

The Letters of Thomas Arnold the Younger (1850-1900). Edited by James Bertram. Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1980. 276pp. N.Z. price: \$25.00.

THIS IS the second collection of the letters of Thomas Arnold edited by Professor Bertram. It begins where the *New Zealand Letters* left off, with Arnold a recently appointed inspector of schools in Van Diemen's Land. Tom, aged 26, had just met and fallen in love with Julia Sorell, grand-daughter of a former governor of the colony. A period of religious doubt was just three years behind and Tom seemed well adjusted to his scepticism. Two hundred and eighty letters and half a century later the book ends with Tom's death. In these fifty years Arnold had married twice, had fathered nine children, made a substantial contribution to Australian education, been a schoolmaster, writer and academic in Ireland and England, had fought a long battle to keep his family solvent, recovered his Christian faith, become a Roman Catholic, reverted to Anglicanism, and returned to Roman Catholicism. Tom may have been a minor Victorian figure compared with his father or his brother Matthew, but given such a life and given the family's literary flair, his letters could hardly be uninteresting. As a bonus we have them expertly edited and introduced. Credit must also go to the publishers for the presentation. Everything about the book is well done.

Specialists will doubtless fix upon particular aspects of the letters, such as the six and a half years in Tasmania or Tom's relationship with his daughter Mary, writer of that late-Victorian best-seller *Robert Elsmere*, or with Cardinal Newman, who Arnold described as his 'spiritual father'. But for the general reader the letters which will stay most in the memory are probably those which give a portrait of the first marriage. Tom was a shy man, afflicted almost to the end by a stutter, but he was also ingenuous, and as Professor Bertram says, he held very little back in his letters. It was a love match between Tom Arnold and Julia Sorell but they were unsuited both by family background and by temperament. Tom regretted the narrowness of Julia's mind, she resented that he was not a better provider and that his quixotic behaviour thwarted her social ambition. Compounding these differences was religion: Julia was a fierce anti-papist. When Tom was received as a Catholic she threw stones through the window of the Hobart Town church where the ceremony was being held.

The letters for all their intimacy fall short of providing a complete history of Arnold's religious opinions. We do not learn why he became convinced of the truth of Catholicism in 1854, why he began the drift to liberalism at the end of his first Catholic period, why he was prepared to remain an Anglican for nearly ten years after he moved out of this liberal phase and recovered a sense of God's presence. This is a pity, for obviously a complete understanding of Tom's 'passages' would illuminate the religious unsettlement of the age. On the personal side we do not get a rounded picture of the relationship between Tom and Julia: we do not hear how Julia could, in the words of Cardinal Newman, 'nag, nag, nag'. Above all we learn nothing of the woman who was to become his second wife, Josephine Benison. Since she was a longtime friend and seems to have been a confidant on religious matters, Tom's letters to Josephine may prove to be as important for the religious historian as anything in this volume. Professor Bertram was not given access to these letters but they are likely to be published independently. In the meantime we have a checklist of these letters as well as the

others that have been located by Professor Bertram. The list, 430 in all, attests the thoroughness with which he has gone about his work.

HUGH JACKSON

Auckland University

Lightning Meets the West Wind: the Malaita Massacre. By Roger Keesing and Peter Corris. Oxford, Melbourne, 1980. 219pp. Australian price: \$14.95.

ON 3 OCTOBER 1927 a group of Kwaio people on Malaita, one of the Solomon Islands, challenged the might of the British Empire—or, at least, the local manifestation of it. Under the leadership of Basiana, a noted *ramo*, or fighting man, they massacred a tax-collecting party led by District Officer William Bell. They paid, and their descendants have continued to pay, a terrible price for their temerity. It was not that they did not realize that the *pax Britannica* rested on, and if challenged would be reimposed by, force. Rather, like various other patriots—the Maori of the King movement, the Zulu under Tshaka, the generations of Irish nationalists—they so valued their autonomy and their inherited way of life that they preferred to sacrifice themselves, instead of meekly submitting to an alien invader who threatened to destroy all that most mattered to them. Keesing and Corris make this point clearly. Fundamentally, the attack on Bell was in defence of freedom and independence and sovereignty; and the impulse that gave rise to it was only satisfied by the decolonization of the Solomons in 1978.

The primary interest of this history of the event lies not in the generalities it illustrates but in the details of time, place and personality which the authors present in abundance and with dramatic skill. They focus on the figures of Basiana and Bell and, in a manner reminiscent of Thornton Wilder in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, seek to explain what brought these two outstanding individuals to their fateful last meeting in the tax-house at Gwee'abe. There is a pervasive sense of inevitability, akin to that of classical tragedy.

Bell stood apart from other Europeans in the Solomons. Not only did he avoid them socially (he was a non-drinker) but he disdained their racist values and did not see it as his task to promote their interests at the expense of those of the islanders. He knew Malaita well and genuinely respected the people. Thus, he strongly opposed the introduction of a poll-tax, which he saw (quite rightly) as a device for forcing young men into wage labour on plantations. Yet once it was enacted into law his sense of official duty prevailed. He collected the tax efficiently and as part of a campaign for bringing 'law and order' to Malaita. In 1927 he ordered that all rifles be turned in at the tax collection.

This was the ultimate challenge to the power of the *ramo*, and it was taken up by Basiana. Some who had at first supported him drifted away at the thought of the possible consequences, but Basiana held firm. He split Bell's skull with the barrel of his rifle.

And the consequences? The ring leaders were hanged in the 'capital', Tulagi, where, sixty years after the last public execution in England (that of the Fenian