

by the competitors I heard, there seems to be a prevalent idea that the popular vote will go to elocution items of Victorian vintage, imitators of hot jazz band combinations, singers of blues with an accent meant, presumably, to be that of the Southern States of the U.S.A., or such instruments as Hawaiian guitars, ukeleles, and piano-accordions playing popular hits of the day. Very few competitors offered serious music, but I should like to say to the young singer who actually gave us Delius that there was at least one listener who appreciated her temerity. Such professional musicians as I spoke to on the subject of the Talent Quest had either not heard of it, or had listened once and switched it off; if they had the cause of good music at heart, they should of course have urged their best pupils to enter for the competition, and so provide an alternative type of item. It may therefore take the wind out of the sails of these musical snobs to know that, in the end, the musical critics who merely listened, and the public vote which actually decided the winner, came to one and the same conclusion—namely, that such a respectable sum of prize-money must not be given indiscriminately to purveyors of popular hits, but must be awarded to a performer of genuine merit. The winner is well known locally as the possessor of a fine voice and the ability to use it; and if he made a slight concession to popular taste in his choice of a song, anything more classical would scarcely have got him into the finals, and that would have been a pity. It is interesting that a Talent Quest, which judgment by public vote may have been expected to turn into a Popularity Contest, should have been won by the competitor best fitted to use its benefits for the furtherance of genuine musical talent.

Scottish Humour

LISTENING on November 13 to George Campbell's studio broadcast over 3YA of numbers from Scottish comedy provided an interesting comparison between Will Fyffe and Sir Harry Lauder. After hearing items composed by both, rendered by a single competent local artist, one

feels that Lauder more nearly approaches the minstrel tradition of glens, bagpipes, and ballads, while Fyffe, deliberately less musical and more dependent on speech, presents in comic form something more like the actualities of Scottish village and town life. Thus Fyffe's items are more realistic and human, Lauder's more romantic and sentimental; but, oddly, funnier.

For Wet Sundays

WET Sunday afternoons (and Auckland has had so many this year) have lost some of their terrors since the advent of the U.S.A. programmes. With special American radio recordings at 3.30 p.m. in place of the former better-known gramophone recordings, and a similar session from 12M at 5.0 p.m., we are for a few hours very well off for symphonies, concertos and some very interesting oddments. Often it is new music that we would not otherwise hear at all; sometimes it is a new presentation of a work such as Prokofiev's



POET, SPARE THAT TREE!

An Arboreal Note—Written for "The Listener" by JACK POINT

BETWEEN the years 1688 and 1744, Alexander Pope wrote a poem bearing the title, "Where'er You Walk." Some time in that period the melodious Handel looked at the poem, found it good, and fashioned for it a musical setting. The poem then became a song, reached popularity, and at this late day is still being tirelessly sung by a wide range of vocalists from Tibbett to the man with a meagre voice who sang it regrettably in a front room in our street not so very long ago. May starlings nest in his chimney.

Now you may like the song, and your aunt may positively thrill at it, but I demand to be permitted to sit a little to one side and writhe as it runs its course. The music I do not object to. Handel's melody measures high with me, but the words of the poem do not. I brood on them. Let the first notes—nay, let the mere announcement of the song be made, and I am into my brood like a flash. I wait for the words. They come.

*"Where'er you walk cool gales shall fan the glade
Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade—"*

It is that bit about the trees. Imagine it. The poor girl is not to be allowed to sit without having trees bustle about her and deny her the sunshine.

No Reason at All

Poets have sought favours of many kinds for the objects of their affection. There was splendid Robert Herrick, for instance, who asked of the glow-worms that they lend their eyes to his sugar of the moment. This was a reasonable

enough request in view of the fact that electric torches were not then available. But there was no reason in Pope. There could be no reason at all in a man who would ask trees to behave like that.

Let your imagination work for a moment. See, here comes the sweet young thing, stepping lightly across the daisy-speckled meadow, inhaling deeply and advantageously the amorous air. The day is fair, and she carols happily as she admires the view and the sheen on the coat of the young black bull over the fence. Coming now to a bank, all primrosy, maybe, and violetted, she thinks to herself: "I'll just sit me down for a while. It is so lovely out here, especially as I have managed to elude Mr. Pope, who will read me his verses over and over."

She sits, and immediately there is a tremendous commotion. The girl pales, looks swiftly to left and right. Have the trees gone haywire? There a tall elm is noisily yanking its great roots out of the ground. Here a row of poplars resembles an eccentric ballet as it does the same. Other trees are at it, too, and presently they begin to hobble and hirkle their way towards her, led by an elderly oak, which has had a wire fence fastened to it. The oak brings the fence along. It all helps. By now they have gathered about the wide-eyed lass, waving their branches over her and spilling in her lap eggs from the nests of robins in their hair. Are you surprised to hear her yelp, see her drag up her petticoats and leg it for home? (or to see the young black bull rocket for the horizon, and be heard of a week later coming down a mountain three counties away?).

Young Ladies Avoided Him

It would probably not surprise you any more than it would me to learn that young ladies fought shy of Alexander. "I do wish Mr. Pope would turn his attentions elsewhere, Mamma," a young thing would say. "I find the tokens of his affection most upsetting. I cannot sit down without having trees pester me. Even at this very moment there are a couple of hollies at the door trying to force their way in. For Heaven's sake, have Thomas go out and ringbark them, or something."

Now, I have a daughter for whom I care in a big way. She is my sunshine,

the cream in my coffee, the star in my blue heaven, and all that, and there are times when I believe her heart to belong to daddy. I have trees, too. I have in my garden a pussy willow, four lacebarks, a small walnut, a sycamore, a laburnum, and two ngaos. If, in a wild, unreasoning love for her, I were to go all Popish and arrange for this motley collection of trees to crowd into a shade round her whenever she sat to pluck daisies on the lawn, would the child's affection for me mount? I think not. I think definitely not. It would take her mother a week to calm her down, and it would take me six weeks to recover from a series of assaults with a Number Two iron wielded by that same mother. And ever afterwards the child would edge away at my approach. Of course Pope had the locale all wrong. The idea was fine for a hot country with little shade; that is, provided the local maidens were strong of nerve and surprised at nothing. The desert, for instance. I should say that any Arab maid would fall handsomely for a lover who could arrange to have palm trees surround her where'er she sat on the hot sand.

Even in the Desert

But even in the desert it would perhaps be better to have nothing like that happen. Trees in that awful place are not common. Just an oasis of a few trees every so often, but not too often. The act of sitting, then, by the Arab maiden favoured of the poet, would result in some fast moving by the trees, owing to the distance they would have to travel. The desert would become a most disconcerting place. Many a caravan taking its slow course over the sandhills would be thrown into confusion by the passage through its ranks of a file of speeding palms. And picture the surprise and dismay of some elderly Bedouin lying contentedly under a few palms and suddenly finding himself bereft of shade and shelter because a brown-skinned girl has taken her seat in another part of the desert.

However, if Pope had to write his poem it would have been as well placed in the desert as anywhere. He could have made a sort of Bedouin Love Song of it—

*"Where'er you sit, my little Arab miss,
Palm trees shall crowd into an oasis—"
and so on.*