Russell's dismissal from Trinity: a study in high table politics

by Paul Delany

RUSSELL'S DISMISSAL FROM Trinity College in 1916 has now passed into legend as one of the most notorious infringements of academic freedom since Socrates was given hemlock. Our knowledge of this episode has come largely from one source, G.H. Hardy's *Bertrand Russell and Trinity: a College Controversy of the Last War*.[1] Recently, the Bertrand Russell Archives acquired new evidence on the struggle behind the scenes at Trinity over Russell's dismissal.[2] This material does not challenge the fundamentals of Hardy's narrative, but it makes possible a less reticent account of the affair with much new information about two key participants: Hardy himself and A.N. Whitehead.

To read *Bertrand Russell and Trinity* well, one must know how to read between the lines. Hardy was Russell's most active and dedicated supporter in 1916, but not at all his most visible one. In 1919 he again promoted Russell's reinstatement, and in 1941, when he wrote his pamphlet, he was organizing a third campaign to get Russell back. Each time, Hardy knew that the best way to succeed was to keep several

[1] Privately printed by Cambridge University Press, 1942; reissued in facsimile by Cambridge, 1970, with a Foreword by C.D. Broad. A typescript of Hardy's pamphlet in the Russell Archives has significant differences from the published version; see particularly n. 47 below. Additional material on Russell's dismissal may be found in Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (London: Jonathan Cape and Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), and in Jo Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980). For permission to quote from unpublished letters I am indebted to Mrs. T. North Whitehead and to the London Mathematical Society (for G.H. Hardy).

[2] Donation by Christopher Cornford of papers belonging to his father, F.M. Cornford. See *Russell*, n.s. 5 (Winter 1985): 98.

arm's lengths between himself and his candidate. In writing about the events of 1916–19 he preserved a scrupulously cool tone, he defined the struggle as primarily one between youth and age, and he said practically nothing about Russell's current battles. Russell had been dismissed from the City College of New York in 1940 for "immorality", before he ever met a class. He then accepted a lecturing position from the eccentric Albert Barnes, but by early 1941 he had quarrelled with his employer and was homesick for England. Hardy's pamphlet was part of a broad campaign of wirepulling that culminated in the offer to Russell of a Trinity Fellowship in the autumn of 1943. Russell came back—to the rooms previously accupied by Newton—and remained a Fellow of Trinity for the rest of his life. He had gone there to sit a scholarship examination in December 1889, so his connection with Trinity lasted eighty years. Like many of his relationships, this one fluctuated between times of passionate devotion and times when both parties were thoroughly exasperated with each other. But 1916 was clearly the stormiest year of all.

I

On 5 June 1916 Russell was convicted for writing a pamphlet "likely to prejudice the recruiting and discipline of his Majesty's forces", and sentenced to a fine of £100 plus £10 costs. An appeal against the conviction failed on 29 June. The Council of Trinity, the governing board of the College, were required by the statutes to meet if a Fellow was convicted "of a crime of whatever nature or description". On Tuesday 11 July they met to decide what to do about Russell. The Council were empowered (but not obliged) to expel delinquent Fellows by a vote of seven members, of whom the Master had to be one, out of thirteen. The eleven who attended voted unanimously to remove Russell from his lectureship. A substantial minority wanted even stronger action, presumably the formal removal of Russell's name from the College books.[3]

The Master was H. Montagu Butler: eighty-three years old, former Dean of Gloucester, former Chairman of the Church of England Purity Society, father of three sons in the army, and an Apostle. "I never

[3] This would have taken away Russell's right to use the Senior Combination Room or dine at High Table. Ward to Cornford, 26 July 1916. (Unless otherwise noted, all documents, or copies thereof, cited are in the Russell Archives; file numbers are given in parentheses. Documents belonging to the Cornford acquisition, such as this one, are in file REC. ACQ. 912.)

discharged a more painful public duty", he would write, "than in taking action against B. Russell, and I was never more clear as to the necessity in the interests of the College."[4] Butler had been Senior Classic at Trinity in 1855, and Headmaster of Harrow at the age of twenty-six. He was appointed Master of Trinity in 1886 by the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, the Mastership being in the gift of the Crown. The revised statutes of 1882 had deleted the requirement that the Master be in Orders of the Church of England, but Salisbury chose not to break precedent by appointing a layman. There was some dislike of the appointment, partly because Butler was an outsider (many Fellows would have preferred Henry Sidgwick), and partly because he was a cleric.

Although two clerical Fellows (F.R. Tennant and F.A. Simpson) supported Russell, there can be little doubt that the rest of the clerical party—six or seven Fellows, of whom two were on the Council—disliked Russell and were glad to get rid of him.[5] The Master was a "muscular Christian" of the classic Victorian type: a fervent Imperialist, an opponent of Home Rule, and a firm supporter of the war. He had arranged for troops to be billeted in the College, for Nevile's Court to be made into a hospital, and for officers to dine in Hall—where champagne would be served when one of them left for the front. Butler also preached regularly to the troops, with emphasis on the moral temptations that awaited them in France.

Butler had not been a dominant Master—in fact, he was famous for sleeping through meetings—and before 1914 the younger Fellows seem to have treated him with amused tolerance. But when the war began Russell came to feel that Butler and a cabal of his jingoistic supporters had desecrated the College. Russell's complaints to Lady Ottoline Morrell suggest that he had not hesitated to let his enemies know what he thought of them:

> The melancholy of this place now-a-days is beyond endurance—the Colleges are dead, except for a few Indians and a few pale pacifists and bloodthirsty old men hobbling along victorious in the absence of youth. Soldiers are billeted in the courts and drill on the grass; bellicose parsons preach to them in stentorian tones from the steps of the Hall.... No one thinks about learning or feels it of any importance ... I am *intensely* disliked by the older

[4] Quoted in J.R.M. Butler, *Henry Montagu Butler: Master of Trinity College Cambridge* (London: Longmans, Green, 1925), p. 216.

