

Women at Home

A Fair-Haired Australian Who Likes Us a Lot

HIGH upon one of Kelburn's green hilltops is a house with lots of windows. From between the crisp muslin curtains of the drawing-room one can have what the guide books would describe as a "panoramic view of Wellington"—the light-house at Pencarrow, whitecaps flinging themselves against the waterfront at Oriental Bay, the Hutt Valley with a blue haze suspended from hilltop to hilltop, and the city itself with its cunning pattern of slender spires and pale pink towers.

The king of this castle is Mr. James Payne, Assistant Australian Trade Commissioner in New Zealand, but, to pursue the old nursery rhyme further, I was not treated on arrival at his "castle" like a dirty rascal. Instead I was given tea beside the drawing-room window and, as Mrs. Payne and I chatted, we watched the ships going about their business in the harbour. Mrs. Payne is one of those rare people who is keenly interested in everything that is going on about her—she lends an attentive ear to your own little hopes and fears, and makes you feel that, for the time being, your own shred of conversation is all that matters.

Mrs. Payne is young-looking (so youthful, in fact, that her 12-year-old daughter, Margaret, might easily pass for her sister), fair-haired and dresses well. It is now just six months since her husband was appointed to his present position, and Mrs. Payne has decided that she likes Wellington a lot. "I'd never have been across to New Zealand before," she told me, "and I'm discovering the truth of the statement that you must come and look at a place for yourself, and not take too much notice of other people's opinions. Wellington is both bright and cheerful—of course, there have been lots of things happening since we arrived here in October—and I've been tremendously grateful for the opportunity of not only meeting New Zealanders but of living among them. I really think that people have a great impertinence to go to a new country, stay there a day or two, and then proceed to criticise it.

"A lot has been said about the difference in the way Australians and New Zealanders dress. Actually, I've noticed very little difference. The women are every bit as smart over here—wear good clothes and wear them well. In the winter in Sydney we wear tweeds and heavy shoes just as New Zealand women do.

"But the social element isn't everything—it takes trade to keep a country going—and that's why I would like to see Australians and New Zealanders getting together more. Lots of your people don't know all they should about Australia and, by the same token, lots of Australians don't know nearly enough about the Dominion. Somehow we don't realise just how close we are to each other—geographically, mentally or in any way. Why, it isn't nearly as far from Sydney to Wellington as it is from Sydney to Perth!



Mrs. James Payne, the wife of the recently-appointed Assistant Australian Trade Commissioner at Wellington. Mrs. Payne takes the keenest interest in the world about her, and some of her views on life in New Zealand and Australia are set down on this page. The photograph is a special Spencer Digby study.

"Since I've been here I've been continually hearing—'Of course, no one entertains in her own home in Sydney.' That idea is all wrong. The real Sydney residents do not entertain in hotels and cabarets any more than New Zealanders do. I always entertained in my own home—and so do most of my friends. Gambling is another vice we're supposed to be addicted to—actually I scarcely know one end of a horse from the other. No, I would like to correct the impression that Australians have no home life.

"In Wellington we have naturally mixed a great deal with the various consuls and their wives, and they are the most charming group of people one could find anywhere. If only we could all travel and meet the various nationalities whose representatives are gathered here in Wellington, I feel sure there would be less international misunderstanding. It rather reminds me of the story that is told about Charles Lamb. Walking along the street one day with a friend, he pointed to a man looking in a shop window. 'I hate him,' he said. The friend, somewhat surprised, asked why. 'Because I don't know him,' Lamb replied. You can't hate people that you know, and I feel that, if only we could get to know the people of other countries a little better, we would be able to promote greater fellowship between nations."

Mrs. Payne has lots of "likes." She likes tennis, and reading—all kinds of books except the "terribly deep ones"—and gardening. In fact, her garden is obviously one belonging to a garden lover. It is not a place of neat flower beds with pocket handkerchief lawns, but a place of delightful old trees and creeper-covered walls and surprising little nooks full of wallflowers and hydrangeas. "I'm trying to grow some sweet peas in a hot-house," Mrs. Payne smiled. "I've never heard of it being done before, but I'm hoping it will be successful." She likes dogs, too—not the superior, drawing-room-cushion sort of dog, but something rough-haired with a glint of mischief in its eye and a chummy face.