

JOHN
GULLY

John Gully

1819-1888

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY
SEPTEMBER NINETEEN SIXTY

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

JOHN GULLY was born at Bath in 1819 and came of a family several of whose members had been celebrated for strangely divergent, not to say disparate achievements. None of those recorded was in the field of the arts, however. Lincoln Lee, the painter's grandson, records the following facts* about two of Gully's kinsmen:—the earlier was John Gully (1783-1863), "the 'gentleman' prize-fighter and sportsman", who began his career as a master butcher and, presumably after some vicissitudes in the Ring, finished up in the House of Commons; the other, also a parliamentarian, was Sir William Court Gully, a physician's son who became a Q.C. in 1877, member for Carlisle in 1886, and Speaker of the House in 1895.

Not a great deal seems known for certain of Gully's early life in England, but it appears he was apprenticed as a boy to an iron foundry and that here his predilection for drawing caused him to be moved from the workshop to the designing and drafting department of the works. He did not, however, wish to continue with this occupation. Having finished his apprenticeship, he first got a job as a clerk in the Bath Savings Bank, then later joined his father's business in that city. He probably already practised painting as a pastime, though, apart from a very few private lessons, he

* G. Lincoln Lee, John Gully (1932), with list of his works.

received no formal tuition — neither at this time, nor subsequently through his life.†

In his early twenties, Gully married Jane Eyles, a young widow with a baby son. He had seven children of his own, some born in England and some in New Zealand, two of whom died in childhood.

His decision in 1852, to emigrate to this country was influenced by his reading of Hursthouse's glowing account of New Zealand. In the same year then, sailing out in the *John Phillips*, a small barque of five hundred tons, he landed, with his wife and family, in the tiny settlement of New Plymouth after a protracted six months' voyage.

Only vague memories are preserved of Gully's first years in Taranaki. He began to make a farm out of bush land at Omata, about six miles from New Plymouth. But, after getting some of the land cleared and under cultivation, he abandoned this attempt and moved to New Plymouth where he engaged in clerical work. At about this time the later Maori wars broke out; Gully was a volunteer and experienced a good deal of activity before he was invalided out of the army, the hard conditions having been too severe for his always rather delicate constitution.

In 1860, with some other refugees from Tara-

† Gully did once mention that Leighton had helped him with criticism of his work and instruction. This is assumed to have referred to paintings that Gully, in his later years, exhibited from time to time in England.

naki, he set sail with his wife and children, and the remains of his worldly possessions, for Nelson where he was to spend the remainder of his life.

In Nelson he was able to devote himself seriously to his painting, and he got a job as drawing master at the College. A year or two later he was appointed draughtsman at the Land Survey Office, a position in which he remained until 1878 when he retired to devote his full time to painting. In the Survey Department, Gully worked under J. C. Richmond, a life-long friend and companion in many painting expeditions; they painted together at Milford Sound, at Lakes Manapouri and Te Anau, and other parts of the country.

During the last ten years of his life, as has been said, Gully was able to give all his time to painting. It is evident that he was able to make a living thereby. At his house in Trafalgar Street, with its sunny, well-kept garden and orchard, he built a large studio which became a gathering place for his friends and members of the family. One of the latter, his eldest granddaughter, writes of him at this period:

'I was very young when grandpa was alive and only remember him as a dear kind man to us children. Everybody loved him. He was always ready to help young artists; never praised his own work and was very modest about it. He was very religious and lived a beautiful life, painting and gardening. As you know, he was never well off, but I do not think money mattered much to him.'

Gully died at the age of sixty-nine, after a long and painful illness.

Of Gully's methods of working, Lincoln Lee writes:

'On his sketching trips he laid solid foundations for his finished pictures. Sketch-books containing great numbers of very careful pencil studies, and numerous quick wash-drawings both in colour and in sepia, show how thorough and painstaking were his methods. If he had no time to paint he sometimes mixed a few washes and applied them as marginal notes to aid his memory later on.'

Mrs Frances Fletcher, probably his only pupil, writes:

'I remember him as a man of medium height, very alert and active — broad brow and receding forehead, brown eyes and dark hair and whiskers — genial in manner. I believe I was Mr Gully's only pupil. He came to my father's house to give me lessons in painting and took me out sketching. Well I remember the big willow in the Maitai River which was my first trial subject. When the lesson was given indoors, the first proceeding would very likely be to take the last week's work to the pump and there sponge it nearly out. This was to soften distance and give atmosphere. We worked on a generous scale — a broad surface, plenty of paint and water and large brushes. If we wanted a flat tint in the sky for instance, we would prepare three saucers of graduated colour and have the paper carefully

damped before we applied any paint.'

It is probably just to claim Gully as a New Zealand painter, for it seems likely that his serious painting dates from the time of his coming to this country. He was honest enough to come to grips with the peculiarities of the New Zealand scene—the stringency and lushness of its colour, the absence of softening mists—though his means of rendering it, of constructing his works, are obviously derived from the tradition of English water-colour painting. What merit his work has is probably due in a large degree to this very character of the New Zealand landscape in which he found his subjects—its often wild and, to a Victorian Englishman's eyes, exotic beauty. Certainly this wealth of untouched material provided an enviable opportunity for our first painters, and for the most part they were equal to realising in their paintings this virility, and to avoiding the sentiment and clichés into which so many subsequent landscape painters have subsided.

