

A TALENT TO ALIENATE: THE 2ND EARL (FRANK) RUSSELL (1865–1931)

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Bertrand's elder brother, John Francis Stanley (Frank) Russell, who was the second Earl Russell for over 50 years, led a fascinating life as a politician, electrical engineer, author, traveller, businessman, barrister, law reformer, polemicist and pioneer motorist. Notorious in his lifetime for his sensational marital history, his prominence has waned since his death to the extent that he is remembered mainly as "the wicked earl" who was twice divorced and once imprisoned for bigamy. His achievements do not match those of his brother, grandfather, third wife and other relatives, but his life merits examination in its own right as well for its familial links with leading figures in Britain's political, cultural and intellectual history.

Aside from being Bertrand's older brother and the grandson of a Prime Minister (Lord John Russell, first Earl Russell from 1861), John Francis Stanley Russell, widely known as Frank, is mainly remembered for a tangled matrimonial history that saw him repeatedly in court and once imprisoned in Holloway for bigamy. He was, however, involved in politics from parish council to government benches of the House of Lords. He also was an electrical engineer, author, traveller, businessman, barrister, law reformer, polemicist and pioneer motorist. Notorious in his day as "the wicked earl", and the subject of much scandalous newsprint, his prominence has waned to the extent that, unlike his brother, parents, grandparents, third wife and other relatives, he has not featured in the *Dictionary of National Biography* until now. He did not deserve such neglect. For his achievements, failings and familial links

with Bertrand, Frank's life is worthy of examination.¹

The starting point for such an examination is Frank's lengthy and engaging autobiography. He wrote *My Life and Adventures*, a volume George Bernard Shaw read with "unflagging interest", before attaining the peak of his political career in Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour Government (1929–31).² The book therefore supplies an incomplete picture of Frank's life. In some ways candid for its time, the book also is selective and self-serving, especially in its coverage of the author's marital history. Among other things, his second divorce and third, disastrous marriage go unmentioned. He ignores his inveterate womanizing and the eight step-children he acquired through his second and third marriages. Neither is Frank's recall of dates and events always reliable.

The bare facts of Frank's early years will be familiar to Russell scholars. Their childhood together has been described by Bertrand in his autobiography and by his biographers, particularly Caroline Moorehead and Ray Monk.³ Scholars also have scrutinized Frank's marital history.⁴ Nevertheless, in the interest of completeness, this article revisits Frank's early years and his three marriages.

Frank was born on 12 August 1865 at Alderley Park in Cheshire, the family seat of the aristocratic Stanley family since the eighteenth century. He was the eldest of the three children of John Russell, Viscount Amberley (1842–1876) and his wife, Kate (1842–1874), daughter of the second Baron Stanley of Alderley. The Amberleys were an unconventional couple who mixed with some of the foremost Victorian iconoclasts, including John Stuart Mill, Helen Taylor and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. The viscount had possessed firm religious convictions in youth but lost his faith in the 1860s, as did his wife.⁵ Both Amberleys

¹ George Santayana, *Persons and Places* (London: Constable, 1944), p. 308. Omission from the *DNB* will soon be rectified as Frank will be included in an online release of lives of significance in the history of motoring. The present article is an expanded version of the forthcoming (2013) *Oxford DNB* entry.

² (London: Cassell, 1923). G. B. Shaw to Frank Russell, 11 April 1923, RA1 710.055829.

³ *Auto.*, 3 vols.; Monk, 2 vols.; Moorehead.

⁴ See Gail Savage, "... Equality from the Masculine Point of View ...": the 2nd Earl Russell and Divorce Law Reform in England", *Russell* 16 (1996): 67–84; Ann Sumner Holmes, "'Don't Frighten the Horses': the Russell Divorce Case", in G. Robb and N. Erber, eds., *Disorder in the Court: Trials and Sexual Conflict at the Turn of the Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 140–63.

⁵ Stefan Andersson, "Religion in the Russell Family", *Russell* 13 (1993): 117–49.

advocated birth control, feminism, radical political reform and free love, and practised what they preached. As Bertrand wrote, Frank's consumptive tutor, Douglas Spalding, was invited to share the viscountess's bed because the Amberleys thought that though he should remain childless, it was unfair that he should stay celibate.⁶ The couple suffered socially and politically for their unorthodoxy. The viscount, for example, lost his short but promising parliamentary career.⁷ In his last years he worked on a comparative study of the leading world religions. The resulting work, the inordinately long and unutterably dull *An Analysis of Religious Belief* (1876), was published posthumously and argued that religion is a human construct rather than divine revelation.

Frank was nearly seven years old at the time of Bertrand's birth in 1872. A sister, Rachel Lucretia, had followed in 1868 (her twin was still-born). Until 1870 the Amberleys and their two children lived at Rodborough, an "enormous" house near Stroud in Gloucestershire that belonged to the first Earl Russell.⁸ When, to the viscount's chagrin, the house was sold, they moved to Ravenscroft (now Cleddon Hall), an isolated property high above the Wye Valley about one mile from Trellech.⁹

At Ravenscroft Frank was brought up under a permissive regime that allowed him to do much as he pleased, from clambering over the roof of the house to roaming the countryside on horseback or barefoot and stealing apples from neighbouring farmers. His father was not averse to the infliction of corporal punishment but on his seventh birthday Frank was permitted to do exactly as he wished all day. He used his freedom to purchase a quantity of treacle which he consumed and shortly afterwards regurgitated. In line with his parents' democratic ideals Frank played with the servants' children "on terms of complete equality". While his parents were alive he never went to church and never had "the name of

⁶ *Auto.* 1: 17. Curiously, Bertrand does not identify Spalding by name but provides a clear guide to his identification. Spalding was an animal behaviourist who conducted pioneer work on imprinting. See J. B. S. Haldane, "Introducing Douglas Spalding", *British Journal of Animal Behaviour* 2 (1954): 1.

⁷ *Auto.* 1: 15; Russell and P. Russell, eds., *The Amberley Papers*, 2 vols. (London: Hogarth P., 1937), 2: Chap. 11; Monk 1: 7–8.

⁸ Rodborough was destroyed by fire in 1906. A more modest house built on the site incorporated some of the surviving architectural features. See *Victoria County History of Gloucester* 11 (1976): 221–4.

⁹ For the history of Ravenscroft/Cleddon Hall, see Sheila Turcon, "Russell's Homes: Ravenscroft", *Bertrand Russell Society Bulletin*, no. 145 (summer 2011): 11–13.

God inflicted upon” him.¹⁰

In his autobiography Bertrand notes that Frank gave his parents “considerable trouble”. His mother “understood him” because his character was that of the Stanleys, but Monk maintains that Frank’s wildness was the “chief blot” on the Amberleys’ “otherwise serene family life” (Monk 1: 8). The verdict of the wider family was damning. Dubbed “from the first as a limb of Satan”, one maternal aunt thought him “a very naughty boy”. His maternal grandmother viewed him as “an unwashed, ill-bred, impertinent little child dressed in rags” (*My Life*, p. 22; *Auto.* 1: 26).

In 1871, when Frank was medically diagnosed as having a brain too large for his body, a ban on serious reading and study was prescribed (Robson, p. 5). But his early education, mainly supplied by a succession of governesses and tutors, was not entirely neglected. By the age of eight he had read the complete works of Sir Walter Scott for pleasure, mastered German (by virtue of German nannies and governesses) and acquired the beginnings of a lifelong interest in science and engineering that he nurtured by attending the Royal Society’s child lectures. Shortly after his eighth birthday he made a start on Greek (*My Life*, pp. 15, 17, 22, 52).

