

the Avon before breakfast each morning summer and winter. . . . Although very shy he had to force himself as he realised that without push he would get nowhere. Despite his modesty and shyness he could become fiery as instanced by his joining [in] public demonstrations [with] the radical Independent M.P. T. E. 'Tommy' Taylor who was an idealistic reformer. Carry[ing] flourishing torch flares they held meetings in favour of prohibition . . .<sup>12</sup>

At such meetings, often stormy, the young Milner began to discover, and extend, his powers of oratory, which in later years won him fame on foreign as well as native public platforms. His crusade against drinking was continued with unrelenting vigour while a master at Nelson College and headmaster of Waitaki. Characteristically, in his valedictory speech to the assembled boys of Nelson College after his appointment to Waitaki, he declared that

he would like to say something helpful . . . For many years there was a subject that was very dear to him . . . He was speaking to boys whose tastes were as yet unformed, for whom life was just opening to success or otherwise. The highest medical authority had proved conclusively that alcohol in any form is [sic] a rank poison . . . He was not voicing the opinion of one whom some termed a fanatic, but was giving the verdict of the greatest doctors in England and America . . .<sup>13</sup>

To many it would seem a somewhat strange choice of a farewell theme. But it bespeaks the man: idealist and unremitting zealot in the service of the Puritan ethic as he saw it.

The greatest single influence upon him while at university was Professor John Macmillan Brown whose lectures on English literature and political economy he enthusiastically attended. Brown's colourful eloquence and force of personality in conveying his imaginative response to literature, especially that in the Romantic vein, his stress on the moral aspect of aesthetic appreciation, his talent for projecting ideal visions and idealised values: all this accorded well with the Ruskinian and Wordsworthian bent of Frank Milner's mind at the time. The fluency and highly-wrought rhetoric of Brown's lengthy performances at lectures were a strong stimulus towards cultivating his own talent for public speaking. A personal liking and regard grew up between professor and student that matured in after years, as correspondence between them shows.<sup>14</sup> During his apprentice years as a Nelson College master he would write to his professor indicating *inter alia* how faithfully he was putting into practice approved principles for the teaching of English literature. And the *cachet* of recognition was gladly conferred:

That was the finest, manliest, most enthusiastic letter I have received for many a day. Quite apart from its fine enthusiasm, it has great literary merit . . . I hope some day to see you hold an English literature chair or the editorial chair of some