

# Harry Ell and the Summit Road

VISITORS to Christchurch who drive or, better, walk along the Summit Road which runs around the top of the Port Hills are likely nowadays to take its sealed surface and magnificent views of harbour, plains and mountains for granted.

The truth is that it's not just another scenic road which was bulldozed overnight and sealed next day when the public purse was overflowing. More than anything else it's a memorial to one man, Harry Ell, who 95 years ago was born in Halswell, just beneath the Port Hills, and around the turn of the century was to take one day a walk to Kennedy's Bush by way of Dyers Pass and a barely noticeable track along the summits. Ell, says Lenore Oakley in a series of talks about him now being heard from 3YA on Tuesday nights, was "struck by the beauty of the views disclosed at every turn . . . returned that way again and again, and from these repeated walks the conception of a Summit Road sprang to life in his mind."

At one time a soldier in the campaign against Te Whiti in Taranaki, later a Member of Parliament and a militant Prohibitionist, Harry Ell gave about half his life to the Summit Road. The road itself was not the whole of his dream, however—he wanted to see also a chain of roadhouses along it. Of the 12 he planned four were in use before he died. Today the best known of them, The Sign of the Takahe, stands about half-way up to Dyers Pass, a monument to Harry Ell's almost in-



HARRY ELL

*The road was not the whole of his dream*

credible labours with his own hands and a devoted team of helpers. The Sign of the Kiwi, once neglected, has been restored, and the Sign of the Packhorse is still used by trampers; but the Sign of the Bellbird is in ruins. The Summit Road was still unfinished when Ell died in 1934, and it was after his death that the Main Highways Board was persuaded to complete and maintain the highway as it is today.

## OPERA GUIDE

### The Queen of Spades

"It is hard to understand," wrote Cecil Smith of this week's YC opera "why the *Queen of Spades* has failed to win a substantial place in the contemporary operatic repertoire. . . . The music is more varied in expression and less persistently sombre than that of *Eugen Onegin*. The vocal and orchestral parts, both separately and in their inter-relationship, are handsomely written and always sound well. There is not a dull moment in the score, and the high moments are very high indeed. . . .

"If the *Queen of Spades* is inferior in inspiration to the official Russian masterpiece, Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, I fail to see how; and it is undeniably more secure in its practical craftsmanship."

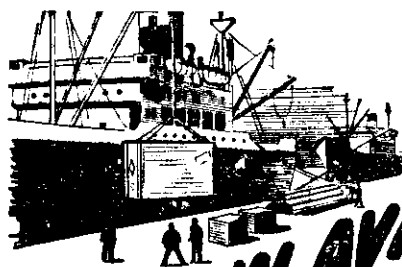
Tchaikovsky started work on this opera (a'so, incidentally, known as *Pique Dame*) after the production of his ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* in St Petersburg in January, 1890. Most of the opera was written in Florence, where the composer went for an extended holiday, and it had its first performance in December of the same year, again in St Petersburg, which is also the locale of the opera.

Like his other well-known opera *Eugen Onegin* (and the successful *Mazeppa*) *The Queen of Spades* derives from Pushkin. Using the famous story of the same



name as a basis, the composer's brother Modeste wrote a libretto which stressed the human, the tragic and romantic possibilities of the characters, thereby giving more scope to Tchaikovsky's particular genius than the original story with its overtones of morality and irony could possibly have done.

The production to be heard from all YCs at 7.0 p.m. on Sunday, July 23, is by the National Opera, Belgrade; with Valeria Peybalova (soprano) as Lisa, Biserka Tzveych (soprano) as Pauline, Melanie Bugarinovich (mezzo-soprano) as the Countess, Alexander Marinkovich (tenor) as Hermann, and Dushan Popovich (baritone) as Prince Yeletsky; together with other soloists, the Yugoslav Army Chorus, Radio Belgrade Children's Chorus, and the Orchestra of the National Opera, Belgrade, conducted by Kreshmir Earanovich.



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