In 1874, after a long period abroad with his family, Frank contracted diphtheria. Treated by Garrett Anderson and nursed by his mother and Aunt Maude Stanley, he recovered. But his mother and sister succumbed to the disease within five days of each other in late June and early July. Both were buried in the garden at Ravenscroft. Little more than eighteen months later Viscount Amberley joined them after he died of bronchitis, on 9 January 1876, following a death-bed scene of sobbing, resignation and farewells that would not have been out of place in a Dickens novel. All three coffins were later removed to the Russell family vault at Chenies in Buckinghamshire. In his autobiography Frank expressed the earnest wish that his remains should avoid the same fate—as they did.¹¹

The Viscount left instructions for two guardians to bring up his sons as agnostics. But the sick and (in Frank’s opinion) “sinister” Spalding and T. J. Sanderson (later Cobden-Sanderson), a friend of Amberley

¹⁰ *My Life*, pp. 4, 12, 22–3; Ann Robson, “Bertrand Russell and His Godless Parents”, *Russell*, o.s. no. 7 (autumn 1972): 3–9.

¹¹ *Amberley Papers* 2: 576; *My Life*, pp. 27–9. See J. A. Froude, “Cheneys and the House of Russell”, in *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, 4 vols. (London: Longmans, 1883), 4: 335–76.

since their days together at Cambridge, never took custody of the boys. Instead, the Russell family appealed successfully to the Court of Chancery to have Frank and Bertrand placed in the care of the viscount's parents: the octogenarian first Earl Russell, his sexagenarian wife and two of their adult children (Rollo and Agatha) at Pembroke Lodge in Richmond, Surrey.¹²

Pembroke Lodge was a "grace and favour" property in the gift of Queen Victoria. Its atmosphere of hushed tones, formality, moral rectitude and piety could hardly have contrasted more with the permissiveness that prevailed at Ravenscroft. A childhood friend of Frank and Bertrand thought it "an unsuitable place ... for children to be brought up in."¹³ George Bernard Shaw was incredulous that Frank never murdered Uncle Rollo and incinerated the Lodge.¹⁴ Certainly, Frank, who was required to dress tidily, behave "nicely" and attend church, hated his time there. Far from being free to do as he liked, he was under constant supervision and never allowed out alone for fear of moral or physical contagion (*My Life*, p. 34). Bertrand adjusted to the restrictions imposed upon him at Pembroke Lodge by escaping into an inner world of the mind and imagination (Monk 1: 19–20). But Frank, who was largely kept away from his brother because he was considered a malign influence, saw Bertrand's apparent acceptance of his circumstances as evidence that he had become "an unendurable little prig" (*My Life*, p. 34). Frank's more assertive character led him to rebel. While the family was lodging in Broadstairs for the sake of the first Earl's health, he twice attempted to flee his "nightmare", once stealing money from his grandmother to fund his failed escape (*My Life*, pp. 37–8).

In 1878, when Frank was twelve, his family dispatched him to the Reverend R. S. Tabor's Church of England school in Cheam which Randolph Churchill had earlier attended. In May 1878, shortly after he arrived there, his grandfather died and Frank became the second Earl Russell. Frank had mixed views about his school, which was run mainly by the "unctuous and pious" Tabor assisted by his "rather sharp son". Its fees were high but Tabor's offered good food (unlike the fare at Pem-

¹² *My Life*, pp. 24, 29–30; Monk 1: 14–15; *Auto*. 1: 17–19. For the history of Pembroke Lodge, see Turcon, "Russell's Homes: Pembroke Lodge", *Bertrand Russell Society Bulletin*, no. 146 (spring 2012): 3–8.

¹³ Annabel Huth Jackson, *A Victorian Childhood* (London: Methuen, 1932), p. 62.

¹⁴ Shaw to Frank Russell, 11 April 1923, RAI 710.055829.

broke Lodge) and facilities that included a gymnasium, sports field, swimming pool and woodwork room. Frank, not a natural team player, was a poor cricketer and hated football but he did learn to swim. His particular pleasure was wood-turning at which he became adept, producing chessmen, hollow eggs and other items. Generally, however, he did not much enjoy Tabor's.¹⁵ More to his liking was Winchester College, the ancient public school he attended between 1879 and 1883, and to which he devotes three enthusiastic chapters of his autobiography. He loved the school's traditions, communal atmosphere, and the physical and intellectual freedom it offered (*My Life*, p. 88).

Frank went up to Balliol College, Oxford in October 1883. He never graduated but his time there (little more than eighteen months) was "quite the happiest" of his life. According to Frank, he voluntarily withdrew from the university in May 1885 after the celebrated Master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett, accused him of "disgusting conduct in writing some scandalous letter". Jowett would not produce the letter; he could not because, as later became evident, he never saw it himself and it may never have existed (*My Life*, pp. 99, 107, 109–10). Frank furiously denied any wrongdoing and refused even the light punishment of a month's rustication that Jowett initially proposed. According to Frank's first wife, Uncle Rollo advised his nephew that his best escape from disgrace was to blow his brains out.¹⁶ Jowett did not go this far but a year after the event he refused to readmit Frank to Balliol and urged him not to apply for admission to another college, either in Oxford or Cambridge, on the grounds that an "application would lead to enquiries and if enquiries are made to a refusal". Instead, he recommended a long spell of foreign travel in the course of which people might forget "the unfortunate circumstances in which you have been placed".¹⁷

George Santayana claimed that Frank's published account of the circumstances of his departure from Oxford was a fabrication.¹⁸ At best, as Savage remarks, "many aspects" of the incident "remain obscure" (Savage, p. 68). They are likely to remain so, but the core issue was the nature of Frank's relationship with Lionel Johnson, his "dearest friend and the greatest influence in my life" since their Winchester days. Partly because

¹⁵ *My Life*, pp. 38–42; *Auto*. 1: p. 27.

¹⁶ *My Life*, pp. 109, 202; Holmes, p. 143.

¹⁷ B. Jowett to Frank Russell, 17 and 21 May 1886, RAI 732.

¹⁸ J. McCormick, *George Santayana: a Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1987), p. 65.

he was short and slight, Johnson, who was Frank's junior by seventeen months, looked much younger than his years (Santayana thought him sixteen when he was actually twenty).¹⁹ As a youth Frank likened him to "some young saint in a stained glass window" (*My Life*, p. 90). In the course of a visit to Oxford, Johnson, having missed the last train to London, stayed overnight in Frank's rooms. Jowett considered this arrangement, which was a breach of college rules, inappropriate.²⁰ In July 1885, in response to a paternal query about whether Frank was a "suitable companion" for Johnson, Jowett replied "in strict confidence" that he thought Russell "a very improper friend". He advised that Johnson's father should "forbid any further acquaintance between his son and Lord Russell".²¹

Frank maintained that he and his accuser were later reconciled (Jowett attended Frank's first wedding in 1890). For his part Jowett was ready to forgive. As early as May 1886 he invited Frank to visit him in Oxford, albeit "not now but at some future time".²² Furthermore, with Frank in mind he wrote: "I am strongly against the errors of young men being visited upon them several years afterwards if they have changed their ways. With all young persons, man and women alike, there ought I think to be a Statute of Limitations. Let them begin again under brighter auspices and be helped by their friends."²³ But Frank avoided Oxford for

¹⁹ Santayana, *Persons and Places*, p. 307; *The Middle Span* (London: Constable, 1947), p. 62.

²⁰ *My Life*, pp. 72, 89–90. Santayana, *Persons and Places* (New York: Scribner, 1944), pp. 309–10. Johnson (1867–1902) entered New College on a Winchester scholarship in 1886. He went on to become a minor poet and man of letters. A repressed homosexual, he introduced his "great friend", Lord Alfred Douglas (another Wykehamite), to Oscar Wilde. Johnson's life was blighted by alcohol. His death, from a stroke, followed a fall from a bar stool in a Fleet Street public house (Savage, p. 70). See R. K. R. Thornton, "Johnson, Lionel Pigot (1867–1902)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford U. P., 2004; online edn., May 2007 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34204, accessed 30 June 2012]); G. A. Cevalco, "Douglas, Lord Alfred Bruce (1870–1945)", *Oxford DNB*; online edn., May 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32869, accessed 30 June 2012]).

