

Obituary

Ronald William Clark (1916–1987): a personal memoir

by John G. Slater

RONALD WILLIAM CLARK, Bertrand Russell's preeminent biographer, died in a London hospital during the afternoon of 9 March 1987. Shortly after 6:00 p.m. on Friday, 6 March, he had been struck down by a massive cerebral hemorrhage in his office at 10 Campden Street in London. His last day of work had been a good one: he had spent some of it applying the finishing touches to his last book, a biography of Lenin, which was published on 25 July 1988; and he had also done some research on his next book, a major life of Trotsky, which he had only just begun. As usual, he had other books in the works, but none of them will be published, for they exist only in fragments. *Lenin*, then, will be his last book.

William Ronald Clark, as he was originally named, was born on 2 November 1916 in London, the only child of Ernest Clark and Ethel Kate (Underdown) Clark. At the time of his birth, his father was a cashier in a bank; he was later to rise to the position of bank manager. Ronald's childhood was a protected one, perhaps too protected for the development of a healthy relationship between himself and his parents. He attended King's College School in Wimbledon, where he was a day pupil. Before he turned eighteen he was in full rebellion against his parents, and his emerging sense of independence led him to withdraw from school and take a job in central London. He broke off all relations with his parents and took lodgings near his work. In London he joined an amateur theatrical group, and it was at one of its meetings that he met the woman who was to become his first wife. Her name was Irené Tapp and she had been born on 4 September 1901. Thus she was fifteen years his senior. They were married on 4 June 1938 in Teddington Parish Church. The marriage proved a failure almost from the start; Ronald soon moved out and set up on his own again. Irené died on 14

November 1977. Ronald was required to pay her, first, support (in England, alimony), then, after the divorce, alimony (in England, maintenance), for a total of thirty-three years.

His first jobs in London were all connected with the publishing business. Their varied character permitted him to learn, at a very young age, all about the production and sale of books. Most of his spare time was devoted to writing for publication. Almost from the start he was able to sell his articles, a fact which encouraged him to think that he might be able to earn his living by writing. John Baker of Phoenix House, for whom Ronald worked during this period, encouraged his writing, and, after the war, published his first book, as well as many subsequent ones. This early journalism led, after the Second World War broke out and he was found medically unfit for military service, to a job in 1943 as a war correspondent with British United Press. On D-day he landed with the Canadian army in Normandy and reported on its activities until the war's end. His next assignment was to cover the Nuremberg Trials. Then it was back to London to a desk job with B.U.P. where he continued to work full-time until 1948, when he decided that he would attempt to earn his living by freelance journalism, thus reserving his best energies for the writing of books.

Shortly after the war ended he bought a rather derelict house, situated in Campden Street, just off Kensington Church Street. Of its three stories, the basement was half-filled with water, and the rooms in the upper floors were let to lodgers. Gradually the lodgers left for one reason or other and Ronald took possession of the whole house. The front room on the street floor became his writing room; virtually all sixty-six of his books were written there. In time the other room on that floor served as the office for his second wife, Pearla Doris (Odden) Clark. Pearla was involved in nearly all aspects of his book production, including, at times, the actual writing. (She is listed as co-author on two of them.) The one task he did alone was the writing of the first draft. Before it was committed to paper, she was involved in the preliminary research, and after it was on paper, she read it critically, making suggestions for its improvement and drafting alternatives to his prose. She also usually compiled the index. To recognize her indispensable role in the production of his books, they formed a legal partnership which was broken only by his death.

Pearla and he met in 1951 on a Sunday outing of the Rucksack Club. She had been married and divorced and was nine years his senior; he was still married to Irené, although they had not lived together for many years. Shortly after they met Pearla moved into 10 Campden Street. They wanted to marry, but first he must be divorced. Existing

law required that he and Irené could be divorced only if she agreed to it. Pearla therefore visited her to ask for her cooperation, which she proved willing to give, but on the condition that they wait for one year. A year of living together, Irené thought, probably not unreasonably, would reveal whether or not they were likely to make a success of marriage. Perhaps too she had in mind her own life with Ronald. At year's end, when Pearla told her that she still wanted to marry Ronald, she readily agreed to a divorce. Ronald and Pearla were married on 22 September 1953.

