

An exhibition of the Slater collection

by *Kenneth Blackwell*

Bertrand Russell, Polymath: An Exhibition of Books, Pamphlets, and Ephemera from the Collection of Professor John G. Slater. 4 November 1982–22 January 1983. On the occasion of the 17th Annual Conference on Editorial Problems. With the assistance of Katharine Martin, Assistant Head, and Wayne Finley, Assistant Restorationist. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

WHAT STRIKES ONE most about John Slater's collection is its size. Even in the sombre tiered beauty of the Fisher Library, against the bright colours of the flawless dust-jackets, unfaded bindings and pristine magazine contributions, the size of Slater's collection dominates. Seventeen display cases holding 268 items made the Fisher Library a mini-replica of the collection housed in two rooms in the Department of Philosophy. The selection of display items must have been painful in addition to painstaking. For those rooms—Slater's is the only faculty office I know with library stacks down the middle—contain several thousand pieces of Russelliana.

The size of Slater's collection epitomizes the challenge of collecting Russell. Think of the nearly 200 books and pamphlets, the more than 200 books contributed to in some way, the 2500 magazine and newspaper articles and letters to the editor *plus* the various editions of the first two categories *plus* translations *plus* all the writings about Russell. Then add the background collection of twentieth-century philosophy that Slater has brought together. He has well said that "steadiness of purpose is the principal virtue of the collector."¹ So much for size. Copies of these items would satisfy the collector whose sole challenge was to collect all the Russell he could read. But Slater's collection discloses his response to a second challenge, the aesthetic one of acquiring copies in new, or almost new, condition and supplementing them with association copies. Thus the collection is kept away from the light, pamphlets are filed carefully in drawers, and the collection abounds with books once owned by famous philosophers, Russell's friends, and Russell himself. There are many books bearing his autograph, even some with autograph letters tipped in. Slater never used to write in his books, but now, with the recent cataloguing of his collection,² he has conceded a pencil press mark.

¹ I quote from his talk on the principles of collecting Russell to the Amtmann Circle (Jan. 1983).

² A preliminary, computerized catalogue has been compiled of the books and pamphlets

Perhaps he will further concede a pencil note on the provenance.

The exhibition pieces were chosen to illustrate various aspects of Russell's polymathy. Other themes—such as his joint authorship programmes, women, fine printing, fugitive writings, or his humour—could have been selected. Usually Slater chose the brightest and most intact copies for display; they contrasted well with the occasional worn association copy or extremely rare exemplar of which not even Russell kept a copy. I shall mention the highlights.³

Two vertical corner cases showed periodicals in which Russell appeared. His first publication in *Mind* (April 1895) was there. Another that I found especially interesting was the *Saturday Evening Post* of 18 July 1959 containing a late Spinozistic piece, "The Expanding Mental Universe". The cover—which I had not seen before—reveals how the magazine viewed the topic. It was advertised there as "Bertrand Russell on Emotions". An unfamiliar item was the 8 May 1935 issue of *The Eleventh Hour for New Order in Great Britain Incorporating New Britain*—a title as curious as that of the *Journal for the Protection of All Beings*, to whose first number Russell contributed. Together the different colours and formats were a veritable typographic circus. Several posters of Russell covered the remaining wall space.

Two more corner cabinets on the catalogue floor provided a bibliographical entrée to Russell's family history and to books about him. There were the rare coloured arms/large paper edition of Wiffen's *Historical Memoirs of the House of Russell; from the Time of the Norman Conquest* (2 vols., 1833), Cobden-Sanderson's *Amantium Irae*, and the book by Macaulay that Russell won at the Cambridge Local Examinations in June 1888 and bearing his bookplate. There were also the privately printed edition of Hardy's *Bertrand Russell and Trinity, The Bitches' Brew; or, the Plot against Bertrand Russell*, and of course Clark's *Life*.

On the main floor the locked display tables began appropriately with logic and mathematics. There were first editions of *Principia Mathematica* and *The Principles of Mathematics*, the latter opened to "The Contradiction". Russell the philosopher was represented, *inter alia*, by "On Denoting" in *Mind* and *The Philosophy of Mr. B*tr*nd R*ss*ll* in its remarkable dust-jacket. *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* was opened to the title-page and captioned: "Russell's elegant revenge on those who

by Russell: "Catalogue of the John G. Slater Collection of Monographs by Bertrand Russell", by Bernd Frohmann, John G. Slater and W. G. Stratton (Toronto: for private circulation only, July 1973), xxvii+443 pp.

³ In place of a catalogue of the exhibition, Slater issued a thirty-page booklet on Russell's career. Copies are available from the author.

engineered his dismissal as Professor of Philosophy in The College of the City of New York in 1940."

The political theorist was represented by the syllabus for the *Principles of Social Reconstruction* lectures, by the U.S. title changes for that work and for *Roads to Freedom*, and by a book Russell may never have seen: the Russian translation of *German Social Democracy* (St. Petersburg, 1905). The pacifist agitator was in evidence through various First World War propaganda leaflets and pamphlets (two erroneously dated 1917), a 1916 letter to Andrew Gow (the transcription next to the letter omitted the comma after "It seems to me"), and *What Happened at Leeds* with a photograph of Colette with whom he attended the meeting.

Further evidence of the political activist 1910-70 was provided by *Anti-Suffragist Anxieties* and the full-page ad in the *London Times* reprinting Russell's last statement on the Middle East. Also displayed was the rare first leaflet of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The historian was represented by the bound English page proofs of *History of Western Philosophy*, the educator by the mimeographed record of Russell's 1941 debate with Mortimer Adler, and the popularizer by various works on philosophy, science, religion and happiness. The "creative" writer was evident in various collections of short stories, the autobiographer by the different books and articles of reminiscence. Included here was a signed letter to Dawson's stating that Russell would be publishing his autobiography posthumously.

The final display case was devoted to Russell the celebrity. Commemorative postage stamps from India, Upper Volta and Grenada were set beside a Russell button, a portrait by C. W. White, and publications emanating from the Russell Archives. Included here was a letter from Lord Russell to Slater, dated 3 September 1965, indicating that Slater had persuaded him to have *Philosophical Essays* reprinted.

Not being primarily literary, Russell has seldom been collected except in the way Slater began—that is, with the object of acquiring merely a reading copy of each book. We know how useful to Russell studies Slater's collecting has been: he has discovered not only new editions and textual variants but also new writings; his section of books and periodicals relating to Russell is our substitute for a secondary bibliography; his collection is a unique record of Russell's publishing career; and he has been a generous source of duplicates for other collectors. This exhibition has shown how eminently collectible Russell is. For there is enough variety to satisfy the pursuer of the fugitive or the student of fine printing, and Russell is still recent enough to provide the brightest of spines and even uncut pages. Slater has had in mind these objects and others in his indefatigable pursuit. Only completeness eludes him.