



A KORERO Report

“**T**O CARVE a violin, go to the Black Forest of Germany where human sacrifices were offered, and cut out the heart of a tree 300 years old.

“Then carry that wood to Greece and leave it there for 100 years to season in the dry air of Attica. Let it absorb the eloquence of the Athenian orators, witness the tragedy of the Grecian masters, and let it season in the drowning hum of greatness that sounds from the field of Marathon.

“Then take it to Italy for another 100 years. Let it be saturated with the greatness of ancient Rome, and the fluttering of the wings of the Roman Eagle.

“Then take it to the white cliffs of Dover for another 100 years. Let it take in the sweep of the tide, the flash of the lightning, the rumble of the heavy thunder, and the rhythmic beat of the waves.

“Then take it for another 100 years to the newly built Palace of Versailles. Let it absorb the gaiety of its night life, the dignity of its court performance and the majesty of its architecture.

“Then take it for another 100 years to the rugged mountains of Norway. Let it gather into its heart the clash of the avalanche, the splutter of the waterfalls, the steady pulse of peasants . . .

“For the bow, take the hair of a woman who has lived, loved, and sinned, and been to the foot of the Cross for deliver-

ance. Then you will have the violin and the bow. But only God can make the violinist.”

This eloquent admission that the perfect violin cannot be shaped by human hands came from Antonio Stradivari (1649-1737), one of the world's best violin-makers. Antonio and his brother Geronimo improved and remodelled the old Brescian (1580-1630) violin, and created a graceful, artistic pattern which has been followed generally to the present day.

The violin was not invented, but came from changes made to the viola, a six or seven-stringed instrument with square or blunt corners and a soft, penetrating tone. The viola dates from the fifteenth century, and was a descendant from the lute, an adaptation of the classical lyre. The earliest violin is believed to have been made in Venice in 1563.

For two and a quarter centuries, then, the violin has remained unchanged. This frankly puzzled a violin-maker Korero visited the other day.

