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Do We Need

A NATIONAL TRUST?

NEW ZEALANDERS are strongly conscious of themselves as a community. Our writers spend a good deal of their time in what might be called "national introspection." On the whole, I think this is a healthy sign. For every community, if it is to exist in any other than an atomised form, must become aware of itself; and it must have its myths and its monuments, and its written history.

It is the monuments that I am concerned about just now. The story of our sojourn in these islands, and of our attachment to them, has its concrete embodiment in the works of nature and in the works of man. There are landscapes most of us would not wish to see defiled, even if the god of Commerce sent us out against them with axes and fire-sticks. And up and down the country, in a thousand odd corners, there are old buildings and other historical monuments that link us with the past.

It is only a barbarous people that lacks the "sense of history," of kinship with its own past. Only a barbarous people will tread the past underfoot as it marches forward to . . . wherever it may be going.

On the whole, we have preserved our monuments with sufficient care to be able to refute the charge of barbarism. But the preservation of national monuments is a difficult business. Even when the historic sense exists, there are strong forces working, in an impersonal way, towards the constant destruction of the past. Little or nothing can be done, in fact, without organisation. I am very doubtful whether our present organised efforts to preserve historic monuments are either strong enough or sufficiently co-ordinated to prevent the tide of "progress" from washing away some important parts of our story.

Britain's Example

Let us glance for a moment at what Britain has done. The National Trust Act of 1937 extended the powers of the Trust "to hold properties as investments, using rents for Trust purposes, and extended the purposes of the Trust to include the preservation of buildings, etc., of national, architectural, historic or artistic interest, the protection and augmentation of the amenities of such buildings, etc., and their surroundings, the preservation of furniture, pictures and chattels having a similar interest, and the access to and enjoyment of such by the public."

That is about as comprehensive as one could wish. The National Trust has acquired the "George" Inn in Southwark, and many other old buildings. It has put the work of preservation on a thoroughly systematic basis, so that little or nothing of importance anywhere in the British Isles will, we may be sure, be destroyed in future. I say "in the British Isles"; but I am forgetting that there is a Scottish National Trust as well. Obviously the matter is taken very seriously.

Written for "The Listener"
by A. R. D. FAIRBURN

Another thing the Trust has done is to acquire strips of coast in Devon, Cornwall, and Pembrokeshire, woodlands in Oxfordshire, downland and hills in Gloucestershire and Surrey, and nature reserves in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Foundation Has Been Laid

Here in our own country the Internal Affairs Department has done a great deal of valuable work along similar lines. But, of course, this is only one of many of the Department's activities; and the good work that has been done has, I feel, lost some of its efficacy through lack of publicity.

There is no doubt that the Department deserves very great credit for the conscientious way in which it has approached the problem. But—there is no harm in asking frank questions—can we expect any Government Department to carry out, as one of its incidental activities, the sort of work that is implied in the account I have just given of the British National Trust? In short, do we need a full-scale National Trust of our own?

Perhaps the thing is impracticable. With our small population we may not be able to afford the outlay of monies necessary to make a National Trust effective. I feel, however, that even if it had a modest beginning, the very fact of its having been established would do a great deal to make New Zealanders more aware of their past history, and of the need for preserving monuments connected with it.

Regrets in Prospect

Many fish have got through the net already. And others will follow them, no doubt. The Bank of New Zealand building in Auckland is to be pulled down before long, to make space for a tall modern building. There are many Aucklanders who would like to see the existing one preserved, and perhaps turned into an Old Colonists' Museum. It is one of our finest pieces of architecture; and it forms an important link with the city's past. Even if it is demolished, could it not be re-erected on some other site, as has been done with some of the old stone buildings in Sydney?

The Old Mill in Auckland, which was built in 1852 or earlier, has been a landmark from pioneering days until the present. Soldiers returning from the south during the Maori Wars fastened their eyes upon it, and made it a symbol of home. It has a symbolic significance of another kind: for a long period of Auckland's history it provided bread for the people. Efforts have been made to save it, but the prospect is not hopeful. It will no doubt go the way of all flesh, and of most stone.

On the hill that is now Albert Park there were once six blockhouses, relics of the time when this area was occupied by the Barracks. They were placed on strategic high-points in defence against

(continued on next page)