[5] Hardy considered the Rev. R. StJ. Parry, who was on the Council, to be the ringleader of the attack on Russell.

dons, and still more by their wives, who think I should not mind if they were raped. It is the young who like me.[6]

Clearly, Russell was a thorn in the side of the ruling group at Trinity. But when the Council acted against him he must also have taken it as a bitterly personal rejection, for among the eleven who voted him out there were five Apostles: the Master, Henry Jackson, Rev. V.H. Stanton, J.D. Duff and J. McT.E. McTaggart. All were older than Russell, and elected at a time when the Society's prevailing tone had been more conventional. Still, to be "hounded out of Trinity" (in D.H. Lawrence's phrase) by so many of his brother Apostles must have been a final turn of the knife for Russell. Outside the Council three other Fellows were Apostles: James Ward, G.H. Hardy and A.N. Whitehead. The first two were staunch supporters of Russell, but Whitehead, as we shall see, effectively sided with the Council; so that the final roster was two loyal Apostles and six who favoured his dismissal.

This split within the Society was invisible to outsiders, since Apostles were sworn to keep the very existence of their group secret.[7] They were a closed elite whose chief concern—effectively its only concern—was the personal relations between its members. Nor would it be far off the mark to describe the Fellows of Trinity in similar terms. From the beginning Russell's fate was largely determined by how much the Fellows liked or disliked him as a person, and they were free to act on their feelings because both sides agreed to fight out the affair behind the walls of the College. When Russell was denied his appointment to CCNY the case was taken up by the courts, the AAUP, the Mayor of New York, and many other parties. But in 1916 almost everyone took it for granted that all jurisdiction in the affair lay with the Council of Trinity. Russell himself would have relished a public battle over the issue of academic freedom; but his supporters judged that such a fight would defeat their principal aim, which was to get Russell back. In the long run, what counted for them was "the interest of the College". The reputation of Trinity as a seat of learning had been wounded, and the only thing that could heal it was Russell's return. It was not a question of the rights of the faculty vis-à-vis the administration, since Trinity, like the rest of the Oxford and Cambridge colleges, considered itself to be a self-governing body of Fellows. The Russell dismissal was a family

[6] Russell to Morrell, #1,361 and 1,383, 19 March and [12?] May 1916 (Morrell Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin).

[7] Hardy, naturally, says nothing about the Society in *Bertrand Russell and Trinity*.

quarrel and neither side was eager to have neighbours peering over the fence.

Nonetheless, several of the younger Fellows, such as Hardy, J.E. Littlewood and Donald Robertson, were "incoherent with fury" over the ejection of Russell, and eager to do something about it.[8] Hardy had not believed that the Council would go so far as to dismiss Russell, but he had already decided on the right response if they did: a vote of censure by the Fellows, as soon as the war was over, leading to the Council's resignation. When the ax fell, he proposed this strategy to Russell. The decision could not be reversed until after the war, but there should be an immediate "memorial"—a manifesto putting the Council on notice that they were going to be called to account when the time was ripe.[9]

Hardy felt the strongest personal loyalty to Russell, and he was the only one of the "angry young Fellows" who was regularly present at Trinity. Soon after the war began, Russell had already marked him down as a key ally:

> he is prepared to give all his leisure to work for peace. And as almost all his pupils here have gone to the front he has a great deal of leisure.... He has absolutely first-rate ability, not only as a mathematician, but as an organizer, intriguer, and wire-puller. He loves hidden power, and suffers from his life not being sufficiently exciting and dangerous. If the Government tried threatening him with the police, his eye would gleam and he would feel he was getting some fun at last. I have always thought him utterly heartless, but I think perhaps I was wrong.[10]

Russell's flagrant opposition to the war set off a struggle within Trinity that Hardy was still waging a quarter of a century later with his pamphlet about the events of 1914–19. When the Council acted against Russell in July 1916 Hardy knew that he had no chance of rallying the moderate Fellows against the dismissal, since he wore mufti and was known as a prominent supporter of the Union of Democratic Control.[11] He needed a "heavyweight" to spearhead the protest, and his first choice was Russell's distinguished collaborator on *Principia Mathematica*. Although Whitehead had left Cambridge in 1910 and was teach-

[8] Russell to Morrell, #1,389, Saturday afternoon [?15 July 1916].

[9] Hardy to Russell, early July 1916.

[10] Russell to Morrell, #1,110, [18 Sept. 1914].

[11] He had in fact volunteered for military service, but had been turned down on medical grounds.

ing at the University of London, he was still a Fellow of Trinity and a formidable committee-man:[12]

> assuming Whitehead to be sound, he ought to take the lead and leave the pacificist gang to do the clerical work. And I shd be guided by him. For my own part I shd be in favour of giving the widest publicity to the whole business.
>
> How much it matters to you I don't know and you may well be sick of the College. But even if you welcomed it, the College cannot allow Parry and Co to make it publicly obscene in this sort of way. As for that ghastly shit McTaggart, he shd be cursed and Robeyised—but I doubt if he'd feel even that now.[13]

Henry John Roby had been elected an Apostle in 1855; he resigned in the same year and was ritually cursed for his defection. All five Apostles on the Council could be condemned for betraying their "brother", but McTaggart was the closest to Russell in age and had served, for a while, as his philosophical mentor.

If McTaggart was the Society's Cassius, Hardy soon found that Whitehead was warming up for the role of Brutus:

> I saw Whitehead: he is no good. He was exceedingly long-winded and apologetic: he is going to circulate his own views at length. I'm not blaming him—his views are what they are, just like yours, and it's an awkward pinch for him and we parted quite good friends. He quite understood that he would be impossible as captain.[14]

Russell had flatly disagreed with both the Whiteheads over the war from the beginning, but for two years now they had tried to keep their friendship going on a strained, one might even say schizophrenic basis. The Whiteheads kept sending Russell messages of concern and affection, such as one from Alfred wishing him "Good luck ... in every way" on the eve of his trial.[15] Yet neither of the two men could refrain from scratching on old wounds. When Russell asked Whitehead to help him protest against the treatment of conscientious objectors, he got a reply in the style of Horatio Bottomley: "I am not greatly impressed by men

[12] Victor Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead, the Man and His Work*, Vol. I: *1861–1910* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 317.

[13] Hardy to Russell, *c.* 12 July 1916.

[14] Hardy to Russell, *c.* 14 July 1916.

