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**"Human nature's
a funny thing"**

—says Mrs. Rawlins

They realised that nice things need care, and they knew a harmless way to keep them white. Believe me, **Reckitt's BLUE** in the final rinse is the safe way to keep linens a good colour."

BL 58

"When good linen was a lot easier to come by, people thought a deal more of it.

Literary Life in Erewhon

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so we find the curious fact that several of the novels of the end of last century and of the beginning of this one, are utopias. It was not by chance that Samuel Butler placed his "Erewhon" in New Zealand.

Reading accounts of the principal writers of New Zealand fiction, one is struck also by the great number of women, a characteristic sign of a literature which, not yet reaching professional rank, is necessarily cultivated by those who have more leisure.

It was not long ago when every New Zealand writer was an immigrant "with the memory of a sea voyage" and a great nostalgia for England, which contributed to the conventionality of the novels of the first phase, and which retarded the forming of a local consciousness. Another difficulty which faced writers was the parochialism which surrounded them in the absence of contact with other, mature cultures. Katherine Mansfield had to tear herself away from her country to enable her to become in England a great writer, partly through her nostalgia for, and reminiscences of, New Zealand. "She discovered she was a New Zealander when she departed from her country." (Ian A. Gordon, *Katherine Mansfield, New Zealander*.) According to J. C. Reid, other reefs for local literature are the 'excessive sociologism and the lack of a metaphysic. The preoccupation of many recent writers with the creation of a New Zealand novel or New Zealand poetry hamper also the development of novels and poetry "tout court," of universal value.

The natural features of New Zealand, magnificent, varied and impressive, help the writers little, as they are as yet little humanised and lived in; man has not yet had sufficient contact with them to mingle with them his memories, including his intimate experiences. (M. H. Holcroft, *Creative Problems in New Zealand*.)

Maori Influences

A great potential asset of literature of New Zealand is the absorption of the Maori civilisation by that of the Anglo-Saxon, or better still the amalgamation of the two cultures. Many of the first writers about the Maori suffer from excessive romanticism, while in most of the moderns, the understanding is just skin-deep as few of them really get inside the Maori mentality.

Among the more recent short stories I read concerning the Maori was one which critics have considered one of the best of its kind (Roderick Finlayson *Sweet Beulah Land*.) It may have been because of my lack of familiarity with

the setting or from some deficiency in the story itself; I am certain, however, that I was more impressed by the tone and atmosphere than by the details of the tale. There is here, as in other stories, such as those by Frank Sargeson, a conscious seeking for half-tones, the joining of strands which are slack and loosely sewn; and a systematic use of "points," all of which seem to be characteristic of recent New Zealand writing, and which show the predominant influence of Katherine Mansfield, Chekhov, Virginia Woolf among others on New Zealand writers.

Nothing else proves more convincingly how small the world is than this fact of literary influence. In a recent New Zealand novel which caused some discussion, *Cliffs of Fall*, by Dan Davin (1945), a New Zealand critic traces influences of Dostoevsky, Gide, Kafka, Joyce and Graham Greene. There are no more possibilities for marginal cultures.



Spencer Digby photograph

DAN DAVIN

"There are no more possibilities for marginal cultures"

From a variety of pamphlets received in this precious parcel of books, one realises that New Zealand at the present time still continues to be prominent in the field of experimentation. A complete reform of education with the radical elimination of traditional values —in Latin, in modern languages, in English grammar, in mathematics, and the introduction of a "central core" (a minimum of obligatory subjects) including social studies, under the main inspiration of American education, has provoked violent protest from University teachers with humanistic tendencies (e.g., Professor W. Anderson "The Flight from Reason in New Zealand Education"; J. C. Reid, "Educational Change in Soviet Russia.")

This first contact with the culture of a country so far away reminds us more than anything else that apart from particular local problems, the central problems which civilisation has to resolve are substantially the same in all parts of the world. For this reason, all the more merit to those who arrange the contacts. I was surprised to learn from writings of Mr. J. C. Reid, lecturer in English at Auckland University College, and the author of works to which I owe a good deal of the information in this note, that he knows the country and literature of Brazil much better than his country is known here. In New Zealand, such scholars as he can obtain the greater part of what exists of English and French translations of Brazilian literature, *O Cortico* of Aluisio de Azevedo, *Canaan* of Graca Aranha, *Domitila* of Paulo Setubal, as well as the near-Brazilian *A Selva* of Ferreira de Castro, not to mention books on Brazil by Stefan Zweig to Bernanos.