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Observ(er)ations

I should like to congratulate everybody connected with the Accrington Amateur Operatic Society upon the fact that the handsome sum of £130 has this week been allocated to the various local charities from the surplus proceds of the week's performance of "The King of Cadonia" in December last. This is £10 more than in the previous year, a pleasing token of the popularity of "Our Amateurs" and their achievements in opera. The sum available has been apportioned thus:—Accrington Victoria Hospital, £80; the Blind Society, £20; Accrington District Nursing Association, £15; Mayor's Poor Box, £5; St. John Ambulance Association, £5; Church Nursing Association, £2 10s.; Oswaldtwistle Nursing Association, £2 10s.—a total of £130. The Blind Society have received £5 more than last year, and two new items are introduced in the contributions of £2 10s. each to the funds of the Church and Oswaldtwistle District Nursing Associations.

* * *

There is a concensus of opinion that Blackburn-road, between Eagle-street and Birch-street, must be widened by demolishing the shop property already in the possession of the Corporation. The disposition of the land is, however, a different matter. Shall it be built upon, or shall there be an open space? And if built upon, are the shops to be two stories or three stories in height? To leave the site derelict is out of the question. It would be a positive eyesore to townspeople, as well as to visitors. If the Corporation could secure the property behind, facing Eagle-street and Willow-street, an open square might be worth consideration, but failing that, the question may at once be dismissed.

* * *

The Council has already decided to sell the land for shop property, and all things considered, that seems a wise decision. I cannot, however, agree with the resolution of the Council to permit the erection of two-storeyed buildings, and so far as I can gather opinion is decidedly against the proposition. And even in the Council divergent views prevail. The resolution, it may be remembered, was only carried by a bare majority—16 votes to 14. To permit the erection of two-storeyed buildings by the side of the magnificent three-storeyed shops between Birch-street and St. James-street would be a huge blunder. I have taken the trouble to confer with several architects in the district, and without exception they are of the same opinion. It would simply spoil the present pile of buildings, which are the admiration of visitors and the envy of tradesmen of other towns. There is not a finer block of shops for miles around, and it would be sinful to allow the space adjoining to be filled with property less imposing, less dignified.

* * *

If the decision of the Council to allow shops of two and three stories, according to the whims and fancies of the purchasers of the land, is upheld, the result, from an architectural point of view, would be disastrous. Imagine a two-storey shop in the centre of the adjoining block—say where Boots' establishment is reared. What a sorry picture it would be!

* * *

One of our aldermen, whose judgment is usually correct, pleads for variety, and claims that Prince's-street in Edinburgh and the Strand in London would not be nearly so picturesque if the shops were all one height. In the selection of the Strand as an illustration the Chairman of the Electricity Committee is singularly unfortunate. The dingy old shops of the Strand are fast disappearing, and in their place buildings of noble proportions are erected. And in Prince's-street, Edinburgh, there are no modern two-storey buildings. Many of these were swept away long ago to give place to lofty, well-proportioned buildings.

* * *

We have in Accrington a striking example of two-storey and three-storey buildings right opposite the handsome shops between Birch-street and St. James-street. Not many years ago an attempt was made to brighten the property by raising the frontages, but with only indifferent success. Again, further along Blackburn-road, between Church-street and Bank-street, the shops were dwarfed by other buildings, and to add to dignity the roofs were faced with wooden hoardings.

* * *

Three-storeyed buildings lend themselves better for architectural treatment than shops lower in height. There would be general, but not absolute uniformity of height with the present shops, and each shop would have its own architectural features. It is to be hoped that it is not too late to reverse the decision of the Council. If it is adhered to the result, I fear (to use a homely but very inelegant expression), will be a higgledy-piggledy job.

