

Russelliana africana

Mr. Peter Weinrich, proprietor of Blue Heron Books, Codrington, Ontario, spent the last year working for UNESCO in Dar-es-Salaam. He sent us the following reflections.

The Editor calls for a note on Russelliana Africana. I am reluctant to add to the flood of learned hagiography following the demise of Bertrand Arthur William, 3rd Earl Russell. By now it must exceed in volume *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, but I shall heartlessly suggest that it is considerably lower in entertainment value than that majestic work. Indeed, aside from the gathering of *obiter dicta* of the Master, post-Russellian commentaries strike me as being rather arid, and not at all suited for the amelioration of tropical heat under which we labour in sub-Saharan Africa. What is needed is a long draught of cool rationality, a cup from the Castalian fountain.

There are those who would be satisfied with a dram of Red Hackle: the rest of us must make do with a local distillation known as Konyagi. It does not generate much light, it is true, although itself crystal clear, and would not, I fear, be much cherished by a philosopher smoke-dried in a Cambridge cell. However, it produces neither blindness nor lung cancer. Neither does another backwoods brew made of finger millet. It is definitely not for the discriminating palate, but anyone who could survive a course of pneumonia on a Chinese junket, or immersion in a Norwegian fjord in winter, would surely take this in his stride. It is served in a large enamel bowl, and comes warm and bubbling to the company, a heaving, thick, granular and pungent scum on the surface. Each participant has a long thin bamboo tube, sealed at the lower end, but with small perforations around the circumference. This implement is plunged beneath the surface of the broth (in proper order of seniority), and the rather sour, but not unpleasant, liquor sucked up from the lower reaches of the bowl. It is a pursuit singularly fitted to philosophic contemplation in the cool of the house, while the sun blasts down outside. Afternoons can easily pass into evening and night in the sober contemplation of such a thesis as $(1) \vdash P \supset (Q \supset P)$. Problems are easily resolved in such an atmosphere. By the time the bowl is empty - and it can be replenished continuously by the willing women - one no longer cares whether a definitive proof is possible, or even desirable. One might say, indeed, that there is a definite tendency for the night to dissolve into a Principle of Uncertainty, if not actual Irreducibility.

Luckily for those of us who survive the exposure to twenty miles of palm-fringed gleaming white beach, the warm bathwater, and tropical moon of the shores of the Indian Ocean, we are pleasantly refreshed by coming across the footprints of the Master in the most unlikely sands. I recent-

ly encountered a fragment of the *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* in the preface to *Structure in Art and Science*, and even better, a pamphlet hitherto (I hope) unrecorded - "Message adressé par Bertrand Russell au Congrès International Parlementaire réuni au Caire en Fevrier 1970".

I cannot say there is much here that would interest Russell the philosopher, nor indeed, Russell the mathematician; but Russell the political probe is another matter. At this distance of space I am quite unable to say whether he ever interested himself in, or commented upon, the affairs of Black Africa, nor can I say whether any of its best theoreticians of political power have ever acknowledged any debt to his writing. I would like to think they have. Certainly Nyerere is a member of the Peace Foundation Committee. No doubt our redoubtable archivist will instantly unearth¹ a sun-shrivelled exercise book with the childish pencillings of Sekou Toure, indicating an early indebtedness, albeit through the somewhat more opaque medium of the French tongue....

(The manuscript breaks off at this point and it is conjectured that the writer was assassinated by wine-maddened Francophones.)

¹Cf. the symbolism of Nkrumah's *Consciencism*. Furthermore, Russell was asked to write a preface to Nkrumah's *Axioms* (but didn't). - The Editor.