[15] Whitehead to Russell, 4 June 1916.

who ask me to be shocked that they are going to prison, while ten thousand men are daily being carried to field hospitals, women and children have been raped and mutilated, and whole populations are living in agony. Frankly, the outcry is contemptible."[16] Throughout the Russell affair, the Whiteheads were driven half frantic by concern for their sons. The elder, North, had already enlisted at the time of Russell's dismissal; the younger, Eric, was seventeen and would be taken in a year.

It was an explosive situation, and neither Russell nor Whitehead was fully conscious of the complex feelings both of them had about the war.[17] The closeness of their friendship somehow drove them on to repeat their verbal stabs. So, by a kind of fatal necessity, Russell went as soon as he could to seek help from the Whiteheads over his dismissal. Mrs. Whitehead was "furious with Trinity", he reported to Ottoline; "he began by being, but went down and talked the matter over and came to the conclusion that the Council were not to blame."[18] Whitehead had jumped in with both feet; by the time Russell came to see him, on 14 July, he had already gone up to Cambridge to confer with the Council and nearly completed an eight-page pamphlet giving a formal statement of his views.[19]

The dismissal seems to have strained Whitehead's nerves to the breaking-point, for his pamphlet is painfully incoherent and uncertain. He points out that a Conservative peer (Lord Parmoor) and the Archbishop of Canterbury have publicly corroborated Russell's two main points: that conscientious objectors have been mistreated in military prison, and that they should remain under civil jurisdiction even after being sentenced. So why should Russell be punished for saying the same things as Lord Parmoor and the Archbishop?

[16] Whitehead to Russell, 16 April 1916. In *To the Master and Fellows* (p. 4), Whitehead notes that he "unfortunately" destroyed Russell's appeal. The opinions quoted here should be compared with what Whitehead *says* his opinions were on the issue (*ibid.*, pp. 4–6).

[17] See, for example, D.H. Lawrence's famous attack on Russell for "satisfying in an indirect, false way your lust to jab and strike" (*The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Vol. II, ed. G. Zytaruk and J. Boulton [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], p. 392). It should be noted that we cannot know the exact degree to which Russell personally provoked Whitehead, since his letters to him were destroyed (at Whitehead's direction) by Evelyn Whitehead; but Russell's published writings on the war were infuriating enough.

[18] Russell to Morrell, #1,391, [17?] July 1916. On the day Russell came to London from South Wales he saw his lawyer, the Whiteheads, and the T.S. Eliots, and attended a No-Conscription Fellowship committee meeting.

[19] Reproduced complete in this issue of *Russell*.

> For the moment the equities of individual cases are subordinate to the safety of the State and of the cause for which our men are dying. Our statesmen have characterised it as the cause of freedom, of justice, and of civilization; and that is the thought which sustains us as in our minds we follow the fate of our boys.
>
> I make no criticism on the College Council for their action. Their minute, removing Mr. Russell from his lectureship, is on the face of it a support of the State in its decision as to the civil discipline necessary in the immediate present. (P. 7)

Whitehead's reasoning seems to have been as follows: Lord Parmoor and the Archbishop had said the same things, but they had not said them "heedlessly", as Russell had. When people set out to stir up trouble in time of war, the State could repress them in the name of collective self-preservation. And if the State had acted rightly, then the Council of Trinity could not be blamed for backing it up.

At the same time, Whitehead felt, the Council should preserve "a just appreciation ... of the future obligations of the College" (*ibid.*). He said nothing more definite about the Council's duties before bringing his pamphlet to an obscurely portentous conclusion: "The existing Master and Fellows of Trinity have in their hands issues, which for succeeding generations, greedy of knowledge of these great times, will affect the honour of England, the good faith of its professions of motive, and the fame of its Seats of Learning" (p. 8). What this meant was that the Council was right to dismiss Russell, but should reinstate him after the war. If they refused to do so, they would show that they had acted more from malice than from public-spiritedness, and would then go down in history as wrong.[20]

Whitehead wanted to show formal loyalty to Russell, as his old friend and intellectual collaborator, but his basic allegiance was to the Council. Over the years, Russell's sharp tongue in debate and his general bumptiousness had left many scars. Of the three major philosophers who were his contemporaries in the Society, McTaggart was his avowed enemy, Whitehead was disaffected and G.E. Moore, for all his dislike

[20] This interpretation is supported by Whitehead's letter to Cornford of 1 August 1916 (REC. ACQ. 912).

of the jingoes, would do nothing to help Russell in his troubles with Trinity.[21]

II

With Whitehead out of the picture, Hardy then wrote to F.M. Cornford asking him to be the official sponsor of the protest. It was essential, he told Cornford, that the campaign be led by Fellows who had taken commissions, since "those of us who are not respectable should make use of the respectability of those who are."[22] But Hardy was constantly active behind the scenes, and in his pamphlet of 1942 he was simply not telling the truth when he claimed that he "did not take any part in the actual quarrel, except to sign the protest at the time."[23]

Why did Hardy pick Cornford as Russell's standard-bearer? Although he was over forty and had a child, Cornford had been an early volunteer. In 1916 he was serving as a rifle instructor, but he still had a home in Cambridge and kept up his College ties. He had supported Hardy in November 1915 when the Council banned a meeting of the Union of Democratic Control that had been announced for Littlewood's rooms in Trinity. After the dismissal, Cornford told Russell that "the Council has disgraced us", and that the older dons were "in various stages of insanity".[24] He could be relied on to take a firm moral stand, but in a way that would not offend his more warlike colleagues. He had published a widely admired book on Thucydides, and had married into the Cambridge "aristocracy": his wife, Frances, was the daughter of Francis Darwin (a Fellow of Christ's) and the granddaughter of Charles Darwin.

For all his anger, Hardy was keeping his eye on the long-term goal of getting Russell reinstated as a member in good standing of the College; and the banning of the UDC meeting had shown that in any immediate showdown over Russell's dismissal he was bound to lose. The issue needed to be kept alive, and quietly nourished. Cornford seemed the ideal agent for such delicate work, for in 1908 he had published a

[21] Moore, a university lecturer, was not a Fellow of Trinity; but he had rooms in the College—of which he was a former Prize Fellow—and dined in Hall. He made a public protest against the banning of the UDC meeting in Littlewood's rooms, but faded into the woodwork when Russell's dismissal came up. See Paul Levy, *Moore: G.E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), Chap. 10.

[22] Hardy to Cornford, [14? July 1916] (REC. ACQ. 912).

