

“MAD JACK” and the MISSIONARIES

The Pacific Ocean is vast and lonely. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, when the American whaling industry was expanding rapidly in that great sea and American merchant ships plied the lucrative China trade, they ventured in an area where no nation's law extended. The United States naval force in the Pacific totalled at most three vessels, all well occupied in protecting American interests on the coasts of Peru and Chile in the midst of Bolivar's revolution.

This situation was an invitation to the strong and ruthless. Whalers and traders commonly lost men by desertion at the islands and had to recruit their crews from men who had deserted from other ships. Deeds of violence were not uncommon, but the worst to date was the bloody mutiny aboard the American whaleship *Globe*.

Globe had sailed from Nantucket in December, 1822. One year later, on her second call at the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii), six of her men deserted and one was discharged. *Globe's* captain, Thomas Worth, filled out his crew with seven men “from the beach” at Oahu. The ship was not more than a month at sea when, on the night of January 25, 1824, four of these men joined Samuel Comstock, a boatsteerer, in seizing *Globe* and murdering her four officers. The mutineers, with the re-



Hiram Bingham and his wife, Sybil, by Samuel F. B. Morse

mainder of the crew afraid to defy them, took the ship to the Mulgrave Islands (now Mili Atoll), where they arrived on February 14. Three days later Comstock was killed by his fellow mutineers. That night, six crewmen who were not involved in the mutiny cut *Globe's* cable and escaped. They left nine men behind on the island, five of whom were nonmutineers. None of the men on *Globe* was a navigator, but after four months of wandering the ship made Valparaiso. There the United States consul, Michael Hogan, interviewed the sailors and, after manning *Globe* with a new crew, sent the six men home aboard her to stand trial. The men were exonerated, but the story they

told when *Globe* returned to Nantucket in November, 1824, set off an outcry for punishment of the mutineers and for protection of American vessels in the Pacific. The citizens of Nantucket and New Bedford petitioned first the outgoing President, James Monroe, and then his successor, John Quincy Adams, for an increased naval force in the Pacific and for a warship to visit the Sandwich Islands. The latter request was seconded by American merchants trading at the islands, who were experiencing difficulty in collecting their debts from the native rulers.

As a result, Commodore Isaac Hull, commanding the

*Hell broke loose in Honolulu
when Captain Percival gave
his men shore leave in 1826*

American squadron in the Pacific, ordered the schooner *Dolphin* to prepare for a cruise among the islands. Her first mission was to visit the Mulgraves and collect any of *Globe's* men who might still be there; her second was to call at the Sandwich Islands, try to put some curb on desertions there, and do whatever could be done to help the merchants and whalers at Honolulu. Since no American warship had yet visited those islands, Hull ordered *Dolphin's* commander, Lieutenant John Percival, to learn something of their government and its attitude toward the United States, and to find out whether American vessels were being granted the same privileges as those of other nations.

Dolphin's commander was the very person of the sea dog. Massachusetts-born, Percival had gone to sea at thirteen, been impressed into the Royal Navy, and escaped to join the American service in time for the quasi-war with France. Demobilized in the peace establishment of 1801, he returned to the merchant service, where he earned a remarkable reputation for feats of seamanship including—or so he claimed—the navigation of a ship from Africa to Pernambuco, Brazil, with his entire crew sick or dead of fever.

In 1809 Percival rejoined the American Navy and once again, during the War of 1812, came up “through



The governor of Oahu, Boki, and his wife, Liliha, by John Hayter

the hawse-hole” from sailing master to lieutenant.

He and Hull had become friends while serving together at Boston, and in 1823 Percival went out as first lieutenant of Hull's flagship, *United States*, leaving a new bride at home. In the Pacific he took command of *Dolphin*.

John Percival was then forty-four years old. Although an affable man under most circumstances, he was fiery tempered. His rages, quickly triggered and as quickly ended, had earned him the name of “Mad Jack” or “Crazy Jack” among the sailors. He was a great favorite with the men, who accepted his swearing as a mark of affection; he shared the cabin wines with the sick, and when there were fresh provisions to be distributed, the men on the

gun deck shared equally with the officers.