Ronald's first books were all derived from his enthusiasm for mountaineering. In London after the war he learned of the existence of a large number of photographic prints of the Alps made a half-century earlier by Vittorio Sella, one of the first men to photograph these great mountains. He published a generous selection of them in *The Splendid Hills: the Life and Photographs of Vittorio Sella, 1859–1943* in 1948. This was his first book and was followed during the next ten years by nine more books on various aspects of mountaineering, the most important of which was a major study, written with Edward C. Pyatt, of *Mountaineering in Britain*. It remains the standard book on the subject.

Mountaineering books, unfortunately, are not money-makers. They may help to build one's reputation as a writer, but they do not come even close to paying the bills. Throughout the years which he spent writing about mountaineering he continued his freelance journalism, writing numerous articles and many short books to fill particular contracts. All of the many books he wrote for young people were undertaken in this way. A complete list of his books is appended to this memoir.

Around 1960 Ronald again turned his attention to the Second World War. Some of his books for young people had involved research on war topics, especially the roles which scientists played in the Second World War. His first major book to bring these two interests together was *The Birth of the Bomb*, published in 1961. The role of scientists in that war was to remain an interest for the rest of his life. But the study of science required to write books such as *The Birth of the Bomb* gradually led him to consider more ambitious projects.

One of his books for juveniles, *Sir Julian Huxley* (1960), required him to interview his subject. Huxley was very favourably impressed with Ronald's little book about him, and he proposed to Ronald that he write a combined biography of the Huxley family. *The Huxleys* (1968) established his reputation as a major biographer. As he was wont to say, it was the first of his "big" books. This language seems to allow no appropriate adjective for some at least of his mountaineering books,

which are “big” books too. Nevertheless this is the way he talked about his books, for in later life he thought of himself first and foremost as a biographer. To prepare to write *The Huxleys* he interviewed as many of the living members of that extraordinary family as he could. He freely allowed that the book had not been easy to write, because there is no unifying thread in a group biography. His experience with writing it led him to avoid such books later. The life of a single individual was much easier to organize and, consequently, to write, an important consideration for a writer who has to meet a deadline.

This is perhaps the place to report upon Ronald’s work habits. He was a “workaholic” long before the word was invented. On every day of the week except Sunday he awoke about 7:30 and called for *The Times* to be brought him in bed. After a quick read of it, he completed his toilet and appeared in the basement for breakfast shortly after 8:00. His breakfast, which he had ordered at the time the newspaper was brought him, was ready; while he ate, he continued to read the newspaper and any other publications, such as *The Times Literary Supplement* or *The Listener* or *The New Statesman*, which had been delivered that morning. Breakfast was a frugal meal: one boiled egg with toast or a single-egg omelet or bacon and toast, etc. Since he despised coffee, he always drank tea with it. The post usually arrived while he was at breakfast; as soon as it came he gave it his undivided attention until he had decided how to deal with it. At 9:00 he went upstairs to his office and, to discourage all but the most urgent interruptions, closed the door behind him. The only telephone in the house was in his office, so its use during the day was not encouraged. All of his writing was done at the typewriter; its sound was the most constant one in the house. He used it when he “guttled” his source books, and, of course, he used it for preparing first drafts. Final drafts of his books and articles were typed by someone else (usually his wife, although for a short time he had a secretary) from his typed draft and handwritten corrections. At 11:00 he was served tea but no food in his office, and at 1:00 he was brought more tea and two sandwiches whose crusts had been carefully removed. Work was barely interrupted while he took these repasts. Just before his lunch, so long as he was able, he walked up to the Notting Hill Gate underground station and bought *The Guardian*, which he skimmed at odd moments during the afternoon. At 4:00 he came downstairs for tea, usually taking a piece of cake with it. He rarely spent even a half-hour over this meal, carrying his last cup of tea up to the office, where he continued to work until at least 6:30 and usually a bit later. At that time he went out and bought both *The Evening Standard* and *The Evening News* and dropped in at The Churchill, a pub at the

