

Nelson, by Land and Sea

THE DILLON LETTERS, 1843-1853, edited by C. A. Sharp, A. H. and A. W. Reed, 16/-; THE HISTORY OF PORT NELSON, by Ruth Allan, Commissioned by the Nelson Harbour Board; Whitcombe and Tombs, 25/-.

(Reviewed by A.M.)

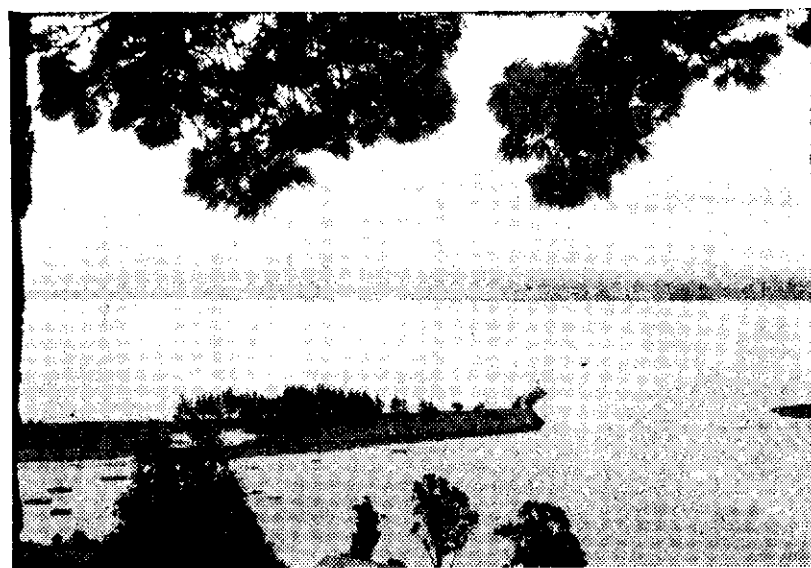
AS the years pass we can see our special settlements in clearer perspective. Work on early records helps in the process. Constantine Dillon, whose letters are now published in a slim attractively printed volume, was one of those men from privileged families who enjoyed pioneering New Zealand. Before this son of an Irish peer arrived here in 1842 at twenty-nine, he had served in the Navy and Army, and had met Wakefield in Canada. He farmed near Nelson, served Grey as a secretary, and was drowned in the Wairau at the age of forty.

Constantine Dillon was an active, capable, affectionate, and, I should say, an attractive man, but one of strong dislikes and probably hasty judgment. The letters presented here, mostly written by him to his wife (who bore him six children on the farm), or to relatives in the homeland, contain much

domestic detail that some readers may find dull, but they help to fill in the picture of pioneering life. In the public sphere, Dillon denounces FitzRoy at length for his policy after Wairau and general conduct, and, having read official documents at Auckland, declares him to be rogue as well as fool; a judgment new to me. Eyre, the Lieutenant-Governor of New Munster, is a "goose," and apparently because the bishop is "High," Dillon does not like Selwyn at all. Better that the whole idea of a collegiate school at Nelson (now Nelson College) should be abandoned than that Selwyn should have anything to do with it.

The book's chief interest is its portrait of a man from a comfortable class who takes easily to pioneering life and contributes to its improvement. Constantine Dillon deserves to be remembered for the soundness of his views on education. The collegiate school is very dear to him, and he emphasises "how absolutely necessary good education is in a colony"—even more so than in Britain.

There are two racy letters from Fox and Domett, which make me curious to know if there are more of the same kind. "I scarcely know two women who care about anything general, wide, high



NELSON HARBOUR—the cut through the Bank which replaced the original treacherous entrance

and beautiful, to talk about," says Domett, and of John Robert Godley, founder of Canterbury: "A great acquisition, and a man who knows how to be a radical without ceasing to be a gentleman."

The city of Nelson owes its site to its harbour, which was so well concealed by

the Boulder Bank that it had to be discovered. It was not until 1906 that the narrow, tide-swept entrance, where the first emigrant ship was lost on leaving, was replaced by the cut through the Bank. In this official history, Ruth Allan tells the story of the port to the present time. A trained and experienced



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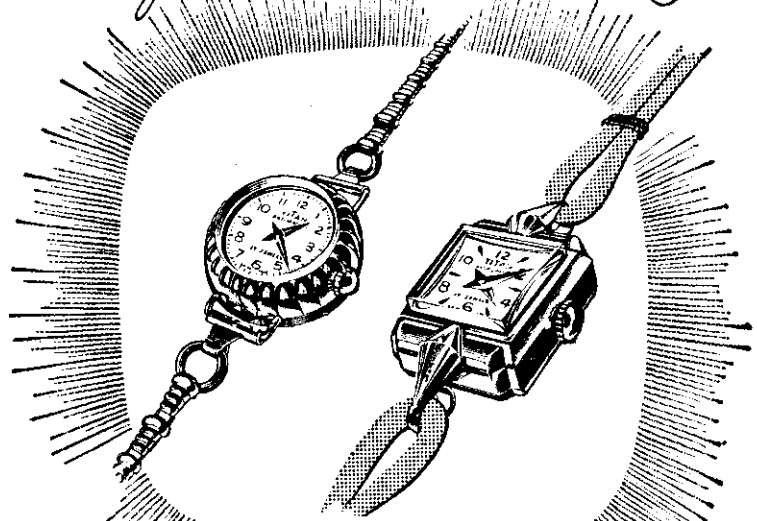
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