

## BOOK REVIEWS

### RUSSELL IN THE WILDERNESS

The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1914-1944

Volume 2. Pp. 268+10 plates. (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1968.) 42s. net.

THE first volume of Bertrand Russell's *Autobiography*, published a year ago, was widely acclaimed and already has the status of a classic. This second volume runs from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, when Russell was 42, until the end of the Second World War, when he reached the ripe young age of 72. Before 1914 he had worked mainly on mathematical logic and had shared the general faith in prosperity and progress towards a better world. The outbreak of war in August 1914 was traumatic. "I became filled with despairing tenderness towards the young men who were to be slaughtered, and with rage against all the statesmen of Europe. For several weeks I felt that if I should happen to meet Asquith or Grey I should be unable to refrain from murder." Instead he expressed his violence in a remarkable letter, published in the *Nation*: passionate yet far-seeing, it exposes the deep roots of his opposition to the war.

Despite his pacifism, he remained friendly with Asquith. "Once when I had been bathing stark naked in a pond, I found him [Asquith] on the bank as I came out. The quality of dignity which should have characterized a meeting between the Prime Minister and a pacifist was somewhat lacking on this occasion. But at any rate, I had the feeling that he was not likely to lock me up." Such lighter moments were rare during the war, for Russell devoted himself to the unpopular cause of peace, suffering much obloquy and severing many old friendships. In 1915 he wrote a spirited open letter to President Wilson, asking him to try to bring hostilities to an end. The plea was in vain, but the episode reminds us of the dark days in October 1962 when the telegrams from Russell at Penrhynudraeth were among the few visible signs that anyone in Britain was trying to influence the course of the Cuban crisis.

In 1918, Russell was imprisoned for one of the many anti-war articles he had written. His particular crime was to mention that units of the US army might be brought into England to intimidate strikers, though he added the immediate proviso: "I do not say that these thoughts are in the mind of the Government. All the evidence tends to show that there are no thoughts whatever in their mind, and that they live from hand to mouth consoling themselves with ignorance and sentimental twaddle". But perhaps the proviso was worse than the original suggestion. In prison, which he found "in many ways quite agreeable", he wrote the *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*.

The years immediately after the war were a time of travel. In the summer of 1920 he made a nightmarish visit to Russia with a small Labour Party delegation: "cruelty, poverty, suspicion, persecution, formed the very air we breathed". Later in 1920 he went to China on a lecture tour, with Dora Black, whom he married in 1921. After a delightful autumn in Peking, he fell critically ill for several months with double pneumonia, complicated by heart and kidney disease, dysentery and phlebitis. Reports of his death were widespread, and a missionary paper had the terse obituary: "Missionaries may be par-

doned for heaving a sigh of relief at the news of Mr Bertrand Russell's death".

The return from China in 1921 was followed by a ten-year "parental period", and in 1927 Russell and his wife, convinced that existing schools were unsuitable for their two children, set up their own school at Telegraph House on the Sussex Downs near Harting. They had many problems of discipline and organization, but their financial problems were eased by the success of Russell's books in this decade, including *Icarus, or the Future of Science* (1924), *The ABC of Relativity* (1925), *On Education* (1926), *Marriage and Morals* (1929) and *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930).

In 1936 came his third marriage, to Patricia Spence, and in 1938-39 he held professorships at the Universities of Chicago and California. 1940 saw the infamous witch-hunt against him, in which one lawyer, obviously well briefed from Roget's *Thesaurus*, condemned his works as "lecherous, libidinous, lustful, venereous, erotomaniac, aphrodisiac". For a time the outcry almost destroyed Russell's earning power in the USA and he could not return to England because of the war. At the age of nearly 71, he wrote to Gilbert Murray in England: "I would accept any honest work that would bring in a bare subsistence for 3 people". Future historians may single out this sentence as yet another illustration of the truism that the world often denies genius a decent living, now just as much as in the time of Mozart. Still, Russell managed to subsist in America, partly on loans from friends, partly on lectures and partly because of a generous advance by the publishers of his *History of Western Philosophy*, which was to be his main source of income for many years.

This second volume of the *Autobiography* has fewer brilliant flashes than the first, and the narrative after 1930 is rather sketchy. In compensation, however, the book is more continuously interesting than its predecessor, possibly because the events are nearer our own time, and because the letters, which occupy about two-thirds of the book, provide so many fascinating glimpses of Russell's friends and acquaintances. During the First World War we see Russell providing a home (and debentures worth £3,000) for T. S. Eliot, who was duly grateful; and quarrelling with D. H. Lawrence over the novelist's idea of "blood-consciousness". We read of Russell's love affairs with Ottoline Morell and Colette O'Neil, and meet Wittgenstein in all the glory of his eccentricity. Among many others whose letters enliven the book are Joseph Conrad, Gilbert Murray, Bernard Shaw, and—liveliest of all—Russell's elder brother Frank, whose death in 1932 transformed his brother into England's most reluctant earl.

Some readers of these volumes may feel sad that such a brilliant intellect has had to battle against so many stresses and upheavals, and the author himself expresses regret at not having been able to lead a more settled life. But the years in the wilderness recorded in this book were perhaps inevitable: like Shelley, one of his early heroes, he was too energetic and single-minded in pursuit of his ideals ever to lead a quiet life. It is only in recent years that rest and contentment have come, and a settled home among the hills of Merionethshire.

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### HISTORY OF THE ATOM

The Atomists (1805-1933)

By Sir Basil Schonland. Pp. x+198+4 plates. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1968.) 35s. net.

THE atomic theory and the constitution of the atom have played such a fundamental part in the development of science that their history is of intense interest. They were