THE Auckland Education Board does not at all approve of the proposal of the Railway Department to allow the poorer children in our public schools to enjoy the school excursions organised by the Department 'free, *gratis*, and for nothing.' The Board entertains a dread that if the proposal were carried into effect it would pauperise the children. Nonsense! Why should it pauperise the children? This is an old cry, and it is echoed too often without much consideration. Granting the truth of the general contention that we should be careful not to do anything that would make poverty conscious of its disabilities or deprive it of that independent spirit which is so often found in noble association with it—granting all that, we are surely not to refrain from giving aid to the suffering, or comfort and enjoyment to the sorrowing and distressed. Still less are we to be deterred from affording the children of the poor, or comparatively poor, what amusement it lies in our power to give because we fear it may 'pauperise' them. If the members of the Board object to the free passes in themselves, then on the same grounds they should object to the reduction of fares which were made for the children, for the intention of both was to give the little ones an outing at a rate which would be within the limits of their parents' purses. But the Board's objection, one gathers, was not so much to the free passes as to the distinction which their partial introduction made among the children of the schools. It seemed to them to single out the children of prosperous parents from the children of comparatively indigent ones. But is not that distinction made pretty clear as it is by the fact that the poorer children cannot get the money—small though the sum is—for the trips? The little ones are ready enough to tell their companions why they cannot go on the excursion, and the sense of their poverty is quite as much impressed on them as if they were allowed a free pass on the terms suggested by the Department. If there was any fear of 'pauperising' these terms would quite dissipate it, for the intention is to issue the free passes as rewards of merit. Gained in that way the youngsters will look on them, not as charitable doles, but as prizes which they have gained by their own efforts. For pity's sake do not let any bogey of 'pauperism' hinder us from letting the children enjoy these railway excursions. The idea of the youngsters being pauperised would never have occurred to any broad-minded person in this connection.

THE idea of a Scenery Preservation and Restoration Society, of which Messrs Tregear and Reid are, I understand, the joint authors, ought to have every encouragement. What such a society might have done in the early days, not only for Wellington, where it is now proposed to organise one, but in Dunedin and Auckland only those who have lived long in these cities can understand. Where are now the forests which used to clothe the hills around Wellington harbour, or the wealth of pohutakawa which used to form a crimson fringe to the blue waters of the Waitemata. They have long ago fallen before utilitarianism in the shape of axe and saw. No society, unless possessed of the magic powers of Amphion, can ever hope to restore the rich and primeval vegetation to those hills, or re invest those bays with the wonderful beauty they once possessed. Still, a society on the Wellington lines has plenty of work before it in the way of preserving whatever remains of beautiful natural scenery near our cities, even though it leaves restoration alone. Nature herself will do much in the way of restoration if only she gets fair play. The object of the society will be to preserve her from molestation while she reclothes her hills or valleys, to guard her from the attacks of the Vandal, who goeth abroad with steel and fire seeking what he may destroy.' In doing this well the members will have plenty to occupy them, for the instinct to destruction is deeply rooted in the average Anglo-Saxon mind. It is not only 'Arry and 'Arriet who have little or no appreciation of natural beauty. Alas, it is a too common failing in higher strata of the community. But the mere organisation of a society which has for its object the conservation of nature in all her most attractive forms will itself do much to infuse a better spirit into the people who are never happy except when they are cutting down or burning something; and the active bodyguard which the goddess will have in the members will be an assurance against many a wanton attack. If the Society is only alert to discover the perpetrators of every act of vandalism, and to see that the offender is punished it will be of immense good. The senseless Vandal will think twice before lifting his axe or applying his match when he recollects that there is no saying how near to him one of the members of the dreaded society may be. The great thing needed is that every lover of scenery and every one who takes a pride in their city should belong to the new organisation and that there should be no sleeping members in it.

MR FESSEY came from London, where he had taken a strong interest in the condition of the poor of the metropolis, and especially of their children. While he was living in Auckland and basking in the sunshine of our New Zealand summer he read of the terrible winters in the Old Country, and his thoughts travelled back to the slums of the great city and the little children. Round about him in the streets of Auckland were children too, but so unlike those he could see with his mind's eye—so well-cared for, so healthy, so well-clothed. It was their clothing that particularly struck Mr Fessey—so he says; it was such a contrast to the ragged garments of the London waifs. He told himself that where all the children were habitually so well clad there must be a good deal of old clothing, and so he determined, if possible, to start a society whose object would be the collection of cast off juvenile clothing for the purpose of sending it Home. Mr Fessey called a meeting of charitably-disposed ladies and laid bare his scheme. It was not warmly embraced. People and press looked askance at it. Eventually, however, Mr Fessey carried his point and the Society is an accomplished fact. I must say I feel sympathetic towards it, although the amount of actual good it may accomplish should not be marvellously great. I would not think of classing it as some have done in the same category as Mr Stiggins' organisation for sending 'flannel vestkits to the little niggers in central Africa.' Nor do I think that the argument that England is rich enough to look after her own poor is a very conclusive one against the scheme. Doubtless England has great wealth, and could do a great deal more for her poor than she does, but the fact still remains that thousands of her little ones are starving from cold in the great cities. The question is, can we help them out of our abundance? If we can, after meeting whatever demands poverty at our doors may make on us, it is surely our Christian duty to do so without thinking whether there are others more able to assist, on whom the starving ones have greater claims. If the good Samaritan had reasoned in that way the man who fell among thieves might have lain on the Jericho road till he died.