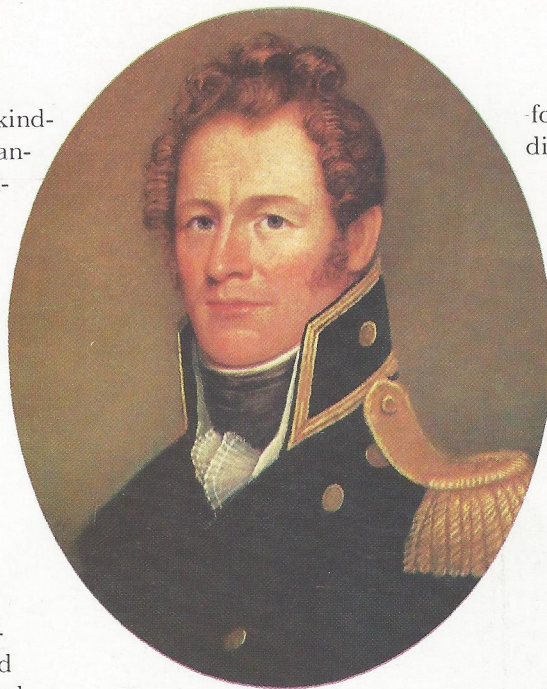
Percival's methods were unconventional, as might be expected of a naval officer who had begun his career as a sailing master. A colleague described him as “the roughest old devil that ever was in his manners, but a kind, good hearted man at bottom.” Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was to meet Percival at the Boston Navy Yard in later years, thought he saw “an eccentric expression in his face, which seemed partly wilful, partly natural. . . . He seems to have moulded and shaped himself to his own whims, till a sort of rough affectation has become

thoroughly imbued throughout a kindly nature." Mad Jack's peculiar manner, coupled with his extreme sensitivity for his own and his country's honor, was to be a large factor in the events of the cruise to come.

Dolphin sailed from Chorillos, Peru, on August 18, 1825. Reaching the Mulgraves in November, she proceeded to search among the islands of the atoll, and after ten days found Cyrus Hussey and William Lay, the only survivors of the nine men left by *Globe*. The rest had been killed by the natives, who, provoked by the mutineers' flaunting of firearms and their seizure of women, massacred them with spears, stones, and hatchets. Hussey and Lay, aged twenty and eighteen respectively, were saved by native couples who wished to adopt them as sons. Neither was implicated in the mutiny. Percival took them aboard, to the great sorrow of their island parents, and after showing the flag among the islands for about a month, stood for Honolulu, where he anchored on January 14, 1826.

As *Dolphin* came up the harbor that Saturday noon, she was saluted by the guns of the fort at Honolulu and those of the ships anchored in the harbor—the American traders *Parthian*, *Convoy*, *Tamaahmaah*, *Owhyee*, *Harbinger*, and *Waverly*, and the British merchantman *Kiel*. The placid village that greeted the eyes of the sea-weary sailors was made up of about 150 thatched houses and a few buildings of frame or stone, the whole surrounded by fish ponds and taro patches. In the eastern quarter rose the unfinished stone walls of a church. But Percival soon found that this hospitable-looking place was as riddled with tensions and scandals as the New England villages he had left behind. The white residents, who numbered between one and two hundred, were divided into hostile factions engaged in a struggle for control of the government, and each faction hoped to make the visit of *Dolphin* work to its own advantage.

The first group whom Percival met were the resident merchants. They came down to greet him as he landed with First Lieutenant Hiram Paulding and Purser John Bates. The delegation was led by Dixey Wildes, partner in the Boston firm of Marshall and Wildes, and by Eliab Grimes, captain of Marshall and Wildes's brig *Owhyee*. These gentlemen escorted the American officers to their house—commonly called "the wooden house" because it was one of only two or three frame dwellings in Honolulu



Dolphin's captain, John "Mad Jack" Percival

for an impromptu reception. After dinner Paulding and Bates visited the house of Stephen Reynolds, a testy merchant from New England, and later Bates accompanied Reynolds to a luau. No doubt the company was entertained by the hula, although Reynolds explained to the purser that the missionaries had tried to abolish it. Percival was quite soon made aware of these missionaries, who formed another of the warring factions of Oahu. They were a New England group, sent to the islands in 1820 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. [See "The Isles Shall Wait for His Law" in the February, 1960, *AMERICAN HERITAGE*.] Their self-appointed leader was Hiram Bingham, a thirty-seven-year-old Vermonter. Bingham, while doubtless sincere, had an overbearing manner and was known, even among his fellow missioners, as "Pope." What the merchants called him had best be left unsaid; one printable comment was that of Reynolds, who called him "the most impudent puppy I have seen for many a day."