²¹ Balliol College Archives, Jowett Papers (hereafter BCAJP), IV A8/24. Jowett to J. Ffolliott, 5 July 1885. Frank and Johnson remained friends. Indeed, Frank's "passionate devotion and admiration" remained intact long after Johnson's death. See *Some Winchester Letters of Lionel Johnson* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919), p. 10. I am grateful to the Editor for information that the anonymous editor of this volume was, in fact, Frank.

²² Jowett to Frank Russell, 17 May 1886, RAI 732.

²³ Jowett to Lady Stanley, 7 Dec. 1891, BCAJP, IF6/61.

years and missed Jowett's funeral, supposedly because of an attack of rheumatism.²⁴ To the end of his life he remained bitter about the circumstances in which his undergraduate career was curtailed.²⁵ The fact is that Jowett never withdrew his accusation and Frank never escaped the stigma of the so-called "Oxford Incident". His first wife used it against him in matrimonial litigation in the 1890s, when she also alleged that Frank engaged in homosexual practices while married to her.

For about two years after leaving Oxford Frank lived with a tutor in "a little jerry-built semi-detached house" near the Thames in Hampton, Surrey. He named the house "Ferishtah" after Robert Browning's recently published poem, "Ferishtah's Fancies". There, still under age and living on an allowance from his family of £400 per annum, he did little but read, boat on the river and practise shooting his Derringer at bottles in the house (*My Life*, Chap. 15). In this period he did, however, make the first of several extended trips to the USA, travelling throughout much of the country and making the acquaintance of Walt Whitman, whose work Bertrand came to admire, President Cleveland and George Santayana. Frank was the first Englishman Santayana ever met and they became friends. Though favourably impressed by much that he encountered in the USA, Frank took a strong dislike to New York that he did not overcome for decades.

Once he reached the age of twenty-one and gained access to his inheritance, Frank was able to live on a grander scale.²⁶ In the summer of 1887 he moved to Broom Hall, on the banks of the Thames at Teddington, where he played the young lord and amused himself on his steam yacht, *Royal*. But his lifestyle was not entirely hedonistic. As a youth in the early 1880s he had helped install electricity at Lord Salisbury's ancestral home, Hatfield House, one of the first private houses in England with electric light.²⁷ In the grounds of Broom Hall, he set up with James Swinburne

²⁴ Frank Russell to Sir William Markby, 9 Oct. 1893, BCAJP, IID/4/85.

²⁵ Santayana, *Persons and Places*, p. 308.

²⁶ Bertrand notes that he inherited "some £20,000" when he attained the age of twenty-one. Frank's autobiography supplies no similar information but it seems likely that he came into a similar sum in 1886. Santayana mentions a sum of £15,000 (*Auto*. 1: 82; McCormick, p. 76). In a sworn statement in 1894 Frank declared that he possessed "property principally consisting of land in Ireland" valued at £60,000–£70,000 which yielded an income of some £3,500 a year (The National Archives [hereafter TNA], J77/534/16305, Answer to Petition of Alimony, 17 July 1894).

²⁷ *The Times*, 4 and 9 May 1931.

an electrical contracting firm. The enterprise did not prosper, but Frank went on to establish his own contracting company with offices and works in London, and a branch in Cambridge. This too foundered, and after three years Frank was forced to abandon the business at considerable financial loss.

Other commercial ventures followed. For many years he was chairman of the marine engineering firm Plenty & Co. of Newbury. He also was associated with the Motor Union Insurance Company, British Union and National Insurance Company, Humber Ltd., Gold & Phoenix Gold Mining, and Thermo Electric Ltd. He was a director of an arms manufacturer but declined the opportunity to serve as chairman of the Great Horseless Carriage Company.²⁸ Though some of these businesses flourished, at least for a time, and generated large profits, Frank described himself as “bankrupt” in 1921.²⁹ Bertrand noted that he inherited a title from his brother but “not a penny of money” (*Auto.* 2: 141, 201). It is difficult to say precisely what happened to Frank’s wealth but he liked to spend on travel, women, houses, high stakes bridge and motor cars. He also used cocaine, though to what extent is unknown. Most significant, perhaps, he was “very much impoverished with the enormous expenses of ... litigation”, not all of it matrimonial, to which he was “addicted”.³⁰

Frank met his first wife, Mabel Edith Scott (1869–1908), in 1889, apparently after her mother, the divorcee and adventuress, Lady Selina Scott, had targeted him as a suitable marriage prospect. Frank later described her ladyship as “by instinct a blackmailer and preyer upon men” whose plan from the first was to extract money from him (*My Life*, p. 160). But initially he was, according to Santayana, romantically attracted to the mother rather than the daughter.³¹ The trio first met when the Scotts visited Broom Hall on a pretext. A tour of house and grounds led to trips on Frank’s launch, visits to the Scotts’ residence at Walton-on-Thames, and a contract to supply their house with electricity. Though

²⁸ *My Life*, Chap. 32; K. Osborne, “Elizabeth”: *the Author of “Elizabeth and her German Garden”* (London: Bodley Head, 1986), p. 196.

²⁹ Frank Russell to Russell, 27 Jan 1921, RAI 730.

³⁰ *My Life*, p. 299; Osborne, pp. 196, 209, 212–13, 222. One of his lesser known actions was an unsuccessful slander suit against a Kendrick Murray. The defendant convinced a jury that he had not accused Earl Russell of being a serial bankrupt or of having been prosecuted for non-payment of hotel bills. See *Daily Express*, 15 June 1914.

³¹ Santayana, *People and Places*, pp. 316–17.

warned off by his relations and doubtful himself that he had chosen wisely, Frank was in love (*My Life*, pp. 156–8). After a short engagement the couple married on 6 February 1890, five days after Mabel's 21st birthday. Following a honeymoon in Torquay they moved into a rented house at 48 Eaton Square in Belgravia, while Frank made ready the projected marital home, Amberley Cottage, on his beloved Thames near Maidenhead in Berkshire. This house, which later burned down and was rebuilt, was the first of two dwellings that Frank had a hand in designing. Both have been described as monuments to ugliness, though to Frank they were architectural perfection.³²

Mabel never lived at Amberley Cottage and never even visited it, for she and Frank rapidly discovered that they were incompatible. On 6 May, exactly three months after her wedding, she left her husband. An attempted reconciliation lasted only one week. Some ten years of litigation followed. Mabel made the first move when in November 1890 she petitioned for a judicial separation on the grounds of Frank's physical and mental cruelty. Some of her many allegations, for example that he terrified her by driving up and down hills in a pony carriage when the roads were wet, or forced her to stay by his side while he prepared his accounts, were ludicrous. But others, involving violent and abusive behaviour, carried more substance.

For Frank, the most damaging claim concerned the nature of his relationship with Herbert Roberts, head mathematics master at Bath College, whom he had known since 1884. Mabel's counsel stated that in the course of Roberts' two stays in the marital home Frank made several lengthy visits to his guest's room, including when dressed for bed. When, under cross examination, Mabel was asked whether she wished "to make an imputation" about the relationship between Roberts and her husband, she answered affirmatively.³³ She also maintained that information from Frank's relatives concerning his past life led her to believe there was "something very grave in the Roberts incident". For his part, Roberts admitted that he had stayed up late into the night with Russell smoking, but denied that these smoking sessions took place in a bedroom or that the earl was ever anything other than properly dressed.

³² *Auto.* 2: 54–5; Santayana, *Middle Span*, p. 78. Katharine Tait termed Telegraph House "ugly, inefficient and absurd". See *My Father Bertrand Russell* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 70.

³³ *The Times*, 2 Dec. 1891.

