

New York Hard To Believe

By **WILLIAM
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THE first time I saw a flying saucer was in New York. It moved slowly across the square yard of sky which the tall buildings allowed me to see, and then to my surprise its brilliantly lit outline, looking like a great silver coin, moved back the way it had come.

Suddenly more lights flashed on, proclaiming "How to catch a flying saucer! Save your dimes in the New York Savings Bank."

The flying dimes disappeared and were succeeded in my view by an enormous bottle of beer, a couple of hundred feet long, which slowly poured its contents into a giant glass with a cascade of electrically lit bubbles.

To an Englishman—or a visitor from Ohio or Australia—New York is always so astonishing and improbable that it is difficult to realise that it has any proper place in the ordered existence of the United States. Yet it is in fact the intellectual and cul-

it is in fact the intellectual and cultural capital of America, which has been occupied by the Advertising Man and made his headquarters.

Every moment of the day and night you are subjected to his appeals designed to "stimulate consumer demand." The radio in honeyed tones urges you to buy, the newspapers are pictorial catalogues of goods only lightly interlarded with news, the very housetops are covered with admonitions to drink Coca Cola or use deodorants.

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SO great is the eye-appeal of the shop windows with their massed display of goods—20,000 pairs of scissors here, a 100 yards of chandeliers next door—that even the visitor finds it hard to lift up his eyes to the lofty heights of the skyscrapers. The resident almost never regards their beauties, which are indeed hard to contemplate, for these colossal business cathedrals have no quiet, green close around them where you may stand and stare at them from an adequate distance.

Apart from the oasis of Central Park there is no peace and few signs of nature in Manhattan.

There are no quiet squares or lazy backwaters; everything is subordinated to the strict geometry of the avenues and streets.

It is typical of the clash between aesthetics and commerce in New

aesthetics and commerce in New York that the R.C.A. building—which is a piece of modern architecture to compare with Notre Dame or St. Paul's—can be properly seen only from a ship at sea.

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BUT New York does not forget her cultural mission as the intellectual advance guard of America. Conversation at a good New York party (and there are

scores every night in the identical flats of the wealthy or in the more individual tatty bohemianism of Greenwich Village), sounds as brilliant as a one-act play by Noel Coward. It is designed to do so, for New Yorkers know that their leadership of America depends on the high intellectual standards and the level of sophistication they maintain.

The growth of Washington in the past 15 years, which reflects the new importance of government and foreign affairs in American life, presents a real threat to New York's hegemony. Its society is the reverse of Washington's.

In the capital are all the planners, all the leading politicians and all the foreign diplomats; in New York the predominant influences are on one hand the business community and on the other writers, artists and advertisers, who are brought together in a society organised by men and women of great wealth.

So while Europeans dream of playing the part of Greece to an

playing the part of Greece to an American Rome. New York works away at providing a high cultural level for the United States which are governed from "provincial" Washington.

It is this culture by which America is becoming known, wherever people look deeper than the distorted picture in the films.

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BECAUSE it bears many marks of the pervasive influence of the Advertising Man, it often repels by its surface glitter.

But the brash, corny vigour of New York life also helps to give



American culture some of its distinction.

In contrast to the huckstering advertisements, there is the "New Yorker" magazine with its unbroken high standards of cool detached

dards of cool detached observation and deflationary wit. Perhaps it is the noise and fever of metropolitan life which has made modern American painting react towards the primitives, and has sent their entertainers searching for peace in Oklahoma or the South Pacific.

Certainly the constant battering on the emotions by the Advertising Man also produces artists who are not afraid of emotion. American culture may well make its deepest mark by such modern operas as Menotti's "The Consul," where pathos and indignation are both allowed to grow till they spill over into the strongest emotional music that has been heard since Wagner.

Whatever its merits may be, American culture has lost a defect fatal to any culture. It has lost the snobbish respect for what is foreign.

Henceforth it is not likely to be just a younger version of European cultures; it will produce various versions of itself.

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