



WHERE else can you cross a harbour as lovely as the Waitemata . . . to work not 15 minutes from your own doorstep?

Just as assistants in sweetshops are reputed to eat themselves silly on what D'Arcy Cresswell calls "sickly and fictitious foods" within the first few weeks of apprenticeship, so the child's eye reads itself sick on rubbish early, and therefore tends to be unable, or unwilling to read good stuff later. The eye has become irritated, the brain lazy or indifferent. The assault on the modern reading child from every side—from buildings, shops, shop windows, buses, trams, ferries—is so fierce, so insistent, so continuous that his mind has got to become as indifferent as the fakir's body on its bed of nails, in order to save itself by rejecting this needling warfare.

Advertising has even crept into our most intimate adult lives, is even established on our domestic hearths. Probably many of you have space heaters, as we have: yours, like ours, may have on their roomward-facing sides the name of the brand

which is only another advertisement, another indecent, tasteless, indefensible invasion of what we still have left of privacy. In our case, this insult was on a metal label which could be, and has been, simply unscrewed and thrown away, leaving two neat holes for our own and our guests' imaginations to work upon in idle moments: but on another kind that we had lately to buy in an emergency, our hard-earned, reluctantly-spent twenty quid brings with it the name of the product as part of its very frontage, moulded on at the works, coloured an eye-piercing red, indestructible, uncoverable, screaming at us as we try to relax and then forgotten.

So I would suggest, as a parlour game for the long winter evenings, a reconnoitring round your own sitting room in search of the printed word which didn't mean much in the first place, means nothing to you, now that you hardly see it, except as another needle point of irritation, and has probably crept up upon you by stealth, anyhow.

Here, where you spend your leisure time, where in your grandparents' day would have been a cosy litter of occasional tables, Chittagong brass, photos of impending nuptial sacrifice, trifles from the looted East, peacocks' feathers, *et alia*, all gathering dust, you probably have, and dust quite often without even seeing it, a lot of useless print. But your children, by its very presence, and their very age, have had to cut their eye-teeth on it willy nilly, thereby becoming sated with the printed word early. No wonder that they have got subconsciously irritated, and turn now to the easily-read, quickly-exciting comic instead of the book which needs real effort. This seems to me something we must accept and be patient about: we cannot, at this stage, do anything else—but we can do that.

Auckland Notebook

SEASCAPES—AND HOARDINGS

By SARAH CAMPION

IF some of my last letter was vinegar, as many Aucklanders probably thought, surely some also was tempered with sweetness and light? Going about the city a good deal in the following week, I chewed over my strictures, found them more than justified by the architecture I tried *not* to see after writing so bitterly about it, but remembered again and again, more warmly, that cock pheasant coming out of the bush to haunt a Remuera doorstep. Where else in the cities of the world do you find wild life such as this, so close? Where else in the world can you stroll around cliffs not 10 minutes by water from the city's heart, and scramble over rocks, peer into that sea-pool life which Cyril Connolly has written up with such a passionate warmth of affection, such a wry appreciation of its horrors? Where else can you live within sight and sound and smell of the seashore, travel by ferry every morning across a harbour as lovely as the Waitemata, in order to go to work not 15 minutes away from your own doorstep? In Wellington? In Sydney? I've lived or stayed in each, but can't remember in either such a delightful and often tantalising tangle of town and country.

Delightful, and very tantalising. Once again the right hand of my brain has written without knowledge of the left hand's doing—the right hand gives, the left hand takes away. For you can walk or clamber, as I've said, along wild pohutukawa-hung cliffs within reach of the sight of the city—and that city looking almost architecturally possible, being not only one and a half miles away but also often wrapped in the

seven gaudy veils of Auckland's kindly haze—but you can't forget it. You can't forget that all these toothsome-looking pipis, cockles, mussels and even oysters over and past which you scramble, Maori food for uncounted generations, are now uneatable because of Auckland's habit of spending thousands on indoor swimming pools a few yards from the fresh sea, and emptying its sewage straight into that sea. Nor, like the psalmist, can you lift up your eyes unto the hills, lest they should be seared by some architectural shambles, such as the Memorial Museum settling its fallen arches down for a rest on that once-lovely volcanic cone it has now so heavily flattened. Still, even though this is so, as most honest Aucklanders would admit, the city is still, for me, one of the loveliest, homeliest, most *gemutlich* (an untranslatable word now happily passed into most people's currency); and I hope it will stay "home" for me, for at least the next 20 years. I can't let my earlier scoldings go into reading eyes and thinking brains without this little-sop of a pat on the back—providing therewith a metaphor as deliberately mixed as Auckland's own peculiar ethos.

SPEAKING of reading eyes and thinking brains, what a pity the first must nowadays so often destroy, or at least deaden, the youngest among the second. It may seem a long way from the reading habits of modern children to the interesting news item that the Waitemata County Council has begun to fight roadside advertising—but it is not so very far, really. Those of us who remember the inter-war years in England when:

this particular virus manifested itself in a rash all along our roads, will hope that the Council has got in soon enough to save its own bush and paddocks. Ours were not so well worth saving, then, as Northland's are now. If advertising can here be restrained, good indeed: but in the towns, in the settlements which replace the English villages and sometimes uneasily and rather selfconsciously call themselves "villages," the damage to the children is already done and can't be undone.

I hate tasteless advertising—not only as a person with some aesthetic sense, not only as a woman whose instinct is to spend creative effort without wasting it, but also as a parent. I'm quite sure that our children's badly forming and slummocky reading habits are due not so much to a lack of good reading matter as to a plethora of worthless print which impinges on their eyeballs from every side. Think of the strain to which the modern child's eyes are steadily subjected. My generation, as a whole, started reading earlier—most of us could read at four or five—and we got off to another running start by reading books for fun, not reading rubbish simply because it was part of our daily seeing. Nowadays, when a child gets to the stage when the fascination of the printed word is such that he will almost stand on his head in order to decipher the legend on a tea-chest or grocer's carton, his eye is assailed on all sides by just such reading matter, by advertising run riot, irresponsible, damaging him; and doing itself little good, either.