

'From the Black Rocks on Friday': more than a bibliographical footnote

R. M. ROSS & A. G. BAGNALL

Shortly before her death Ruth Ross asked A. G. Bagnall to write up background material she had accumulated on the authorship of 'From the Black Rocks on Friday'. Dr Bagnall has written the introduction and section II; section I is from Ruth Ross's draft. Ed.

The late A. H. Reed, in 1950, republished under the auspices of the Dunedin Public Library Association two stories which had appeared in Charles Dickens's periodical *All the Year Round* in May 1862 and April 1864. In his introduction to the first sketch, 'From the Black Rocks on Friday', Mr Reed discussed the two obvious problems which the work presents, the identity of the author, and of the island which is the setting for its principal event.

The story describes how an English clergyman, as the narrator refers to himself, leaves the Bay of Islands in a small boat on a lone fishing expedition. By the evening of the following day wind and current have brought him to one of a group of islands of whose existence he knew from local Maoris. He is obliged to remain and after some months of Crusoe-like existence is eventually rescued by a Maori chief whom he knows.

Despite enquiries to a number of libraries with Dickens collections such as the Huntington, Mr Reed was unable to resolve the problem of authorship. Somewhat boldly he did enlarge on a theory of his own that the island to which the clerical fisherman had drifted was Raoul or Sunday Island in the Kermadecs. Such a hypothesis, if correct, would imply a journey that would have taxed the best navigational skills of an early Polynesian and required considerable luck; it also ignored the time constraints of the story itself which should have been apparent.

Reed's reprint was included in the retrospective *National Bibliography* as F838, but beyond my display of scepticism concerning its author (in choosing to enter it under its title) I had nothing to add. Regrettably my probable over-reaction to Reed's treatment led me to ignore customary bibliographic curiosity and hence fail to consult the one person who could have given an immediate lead by the time the volume concerned was going to press. In fact it was ten years later, on 5 December 1979, that,