

BRILLIANT HARVEST OF PATIENCE AND DETERMINATION

The Nan Kivell Collection of Early New Zealand Pictures, described here by DR. J. C. BEAGLEHOLE, will be on exhibition first in Wellington (opening on December 11), and will be on tour through the Dominion until November of next year.

IF you have £30,000, and want to spend it on a Renoir, or a Cezanne, you can hardly do better than go to London, to the Redfern Gallery, and seek out Mr. Nan Kivell. But if you have rather less, say two or three guineas, and want a picture by some relatively unknown but interesting young English lithographer, then you might very well seek out Mr. Nan Kivell too. I do not know if the reception you get, in the latter case, will be as warm as if you were the king of I.C.I. or Shell-Mex, with the £30,000 sticking out of your pocket, but it will be a very pleasant and friendly reception—as I know from personal experience. For Mr. Nan Kivell is interested not merely in names but in pictures, not merely in the eminent dead but in the promising young. I have no doubt that as an art dealer he is as able and shrewd as anybody in Bond Street (he is in Cork Street, a few yards away), but he is much more than an able and shrewd art-dealer, with a lively eye cocked at the market.

He is, as we have been coming to realise in New Zealand, a very generous man; and he now comes before us as himself a great collector. The extent of his collection is staggering. The New Zealand portion of it, which will be on view for the next few months in our country, is by no means its largest part.

Staggering: a good deal goes into that word; this is not the sort of thing that a man of money, a Mellon or a Huntington, heaps up and puts in a marble palace; it is the harvest of knowledge, patience, determination, a sort of collector's strategy and tactics as well as the collector's flair; a willingness to plunge as well as to scratch. It is a brilliant collection, and it is quite un-snobbish.

Some of Mr. Nan Kivell's great prizes no doubt cost him a good deal—one

does not pick up a portfolio of Ellis's water-colours on Cook's third voyage for a song, or a sheaf of Webber originals; but casting his net widely, he has seen the point of the little fish, he has seen the point, even, of the horror as well as the masterpiece. He has had the historical mind. He has taken in the oil, the water colour; he has taken in the popular lithograph, the scrap of drawing; the gauche and the amateurish as well as the expert, the "primitive" as well as the sophisticated. The result, as a mass of illustration of early life on this side of the world, is—well, staggering. And every now and again there turns up a picture, a Heaphy or a small Augustus Earle, which is in its way a masterpiece as well as a historical document.

Rex Nan Kivell is himself an interesting and somewhat odd phenomenon. Canterbury-born and educated, he is dragged out of the army well under age just in time to escape Messines, and plunges into a delightful life as science student and hunter of book and print shops, already a collector and amateur book-binder. He abandons science for the non-professional side of the law, as a judge's marshal, and he is happy in his judge; he becomes a partner in the then little and exceedingly inconspicuous Redfern Gallery; he goes digging on Roman sites and establishes some claim to distinction as an archaeologist.

He begins his career as benefactor by giving away his archaeological collection. I suppose he has a bit of money, but he is, happily, in collector's country that is unfashionable, the Redfern is succeeding, and for ten or fifteen years in his sphere of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific he carries all before him—anyhow all he wants. He travels all over Europe and into North Africa on some enticing clue; he casts his net still wider and collects a chauffeur and factotum in Morocco and one of Ribbentrop's cars in London, when war sends the champagne-salesman home. He is



REX NAN KIVELL

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tactful, he is alert, he has an admirable cunning; the provincial antique shops render up their unregarded treasures, old ladies melt before his charm. So small Elizabeth Broughton of the Boyd comes alive for us, we can see the sketch somebody made of the way Heaphy won his Victoria Cross, we have an intimate view of the Ruapekapeka encounter of 1846; we have the pas, the early settlements, the missionaries, the chiefs, the plains, the rivers and mountains of New Zealand as our predecessors saw them from the 1820s to the 1850s.

Mr. Nan Kivell lends it all to us, in addition to all the wood-engravings and the lithographs he has given us. Is he left lamenting in London, even if stoically and only sporadically lamenting? Probably not; our New Zealander from New Brighton can still pass from the pictures and the pleasures of his gallery

to his flat behind the BBC, where Renoir and Van Gogh, Soutine and Graham Sutherland provide their more intimate benediction from his walls.

Well, the pictures will travel the country. The people in the Alexander Turnbull Library and the Government Printer have provided an excellent catalogue, which will have a permanent value as a work of reference. Everybody who can should see the collection. Those who see it will have their own enthusiasms and their own reserves. Myself, I should like to steal the Earle and the Heaphy and the Ellis which are reproduced in colour in the catalogue, and perhaps one or two more Earles and perhaps one or two things by persons more obscure in the history of New Zealand art. I should not like to steal E. G. Temple, *The Landing of Captain Cook in New Zealand*, "initialled and dated 1869," because of a prejudice against this sort of "artist's reconstruction"—unless the artist happens to be a Titian or a Rubens.

The same holds for Meryon's large *Death of Marion du Fresne*. Its anthropology is dubious, its rendering of history is speculative. I suppose it has some significance in the interminable list of French "history-pictures," and it is interesting, no doubt, also as an example of what the etcher of Notre Dame and Banks Peninsula could do when he had a bit of canvas six or seven feet long in front of him.

About the identification of the stiff little Cuyp portrait group with Tasman and his wife and child I have the severest reserves. It has its charm. But if this pale refined bourgeois is the rough and tough seaman who beat so many Pacific gales, played at kidnapping in the East Indies, harried the Philippine Spaniards, and tried in a fit of drunken rage to hang two of his own sailors—I'll eat a good many hats. I add that to my gratitude to Mr. Nan Kivell there are no reserves whatever.



The central detail of Meryon's "Death of Marion du Fresne"—"its rendering of history is speculative."