

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

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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

bomber Michael Barrett in 1868), Basiana's two young sons were forced to witness their father's execution. Moreover, the Kwaio country was devastated by a brutal punitive expedition. In this the colonial administration aided by indigenous rivals of the Kwaio and by a whisky-sodden 'army' of planters and traders supported by the Australian warship *Adelaide*, sought not so much to avenge Bell as to defend the sacred principle of British ascendancy.

To tell their story Keesing and Corris have drawn extensively on the recollections of people who observed or participated in the attack or its aftermath. These include Basiana's son, Laefi, and the now celebrated novelist Xavier Herbert, who was working as a pharmacist in Tulagi at the time of the executions. The result is a well-rounded piece of history in which the documentary sources (which present an official's eye view of the massacre) are balanced by the views of those who were closest to the affair and so were in the best position to know what happened and why. The oral sources unlocked by Keesing's knowledge of the Kwaio language make it possible to see the event from 'below', while the documents enable it to be set within the context of the administration's general ignorance of, fear of, and lack of concern for its colonial subjects.

As an account of a dramatic event, as a contribution to our understanding of the larger question of the nature (fallen?) and merits (few?) of colonial rule and as the result of a successful mingling of historical techniques, this book deserves a wide readership. Anyone who has occasionally wondered why those who lived under colonial rule have commonly been 'ungrateful' for what they have received should be enlightened by Laefi's account of his father's death:

When they were going to hang our father, they took us to him. The Government stood us in front of him. The Government said they were going to make us see the hanging, as a lesson to us. 'This is to make you see what happens. You two might want to kill (to avenge him)'. The Government was treating us cruelly making us see our father being killed. We were the only people there. Some white men and the natives who did the hanging were the only other ones. Anifelo and I were made to stand there with the hanging party when they were hanged. My father first, then Ruita, then Fairi'ia, then . . . [he began to sob . . .] I was only about seven years old.

It is little wonder that the Kwaio supported the Maasina Rule nationalist movement of the 1940s.

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Divorce in New Zealand; a social history. By Roderick Phillips. Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1981. Price: \$10.95.

THE NEW HISTORY has been slow to come to New Zealand. It is then exciting when a historian who has made a central contribution to the new European social history turns his attention to this country. Dr Phillips has a comparative background and skills in the methods of the new social history which few New Zealand historians possess. *Divorce in New Zealand* is thoroughly professional in both content and style. The form of the book is impeccably economical. It is