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AN EARLY picture of the Bay of Islands, by a French artist. The vessels at anchor are mainly whalers

BOOKS

A Yankee at the Bay of Islands

THE NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL, 1842-44, of John B. Williams, of Salem, Massachusetts. Edited with an Account of his Life by Robert W. Kenny; Peabody Museum of Salem and Brown University Press, U.S. price six dollars.

(Reviewed by Keith Sinclair)

WHAT a pity it is that history, though made by men, is written up by historians! How much more rich, varied and lively the past usually seems when we read the accounts left by its inhabitants! Many of us, brought up on our pious and dull traditions, will scarcely recognise the founding of New Zealand as it is recorded in the previously unpublished journal of John B. Williams, who was the United States Consul at the Bay of Islands, 1842-44.

Williams is a Republican, and shakes his head at the thought of Queen Victoria ("She is only an Imperial pauper herself"), rocking her babe in a golden cradle while, in New Zealand, the "poor European female undergoes the pains of accouchment in miserable huts." He regards the Treaty of Waitangi as "a plan, a deep laid plan," concocted by Governor Hobson and the Governor of New South Wales, to despoil the Maoris of their land; "a disgraceful plan" carried out by bribing the Maoris with tobacco. He thinks that hitherto New Zealand has been a brothel, and that its future, should England continue to send out poor men "without money or marbles," is to become "the poor-house of Great Britain."

Williams is a genuine old-time New England Puritan, a great denouncer of sin and not at all mealy-mouthed. There are endless quotable comments on the leading settlers at the Bay, on "their Satanical Satanism with those children of innocence"—the Maori girls—and on their "grogeries." Their wives are scarcely better than the husbands. And the shocking thing is that they actually look down on the Americans and believe American women are "wild"! When he looks at the "mongrels" being bred

at the Bay, Williams feels proud to be a Yankee.

No doubt the inhabitants at the Bay in 1842-43 were no better than Williams believed, but, of course, he saw it at its worst. Customs duties had driven off the Yankee whalers and killed the victualing trade. The population was dwindling fast, attracted to the new capital at Auckland. Land sales had almost ceased. The American and Australian age was at an end, the British era was just beginning. Williams witnessed the death of the first, the early infancy of the second, but he knew neither in its prime.

Everything in the journal is in character. Williams is a New Englander. Of course, he is a trader, too. He looks at the country in terms of its maritime and commercial prospects. Much of his journal consists of descriptions of the harbours, timber and other resources. But he is not blind to its beauties, its "voluptuous climate" and the "health which it pants forth to the blue sky." He is a credulous soul. He offers much singular, curious and erroneous information gleaned from hearsay. There is that fearful beast, "The Hotte, a decided caterpillar or worm," which grows at the foot of the rata (the *awheto*, a fungus which attacks caterpillars). Why are the Rotorua Maoris light in colour? They are bleached by the sulphur. The Moa is "a most powerful and tremendous large bird (called Moa from More), but few of these birds have been seen of late years!"

This is altogether a pleasant volume, well printed and bound with apt illustrations. There is a glossary but no index, and few footnotes. Perhaps too much scholarship might spoil the work of so garrulous and gullible a diarist. But there are places where some editorial comment is needed to elucidate or correct. The Consul's account of the Treaty of Waitangi, for instance, is a wonderful mixture of fact and prejudice. Some indication of which parts are fact seems required. Occasionally

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 5, 1956.