[23] *Bertrand Russell and Trinity*, p. 2.

[24] Quoted in *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1914–1944* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), p. 69 (original letter in RA).

satirical pamphlet on academic politics that had become an instant classic: *Microcosmographia Academica: Being a Guide for the Young Academic Politician.*[25] However, Cornford's treatise was a spoof on the entrenched inertia of academe—the rule that "nothing is ever done until every one is convinced that it ought to be done, and has been convinced for so long that it is now time to do something else."[26] The Russell case was a notable exception to this rule. An inner group of academics, whose average age was nearly sixty, had swiftly and boldly removed an enemy from the College. Faced with a *fait accompli* by the "old men in a hurry" of the Council, Cornford and his allies were knocked off balance. He agreed that there should be a protest; but it was now the Long Vacation, when little could be done at Cambridge, and nothing could be done quickly. He sent out a round of letters to possible supporters, trying to muster a counter-offensive for the autumn.

One person capable of decisive reaction was Russell himself; but he too vacillated. Much as he despised the Council's decision, he also found it a relief, and felt little urgency about getting it reversed. Since his intense and short-lived friendship with D.H. Lawrence in 1915 he had been feeling emotionally stifled by Cambridge, and attracted by Lawrence's urging that he should "retire out of the herd and then fire bombs into it."[27] In July 1916 he was exhilarated by the rousing welcome given him by the miners of South Wales, on his speaking-tour for the No-Conscription Fellowship. He told Ottoline that he wanted to become a completely different kind of teacher:

> Probably *for me* it is a good thing, though it is sad that Trinity should do it. It decides the issue. I will make myself a teacher of all the working-men who are hungry for intellectual food—there are many throughout the country—I am always coming across them. I am amazed at the number of them at my meetings who have read my *Problems of Philosophy*. I foresee a great and splendid life in that sort of thing—dealing with political ideas, but keeping out of actual politics. And I want to enlist all the teachers and men of education who will have been turned out for being C.O's. There are numbers of them. Think of building up a new free education not under the State! There are infinite possibilities—finance is the only difficulty, but not an insuperable one. I could give heart and brain and life to that.... I am delighted at the way the question of Cambridge has been solved. I hope the Council will be made to feel that they have acted unworthily. I feel quite impersonal about it, as I am glad to have my own course decided for me. Every bit of persecution is useful—it makes people see that no good comes out of war.[28]

[25] Reprinted: New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966.

[26] *Microcosmographia*, p. 10.

[27] *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, II: 546. See also my *D.H. Lawrence's Nightmare: the Writer and His Circle in the Years of the Great War* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), Chap. III, passim.

The court order to sell Russell's goods to pay the £110 fine was to be carried out on 26 July. Philip Morrell generously offered to raise enough money from supporters to pay £125 for the first item auctioned and thus discharge the fine. But Russell was eager to make a clean break by clearing out all his household goods:

> I have too many possessions, and I shall be glad to be rid of some—I hated the thought of my flat [in London] being sold up, but I don't mind about Trinity at all.... I think perhaps it would be best that my Cambridge furniture should actually be sold.... I shall never go back to Trinity, so it doesn't matter offending them past forgiveness.[29]

After the first lot, Russell withdrew his library from the auction; then everything else in his rooms was sold off for thirty pounds, from rugs to teacups.[30] A bare fortnight after his dismissal he had evacuated his base at Cambridge and plunged back into his hectic life in London. Apart from his work for the No-Conscription Fellowship, he was running two major love-affairs—with Ottoline and with Vivienne Eliot—and would soon add a third, with Lady Constance Malleson.[31] Why should he haunt Trinity in some faint hope of being reinstated when he would have wanted, in any case, to do a minimum of teaching until the end of the war? The place had no appeal for him any more, what with the bloodthirsty old dons, the five Apostles who had voted to dismiss him, and for good measure the failure of Whitehead to lift more than a finger to help.

III

Cornford went softly with Russell's defence. By temperament he preferred the path of conciliation and gentle pressure (the opposite of the

[28] Russell to Morrell, #1,389 and 1,390, [15? and 19? July 1916].

[29] Russell to Morrell, #1,391, [17? July 1916]. Russell proposed that he should pay the fine himself from the proceeds of the auction, and the money collected by Philip Morrell should go to the NCF. Cornford and Hardy were among the fund's subscribers.

[30] The bill of sale is in RA 710.110337.

[31] Russell met Lady Constance on 31 July; they became lovers in late September.

WEDNESDAY NEXT.
CORN EXCHANGE, CAMBRIDGE.
Removed thereto from Trinity College, Cambridge, under a Distress levied for non-payment of a fine under the Defence of the Realm (Consolidation) Regulations, 1914.

The Furnishings of the College Rooms
of the
Honble. Bertrand Russell, M.A., F.R.S.,
Including:
CHIPPENDALE 6-LEGGED SETTEE,
SUPERIOR TURKEY CARPETS and RUGS,
Walnut Kneehole Writing Table, 6 Large Bookcases, Antique Mahogany Pembroke Table, Coromandel Wood Tea Caddy, mounted with 10 painted medallions, upwards of 100 OZS. of PLATE, Plated Articles, Gentleman's Gold Watch and Chain.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
BUTLER GOLD MEDAL,
awarded to Bertrand Russell, 1915.
LIBRARY
of upwards of
1,500 VOLUMES of BOOKS,
Royal Society Proceedings and Transactions, 1908-14; London Mathematical Society Proceedings, Vols ' 4—15; Blake's Works, ed. Ellis and Yeats, 3 Vols., 1893; Cambridge Modern History, Vols. 3—7; Bentham's Works, ed. J. Bowring, 11 Vols., 1843; Berkeley's Works, 4 Vols., 1877; Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, 1901-5; Hobbes' Complete Works, ed. Sir W. Molesworth, 16 Vols., 1839-45; Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale, 1893-1914; Mathematical and Philosophical Works, Poetical Works, &c., &c

To be Sold by Auction by
Messrs. Catling and Son,
AT the CORN EXCHANGE, on WEDNESDAY NEXT, JULY 26th, 1916, at 3.30 in the Afternoon precisely.
On View Morning of Sale.
Further Particulars of the AUCTIONEERS, 6, St. Andrew's-street, Cambridge.