corner of Campden Street and Kensington Church Street, for his daily ration of beer. In addition to the newspapers he always took some work along with him, perhaps a book he was “gutting” or one of his own drafts which he was editing, and while he had his customary five pints he got more work done. He had a very firm policy of not talking to other customers of the pub; the most I ever heard him accord one of the other regulars was a brusque greeting. At 9:00, or shortly thereafter, he went home for dinner. He usually ate alone, because Pearl had eaten earlier. She kept him company at table, however, and he took delight in arguing with her about anything at all. He could be terribly rude and unfair in argument; he nearly always resorted to *ad hominem* attacks when arguing with people whom he knew well. With those whose relationship to him was more distant he never exhibited this vice nor is this sort of argument to be found in his writings. His taste in food was decidedly limited: he had at most ten favourite meals (and by this I mean meats since he had potatoes at every meal) which were repeated year in and year out. Casseroles or stews of any sort or description, with the single exception of steak and kidney pudding, were anathema to him, as was any meat containing bones. He almost never took dessert, although one was always prepared in case he should want it. After dining he stayed up to listen to the 10:00 o’clock newscast, during which he drank a rather stiff nightcap of Scotch whiskey. He was always in bed by 10:30. His routine varied slightly on Sunday, since there were three newspapers to read, *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, and *The Sunday Telegraph*, although he scorned the colour supplements as catering to the unintelligent. Reading the Sunday papers delayed his start until 10:00 or even later. Otherwise the day proceeded as every other day.

Breaks in this schedule came when he was obliged to travel to consult distant archives or to interview persons in their homes. But he did not welcome either sort of interruption; he would rather have been at home working. One deviation from routine was welcome: his visits to a primitive cottage he rented in an isolated area of Wiltshire. “The Dellings”, pronounced as if it were spelled with an “i”, was situated in the middle of a large pasture. Only the most rudimentary of tracks led into it, so Ronald bought a Land Rover to reach it from Marlborough. Even with this vehicle the way was hazardous, because there were large boulders and deep ruts everywhere, once the main road was left behind. The cottage, whose only concession to the twentieth century was a faucet with cold water, came with a small fenced-in plot of ground which Ronald gardened with great skill and enthusiasm. In his heyday he grew enough vegetables to supply a small greengrocery. This extraor-

dinary industry had its odd side, for he would eat only a small selection of the vegetables he grew, being, as has already been noted, a meat-and-potatoes man himself. He also planted berry bushes and dwarf fruit trees, but the birds usually took all, or nearly all, of these. From the moment he arrived at the Dellings until he left, he worked, and worked very hard. His wife, of course, worked equally hard, for in addition to helping outside, she had to prepare meals under the worst possible conditions. Cooked foods were brought from London and reheated on a propane cooker just before the meal, but even so there was always a lot of work involved, and the washing up afterward was arduous, and it had to be done by the light of oil lamps, there being no electricity. In addition there were pests of every sort and description in and around the cottage, so all of the food had to be stored in containers that were both insect-proof and rodent-proof. Ronald insisted on his usual pub visit at the end of the day, so around 7:00 everyone climbed into the Land Rover for the bumpy ride to and from Marlborough, the return trip being especially uncomfortable, if very much beer had been consumed. But none of this fazed Ronald; he loved it. And even though he might be on his knees transplanting lettuces and cursing rabbits, he was always thinking about his writing. The Mondays after these weekend outings were always very productive of new writing, for he simply poured into the typewriter everything he had already written in his head while toiling in the wilds of Wiltshire.

The success of *The Huxleys* led him to formulate his most ambitious project: a major biography of Einstein. It was a daring venture for a man who was a school-leaver; and it was doubling daring since the same man had no other income except what he earned from his writings. Had the project failed he would have been obliged to go back to freelance journalism for an income. Because of the high quality of his recent lives of scientists, those of Sir Henry Tizard and Sir Edward Appleton, his literary agent was able to interest publishers both in Great Britain and the United States in paying him large advances for the book. Besides the difficulty of the science there was the added difficulty of the German language. Ronald really knew only English; he could usually, with the help of a dictionary, determine the gist of a passage in another language, but that was all. To overcome this deficiency he always asked experts to read those parts of his books where expert knowledge of one sort or other (including linguistic knowledge) was required. But by the time he signed contracts for *Einstein* he felt confident that he could bring it off. It took him about five years to write; the same would be true for his subsequent biographies of Russell and Freud. It was completed on schedule; he took pride in the fact that he

had never been late for a publisher's deadline. The American edition, which was published first, sold over 300,000 copies. Its success gave his finances a solid base; he was finally able to quit journalism entirely. After the publication of *Einstein* he published very few articles that did not derive from his books.

