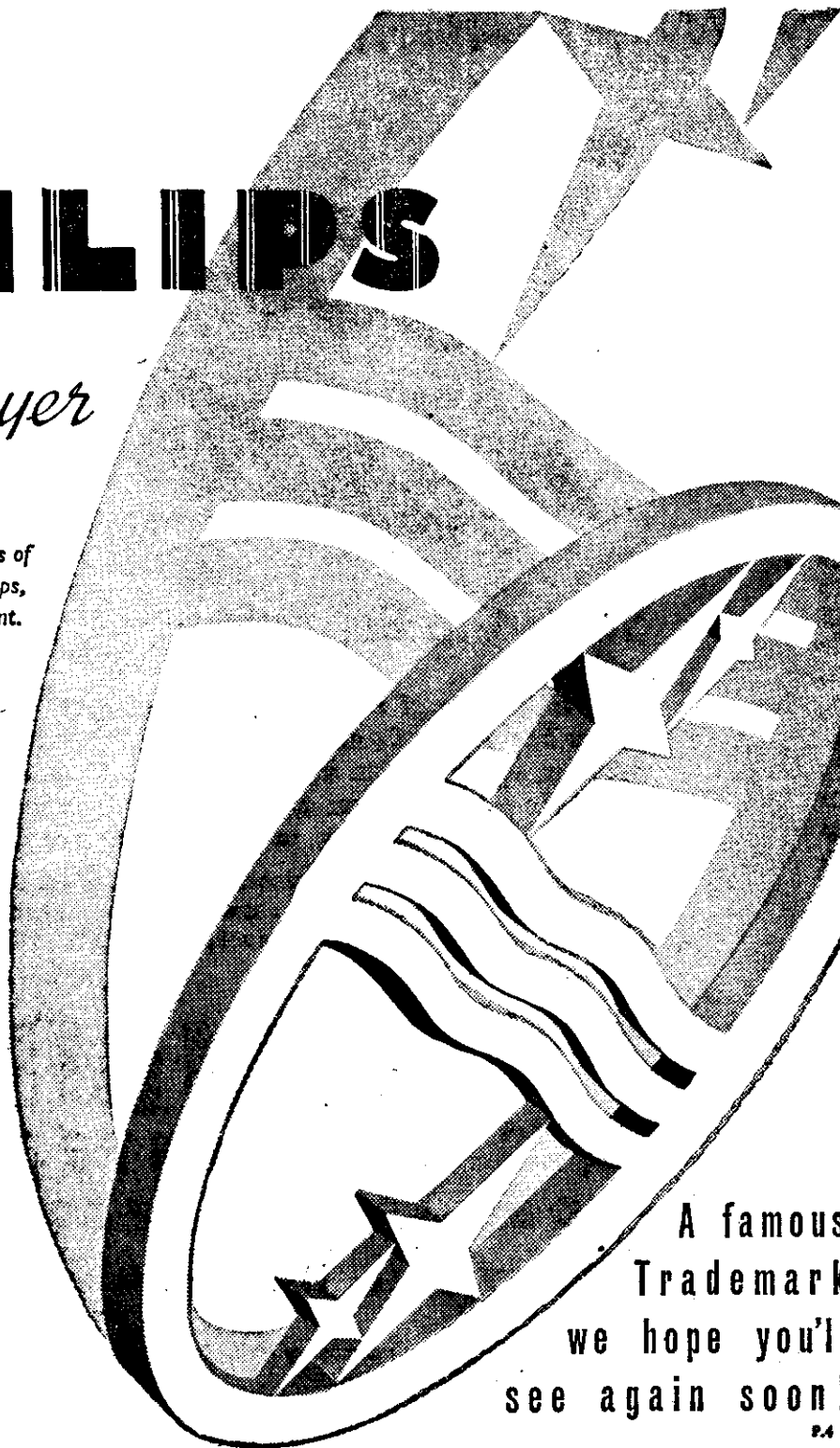


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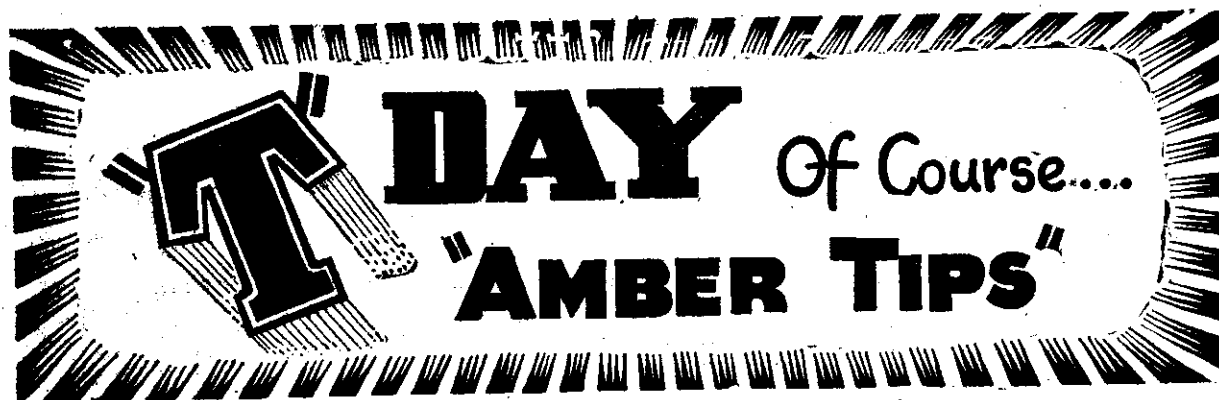
EXPLAINED TO AMERICA

UNDERSTANDING NEW ZEALAND. By
Frederick L. W. Wood. Coward-McCann,
Inc., New York.

THIS is a good book by any standard. For the purpose for which it has been written—to explain New Zealand to the reading section of Americans—it is just about as good as it could be. But I was not applying that easy test as I read it. I was asking myself what the book meant to me as a New Zealander, what new things it was teaching me, what old things it was making clearer; and that was a severe test for even a fuzzy mind to apply. But it was not too severe. The answer was "Much" in both cases. I know some things now that I did not know before, I understand some things that were formerly hazy; and that, I am sure, will be the experience of most New Zealand readers. For the claim made on the blurb is true. Professor Wood approached his task with much in his favour—the blurb says everything, but I can't go as far as that. He is an Australian topped off at Oxford who teaches history in New Zealand, and has therefore a better perspective on many of our problems than we have ourselves. I envy him his capacity to see men and movements under a reducing glass when I see them in their original proportions: and of course wrong proportions to-day. Professor Wood was never poked in the stomach by Richard John Seddon, he was never asked to meet Massey secretly, or flattered by Ward, and he can, therefore, as I can't, estimate those men without bias. They were in fact all very pleasant men, as unlike as three men could be, but equally skilful in using journalists; and some of their works live after them. But it is not a simple task to say how big each was in relation to the other, to the leaders who preceded them and those who followed, and it is far more likely that Professor Wood sees the truth more clearly than those of us do who have cow-dung on our boots and fern-leaves in our hair. In any case I have found it easier to let him decide many questions for me than wrestle with them myself; and if the blurb goes further at the end than I can—if I can't with its imaginary reader put down the book feeling that I "now know and understand New Zealand"—that is partly because I have seen too much of it.

That, however, is not the end of my comment; only the most important part of it. It is not a good book technically; for some reason or other which we shall call the war it is badly bound and weakly illustrated. It is well subdivided but not well sub-edited: "life marches on" two or three times at least; education is a hidebound "affair" on one page, a shabby "affair" on another, a national "affair" on a third; there are too many town and country cousins; there is even a shocking mistake on a map (not the author's of course). But the author must accept responsibility for the fact that New Zealand is "only too conscious" of inferiority on line 12 of page 154 and criticism "only too often greeted" with a deadening response a line or two further on. The chapters on "Education" and the "Gentle Arts"

(continued on next page)



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