

My parents moved from Napier to Wellington in 1913, when my father Lionel, known to all his friends and family as 'Jack', took over, from his brother George Nelson, the management of the engineering firm Jas.J.Niven & Co., and the head office was transferred to Wellington. Two hundred miles from Wellington to Tomoana was an all day journey in the 1920's and not to be undertaken lightly, so our visits to Hawkes Bay were infrequent.

My earliest and rather vague memory of Waikoko goes back to 1921, when I was four years old. I can remember arriving by car with my father at the front door of the house. We were on a circular driveway, with a big Deodar cedar in the centre. There was a realisation that there was a crisis on, and my grandmother Emma Caroline was ill. Looking back, I realise that it must have been about the time she died. I have no recollection of being inside the house at that time. It was probably thought that the young should be spared any trauma of death and funerals.

As far as I can remember, I did not meet my grandfather until about 1927, and, as a timid boy of 10, found him a somewhat forbidding character, with a long white beard, and a brown moustache, stained, as I would later realise, by nicotine from his pipe smoking, and his daily glass of Guinness (he also had a whiskey and soda at night). He seemed to spend most of his time esconsed in a big wing-backed armchair, in his smoke room. The chair seemed to be fitted with outriggers in the form of shelves, on which he kept his tobacco and pipe, and current reading matter. Also handy was a jar of sweets. I doubt if he indulged himself, but as part of the daily ritual, we were required at bed time, to enter the sacred precinct to shake hands with the old man, utter a suitably reverent "Goodnight Grandfather", and receive from his hand a morcel from the jar. *morcel*

The smokers room mantelpiece was covered with all sorts of nicknacks, miniature cars, animals etc. I can remember a man with a top hat, who wobbled his head at the slightest provocation, a model lighthouse, a Bhudda, a kookaburra perched on the edge, and a card with the inscription "There's a good time coming, but it's a good time coming!" At my tender age, it took me a little time to work that one out.

Low down on the outside of the smoke room door was nailed a 6" x 18" piece of boxwood for his fox terrier, 'Tiddles', to scratch on when he wanted in. Under the verandah, outside the smoke room, was a Thermometer, and nearby noted in pencil on the wall, the daily maximum and minimum temperatures and rainfall figures for the past 40 years.

When the weather was suitable, William would take a stroll around the garden in the afternoon, arm linked with that of his third wife, whom we knew as Aunt Katherine, and escorted by Tiddles.

Aunt Katherine was a kindly woman, white haired, always well groomed, and although short in stature, of somewhat regal bearing and dignified manner. I was intrigued by her spectacles – rimless 'pince-nez' on a fine golden chain, which was housed in a little gold reel attached to her dress just below the left shoulder. When not in use, they hung close to the reel, and when required, she would pull them out with what appeared to be a rather grand flourish, but was necessary to pull out enough chain, to allow plenty of slack. With a smart little tug on the chain, it could be retracted again, in the same way that window blinds can be operated.

Two years after William's death, she was living in Napier, and I was a farm cadet on Tauroa Station, Havelock North. I occasionally stayed a weekend with her, and drove her to visit various relations – Eva and Harold Russell, Gertrude and Hector Smith, and Ida and Jack Lane.

Each year from 1927 to 1931, my older brothers, Hugh and Dudley, and I, spent a couple of weeks of the summer holiday at Waikoko. This was quite a highlight of our year. We had the freedom of the whole estate, but saw little of our grandfather except at meal times. We dined in style, the table set with well polished silver, on a starched white linen tablecloth, and in the centre a silver vase with flowers. This was a copy, much reduced in size, of a large sculptured marble vase, about six feet high, which is in Warwick Castle, England. The copy was presented to William and Emma, by members of the family, to celebrate their 25th Wedding Anniversary. The base is square, with an inscription on each side – 1884 E.C.N.-W.N. 1909, L.N. & E.M.N. (Lionel and Esther), H.M.N. (Hilda), W.H.N. & M.V.N. (Harry and Molly).

