

Alfons L. Korn, ed., *News From Molokai: Letters Between Peter Kaeo and Queen Emma, 1873-1876*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976. Pp. 338. \$14.95.

Moloka'i is an island whose name has been linked in literature and in history with leprosy and lepers. Kalaupapa, the settlement established in 1864 as the exile for these unfortunates, is but a small place on that island. It is a part of a peninsula spectacularly situated at the foot of precipice on the north shoreline. For most of those confined to Kalaupapa, regardless of the walk of life or rank in society they may have occupied, the end was a loathsome form of death and, perhaps worse, to be forever forgotten. Few of the graves are marked in a colony of the dead. a

There have been some notable exceptions to this medical and social death sentence and one of these was Peter Young Kaeo. This young man was of the *ali'i* class (chiefly), being descended from Keliimaikai, the younger brother of Kamehameha the conqueror, on his mothers side and from the great chiefess, Kamakahelei of Kauai, through his father.

In the usual circumstance, Peter Kaeo would have been condemned to the same fate as all others at Kalaupapa had it not been for his cousin, Emma Kaleleonalani Naea. Peter's mother and the mother of Emma were sisters and the two cousins were reared much together. So it was in 1873, when Peter was found to be a leper and exiled to Kalaupapa. He had a willing, beloved and important correspondent, Hawaii's dowager Queen, widow of Kamehameha IV, Queen Emma.

The letters which passed between Queen Emma, whose place is well established in the history of Hawaii, and her almost unknown cousin are rich in detailed Hawaiiiana and delightful as gossip. One-hundred and twenty-two letters have been preserved from the period of Peter's ordeal on Moloka'i and these are the content of *News from Molokai*. The collection of correspondence has been introduced and edited carefully and sympathetically by Professor Alfons L. Korn, Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Hawaii. Professor Korn's accomplishment in footnoting and explaining obscure references in the letters has been painstaking and thorough. Without this work *News from Molokai* would simply be the publication of some original sources for Hawaiian history. With the midwife-like work by Professor Korn the work is born as an intimate look into a short period of history through the eyes of two educated and involved native observers. For the student of island history there is a wealth of otherwise difficult-to-obtain material. For the casual reader Peter Kaeo and Queen Emma emerge as warm, real human beings in the two different worlds of nineteenth century Honolulu and the beautiful but dread leper settlement at Kalaupapa.

From Honolulu, Queen Emma's letters are of social scandal, political intrigue, poisoning plots and who was *ana'ana-ing* (trying to bring about a person's death through sorcery) whom. The *mea hou* (news) from Moloka'i is of efforts to find a cure for the disease, the state of the food and water supply, the messages of native *kahunas* (prophets and sorcerers), the machinations of William Ragsdale, Jonathon Napela and others for control of the colony and above all, the reaction of the exiles to the happenings in Honolulu.

The period of time covered by the letters is relatively short but was a critical time in the history of the kingdom. Occurring in these three-odd years was the death of "King Bill" Lunalilo, the election of a new king, Queen Emma's campaign for the office against the despised DK's (the party of David Kalakaua who was elected), and the very uneasy beginnings of the reign of the Merry Monarch. Through these letters can be observed the maneuverings of American interests which eventually brought about the overthrow of the monarchy and annexation to the United States. The reader gets a commentary on some of the first moves of ex-Mormon missionary, Walter Murray Gibson in his rise to power. There are also interesting glimpses of Queen-to-be, Liliuokalani. It is particularly interesting from the point of view of our own time and its pro-Hawaiian activism to read these letters which are anti-American, which bluntly disparage commercial and sugar interests, are critical of the American Protestant missionaries and their families and which do not revere the Princess Bernice Pauahi nor her American husband, Mr. Bishop.

Curiously, Father Damien who is a major figure in most modern-day stories about Kalaupapa and lepers, does not figure prominently in the letters of Peter Kaeo nor, apparently at that time, in the life of the settlement. He is mentioned but always only in passing. Perhaps, as one reviewer has suggested, it requires the passing of a hundred years to recognize a saint. Peter's concerns, and by implication from his letters, the concerns of the other lepers, are more centered upon the administration of the settlement by Napela and his successor, William Ragsdale. Ragsdale was a leper, a former member of the House of Representatives of the kingdom, and figured in one of Mark Twain's humorous and insightful sketches of Honolulu of that era. Napela was not at that time leperous but had come to Kalaupapa as a *kokua* (nurse and helper) for his wife who was. Peter Kaeo lived near the Napelas and spent much time with them. For students of the life of this early Mormon leader, he is frequently mentioned in Peter's letters.

On June 27, 1876, Peter Young Kaeo was released from confinement by action of the State Board of Health. It was determined that his condition was better than when he had left Honolulu. Peter lived

the remainder of his life quietly in Honolulu, returning to his seat in the upper house of the Hawaiian legislature as the Honorable P. Y. Kaeo. There he continued to express his opposition to David Kalakaua and his extravagancies. There are both medical and political reasons implied for the unusual action of the Board of Health in returning Peter to Honolulu but they are not made clear. It is probably not possible to do so. The fact of the existence of the letters at all is a romance in itself. Disappearing altogether after the death of Queen Emma in April of 1885, these letters were not heard of again until they were discovered by chance in 1935 at a Honolulu pawn shop. This story is a part of the appendix of Professor Korn's book.

Joseph H. Spurrier

BYU-Hawaii