

*Lady's Magazine*¹¹ there is no hint anywhere that these epistolary efforts, or hoaxes, were used to impress the outside world. So the mystery remained unexplained.

The fact that the solution had all along remained hidden in Micro MS 303 provides this student with a salutary lesson in the need to search for even the most hidden clues, and to scrutinise even the most indecipherable microfilm. In this case however negligence, not virtue, has been rewarded. Thanks to the miracle of modern techniques of reproduction I now have before me Xerox copies of the manuscripts presented by Dr Petersen which are more legible than the original and far less tiring to the eyes than the difficult microfilm version. With this assistance a faint note added to Tuai's letter to Pratt of 26 June 1818 becomes transparently clear. It is apparently written by someone in the C.M.S. office, and reads:

Note by Mr Hall:

'The words of these Letters are their own. I was their amanuensis, & put them down on a slate, from which they copied them; but they cannot read what they have written.'

F.H.'

Maori skill in mimicry and imitation was attested by many visitors; Hongi Hika's carving of a bust by himself won general admiration; but there could surely be no more remarkable illustration of patient workmanship than the achievement of these two young men in transcribing exactly, down to the last punctuation point, a script which they did not understand. If the explanation of how the letters came to be written is hardly more credible than the suspicion of a hoax it does nevertheless explain the distinctive difference in handwriting between the letters written at Madeley and those from London and the *Baring*; it confirms the graphologist's assertion that the letters by Tuai and Titeri, though copied from one man's careful script, were themselves written down by different hands; it supports Tuai's statement that he could neither read nor write – even though he exaggerated (after his usual manner) when he professed ignorance of what the letters contained.

There is another, perhaps even more remarkable, aspect of the affair. By the middle of January 1819 when the last letter was written, Tuai had spent most of the preceding five years in Australia and England and Titeri all the previous three. They were both of above average intelligence. Perhaps, by the end of their stay in England, they could read a few more words than they had learnt after three or four months at Madeley (and after their longer periods under Marsden's care). Probably the business of copying had become easier: the writing has certainly become more flowing, though whether this merely represented a more flowing style on the slate one does not know. But the