

# Keeping Auckland Beautiful

THE Auckland Light Opera Club's very successful and enjoyable *Traviata*, about which I wrote last time, was not only an artistic but a financial triumph. Recently, after the Junior Symphony Orchestra's concert in the Town Hall, the Club presented its juniors with a cheque for £100. This, says Dr Nalden, the Orchestra's conductor, will probably be spent on a bassoon, or some other needed instrument.

Now it has often been lamented that the days of patronage are over, and that the artist has to look to the State for those grants which earlier, he could confidently expect (after a suitable amount of toadying) from some wealthy arts-fancier. Here in Auckland we have a new kind of patronage, one which bears out the moan that "It's only the poor 'as 'elps the poor." Not that the Light Opera Club is exactly poor, after its resounding and thoroughly deserved success; but it could well have ploughed those profits back into its own concern, for bigger and better operas to come. To its undying honour, it has decided, in its own words, to devote some of them "to worthy musical causes in the city"; and this £100 cheque to the young 'uns is evidently only the first of its gifts.

I think this shows the true co-operative spirit, and it certainly makes me feel better about a thing! I noticed on first arrival, and have lamented ever since: the tendency in Auckland, as in my native Cambridge, for people to go round in small circles. The whole city seems sometimes to my (no doubt disordered) imagination, to be pin-pointed with a lot of catherine wheels all spinning merrily enough, but utterly independent, each on its own stick. Now, with this generous gesture, the Light Opera Club has stepped out of its own spin, and is helping to turn the others around on theirs. Perhaps, in time, the idea will grow. Perhaps we shall one day see the Art Gallery giving some of its surplus to the Society of Arts, for a project they both believe in; perhaps the various amateur dramatic clubs of the city will one day get together, pool their resources, and buy themselves a decent theatre in which to perform their separate plays. Who will be next to give the pull or push? It's like that children's game of "You Blink First!"

THE battle seems joined, now, over Judges Bay—and in case any Wellingtonians or Mainlanders think me foolish to devote so much print to one small Auckland cove, I'd like to say here and now that several letters have come in from all over, deploring the threatened ruin of such a pleasant spot, and asking what the writers of these protests can do to help. Now the City Council, having indignantly denied a suggestion that they are regretting their earlier stand against the Railways Department, are to meet on the spot, complete with flags to pop in the soil showing where and how the suggested railway sidings are to be placed. Meanwhile the Citizens' Committee for the preservation of the Bay is persisting admirably with alternative suggestions. All of these have one advantage to the lay eye, that, however awkward they might be, they are at any rate in areas

already spoiled by railway development, and would not ruin a residential park, which is what Judges Bay really is.

AS if these controversies had triggered off others, we have another plea, this time for the preservation of our remaining volcanic cones, and coming, this time, from the Historic Auckland Society. The Society has already tried to get the Minister of Lands to co-operate, but has received from this department a very dusty answer: That, as the proposed committee was to be a local one, the Department need not be represented thereon. In fact, the wanton destruction of some unique features of Auckland, that port through which most travellers enter the country, isn't of much consequence to New Zealand as a whole. Talk of small circles!

NOW to some more cheerful news, still to do with Beautiful Auckland. We lament the passing of the kauri forests, while jealously and rather desperately preserving those we still have, as if the day of that great tree were over. Not at all, says Professor V. J. Chapman, of Auckland, while inspecting a grove of young kauris planted at St. Heliers, not at all. You can plant a kauri any time: for your own pleasure in the next few years, and for the pleasure of your descendants during the next few centuries (if they are spared by modern science to enjoy anything at all). You can plant a kauri now, in your own garden, for the future: and the Tree Society will help you to do it. Just write to Miss W. Huggins, its secretary, at St. Heliers; and she will see that you get seedlings.

This news, pleasant though it is, has sent me into a swivet. I'd love to plant not one kauri but a dozen, and see them grow for the time that is left to me, and watch them in some disembodied state afterward, perhaps, since I'm quite certain nothing will ever stop me from haunting the Waitemata. But, heavens, where am I to find room, in a section which measures only one-fifth of an acre, and is, moreover, largely covered by a new and beautiful house? I've a bit of ground at the bottom, against a fence I'd dearly like to see concealed; but then the growing kauri would soon enter into competition with another native, a young pohutukawa: and I would hate to see civil war between two New Zealand trees going on daily a few feet beneath my living room windows. The other possible sites are already planted out in vegetables: am I to give up the twice-weekly blessings of spinach beet (a vegetable my family will eat if approached tactfully) in favour of the dark romance of a kauri tree which isn't edible? Or must I sacrifice my thriving peach tree, so lovely bare, in leaf, in flower, and in fruit? The problem seems insoluble, since when it comes to the point I'm always more of a Martha than a Mary. I think I shall get me a kauri seedling, and take it one dark night to a propitious spot on the shores of Ngataranga, plant it with the greenest finger I have, and thereafter visit it in secret, like poor Lady Dedlock feasting her eyes upon her little female by-blow. This seems the only compromise possible, for a nature torn between an urge to grow New Zealand's grandest tree, and the practical demands of housewifery.

—Sarah Campion

N.Z. LISTENER, NOVEMBER 15, 1957.



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