In his summing up the judge, Sir Charles Butt, raised doubts about Mabel's veracity and a special jury took less than one hour to conclude that Russell was not guilty of cruelty to his wife. The verdict was greeted by "considerable applause" within the court; in the street as the news spread there occurred "a tremendous outbreak of cheering, again and again renewed". Lady Russell's petition was dismissed and, as a woman of means, she was held liable to costs.³⁴

Frank's problems with his wife, far from ending with his triumph in court, had barely begun. A day after the verdict Mabel gave an interview to the *Hawk*, a short-lived (1888–93) and in Frank's opinion "scurrilous rag" edited by Augustus Moore, brother of the more esteemed writer, George, in which she repeated all her charges against Frank and maintained that the trial had been unfair.³⁵ Then, in 1894, after many expressions of mutual animosity, Mabel sued for restitution of conjugal rights. In response, Frank counter-sued for judicial separation on the ground of cruelty arising from his wife's continued allegations against him since 1891, especially regarding his relationship with Roberts and a boy on board his yacht.³⁶ His action proceeded at virtually the same time (1894–95) that Oscar Wilde was involved, with tragic consequences, in his own civil litigation and criminal proceedings arising from his relationships with Lord Alfred Douglas and other males (Savage, p. 69).

A jury again found in Frank's favour, this time after retiring for only twenty minutes, and the judge, Baron Pollock, granted him a decree of judicial separation.³⁷ However, this verdict was overturned in the Court of Appeal a few months later and in 1897 the House of Lords confirmed the judgment of the higher court.³⁸

³⁴ *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1891; *My Life*, Chap. 19.

³⁵ *Hawk*, 8 Dec. 1891; *My Life*, pp. 171, 185.

³⁶ Court documents were less coy than the press in respect of Mabel's allegations: "the petitioner has alleged and still alleges that the Respondent has been guilty of the crime of sodomy" (Answer to the Petition, 2 May 1894, TNA, J77/534/16305, and Further and Better Particulars, 5 June and 8 Dec. 1894). When the *London Figaro* (25 Oct. 1894), commented adversely on Mabel's suit, and in particular her "disgusting insinuations" against her husband, its editor was charged with contempt of court. A timely apology saved him from prison but he was fined £50 and costs (*The Times*, 13 Nov. 1894). Herbert Roberts sued Mabel for libelling him in the *Hawk* and elsewhere. The action went before a jury in June 1896, but in the course of proceedings Roberts agreed to settle for a written retraction and apology plus nominal damages of £2. See *The Times*, 16 June 1896.

³⁷ *The Times*, 25 April 1895; *My Life*, Chaps. 22 and 23.

³⁸ *Russell v. Russell*, *All E.R. Rep.* [1895–99] 1–32; *Law Reports* [1897], House of Lords,

By 1896 Frank was involved in yet another court case, this time the prosecution of Lady Scott and certain associates who had crewed Frank's yacht, for criminal libel concerning his alleged "impropriety" and commission of "unnatural offences" over an extended period. On 7 January 1897 the defendants were found guilty of publishing "false malicious and defamatory libels". All were sentenced to eight months in prison, which Lady Scott was permitted to serve as a "first-class misdemeanant". According to Frank, the sentence "broke the Scotts" and he "never had any more ... trouble from them."³⁹ He was, however, still married to Mabel, who had taken to performing on the music hall stage and, Frank suspected, earning a living through prostitution with her mother's connivance. Not until October 1901 was he finally free, after persuading Mabel to petition for divorce with the offer of £5,000. A few years later she died of consumption.⁴⁰ Frank reflected that "from beginning to end" Mabel cost him £30,000 and that from a financial viewpoint he should have paid her £1,000 per year for life from day she had left him, as she had originally desired (*My Life*, pp. 289–90).

Frank's matrimonial affairs remained complicated. His second marriage, to Mollie (Marion) Somerville (née Cooke) who was several years his senior, began before his first was over according to English law. She was born in Ireland, the daughter of a master shoemaker, around 1857–58, but lived in Scotland for much of the 1880s.⁴¹ In 1898, when Frank and Mollie met, she had two young sons (plus an older boy from her first marriage) and was still married to her second husband.⁴² She had

395–469.

³⁹ *My Life*, p. 209. Santayana, who testified in Frank's favour at the trial, thought his friend displayed the "most admirable courage and patience" through the whole proceedings (Santayana to Susana Sturgis de Sastre, 14 Jan. 1897, RAI 710.048561).

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, 19 April 1900, 19 July 1901; *My Life*, p. 233. In his teens Bertrand was impressed by Mabel's tennis and her beautiful singing voice. But he also found her shallow and, presciently, foresaw "life-long misery" in her future (*Papers* 1: 52).

⁴¹ Ian Watson, "Mollie, Countess Russell", *Russell* 23 (2003): 65–6.

⁴² Santayana states that Mollie and Frank knew each other as early as 1895, and Holmes speculates that Frank may have kept the relationship quiet at that point because of his ongoing petition for a judicial separation from Mabel. But this suggestion does not explain why, in his autobiography, published in the 1920s, Frank gave 1898 as the year of their first acquaintance. Various court proceedings also identify 1898 as the year they met. A simple explanation for the discrepancy may be Santayana's vagueness about dates (Santayana, *My Host the World* [London: Cresset P., 1953], p. 85; Holmes, p. 162; *The Times*, 12 Dec. 1900 and 29 May 1901).

divorced her first, James Watson, in 1889 and married George Somerville less than two months later, when she was some seven months pregnant.⁴³ Since neither Mollie nor Frank could see a way out of their marriages in England, they decided to travel to the United States where Frank (but for some reason, not Mollie) planned to obtain an American divorce, before entering into an American marriage.

Some struggled to see what Frank ever saw in Mollie or why he stayed with her for so long (till 1914). Santayana described her variously as an “old frump” with “no positive intelligence”, as a “fat, florid, coarse Irish-woman of forty”, and “fat old Mollie”. Still, he acknowledged that she was kind, motherly, undemanding and generally “a good soul” (*My Host*, pp. 85–6, 89). Bertrand, who had doubts from the first about her and the marriage, later wrote that Mollie, “who was very fat, used to wear green corduroy knickerbockers; the view of her from behind when she was bending over a flower-bed ... used to make one wonder that he had thought her worth what he had gone through for her sake.”⁴⁴ Perhaps it was her utter submissiveness for, as Bertrand recorded, she always called Frank “my owner” (Watson, p. 67).

In 1899 Frank and Mollie embarked on a circuitous journey to Nevada. They lived at Glenbrook, on the banks of Lake Tahoe, to fulfil the residence requirement necessary to comply with the state’s divorce laws. Frank obtained his American divorce on 12 April 1900. Three days later, in the presence of Mollie’s oldest son, Stanley Watson, he married Mollie at the Riverside Hotel in Reno. They arrived back in England via Chicago and New York in May 1900, where they briefly set up home in Grays Inn Road, London and at Amberley Cottage. Before long, however, they moved to Telegraph House, near Harting, West Sussex, its downland location having replaced the Thames in Frank’s affections. Their London house, in which Frank remained until 1922, was 57 Gordon Square (where Bertrand lodged for a time).⁴⁵

⁴³ *George John Somerville v. Marion Somerville and Earl John Francis Stanley Russell*, TNA, J77/693/1073; Watson, p. 66.

⁴⁴ *Auto*. 2: 153; Frank Russell to Russell, 19 June 1900, RAI 730.

