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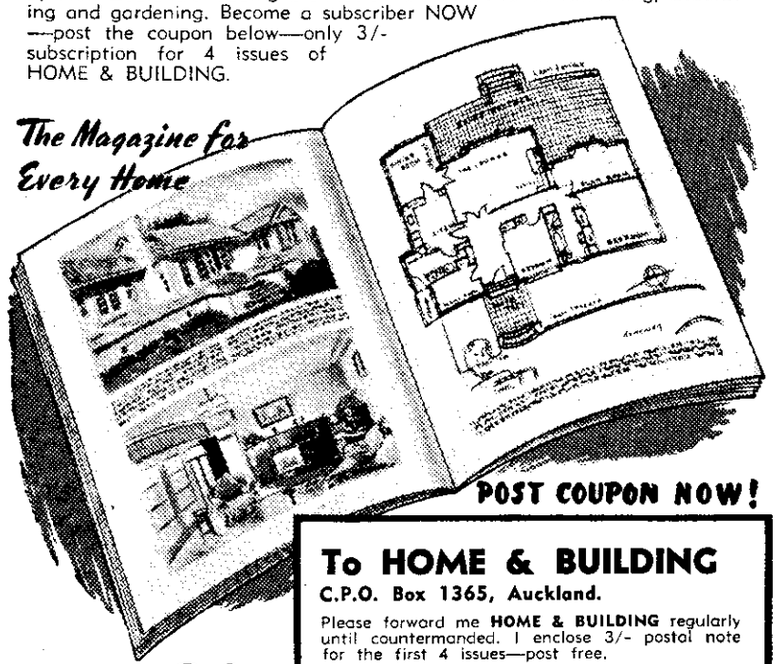

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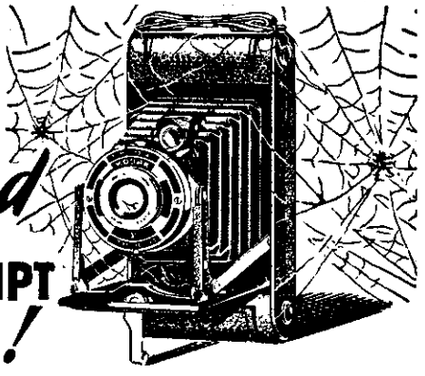

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APPLIED ARITHMETIC

(Written for "The Listener" by B. Heymann)

APPLIED Arithmetic is a branch of mathematics with which I have been familiar all my life. At school it served to demonstrate certain economical morals or moral economics: Dick Whittington collected pins, and the money he got for them he bought a cat, with the cat he caught mice, and before he knew where he was he was Lord Mayor of London. Moral: Look after your pennies (or pins), and your pounds will look after themselves.

At home we got it in a more practical fashion. If we did not buy that worthless midday paper (said my father) in which we read only what we had read in the morning or would read in the evening; if we did not buy it but saved the penny every day, we would in so and so many weeks or months or years, be able to buy—I forget what, but presumably a motor-car.

In the course of time one begins to find out that most morals have their counter-morals, frequently also phrased as proverbs or neat little sayings. Wise men, the inventors of proverbs and neat little sayings, take this precaution in order to meet every eventuality. The main thing is that they should remain wise, so if somebody who has looked after his pennies and finds that the pounds failed to look after themselves should complain, they can always answer that "penny wise is pound foolish," and their reputation is saved.

The look-after-your-penny attitude was that of the Pre-World-War-One generation, of the men who preferred Having Their Cake to Eating It, who thought and talked of a Rainy Day.

* * *

I HAD almost forgotten the whole method of Applied Arithmetic during those years until I met it again—on my honeymoon. In the Swiss Hotel at which we were staying, afternoon tea was not "included" and we were given the choice between "thé simple," meaning just tea and bread and butter at 1 fr. or "thé complet" at 2:50 frs. which comprised tea and toast and a whole waggon-load of the loveliest cakes and pastries to choose from. While we were having our first afternoon tea (complet) my newly-acquired and dearly-beloved husband worked out that having simple instead of complete afternoon tea for three weeks would mean that we could stay two more days than we intended. I felt very much at home when I received this information, because my father on a similar occasion had told us that the money we spent on afternoon teas could provide a week's holiday for a family of four, train fares included.

I can't say that I think much of the method. There was no point in saving up for the complete works of Shakespeare since we had got them already, and by the time our tram fares (even if invested on compound interest) could have mounted up to buy us a motor car, everybody probably would be wanting autogiros and we would have had to start all over again. Taking "thé simple" would not have served to prolong our stay by two whole days since we could not have stayed longer than originally planned, and going without afternoon tea altogether would have made sense only if we had given the money thus saved to some family of four to spend on a week's holiday (train fares included). But this was never done, and all the darned method does for me, for one, is to make me feel choked while I am swallowing cream puffs and chocolate éclairs.

"He would have to start on the first of January and shave until the thirtieth of June the following year." (The pile of razor-blades on the left is part of the total of 9,125 which our artist estimates would be necessary).

It is a little better, though, when the method of Applied Arithmetic is worked the other way round. In this case it is called "redemption" and serves to justify a purchase. When the Old Man wanted to buy a motor mower, he did not just go and buy it. He first made his calculations, employing Applied Arithmetic. "The lawn is too big," he said to himself (and later to me), "I shall have to pay somebody to cut it for me. This will cost me 10/- a week, i.e. £20 a year, allowing for the winter months which need less cutting (one must never cheat oneself). A motor mower costs £35, therefore it will be "redeemed" in two years (allowing £5 for petrol and small repairs). Therefore, in two years' time the motor mower costs nothing and from then on less than nothing." Having arrived at this conclusion his conscience was at rest, and he went and bought the motor mower. I enjoy using the method in his own favour, and I have become accustomed and rather insensitive to its being used *against* me. I do not employ it myself. I find it a strenuous way of making a decision. For me, if I want to buy something, there exists only the question whether I have *got* the money to do so. But I seldom have.

* * *

NOT always does Applied Arithmetic appear in the shape of moral economics. Sometimes it takes the form of detached meditations, related to statistics and furnishing most amazing revelations which are bound to raise one's self-esteem or one's opinion of others where one would scarcely have expected it. In memory of its most famous instance we call it "Chess-Board Philosophy." Everybody has applied arithmetic in this fashion at some time or other. There was an article in *The Listener* once informing us of the numbers of Bakers, Butchers, and so forth who could be found in the Wellington Directory—demonstrating to the Bakers,