

*Living Among the Northland Māori: Diary of Father Antoine Garin, 1844–1846*

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If Antoine-Marie Garin is remembered today, it's likely to be in Nelson, where he was Roman Catholic parish priest for very nearly forty years (1850-89). Born in eastern France, near Lyon, in 1810 to a comfortable middle-class family, Garin trained as a priest for his local diocese but after ordination and three years of parish work he joined the new missionary order, the Society of Mary. Marist priests and brothers had already accompanied Bishop Jean-Baptiste Pompallier to Aotearoa in 1838; Garin was one of a number who arrived early in 1841. In late 1843 Garin went to Mangakāhia, to run the Kaipara mission, and it is his time there which is the subject of this book. It is worth noting here that Garin is one of a significant number of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen from around Lyon who were influential in New Zealand Catholicism, from Pompallier himself to Suzanne Aubert, and, indirectly, the founder of the Society of Mary, Jean-Claude Colin. Garin, therefore, dedicated his Mangakāhia mission to St Irenaeus, Hato Irene, as well as to the Holy Rosary, for St Irenaeus was an early second-century bishop of Lyon.

*Living Among the Northland Māori* is a large and handsome volume, and much credit is due to the editors, translators, and publishers. Garin's French is translated into clear and readable English; the paper is of high quality, and there are some attractive illustrations. A lengthy introduction serves both as a biographical and contextual essay and an assessment of Garin's diary as a historical source, and there are extensive endnotes. By far the bulk of the volume, however, consists of the diary, along with some brief letters as an appendix and the text of a lecture which Garin gave on the Northern War thirty years later.

Garin's diary is a particular type of document. For the most part it is a record of life and events at the Mangakāhia mission. It might, therefore, be thought that it's primarily a source in religious history, and certainly it is valuable in that context. However, there's also a good deal about the ordinary dimensions of daily life. In one dimension it is almost silent: it is not a personal diary, which is to say that there's little explicit religious or spiritual reflection. Garin notes the week-long retreats which he took at least annually, but records nothing about them. It's not that the diary is an official record, for he sometimes reproached himself for impatience with young Māori who were working for him in his house. I do wonder a little about one aspect in which the diary is said to be helpful. Certainly Garin often quotes conversations with Māori individuals, sometimes on matters of custom or spirituality. Do we, however, here get 'a Māori perspective', as the editors suggest, of Garin's understanding of that (p 12)? They are of course not necessarily the same thing.

The routine of mission life consisted in leading prayers, presiding at Mass, teaching and encouraging local Māori and settlers in the doctrines and practice of the Catholic faith, negotiating with both Māori and settler about the exchange of goods and services, and a good deal of time maintaining a garden for subsistence. For a bourgeois, Garin was handy with a spade and hoe. In one of the letters at the end of the book, Garin notes enjoying the life very much.

Perhaps because his religious status meant a perceived impartiality, Garin was often called on to mediate in minor disputes between Māori and European, or between Māori. Equally, he was a source of medical care for Māori and European alike, and we learn a good deal about his medicine chest, which was far from lavish. He had quickly become aware of some rongoa; he used horopito bark (and chartreuse liqueur).

The diary also suggests that Garin's approach to European and Māori alike was, as far as possible, polite and respectful (is there a hint of the manners expected of a gentleman in French society?). The diary is particularly informative on Garin's dealings with the Wesleyan missionary James Buller. The editors have helpfully included Buller's accounts of various interactions with Garin, which show Buller as rather sectarian and bigoted. Garin, by contrast, while insisting on the truth of the Catholic faith as he understood it, seems to have seldom become discourteous. Garin gives good accounts of how he explained doctrine, often using parables, and perhaps unusually for the time made a point of remaining with a gathering when 'Protestant prayers' were recited. He had polite debates with Methodists, and more complex ones with some Pākehā Catholics whom he regarded as deficient in their understanding of the sacraments (some of these wayward ones suggested that everyone should receive communion as wine as well as bread, and suggested that the Mass need not be in Latin. Their great-great grandchildren might have lived to see Vatican 2 agree with them). Garin also notes the facility of some of his Māori parishioners in religious disputation, and also leaves details of how, and where, he celebrated Mass and what obligations attached to attendance and receiving communion. He leaves competent discussions of the practical workings of tapu, and some discussion of what most Pākehā would have called Māori gods. Obligated by his job description to disapprove of some traditional practices, he appears to have approached such matters quietly.

Garin's diary gives much information about daily life for Kaipara Māori. As well as often mediating in relationship disputes, he was obliged to advise one local Pākehā that he would not be permitted to marry the young Māori woman he'd been intending to because he beat her. This prohibition was declared by the young woman's mother. Garin relates the complexities of gift exchange: for much of his meat he depended on local Māori, but sometimes this became awkward, for he was presented with more pork or pigeons than he could immediately use (the usual return was in tobacco, clothing, and musket caps). He recorded a good understanding of the imperatives of reciprocity and at least intuitively understood that maintaining relationships was the point. He was touchingly naïve about the way in which young Māori men and women enjoyed each other's company, gently advising what he regarded as modest behaviour and sometimes expressing chagrin at people singing love songs (ruriruri) immediately after Mass. Unsurprisingly, some of his parishioners were amazed that he willingly embraced celibacy.

The most serious event in the North during Garin's time there, of course, was the Northern War, provoked by FitzRoy's unwise response to Hone Heke's views about flagpoles. Garin was not directly involved in the fighting, even as an eyewitness, but he left extensive records of the tension, some accounts of fighting, and above all of the determination which he and, apparently, rangatira in his district shared to prevent the war spreading. Thus he maintained a strict neutrality.

The diary finishes suddenly in September 1846. Shortly thereafter, Garin was transferred to Auckland, and in 1850 to Nelson. The latter move was a result of the division of New Zealand into two Catholic dioceses, with the southern one extending from the middle of the North Island. Pompallier had fallen out with the Marists, who were moved to the southern diocese under Phillippe Viard. Colin had thought that Garin would have been a good bishop for Port Nicholson, and this diary (as well as Garin's record in Nelson) suggests that he was right. But the loss of the experienced Marist missionaries perhaps did the Catholic church in the north no favours.

Garin's diary, then, will have a number of audiences. It is a valuable record of daily life in a Catholic mission, as it is of the Kaipara region in the 1840s. In that context, the picture is one of Māori as very much still in charge of their own lives - as is Edward Shortland's almost contemporaneous *Southern Districts of New Zealand*. It would have been good to have had some maps. With the exception of the Northern War, this diary is not a record of great events, but its author comes across as a patient, pragmatic missionary with an enviably robust constitution and an equally enviable equable temperament – a likeable man.