* * *

At the last meeting of the Town Council, it may be remembered, Councillor Crawford entered a protest against the Corporation parting with the land in Blackburn-road. Retention of all the land that can be secured by local authorities has many advocates, and in the view of many people in Accrington it is eminently desirable that the Council should keep this particular plot, so that the town may profit from the enhanced value which, they say, is sure to accrue as years go by. Mr Crawford is determined, so far as he is concerned, to keep the land in the possession of the Council, and at Monday's meeting he will move that recent resolutions empowering the sale of the site be rescinded.

* * *

That is not the only motion on the agenda of which notice has been given. One standing in the name of Councillor W. Smith reads:

> That the Electricity, Legal and Parliamentary Committee be instructed to consider the advisability of revising the fares on the Tramways, with a view to introducing return fares and intermediate stages, and to report to the Council as soon as possible.

Mr. Smith will probably find his resolution accepted, for it is of a non-committal character. He is but doing what others have done before him, and so recently as a fortnight ago Mr. Morley advocated every one of the changes suggested by Mr. Smith, and declared his intention of pressing them forward at a meeting of the Committee, of which he is a member. There is not a member of that Committee who would not like to reduce fares and cheapen public travelling charges. Those conversant with the financial position of the tramways, however, are certain as to what the outcome of consideration will be. But the question has so often been considered that one wonders why it should be reconsidered just now when the Tramways Committee have several extension schemes on hand, schemes which will involve large capital expenditure. These include the purchase of five additional cars and the enlargement of the tramway shed. The estimated cost of the latter alone is £9,500. And another ill-omen for any tangible results from such an enquiry as suggested by Mr. Smith is the following statement on the minutes of the Electricity Committee: "The Vice-Chairman submitted certain suggestions for a revision of the tramway fares on certan sections of the tramway system, and the Committee discussed same." So that the very question raised by Mr. Smith has been anticipated.

* * *

As I stated two or three weeks ago, the special committee appointed to consider a scheme for the filling of aldermanic vacancies decided to recommend the Council to appoint aldermen according to seniority of service. The following is the scheme as set out in the minutes:

> 1.—In all future aldermanic vacancies the members of the Council shall be convened to meet informally at least three days before the day appointed for the election, and in case of vacancies occurring by ordinary effluxion of time, the positions shall be offered to the retiring aldermen; and in case of the resignation, disqualification, or death of any alderman, to the senior councillor, or councillors, as there are vacancies to be filled, and in all such cases the decision then arrived at shall be ratified by vote in the Council.
>
> 2.—In ascertaining who is the senior councillor, the office must have been held in continuity, i.e., in case a term of office shall have to be broken for any reason whatever, other than for ordinary re-election as a Councillor on the 1st November, the period of continuity shall only count from the date of a Councillor's most recent election.
>
> 3.—In case the senior Councillor declines to be elected Alderman, the offer shall be made to the next Councillor in seniority, and the seniority of the person declining to be elected Alderman shall commence to date de novo from such date.
>
> 4.—In case two or more Councillors are of equal seniority as Councillors, the claim as to which shall be elected Aldermen shall, failing agreement between them, be determined by them drawing lots.

* * *

Whether the scheme will meet all future contingencies or not, and will give absolute satisfaction or not, is another matter. After all, seniority is not in itself an infallible postulate which will ensure that the men most entitled and best fitted for the aldermanic bench will secure a place thereon. In fact, I have known of instances where the rule has been in force and the members have felt compelled to waive it, with resultant heart-burnings to the individuals affected. Then with regard to section two, it would seem a little harsh in its operation in the circumstances of a member whose continuity happened to be broken for only a few months, or weeks maybe, as, for instance, in the case of Mr. Parsons, who resigned his seat a few weeks before the expiration of his term, in order to become a candidate for a municipal appointment, and who, on failing to secure the post, obtained re-election immediately after. Yet I understand that Mr. Parsons was largely responsible for the clause. Had he forgotten at the moment his own position?

