangi."

There is, indeed, no way of telling exactly how much Satchell wrote for the *Graphic* and other New Zealand and Australian periodicals during his years as journalist in Auckland. But what is identifiable is of considerable value in assessing the full stature of the man who later became one of this country's most notable novelists. In addition to his four published novels, his book of poems, and an early collection of verse and short stories (published anonymously as *Will o' the Wisp* in England before he emigrated), he published at least one other uncollected short story over his own name. It is "After His Kind," a tale of Maori-European relations in North Auckland which appeared in *The Red Funnel* on July 1, 1906. He also wrote articles for the Saturday supplement of the *New Zealand Herald* almost until the time of his death in 1942 at the age of 82 or 83. As yet unidentified is the story or volume called *The Other Inmate*, which he acknowledges the authorship of on the title page of *Patriotic and Other Poems*.

William Satchell was born in Grey's Inn, London, in 1860, and was the son of Thomas Satchell, variously described

as a journalist and as Surveyor-General to H.M. Customs. He was educated at Harrow and St. John's College, Hurstpierpoint, and after the failure of his first book, *Will o' the Wisp*, which was scathingly reviewed in the *Academy* in 1883, he emigrated to New Zealand, settling in the Hokianga district in 1886. Here he tried for a few years to become a farmer, and incidentally gained "much experience of Maori and pioneer life." Here, too, he married Susan Bryers, of Rawene. In the early Nineties he gave up farming and moved to Auckland, where he remained until his death.

In Auckland he followed various occupations. These have been listed as book-keeper, secretary, sharebroker and journalist, although he was described on his death as "author and accountant." His wife died in 1936, and his descendants at his death numbered five sons, four daughters, 19 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.

Although his novels were on the whole favourably reviewed in London, where they were all published, he appears to have had little financial return from them. In the late 1930s his penurious condition was brought to the attention of the Government by some of his Auckland friends, and by the New Zealand branch of the P.E.N. Society. As a result of their combined efforts the Government granted him in 1939 a special pension in recognition of his services to literature. He was only the third person to receive such a grant, the two previous writers being Jessie Mackay and Eileen Duggan.

Among those who were active on Satchell's behalf was Pat Lawlor, who described his meeting with him in an article published over the pseudonym "Shibli Bagarag" in his monthly feature "Among the Books" in the *N.Z. Railways Magazine* of March 1, 1939. He said that Satchell was small and alert, looking much younger than his age, with "keen bright eyes peeping from a rosy apple of a face." He found Satchell unassuming and most reticent about his achievements, "one of the most retiring of our authors."

Satchell later wrote to Lawlor setting out his financial position. "It is a fact that I am very 'hard up' indeed," he wrote, "and more or less dependent on the son with whom I am living for the means to carry on day by day." He said that during the year ending March 31, 1939, he had received in royalties on *The Greenstone Door* the sum of £31/15/11, and that "this was the total of income from my books." Although he expected further royalties of £30 each on *The Greenstone Door* and *The Land of the Lost* (both of which had recently been reprinted), he said that "I consider myself indebted to my son for the major portion, if not the whole of these sums." Any Government pension would be welcome, he said, and added: "It may sound absurd to people who don't know me when I say that I am desirous of obtaining a special pension as much on behalf of my fellow craftsmen and the credit of the N.Z. Government as for my own necessities." The author was then 80 and knew he had not long in which to enjoy his grant.

It is just 40 years since Satchell published his last and best-known novel, *The Greenstone Door*. Certainly he never found the gold or diamond mine which he had once set down ironically as his ambition to discover in New Zealand. But in the novels he wrote about this country he struck a richer vein of ore, and one that should be more enduring.

—P.J.W.