⁴⁵ *My Life*, pp. 235–8, 257–8. In 1927, in need of funds, Frank reluctantly leased Telegraph House to Bertrand for £600 a year in a transaction that led to an enduring rift between the brothers. For seven years it housed Bertrand and Dora’s Beacon Hill School (1932–34, Dora’s alone). Bertrand sold it in 1937. From 1927 Frank lived at Dyke House, Methwold, Brandon, Suffolk. His London address from 1922 was 50 Cleveland Square W2, a much less desirable location than Gordon Square (Monk 2: 85; Frank Russell to

Frank viewed himself as married “according to American law, but in the eye of the English law still living in sin” (*My Life*, p. 259). In the event, as Frank soon came to realize, it was less a matter of sin and more a case of bigamy, hence his decision to bribe Mabel to initiate proceedings against him, as she did in June 1900 (*My Life*, p. 289). Her decree nisi, granted in March 1901, was obtained on the grounds of Frank’s bigamy and adultery. Frank’s arrest on the charge of bigamy occurred within three months of Mabel’s award. Mollie was not similarly prosecuted. Yet Somerville, who like Frank was also an electrical engineer, had initiated divorce proceedings against her in May 1900 on the grounds of his wife’s adultery with Frank and her bigamous marriage. He obtained a decree nisi in December 1900.⁴⁶

Frank thought he was prosecuted because the authorities were intent on victimizing him. He explained this in terms of antipathy aroused by his radical politics and atheism, though it is possible that his notoriety and social standing were also factors. In any event, his behaviour was deemed unbecoming in a man of prominence and high social status; if he could not set an example, one must be made of him. Archibald Bodkin’s close involvement in the case on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) was an additional element in the mix. As DPP between 1920 and 1930 Bodkin became notorious for his “vigorous forays into the sphere of public morals”, and it is likely that Frank’s louche lifestyle aroused his ire.⁴⁷ The legal basis for the prosecution was questionable. If the Nevada divorce was not recognized in English law, why did English law recognize a marriage that took place in the same jurisdiction? This question occurred to one member of the grand jury that in June 1900 sat in judgment on Frank. When the juror asked whether “the form of marriage in Nevada” was recognized in England, the judge’s unconvincing reply was: “You may take it that it is for the purpose of today at any rate” (*The Times*, 26 June 1901).

Russell, 25 Jan. and 3 Feb. 1927, RAI 730; Russell to Ottoline Morrell, 9 March 1931, RA3 69.001691; British Library (hereafter BL), Stopes Papers, Add. 58556, folios 1–152. Change of address note, 1 Nov. 1927).

⁴⁶ Somerville sought £3,000 in damages from Frank. Somerville was awarded £1,500 plus costs and custody of the two children of the marriage (TNA, J77/693/1073).

⁴⁷ Christmas Humphreys, “Bodkin, Sir Archibald Henry (1862–1957)”, revised by Mark Pottle, *Oxford DNB*; online edn. (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31942>, accessed 30 June 2012); *The Times*, 26 June 1901.

Frank was arrested at Waterloo Station as he alighted from the Petersfield train on 17 June 1901. As a peer he had the inalienable right to be tried in the House of Lords. Frank regarded this supposed privilege more as a “misfortune” which cost him dear in terms of the punishment inflicted (*My Life*, p. 281). The trial took place in the Royal Gallery on 18 July in the presence of some 200 peers, including the prime minister, Lord Salisbury. Lord Halsbury presided. Not since the case of Lord Cardigan in 1841 had a peer been brought before the Lords on a felony charge. *The Times* saw Frank’s trial as “a notable pageant”; he viewed it as “hypocritical tosh”. Reluctantly, on counsel’s advice, he pleaded guilty. His speech in mitigation stressed that his bigamous marriage was an honest mistake arising from his belief that his Nevada divorce was valid. He also maintained that he would not have gone to the extreme of seeking an American divorce but for the outrageous behaviour of his first wife over the course of many years. He was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment in Holloway (not the Tower of London, as sometimes claimed) as a first division prisoner.⁴⁸

Since his offence carried a maximum penalty of seven years’ penal servitude, it could be argued that Frank escaped lightly. Indeed, the *New York Times* described his sentence as “extremely light” and even “relatively derisory”.⁴⁹ On the other hand, his sentence could have been much more lenient. He thought he would have received only a nominal day in prison if his case had been heard at the Old Bailey, but because his trial cost between £20,000 and £30,000 it was “necessary that the sentence should bear some relation to the fuss made” (*My Life*, p. 286).

Frank’s time in Holloway was not physically onerous. He was allowed

⁴⁸ “The Trial of Lord Russell”, *Law Reports* [1901] A.C. 446–9; *The Times*, 19 July and 17 Aug. 1901; F. W. Ingram and G. A. Ballard, “The Business of Migratory Divorce in Nevada”, *Law and Contemporary Problems* 2 (1935): 302–9; N. M. Blake, *The Road to Reno* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 153. Under the terms of the Prison Act, 1898 (61 & 62 Vict. c.41), first division prisoners enjoyed many privileges including the right to occupy special cells, opt out of prison work, purchase their own food, books, newspapers and, within limits, alcohol (see Statutory Rules & Orders 1899 no. 322). When Bertrand was imprisoned during the First World War he too had first division status (see Monk 1: 523–4; Turcon, “Like a Shattered Vase: Russell’s 1918 Prison Letters”, *Russell* 30 [2010]: 101–24). Frank’s trial is covered in R. Furneaux, *Tried by their Peers* (London: Cassell, 1959), pp. 191–4, and H. M. Hyde, *Carson: the Life of Sir Edward Carson, Lord Carson of Duncairn* (London: Heinemann, 1953), pp. 164–6.

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, 19 July 1901; 24 April 1902.

unlimited books as well as his own clothes, bed and washstand. He socialized with the governor, received frequent visits from Mollie and others and was permitted to keep his cell light on until 10.00 p.m. He used his time productively, not least to write his first book, *Lay Sermons* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1902), in which he addressed various religious, ethical and moral questions from an agnostic standpoint. He dedicated it to Mollie, ostentatiously listing his address as Holloway Gaol. Santayana regarded the book as “the only regrettable consequence” of Frank’s period in prison (*My Host*, p. 87). Notwithstanding his preferential treatment, Frank was aggrieved that “unimaginative dunderheads” incarcerated him when, in his eyes, he had done nothing wrong (*My Life*, pp. 286–7). He had a point, for in 1911 the Home Secretary granted him a free pardon.⁵⁰

After his release from Holloway, Frank and Mollie lived together in London or on the South Downs, if not exactly in wedded bliss, at least in some content, at least on Mollie’s part. Santayana recalls her toddling around Telegraph House in a loose tea gown followed by a pack of lap dogs “as happy as an exacting husband and a dwindling income could allow her to be”. Apart from running the household and placating the servants after Frank had upset them, she wrote, gardened, smoked, took naps, played cards, and indulged to the full her love of whisky.⁵¹

But Santayana was not surprised when, in February 1914, Frank left Mollie for the Countess Elizabeth von Arnim (1866–1939), author of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898) and many other works. Born Mary Annette Beauchamp in Australia, she was the widow of Graf Henning August von Arnim-Schlagenthin (1851–1910), with whom she had five children. She first met Frank in 1892 when he struck her as “the perfect romantic hero of fiction and every inch an earl”. They remained in regular contact thereafter (Usborne, pp. 47–8). In almost every respect, physically, intellectually and emotionally, Elizabeth was Mollie’s antithesis. Soon after her affair with H. G. Wells ended she fell “deeply in love—for the first time in her life, perhaps”, with Frank.⁵² Mollie swiftly

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 11 Aug. 1911; *House of Lords Debates* 9 (9 Aug. 1911): col. 88.

⁵¹ Santayana, *My Host*, pp. 87–9; McCormick, p. 221. Mollie published two novels: *Five Women and a Caravan* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1911) and, a book she dedicated to Frank, *An Excellent Mystery* (London: Stephen Swift, 1912). Much later she wrote a one-act play: *The Matchmakers* (London: H. F. W. Deane & Sons, 1929).

⁵² Leslie de Charms, *Elizabeth of the German Garden* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p.

petitioned for restitution of conjugal rights but, once convinced that Frank would never return, was induced by the promise of money to sue for divorce on the grounds of his desertion and adultery.⁵³ Her “very onerous terms” were £400 a year for life which, after Frank’s death, Bertrand paid, initially in the form of rent for Telegraph House, then from the proceeds of its sale.⁵⁴ Mollie’s settlement allowed her to pursue a life of pleasure, as Santayana observed when he encountered her in Brighton one day (*My Host*, pp. 91–2). Bertrand, who resented his long-standing obligation to Mollie, complained that she lived until “about the age of 90”, though in reality she was around 84 when she died in 1942 (*Auto.* 2: 153; Watson, pp. 67–8).