THE CATALOGUE

All the paintings are in watercolour. Measurements are given in inches, height before width. An asterisk indicates a painting which will not be shown on the tour of the exhibition.

1

POHARA BEACH, TAKAKA, 1863

8 x 13

Signed *John Gully* 1863

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

2

MOUNT COOK, 1864

15½ x 23¼

Signed *John Gully* 1864

Lent by The National Gallery, Wellington
Bequest of Mrs J. P. Firth

3

THE GREAT TASMAN GLACIER & MT COOK, 1865 *

18½ x 26½

Signed *John Gully* 1865

Lent by Mr A. T. Pyecroft, Auckland

4

MOUNT EGMONT, 1868

18½ x 29¼

Signed *John Gully* 1868

Auckland City Art Gallery
Mackelvie Collection

5

LANDSCAPE FROM THE DUN MOUNTAIN, NELSON

14 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 25

1870

Signed *John Gully* 1870

Auckland City Art Gallery

6

LANDSCAPE (South Alps?), 1873

23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *John Gully* 1873

Lent by The National Gallery, Wellington

7

WAIMEA PLAINS, NELSON, 1875

9 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{7}{8}$

Signed *John Gully* 1875

Auckland City Art Gallery

8

BULLER GORGE, 1879*

12 x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *John Gully* 1879

Lent by Mr E. Maxwell, Auckland

9

MOUNTAIN PASS, 1881

17 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$

Signed *John Gully* 1881

Lent by The National Gallery, Wellington

10

ON THE BATON, NELSON, 1881

19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *John Gully* 1881

Lent by the Canterbury Society of Arts

11

LANDSCAPE (SOUTHERN LAKE), 1881

14 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 25 $\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *John Gully* 1881

Lent by The National Gallery, Wellington

Gift of relatives of R. T. Turnbull

12

LAKE WAKATIPU, 1882*

10 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 21

Signed *John Gully* 1882

Lent by Mr E. Maxwell, Auckland

13

CABLE BAY FROM MAORI PA, 1882

14 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 25

Signed *John Gully* 1882

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

14

SOUTH ISLAND MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE FROM THE
SEA, 1883

13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 29

Signed *John Gully* 1883

Auckland City Art Gallery

Presented by the estate of Mr W. J. Crowther

15

KAIKOURAS, 1884

14 x 24½

Signed *John Gully* 1884

Lent by Mr K. W. Moore, Auckland

16

A WEST COAST ROAD, 1884

14¼ x 25¼

Signed *John Gully* 1884

Auckland City Art Gallery

Presented by Mr Martin Trenwith, 1929

17

LOOKING TOWARDS NELSON, 1886

10¼ x 18¼

Inscribed *Looking towards Nelson from hills back
of Richmond Morning*

Signed *John Gully* 1885

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

18

WAKATIPU, 1886

10¼ x 13½

Signed *John Gully* 1886

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

19

MOUNT EGMONT, 1886

12 x 25¼

Signed *John Gully* 1886

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

20

LITTLE GLACIERS, MT ROLLESTON, 1887

14½ x 11¾

Signed *John Gully* 1887

Auckland City Art Gallery

21

BEFORE THE STORM: RIWAKA, 1888

12 x 19¼

Inscribed *Before the Storm, Riwaka*

Signed *John Gully March* 1888

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

22

BURNT BUSH, RIWAKA, NELSON, 1888

19¼ x 13

Inscribed *Burnt Bush Riwaka*

Signed *John Gully March* 1888

Auckland City Art Gallery

UNDATED PAINTINGS**23**

MOUNTAIN HEIGHTS

16¼ x 24

Signed *John Gully*

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

24

MOUNTAIN SCENE

13½ x 20½

Unsigned

Lent by The National Gallery, Wellington

25

THE SOUTHERN ALPS

8½ x 13

Unsigned

Lent by The Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington

26

THE REMARKABLES

9½ x 13

Signed *John Gully*

Lent by The Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington

27

MOUNT EGMONT*

13 x 20½

Signed *John Gully*

Lent by Mr A. T. Pycroft, Auckland

28

MOUNT ARTHUR FROM PIGEON VALLEY

9¾ x 14⅞

Unsigned

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

29

MOTUEKA, TASMAN BAY

13 x 18¾

Unsigned

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

30

THE KAIKOURAS AND THE VALLEY OF THE AWATERE*

12 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *John Gully*

Lent by Mr A. T. Pyecroft, Auckland

31

BISHOP'S PENINSULAR: MAORI PA

11 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$

Unsigned

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

32

A LAKE SCENE

18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *J. Gully*

Lent by The Bishop Suter Gallery, Nelson

33

GREYMOUTH AND SOUTHERN ALPS

after J. van Haast

13 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$

Signed *J. Gully*

Lent by The Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington

34

LANDSCAPE, WET DAY

9 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *J. Gully*

Lent by The Hocken Library, Dunedin

35

MOUNT COOK

17 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$

Signed *J. Gully*

Lent by Mr J. MacDonald, Wellington