In early 1970 when he was in the middle of his study of Einstein, he decided that his next big book would be a life of Bertrand Russell. Russell had died in February of that year, and there had been no biography of him since the publication of Alan Wood's rather short study in 1957. There were many people alive who had known him well, and most of them were in England or Wales which would make interviewing them easy. In addition there was the Bertrand Russell Archives at McMaster University, which had been opened only two years earlier, and most of whose contents had not been available to Alan Wood. Circumstances were clearly ripe for a major new biography. The American publishers of *Einstein* were eager to have Ronald write the book, so a contract was signed; and the American publisher contacted McMaster and requested its cooperation. Since I had already planned a trip to London when the request was received, I was asked by William Ready, then the Librarian at McMaster and the man who had brought Russell's papers there, to visit Ronald and report back to him on his projected biography of Russell. I spent a memorable evening in the Clark household. I was greeted at the door by Ronald and ushered into his study where we drank whiskey. (I learned only much later what an extraordinary sacrifice Ronald had made that evening by forgoing his beer. I believe it was on my very next visit that he suggested we have our drinks in the pub, where, of course, he drank beer.) After a while Pearla appeared and we were introduced, but she did not stay to talk. After some more whiskey, we went downstairs and joined Pearla for a delicious meal. By this time Ronald was feeling argumentative and, since I was still a stranger, he picked his fights with Pearla. I was appalled by the vehemence of his attacks on her and I briefly considered whether or not I should leave in order to show my disapproval, but I thought better of it since I was not there on my own behalf. Later I came to see that his rudeness in argument was in part, but, let me stress, only in part, a function of the alcohol he had consumed, so I reluctantly came to accept it, although I never felt at all comfortable during its displays. Despite misgivings about his character, I could see that he was an accomplished and dedicated professional writer who would make a thorough study of Russell's life, so I made a highly favourable report to Ready, who in turn pledged McMaster's full cooperation on the project.

I saw the Clarks often during the time which he (and she) were working on the life of Russell. They made two long visits to the Russell Archives where they examined and made notes on a large number of letters and other documents. Present every morning when the Archives opened, they worked until it closed, taking only a short break for lunch. They continued their work in the evening, because Ronald found Canadian beer undrinkable and Canadian bars unpleasant, so he was forced to drink whiskey in his motel room. On my annual visits to London I frequently joined them for dinner, with the obligatory two-hour pub visit to start. During those visits the talk was almost entirely about Russell. Ronald found it very useful to discuss his latest ideas with someone who knew Russell's life and work well. We did not always agree, of course, but that did not matter to either of us. We both knew that Russell was such a complex personality that there is unlikely to be one obvious account of any of his various activities. For my part I was always amazed at how much Ronald had done since the last time I had seen him. Every day counted, and every day he added to the whole. When I was in Canada he would send me drafts of chapters as they were completed. I would read and comment upon them and send them back to him. Then one day, long before I was expecting it, a massive parcel arrived. It was the whole typescript, in very nearly final form. I read it once again and sent my detailed comments to him. Shortly thereafter the book was in the hands of the publisher, well before the deadline specified in the contract. Ronald was disappointed with the sales of the book, especially in the United States. Nearly everyone concerned thought the book would do at least half as well as *Einstein* had done in America, but they were proven wrong. To this day there has not been a paperback issue of *The Life of Bertrand Russell* in the United States. Einstein, apparently, had a kind of cachet among American bookbuyers that Russell lacked.

