

JOHN RUTHERFORD

Among recent acquisitions in the Turnbull art collection is a portrait, from a series of London 'street characters' painted about 1830 by George Scarf, of the one-time pakeha Maori, John Rutherford. It shows him carrying a bowl of nuts in one hand and a gambling board in the other.¹ His face is heavily tattooed in Maori fashion and tattooing of a symmetrical hatched design is shown on his left wrist and lower forearm. From its detail and precision we may assume the portrait to be a careful likeness.

In *The New Zealanders* by G. L. Craik (a work published anonymously in 1830 by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge) there is another portrait of Rutherford 'from an original drawing taken in 1828'.² It is reproduced here. Though in style and quality, and probably also as a likeness, it is much inferior to the oil painting, the tattooing on the face and forearm show the same designs. Each therefore confirms the accuracy of the other. As far as the body tattooing is concerned we have Craik's assurance that it too is accurately represented.³

The circumstances under which Rutherford acquired his tattooing and his subsequent adventures in New Zealand purport to be told in two somewhat divergent published accounts. They appear, in very brief outline, in an eight page leaflet (one edition dated 1829, the other undated)⁴ and, at length, in Craik's work.⁵ This latter account is in turn based on a manuscript which Craik says Rutherford (who was illiterate) dictated to a 'friend' during his return voyage to England, supplemented by additional information Craik gleaned during discussions with the seaman in January 1829, when the two of them went through the MS and Rutherford elaborated on aspects of it.⁶

One doubt must immediately arise in the mind of any reader of the pamphlet and of the passages from the MS actually quoted by Craik. Neither present Rutherford's story in the language of an illiterate seaman. Like an engraving done from a painting or a police statement of a suspect's interrogation they are obviously touched up by the author. Though Craik refers to some 'grammatical solecisms' in the MS,⁷ none appear in the published version. However, in view of Craik's statement that they went through the document together we must assume that it conveys what Rutherford wished to say. Whether he likewise confirmed the accuracy of the pamphlet we have no means of knowing.

Craik describes Rutherford as 'a person of considerable quickness, and great powers of observation. . . . His manners were mild and courteous; . . . and he was evidently a man of very sober habits. . . . He greatly disliked being shown for money, . . .'.⁸ Such a description would hardly seem appropriate to a man who had just won himself space in the *Sydney Gazette* and the *Australian* which on 5 December 1828 both published