Frank and Elizabeth married on 11 February 1916. Before her wedding Elizabeth doubted the wisdom of proceeding; almost immediately afterwards she realized her marriage was “an act of consummate folly” and fled to America (de Charms, p. 181). Following a brief reconciliation she left for good in 1919, though there was no divorce. Frank, who had suspected the nature of Elizabeth’s relationship with Bertrand, was furious with his wife, whom he dubbed “a vulgar little hedonist without a sense of decency”, and was upset with his brother for maintaining contact with her. Not for the first time he questioned Bertrand’s loyalty: “You know that you have never been loyal to me yet in any crisis of my life.”⁵⁵ Not altogether surprisingly, when Elizabeth heard of Frank’s death she declared she “was never happier in her life” (McCormick, p. 310). Her “masterpiece”, *Vera* (1921), with its portrait of a domineering and psychopathic husband, has been described as “a ferocious and at times macabre indictment of Russell”.⁵⁶ The novel, which Bertrand thought

152. Elizabeth’s affair with Wells features in David Lodge’s novel *A Man of Parts* (London: Harvill Secker, 2011).

⁵³ *The Countess Mollie Russell v. Earl John Francis Stanley Russell*, TNA, J77/1151/4961; *The Times*, 13 July 1915.

⁵⁴ Frank Russell to Russell, 15 May 1914, RAI 730. The National Archive file indicates that Frank agreed to pay alimony of £50 per month. See TNA, J77/1151/4961. Watson, pp. 67–8, provides a succinct summary of Mollie’s complicated divorce settlement and Bertrand’s post-1931 obligations to her.

⁵⁵ Frank Russell to Russell, 15 Sept. 1920, RAI 730. See also Frank Russell to Russell, 19 June 1900.

⁵⁶ Nicola Beauman, “Arnim, Mary Annette von [*née Mary Annette Beauchamp; known as Elizabeth von Arnim; other married name Mary Annette Russell, Countess Russell*] (1866–1941)”, *Oxford DNB*; online edn., May 2006 (<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/35883>, accessed 30 June 2012); Osborne, p. 218. According to Molly, a char-

“intolerably cruel”, made Frank “wild with fury” (*Auto.* 2: 153; Usborne, p. 235).

All Frank’s marriages were childless. He accused Mabel of being barren but he may have been impotent owing to gonorrhoea.⁵⁷ Mollie and Elizabeth could both have been beyond child-bearing age by the time they married Frank.

In his autobiography Frank portrays himself as the naive victim of Mabel and Lady Scott while ignoring his other marital failures and his numerous affairs, one of which resulted in a breach of promise action.⁵⁸ It is implausible that he was the guiltless party in all his marriages. Though Frank could be kind, charming and genial, Bertrand, who liked him and was deeply affected by his death, admitted that his brother could be a bad-tempered bully and was capable of cruel and unscrupulous behaviour.⁵⁹ His many other negative qualities included arrogance, greed, fussiness, insensitivity, intolerance, jealousy, possessiveness, rudeness and suspiciousness. What he did have, according to de Charms (who was actually Elizabeth’s daughter, Liebet), was an “unwavering confidence in his own rightness” and an all “but infallible talent for alienating people”. He was widely disliked at the Reform Club, House of Lords and elsewhere. Bertrand, according to Frank Swinnerton, was far more likeable.⁶⁰ Frank was better with “animals, machines, and places” for, as an acerbic reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* pointed out, “they do not answer back” (1 March 1923).

Frank’s divorce suits had broad historical, as well as personal, significance. First, the House of Lords decision in 1897 on Frank’s petition to divorce Mabel because she spread lies about his moral standing es-

acter based on Frank was the hero of Edgar Jepson’s novel *The Passion for Romance* (Russell’s 1902–05 Journal, entry of 13 Dec. [1902], *Papers* 12: 16).

⁵⁷ McCormick, p. 67. Usborne suggests that Elizabeth’s only son, born when she was married to the Count, may have been Frank’s, though Slater dismisses the suggestion. See Usborne, 91; John G. Slater, “Two Countesses and One Formidable Woman”, *Russell* 7 (1987): 188–92.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 4 Dec. 1891; Usborne, p. 209.

⁵⁹ *Auto.* 1: 26. Russell to A. Dora Sanger, 9 March 1931, RAI 710.055438.

⁶⁰ de Charms, pp. 153, 182; Usborne, especially Chaps. 13–15; E. Jepson, *Memories of a Victorian* (London: Gollancz, 1933), pp. 98–101, 313–14; McCormick, pp. 62, 68, 119; F. Swinnerton, *Swinnerton: an Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1937), pp. 306–7, 313–14; D. Crow, *The Edwardian Woman* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 175.

established “the test of legal cruelty”.⁶¹ This test continued to apply until the Divorce Reform Act, 1969, abolished cruelty as a ground for divorce. In fact, *Russell v. Russell* established several legal precedents and remained a leading case for decades.⁶² Second, Savage states that “the publicity and notoriety” surrounding Frank’s American divorce and remarriage “apparently helped to lay the foundations for Nevada’s reputation as a divorce mill” (Savage, p. 70). This observation may be going too far. It is fair to say that the scandal surrounding Frank’s divorce “drew widespread attention to Nevada’s lenient divorce laws” in Britain and the USA. But more important in making the state a divorce centre were the Corey divorce case of 1905 which “catapulted Reno into the national spotlight”, and the extraordinary promotional abilities of William H. Schnitzer, a New York lawyer who established a Reno office in 1907.⁶³

As Frank notes with studied understatement in his autobiography, he gained “a good deal of experience of law and lawyers”. Perhaps strangely, he also developed “a great liking for the law”. In need of an income, in 1899 he decided to read for the Bar. Though his sojourns in Nevada and Holloway, as well as fitful application to his studies, delayed his professional progress, he was called to the Bar in 1905 and practised for about five years. He once had the opportunity to argue a case in the House of Lords but turned it down because it was against suffragettes, whose objectives, though not their tactics, he supported (*My Life*, p. 300). Notwithstanding his personal contempt for drunken and speeding drivers, many who knew of his interest in motoring (see below) retained him to defend them. He had no qualms about using “forensic tricks” to secure their acquittal (*My Life*, p. 299). Such anomalous behaviour, a *TLS* reviewer argued, typified the contradictions in his character (1 March 1923).

Frank was a member of the House of Lords for some 44 years between 1887 and his death. At first he took little interest in the business of the chamber and his route into active politics was at the local rather than national level. Following the Local Government Act, 1894, he was elected

⁶¹ O. R. McGregor, *Divorce in England: a Centenary History* (London: Heinemann, 1958), p. 43.

⁶² Hon. Mr. Justice Wall *et al.*, *Rayden and Jackson’s Law and Practice in Divorce and Family Matters* (London: Butterworths, 1977), pp. 257–8.

⁶³ G. Riley, *Divorce: an American Tradition* (New York: Oxford U. P., 1991), pp. 135–6. See also Ingram and Ballard, pp. 302–9; Blake, p. 153.

to Cookham Parish Council and soon became chairman. He then became a district councillor, serving as a Progressive, Poor Law Guardian and Berkshire justice of the peace. As a local politician and magistrate for six years he was “full of reforming zeal” (*My Life*, p. 173). From 1895 to 1904 he also sat on London County Council, initially as a representative of West Newington, then as an alderman. He met Mollie, a Poor Law Guardian and ardent feminist who converted him to the cause, when campaigning unsuccessfully for the Hammersmith seat in 1898. He served on several LCC committees and took particular interest in asylums.

