

Testament has made us re-examine what we really mean by canonical literature. Even the letter of the gospel can kill, as St Thomas pointed out. Proper study of the writings leads us in the end to 'question the usefulness of ethics as an object of independent interest. Morality will only be for man's health when placed in the wider context of his standing in relation to God'. Within the narrow limits of space and purpose which have been set for this book, Mr

Houlden manages to demonstrate this and other things with great clarity and to raise some very important theological issues in the process. Although there are one or two notable lacunae—particularly where the Old Testament ethical influence is concerned, so important as a background for writers like Paul and Luke—this is as good an introduction to the subject as one is likely to find.

ROGER RUSTON, O.P.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF LORD ACTON AND RICHARD SIMPSON, Vol. II, edited by Josef L. Altholz, Damian McElrath and James C. Holland. Cambridge University Press, 1973. 328 pp. + index, £11.80.

Here is the second volume of correspondence on the high-class but low-circulation periodical of the liberal Catholics in Victorian England, beautifully produced by the C.U.P. at more than twice the price of the first volume, which appeared two years ago. Evidently the circulation is expected to be as low as the *Rambler's*. Addict though I am myself of the quarrelsome mid-Victorians, the full publication of these almost day-to-day exchanges between the two editors does not seem entirely justified. The *Rambler* episode has been very fully treated recently, once by Professor Altholz himself, and nothing new seems likely to turn up now.

About two-thirds of the correspondence is concerned with the contributed letters and articles (meticulously annotated, so that we know which appeared and which did not) and with the mechanics of getting the magazine out, especially the January number each year, because, according to Simpson, the printers were always drunk after Christmas. This volume starts in September 1859, when Acton took over again from Newman, and continues till June 1862, by which time the bi-monthly *Rambler* had been transformed into the quarterly *Home and Foreign Review*. At the beginning Newman was still partly involved, and although both Acton and Simpson were sometimes impatient at the old man's caution, Acton valued his judgment (especially as it was generally endorsed by Professor Döllinger) and Simpson appreciated his powers of thought, wondering how Goldwin Smith had 'the impudence and cheek to knock his little earthen mug against the huge iron sides of Old Noggs' in argument over the question of reason and faith. At the beginning of 1862 there is some gossip about the Oratory School row, from the sidelines. Acton was inclined to support the position of the headmaster, Fr Darnell, against Newman's, while trying to dissuade him from hasty ac-

tion, but he got very tired of the most loquacious of the rebels, the lay master Oxenham, who stayed too long at Aldenham, keeping Acton up till two in the morning and preventing him from doing any work for a fortnight. Simpson got equally tired of the 'spooniness' of Oxenham's style as a contributor; his comments on style are good hatchet stuff and Acton's observations on the reasons for Dickens's habit of caricature are more perceptive than one would have expected.

Among Acton's letters there are a few of intrinsic interest—on the education of the clergy, with France for comparison, on the history of the papacy, on the Temporal Power, and on the relative importance of the scientific and the historical attacks on the Church. Much of this was published long ago by Gasquet, though with the omissions, sometimes amounting to suppressions, that in his day were considered necessary for discretion. In the introduction to the first volume the editors gave the correction of Gasquet as a reason for printing the whole correspondence, but often I found myself wishing that the more interesting letters had been printed correct and entire and at a price within the means of the general reader, rather than the whole mass resurrected in such detail. But if we are to be so minute, perhaps I may ask why, when the editors insist on underlining Simpson's signature (after ticking him off for doing it) they do not give any explanation for the fact that, alone of these letters, No. 386 (Acton's) has no conclusion and No. 387 (Simpson's) no beginning. However, when the third volume has completed the series, they will certainly grace a library shelf, and help us to remember that half those battles are still going on, a hundred years later.

MERIOL TREVOR