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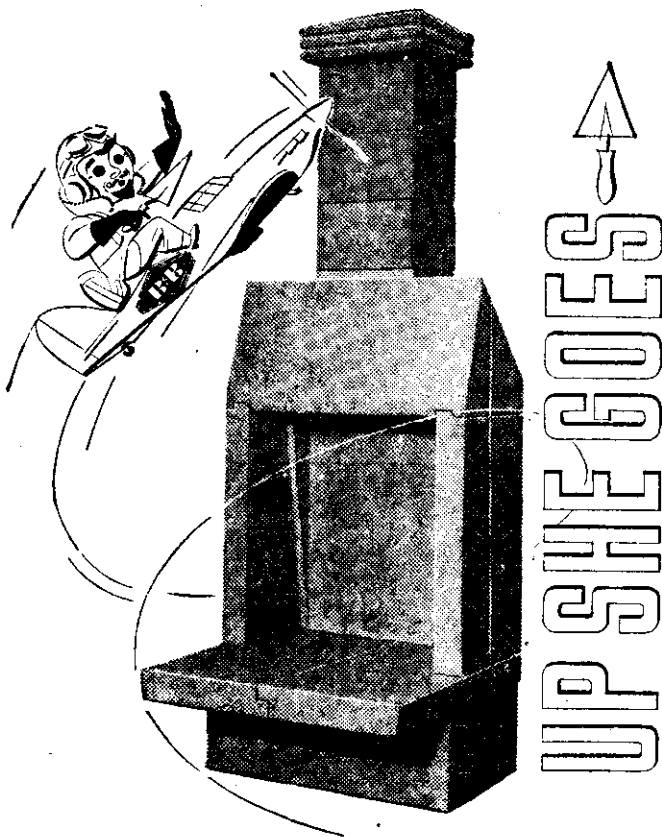
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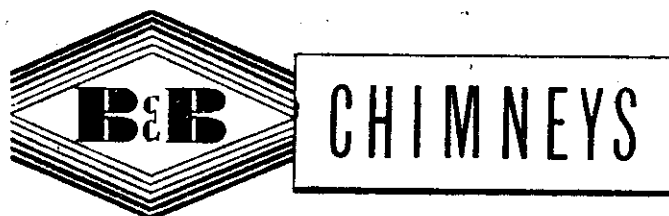
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IN New Zealand I think we find strong evidences of a sense of inferiority leading to the debasement of the spoken language. In some individual cases I am sure we can diagnose from the manner of speech a definite anti-social alignment.

I have noticed at times a deliberate mangling of the spoken language—to an extent that is hard to account for unless we assume some hidden motivation. One result of compulsory education is that the number of people capable of doing "white-collar" jobs far exceeds the supply of such jobs. In spite of a fair measure of democratic sentiment, "white-collar" work still has a prestige that derives from its association with the business and property-owning classes who up till the present have held economic power.

I find it not at all fantastic to assume that these speech-manglers are people in whom a moderate amount of education has produced a heightened sense of social inadequacy. Either it has made them too poignantly aware of their own native deficiencies; or it has antedated them with prospects of advancement never to be realised. They become, in a real sense, social misfits. If they had more character they would either thrust their way up through the social hierarchy toward "success"; or become communists; or even philosophically accept a place near the bottom of the ladder—after having looked at some of those near the top.

Revenge is Cheap

When such a personal crisis leads to psychological defeat, the victim often seeks revenge against society. Since crime, on the whole, doesn't pay, only a few take that path. In any event, it is only in the more extreme cases that the situation is intense enough to produce such strong anti-social reactions. But there is another sort of revenge that is cheap and painless (if quite profitless, except in terms of psychological satisfaction), and that is the mutilation of the language. This amounts, on a secular plane, to something like the defilement of an altar. For language is, in a metaphysical sense, the body of society, its real substance and being: it is the repository of the communal spirit, in and through which social values are realised, recorded, and enshrined. It is logical to expect those who have hidden anti-social motives: to "take it out" in ritual fashion on the language of society.

I have heard larrikins aggressively maiming the language they learnt at school—mangling it, pulling its wings off, kicking it along the gutter with evident gusto. These are the same people who smash bottles in the street, and reel out life-lines on surf beaches, cut them halfway, and re-wind them again. They are

"COLONIALISM"

The third of a series of four articles written for "The Listener" by A. R. D. FAIRBURN

a small minority of the population, and they constitute a social problem. My purpose at the moment is not to preach a sermon against them, but to indicate one of the ways in which the spoken language comes to be debased.

"Colonial Inferiority"

Apart from such extreme types, there are in New Zealand many people who show evidence in their speech of some sense of social inferiority. My own view—and you can take it for what it is worth—is that there is in this country a widespread "Colonial inferiority" feeling. Any well-bred and well-spoken Englishman who has lived for a time in New Zealand will, I think, confirm this view



"If this idea could be got into the heads of school athletes..."

if you ask him. The ordinary New Zealand voice has a hint of something sly and hang-dog about it when set against a good English voice. So far from English speech providing an example, it is more likely to provoke a resentful reaction in the opposite direction, towards a more aggressive Colonialism. Very often, of course, this is due to the English voice being tinged with one of the more precious dialect-flavours of fashionable England to which I referred in an earlier article.

Then, of course, there is the opposite type of New Zealander, who cultivates a ridiculously "superior" style of speaking, which becomes more affected the higher he manages to climb up the monkey-puzzle tree of bourgeois society. The social toady and the profiteer's pimp can often be identified by their voices.

There are many others in New Zealand, perhaps the majority of those who speak badly, in whom the fault is due to indifference and laziness more than to anything else: an acceptance of the conventional habits of speech of those with whom they mix. They feel a certain diffidence about trying to improve their speech. They are afraid of being mistaken for pansies or social climbers. Their friends and workmates might think they were putting on dog, trying to get

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