

*Cinderellas of the Empire: Towards a History of Kiribati and Tuvalu.* By Barrie Macdonald. Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1982. 334 pp. Aust. price: \$19.50.

BARRIE MACDONALD knows his subject thoroughly, although the title of his book suggests that he is not quite so well up on fairy tales. For the 'real' Cinderella of Perrault's story, on becoming free of her ugly and domineering sisters, obtained a position of wealth and power. In contrast, Macdonald's 'Cinderellas', the components of the former Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, did not acquire great affluence or eminence when they shuffled off the coil of British rule in the late 1970s. The only Pacific territory to have so bettered itself at independence has been Nauru, which thereby obtained full control over the extraction and marketing of its phosphate deposits. Kiribati (with the exhaustion of phosphate on Banaba in 1979) and Tuvalu have no such resources to exploit; and so have remained peasants, so to speak, rather than becoming princesses.

Nevertheless, and in fairness to Macdonald, it should be admitted that the attainment of independence is an ennobling experience in that it procures for a people international recognition of their full human worth. Such recognition is not compatible with colonial status, although for colonized people it may well be a merely formal and legal affirmation of a truth they had never doubted, even when they lacked the means fully to express it. That this was so for the people of Kiribati and Tuvalu is a theme that runs through Macdonald's survey of the last two hundred years of their history. With a wealth of detail he describes the successive waves of foreign intruders into the two groups — explorers, traders, missionaries, administrators, soldiers (World War II); and the selective, adaptive, defensive responses of the islanders, who have managed to retain many of their traditional values and institutions. Despite the changes, there remains (concludes Macdonald) 'something immutable about the individual's ties to his kin and to his land, and a supreme identification with the island on which both are to be found'. Independence was but an outward sign of an inward self-sufficiency.

That Kiribati and Tuvalu did not find European contact too destructive was due largely to their small size and the limited productive capacity of the coral from which they were formed. Consequently, European settlers were few and government officials had little to do, as Macdonald explains with admirable clarity: 'in the early years of the twentieth century there were no fixed expectations for government activity in colonial dependencies; rather each was restricted to the levels of administration and services that it could afford, and the interest shown in dependencies from London was directly proportionate to their imperial contribution and to the difficulty and embarrassment that they might cause.' The one part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony unfortunate enough to become a centre of commercial exploitation and government interest was Banaba (or Ocean Island) which was devastated by phosphate mining. The Banabans had their lands and way of life destroyed, so that farmers in New Zealand might have cheap fertilizer, and thereby be able to supply England with cheap food. Macdonald deals at length with this sordid enterprise, which culminated in the shameful dismissal of the Banabans' claim for compensation in the British High Court in 1972.

He also, with unintended irony, points to the tragic folly of the most recent of

England's imperial wars when he describes how in 1912 the Resident Commissioner of the GEIC, having fallen from favour with his superiors, was transferred to a territory of even lower status, namely, the Falkland Islands.

Clearly written, comprehensive and up-to-date, *Cinderellas* is informative and stimulating not only about Kiribati and Tuvalu, but also in regard to the broader processes of cultural and political change that have affected other former colonial territories. Now, garbed in the raiment of Macdonald's polished scholarship (and adorned with indigenous histories recently published by the University of the South Pacific) Kiribati and Tuvalu have been securely removed from historical obscurity. If, in a literary sense at least, that makes them a species of Cinderella after all, Macdonald may well lay claim to being a Charles Perrault — or a Prince Charming.

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*The Aggressions of the French at Tahiti and Other Islands in the Pacific.* By George Pritchard. Edited by Paul de Deckker. Illus., bibl., 253 pp. Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press, 1983. Price \$48.00.

GEORGE PRITCHARD, who arrived at Tahiti as a missionary in 1824, served as British consul from 1837 and was expelled by the French administration in 1844. The story of his meddling career, and the diplomatic background to French protection and annexation of the island he sought to keep as a British sphere of influence, have been recounted many times and can still draw a certain *frisson* from French historians. Pritchard's manuscript of some two hundred pages, deposited in the Alexander Turnbull Library, is essentially his version of the story, intended for publication shortly after his expulsion, but wisely allowed to gather dust by both the London Missionary Society and the Foreign Office, which had separately sanctioned the polemical work by Marc Wilks in 1844 and the series of Parliamentary Papers dealing with French and British treaty relations with the Tahitians and Pritchard's removal, 1843–1845. Some of the manuscript found its way into his son's *Polynesian Reminiscences*, published in 1866, but its existence has been largely ignored by researchers until Dr de Deckker took an interest, arising from his investigations into the career of J. Moerenhout.

For a polemical work aimed at general condemnation of French actions it is less exaggerated than one might expect, and the general reader will gain a good deal from the text and the insights of the editor into the background history of Tahiti in the period leading up to French occupation. Its usefulness to the historian and student of Pacific societies is perhaps less evident, despite the copious citation of original documents by Pritchard, as these found their way into French and British official papers, and adequate accounts of the episode are given by W. P. Morrell, J. Faivre, L. Jore and others. A more interesting question is whether Pritchard selects or omits from the evidence to suit his case.

He certainly glosses over certain facts, such as the age of the infant Pomare III,