* * *

Another interesting recommendation emanates from the Library and Baths Committee. At the last meeting of that body the Librarian threw out a suggestion as to the establishment of branch libraries in outlying districts, and after consideration the Committee requested the Librarian to prepare a report as to the establishment of a branch library in the Baxenden district.

* * *

Among the questions likely to loom large at Monday's meeting of the Town Council is the recommendation made by the Parks Committee that the Municipal Museum at Oak Hill Park shall be open to visitors on Sunday afternoons. Observerites will be greatly interested in the Rev. J. Moffat Logan's open letter to the Town Council, which appears in another column. Mr. Logan opposes, on grounds which one must respect, even if one does not endorse, the Sunday opening of the Museum. Always the soul of candour, the pastor of Cannon-street Baptist Church tells us that in a similar controversy at Bristol he was actively on the side of those who advocated the Sunday opening of the museum, the art gallery, and the reading rooms in that city, but he has since arrived at the conclusion that he then championed a mistaken policy, and to-day he is on the side of those who would keep these places entirely closed on the Sabbath. Mr. Logan therefore throws his very considerable influence against the proposal of the Parks Committee to open Oak Hill Museum on Sunday afternoons.

* * *

I find myself among those who fail to see eye to eye with Mr. Logan in this matter. I cannot conceive in the opening of the Museum on Sunday afternoons anything inimical to the moral or spiritual welfare of the community, or to the great work of our churches and Sunday schools. On the contrary, I can imagine a Sunday school teacher making a deep impression upon his scholars by inviting them to accompany him, when school is over, to inspect some of the beautiful things that are on exhibition at the Museum, and with the help of the splendid collection of butterflies, or of the geological specimens which unfold to us so much of the wonderful story of the world in which we live, impressing upon the youthful mind and imagination the great works of the Divine Creator. The opening of the Museum can only be for the good of those who enter its doors, and I am glad to see that "Quintus," in his article to-day, lends his cordial support to the Parks Committee's recommendation. I certainly hope and expect that the Town Council will approve the Committee's decision.

* * *

By the way, "Quintus" deals to-day with two thorny subjects in Sunday closing and the regulation of working men's clubs, and in both matters I venture to believe that a large number of readers will find themselves in sympathy with his views. Sooner or later the question of the more effective regulation and supervision of clubs will have to be tackled, in spite of all the high encomiums one sometimes reads of having been uttered by those who give their whole-hearted approval of the club movement.

* * *

Readers of this column are already pretty familiar with the two schemes advanced for the beautifying of St. Annes. The foreshore scheme, which embraces the construction of a marine lake, swimming bath, and other attractions on the shore, has been received with almost universal favour, but to the purchase of St. George's Gardens strong opposition was raised. The latter scheme has excited the ratepayers of St. Annes to a degree never before experienced by the progressive resort 'twixt Lytham and Blackpool. Meetings for and against the purchase have taken place, and a poll of the townspeople demanded. The controversy was hot and furious, and even led to personalities, some of the combatants losing their heads completely. Just on the eve of the poll, Lord Ashton, who some time ago purchased the fine bungalow at the extreme end of the promenade on the eastern side, intending taking up his residence there during portions of the year, stepped into the breach. Somebody had sent him copies of local newspapers in which he read of the divided views of the ratepayers. Sending for the Chairman of the District Council, he proffered to defray the cost of the gardens, which is understood to be something over £21,000. Naturally the news gave intense pleasure to the people of St. Annes—to opponents as well as supporters of the scheme. And now, I suppose, there will be hand-shaking all round. Lord Ashton is, of course, proclaimed a "jolly good fellow." Of that there can be no shadow of doubt.

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Mr. Oliver Porritt, who may be claimed as a local man, because of his association with Helmshore, also shares in the success of the scheme, for, as announced at a meeting this week, he has surrendered his interest in the land, equivalent, as the Chairman of the Council puts it, to a gift of £15,000.