Postcard received by F.M. Cornford advertising the auction of Russell's goods. Original size: 138 × 88 mm.

man he represented). His advisers on the form of a protest were Hardy, Ward, Simpson, and Whitehead; this informal steering committee thus had two members who favoured strong action—Hardy and Ward—and three "minimalists". Indeed, Whitehead's support was so minimal as to be almost invisible:

> At present I feel that we should recognize the supreme crisis in the State as giving honest and substantial grounds for the Council's action. But the whole circumstances are such that if they do not rectify the matter after the war, a scandalous injustice will have been perpetrated—much to our discredit. My hope is that they, of their own motion, will so act—especially if the generality of the fellows, in ways which seem to them appropriate, let the Council know that this is their expectation.
>
> If the Council will act, I hope that there will be no College Meeting to deal with the question. We can discuss till doomsday how big the greatest crisis in the world's history is, and what is the greatest amount of national discipline which authorities are justified in imposing. The trouble is that our pacifists refuse to recognize any crisis except an inexplicable desire on the part of men of all nations to kill each other.
>
> Of course, if the Council will not act, we must have a meeting and express our minds as to the injustice perpetrated, and the discredit which they will have brought on us.... But this is after the war, and I have great hopes of the Council.[32]

The hard-core protesters like Hardy felt mistrust and even contempt for Whitehead, but continued to court him because his prestige made him an essential name to have on their side. The "moderates", on the other hand, accepted Simpson's strategy: to avoid any "definite alignment of forces", because if the "neutrals" were not prodded too hard now they would come down on the right side once the war was over. Simpson himself almost threw in his hand at the start when Russell, in a calculated gesture of contempt, wrote to the Head Porter directing him to take his name off the College books. The protest would now get so few signatures, Simpson thought, that it might be best to abandon it.[33] It is not clear why Russell's gesture should be considered so shocking, given what the College had done to him; but three years later A.E. Housman brought it up when he was sent another petition for Russell's reinstatement: "what prevents me from signing your letter is Russell's taking his name off the books of the College. After that piece

[32] Whitehead to Cornford, 1 Aug. 1916 (REC. ACQ. 912).
[33] Simpson to Cornford, Thursday, [14? Sept.], and Sunday [24 Sept.? 1916] (REC. ACQ. 912). Russell wrote to the porter around mid-September.

of petulance he ought not even to want to come back."[34] Cornford persuaded Simpson, at least, to overlook Russell's action, and a petition finally went out early in October 1916.

The protest drafted by Cornford and Simpson could scarcely have been milder:

> The undersigned Fellows of the College, while not proposing to take any action in the matter during the war, desire to place it on record that they are not satisfied with the action of the College in depriving Mr. Russell of his lectureship.

This did nothing more than put the Council on notice that some of the Fellows might, at some future time, do something on Russell's behalf. Several of Russell's supporters were dismayed that the protest was so late and so feeble. One of these was Eric Neville, who had been a student of Russell's in 1910. "I am sorry", he told Cornford, "the list is not to be made as public as the action which it condemns; will you gain any signatures by privacy, and even if you do, would not the credit of the College be restored further by a small list published than by a large list seen only by those who could predict its composition?" Neville suggested putting out a "minority report" that publicly condemned the Council's action as "petty, impertinent, and unpatriotic."[35] Probably eight or ten Fellows would have signed such a protest (out of about sixty); but in the end everyone agreed to keep their quarrel within the walls of Trinity.

The person most responsible for keeping the protest private was Hardy. Once Cornford had drafted the memorial, Hardy wrote to Russell about it:

> I wish you would tell me your *considered* view (if you are clear what it is yourself) about Trinity. You see there are two rival opinions. *I* think (with James Ward) that the Council are really malignant and obstinate—that, even after the war, they will be so still: and that the only thing to do is to fight and try to break them. For I imagine it to be certain that you would not come back, at any rate, unless asked to do so by a *repentant* College. And, taking that as so, it seems merely silly to try to avoid a row.
>
> The other view is that, as soon as the war is over, the Council will bow gracefully to opinion in the hope of perpetuating their beneficent rule. This is the Whitehead–Harrison–Simpson line. Cornford, of course, is out of touch with local opinion now, and seems to incline to whichever side has talked to him last. What they are after, naturally, is a rather colourless manifesto to attract doubtful signatures. Of course, to some extent, it is funk, and the hope of not compromising themselves: but not entirely.[36]

Russell's reply did not provide much guidance, except on the issue of whether to have a row:

> I agree with your view as to the Council, but I think that after the war it ought to be possible to elect a Council which would take a different view. I see no object whatever in trying to avoid a row. The Whitehead–Harrison–Simpson line does not seem to me any use. I cannot the least tell what I, personally, shall wish to do when the war is over, but I think it unlikely that I can ever again endure the stuffiness of a high table, even if it could endure me, with all the cold draughts that I should let in.[37]

What seems to have finally tipped the balance was Hardy's expectations from the "service vote". He was convinced that after the war the Fellows who had done military service (about a third of the College) would gain the moral initiative and could dictate a settlement. In the meantime, however, anyone in uniform would find it extremely awkward to appear as a public supporter of Russell. A year later, the Siegfried Sassoon affair made it clear that pacifists and soldiers simply would not be allowed to act in unison. The best Russell could expect from the average serving officer was summed up in a letter from the trenches by C.N.S. Woolf, Leonard Woolf's younger brother. He would sign the protest, he told Cornford, provided it remained secret and nothing was done about it until after the war. But he was not signing out of any solidarity with the Russell who had been convicted under the Defence of the Realm Act:

> I entirely disagree with everything I have heard of Russell's opinions about the war and I entirely disagree with the whole movement he is mixed up with. I think the whole movement very pernicious. In war there are only two things to do—in my opinion—fight or keep quiet: if people want to talk or write or protest, let them do it when the fighting's over.
>
> ... I'm *not* protesting against any action that may have been taken against Russell except that of the College Council. I object to that because I consider

[34] *Bertrand Russell and Trinity*, p. 54.

[35] Neville to Cornford, 16 Oct. 1916 (REC. ACQ. 912). E.W. Barnes and C.D. Broad also wanted a stronger protest.

