

*Journal of a Rambler. The Journal of John Boultonbee.* Edited by June Starke. Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1986. 1xxviii, 225 pp., maps, illustrations. N.Z. price: \$75.00.

JOHN BOULTBEE celebrated his thirty-fourth birthday on a ship anchored off Menado, on the north-western coast of the Celebes. In a rather forlorn mood he surveyed his life's achievements and found little to be proud of: 'I cannot but look back with some dissatisfaction at the lost time. I have no more means now than I had from the day of my birth!' His journal abounds with such self-denigration, most of it entirely warranted. In terms of his own age, he was a ne'er-do-well. In terms of ours he was fickle, restless, impatient and unskilled. He moved around the world in an apparently aimless way, dependent for survival on the goodwill of others and on the bodily health which enabled him to take on such tough, seafaring jobs as came his way. There was, then, something lacking in the personality of the man. Boultonbee had his own explanations. He put it down, variously, to a 'fondness for change', a 'propensity for novelty', and an 'over-heated imagination, which exceeds the strength, or more properly speaking the firmness, of my judgement'. Towards the conclusion of his *Journal* he fell back to blaming his mother and father, gently chiding them for being too indulgent and lax with discipline.

The curious paradox is that such a feckless drifter kept a regular diary, and at the end of his wanderings took the trouble to write up a journal which is lively, readable, observant and opinionated, if a little reckless with chronology. Although his stated purpose was to produce something which would provide diversion and entertainment for relatives and friends, there are sufficient hints in his narrative that he had an eye to a wider audience. Towards the end of his story Boultonbee apologized to readers for the simplicity of his style: 'I do not choose to embellish my style, by a world of farfetched words picked out of the Dictionary, — neither do I pretend to aim at notoriety in my narrative: I state things as they appear to me, and if I am wrong, it is the fault of my head. . . . I am a plain man, and let me tell my story in my own plain way'. Despite the protestation the journal is a self-conscious work, with its author fully aware of the content and literary conventions the market demanded. It is therefore a rich, intelligent, and informative resource for historians of early nineteenth century New Zealand and Australia, but it also has a great deal to offer the general reader.

John Boultonbee was born in 1799, the ninth and youngest son of a declining tenant farmer. Lacking the powerful patronage which gentry status might have conveyed, he had to make his own way in a world which was undergoing dramatic change, particularly in its agricultural sector. His travelling career began at the age of 17 when he sailed to Brazil as supernumerary on a merchant vessel. Two years later he set off for Barbados to take up plantation work, but in a pattern repeated throughout his life, Boultonbee found the work tiresome and uncongenial, and became impatient to move on. After three largely wasted and unhappy years back in England, he set out for the South Pacific, hoping somehow to live out his days in the 'Elysium' of Tahiti. It was to be a part of the globe he was never to reach, for the next five years of his life were spent in altogether different circumstances in the tough world of the sealers and whalers of Bass Strait and Murihiku.

Although he spent only two years sealing on the southern coasts of New Zealand, this portion of his life occupies the largest and most satisfying section of the *Journal*. For the most part he eked out a harsh, sparse and indigent existence on the coasts of

Fiordland and Foveaux Strait. His account of the work and conditions of sealers is a graphic and unembellished one. Even more valuable are his descriptions of the life and politics of the Maori people of the region on whom the sealers were to a large degree dependent. Relationships were always precarious, with occasional depredations by both sides, and at times it seems the sealers were almost wilfully oblivious of tapu. Boulton's own contacts with the Maori were sufficiently close for him to be able to construct an extensive Maori vocabulary, which reveals that he had a fine ear for languages.

In February 1828 Boulton sailed to Sydney, and after 18 months working on the coasts of New South Wales and Tasmania he joined the rush to the new Swan River colony. He spent more than three years in the colony — longer than he had spent at any place since he sailed for Brazil in 1816 — and yet this is the least satisfactory part of his *Journal*, occupying a bare six pages of this edition. For reasons which are not made clear, it was another unhappy period in the life of the traveller. Boulton always had problems in human relations — particularly with masters of ships and sisters-in-law — and perhaps personal difficulties of this nature soured his experience in that depressed settlement. He certainly left without any regrets in 1833, journeying for a further 14 months through the East Indian archipelago before settling in Ceylon where he lived out the remaining 20 years of his life.

*Journal of a Rambler* provides a rare glimpse of a seafaring world which is in general sparsely documented. It is in every respect a finely produced work. The extensive Introduction by June Starke is authoritative, lively and elegant, filling in wherever possible the gaps in Boulton's career and coming to terms with his own wayward sense of time. The editing and annotation are scholarly without intruding too much into the flow of the narrative. The book is expensive, but justifiably so for such a handsome production. In most respects it is a saga of a squandered career, but 130 years after the death of its author, the editor and publishers of this attractive *Journal* have created a fine memorial. It is perhaps a better one than John Boulton deserved.

DAVID MACKAY

*Victoria University of Wellington*

*John Kinder: Paintings & Photographs.* By Michael Dunn. SeTo Publishing, Auckland, 1985. 224 pp. N.Z. price: \$435.00.

MICHAEL DUNN'S book on John Kinder is one of the best monographs yet to appear on a nineteenth-century New Zealand artist. In particular, the quality and generosity of the colour plates are remarkable, reflecting both careful photography and painstaking checking against the original works. This means the reproductions can be trusted by students, teachers, researchers, indeed all those who may be interested but who do not have recourse to the originals. And this kind of fidelity consequently lessens the surprise value of an encounter with the works themselves, for those forced to rely on the inadequate reproductions spread through much of our art-historical literature. It raises the cost of the volume (in this case to \$435), but this calibre of colourful reproduction is invaluable.

The latter half of the book is devoted to a useful catalogue of Kinder's surviving oeuvre. Here are entries for 424 watercolours and drawings, and for no fewer than