

(continued from previous page)

does not need assurance that his calling is honourable and useful) or it would have been built up in the course of centuries by numberless individuals. This is one reason, perhaps the least important, why the essays could have been written only in New Zealand.

We can now see the trilogy as one work elaborating a few main ideas which in *Encircling Seas* are carried to their ultimate conclusion. I agree with Mr. Holcroft's publishers, omitting their qualifications, that this is his best book. He has now freed his work from that element of the topical and impermanent which was present in *The Deepening Stream*. The new essay develops and explains, as far as they lend themselves to verbal explanation, certain difficult concepts, such as that of the "collective mind," which were stumbling blocks—at least to me—in the earlier works. And the style is now fully mature, a beautifully fashioned instrument of self-expression, implying in itself the writer's profoundly serious view of his undertaking. Added to these reasons, we have acquired from Mr. Holcroft himself a taste for the reflective essay. He is no longer so unfamiliar and difficult. We know him.

THE book opens with one of those characteristic passages in which Mr. Holcroft develops, in widening circles, an abstract idea from some observation of the near and the particular. He is at



home; his gaze wanders past his garden to the surrounding country and the Takitimu; beyond them his vision takes in the southern lakes. He reflects on the "mystery of those secret places" and their uniqueness. Only now, he ponders, are painters beginning to translate that landscape in something approaching native terms. And then "I believe that if there is an essential anatomy of the country, and a colouring which hides and reveals it in the work of native painters, the same materials must be at work in the minds of those whose impressions are expressed in words." Mr. Holcroft is launched on his central theme.

He answers, finally it would seem to me, those cosmic-minded critics who dispute the possible growth of a local culture because we can now fly round the world in three days—or whatever the record happens to be at the time of writing. (These are *Readers' Digest* specialities). Without advocating a narrow provincialism (which we already possess), Mr. Holcroft truly asserts: "New Zealand can grow from her own roots and collaborate with the outside world simultaneously." But growth in a true sense means a great deal more than material progress, and a strong case is here made for the social value of literature and the other arts. In particular,

Mr. Holcroft demonstrates the connection between the cultural level of a nation and the presence of an informed criticism, penetrating to many spheres of life beyond that of literature. This plea for criticism is timely, coming as it does at the end of a period when we relinquished—almost it seemed with relief—the democratic obligation to speak and write as we think.

The traditional freedoms, it is evident, are precariously rooted in our soil, and as Mr. Holcroft proceeds to examine them he has no difficulty in disclosing many shortcomings and a large element of hypocrisy. We are a sociable people, blessed with an "innate kindness" that is often the principal check on the extreme powers of the state. We have gone far in removing the grosser forms of inequality and widening the rights of the citizen. But are we always prepared to accept the consequences of so extending economic and social benefits? Is more than a small minority aware of the principles underlying the political and administrative changes in which we have been caught up? And there are dark corners into which few of us are willing to peer. Mr. Holcroft mentions our backwardness in the management of industry, the lack of enlightenment in our penal system, and our "languid interest" in the minorities shut away in mental asylums and orphanages. (A few months ago detention camps might have been added to the list). This chapter, "Anatomy of Freedom," should be made compulsory reading for political candidates—and voters—in the next election.

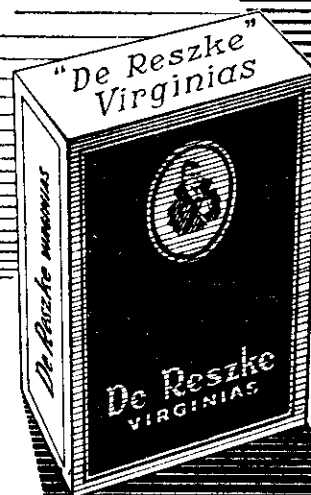
MR. HOLCROFT offers no specific for our social ills, but without excessive optimism suggests that developing maturity, aided by the civilising efforts of art and education, may lead us towards the better life. In his wise and searching review of education, he recognises the dilemma that confronts all those who wish to achieve reform by educational means: the school does not exist in isolation from society; it meets with many opposing forces, including that of the home, where from the days of infancy "the world outside establishes its influence, teaching the opening mind to be careful of authority, pouring its superficial emotions through the radio, bringing limitations of money and prejudice from their mysterious sources in the city." Nor are the teachers themselves exempt from the defects of the world about them. Education as a moral force chiefly fails, however, because in our society it lacks any strong spiritual basis. Mr. Holcroft hereupon outlines a form of religious education suited to our times, confessing that lack of wisdom and adult intolerance make it impracticable.

Turning now to literature, he shows how New Zealand writers suffer from the absence of any shared body of established belief. Our culture has been transplanted, religious institutions survive only in vestigial form, divorced from the associations which in the old world give them their profound meaning and their continuity. The thesis is

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