[36] Hardy to Russell, 19 Sept. [1916].

[37] Russell to Hardy, 25 Sept. 1916.

it no business of the Council to punish Russell in this matter. Trinity is a home of learning—nothing else—and we don't show our patriotism by driving out of it a scholar like Russell. If he is a bad citizen, as I and many of us think, it cannot alter the fact that he is a very great scholar. The State is quite capable of punishing him, if it wants to; Trinity has got to keep learning going till after the war—not an easy job, I should imagine. The State—and rightly I think, will look after Russell's and other people's anti-war views; the College Council, I'm sure, needn't fear these views are going to enter into the next volume of *Principia Mathematica*.[38]

C.E. Stuart and G.B. Tatham, also infantry officers, refused to be drawn in so far. Stuart said he was very sorry for Russell's misfortunes, and admired him more than ever; but he didn't know enough about the affair to condemn the Council. Tatham merely said he was glad to have nothing to do with it all. All three—Woolf, Stuart and Tatham—were killed at the front. Woolf's letter so impressed Cornford that he sent it to R.D. Hicks, one of the elderly jingoes, in the hope of getting him to sign the memorial. Hicks retorted that "the salutary prejudice called our country" prevented him wanting even to discuss the issues. Russell had been guilty of a long string of offences, and patriots were right to "fight honestly and stoutly against him." Russell and Whitehead, he felt, were being disingenuous in trying to crawl under the skirts of the Archbishop of Canterbury. "Is it honest of such men", Hicks concluded, "to take advantage for their own ends of a religious sentiment which they really despise? Some will unkindly call it a dirty trick."[39] E.D. Adrian signed out of admiration for Russell's scholarship, but noted that he would like to kick the bottom of Mr. Everett (the pacifist whose treatment had been the original *casus belli*). Another signer, for reasons not recorded, was Captain J.R.M. Butler, the son and future biographer of the Master.

The Cornford correspondence confirms the political truism that people take sides for all kinds of reasons, and that academics can provide even more odd and diverse grounds for belief than the man in the street. But in the end, the decision for the Fellows of Trinity was a simple one: to sign the memorial, or not sign it. Whitehead, perhaps the most self-divided of them all, added to his signature the odd note: "Unless the Council proposes to offer to Mr. Russell a suitable academic post." His covering letter to Cornford leaves the issue unclear,

[38] Woolf to Cornford, 19 Nov. 1916 (REC. ACQ. 912).
[39] Hicks to Cornford, 29 Nov. 1916 (REC. ACQ. 912).

but everything else in the correspondence argues that he expected this post to be withheld until *after* the war:

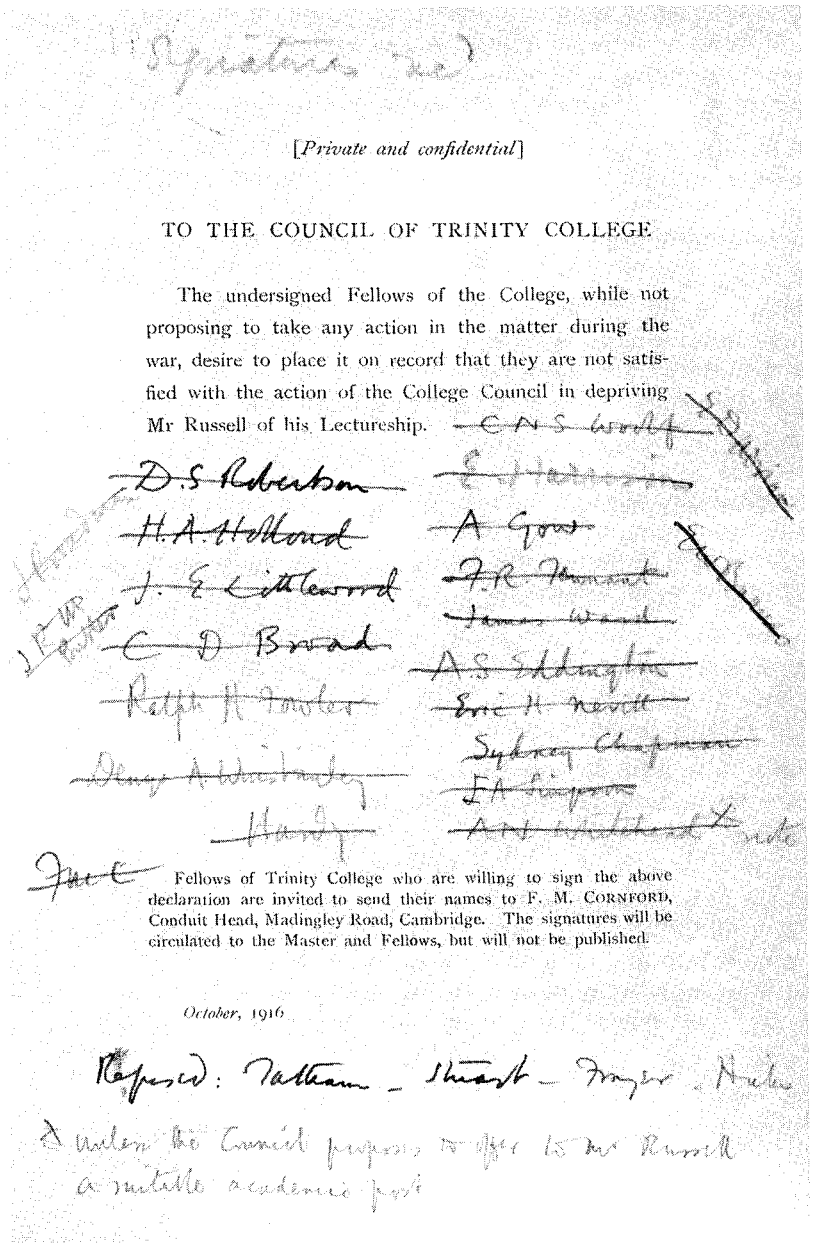
I enclose my signature, with a note appended. Of course, even if the Council act as suggested, they will have been unnecessarily clumsy in their action—first dismissing and then reconstructing a modified post, *e.g.* a research post with occasional lectures. But I should not say (in that case) that I wanted to put my opinion on permanent record. Everyone has had to take action, or make speech, under stress and pressure, and should not be criticized too closely. For example, Bertie has said things about the young men who went to war which have hurt us bitterly—and has published them in America—So remembering that where action is concerned, very little can escape criticism, I am anxious simply for substantial justice, and the substantial good name of the College as regards its respect for learning.[40]

Cornford sent the memorial to Council on 17 January 1917, with twenty-two signatures. A few more might still trickle in; but six months had now passed since Russell's dismissal, there was no chance of getting a majority of the Fellows to sign, and even those who had signed were not ready for further action. The Council received the submission and naturally did nothing. Probably they assumed that the dissidents, having fired off their popgun, would sheepishly disperse and be heard from no more. Russell had sold his furniture and gone, and there was no reason to expect him back.