The American missionaries were strict Calvinists who regarded the islands as an unspoiled wilderness filled with pliable heathens waiting to be molded into a kind of utopian commonwealth. So they set out to convince the bewildered natives of their innate and hopeless depravity, and to persuade them to give up dancing and drinking in favor of prayer and meditation. Bingham soon concentrated his proselytizing efforts upon a few of the chiefs, leaving the ordinary *kanakas* to follow the example that he hoped would be set by their leaders. His principal disciples were Kalanimoku, popularly known as "Billy Pitt," and his sister, the dowager queen Kaahumanu, widow of Kamehameha I, who together acted as regents for the boy king Kamehameha III. Both the youth's father (Kamehameha II) and his mother had died in England in 1824 while on a visit there. Billy Pitt and Kaahumanu were the two most powerful chiefs in the islands. One-eyed and dropsical, Billy Pitt was usually ill and always indolent; he acquiesced cheerfully in the missionaries' demands so long as no great effort was required of him. The haughty Kaahumanu, resistant at first, eventually became a model convert, zealous to spread the teachings of her savior—Bingham.

One of the first orders of business was the elimination of the native costume—a *pa'u* (a short skirt, usually made

of tapa cloth) and a *kihei* (a kind of cape or mantle thrown loosely over the shoulders)—because it was too “revealing” by Puritan standards. While Bingham toiled with Kaahumanu over the letters of the alphabet, Mrs. Bingham and the other ladies of the mission plied their needles over the many yards of black silk needed to clothe the three-hundred-pound dowager from wrist to ankle in proper New England fashion. (All the Hawaiian chiefs at this period were large—tall, big boned, and very stout—doubtless because they had nothing to do and plenty to eat.)

So well had the missionaries succeeded in Calvinizing Oahu that when the Russian traveller Otto von Kotzebue, who had visited the islands in February, 1825, returned to Honolulu the following September, he viewed the change with horror:

The inhabitants of every house or hut in Hanaruro [Honolulu] are compelled by authority to an almost endless routine of prayers; and even the often dishonest intentions of the foreign settlers must be concealed under the veil of devotion. The streets, formerly so full of life and animation, are now deserted; games of all kinds, even the most innocent, are sternly prohibited; singing is a punishable offence; and the consummate profligacy of attempting to dance would certainly find no mercy. On Sunday, no cooking is permitted, nor must even a fire be kindled: nothing, in short, must be done; the whole day is devoted to prayer, with how much real piety may be easily imagined.

But these moralistic decrees were not the only basis for the objections of the merchants to Bingham. One of his greatest offenses in their eyes was that he tried to give the natives some idea of the proper value of trade goods so that the merchants could no longer cheat them.

On December 12, 1825, a meeting of the chiefs had been called at Honolulu to discuss Bingham's suggestion that the Decalogue be made the law of the islands. Billy Pitt and the dowager queen Kaahumanu favored the proposal; Boki, their brother and the governor of Oahu, opposed it, as did the traders, who angrily accused Bingham of trying to control the government. The proposal was shelved for the time being, but the atmosphere between merchants and missionaries was still seething when *Dolphin* dropped anchor in the roads.

On Sunday, January 15, *Dolphin* made the customary salute to the fort at Honolulu, and Percival was surprised that it was not returned. When the salute was answered



The 300-pound queen, Kaahumanu (“Feather Cloak”)

on the following day, it was accompanied by an explanation that saluting on Sunday was a violation of the Sabbath. Percival began to smell a rat—or at least a missionary—in what he considered a deliberate insult to the flag of the United States. His pique was increased when on Tuesday the missionaries and their client chiefs failed to attend a party given on board *Dolphin*. The only prominent chief in attendance was Boki, who had accompanied Kamehameha II to England a few years earlier, had no illusions about the perfection of moral life in Christian countries, and had resisted Bingham's attempts to convert him, explaining that he had already been baptized in the Church of England. Boki appeared attired in the splendor of a British major general's uniform and attached himself to *Dolphin's* officers as

a friend. Most of the ship's officers established quarters ashore—Midshipmen Charles Davis and C. H. McBlair at Reynolds' house, Lieutenant William Homer, Purser Bates, and Percival himself at the wooden house of Captain Wildes. Since at this time a man could acquire a “wife” in the islands simply by casting a piece of tapa over her in the presence of witnesses, and could dismiss her at pleasure, it is not unlikely that some or all of *Dolphin's* officers soon had “wives” on shore. Money passed hands during such liaisons, most of it apparently going to the island chiefs. The schooner was soon brought to the town dock (a hulk sunk near the fort) for repairs, and the sailors too were able to avail themselves of female companionship. All the “Dolphins” settled in for a pleasant stay at the islands.

