

Women At Home

Charming Hostess at 80 - Year - Old "Riverlaw," Lovely Christchurch Home

THE home of Colonel the Hon. G. J. Smith and Mrs. Smith is "Riverlaw," at the foot of Huntsbury Hill, St. Martins, Christchurch, and here in beautiful surroundings the colonel has lived for the past 35 years. The original wing was built by Colonel Lane more than 80 years ago, the bricks and interior cedar panelling being brought from England, and after some years the homestead passed into the hands of the Murray Aynsley's, from whom Colonel Smith acquired it. Built on two levels, on a high terrace overlooking the garden, it has the appearance of three stories, and the garden surrounding the house contains the oldest gum tree in Canterbury, measuring 35ft. in girth. The balustrade of the stone steps leading to the house is thickly covered with Virginian creeper, and at the front door I was greeted by the great Alsatian, "Lasso," who is well known in Canterbury's "doggy" circles.

The drawing room is of palest resida, just meant for entertaining, and here I found Mrs. Smith surrounded by evidences of her hobbies. A table grand piano was there, illustrated books on gardening, the latest novels—and it was with pride Mrs. Smith pointed to the beautiful white marble mantelpiece. "People have told me that it spoils my room, but I don't think so. It was brought from England with the bricks and cedar by those wonderful pioneers for whom I have the greatest respect." Instead of the pictures being hung, they rested on a narrow white shelf about three feet high, and one end of the room opened through an arch into a sun-room enamelled in cream and hung with the same lovely resida curtains and palest mauve rugs.

Mrs. Smith was born in Sussex but has spent most of her life in New Zealand, and, since her marriage 10 years ago, this lovely old home has been a perfect haven. Mrs. Smith lived in England for the whole of the War period, and one of her most lasting impressions is of the famous naval review at Spithead in July, 1914, when she viewed rows and rows of battleships from the deck of the H.M.S. New Zealand. Her husband had joined up with the New Zealanders as doctor to the Forces, and Mrs. Smith became an enthusiastic war worker. "I took up war work and became one of the workers for the St. Barnabas Hostels in France for Pilgrims," Mrs. Smith said. "It just happened that when I got there as a pilgrim one of the girls was called home to Canada, and I took her place. I met every type from all corners of the earth and gained a great knowledge of the French battlefields, being stationed at Amiens. The organisation of those hostels was wonderful. It was most interesting work and I loved it, and as these battlefields had reverted again to private property, the hostel worker's knowledge was of great benefit to the Pilgrims."

During Colonel Smith's long term in the Upper House, he and his wife made many friends in Wellington, and for 10 years Mrs. Smith's life consisted in picking up threads of friendship in Wellington and Christchurch, besides making many new friends. Mrs. Smith is a great reader, and misses the Parliamentary Library, where, during the session, she could obtain baskets of books, "and I used to become utterly selfish and just get away and indulge in my heart's desire." She is an accom-



The hostess of "Riverlaw," Christchurch, and her Alsatian, "Lasso." This photograph was specially posed for the "Radio Record."

plished musician and spends many hours at her piano, inheriting her love of music from her mother who has the distinction of being one of the last remaining pupils of Madame Clara Schumann. Music in her family is established as a sort of tradition, entering into her life from her earliest recollection, and Mrs. Smith has many friends amongst the foremost of the world's musicians. Besides music and reading, she is very fond of her "unrehearsed" garden as she calls it, and "Riverlaw" is so big and has such wonderful "woods" that it gives one an impression of unexpectedness. The croquet lawn and tennis court come upon you suddenly, both being completely hidden by the huge trees, and the quaintest of circular paths made of stepping stones lead to these. "Riverlaw," too, is justly famed for its garden parties. Accompanied by "Lasso" we made a tour of the woods and after the hot day the marvellous song of the birds was refreshing and beautiful.

"I have spent many hours rearranging the garden and planting new beds, and, with the colonel's help, transforming paths under the trees from grass—which gets ever so slippery in the winter time—to quaint patterns in brick which we obtained from the disused quarry nearby," Mrs. Smith said. "Riverlaw's" hostess does not court publicity and, if she accepted all the invitations that came her way, she would have little time for the things she really loves in life—her garden, music, reading. This charming, auburn-haired woman realises that the gods have smiled upon her, but she parted from me with the words, "Although I realise that I am fortunate, my idea of real bliss is life in a tiny, four-roomed cottage, set in acres and acres of ground."