

Charles De Varigny, *Fourteen Years in the Sandwich Islands, 1855-1868*,
Alfons L. Korn Ed. and Trans. Honolulu: The University Press of
Hawaii, 1981. Pp. 289. \$24.95.

Charles de Varigny served as minister of several portfolios in the cabinet of Kamehameha V from 1863 to 1867, after serving as French overseas consular secretary in Honolulu. His memoir, focusing on his ministerial service, is a personal record of the "material and moral progress" of a small oceanic nation. In de Varigny's view, progress is the "law of humanity, a providential law, laid down by God himself, which a whole people as well as individuals obey, sometimes without being aware of doing so." His initial chapters dwell upon Hawaii's early history from "extreme barbarism . . . to a state of civilization" and are drawn from the already published works of Hiram Bingham and James Jackson Jarves in order to present a diachronic perspective on Hawaiian political development from the arrival of Captain James Cook to the accession of William Lunalilo as King.

The author's account is appealing in two basic ways. First, to the general reader, de Varigny presents an informative and readable narration

without being overly sentimental or pedantic in tone or content. Generally, de Varigny was sympathetic with the Hawaiian people, even if one does not excuse his use of "Kanakas" as an occasional term of reference. He firmly believed that the Hawaiian people had "incontestable rights to live their own lives and maintain their own place in the sun," a point of considerable debate in the Pacific. Yet, de Varigny was disturbed about the social disruption which, in his opinion, was caused by the whaling fleets in the North Pacific. Hawaiian males, excited by the possibilities of adventure, left for sea, often leaving their families. He, moreover, felt that by establishing an agriculturally based economy, the ill effects of the whaling fleets could be successfully thwarted. Though de Varigny was familiar with such personalities as Robert C. Wyllie, William L. Lee, and Gerrit P. Judd, de Varigny, possibly because of his nationality, was never intimate with the founding members of the Hawaiian cabinet. Indeed, de Varigny wrote in almost despairing terms of the factional rivalry which persisted in the expatriate communities in Honolulu.

Second, to the historian, de Varigny is notable for his account of the constitutional *coup d'état* of Kamehameha V in unilaterally promulgating the 1864 Constitution. Consonant with the King's view, de Varigny was convinced that universal suffrage, the major change in the new constitution, was "too little adapted to the instinct and understanding of the natives." In addition, the long-standing office of Kuhina Nuu, once termed the "premier," had by then devolved into a "useless wheel" in the engine of state. The new constitution thus eliminated the "bizarre institutional arrangement, as queer and quaint as it was ill-defined." There are, however, curious contradictions and omissions in de Varigny's narrative. The Privy Council was described by him as a "body without much real responsibility" whose purpose was "purely consultative in function." Yet it was the Privy Council that drafted the proclamation signed by the Kuhina Nui that declared Lot Kupuaiwa as Kamehameha V, though under the existing 1852 Constitution, that authority lawfully belonged to the two houses of the legislature acting by joint ballot. Hence, the reservations concerning universal suffrage may very well have been a convenient pretext as the real *coup* was in legitimizing a dubious act of state by the promulgation of a new constitution. The question of succession, however, did not abate. Why Kamehameha V refused to marry or designate an heir during his reign has been a point of speculation which de Varigny had the opportunity to explain, but to which he only added more speculation.

Though this account is informative, it does not deal decisively with important issues in a thorough manner. Little is now known of the day-to-

day operations of government administration, record keeping and de Varigny's relationship with subordinate officials. It seems, moreover, that there was a two-tiered form of political behavior, wherein the Hawaiian and the *haole* operated in different idioms in the affairs of government. There is a definite tenor in de Varigny's discourse that Kamehameha V, as well as the other Hawaiian nobles, kept their rapidly fading political culture at a discrete distance from the eyes of all but a very few of the expatriate ministers. Though expensive, this work is a useful and entertaining account.

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