William always had a bottle of Guinness with his lunch, and a whiskey and soda with his din, while the boys were given Plowman's lemonade from the Ice Box. At the end of the meal he would sometimes sit back and tap his fingers on the table, as if playing a piano, and remark: "*The tune the old cow died of.*"

There was one exception to our freedom. The deep end of the lake was out of bounds for swimming until our last year there, when I suppose it was considered we had sufficiently matured. We could row on the Lake in the dinghy, by name of "Enid", and one Summer we made a canoe. Bamboo from the island in the lake was used for framework. Aunt Katherine provided a sheet to cover the frame, and Hastings Gasworks supplied tar for waterproofing. The lake level was maintained from an artesian bore running continuously from a three inch pipe, and the overflow from the lake went along a concrete channel through part of the garden, and could be used to irrigate the vegetable garden. It discharged into the drain on the edge of the garden. There we could catch eels, and have fun stirring up the mud, and trapping the released methane gas in a jar and setting it alight.

HODGES

ACETYLENE

Of the staff I can remember Hadjes, the gardener, Horne the cowman, and Bell the chauffeur. Horne had a special cap he wore over his left brow, as he leaned his head against the cow's flank, while he milked. He also operated the ascetelene gas plant. The gas was generated by mixing calcium carbide with water, and was collected in a gasometer – a system which kept the gas at a constant pressure for domestic lighting.

Bell probably had other duties, but was on call to drive the car – a bull nosed Morris Cowley tourer, and later a Morris Isis Saloon. In the former Stables were an early Lanchester car, more like a motorised carriage, and a small single cylinder Cadillac converted into a truck, which could be used on the wider paths in the garden.

The sunny side of the house was about 140 ft. long, with a very robust wisteria growing right along the top of the verandah. The front rooms were generous in size, and opened to the verandah, not with doors, but through high wide double-hung-windows, down to floor level. An internal passage ran the full length, giving access to various wings.

A south east wing was built for the eldest son, Harry and his wife. We boys slept in a wing to the north west, and in between were the working parts of the house; kitchen, store rooms, dairy, and accomodation for domestic staff. Two features of this area are worth noting: To minimise one of the risks of staff breaking the crockery, William had ordered

the hot and cold taps for the sink to be under the bench, and water conveyed to the sink in a bucket. Around two walls of the dairy was a broad lead-lined bench on which were several shallow pans. These were filled with milk, and after 24 hours cream was skimmed off to make butter. The milk was cooled by a continuous flow of cold artesian water along the bench.

The reader should bear in mind that what has been written here, are just the memories, back more than 70 years, of a young teenage boy, more interested in having fun, than in observing human character, or what makes people tick, or what makes the world go round. So as I read these impressions, I realise that there is little about the man himself, his character, his ambitions, his hopes, his dreams.

At the end of his 1864 diary are several pages of blank verse, all of a rather moralistic tone, which tell more of his character than I could ever do. They appear to portray a man of high principles, firm opinions, resolute actions, not suffering fools gladly, industrious, determined, and undaunted by setbacks.

Some of the verse appears to be attributed to 'S.W.Partridge 10-5-63'. The rest is anonymous. I doubt they were the work of the 21 year old William Nelson; he was a man of few words, as witness the following quote from his diary, regarding his wedding to Sarah Newcombe Bicknell:

1865

Sept 30 Rode over to R.F.W.'s by 9.15, down to Warwick to dinner, Chester by 7.30 p.m. Called at Dingle Bank, back to the Hotel by 1 a.m. Llandrillo by 9.10. a.m. on

October 1 Church in morning.

2 Bangor with S.N.B. at 12. Home at 5. Fine.

3 Called on Rev.Roberts at Llandudno 3.30. Met my brothers etc. at 4.30. Lived at the Adelphi. Fine.

4 Up the great Orme in the morning. Drove with Charley and Mont and F.R.W. to - Left at 8.30, and walked to Llandudno to supper. Fine.

5 Drove to Llandrillo Church with Mont. and to Conway with S.N.N. Breakfasted at the Castle, Conway, Chester with S.N.N. at 7 p.m.

