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THE LAND FOR A HUNDRED YEARS

THE FARMER IN NEW ZEALAND. By G. T. Alley and D. O. W. Hall. Centennial Survey issued by the Department of Internal Affairs. Printed by Whitcombe and Tombs.

THE first thing to be said about this book is that it is an essay and not a history. You will certainly have a good deal more history after you have read it than you are likely to have had before, but you will not have many more dates, many more names or district chronicles. Don't buy it if you want to know who introduced the first two rabbits into New Zealand—you are told when the first two were exhibited at a show—who built the first dairy factory, established the first stud of Romneys, or the first herd of Black-and-whites. And don't suppose, whatever your purpose is, that the *history* of even one farm could be told in 150 pages.

ON the other hand don't suppose that there is nothing new here but possibly provocative opinions. There are opinions, thank God, but they are firmly

based on facts, and you are an unusual person if all these facts are familiar to you. For example:

That the Maoris in 1845 were producing food cheaply enough to disturb the white settlers' market.

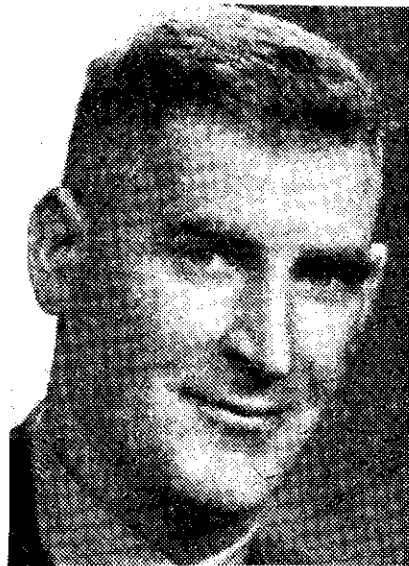
That the Waikato ninety years ago was "one great wheatfield."

That in the Bay of Plenty and round Taupo and Rotorua Maori farmers in 1857 had 3000 acres in wheat, 3000 acres in potatoes, nearly 2000 acres in maize, and upwards of 1000 acres planted in kumeras; owned nearly 1000 horses, 200 cattle, 5000 pigs; worked four water-mills

tion of the resources of New Zealand" (page 13).

"The principal benefit to them of their early success as farmers was to give the Maori people a secure place in the new society the white man was acclimatising in New Zealand, a place not of inferiority, but of partnership and self-respect." (page 22, our italics).

"The more highly organised settlements, where much more depended on community as against individual success, went through some dismal days before they reached a degree of self-



Spencer Digby photograph
G. T. ALLEY (left) and D. O. W. HALL
"...New light and a new line of thought"

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and 96 ploughs; and in addition to 900 canoes had 43 coasting vessels of about 20 tons each.

BUT it is still the case that the book is an historical essay or survey and not a chronological record. The authors climb high before they start pointing out the landscape. They have to travel too far and too fast to take photographs. You must be content with this God's-eye view or get down and get out. But if you stay you will learn a lot. The North Island floats past dotted with cows. At this height you can see why it is cows and not sheep. The South Island appears as the apron of the Southern Alps. You realise why it grows wheat and fattens lambs.

But you don't fly so high that you lose sight of the politicians. The paramount economic importance of the farming industry to New Zealand makes it impossible for the State to leave their welfare to chance, hope, and the satisfaction of political prejudices," the authors point out. In spite of your elevation and speed, you get a very clear impression of the purpose and general direction of the chief interventions by political parties in farming affairs.

AND so it goes on, two authors writing as one without revealing where one has dropped the pen and the other taken it up. We said that there are opinions. Listen:

"The Maori was an indispensable tool in the white man's first exploita-

tion sufficiency in any way comparable to that achieved by the Scots of Banks Peninsula" (page 40).

"The leasehold regulations made life precarious for the sheepfarmer, and put him on the defensive just at the time when he had become the economic backbone of the young nation." (page 54).

"The second generation of large graziers rarely inherited either the charm or the education of their fathers, but at least they produced an increasing quantity of wool." (page 56).

"The credit structure has been elaborated to the point where the farmer is hardly even allowed to manage his own farm according to his own ideas, so firm a grip on him have his creditors." (page 112).

And just once more:

"It is both natural and graceful that a man's children should help him in his work, and most children enjoy the tasks of farming when they are not sickened of them by overwork. But the financial pressure that makes the labour of the farmer's children his only hope of getting on in the world, is hardly likely to benefit the children." (page 137).

NO, not a catalogue of prices. Not a history of breed societies. Not a digest of discussions by Farmers' Unions. No duplication of anything that has ever been written in New Zealand, but an entirely new light and line of thought.