

British Enigma

... might this much-honored philosopher, author and humanist is leader in the civil disobedience campaign for nuclear disarmament.

(From THE LONDON OBSERVER NEWS SERVICE)

(First of two articles)

LONDON — British nuclear disarmers began a new campaign of civil disobedience, aimed at the Government's defence policy, by staging a sit-down demonstration outside the Ministry of Defence in London. The most famous man there was one of the most famous of our age, Bertrand Russell.

No doubt some people, on reading that Bertrand Russell is willing to spend his time like this, will think that it merely proves how silly a clever man can be. Others, more charitable will murmur "Senility," and turn to the sports pages. Yet millions more, including many who are not nuclear disarmers and who disagree profoundly with his policy, will feel proud that an old man of 88, who has long enjoyed every honour which men can give, should feel so concerned about the future of humanity that he is prepared to risk abuse, imprisonment and even death—for it is not the kind of thing usually recommended for men of 88 by their doctors—in order to draw attention to the dangers which threaten it.

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Abuse, imprisonment and death are not things which have ever greatly troubled the third Earl Russell. He has been in prison before for publicly denouncing conscription during the First World War. He has been abused at different times for advocating pacifism, rights for women, free love, trial marriage, new methods of education, preventive war and unilateral disarmament.

Death he has not yet experienced, though he was very close to it when a plane in which he was travelling to Norway crashed and deposited him—at the age of 76—in the icy sea; but as a consistent atheist who believes firmly

that there is no God and no life after death, he regards it with the scientific detachment of a man who is about to see the proof of one of his favourite theories.

It is easy to recognise Bertrand Russell as a great man—perhaps, after Sir Winston Churchill, the greatest living

especially with modern philosophy, which he feels is often niggling and petty. He has always sought some reality which would transcend humanity. Though it may sound an odd thing to say of so determined a sceptic, there is something almost religious in his search for impersonal, objective truth. As he once said: "I wanted certainty in the kind of way in which people want religious faith."

But Russell is also a humanist, with a humanist's passionate concern for human beings. He has written many books on politics and sociology. All of them have that dazzling lucidity which won him a Nobel Prize for Literature and which makes it almost impossible to disagree with his arguments while reading them; yet few have lasted well and only one, his essay on power, could be called a classic. He has left no body of political writing to compare with that of his godfather, John Stuart Mill, or even with that of his own contemporaries, Croce and Ortega y Gasset.

The truth is, perhaps, that Russell has never wholly understood politics. He inherited from his Whig ancestors—his grandfather was Lord John Russell of the Reform Bill—a superb intellect, a passion for freedom and that independence of mind which is aristocracy's greatest gift. He also inherited a certain temperamental aloofness and lack of understanding of the way in which men and women behave.

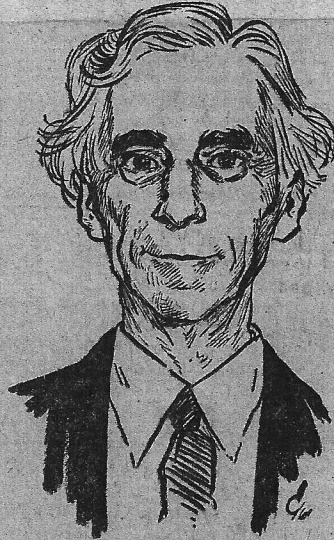
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The tendencies were no doubt exaggerated by his upbringing. His parents died when he was a child and he was brought up by his grandmother, who had him educated privately at home. She intended him for politics, but from the age of 15 the shy and lonely boy found himself bored by this prospect and more interested in mathematical and philosophical speculation.

At Cambridge he got a first in Mathematics and was elected a Fellow of Trinity College. He soon found himself a leader of that brilliant circle of intellectual young men which Keynes described so well and D. H. Lawrence disliked so much.

Well-to-do, superior, breathing the optimistic air of Edwardian England, they believed firmly that human nature was essentially reasonable and that human beings had only to be freed from restraints and superstitions to be happy. They repudiated all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men. They were pre-Freud as well as pre-Hitler.

(NEXT—The change that came to Russell after 1914.)



BERTRAND RUSSELL... from free love to ban the bomb.

Englishman. It is much more difficult to explain exactly why he is a great man. Certainly his "Principles of Mathematics" and "Principia Mathematica," both published before the First World War, helped determine the direction in which modern philosophy was going to move; but how many people in this country today have read the "Principia" and can understand it?

Nor would Russell himself wish to be judged purely as a philosopher. He has always expressed a certain dissatisfaction with philosophy, and es-



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