6 Windemere at 4.30. Living at Windemere Hotel. Fine.

They honeymooned in the Lake District, Grassmere, Ambleside and other places. Here he allowed himself to write a little more than the bare facts:

14 ... round the Vale of Lorton (very, very pretty)

16 Crossthaite Church in morning. Drove to Ullswater, through Mattendale. Had the best steak and bitter beer that I've ever heard of. Raining all day. 34 miles.

THE VERSES FROM THE END OF WILLIAM'S DIARY WHEN HE LEFT FOR ENGLAND ON 30th NOVEMBER 1864

Guy Nelson has marked parts of the verses that he considers are the most important. These are in dark type.

EARLY DECISION

Youth is a promise and a prophecy

An adumbration of the coming man,
And as the blossom scarce belies the bud,
And even childhood is significant,
So manhood hath small difference from youth,
The child walks in the shadow of the man:
A man is but a boy intensified.

**The world soon labels men, and character
Grows with the many full as fast as age,
Power, aptitude and capability
Distinguish man from man; the common herd
Will stand aside unbounded, for him
Who hath with industry equipped himself
For the stern work of life. But who will budge
Respectful for the dreamer, who will care
To blazen his dishonourable name
Who trifles opportunities away,
Postpones, doubts, pauses, lingers, hesitates,
And tries his unaccustomed armour on
When half the battle's fought ?**

LIFE IS AT BEST

With ev'n the youngest, a short summer's day;
And he who hopes to serve his fellow men,
Or rank with earth's achievers, scarce must lie
And doze away the morning. No man yet
Ever attained to be a medal man
Among mere human coin, but early set
His face to duty, chose him some high path,
Breasted the adverse tide, and steeled himself
'Gainst opposition, danger, ridicule,
And gave himself all unreservedly
A holocaust to some great noble aim.

The steps to greatness take a life to climb,
And he who dreams its morning at the base,
How shall he hope to gain the pinnacle ?
Alas how many vainly strive to weave
Great patterns on the selvedge of a life,
And crowd a world of enterprise and work
In the brief space of one scant afternoon !
The leaf in Autumn scarce becomes the tree,
When men are seeking fruit. The bud, the flower,

Pleasant in Spring, are then poor substitutes
For the ripe growth of pure maturity.
Not the seed basket, but the sickle, then
Becomes th' autumnal field. **Alas, alas,**
There is too much to be, too much t' achieve,
In this short life, for any to delay,
Or waste its hours in meaningless resolves.
"There will be time tomorrow" saith the fool:
There may be time, and opportunity;
But he who hath no willingness today
Will he have more tomorrow ?

The Platoons

Of truth and error, and of good and ill
Behold on either side, for fight arrayed.
Life's paths are all before thee. Solumn choice !
What wilt thou be, and whose ? Along which road
Art thou prepared to travel ? Awful thought !
On thy decision hangs thy hell or heaven.

He who in life's fresh morn doth choose aright,
And spends his energies on noblest things,
The day of life before him – he it is
Who lives to ripen well his purposes,
And gather in the harvest from his plans.
The finest apple was the earliest formed,
So 'tis the early trained that ripen best
To full proficiency and highest use
But waits and trifles, lingers on,
Till, nudged to action by the westering sun,
He bungles in his fatal haste his task,
And only lives to see a few sour fruits
Hanging around reproachful.

A true man,
Titanic, brave, one purposed, resolute,
Doth seldom grow from undecided youth,
Greatness casts no mean shadow. If they youth
Is marked by indecision, tremble then
For manhood and for age. To few indeed
Doth life's fast sinking tide flow more than once:
And while irresolution dubious stands,
It ebbs, and all is lost.

It needs not vice,
Debasing habits, lawlessness of crime
To mar and poison life. The two-souled man,
Who oscillates between the right and wrong,
With scarce a preference discernable,
Who is, yet is not; will, and yet will not:
He may as surely ruin, curse himself,
As he who, reft of name and character,
Hides from his branding fellow men. The tree
Was not a vicious but a barren one,
The gentle saviour cursed. The salt denounced
Was only useless and unsavoury,
No base corroding poison. Something more
Than a mere will-less human negative
Must be the man who can expect to please
His God, his fellows – or his own poor self.

