

Travels in Oceania: Memoirs of a Whaling Ship's Doctor, 1866. By Louis Thiercelin (trans. and ed. by Christiane Mortelier). Dunedin, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1995. 352pp. NZ Price: \$34.95. ISBN 0-908569-71-8.

IN AN IDEAL WORLD American whaling vessels would have been legally obliged to carry a surgeon, and the extant records of British and French vessels would be more voluminous than they are. As it is American records are numerous but, Herman Melville notwithstanding, tend to be narrowly focused on the voyage and the catch while proportionally fewer British and French accounts, which are inclined to be more discursive, have survived. There is in this state of affairs much for the Pacific historian to regret, but especially the absence of surgeons from American whalers. That is because wherever he was signed on the surgeon tended to be the best educated and most literate man aboard and the one with most time on his hands, and hence the one best placed to write a fuller account of the voyage than the emaciated one commonly contained in the ship's log. This contention is supported by recently published journals of British whaling ventures and now is further strengthened by the appearance of a French one. It is not that Thiercelin's is a new book. It was first published in 1866, in French, but then dropped into obscurity. Now, in Christiane Mortelier's English translation, it is available to an audience that is not only larger than before but likely to be more enduringly appreciative since it is a rich source for Pacific history. In the volume under review a too-long-hidden treasure is revealed.

Thiercelin made two voyages to the Pacific, 1837-41 and 1863-64. On the first of them he visited Hawaii, on the second New Caledonia and the Chatham Islands, and on each of them Akaroa and Tahiti. His observations of these places and their inhabitants, fortified by conversations and by extensive reading, are the core of his book. Of particular interest, and poignancy, are his accounts of Akaroa. In January 1840 it was a Maori settlement, with a couple of Pakeha resident there to manage a hand of cattle on behalf of the Rhodes brothers of Sydney. In February 1864 it was a European settlement, with a large French component, and with farms where the bush had been.

Thiercelin, though, does not rest with description. He ruminates on the ethics and practice of colonization and on the fate and entitlements of the people of the Pacific in the face of advancing European encroachment. In general, he sees that process as representing progress and improvement, a movement from savagery to civilization. In so doing, though, he resignedly sees it not as being unequivocally benign but as being driven by a measure of inevitability, so that while the indigenes might resist the forces of change they could not repel them. Insofar as the islanders were victims of the process he sympathized with them. Thoughtful and humane, yet a man of his times in assuming the essential superiority of European culture, Thiercelin in his reflective mode offers a nuanced view into the mind of the colonizer, and a benevolent — but not plainly optimistic — assessment of the prospects of the colonized.

Further substance to what is so much more than a traveller's tale derives from the historical narrative that Thiercelin weaves into history. The result is an artfully constructed history of Polynesia — indeed, the first of that genre — that blends personal reportage and opinion with wide reading. The quality of the discussion is pleasingly illustrated by remarks on Polynesian navigation which anticipate opinions that would eventually become an orthodoxy in the 1990s:

In the tropics, the prevailing winds are from the east. Based on this fact, some writers had thought that emigration had to come from America. But it is difficult to accept a voyage over such long distances in canoes which had such limited storage space for provisions. Instead of reminding you that the American and Oceanic races are different, it is more natural to allow that the emigrants went

towards the east with the variable winds, which sometimes blow, with the idea of being able to retrace their steps by returning with the trade-winds, if they were to discover nothing.

There is much in this book to inform and stimulate the reader on a variety of levels. Incidentally, its publication is further evidence of the estimable contributions to New Zealand and Pacific studies flowing from the French departments of New Zealand universities. Christiane Mortelier's work is a worthy companion to that of Dunmore, Ollivier, Arnoux, Legge, Tremewan and others.

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Aotearoa and New Zealand: A Historical Geography. By Alan Grey. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 1994. 476pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 0-908812-34-5.

WHILST THE STUDY of historical geography has had a long, though at times chequered, career in New Zealand university geography departments, no complete study of this country's economic and landscape changes had been published before Alan Grey's *Aotearoa and New Zealand: A Historical Geography* appeared. The only comparable book is K.B. Cumberland's 1981 *Landmarks*, but this was much more limited in scope and was aimed at a popular rather than academic readership.

Alan Grey was born here, but has for many years taught in the United States, and has the 'advantage' of being both familiar with the New Zealand scene and seeing the wider picture from an outsider's point of view.

His book begins in what has been the traditional way of emphasizing that the study is geographical, namely by a chapter on New Zealand's physical geography. Grey then covers the period from Polynesian occupation, through early pakeha settlement, pastoral and agricultural expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the post-1920s period when there were only a few limited agricultural frontiers left to conquer. The growth of population, of urban centres, communications, the rise and fall of mining, forest destruction and subsequent replanting, tentative manufacturing endeavours, and other geographical aspects are all detailed and commented upon.

Grey ends his study at 1935, but provides a brief afterword which examines the changes in our economy and landscape from that date until the mid-1980s when the Labour Government started dismantling the state's involvement in the economy.

Given the vast amount of factual material the author has included, it is not surprising that a few minor errors have crept in, including, amongst others, allocating to Dunedin the whole of Otago-Southland's 1863 population, wrongly dating New Zealand's first locally-built locomotive, and most surprisingly misquoting the famous and somewhat hackneyed description of the Milford Track as the 'finest walk in the world' by substituting 'best' for 'finest'.

New Zealand's historical geographers have never agreed on what theoretical approach should be adopted for their studies. Grey dismisses the 'static snapshots' which Cumberland and other earlier geographers used in their periodical articles, and instead has emphasized the processes of change. But many earlier snapshot studies of New Zealand at different dates are not as static as the author implies, and Grey cannot divorce himself entirely from that approach, for he makes use of a 'snapshot' of Aotearoa about 1770.