This round of pleasure was interrupted on Friday, January 27, by the arrival of the pilot boat from Maui with news that the ship *London* of New York had been wrecked on Lanai. Since *Dolphin* had her foremast out, Percival hired the brig *Convoy*, one of Marshall and Wildes's ships, to go to the assistance of *London*.

Percival spent about a week at Lanai helping *London's* master, Alfred P. Edwards, salvage as much as possible from the wreck. While he was away the situation at Honolulu heated up even further. Exactly what happened is not entirely clear, but it appears that a taboo on women visiting the ships in the harbor, which had been proclaimed before *Dolphin's* arrival, began to be more strictly enforced. Several girls were imprisoned at the fort for violating the taboo, and the seamen aboard

Dolphin and the various whalers and merchant ships in the port began to find “wives” much harder to obtain except on the occasions when they received shore leave. When Percival returned to Honolulu on February 5, a delegation from the forecandle called on him to ask his assistance in having the taboo lifted. Percival promised to do what he could.

Mad Jack correctly suspected that the instigator of the taboo was Hiram Bingham. The missionaries had been delighted to learn on their arrival in the islands that the old pagan custom of taboo had been abolished. Virtually all life had been controlled by the system, and the punishment for violating it—for such an offense as letting a dog bark during a period of ritual silence—was torture and death. The missionaries had since found, however, that the taboo could be a useful tool in combating practices (including the hula) that they wished to see abolished. They viewed the sexual freedom of the natives as “lewdness,” and in December Bingham had persuaded Kaahumanu that such practices should be taboo.

Up to now Mad Jack’s contacts with the missionaries had been reasonably cordial, so far as they went. On January 23 Mr. Bingham had acknowledged with thanks Percival’s gift of a cask of wine, and two days later Perci-

val took morning coffee with the Bingham and another couple, who were visiting from a mission assignment at Maui. On this occasion Percival talked expansively of his voyages, and it would appear from their later remarks that the missionaries regarded him as peculiar. In any event, when he brought his men to meeting on Sunday he found himself snubbed, and he was soon grumbling to the white residents that Bingham and his friends were “a set of damned schoolmasters.”

After the sailors’ complaint about the taboo against women visiting the ships, Percival remarked privately to Paulding that “the sailors would serve the missionaries right if they were to tear down their houses.” Then, on February 20, a number of women were taken from their white “husbands” and put to work at carrying stone to complete the new church. One of the women was Paulding’s “wife”; another was one of the Holmes girls, a white resident’s half-breed daughter who was said to be Percival’s “wife.” This raised the captain’s temper to the boiling point.

On February 22, after saluting the fort in honor of Washington’s birthday, Percival went to call on the dowager queen. He had convinced himself that his honor and the honor of the United States were at stake, because *Dolphin* was being denied an indulgence that had been granted the previous year to the British frigate *Blonde*. The dialogue with Kaahumanu, conducted through an interpreter, has been variously reported. Something like the following seems to have taken place:

Percival: “Who governs the Islands?”

Kaahumanu: “The young king.”

Percival: “And who governs him?”

Kaahumanu: “I do.”

Percival: “And who governs you?”

Kaahumanu (piously): “My God.”

Percival (pointing a finger scornfully): “You lie, you damned old bitch! Mr. Bingham governs you!”

Percival also told Kaahumanu, apparently as a bluff: “Take heed. My people will come: if the women are not forthcoming they will not obey my word. . . . By and by they will come to get women, and if they do not obtain them, they will fight, and my vessel is just like fire.”

This simmering pot came to a boil at last on the morning of Sunday, February 26, when Percival boarded *Dolphin* for a muster. Several men who had caused trouble on shore the previous Sunday were again requesting liberty, but he ordered them to remain on board. Liberty was granted to the usual number of seamen—about twenty-seven, perhaps a third of the ship’s company—and Percival admonished them to go to meeting, stay sober, and return on board promptly.

