

## The Seagull Reader

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in 1859 samuel butler a young cantabrigian out of joint with his family with the church and with the times left england to hew out his own path in new zealand at the end of just five years he returned with a modest fortune in money and an immense fortune in ideas for out of this self imposed exile came erewhon one of the world s masterpieces of satire which contained

the germ of butler's intellectual output for the next twenty years the cradle of erewhon is an examination and interpretation of the special ways in which these few crucial years affected butler's life and work particularly erewhon and erewhon revisited it shows us butler the sheep farmer explorer and mountain climber as well as butler the newcomer to the colonies accepting and accepted by his intellectual peers in the unpioneerlike little city of christchurch sharpening and disciplining his mind through his controversial contributions to the christchurch press but more importantly the book suggests the depth to which new zealand penetrated the man and reveals new facets of influence hitherto unnoticed in erewhon and erewhon revisited the southern alps oh wonderful wonderful so lonely and so solemn the perilous rivers and passes the character and customs of the maoris all these blend to afford new insights into a complex book butler was not the first to create an imaginary world as asylum from the harsh realities of this one vergil did the same in the eclogues nor was he the first even in his own time to protest against the machine as the enslaver of man but his became the clearest and the freshest voice on the biographical side the cradle of erewhon offers new evidence for reappraising the man who for so long has been a psychological and literary puzzle why for instance did he repudiate his first born book a first year in canterbury settlement and why once safely away from the entanglements of london did he voluntarily return to them answers to these and other butlerian riddles are suggested in the engrossing account of the satirist's sojourn in the antipodes

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