IV

In January 1917 Whitehead threatened a complete break with Russell, by refusing further collaboration on philosophical projects, and by challenging him to do something about the deportation of French and Belgian workers to Germany.[41] Evelyn again tried to heal the breach, telling Russell that Whitehead was angry because their pacifist friends had neglected her during her recent illness:

[40] Whitehead to Cornford, 18 Oct. 1916 (REC. ACQ. 912). Whitehead was referring to passages of this sort: "There is a wild beast slumbering in almost every man, but civilized men know that it must not be allowed to awake.... War is perpetrating this moral murder in the souls of vast millions of combatants; every day men are passing over to the dominion of the brute by acts which kill what is best within them. Yet, still our newspapers, parsons, and professors prate of the ennobling influence of war" (Russell, "The Danger to Civilization", *The Open Court*, 30 [March 1916]: 174; reprinted in his *Justice in Wartime* [Chicago: Open Court, 1916]).
[41] For details see Clark, p. 318.



[*Private and confidential*]

TO THE COUNCIL OF TRINITY COLLEGE

The undersigned Fellows of the College, while not proposing to take any action in the matter during the war, desire to place it on record that they are not satisfied with the action of the College Council in depriving Mr Russell of his Lectureship.

Fellows of Trinity College who are willing to sign the above declaration are invited to send their names to F. M. CORNFORD, Conduit Head, Madingley Road, Cambridge. The signatures will be circulated to the Master and Fellows, but will not be published.

October, 1916

Cornford's compilation of the 22 signatories and four refusals to the memorial sent to Trinity College Council in January 1917.

> We are all suffering from conscientious motives, you would be the last to deny that our share of it is a very heavy one—the irritation you feel in Alfred is not against *you*, he does not like your views, you do not like his, the irritation does not spring from the divergence, Alfred is *the* most liberal minded person I have ever met.... [H]e resents the way in which I have been treated at a time of acute suffering, when owing to illness, and inability to go out during many months, these same intimate friends have been unable to spare an hour to come and cheer my loneliness by kind friendship....[42]

In March 1918 the Whiteheads' son Eric was killed in action, at the age of nineteen; a month later, Russell went to jail for his continuing anti-war activities. Before going, he sent a letter of condolence that softened Whitehead's heart. He promised to visit Russell in Brixton Prison (which he did regularly), and ended "Goodbye, old fellow, and good luck to you during the next trying few months. Yours affectionately, Alfred."[43] Russell had been deeply fond of Eric, and probably assumed that by sharing Whitehead's grief, and paying the price of his own beliefs, he had done more than enough to restore the friendship. If so, he was quite wrong.

A few days after the 11 November Armistice, Hardy asked Cornford to lead another assault on the Council:

> My own attitude is
> (a) the question must and will be raised, so soon as there is a full High Table again
> (b) if it can be raised in as conciliatory a way, and by as moderate people as possible (provided always what is proposed is enough to satisfy a man of Russell's eminence and pride) so much the better—people of my way of thinking will not want to wreck things by violence
> but (c) if the "reasonable" people—of whom I regard you as the natural leader—do not, within reasonable time, show definite signs of action, then the unreconcileable element will get out of hand—I mean people like Littlewood, Donald Robertson, Winstanley, and myself:—
> and (d) that will mean that the present condition of suspicion and quarrel will be prolonged indefinitely, and a very serious handicap to all efforts of the College to get itself straight again.
>
> It seems to me that what wd not be enough is that the College authorities shd be willing to say "now it's all over, we forgive you". Russell is not a schoolboy to shake hands after a flogging. What is wanted is some definite

[42] Evelyn Whitehead to Russell, 10 Jan. 1917.
[43] Whitehead to Russell, 1 April 1918.

expression of *regret*—nothing unnecessarily violent or provocative, but a clear reversal.

E.g. (I only state this as an illustration) I think everyone would regard as sufficient a motion passed by a College meeting "that the meeting regrets Mr. R.'s removal from his lectureship in 1916, and requests the Council to take the steps necessary for his reinstatement".

Something on those lines wd, I should think, command the assent of all signatories of your memorial.[44]

Hardy was proposing that a meeting of the whole College should pass a vote of censure on the Council, at which point those members of Council who had voted to dismiss Russell would have been morally obliged to resign. Before bringing on such a showdown, Cornford consulted Whitehead, probably because he thought him the best "litmus test" of where opinion in the College was likely to settle. The response showed that Whitehead's position was harder now than it had been in 1916:

> The subject of B.R.'s relations to Trinity is difficult and painful. I will express my views to you categorically and without expressions of personal feeling.
>
> (1) The governing factor in the situation is the second offence and conviction, which is ignored both in Hardy's letter and yours. Here B.R. was seriously in the wrong.
>
> (2) Public feeling is strong on this point. The immediate restoration of B.R. to his position in Trinity, which necessarily recalls influences other than those of the public lecturer on philosophic studies, is impossible, unless we are prepared to ruin the college.
>
> (3) For the immediate future the best prospect is that a lectureship can be provided for him in some other university and College, where his immediate activities would naturally be in connection with his more formal duties of teaching. Steps are being taken in this direction. Perhaps you know about them. Gilbert Murray is the promoter and he could inform you as to their chances of success.
>
> (4) It seems to me to be a plain duty for you to take an early opportunity of talking the matter over with the Master.
>
> (5) As the question of appointments is outside the competence of the College Meeting, it seems that motions commenting on appointments or dismissals, or urging appointments of particular men, should be out of order.

[44] Hardy to Cornford, *c.* 18 Nov. 1918 (REC. ACQ. 912).