Frank made his “first considerable speech” in the House of Lords only after his release from Holloway (*My Life*, p. 324). In 1902 he introduced a bill which provided, *inter alia*, for divorce by mutual consent after one year’s separation. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury, “danced with rage” at this prospect. He thought the bill amounted to “the abolition of the institution of marriage” and, as such, was an “outrage”. Peers unanimously denied it a second reading.⁶⁴ Undaunted, Frank unavailingly persevered with the cause, not least through his book, *Divorce*,⁶⁵ his Divorce Reform Society and as a witness before the Royal (Gorell) Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Proceedings. While he repeatedly championed reform on the basis outlined in his 1902 bill, his proposals to the Gorell Commission in 1910 to make divorce available to either party after two years’ judicial separation were slightly more pragmatic.⁶⁶

Until the year of his death Frank regularly attended the House of Lords. He frequently contributed to debates and played a full part in committee work. He spoke on many subjects including finance, marriage and divorce, road transport, animal cruelty, minority rights, criminal justice, broadcasting, lunacy, betting, the law of blasphemy and House of Lords reform. During the First World War, when Bertrand was imprisoned as a conscientious objector, Frank accused the authorities of vindictiveness. He also decried the brutal treatment of others punished for

⁶⁴ *House of Lords Debates* 107 (1 May 1902): cols. 389–409; *My Life*, p. 324; *The Times*, 2 May 1902. See also *House of Lords Debates* 124 (23 June 1903): cols. 202–13.

⁶⁵ *Divorce* (London: Heinemann, 1912).

⁶⁶ E. S. P. Haynes, “The Late Earl Russell and Divorce Law Reform”, *Saturday Review* 151 (14 March 1931): 369; Crow, p. 15; PP 1912–13 (Cd. 6479), Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes: Minutes of Evidence, pp. 456–61.

their pacifism.⁶⁷ In practical terms, Frank (and Elizabeth) did much to alleviate Bertrand's prison conditions.⁶⁸ Frank also interceded with the War Office and with the Home Secretary, Sir George Cave, not always judiciously and with scant success, to have his brother's sentence remitted.⁶⁹

Frank, who belonged to the Reform and National Liberal Clubs from the mid-1890s, spoke in the Lords initially as a Liberal, but in 1912 he joined the Fabian Society, of which he remained a member for the rest of his life, and became an avowed socialist.⁷⁰ Years after the event Bertrand alleged that another Fabian, Beatrice Webb, effectively barred Frank's appointment to high office in the first Labour Government of 1924 because she objected to his marital "eccentricities".⁷¹ The truth of the allegation is uncertain. At the time Sidney Webb, who served as MacDonald's President of the Board of Trade, wrote that he and Beatrice were disappointed that the Prime Minister had overlooked Frank.⁷² When Frank died Beatrice wrote that she "had a real affection" for him and thought it "a great misfortune that the events of his life prevented him from taking a front place in Labour politics".⁷³ Though the Webbs did not attend Frank's memorial ceremony, Bertrand recognized them as having been his brother's "very good friends".⁷⁴ So if the Webbs were not thoroughgoing hypocrites, it seems likely that Bertrand's recall in old

⁶⁷ See, e.g., *House of Lords Debates* 21 (4 May 1916): cols. 904–37; 22 (4 July 1916): cols. 521–46; 26 (11 Nov. 1917): cols. 1,005–6.

⁶⁸ Turcon, "A Shattered Vase", pp. 104–5; Monk 1: Chap. 19.

⁶⁹ G. Cockerill to Frank Russell, 17 March 1918, RAI 710.048438; Frank Russell to Cockerill, 5 July 1918, RAI 710.048447; Frank Russell to G. Cave, 29 July 1918, RA3 730.079998; Cave to Frank Russell, 11 Aug. 1918, RA3 903; Frank Russell to Cave, 13 Aug. 1918, RA3 903; Frank Russell to Cave, 10 Sept. 1918, RA3 903; Cave to Frank Russell, 12 Sept. 1918, RA3 903; Frank Russell to Cave, 18 Sept. 1918, RA3 903. Bertrand's later suggestion that Frank had influence over the Home Secretary because Cave had been his "fag" at Winchester College was wide of the mark. Not only was Cave more than nine years Frank's senior, but also he never attended Winchester. See Monk 1: 524; Thomas S. Legg, Marie-Louise Legg, "Cave, George, Viscount Cave (1856–1928)", *Oxford DNB*; online edn., Jan 2011 (<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk:2117/view/article/32329>, accessed 30 June 2012).

⁷⁰ LSE Archives, Fabian Society Membership Index.

⁷¹ Royden Harrison, "Bertrand Russell and the Webbs: an Interview", *Russell* 5 (1985): 44–9.

⁷² S. Webb to Frank Russell, 25 Jan. 1924, RAI 732.

⁷³ B. Webb to Russell, 26 March 1931, RAI 735.

⁷⁴ Russell to B. Webb, 29 March 1931, RAI 735.

age let him down—as it did on some other occasions.

In the event, Frank attained the pinnacle of his political career only in the last two years of his life, when he served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport and as Under-Secretary of State in the India Office in Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour Government (1929–31). He had hoped for the more senior positions of Lord President of the Council and leader of the House of Lords but was persuaded to accept lesser office.⁷⁵ At the Ministry of Transport he was responsible for piloting the Road Traffic Act, 1930, through the Lords. This important measure is chiefly remembered for its abolition of the long-standing 20 mph speed limit for motor cars (but not other vehicles) which had stood since 1903. As such, it can be seen as a libertarian measure which rendered Britain's dangerous roads even more hazardous. However, the reintroduction of speed limits in 1934 did not stem the growing tide of death and injury. A more favourable verdict on the 1930 act, which also introduced compulsory third-party insurance, a minimum driving age and measures against careless and dangerous driving, is that it was the "first systematic attempt to control the motor vehicle in the interests of the community as a whole".⁷⁶

Soon after Frank joined the India Office, his extemporary remarks about independence at a gathering in Cambridge upset Indian nationalists.⁷⁷ Many Indians, however, "came to recognize him as a real friend" who favoured Indian political advance, and he distinguished himself as a delegate at the Round Table Conference in 1930–31.⁷⁸ In the late flowering of his political career Frank also played leading roles in piloting the Coal Mines, Mental Treatment and Workmen's Compensation (Silicosis and Asbestosis) Bills through the Lords. Lord Birkenhead thought him a fine debater, though when Santayana saw his friend in action he found him "platitudinous and partial".⁷⁹

Outside the Lords Frank proclaimed himself an "ardent feminist". He often addressed women's suffrage meetings but found the Pankhursts "autocratic" and "never quite cottoned to the WSPU". He disapproved of

⁷⁵ Frank Russell to Russell, 14 June 1929, RAI 730.

⁷⁶ W. Plowden, *The Motor Car and Politics in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1973), pp. 255, 287.

⁷⁷ *The Times*, 9 Jan. 1930.

⁷⁸ *The Times*, 5 March 1931.

⁷⁹ *The Times*, 5 March 1931; Santayana, *Middle Span*, p. 75.

its violent tactics, though accepted that these were effective (*My Life*, p. 178). From 1921 he was an active and “partisan supporter” of Marie Stopes’s Society for Constructive Birth Control (CBC) and also one of the earliest of its few aristocratic champions. To Frank’s surprise Stopes initially had him in mind as a vice-president. Though surprised to be asked, given his “entirely undeserved reputation as a ... roué”, he was keen to accept “if you think it won’t do any harm.” But the offer was swiftly withdrawn because “when your name came up 2 of my most useful supporters threatened to resign if your name were prominently associated with us.” No one objected to his membership, however, and Frank, who became “devoted” to the cause, eventually gained a place on the Society’s executive committee.⁸⁰ Until his death he was a good friend to the redoubtable Stopes and also a trusted adviser, especially in relation to the litigation in which she was much involved during the 1920s. Unlike many, he was not afraid to tell her when she had got things wrong. On several occasions he berated newspaper editors for failing to use her proper title (she had a PHD), misrepresenting her, or failing to treat her with proper respect.⁸¹ Through Frank Bertrand also became involved with the CBC. Indeed, he gained the vice-presidency denied his brother.⁸²

Throughout his life Frank was an enthusiastic traveller by bicycle, horse, rowing boat, steamer, rail and motor car. Though Santayana thought him “no pedestrian”, he claimed that he liked to walk at least three miles per day and once tramped from Winchester to Pembroke Lodge.⁸³ He took up cycling in 1880 and for many years kept a steam launch in which he explored the entire River Thames as well as continental waterways, the English Channel and North Sea. He had a long-standing interest in motoring, in which “he took a boyish pleasure”. Driving appealed to his wanderlust and love of things mechanical; “he

⁸⁰ BL, Stopes Papers, Add. 58556, Frank Russell to M. Stopes, 10 Aug. 1921; Stopes to Frank Russell, 3 Sept. 1921; Frank Russell to Stopes, 1 Oct. 1921.

