

Deryck Scarr, *Viceroy of the Pacific: The Majesty of Colour, a Life of Sir John Bates Thurston*. Canberra: Australian National University, 1980. *Pacific Research Monograph No. 4*. \$9.00.

Sir John Bates Thurston has been described as *Na Kena Vai*, the spearhead or bayonet, the Grand Panjandrum, Pooh Bah, and King of the Western Pacific. These are just a few of the names attributed to the Governor of Fiji (1887 and 1897) and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. This was a role he relished, reflecting the pinnacle of a lifetime in the Pacific. Yet he might not have gained such eminence since there was some feeling in official British circles that a governor should not be appointed from among the local population. Thurston had lived in Fiji since 1866, had acquired plantations there and had been closely involved in the local political scene before cession in the early 1870s. He had made enemies among European settlers and missionaries; he had made friends among many of the Fijians. The crowded life of this person has been recorded in two volumes by Deryck Scarr, senior fellow in Pacific history at the Australian National University. The first volume, covering Thurston's years until 1875, was published in 1973; there has been an unfortunate delay in the appearance of the continuing volume--a delay arising primarily from problems that have currently overtaken publishers around the world. The second volume covers the years from 1875, with the arrival of Governor Gordon, until Thurston's death in 1897.

Unfortunately, I found the first dozen chapters somewhat unsatisfactory. The story seemed to drag; the events often seemed inconsequential; details seemed to be recorded almost solely because the evidence had been unearthed. This arose partly from the author's style. He has relied upon a wide variety of manuscript sources, private and public, and he has

let the story unfold through quotations, sometimes longish, from private letters. In one sense this is commendable; but in another it confounds the object of presenting Thurston in a clear and living light. Indeed, seldom does Thurston's character or personality come through whether in his own correspondence or in the biographer's analysis. Rather, the reader is inclined to become lost in the plethora of detail that surrounded Thurston in the routines of his life as a politician, citizen, settler, administrator and family man. This problem seems to arise more especially in the early part of this volume partly because Thurston's role in the years before 1886 was somewhat subdued, and the reader might well be pardoned for asking of what consequence is some of the narrative as revealed in the biography.

Thurston's significance in the sphere of race relations was well established in Volume 1. In the present volume there is a continuance of this theme which emphasizes his desire to create an atmosphere of trust to protect the Fijian people. To Thurston this meant working through the great chiefs, using them in government and creating a basis of trust between the British as overlords, the Fijian chiefs as effective rulers, and the people who had traditionally occupied the land. This approach received reinforcement through the policies and rhetoric of the first governor of this new British colony. The Fijians needed to be given time to adjust, using their own agencies and talents. To Thurston this meant insulating them from the exploitation of their labor; they should not have to work for Europeans. So a local tax system was devised whereby they would have to rely upon their own labor rather than turn to wage-labor. This was to have long-term implications for the history of Fiji and its people. Indian laborers needed to be imported to help production upon the sugar plantations of the European growers while the Fijians worked for their chiefs, and themselves. This system was a source of continuing criticism by most local Europeans who argued that a form of slavery had been instituted with the Fijian chief in an all-powerful position,

From 1886 Thurston was occupying a more central place in Fijian and Pacific affairs. He was an observer and adviser on problems in Samoa and Tonga; he was involved in the expansion of British imperialism, at least indirectly, in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and the Solomon Islands; he was trying to regulate relations between Europeans in the New Hebrides. He seems to have enjoyed this position of eminence and was pleased that he could make his stamp in establishing British protectorates which allowed, again, a considerable local authority. Imperial rule should not be too heavy.

Yet, in Fijian affairs, he developed a reputation as a hard-liner. This particularly affected policy towards the Indians and also colored relations

with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company from Australia. He ran a tight administration and relieved British officialdom greatly by curbing financial extravagance. Personally he was happy that the imperial ambitions of New Zealand were kept at bay; he was succeeding in his goal of preserving Fiji for the Fijians. But his rule was not unalloyed success; there was some Fijian resentment; there were occasional resistances; the death rate problem was not solved and various criticisms of the tax system continued.

He was a strong personal ruler tempered by kindness and consideration--"velvet lay over his iron hand." This book helps fill in the details of Fijian history, through European eyes, in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is a large gap that needs to be filled, and here a start has been made. But my doubts remain as to whether a person such as Thurston, as citizen and governor, deserves two volumes to record his life. Some condensation of events is desirable--such as in chapters 18 and 21; more analysis and summarization would help in estimating the worth of this person--he is, after all, presented in the format of "the hero in history"; and a greater Fijian corrective, one can only hope, will one day emerge so that the full story of this imperial age can be understood.

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