But the dozen or more grog shops of Honolulu were hospitable, and in the course of the afternoon some of *Dolphin*’s men paid them extended visits. There they

HONOLULU ACADEMY OF ARTS



*Kamehameha III, boy king of Hawaii, was painted by Robert Dampier, who visited the islands shortly before *Dolphin* arrived.*



Merchantmen and whalers found Honolulu a most pleasant port-of-call. C. E. Bensell, who visited the city in 1821, painted this view.

found sailors from the whaling ships, and the two groups commiserated with one another on their troubles with the missionaries. The discussion waxed hot, and presently several of the whalers and a number of "Dolphins" picked up clubs and set off for the Mission House.

On the way there they passed the new house of Billy Pitt, a substantial stone structure with a forty-foot verandah across its front. The rioters stopped long enough to smash the verandah windows and frighten a group assembling upstairs for evening worship. Bingham had left the house ahead of the mob and raced home by a back way, but finding that his wife had prudently locked the door, he returned to Billy Pitt's yard, with the rioters now on his heels. The native converts, seeing Bingham surrounded by the seamen, intervened, and there was a small scuffle from which Bingham escaped and returned to his house. This time Mrs. Bingham let him in.

Just then Percival, with two of *Dolphin's* midshipmen, McBlair and Schermerhorn, rushed into the yard, roaring "I'll teach you to disgrace us!" and laying about him with his cane. With the help of the natives the officers seized and bound every sailor in sight and sent them on

board *Dolphin*. Two of the men carried off a third, who had been knocked out by a club. Bingham leaned out of a window and shouted that the clubbed seaman had been killed (for so it appeared, although the man did not die) by another of the sailors, and not by a native. "I wish they were all killed," Percival retorted.

When the men had been secured and the excitement had passed, Percival returned to call on Bingham. He assured the missionary that the damage caused by the rioters would be repaired but pointed out that the decree against shipboard fraternization was the source of the trouble. He reminded Bingham that prostitution was common enough in America and England and accused him of interfering with the government of the islands by putting forth the Decalogue as law. Bingham denied it, but Percival said, "You are going on too fast; you will have a terrible reaction shortly. . . . The tabu must come off. I will not leave the islands until it is taken off; I would rather have my hands tied or even cut off and be carried home maimed as a criminal than to have it said that Lord Byron [captain of the *Blonde*] was allowed a privilege greater than was allowed me."

Next morning Bingham, at Percival's invitation, boarded *Dolphin* to help single out the rioters for punishment. He declined, however, to witness the flogging, saying as he went over the side, "I hope they lay it on well."

From that day until *Dolphin* sailed, none of her seamen was allowed on shore. But within a few days the nervous Governor Boki lifted the taboo for the duration of her stay. Meanwhile, as a result of the rioting, Percival on March 3 sent a letter to other commanders in the port:

