



## Swam in Shark Pool!

A Sydney girl dived into a pool where a 12-foot man-eating shark was kept on display. She did several turns round the pool while the monster followed open-mouthed!

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FEELS  
BETTER**

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## "ENCIRCLING SEAS"

(continued from previous page)

ducing fiction. I have not seen any of the fiction referred to, nor do I know whether it was published; it does not appear amongst Mr. Holcroft's listed work. It is apparent, however, that during these years he was reading widely and deeply, not confining himself to English writers but ranging throughout European literature, classical and recent. There are finely discerning passages of criticism in *Timeless World*, and many acute observations on the literary tendencies of our age. For example, the class of fiction to which his own early work belongs could not be better summed up than in this passage: "If you examine present-day novels you will find that, in spite of technical smoothness, there is not much in the way of an interior life. They may be witty and entertaining, or constructed with a sort of mathematical precision in the care of detail and the winding threads of plot; but very few of them have that atmosphere of necessity which belongs to a work of art." But in the main these essays served the function of giving form and clarity to a multitude of ideas absorbed in a strenuous course of reading amongst the masters; for there is scarcely a poet, a novelist, a philosopher, or a critic mentioned in the pages whose name is not sanctified by tradition or the highest critical approval.

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MR. HOLCROFT had now reached a crucial point in his development. He had turned his back on the false standards implicit in his early work. By rigorous self-application he had found himself and his vocation. It is only a slight distortion of the facts to say that he had now to find New Zealand. True, in that key passage of autobiography which has already been cited, he describes his emotional apprehension of the fact that New Zealand was home; he speaks of the "compensatory peace" that descended on him as he entered Wellington harbour on his return. But New Zealand was a place that spelt material security—a deceptive security, as events were to prove—and the comforting associations of the past. There is little suggestion in *Timeless World* that New Zealand might also provide the theme for major literary work. Indeed, towards the end of the first essay,



in considering the prospects for writing in this country, Mr. Holcroft concluded: "Our small power of thought and outlook has little choice of resisting the pressure of Fleet Street and Hollywood . . . we wait so long for the true New Zealand imprint upon our literature, not because we are too young, but because we have been robbed of our youth."

The sequel has become an important chapter in New Zealand's literary history. Guided by a wise instinct, Mr.



Holcroft withdrew to our southernmost city, devoted to literature the leisure extracted from a life in daily journalism, and in a series of three essays that began with *The Deepening Stream* and has now concluded with *Encircling Seas*, triumphantly refuted his own pessimistic view. Before turning to the book whose appearance is the occasion for these remarks, let us see where the trilogy stands in relation to Mr. Holcroft's career. What is its personal significance? First, it should be recognised that Mr. Holcroft is essentially a creative artist—a fact that is borne out even by his criticism. His first venture in the field of imaginative writing had not—could not—give him deep or permanent satisfaction. In the phase represented by *Timeless World* he has gone as far as it was profitable to go without becoming a professional critic—an occupation for which, in any case, there is little scope in this country. Circumstances, and, beyond them, some inner compulsion forced him to consider seriously the problems of authorship in New Zealand. To begin with, could there be New Zealand authors, in the sense that Tolstoi and Doestoevski are Russian authors? Had New Zealand life a distinctive character—a spirit of its own—that would inform the work of its writers, as *milieu* and tradition have shaped the work of the European masters? Or was it not perhaps too late to think in terms of local and distinctive cultures? But, after all, there were New Zealand poets and novelists worthy of serious consideration; what themes had they drawn on and what results had they achieved? Then beyond the field of authorship were larger but still related problems touching the society at hand and the world beyond; what was the nature of the New Zealand people, and how were they affected by the wider movements of our time?

\* \* \*

THESE, in a crudely simplified form, are the questions which, passing through a sensitive mind, serious and pertinacious to a degree, have resulted in the three essays—a work to which there is in kind no exact parallel. As I have suggested, it constitutes Mr. Holcroft's personal credo. (Note the recurrence of "I believe," or some similar phrase). But it goes far beyond that. In debating his own problems, Mr. Holcroft has suggested to New Zealand writers the potentialities of their own country; he has supplied them with a moral and social justification; he has erected for them the basis of a philosophy and the framework of an aesthetic; in the last chapter of *The Waiting Hills* he has even supplied them with a political platform. In older countries this edifice would have been superfluous (a French writer

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