

LITERARY LIFE IN EREWHON

THIS article, which we are permitted to reprint from "Letras e Artes," Rio de Janeiro, is, we believe, the first appreciation of New Zealand writing in our time to appear in a Brazilian literary journal. The author of the article, Dr. Paulo Ronai, is 42 years old, a Hungarian by birth, and a naturalised Brazilian. He was one of the editors of the "New Hungarian Review," and lectured at the University of Budapest in classics and modern languages. He is the editor-in-chief of the complete edition of Balzac's works in Brazilian; his publications include "Balzac and His 'Human Comedy,'" and an anthology of modern short stories written in Europe. He has translated a collection of Brazilian poetry into Hungarian, and into Brazilian, Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet," and works by Dickens, Galsworthy, Conrad, James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield. The translation from the Brazilian of "Literary Life in Erewhon" has been made by Mrs. S. R. Nathan and J. C. Reid.

FROM the youthful urge for adventure there always remains even in spirits otherwise immobilised and resigned a spark which rekindles at the call of the exotic. At any rate, this proved so in my case when I received recently a parcel of books from New Zealand.

With regard to this far-off country, I know only what is known to most people, which is almost nothing. The name of New Zealand lives in my mind associated with Katherine Mansfield, who left it as a young girl never to return. I have now learnt that not only have there been New Zealand writers who have followed the path of Katherine Mansfield, but that both before and after her there have been other writers who have helped to develop a distinctive personality in New Zealand literature.

The books which I received, thanks to the interest and courtesy of a New Zealand scholar, are partly studies of history and economics and partly literary criticism; all show high cultural standards and lively intelligence. From these, and from several specimens of the literature of New Zealand, I have had some opportunity of learning what is being written in this distant dominion of the British Crown.

Letters Lag Behind General Culture

The level of literary achievement does not yet reach that of the general culture, which is high. This country, in which everybody knows how to read, possesses many writers and a large number of readers. But New Zealand readers rarely read what their writers produce, and the writers write only rarely primarily for them. In other words, the reader in New Zealand reads mainly English

books, and New Zealand writers wish to be published and read in England.

However, recently there have been signs of change in this state of things. One notes frequent complaints on the part of authors of the lack of opportunities and of publishers; at the same time, several literary periodicals have not managed to survive; the interesting review *New Zealand New Writing* (an imitation of *Penguin New Writing*) could not reach its fifth number.

Although the works I consulted were clear and representative, it is naturally impossible to form an idea, even an approximate one, of a literature chiefly through reflections suggested to the critical and historical sense. But it may be interesting to set down briefly a few of my impressions and reactions.

In New Zealand writing, "non-fiction" has had the advantage over fiction. The earliest writers confined themselves more or less to descriptions of the country, while those of the later period seek to draw conclusions or to make analyses. Hence the predominance, on the one hand, of works of geography, ethnography, and sociology; on the other, of pedagogical, political and historical works over novels and poetry. Such analysis supposes a collective conscience more or less crystallised and which is formed by a few.

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