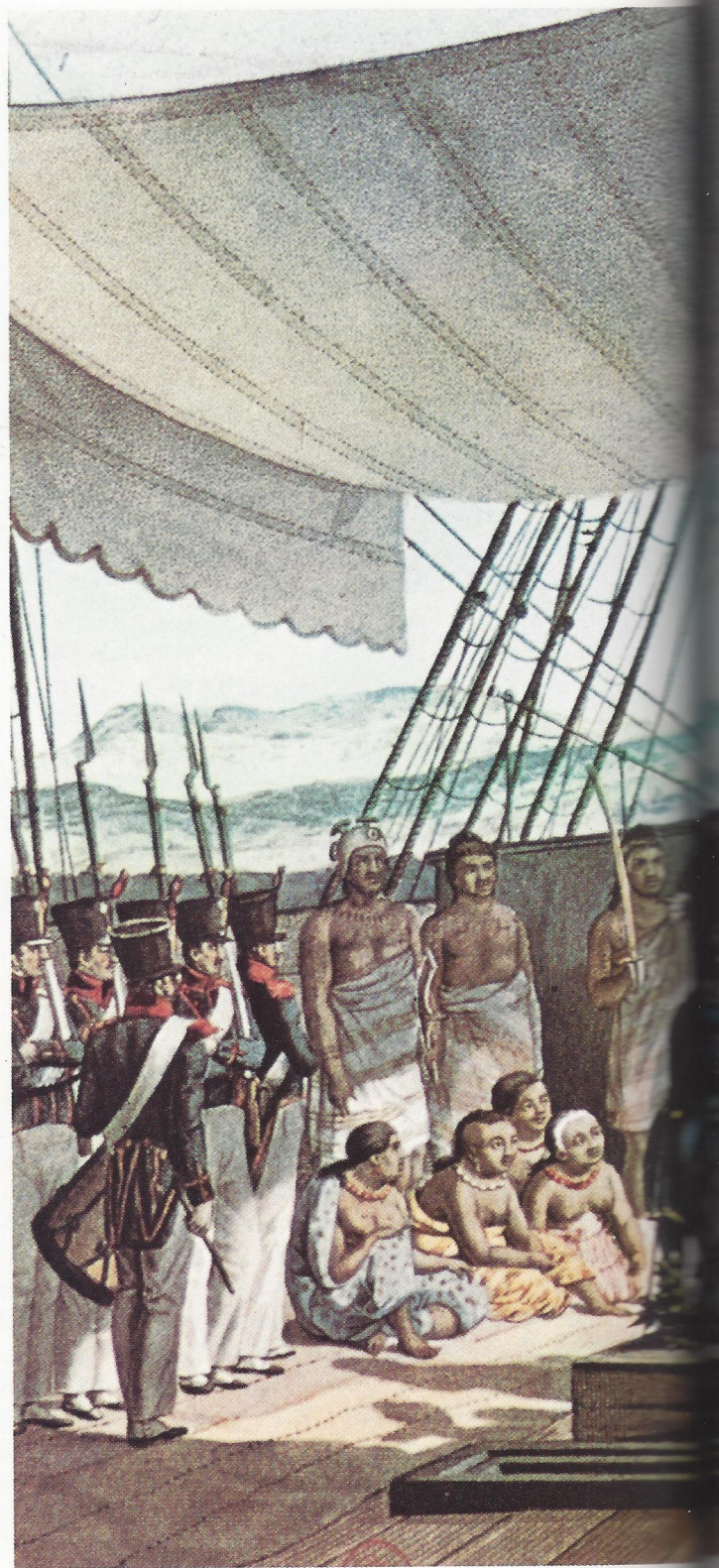
The excitement of the Seamen towards Mr. Bingham who is at the head of the Missionaries at this Island is such, and from the recent outrage committed by them from the belief he has interfered with some of the Civil regulations of this place, and thereby deprived them of an enjoyment they have always been in the participation of, when they visit this Island: I have to request you will let but a small proportion of your Crew come on shore on Sunday. By complying with this request you will aid my wishes in preventing anxiety to the Missionary family.

