

Review

"NEW ZEALAND HOMES," PRICE 3/6

To those about to marry, "Punch" gave the emphatic and brief advice, "Don't!" We have an advertisement notice before us addressed: "To those about to build," which advises them to secure a copy of "New Zealand Homes." It is only now and again that we would care to endorse "Mr. Punch's" advice, but to this advice to those about to build we most emphatically say "Don't!"

"New Zealand Homes" is a new publication of "Practical Designs and Plans for Those Who Wish to Build," and the authors are "Property and Finance Co.," of Invercargill.

While we are not at all willing to admit the necessity or advisability of any such book, we are, at the same time, glad to welcome the advent of any publication which will tend to improve our domestic architecture, and stimulate an intelligent interest in the subject amongst laymen.

We regret that we cannot extend any such welcome to "New Zealand Homes." There can be only one reason for putting a book dealing with the building of houses into the hands of the public, and that is, as we have already said, that it will really tend to improve the work we are doing at present, and make our towns and suburbs and homes better and more beautiful.

We cannot say that the book under review does anything of the kind, and we take exception to it for this and a number of other reasons.

In the first place we think the notes and estimated costs given are misleading. We do not of course suggest that they are intentionally so, and our criticism must be understood by our readers not to in any way reflect on the business integrity and complete honesty in all respects of the individuals who compose the company whom we have and do subsequently refer to, nor do we in any way impute that their intentions in publishing such a book, or with regard to any of their statements therein are anything but honest. Our point throughout the review is that they are mistaken in their ideas, that and that alone.

Considered as practical plans, we fail to see any one design which we consider to be one whit better than we find every day in the most ordinary work.

Hardly any of the verandahs are wide enough to be of any use, and in most cases they are so planned that they darken the rooms.

The book throughout is set with phrases calculated to attract the eye and attention of the public, and it must be borne in mind that the average man or woman at best only half understands a plan, and is quite ignorant of design. When, therefore, they are told that design "No. 40 should be a favourite among all the lovers of a beautiful home," they believe it, while as a matter of fact the plan is very ordinary, and the external appearance quite commonplace with a grotesque feature on the verandah.

No. 13, we are told, is "a study of labour-saving ideas for the busy housekeeper," and yet on looking at the plan the only unusual thing we can discover is a very badly planned and lighted scullery.

The dining-room of No. 21 is also badly arranged, being lighted by one window placed hard up in one corner.

No. 1 is called "a popular style of bungalow, of attractive and homely appearance," while No. 4 is in "a style that some clients prefer to the prevailing bungalow style." Most subtle difference! What it is we are not prepared to say.

They are really ugly houses, with the usual verandah to darken the rooms.

No. 36 is, we are told, "well-suited for any locality, the arrangement of rooms allowing for all rough work to be done at the back, and away from the living rooms. Hot water is supplied from the copper and the water supply from tanks."

This, we foresee, will be a popular house. It will not be necessary to wash the dishes in the dining-room, and

hot water can be obtained otherwise than from a boiling kettle on the best room fire!

And so on through the whole catalogue, for catalogue it is rather than book! We open it at random, and come upon phrases which may mean anything or nothing.

The inside finish of No. 32, we are told, "would please the most fastidious"! This is too much! The interiors are not shown, but to say that they would please the most fastidious is claiming too much for houses whose plans and exteriors are stereotyped and commonplace. We cannot finish without saying a word about the costs given. We will not say that these houses have never been erected for the sums mentioned, but we are of opinion that they could not now be built here at these figures. We have gone into the question with a reputable builder, and he confirms our view.

Here, again, such a publication is misleading. We are told with regard to one house that the finish is "above the average," and also that it has the "best finish throughout," and the cost is given. We are of opinion that it could not be built even decently for less than £200 more than the sum mentioned.

We are told that "most of the houses are of superior finish," and in the same line that the "costs mentioned are for ordinary good finish," and, again, that "all costs mentioned are for medium quality work throughout."

On one page a paragraph appears which would appear to be a kind of saving clause:—"As the inside finish of the houses herein may be greatly altered, the cost mentioned is not necessarily what these cost, but what they can be built for with a good finish."

We repeat that we do not question the fact that these houses may have been built somewhere at one time for the sums mentioned, but we are emphatically of the opinion that they could not be built here, and now, to an even "medium" or "average" standard for anything like the sums mentioned, while to build them in a "superior" manner would cost still more.

We urge that a publication like "New Zealand Homes" does a great deal of harm by enticing many people to embark on a scheme of building on a deferred payment system, which will prove to be a heavy burden in years to come.

Some time ago we had occasion to criticise a Government scheme of building workers' houses, and took exception to the poor, commonplace plans and tawdry elevations, and condemned the undertaking as one unworthy of a Government which had the true welfare of the people at heart. The designs of the houses now under review are in no wise better than those dealt with on the previous occasion, and, indeed, the chances are in favour of the workers' houses, inasmuch as they are likely to be better built.

We have got beyond the stage when we will be content with ill-designed, stereotyped houses, bedecked with stock-pattern, factory-made ornament. Up till a few years ago one of the most crying wants of this country was the need of some well-trained architects, who would earnestly endeavour to design better houses for the people. It is a very important work, and one which, in our opinion, will do more than almost anything else to promote the success and happiness of the country by helping the people to strike deeper roots. Houses of the kind under review are spread all over the colony, like a festering sore, and have made many an otherwise pleasant place unattractive and repulsive. Now that we have amongst us some architects who are bent on doing better things, and who have already set their mark on many parts of the country, we are not going to turn back. We regret having to write in this vein of any publication coming under our notice, but our duty is to support in every way possible all earnest endeavours which make for better things. However leniently we view our present subject, we cannot bring ourselves to acknowledge that it will serve any good purpose or is even desirable, and this must be our excuse for the somewhat drastic treatment of "New Zealand Homes."

The printers have done well in the general get-up of the book, the three-colour half-tone illustration on the cover being very well turned out.