

The AUNT DAISY story

(2) New Plymouth Ho!

IF Victorian London was the greatest capital on earth, it also suffered the greatest headaches. Unemployed demonstrators were breaking some very distinguished windows in Pall Mall. Charles Booth published maps of London, using colours to show the varying degrees of poverty, street by street. About 30 per cent of Londoners lived below what he called the "poverty line." In the Reading Room of the British Museum, a man was still busy writing his remedy for this decaying economy. His name was Karl Marx.

The middle classes, into which Aunt Daisy was born, felt the pressure if not the pinch of the twenty-year depression. With them the general insecurity was expressed by dignity of behaviour, and a frugal and pious way of life. Queen Victoria herself set the example.

"I don't think my mother was left well off, though we didn't really lack anything," says Aunt Daisy. "But I know we were very careful with all our things. It was an age of being careful. Nothing was wasted. You didn't leave a tap running."

Withal, the family afforded at least one servant, sometimes two, and the children were well if not richly dressed. One year little Daisy wore a pretty, plum-coloured velvet coat with box pleats. The next year she wore the same coat, with bands of beaver fur sewn to the hem and collar and cuffs to allow for growth.

Each Sunday morning the whole family went to church, and in the afternoon the children to Sunday School. Piety was as natural a part of the order of things as patriotism or poverty or perpendicular architecture.

"Ours was an old church with rafters," Aunt Daisy remembers. "The clergyman was a Mr Pinkington, a tall man with a beautiful face. He used to stand in the pulpit and look around, and each of us felt that he was looking at her. We used to adore him from the distance."

Church services then were longer, but were not therefore a time for the children to fidget. There was no tying of pigtails to the backs of the pews. "I do not remember that we ever got into trouble at all," says Aunt Daisy. "The children sang, and chanted the responses and enjoyed it all. I think it's a pity now that in the craze and anxiety to make services shorter they no longer read all the Commandments. I think they should be read at one service a month, at least." She recalls the recent story about the small boy preparing for confirmation in the Church. He was required to know the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. When asked if he knew the Commandments, the boy replied, "No, Sir." The vicar, aghast, inquired: "You don't know the Ten Commandments! What's your name?" And the boy replied, "Moses, Sir."

WHILE Daisy Taylor learned the Commandments at church, other proposals were being made for the

succour of suffering mankind. They were the ten expedients of William Booth, the ex-pawnbroker's apprentice who founded the Salvation Army. And, while Daisy and her family did not concern themselves with the deliverance of the poor, the convicted, the alcoholic or the fallen, they did attend some of the Army's services. "I remember being taken to the Congress Hall," says Aunt Daisy. "It was a tremendous place. Sometimes a curtain had to be drawn half-way across to make it smaller. And they sang beautiful hymns—mission hymns that appeal to children—to emotional children—which appealed to me very much, I think there's a warmth about the Salvation Army—a reality and closeness to people. I've always been attracted by them."

It may have been this attraction which prompted Daisy Taylor to declare later on that if she had not become a broadcaster she would have liked to be a missionary. And there have been times when she has kept the two roles separate only in name.

If her Christianity inclined toward the active and muscular, the young Daisy's recreation was decidedly lady-like and genteel. Victorian schools showed less faith in the Spartan virtues of sport than the schools of today. Daisy played an occasional game of rounders, but was forbidden croquet on the grounds that the mallet was unmanageably bigger than she was. But the two younger girls and their friend Kata Graeger had the run of Mr Graeger's factory and blissfully rode this limited range in a precarious, uncovered wagon. Kata was German, and

Daisy and Katie picked up impossibly compound nouns the while they toughened their muscles.

Most recreation took more sedentary forms. There was much recitation and singing and playing the piano. Daisy learned German lieder, an accomplishment that was to be useful later on. She read all of Dickens's books except the frightening ones, which were forbidden. With rather less gusto, she plodded through Sir Walter Scott. She laughed roundly at Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, and wriggled her toes excitedly among the fabulous colonial characters of Mark Twain.

HER first association with the colony of New Zealand was literally disastrous. In 1886 London shuddered at the news of Tarawera's violent eruption, and its people, Daisy included, heard details of the tragic extinction of Te Wairoa village and the destruction of one of the world's wonders, the Pink and White Terraces. For someone who was afterwards to declare that she would not live anywhere but in New Zealand, it was an unpromising introduction.

Daisy's next contact was more intimate and personal, but hardly more promising. It took the form of William Courtenay, the London-based employee of a New Zealand company. A friend of the family, he frequently visited the Taylor's house. And the smallest child inevitably received most attention. "I remember Mr Courtenay would sit me on his knee," says Aunt Daisy, "and he would kiss me, although we were a most undemonstrative family. He had a long beard, and I used to shudder! But Mama

would nod to me—I mustn't show I didn't like it. That would be ill-mannered."

