

# A PHILOSOPHER

## LOOKS BACK AT NEW ZEALAND

By J. N. FINDLAY

After ten years in the Chair of Philosophy at Otago University, Professor Findlay lately left New Zealand to take up an appointment in South Africa, his former home. This article was written for the *Otago Daily Times* on the first stage of his journey by air.

PAINLESSLY, IN the soaring élan of mystical modern engines, one is lifted out of New Zealand, painlessly it slips away from one, an inert and powerless picture; the whole process is far too rapid for any valedictory tears. Is it then truly possible for them to melt away so easily, those seemingly solid mountains with their spiky Chinese contour, those undulating pastures that one loved to stroke spiritually, those precipitous vantage points from which one gazed on the blue vacancy of southern seas, those faces and voices, whether kind or unkind, that caressed or oppressed one, those quaint, shabby, agreeable streets and buildings that constituted for a while the whole architecture of one's world? Yes, indeed, for such instantaneous dissolution is the lot and law of all things experienced; they vanish incontinently, leaving behind them only that inner residuum from which one can at best raise wandering vapours in the sad self-indulgence of memory.

What, then, would one cite as most truly memorable in one's ever foreshortening and receding picture of New Zealand? One might perhaps choose, as less personal and more readily communicable, that strange, senseless conflict of classes, that battle of the élite and the masses, which gives an unexpected piquancy and vividness to New Zealand living. Such conflicts would be quite in order in the major social structures, where power and wealth are vast and divided with the

grossest inequity, but they are truly surprising in a structure where there is all too little of power and wealth to be battled for, and scarcely anything in the way of disparity to be adjusted. Historically, however, the situation offers nothing extraordinary. The small city States of Greece, poised perilously on their rocky citadels, and with equal peril on the fringes of starvation—whose wealthy pursued simplicity and achieved vulgar ostentation as much from necessitous circumstances as from inward preference—these small city States were after all the classic battleground of rich and poor, the seat of all those unmeasured animosities which could only be satiated by periodical essays in extermination.

Certainly there seems to be something of that classic rancour in the small cities of New Zealand. Outwardly, indeed, the garment is notably seamless. They extend before one, immense, formless aggregations of closely similar wooden houses, some spruced with paint, some weathered like an ancient schooner, some graciously or vulgarly Victorian, while others are as graciously or as vulgarly modern, but none displaying any distinctive marks of aristocratic or plebeian tenancy. Inwardly, also, there are as few observable differences. Everywhere one sees the same autumn-tinted carpets, the same half-drawn blinds, the same tassels and satin. Everywhere one finds the same faltering taste in pictures and decorations: one hears the same conversations and listens to the same