> (6) I hope that I have misunderstood paragraph (d) in G.H.H.'s letter. As fellows we are both governors and servants of the college. In our former capacity we must give our opponents credit for a sense of duty, however mistaken, and as servants we must loyally work under the conditions laid down by the constituted authorities. I do not understand the reference to "suspicion and quarrel". Such suggestions of consequences can have no place in our determination of college policy....
>
> It is a great thing that the horrors of the last four years are over. But nothing can put back those we have lost, or lighten the pain....[45]

Cornford now faded out of the picture. His wife had suffered a nervous breakdown, and he did not have the stomach for another round of academic guerrilla warfare. But Hardy was nothing if not persistent and kept on lobbying within the College. As the months passed, he came to realize that if he wanted to get Russell back he would have to play a less aggressive hand. By late summer of 1919 another memorial was launched under the sponsorship of H.A. Hollond, offering terms that were scrupulously neutral. If the Council agreed to take Russell back, they would not have to admit any guilt for his dismissal. Some of Russell's supporters considered this a whitewash and refused to sign the memorial. Hardy wrote to him and said that it was "hardly conceivable" that Whitehead would refuse to sign such a watered-down protest, "though, after [the] preface to his book, I can believe anything almost of him."[46]

The book was *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge*, published in September 1919 and dedicated to Eric: "The music of his life was without discord, perfect in its beauty". In the Preface Whitehead had acknowledged his indebtedness to Russell, but also to a group of others that included McTaggart; he observed that they were all, "amid their divergencies of opinion, ... united in the candid zeal of their quest for truth." It was a classic proof of Evelyn Whitehead's claim that her husband was the most liberal-minded person she had ever met. Unfortunately, Whitehead's liberalism was of a kind that allowed him to forget that McTaggart had ruthlessly denied Russell the opportunity to seek truth within the precincts of Trinity College. Nor did Whitehead's principles allow him to sign Hollond's request that the Council should now forgive, forget, and take Russell back:

[45] Whitehead to Cornford, 27 Nov. 1918 (REC. ACQ. 912).

[46] Hardy to Russell, early Sept.? 1919 (REC. ACQ. 912).

I have read over your draft letter to the Master many times, and wish that I could make up my mind to sign it. But I cannot in honesty do so, although I agree with almost every word of what you make the signatories say. My difficulty is that there is another side which is ignored. It is a side which is naturally underestimated by those members of the Society with whose approval the draft letter has been circulated—a body of men with an honourable record of active service during the war. I mean the point of view of those who saw their children go into the furnace, and who now live on the memory of the high ideals which led to that sacrifice. It is expressed with pathetic obviousness daily in the "In Memoriam" columns of the *Times*.

I am well aware of the immense sympathy which Russell feels for the heroism and the loss. But most unfortunately his public utterances did not adequately express his full feelings. His pointed literary style, and a natural irritation at the mixed phenomena which all mass action must exhibit, led to articles in America and England with stinging phrases belittling the motives of the sacrifice and calculated to delay the marshalling of the forces of industry or national action which might have led to an earlier decision. As a result I cannot estimate the force of antagonism which might be aroused by his immediate reinstatement. The feeling is so deep that the mention of his name raises a storm of protest. Accordingly—since, apart from Russell's opinions, this situation has arisen from his own unguarded expression of them—I cannot take the very strong step of urging the Council to proceed to his immediate reinstatement. Time should be given. I cannot say how long: it depends upon the course of events in the near future. I look on this hasty action as ill-judged and as in effect delaying the issue which we must all desire. But in questions where such primal feelings are aroused there can be only one sedative, and that is Time.[47]

Two months later, when it was clear that the Council was going to be forced to reinstate Russell, Whitehead decided at the last minute to sign the memorial after all. "[T]he simplest course", he told Hollond, "is for me to sign and to send you a covering letter (enclosed) to send in with it. I feel a most distressing difficulty over the whole matter. Owing to the fact that some of Russell's activities appear to me to have been indefensible, I cannot take the line that justice must be done, though the heavens fall. Accordingly it is a question of letting feeling

[47] Whitehead to Hollond, 24 Sept. 1919. This letter, and the one that follows, is taken from a typescript of Hardy's *Bertrand Russell and Trinity* in the Russell Archives (file 710.050781). In this manuscript Hardy says that the letters are included in an appendix; in the printed version he describes them as "too long, and perhaps too personal, to quote" (p. 55). Probably Whitehead had refused his permission.

subside, of wiping a sponge over the past, of ceasing to judge each other's actions, of recognising that Bertie is a dear fellow and a great man, and of getting him back when it can be done with reasonable safety to the College."[48]

Hardy gave Russell a cynical report of this change of heart: "I did succeed in getting W. in the end: I wrote a letter which went almost to the point of offensiveness, as a gamble, and it came off."[49] Having been thus pressured into standing up for Russell, Whitehead characteristically sent in a covering letter that told the Council he was doing his utmost to support *them*![50] One suspects that the die-hards on the Council, as they faced defeat, were less than grateful for Whitehead's sentiments.

And so the rift within Trinity was covered over, if not healed. The settlement was an exact restoration of the pre-war status quo: Russell was not offered a Fellowship, but a modest lectureship like the one he had before, and with a modest salary of 250 guineas per annum. The deal was made grudgingly and secretly, and it left untouched the real and great issue, of academic freedom. All that could be said for it was that it allowed the Fellows of Trinity to restore their collegiality and carry on their traditional work, no longer fretted by "suspicion and quarrel". The war had passed through the quadrangles and gone; now the academics made their treaty—one which, unlike Versailles, pretended as far as possible that the war had never happened.

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[48] Whitehead to Hollond, 24 Nov. 1919.

[49] Hardy to Russell, 30 Nov. 1919.

[50] "I am however now convinced that the balance of feeling in the College is such that the reinstatement of Mr. Russell at a reasonably early date is the wiser course for the responsible governing authorities of the college. Accordingly I feel that it will be convenient for the Council and will strengthen their hands to have a plain list of the fellows who are prepared to support them in that course, for the reasons urged in the memorial" (Whitehead to Hollond, 24 Nov. 1919 [Trinity College Library]; copy in RA, REC. ACQ. 403).