AN unknown correspondent in Christchurch—a lady, I presume, from the handwriting and the sentiment—writes me complaining that she did not receive a single valentine on the 14th of last month—St. Valentine's Day—and asks me if all these dear old customs are dying out. Alas, I am afraid they are, and that the day will come—may it not be in our time—when the interchange of Christmas cards will be a thing of the past. James Payn, in a recent note, attributes the decadence of the old custom of sending valentines to one's friends to the fact that the senders, instead of sending simple reminders of their good will or affection, thought it incumbent on them to send something costly: as if a penny card could not carry a loving sentiment as well as a perfumed affair costing half-a-crown! From costly cards the fashion changed to the sending of presents, and when people began to find these a drain on their pockets, they, too, were dropped except by those who had plenty of spare cash—a small minority now-a days. My Christchurch friend will thus see how the old custom, which she regrets to find is dying out, came by its end. It was lucre, filthy lucre, did it all. It killed the kindly sentiment that dictated these humble little tokens, and substituted a mere love of display, or what is meaner still, a spirit of commercial calculation. But you and I, my dear young lady, will still keep the old custom alive. Your letter to me I accept as a true valentine, and I hope that you will regard this little paragraph from me in the same light.

WHETHER the English cricketers can teach their Australian cousins anything in the game may be a moot question, but that it would not be difficult for them to give the latter points in the matter of courtesy would appear pretty clear from the little incident which took place at Brisbane the other day. The Englishmen were playing the combined Queensland and New South Wales, and Stoddart, the captain of the visitors, was defending his wicket against Conningham. Stoddart was running up a good score, and playing Conningham's balls in a way the latter evidently did not like. He was getting chagrined, was the Australian, and his rising temper fairly boiled over when Bannerman, the umpire, no-balled him. With a display of passion we are very sorry to think any Australian would have been guilty of on the cricket field, he seized the ball when it was returned to him and deliberately threw it at the batsman. Very properly, Stoddart stepped from his creases and refused to play until the irate bowler had apologised for his decidedly caddish conduct. Of course Conningham complied, and the game went on, but the impression left on the spectators was unpleasant, and the impression which was left on all who read of the incident was very unpleasant also. These displays are getting more common nowadays than they were of yore: alas for cricket that it is so. In football they have been of alarming frequency in the Old Country. Now it is the players that forget themselves, now the spectators. The latter are sometimes guilty of the most atrocious conduct, as in the case of a late football match when they assaulted the referee whose decision did not coincide with the opinion they had formed. The root of this degeneracy in our national games one cannot help thinking, is the professionalism that is flagrantly apparent in some of them and is creeping into others. When the men think less of being gentlemen in the true sense of that noble word than of being cricketers and footballers or, worse still, than of making money by the games, we cannot wonder that both they and the pastimes they adorn degenerate very quickly. All honour to the genuine amateur who in these days strives against such odds as he has to contend with in the shape of money grasping professionals and betting men.

WELLINGTON FESTIVAL CHORAL SOCIETY.

(BY TELEGRAPH—OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

AT the meeting of the Wellington Festival Choral Society on Friday evening there was a very large attendance. Sir James Prendergast, who presided, referred to the advantages the Society offered to those who took an interest in music, and pointed out that the objects of the Society were the cultivation of a taste for vocal and instrumental music of a high class, and the practice and performance of such music.

The Bishop of Wellington thanked the Society for proposing to make him one of the vice-presidents. He was pleased, he said, to learn that the Society was determined to cultivate a high standard of music, also that people of all creeds were welcome as members of the Society.

Sir R. Stout referred to the cultivation of music as a most desirable thing. The young should be made to learn. They were to be our future artists and musicians. The time might come when we would be able to send some fine musicians and singers to the Old Country. He approved of the idea of holding triennial festivals of a national character, and he hoped the Society would have a prosperous career.

The following office bearers were elected:—Patron, His Excellency the Governor; President, Sir J. Prendergast; Vice-Presidents, the Bishop of Wellington, Sir R. Stout, and Mr W. T. Glasgow; Secretary, Mr T. H. Ritchey; Librarian, Mr A. E. Waterson; Committee, Mesdames C. C. Barron, C. D. MacIntosh, Miss Swainson, Captain Barclay, Messrs C Dasent, and A. M. Lewis. Mr Robert Parker was appointed conductor.

WELLINGTON LIEDERCRANTZ.

The first practice of the newly-formed ladies' Liedercrantz was held at the Art Gallery under the direction of Madame Merz, and was most successful, about thirty members being present. Much interest is being shown in the Society, it being the first of its kind started in Wellington.