

first reading *Shackleton* is of a long, compelling play (perhaps a TV serial?) crammed with character parts. Worsley, Wild, Orde-Lees, Crean, Mackintosh and Wilson jostle for the limelight; there are lesser parts for a dishonest brother and a sad, shadowy wife, and behind stands a chorus of randomly-selected scientists, explorers, sponsors and creditors—including the disgruntled deckhands of *Endurance* whom everyone else seems to have forgotten. The main character, Shackleton himself, is never off-stage for long, but his bit-players get the best lines and upstage him shamelessly.

This is strange, for the real-life Shackleton cannot often have been upstaged. Perhaps after writing of Scott and Amundsen, Huntford has found less to hate and to admire in this restless Anglo-Irish adventurer, and drawn a pale figure who only marginally stands out from his dramatic background. Shackleton was certainly not everyone's hero; as Huntford reports, Mawson, Edgeworth-David and many of his early backers found reason to distrust and dislike him. His muddling, improvidence and proneness to disaster are fully and faithfully reported in this biography, and very interestingly too. But there must have been more to Shackleton than muddling; there was magic too, and that emerges less clearly. Shipmates from cooks to scientists spoke joyfully of 'The Boss'; he was a well-loved leader to whom hard-bitten characters repeatedly trusted their lives, and hard-headed backers their money. Antipodeans prejudiced against him (quite reasonably—he left them to foot the bills) met him and ended up firmly on his side. Leadership of Shackleton's quality is rare and interesting, but this fat and detailed book draws a surprisingly thin portrait. Perhaps the secret is in there among the gossip, the bit-parts and the well-marshalled masses of facts and opinions. I'll happily read *Shackleton* again to find out, because it is a book to be re-read and pondered. Meanwhile it complements the Fishers' biography but does not replace it. (Bernard Stonehouse, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1ER.)

AN EARLY RECORD OF ALASKAN NATIVE PEOPLES

HOLMBERG'S ETHNOGRAPHIC SKETCHES. Falk, M. W. (editor), translated by F. Jaensch. 1985. Fairbanks, University of Alaska Press. (Rasmuson Library: Historical Translation Series Vol 1). 133 p, map, soft cover. ISBN 0 912006 17 X. US\$15.00.

H. J. Holmberg (1818–1864) was a Finnish mineralogist who visited Alaska in 1850–51. As a result of his spare-time investigations of native life, he published in Helsinki a number of essays *Ethnographische Skizzen über Völker des Russischen Amerika* between 1855 and 1863. These have now been translated and issued as the first volume in a new series devoted to making available in English both primary and secondary source material on Alaska. It is a valuable addition to our knowledge. Holmberg discusses with both precision and sensitivity the Tlingit and Koniag peoples of Alaska, as well as providing an account of the early relations of Russian fur-traders with these groups. This gives an interesting picture of the Russian–American Company and its operations. Finally there is a verbatim account of the wreck of the *Saint Nikolai* on Destruction Island, Olympic Peninsula (Washington) in 1808. Here a different indigenous population was involved in the aftermath. Considering the date when he was writing, Holmberg was a most enlightened author. One welcomes the translation, and looks forward to other useful additions to this series. (Ian Whitaker, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada V5A 1S6.)