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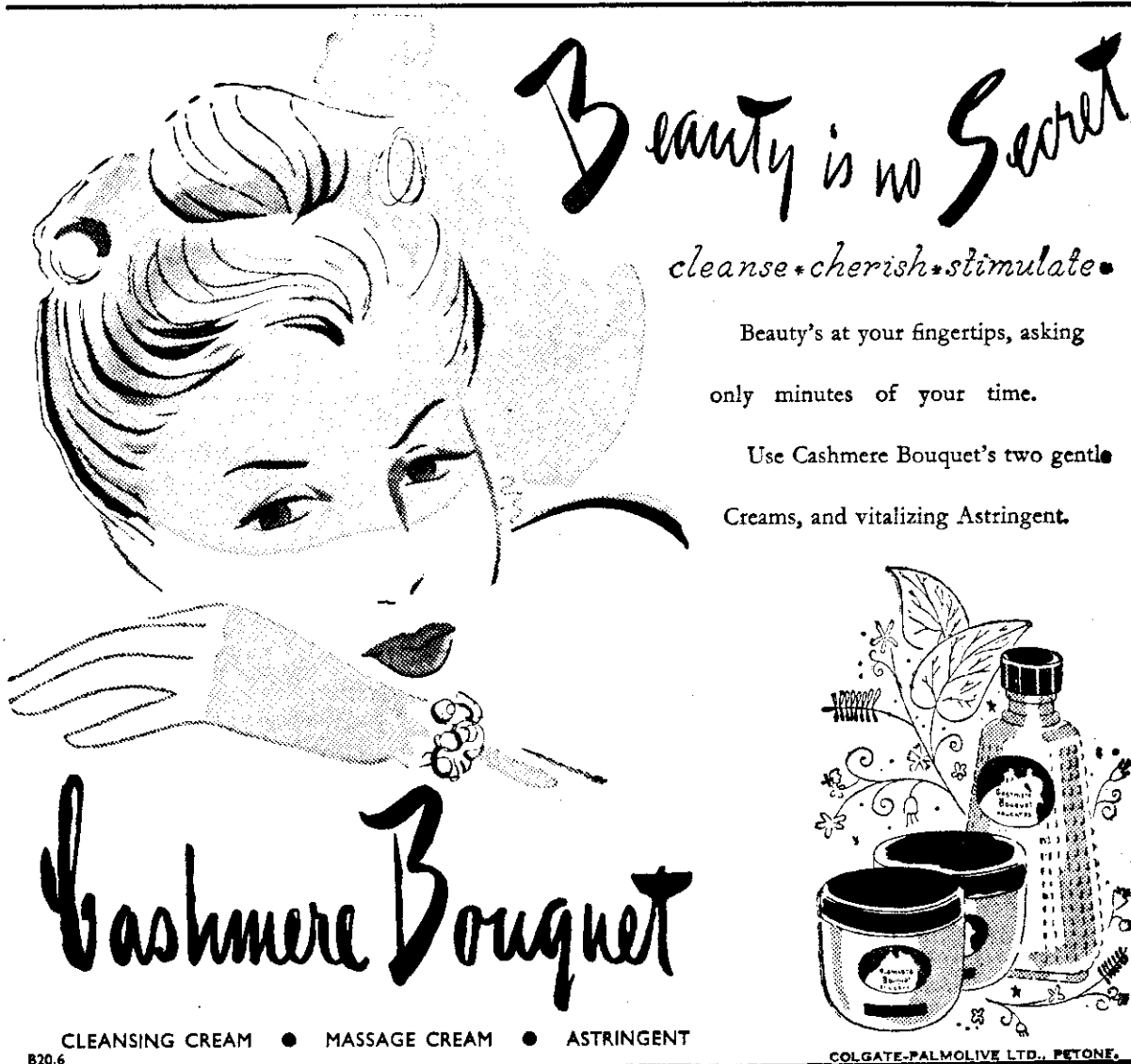
and created and sustained that mellow mood which rounds off the perfect and well-spent Christmas Day.

Box of Tricks

TYPICAL of the fake legend which has synthesised itself round the birth of Christ is *The Littlest Angel* by Charles Tazewell, which we heard purred by Loretta Young from 2YA on the Monday before Christmas. This tells the story of a four-year-old cherub abruptly translated to Paradise, and unable to tune his infant exuberance to the smooth and lovely rhythms of heavenly life. The first part of the tale concerns his hobbledehoyism, and its reformation, the second jerks in the Christmas motif by telling of the Littlest Angel's gift of his most treasured possession, his toy-box, to the Christ Child about to be born upon earth, which gift is irradiated by the Heavenly Father's approbation so that it is translated (inappositely enough) into the Star that glows over the stable at Bethlehem. Victor Young's musical decorations (arpeggios for falling tears, rising chords for suspense, and kitten-on-the-keys any time Loretta may have wanted to clear her throat) merely emphasised, like underlinings in Victorian correspondence, the archness of the story's treatment. Theologians would squirm at the author's failure to distinguish between Heaven and Paradise, pedants at the split infinitives, and even the non-believer in a material heaven might question the decorum of all this juggling with haloes and tripping over of robes.

A Christmas Tale

THE one-act opera *A Christmas Tale*, which I listened to from 2YA on Christmas evening sounded much like any other opera, an indication that our local artists are not as far below overseas standards as some of our correspondents would have us believe. The operetta could be described as a one-woman show—there are four singing parts, but all are subordinate to that of the mezzo-contralto, Jacqueline, imposingly played by Molly Atkinson. But though the production itself was excellent, the material, the opera itself, seemed to me a little thin. There were, I think, only two duets, and most of the 40 minutes were devoted to aria and recitative by female voices, which made for monotony. And though the story of the opera has human interest, and indeed has a 20th Century, rather than a 15th Century ring (anxious wife waits home on Christmas Eve for convivial husband, child's sabots forlornly empty by the bed because convivial husband has forgotten to buy child's presents), the dialogue itself, clearly heard because of the technical excellence of the production, is banal to the point of burlesque. (This perhaps explains why English operas are seldom successful in England). Moreover the husband's reformation, though brought about by gentle means, seemed to me to strike a note alien to the Christmas spirit (the only false note in the production). Christmas is nothing if not the season of good cheer, and Christmas night listeners might have felt happier if Jacqueline could have been weaned from her virtuous abstinence rather than Pierre from his wine-bibbing.



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