⁸¹ See e.g. BL, Stopes Papers, Add. 58556, draft letter to *Daily Herald*, 6 May 1923; letter to *The Times*, 1926. On Frank and Stopes see R. A. Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina P., 1982), pp. 196, 218, 221, 226, 230, 288.

⁸² BL, Stopes Papers, Add. 58556, Frank Russell to Stopes, 10 Jan. 1922; Russell to Stopes, 7 Feb. 1922. On Bertrand and Stopes see Diane M. Keress, “Russell, Stopes and Birth Control”, *Russell* o.s. nos. 25–8 (1977): 72–4.

⁸³ *My Life*, p. 99; Santayana, *Middle Span*, p. 56.

fell greedily upon the prospects which motoring held out”.⁸⁴ His first vehicle was a 2½ horsepower Benz. In America, soon after marrying Mollie, he bought a Hayes-Apperson car which he had shipped back to Britain. Many other vehicles followed and in 1924 he claimed to have driven over 200,000 miles.⁸⁵ As chairman of the LCC’s highways committee he obtained the registration plate A1 after the Motor Act, 1903, made licensing compulsory. He later relinquished it because it became too well known to the Surrey police, notorious for their speed traps. Frank spoke in the House of Lords on motoring matters as early as 1903 and regularly thereafter. He championed the motorist, who he believed was over-taxed and victimized by the police, but also favoured severe penalties for drunk drivers. Though not a founder member of the Automobile Club of Great Britain and Ireland (Royal Automobile Club or RAC from 1907), he joined at an early stage, served on all its committees, and acted as a steward in the 1903 Gordon Bennett race in Ireland. He also was prominent in the Automobile Association from its first days but resigned when it became too “cautious and respectable and refused any longer to fight the police” over speed traps.⁸⁶ He served with the Army Motor Reserve from its earliest days and gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Transport (1929–31).

In her memoirs, Annabel Huth Jackson recalled Frank as Bertrand’s “beautiful and gifted elder brother” (Jackson, p. 62). As a youth he was tall and slim with “abundant tawny hair”. In later life he lost his good looks and became “a big burly man with a florid complexion and steel-blue eyes, who moved slowly and carefully”.⁸⁷ From childhood he loved cats and dogs. One of Elizabeth’s reservations about marrying him was his habit of sleeping with seven dogs on his bed (she also objected to his practice of reading Kipling aloud and his infatuation with the “hideous” Telegraph House) (*Auto.* 2: 54–5). Though utterly irreligious when he entered Winchester College, Frank took to the school’s ecclesiastical traditions and for some three years was “a consistent and devoted High Churchman” (*My Life*, p. 335). He gradually retreated from this position and, after dabbling with Buddhism, jettisoned all religious belief. When

⁸⁴ *My Life*, p. 293; Swinnerton, p. 313.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 20 Feb. 1924.

⁸⁶ *My Life*, p. 295; Russell to Kenneth Mylne, 9 Sept. 1959, RAI 720.

⁸⁷ Santayana, *Middle Span*, p. 51; Osborne, pp. 47, 143, 176; Swinnerton, pp. 313–14; Moorehead, p. 190–1.

admitted to Holloway he declared himself agnostic (but was listed as a member of the Church of England). One meeting with the prison chaplain sufficed for Frank, though he did read the entire Bible while incarcerated (*My Life*, pp. 285–7).

Frank died in his bathroom on 3 March 1931 at the Hotel Noailles, Marseilles, while returning home from the French Riviera where he had been recuperating from a severe attack of influenza. Though Bertrand was unaware that his brother was ill, Frank had been suffering serious heart trouble (angina) for some time—a condition Frank attributed to the anguish he suffered when Elizabeth left him.⁸⁸ Bertrand was shocked by what he saw when he travelled to Marseilles to identify his brother's body: "It was very horrible as he had been dead rather a long time. He looked more than life size and terribly cruel, like some dark heathen deity to whom human sacrifices are offered. I wish that had not been my last impression of him." But he was consoled by his belief that Frank met a "good end", dying "stoically" and courageously from "his exertions in the public service".⁸⁹

After cremation at the St. Pierre cemetery in Marseilles on 6 March, Frank's ashes were returned to England. On 30 March they were scattered on the downs near Telegraph House. There was a secular ceremony but no religious service and mourning was not worn. To general surprise, not least Bertrand's, Frank left his scanty personal effects to Amy Elizabeth Otter, his executrix, whom he had met at the LCC and later employed both as a secretary, initially to his third wife, and "for carrying on purposes". Miss Otter had joined Frank in Toulon the day before he died.⁹⁰

To the extent that contemporaries and scholars have evaluated Frank's life he has been regarded as an eccentric with a colourful personal history who possessed considerable ability but underachieved for years. In other words, he was a dilettante who dabbled, with minimal success, in fields

⁸⁸ Russell to R. W. B. Buckland, 8 March 1931, RAI 735; Buckland to Russell, 9 March 1931, RAI 735; Santayana, *People and Places*, p. 308.

⁸⁹ Russell to Morrell, 9 March 1931, RA3 69.001691.

⁹⁰ Russell to Buckland, 8 March 1931, RAI 735; Buckland to Russell, 9 March 1931, RAI 735; Russell to A. Otter, 8 and 16 March 1931, RAI 735; Otter to Russell, 11 March 1931, RAI 735; *The Times*, 31 March 1931; *Irish Times*, 2 June 1931; Osborne, p. 209. By 1931 Miss Otter was an inspector in the Ministry of Health's Lymph Establishment (1907–1946), based in Colindale, North London. See *British Imperial Calendar and Civil Service List 1931* (London: HMSO, 1931), p. 177.

such as law, business and engineering before finally coming good as a politician in the House of Lords, especially when in office during the second Labour government.⁹¹ It is difficult, however, to deny his significance as champion of divorce reform and birth control or in stimulating Bertrand's interest in mathematics around 1883 (*Auto.* 1: 36). His supposed inability to stick with enterprises over the long term was not always a matter of insufficient endurance. He was sidelined in politics and in the movements for divorce reform and birth control because his name was deemed too controversial.⁹²

It is hard to warm to Frank but easier to excuse, or at least explain, his character in terms of genetic inheritance, peculiar upbringing and the childhood tragedies that cost him most of his immediate family. The adult who emerged was a mass of contradiction: the socialist aristocrat who was proud of his status yet contemptuous of social convention; the agnostic who wrote sermons; the protector of the oppressed who tyrannized servants; the champion of women's rights who bullied his wives; the opponent of bad driving who briefly made a career of defending bad drivers. In the end he will be remembered less for his achievements and more for his marital history, scandals and association with those family members, notably his grandfather, brother and third wife, whose achievements far outshone his own.

⁹¹ Kirk Willis, "Russell in the Lords", *Russell* 22 (2002): 101–41. See also, O. Borymchuk, "The Limb of a Satan": the Life and Times of the First Socialist Peer, the Second Earl of Russell, 1865–1931" (unpublished paper read at the Fin de Siècle Seminar, U. of Oxford [Feb. 2004]).

⁹² Soloway, p. 218; Haynes, p. 369.