The undecided – what shall prosper him ?
The tide is flowing and the wind is fair,
All is propitious, and the gallant barks (barques),
With bellying sails, glide merrily along;
But still he pauses, eyes askant the clouds,
Suspects a storm, the wind may veer 'ere long,
He'll wait awhile – and then. So fade the hours
With all their golden opportunities,
And he who might have distanced any man,
And made the port of Fortune with the best,
Temps the long voyage with a worsening tide,
Or never ventures out to sea at all.

Life's opening chapters colour all the rest,
And blessed he who hath surrendered up,
Free from all base duality of heart,
A hearty holocaust, his whole of life
With all its round totality of years
On duty's hallowed altar. To repent
A wasted youth may be a seemly thing,
But ev'n contrition can't efface the past,
Or hide the scars of evil. Innocence
Is better than repentance. Sighs and tears
Are miserable pumice-dust to hide
The ugly blots on the past leaves of life:
Arrears of duty never can be paid.

A man should be a self reliant thing,
Freighted with trust and capability,
Equipped for the requirements of life's war,
And leaning only on himself and God.
Not from around him will a wise man look,
But from within, above, for strength and help.
He will despise the smile of circumstance,
And hold the promise cheap; will hunger not
For rich men's smiles nor great men's patronage,
(The patronised is only half a man);
But nerves himself with all subjective strength,
Earns for himself, and lays, too, for himself
The timbers of his fortune, stands an oak
Amid the human bindweed all around,
And seeks at his own hands deliverance
From penury and want.

How many a youth

**Lingers at home in enervating sloth,
And wastes the precious months which nobler men
Have coined already into worthy deeds.**
Pillowed on circumstances, wrapped in ease,
A lazy idler, and unearning thing,
Of little earthly use, except to spend
What better men have earned, he waits forsooth
His Uncle's legacy, his aunt's bequest,
His patron's promise, his friend's interest,
The Government appointment, the snug post,
And then – and then he will begin to live.
He reads the "Wanted" list, and haunts the Club,
And worries the M.P. The seasons roll,
The tide – the tide of opportunity.

Ebbs daily fast away, while from the shore
He marks the white sailed argosies glide by,
Which, had he been a self-reliant youth,
Might have been his; wealth, honour, fame, all reaped,
And he, unladen, sneaking to the hive
Amid his scorning fellows, bare, unsheaved,
Amid the shouts of harvest.

Linger not

Till skies are fairer, therefore. Life is short,
And now is the strong peg on which to hang

The weightiest achievements. Legacies –
Leave them for those that cannot earn themselves;
Patrons – for those who cannot rise alone;
And government appointments for the mean,
The unable and the imbecile. Success
Will be the sweeter, though it come but late,
Because unaided thou hast carved it out,
And, hewn, thyself, thy fortune to a shape.

“He who thinks he can”. Self confidence
And self-reliance are twin Anakim,
Strange thaumaturgi both: possessed of these,
All things are possible, few difficult.
Man steps from hindrance on to hindrance
As a boy crosses, on the stones, the stream;
Ev’n obstacles themselves are but the rungs
That form the ladder of success.

Alas,

Of what is he possessed who hath them not,
This self-reliance and self confidence?
Little will he attempt, and less achieve;
He will but be a unit in the herd,
Unlaurelled and unblest. The helping hand
(without self-help there’s little neighbour-help)
The ready purse, the station, influence,
That nobler men secure, can ne’er be his:
Nor, worse, that self-respect, that consciousness
Of capability and high desert,
That, even if success be partial, brings
At least sweet calm consolatory thoughts,
Placid contentment and benignant peace.

Leave “Can’t” for children. “Try” ’s the word for men.
He prospers most i’ th’ world, who early learns
This weighty lesson – confident self trust.
Whole-willed, resourceful, from his early years,
His masculine prompt nature still will wring
From out th’ unlikliest and most adverse things
The fairest best results. He loses not
The top o’ th’ tide when favouring breezes blow;
Nor idly wastes the fleeting priceless now,
In times of trial and emergency,
In seeking puzzling council from his friends,
And heaping up impossible advice.