The Life of Bertrand Russell contains much new information. Ronald cast his net wide and hauled in some impressive catches. A letter to Lady Constance Malleon, to mention but one instance, brought, by return of post, a bulky parcel which proved to be her own account of her long relationship with Russell and which quoted in full all of her letters to him and summarized his to her. From a source who preferred to remain anonymous he secured a copy of Russell's still unpublished "Private Memoirs" which gives his own account of his relationships with various women in his life. Then, of course, there was the truly extraordinary correspondence between Russell and Lady Ottoline Morrell, which Ronald was the first to use extensively. And there were interviews with those who had known Russell in one capacity or other,

including some of his children and some of his wives. In the course of his researches Ronald assembled his own impressive collection of Russelliana, which will be deposited in the Russell Archives in due course. Future biographers of Russell will certainly welcome this treasure trove.

At the time of his death Ronald was thinking of revising his biography of Russell for reissue. Since it was published, much new information has come to light, much of it contained in the papers of two of Russell's wives. The archives of both Dora Russell, his second wife, and Edith Russell, his fourth (and last) wife, are now safely housed at McMaster. There are embargoes on some of the papers (as there are on some parts of the original archives), but most of them are available to researchers. Ronald planned to make use of these new papers, but had not yet made a start. He did, however, mark in one copy of the book all of the corrections and emendations he had already decided to make in a new edition; it too will be deposited in the Russell Archives.

During the course of his work on Russell, his private life underwent a momentous change. In October 1972 McMaster University held a conference to celebrate Russell's centenary. Ronald and Pearla attended it to take full advantage of the opportunity to interview some of the participants, many of whom had known Russell or knew a great deal about him and his work. After the conference was over they stayed on for a while to complete their researches in the Archives, then they went to Washington, D.C., for the purpose of researching the life of William F. Friedman, the cryptologist who had broken the Japanese code in September 1940, and whose life Ronald had been invited by his widow to write. The book was published in 1977 under the title, *The Man Who Broke Purple*. During their stay in a Washington hotel Ronald suddenly announced to Pearla that he wanted a divorce. The strain that this wholly unexpected demand produced followed them back to London where they continued to live in the same house. Ronald sometimes alleged to me that he had been led to decide upon divorce by his study of Russell's life, that he had come to believe Russell was right when he said that a man could remain in love with the same woman for only about seven years. At other times he hinted that something mysterious had happened to him in Washington; that certain unnamed persons who wished to suppress the Friedman book had in some devious way altered his mind, and thus caused him to make a decision he had no intention of making when he arrived there. In conversation Ronald often espoused some version or other of the conspiratorial theory of history, but he never mentioned it in his books; I never knew, when he advanced it with me, whether it represented his true beliefs or was

only a conversational ploy. I mention these two allegations only to underscore the fact that his decision, even to himself, was an abrupt one, and, for Pearla, both abrupt and devastating.

Even though their personal relations were strained to the breaking point, their work as partners in writing books had to go on, since there were deadlines to meet. So they continued to live in the same house and followed the routine they were accustomed to before their trip to North America, Ronald making the same demands on Pearla that he had always made concerning the running of the house. Once they were back in London, Pearla hoped that he would change his mind, but he proved adamant. Faced with the prospect of spending the holiday season alone together, she suggested that they accept a standing invitation, which they had always declined in earlier years, to spend it with friends in the country. Probably because he was as miserable as she was, he agreed. On that visit he met another house guest, Elizabeth Allan Soutar, who was several years his junior and who lived in Elgin, Scotland, and he struck up a friendship with her. The fact that she was Scottish greatly appealed to Ronald, for he had a life-long love affair with nearly everything Scottish. Soon he was paying her court, driving up to Elgin for weekends and, later, for longer stays. This new relationship made divorce from Pearla certain, so they negotiated an end to their marriage but not to their legal partnership. Pearla received the house and Ronald agreed to rent the street floor as his working place. It was further agreed that she would continue to work for him; and, of course, she would, since he was absolutely bereft of domestic skills, continue to supply him with tea and food when he was working there. Their divorce became final early in 1973, and he married Elizabeth on 9 October 1973.