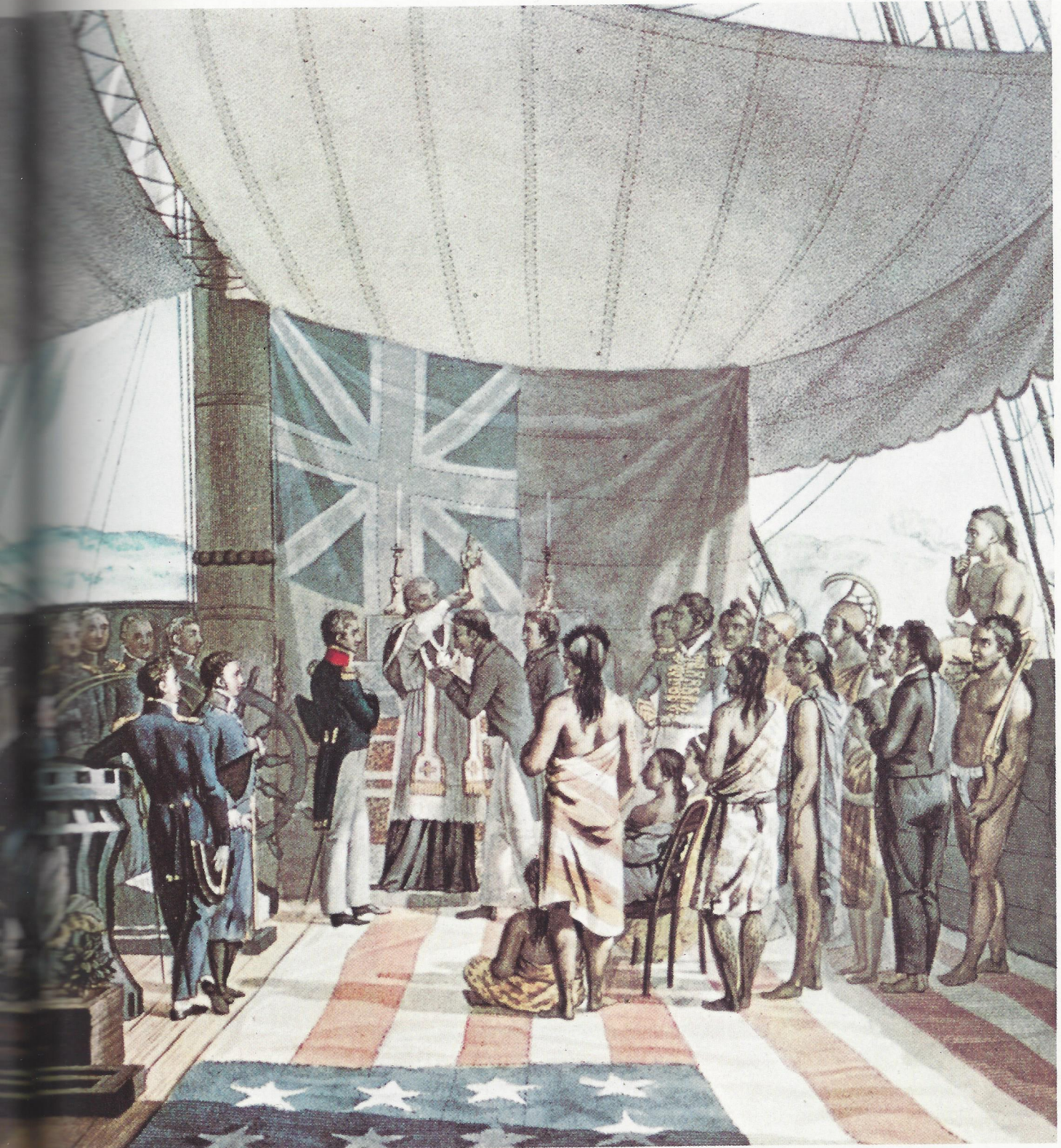
Bingham, however, while he may have felt less anxious, contrived to take umbrage at the letter, inferring that the "enjoyment" mentioned by Percival could mean only one thing. He spent a good part of the next several months in preparing charges against *Dolphin's* commander, to be forwarded to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. These, together with charges brought by Edwards, ex-captain of *London*, were to cause considerable trouble for Percival on his return to the United States.

For Percival was also engaged in a quarrel with Edwards, which began to wax hotter just as his imbroglio with the missionaries seemed to be cooling off. A sharp character, Edwards had been transporting a large amount of uninsured specie aboard *London*; he hoped, by concealing its presence from his underwriters, to avoid paying the portion of the salvage charges that should have accrued to it. Percival, who had taken charge of the specie as a favor to him, got wind of this and refused to relinquish the money until a written accounting of it had been made, and until the bill for charter of *Convoy* (\$815) had been paid.

While this matter was still being argued, Edwards made arrangements to charter the native-owned brig *Becket* to take himself and crew, his remaining cargo, and the specie to China. Percival was called upon to witness the charter, but upon reading it he discovered that it had been drawn in such a way that the United States was made guarantor of payment. Accordingly, he declined to witness the document. Edwards snapped that he had merely come for Percival's signature and not to discuss the terms of the charter. This sneer lit the fuse to the Percival temper. Mad Jack called Edwards a few choice names, among the mildest of which were "liar" and "scoundrel," and then collared him and threatened to throw him over a balustrade.

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Kalanimoku (Billy Pitt), at the time minister to Kamehameha II, wore European garb to be baptized as a Roman Catholic in 1819 aboard the French exploration ship L'Uranie. The quarter-deck was rather strangely decorated with flags for the occasion, most improperly in the case of the Stars and Stripes. Jacques Arago, the expedition's draftsman, who painted the ceremony, recalled that several of the king's wives preferred to sit on the deck. Later, Protestant missionaries accepted Billy Pitt's baptism as valid, and he took communion in their church.