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One of the leading supporters of the scheme for the acquisition of the gardens was our old friend Mr. C. F. Critchley, who, in addition to speaking at a meeting of ratepayers, presided over a crowded meeting held in favour of the District Council's proposals. Mr. Critchley had been challenged to name a single town in the kingdom that had paid half, nay, a quarter of the sum per acre asked for the St. George's Gardens, for recreation ground or park. Mr. Critchley accepted the challenge, and quoted Oak Hill Park, Accrington. That land, said the speaker, was purchased in 1892 for £9,500. There were about 13 acres, which worked out at £730 per acre. "Oak Hill Park (Mr. Critchley proceeded) was on the outskirts of the town, on a hillside, impossible almost to be used for building purposes. The price was considered monstrous at the time, but they could not find a single person to-day to criticise the wisdom then displayed." St. George's Gardens, it is perhaps as well to explain, are within a stone's throw of St. Annes' railway station, and belong to the Land and Building Co., who have this week agreed to sell at 25 years' purchase.

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What a wonderful place Blackpool is! Visitors to the popular Lancashire resort can always rely upon seeing or hearing the very best and the very latest. Another striking example is afforded this week. At the Palace Picture Pavilion Edison's most up-to-date "talking machine," the Kinetophone, has been installed, and some of the pictures are now accompanied each evening by recitals from this truly marvellous instrument. An "Observer" man went to the Palace on Wednesday evening in the expectation of seeing and hearing "the show," but although he had taken the precaution to present himself early, found the great pavilion packed to the doors—there was, apparently not standing room for another living soul. But as he had gone specially to see and hear the latest invention, he was not deterred by the fact that the place was already filled to overflowing. "Where there's a will there's a way," is an old saying. He found the way. And he was delighted with the Kinetophone. The instrument is not "attached" to many pictures; that is a matter of time, but it is sure to come. Moving pictures without song, without music, without dialogue, will in time be practically unknown. By the aid of the Kinetophone the voices of the performers, the strains of the orchestra, the speeches of the men and women taking part in the show, are reproduced, and in the good time coming it will not be necessary to attend the opera, or the play, or to travel long distances to hear a great statesman or a popular divine. All will be shown on the screen, and attitudes and gestures will be accompanied by the spoken word, which fit in the picture with such accuracy and minuteness that you forget you are only looking at an enlarged edition of a picture no bigger than a postage stamp. It becomes, indeed, a living, moving, and speaking picture. The management of the Palace are to be commended for their enterprise in securing the rights for Blackpool. Who will be the first in East Lancashire?

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The members of the Accrington Tradesmen's Association are among those who strongly favour the erection of a shelter on the Accrington Market-ground for the protection from the weather of passengers who may be waiting for cars. Councillor Alfred Nuttall, at the annual meeting of the Association, expressed his keen disappointment that the Markets Committee had failed to respond to the proposal to provide such a shelter, and the meeting appointed a deputation to place the views of the Association before the Markets Committee.

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"Personally," writes an "Observer" man, I regard the proposal to provide a tram shelter with not the least enthusiasm. It would neither be particularly useful nor ornamental. Already there is ample shelter close at hand under the covered market. And besides, I have still visions of the last tram shelter which stood on the Market-ground in the early days of the old 'Baltic Fleet.' That ill-kept wooden hut was often the rendezvous for half the rag-tag and bobtail of the district, and was of little or no service for the purpose for which it was intended A tramway shelter is simply one of those pretty fads that are by no means necessary or even desirable. A shelter would simply be an eyesore and a blot on the landscape, to say nothing of a standing nuisance on such special occasions as that of July last, when the King and Queen visited the town."

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That, at any rate, is one side; the reverse of the picture is held up by "Stella," who speaks for her sex to-day. The shelter would belong to the Corporation, likewise the trams. If the shelter were "ill-kept" the Corporation officials would be to blame; if it became "the rendezvous for half the rag-tag and bobtail of the district," the police would be seriously at fault. Shelters are found a great convenience in other towns, and it has yet to be proved that the people who use the Accrington trams are worse than those of other places.