At the time of his remarriage he bought a flat in Wimbledon where he and Elizabeth lived. In the early days of their marriage he commuted to Kensington in his Lancia, but in later years, to avoid the increasingly heavy morning traffic, he sometimes travelled by the District Line (which he abhorred) or stayed the night at Campden Street to ensure an early start to work the following morning. There he would follow his old routine. The telephone was his contact with Elizabeth while he was at Campden Street; he spoke to her several times a day, and when he stayed there he always telephoned her after he came from the pub and before he had his dinner, and again before he retired to bed. Saturday was often spent at the Dellings, although he and Elizabeth did visit it on other days, whenever he felt the need of a break from his work. Pearla, of course, cooked all of his meals for him when he was in residence in her house. He still argued with her as he had always

done, but, to me, who had now come to know him very well, it was plain that he had a deep affection for her despite the inexcusable way he sometimes treated her. His relationship with Elizabeth, by contrast, was affectionate in a different way; exceptionally, he never in my presence argued with her in the way he did with Pearla.

Elizabeth was from the start of their marriage intimately involved in the production of his books. She had all of the skills of an executive secretary; and she proved to be an expert researcher, too. Moreover, she could drive a motorcar, so visits to libraries and other research centres were facilitated. Ronald came to rely heavily on her for both research and the obligatory double-checking of all his references. She also took over the task of typing second, and subsequent, drafts of everything he wrote. She did not, of course, just retype, she also raised queries as she went, with which he then had to deal. Pearla did the same at her end. She read all of his drafts and provided him with written queries; she also indexed all of the later books. The three of them worked together as a team, with Ronald deciding all of the issues either of them brought to his attention. There can be no question that every word in every one of his books was written by him, but he would not have been quite so prolific during his last years without the enormous help both women provided him. He was well aware that his style of life after his divorce and remarriage was highly unusual, but the adverse opinion of others did not bother him. On more than one occasion he remarked to me that he considered himself very lucky in the way in which his divorce and remarriage had worked out. Since his work was what he cared about most, he certainly was lucky in having the skilled and dedicated help of these two women in the production of his books.

Ronald was justifiably proud of his big books. He regarded himself as a professional writer, as someone who had the talent to digest great masses of information and to present it to his readers in clear, well-written prose. He wanted his books to show his workmanship. He thought of himself as contributing to the spread of information, and not as creating literature. Once a point had been made as clearly as he could make it, it was ready for the publisher. He never went over his work only for the purpose of improving its literary style, although he paid attention to style when he was revising his first drafts. I think he would have been pleased by a passage in *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (1984) by Ira Bruce Nadel:

Examples of biography as rewriting or revision are innumerable. Among contemporary illustrations there is Ronald W. Clark's *Freud: The Man and the Cause* (1980), a one-volume life which alters and updates Ernest Jones's

three-volume life (1953–57). Using the archive Jones amassed for his biography, Clark re-examines documents used by Jones and queries as well as revises their significance and meaning. The result is a more critical and uncompromising biography, in part reflecting Clark's experience and approach as a professional biographer; he is not a disciple, Viennese associate or psychoanalyst. The professionalism of Clark replaces the piety of Jones.

Professionalism, with its principal virtue of critical objectivity, was what Ronald most wanted to achieve in his writings. To a very large extent he succeeded.

When I first met Ronald in 1970 he had rarely experienced illness. He had, many years before, broken his leg in a freak accident in a neighbour's back yard, and had been laid up for a long time with it. But broken legs do not remind one of one's mortality. I happened to be staying with Pearla when Ronald came down with the gout. His reaction was alarming; he was at first completely unwilling to accept that he was sick. A doctor was called in, made the diagnosis, and recommended that Ronald give up beer immediately. This recommendation was, at first, rejected out of hand, for he had been a confirmed, and heavy, beer drinker all his life. Gout can now be treated medically, and Ronald resigned himself to taking pills in order to be rid of the discomfort, but he was very reluctant to become a teetotaler. A compromise was struck with his doctor: he would reduce his intake of beer to one pint per day and he would give up whiskey entirely. Shortly after he began this new regimen he lost several stone and became quite thin. Other ailments developed as time passed, and there were more pills to take. Then came the most shattering blow of all. In October 1983 he contracted one of the severest cases of shingles his doctor had ever seen. Taken to hospital, he refused to stay. So that he could continue his work Pearla suggested that he remain at Campden Street and invited Elizabeth to move in to nurse him, which she did. Shingles is one of the most painful of diseases, and since his case was severe, he suffered enormously. It is fair to say, I think, that he never recovered from that attack. The sores healed, but the pain never left him. When he had recovered from the shingles sufficiently to travel, they moved back to Wimbledon. Thereafter Elizabeth drove him in to Campden Street every morning and collected him in the evening. Through the years the disease sapped his vigour, and when I saw him in the spring of 1986 I could hardly believe the changes in his appearance and his movements, both were those of a very feeble, old man. When he walked outdoors or in any unfamiliar place, he had to cling to another for support. As time passed his dependence on Elizabeth when outdoors

