

LET CHARITY BEGIN AT HOME

IT is clear from "Barc's" comments in *The Listener* of July 16 that she has misunderstood the true aim of the new scholarship. It will be proved, I hope, that the purpose of the award is not merely to facilitate study abroad for our most promising art school students, however desirable that might be, but to make it possible for painters of some maturity to carry their achievements further.

Mr. Waghorn states clearly enough that the purpose is to give the artist who has already established himself in New Zealand the opportunity to visit art centres in other countries, and the successful candidate, therefore, need not be a young man at all. The age group that it has been decided will reap from the award the greatest benefits for themselves and the cause of New Zealand painting extend from 22 to 40. But these arbitrary age limits could with advantage be dispensed with altogether. Despite the fact that the majority of our painters are already classed by visitors as imitation Europeans, the big idea, surely, is to bring practising Dominion artists into personal contact with modern European influence. If the main desire is to bring our art world into contact with the enlightening influences of the art centres overseas, I do not see that the ages of our pilgrims matter as long as they are fully qualified otherwise. Actually the strongest claim must come from the elder of our artists, there being more evidence that they could benefit from such contact. And they, after all, are the ones who generally have the greatest influence at home. Older men, too, are less likely to skip the country at the end of the stipulated two years' residence upon return.

However, we do not need to look far into the matter to see that unless the scheme is modified to some extent (and the necessary modification is surely quite practicable) it cannot bear much fruit. The Association's scheme blithely ignores the real problem confronting any forward development in the graphic arts in New Zealand. The true stumbling block is the fact that it has never been possible for the most advanced and original of our artists (not to be confused with the most popular) to support themselves in New Zealand by their painting or by their sculpture, as the case may be. In other words it has never been economically possible for our potentially most valuable men to devote their whole time to the proper practice of their craft. Unless a painter is able to bring the concentration of his whole mind and energies to his task over a long and uninterrupted period of his life he can never hope to excel. Unless the cream of our artists are

WHEN the new £1000 A.N.Z.A.S. Travelling Scholarship was announced last month we published at the same time some comments on the award by the Wellington artist "Barc." Here is what one of our younger painters, ERIC LEE-JOHNSON, thinks about it.

enabled while working in this country to put into their work as much as it is possible for the best overseas artists to put into theirs, there can be little hope of their equalling overseas achievements.

The symptoms of arrested development prevalent among even talented artists in New Zealand are not due to lack of contact with Europe at all. Great numbers of our painters have, despite the fact that Travelling scholarships have not been handed out so freely in the past, contrived to study abroad. Some have returned with the highest academic qualifications. Let the A.N.Z.A.S. carry out a survey of what has since been the experience of these people.

Our artists' failure to produce great masterpieces of figure composition for every art exhibition is not due at all to the fact that too few have gone on from local schools to life classes in Australia, or England, or France. The standards of draughtsmanship taught here in Auckland at any rate are as high as in Australia or the schools in England.

Forced to Mark Time

When, in this country, painters appear to drop anchor after finishing a thorough training here or abroad, and then go on repeating themselves year after year, it is not because of any failure of the imagination. It is because they are

being forced to mark time. These are the artists who live in hopes that some miracle will eventually remove the economic obstacle to their complete application to the work they are most anxious and best qualified to do. In the meantime they try to hold their ground. Others, more realistic, recognising that further advance is impossible, rather than compromise turn away altogether to chicken-farming or working in the Post Office.

Probably 99 per cent. of the working members of our art societies are no more than Sunday painters. Men with talents as fine as can be found overseas are often forced to waste the best part of their time teaching, or to squander their talents on endless commercial jobs devoid of proper scope. The majority can carry on their painting only at weekends, or in the evenings when they are tired after a day spent working at some quite unrelated job. Precious few ever achieve adequate working conditions. A properly lit and equipped workshop is as essential to the serious artist as one is to a cabinet maker. Most of our painters are struggling along in the back bedroom, with the added drawback that since the import restrictions they seem doomed to compromise with makeshift materials. It is true that our bigger art societies have built up limited funds to be used for purchasing paintings and other works of art for their own and

public collections. But these funds seem fated to be used mainly for the sentimental acquisition of work by deceased painters. In the case of the struggling younger painter, no matter how good he is, there is little chance while he remains alive of his receiving the encouragement and help of having some of this money spent on this work. Such assistance in any case would be too niggardly. We must begin to think on the scale of the Archibald prize.

The money available for this new scholarship is in this class, but the first concern of the A.N.Z.A.S. should be to alleviate the economic difficulties of competent artists at home. More enduring good and a far healthier situation generally could be achieved in five years by a scheme of judicious and generous subsidising on the home front than can possibly result from 50 years of merely sending artists abroad, and then leaving it at that.

Travel Necessary, But Secondary

I am not of the opinion that travelling scholarships are unnecessary and useless. There is to-day a most urgent need to send several people abroad to study ceramics, for instance, and domestic and industrial design. We are most backward in these directions, and in these subjects our schools are not equipped to give a full and advanced course. It would surely pay our large pottery concerns handsomely in the long run if they were to band together now and finance a travelling scholarship in ceramics. Our furniture manufacturers could atone for some of their

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"FEW achieve adequate working conditions"—Lee-Johnson solves his problem by working for the greater part of the year in a tent