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I see that the Accrington Tradesmen's Association have decided to run another trip this year, the date having been fixed for June 24th, though the destination is not yet decided. Rather remarkable to relate, the Women's Liberal Association have also this week resolved upon running another long distance excursion, and probably without knowing anything of the tradesmen's choice of date have also selected June 24th. In their case choice has fallen upon Aberystwyth—and a very excellent choice, too. It would scarcely do, though, to have both the Tradesmen and the Women's Liberal Association promoting excursions for the same day. To clash in that way would not be in the interests of either.

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Few indeed are the people who are not interested in stories of life and travel in lands outside our own, and to-day there appears in the "Observer and Times" a couple of articles which will be found pleasant and entertaining reading. One is from the pen of Mr. John Little, of Accrington, whose passion for mountaineering, fostered and fed by many fine tramps in Lakeland, led him to turn toward the greater adventures of some of the Swiss peaks. Mr. Little writes enthusiastically of his experiences on this climbing expedition in Switzerland. Still another article retells the story of life and conditions in British East Africa, as recorded by Mr. Marston Logan, second son of the Rev. J. Moffat Logan, of Accrington. Mr. Logan is an Assistant District Commissioner, and finds the life in the main very much to his liking.

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Still another admirably told story of a Continental holiday was afforded on Wednesday evening by Mr. J. Beckett, Borough Treasurer of Accrington, who, in the presence of the members of the Workers' Educational Association, outlined in word and picture many striking features of a recent holiday in Italy. Such a lecture could scarcely fail to inspire in many of those present the desire to extend the field of their holiday radius.

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That popular local combination of entertainers "The While-Aways" are earning for themselves quite a big reputation. To-night Oswaldtwistle is to have an opportunity of seeing and hearing of what they are capable, and a new feature is being introduced in the form of the tango dance. "The While-Aways" include Miss Florence Green, Miss Gertrude Eglin, Mr. Jack Oldham, Mr. Walter Greenhalgh and Mr. Wilfrid Schofield—all well-known in connection with the performances of the Accrington Amateur Operatic Society.

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To-morrow is our local Hospital Sunday, and as one way of marking the circumstance the St. John Ambulance Corps are to attend the morning service at Whalley-road Congregational Church, Accrington. In the evening the members of the Victoria Hospital staff are to be present at the service, which, like the one in the morning, will be conducted by the pastor, Mr. A. Isherwood. The Hospital fund will receive the whole of the collections.

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A lecture of an unusually attractive character is arranged by the New Church Guild for Wednesday evening next. The lecturer, Mr. S. Langford, is well known as the chief musical critic of the "Manchester Guardian," and his extensive knowledge of music, the keenness of his criticisms, and his readiness of expression should constitute an attraction which no music lover can afford to miss. We expect, of course, songs of a high class, and from the well-known names of the vocalists they are pretty sure to be adequately rendered.

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I am indebted to a solicitor friend, who is greatly interested in the question of copyhold enfranchisement, for a copy of "The Law Times" containing a lengthy and detailed judgment by His Honour Judge Parry in the Sevenoaks County Court in cases of very considerable interest to those who follow this question. But let me confess here and now that, lucid and clear as Judge Parry's judicial utterances generally are, the case is much too involved in character to permit of the presentation of a mere summary that would do justice to the points raised, and even were the whole judgment to be printed I question whether the lay reader would be one whit the wiser. The main impression that stands out in my own mind after reading the judgment is that whatever else happens the lord of the manor seeks to retain his hold upon rents and fees. Let me give just one illuminating extract:

> If there is really a court baron of the manor of Wrotham to-day why does it not appoint proper manorial officers to carry out its presentments and decrees? Where are the other officers of the manor—the hayward, the hog-ringer, and the aletaster? Everything seems to have disappeared but the lord and the ste