became total. To all who knew him, and very probably to himself also, it did not seem that he would live for very long. Yet despite this physical deterioration he remained completely unaffected in mind. His work went on as before, although now he had to lie down for short periods during the day. And it is true that he worried more, usually over completely inconsequential matters. He told me that he could not lay such trivia aside as he had once been able to do. It is also true that he was a lot less talkative after the shingles than he had been before; he seemed drained of his old argumentativeness, although occasionally it flashed out as of old. It was while Ronald was waiting for Elizabeth to collect him on the 6th of March 1987 that he collapsed. I had talked to him on the telephone only an hour or so before he suffered the stroke and he sounded his usual confident self; certainly there was nothing wrong with his mental faculties during that conversation, although he was upset over a rumour that another biography of Russell was in the works just when he was planning a new edition of his own life of Russell.

In his prime Ronald was formidable both as a person and as a personality. I can still, in my mind's eye, see him as he opened the door for me on that first visit. Over six feet tall, with a well-developed paunch, a shiny bald head, and eyes that fixed upon you, he was not the sort of man you would hand your hat by mistake. Getting to know him was a daunting experience, partly for the reason that I have given above, namely, the way he treated his wife during my very first visit. Another obstacle to making his acquaintance was the way in which he announced and defended what seemed to be his own opinions. They were advanced in the most dogmatic way, as if to preclude challenge to them; and when they were challenged, which is what he wanted all along, they were defended in the most rough and tumble way, any and every persuasive device being called in, if there was a hope that it would carry the day. Of course he did not write this way; had he done so he would have remained unpublished. Therefore, it seems likely that his conversational ways were rehearsals of a sort for his writings. Every possible opinion, however outrageous, must be considered, and every reason that might support it, must be canvassed, just to make quite sure that the opinion could be safely disregarded or otherwise disposed of. One could never be quite sure, therefore, what his own opinions were. As a biographer, striving for objectivity, he tended to omit his own point of view. And as a private person, he was much too fond of argument to refrain from it for long. So a conversation that began by asking him what he really thought of Bertrand Russell, say, would quickly become an argument about the right interpretation of some quite small and precise piece of Russell's behaviour, usually one not

greatly to Russell's credit. One gathered that he had come to dislike Russell while writing his life, but, if you made the mistake of expressing this opinion, you had a blistering argument on your hands, which would be ended only by an interruption of some sort. Ronald rarely resumed an interrupted argument (this is not to say that on some later occasion the whole argument might not be repeated almost word for word), which led me, as I came to know him better, to conclude that an argument's purpose for him was not what it seemed to be. He was constantly composing tomorrow's script in his head. This basic fact about him explains nearly all of his behaviour toward others: his argumentativeness with most of the very few with whom he had personal relationships, his disdain for the general mass of mankind, and his general unsociability. Whatever interfered with his work was not to be tolerated. Because of the devoted way in which Pearla and Elizabeth provided for his needs, he was able to hold this principle, and even to live by it, a privilege granted to few, if any, others.

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A CHECKLIST OF RONALD W. CLARK'S BOOKS

- The Splendid Hills: the Life and Photographs of Vittorio Sella, 1859-1943.* With 3 portraits and 80 pages of plates. London: Phoenix House, 1948.
- The Early Alpine Guides.* London: Phoenix House, 1949; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950.
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