

KORN, ALFONS L. *News From Molokai*. Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976. 345 pp. \$14.95.

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Alfons Korn, professor emeritus of English at the University of Hawaii, has provided scholars of Mormon history in Hawaii with a rich vein of high-grade ore in an area of research heretofore seriously deficient. The letters and notes in his recent *News From Molokai* encompass the lives of three Hawaiian Latter-day Saints in the latter half of the nineteenth century who collectively represent in very human terms the birth pangs of modern Hawaii and the role of the Church in that process. The three are Jonathan Napela, Koihi Unauna, and Queen Liliuokalani. In their collective story lies a great drama for both the researcher and the playwright.

The book is comprised of correspondence between Dowager Queen Emma Kaleleonalani and her cousin Peter Kaeo, both *alii*, or nobles. Their letters were written in the years 1873-76, when Peter, then a confirmed leper, had been confined to the leper settlement at Kalaupapa, Molokai. The correspondence is significant because it reflects the attitudes of two Hawaiians of noble birth during a period of political intrigue, cultural change, and new social values, "especially of the more piercing emotions that sustained some of those values, not only into the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but also very evidently beyond" (p. 278). The numerous references to Mormons and Mormonism throughout the letters suggest the depth to which these conditions and the Church intermeshed.

When Peter Kaeo arrived at Kalaupapa late in June 1873, he found Jonathan Napela and his wife, both also of chiefly lineage, already in residence. Napela, a former magistrate at Wailuku, Maui, had been one of the first Hawaiians to accept the Restored Gospel when it was taught to him by George Q. Cannon. He had become Cannon's missionary companion, helping him to translate the Book of Mormon into Hawaiian. Napela had once been involved with Walter Murray Gibson on Lanai, had lived for a time at the Mormon settlement at Laie, Oahu, and had journeyed to Salt Lake City to be ordained a high priest under the hand of Brigham Young. Now he had finally come to Kalaupapa as a *kokua* or helper to his wife who had contracted leprosy.

From the friendship which developed between Peter Kaeo and the Napelas we see a picture of Mormons caught between the new culture and the old ways, between the new religion and the traditions of their fathers.

The “existential shock and suffering of that destructive scene” in Kalaupapa (p. xxvii) are shown up here in all the horror of an archetypal night journey that competes with anything in the leprosy stories of the Bible for grotesqueness. Peter writes: “Napela has just told me that they tried a man for burying another one which was eat by the Hogs” (p. 24). Napela was involved in such trials since he was a *luna* or overseer of the settlement and responsible for the adjudication of such matters: “Napela has begun to have Beef killed at the Beach so as not to let those poor men without fingers handle the meat for those at the Beach” (p. 33).

Peter never mentions that Napela taught him Mormon doctrine, though Father Damien, the famous Catholic “leper priest of Molokai,” tried on several occasions to convert both Peter and Napela to Catholicism. For the Napelas and Peter Kaeo, religion included not only theology but politics, and they were religiously concerned about the fate of the kingdom of Hawaii. They shared many dreams and visions portending the hoped-for death of the king, Kalakaua, and the ascension of Queen Emma. “Signs, Omens, and Dreams,” Peter writes to Emma, “are the orders of the day here, and all on your behalf” (p. 186).

Peter and Napela paid frequent visits to the resident priestess, or *kahuna*, to hear her forecasts of doom and invocations of the “ancestral gods” in Emma’s behalf. They fasted and prayed together, Old Testament fashion, for divine intervention in the lives of all their enemies. The central political issue at the time was the proposed “Reciprocity Treaty” with the United States and the cession of Pearl Harbor as a naval base, and both were seen in terms of white supremacy versus Hawaiian home rule. “Mr and Mrs Napela and I are Praying every morning on your behalf, beseeching our Lord that he may . . . subdue your Enemies which infect the name of Hawaii . . .” (p. 173).

Anti-Mormons within the settlement caused Napela to be stripped of his rank as *luna* only months after his appointment. He pleaded with the Board of Health to be permitted to remain with his wife, and this was granted. Then early in 1874 Emma wrote to Peter: “Do you divine Taffy’s [Kalakaua’s] object in soliciting the Morman party, so as to secure their votes in case of anything happening to His Majesty before a successor is appointed?” (p. 169). Shortly thereafter Emma tells of a plot to poison her, allegedly perpetrated by Kalakaua, his brother, and one “Koi.”

This was Koi Unauna, a kinsman of Kalakaua, a lawyer, and a court genealogist, who was baptized a Mormon by Jonathan Napela in 1862.

A third side of the political triangle was Kalakaua's sister, Mrs. Lydia Dominis, about whom Emma loved to gossip: "Mrs Dominis has a new love, a native boy of Waikiki" (p. 88). Any such "news" about "Mrs Dominis"—fact or fiction—is of interest to Mormon scholars because she became Queen Liliuokalani upon Kalakaua's death. She was deposed in a revolution a few years later, thus ending the monarchy in Hawaii, and on 7 July 1906, while in private life at her home in Waikiki, she was baptized a member of the Church, eleven years before her death.

Though the Church has flourished in the Islands for a century and a quarter, we have not yet produced a synoptic, scholarly study of what that existence has meant. Hawaii's special situation both geographically and ethnically—its significance as a crossroads and a gathering place—suggests that the human business which has been transacted here, both in and out of the Church, has large implications for any Mormon concerned with the Pacific Islands and Asia.

When George Q. Cannon first came to these Sandwich Islands, the Savior himself appeared to him at Pulehu, Maui, to show his approval of this work. Now, as the new official history of the Church is presently being written, we must hope that the appropriate people will be concerned with the works of scholars like Alfons Korn as they strive to provide a truer view of the Hawaiian context of Mormonism.