

*The Polynesian Journal of Captain Henry Byam Martin, R.N.* Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, 1981. 192 pp., illus. U.S. price: \$16.95.

THE PEABODY MUSEUM of Salem — not to be confused with that at Harvard — is well-known for its publications about its Maori and other Pacific artefacts, and for its ethnological expedition to Polynesia, 1951–53. Its late director, Ernest Dodge, maintained contacts with the Pacific and this publication is derived from his enthusiasms. It breaks new ground. It is a first-hand account by a perceptive, and intelligent, participant of the political intrigues flourishing in the Tahitian islands in the later 1840s. When published, in 1981, it could be claimed as the only English viewpoint, all previous publications having been by French officials or missionaries. However, last year Paul de Deckker's *The Aggressions of the French at Tahiti*, edited from the Alexander Turnbull Library's manuscript of the notorious George Pritchard, missionary, and Her Britannic Majesty's Consul, appeared. This account provides an interesting supplement to Martin's, from an activist who had been expelled only two years before this visit.

Admiral Sir Henry Byam Martin (1803–65) was at that time Captain Martin in his first command, the fifty-gun frigate H.M.S. *Grampus*. Coming from the best type of service family, widely-read, humane, with a lively wit, in his daily *Journal* he was frank and outspoken yet in his dealings with the French Governor was the circumspect diplomat. The unpublished manuscript in the British Library has been ably edited by Edward Dodd, with assistance from the Bengt Danielssons and Pierre Montillier. Helpful notes are appended, an index, and a useful map of Tahiti, although a map of the whole Society group would have assisted greatly.

There is an appealing inconsequentiality about the entries. The punctilious protocol of the Victorian Royal Navy, the endless round of formal dinners given and returned, aboard ship and ashore, contrasts abruptly with the frequent terse recording of the death of still another of his sailors from accident or illness. He was by no means insensitive, simply matter-of-fact once death had occurred — indeed, he had a paternalistic care for his young midshipmen. Much that might pass for mere gossip is informed comment of real significance. A dry sense of humour is often apparent. He is fascinated by the tragi-comedy of the royal pawn, Queen Pomare, for whom he has both affection and contempt: 'In the days of her Queenhood Pomare was imperious, tyrannical & oppressive, and in her misfortune she is petulant, peevish & capricious.'

In August 1846 Martin arrived at Honolulu and there Admiral Sir George Seymour gave him 'a difficult and uncompromising task'. Dupetit Thouars had declared Tahiti a French protectorate. Seymour had already clashed with Bruat, the first Governor, and he despatched Martin to keep a watching brief over Britain's interests, with special reference to the degree of real sovereignty exercised by Pomare over the hereditary chiefs and to the question of the independence or otherwise of those other Society Islands beyond Tahiti itself. Bruat summed it up, bitterly: 'now it is discovered that Tahiti and Eimeo [Moorea] are the Georgian islands and that the Society Islands are quite distinct!'

The French hold on Papeete was tenuous, the Queen had taken refuge on Raiatea and few of the islanders supported the protectorate. Pomare and some of the most influential chiefs hoped for active continuance of the British patronage initiated by Captain Cook. This Britain was reluctant to promise, yet wishing to

deny the French a free hand.

The Captain and the Governor appear to have had a wary respect for each other, although not without some reservations. Diplomatic niceties were most scrupulously observed on either side, even while each jealously guarded his nation's *amour propre*. Bruat greatly mistrusted the continuing British presence. Martin, for his part, thoroughly enjoyed inflaming Bruat's suspicions of undue British influence, while in fact taking pains not to commit himself or his government to any positive or irrevocable action. He had an impish sense of mischief: '18 June. Waterloo Day. A good day to squabble with a Frenchman.' And: 'I wrote a letter to Pomare — one that will give her no satisfaction & will offend everyone else.'

Martin travelled extensively throughout the Society Islands, from 28 September 1846 to 10 July 1847. He recorded much detail of the topography, and of the inhabitants' way of life and their position *vis-à-vis* the French. His comments on the French and their activities are enlightening, always most carefully weighed although showing prejudice. He made a real effort to understand the Tahitians and their situation, and he did all he could to help them, hampered though he was.

He was cynical about the benefits of so-called civilization being introduced into the Pacific. Of the Hawaiians, he commented, 'There may be some dignity in a naked savage, there can be none whatever in a dirty shirt.' As to the Tahitians: 'Music and flowers seem to be their delight — and what pleasures can be so harmless' although, rather surprisingly, he continued severely, 'But I must add that the "Hula Hula" the native dance is unbecoming, ungraceful and indecent'.

Of particular interest are the illustrations from drawings by Martin, 19 colour reproductions of watercolours and, interspersed through the text, many wash or pen drawings. One regrets that the illustrations are not listed nor even all titled. They deserve better. Henry Byam Martin was a most accomplished amateur artist of considerably greater merit than his contemporary, Admiral R. A. Oliver, whose work has recently attracted so much notice in Auckland. Martin draws and paints with an easy eloquence. Many figure studies have a humorous touch but there are some fine portraits and much of ethnological value, including finely detailed tattooing.

It is, however, in some of his Tahitian landscapes that Martin captures the rich enchantment of tropical islands, reflecting his appreciation of this beauty, also noted in his writings. One quite charming view is of Moorea, looking across Papeete itself, now so different. In 1847 the artist saw the embryonic town's simplicity in all its calm beauty and he enables us to share it with him.

This is a most attractive and useful book. The sailor-diplomat throws a little more light on the might-have-been in Tahiti, perhaps of added interest now when the future is again in question.

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