

REVIEW

Typee, or a Peep at Polynesian Life (1846) by Herman Melville

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The Salem Advertiser (25 March 1846)

Wiley & Putnam's Library of American Books, Nos. XIII and XIV. The present numbers of this excellent and popular series, contain a very remarkable work, entitled *Typee, or a Peep at Polynesian Life*. It records the adventures of a young American who ran away from a whale ship at the Marquesas, and spent some months as the guest, or captive, of a native tribe, of which scarcely anything had been hitherto known to the civilized world. The book is lightly but vigorously written; and we are acquainted with no work that gives a freer and more effective picture of barbarian life, in that unadulterated state of which there are now so few specimens remaining. The gentleness of disposition that seems akin to the delicious climate, is shown in contrast with traits of savage fierceness;--on one page, we read of manners and modes of life that indicate a whole system of innocence and peace; and on the next, we catch a glimpse of a smoked human head, and the half-picked skeleton of what had been (in a culinary sense) a *well-dressed* man. The author's descriptions of the native girls are voluptuously colored, yet not more so than the exigencies of the subject appear to require. He has that freedom of view--it would be too harsh to call it laxity of principle--which renders him tolerant of codes of morals that may be little in accordance with our own; a spirit proper enough to a young and adventurous sailor, and which makes his book the more wholesome to our staid landmen. The narrative is skillfully managed, and in a literary point of view, the execution of the work is worthy of the novelty and interest of its subject.

anonymous review discovered by Randall Stewart
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