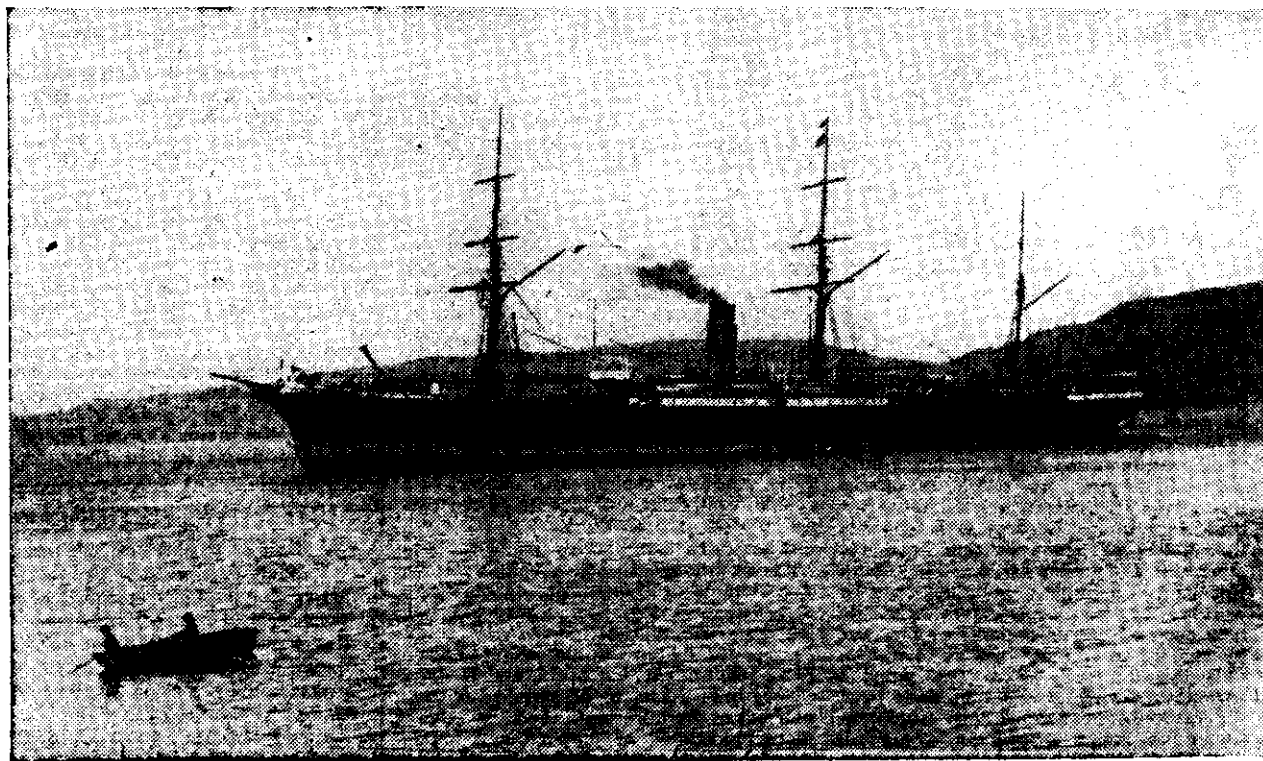
Through the bearded Courtenay, the family met the Freeings, a farming couple from Bishop's Stortford, with seven children and a common interest in music, poetry and reading. They were planning to migrate to New Zealand, and they urged Daisy's mother Elizabeth Taylor, to uproot her home and do likewise. They were backed up by Daisy's restless elder brother, Bertie, who yearned for the free and open spaces. His impatience brought him to New Zealand ahead of the rest of his family. For the others, the step was not taken till Mrs Taylor broke off her engagement and began to wonder what next. William Courtenay was on hand to urge. "Why not come to New Zealand?" Mrs Taylor considered. Indeed, why not? Somehow she raised the money for their fares. The Taylor family, she decided, was going to the colonies.

"FOR a young person," says Aunt Daisy, "coming to New Zealand was a terrific event. We were all getting ready, and saying goodbye to our friends, and I remember being taken for a final time to see Westminster Abbey and the other sights of London."

The voyage, via the Cape of Good Hope, is only a hazy remembrance. Teneriffe, Table Mountain with its cloth on, and Tasmania, all slipped by. Their novelty could not quite overwhelm the children's sadness and homesickness for London. New countries, new towns and people, the ship itself carving deep-blue tropical water, seemed like the flitting silver flying-fish, unsubstantial when compared with the solid stonework of solid Victorian London.

The S.S. Rimutaka, Captain Greenstreet commanding, brought the family

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"THE S.S. RIMUTAKA brought the family to Wellington on August 13, 1891."

Turnbull Library photograph