

## THREE PORTRAITS OF BERTRAND RUSSELL AT HOME<sup>1</sup>

CONSTANCE MALLESON

### I. “BERTRAND RUSSELL AT HOME” (1949)

**A**sage in ancient times once said that the best and wisest men love the mountains and the sea. So it is perhaps not surprising to find England’s great philosopher, Bertrand Russell, living in a little grey stone cottage on the side of a mountain and within sight of the sea. At a bend in a steep road, you suddenly come upon it: a typically Welsh looking place, for it is situated not far from the village of Llan Ffestiniog—in North Wales.

It is small-scale country, this north-western corner of Merioneth: small steep hills; small glistening-green oak woods; small compact purple mountains (about 2,000 feet high). Ffestiniog village stands upon a ridge with a deep valley on either side; and a river, with white churning waterfalls, in each valley. From the grey stone terrace in front of Russell’s cottage, the whole Vale of Ffestiniog opens out to the shining estuary and the sea.<sup>2</sup>

The terrace has three tall, clipped, very prim looking bay trees; and all the cottage’s eight windows and two doors open out onto it; and Russell will tell you (with a lightly sardonic tone in his voice) that there were originally six trees, but that A. S. Neill’s small scholars cut down three of them. (A. S. Neill’s famous “experimental” school was evacuated here during the war.<sup>3</sup>) While Russell is himself an advocate of a very great deal of freedom in education, he thinks it is a pity if small children grow up without any knowledge whatever in their heads.

At the western end of the terrace, the cottage has a projecting wing and it is

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<sup>1</sup> [For document sources and the pseudonyms used, see the entries in D.4 of the Malleson bibliography in this issue. The first is under “Hemma Hos BR”. —K.B.]

<sup>2</sup> [Russell had given Malleson directions: “Ffestiniog is 3 miles from Blaenau Festiniog, along the road to Port Madoc; our cottage is a quarter of a mile from Festiniog, towards Port Madoc; the inn, the Pengwern Arms, is at our end of the village. You would not find our cottage on any map, but you might find Bryn Llewelyn, a big house next door. Festiniog is on a ridge between two mountain streams, the Teigl and the Cynval” (24 Aug. 1948, RA3 596.200860). Find it at 52 57’ 32.17”N, 3 56’ 29.04”W on Google Earth.]

<sup>3</sup> [Russell’s later secretary, Christopher Farley, attended the evacuated school.]

there that Russell's own small son, Conrad, age twelve, has his bedroom. Its walls are covered with delightful, large, coloured, historical maps of the world; and it once happened that, when the famous military expert of *The Times*, Liddell Hart,<sup>4</sup> was visiting Russell and holding forth about some very remote and little known place, Conrad piped up and corrected him. To the astonishment and amusement of the assembled company (Liddell Hart himself most of all) Conrad proved to be right.

Many years ago, before the war, Russell's cottage used to be the village school; and what was then the class room, is now Russell's large, long, living room. The walls of it are plain whitewash, but you don't see much of the whitewash because the walls (as might be expected) are, on three whole sides, lined with books from floor to roof. Amongst all that wealth of reading you may find priceless treasures: a first edition of the famous *Clarendon's History of England*, a book of several gigantic volumes<sup>5</sup>—volumes so huge that you can hardly hold one of them on your two knees. There are also slim, exquisitely bound, presentation copies from Cobden-Sanderson's renowned Doves Press—that same Press which “old Cobby” commanded should be flung into the River Thames<sup>6</sup> at the same moment as his own corpse was shovelled into the grave. That Russell should possess so many of those highly prized volumes is not surprising—because “old Cobby” was a lifelong admirer of Russell's highly intelligent, lively and progressive-minded mother: Lady Amberley, born Kate Stanley, daughter of Lord Stanley of Alderley. Yes, this room of Russell's is one in which Matti Pohto<sup>7</sup> would have felt happy. It is also one in which children and dogs feel happy—and you will generally find Conrad's two spaniels, and Conrad himself, sprawling upon the floor, inextricably mixed up together. And I think that a Finnish visitor might perhaps also feel happy if he chanced to notice a white and blue bound book, lying open beneath Russell's spectacles: *Finland*, by J. Hampden Jackson.<sup>8</sup>

The colours in this room are neutral and restrained: coarse straw-coloured matting on the floor; oatmeal coloured covers on the comfortable old armchairs; grey-green cushions; honey-coloured linen curtains. Not many ornaments: a few enormously heavy Icelandic bowls, collected by Wittgenstein<sup>9</sup> (professor of philosophy in the University of Cambridge and author of *Tractatus Logico-*

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<sup>4</sup> [B. H. Liddell Hart (1895–1970). Conrad Russell recalled him visiting in “Shaking Off the Family Curse” (interview), *The Independent on Sunday*, 13 June 1999, pp. 16–17.]

<sup>5</sup> [Edward, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars of England Begun in the Year 1641*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1704). The copy is still in Russell's library.]

<sup>6</sup> [It was the unique Doves type that T. J. Cobden-Sanderson disposed of in this way in 1916. He died in 1923. Many Doves Press publications remain in Russell's library.]

<sup>7</sup> [1817–1857. Finnish book collector.]

<sup>8</sup> [The book was on loan to Russell from Malleson. She later sent a wedding offering of what is probably the same copy to the Editor and his wife.]

<sup>9</sup> [One such stone jar, with a screw-on top, is in RA.]

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*Philosophicus*); an antique glazed Persian bowl, blue and white, gift of Lady Ottoline Morrell (patroness of Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield—and godmother to Russell’s small Conrad). Over at the far end of the room stands a very remarkable kind of gramophone, the kind only found, as a rule, in the houses of composers and professional musicians. Beside it stands a workmanlike desk. Both those things belong to Russell’s wife<sup>10</sup>—for he himself does his writing in another room, his study.

It is the tiniest room imaginable: one side of it is lined with work books—technical philosophy, mathematics, physics—the other side has a writing desk, and an armchair in front of the fire. There is no room for anything else. The mantelpiece has upon it many small, enchanting, carved Chinese ivory figures—which remind one that Russell spent a whole year as professor in the University of Peking. If those figures did not already convince one of his sensitiveness to the exquisite and the beautiful, one need but raise one’s eyes to the only coloured picture in the room: an Italian pastel of a lonely white seagull, its wings outstretched, against a faint bluish-grey background which seems to suggest the vastness and mystery of eternity. Above the writing desk are a few photographs of those men and women who have meant most to Russell in his long life. On the desk, an extremely varied collection of pipes—for Russell will tell you that the only time he is not smoking a pipe is when he is eating or sleeping.

His vitality and physical stamina is extraordinary: in all weather and at all seasons he is out—hatless—walking the hills. When his aircraft crashed at Trondheim last October and he had to swim for his life in the ice-cold water, he turned up again at the British Embassy in Oslo in the very best of health, with not so much as even a cold in the head. His physical energy is only equalled by his mental energy. Both, to a large extent, are a legacy from his parents and his ancestors: physical vigour from his mother and the Stanleys; mental vigour from his father and the Russells.

Let us take a look at them, these Stanleys and Russells, reproduced in old engravings on the walls of the dining room and the little hall. There, over the mantelpiece, is his *mor-mor*,<sup>11</sup> Lady Stanley of Alderley, in Victorian bonnet tied with tulle under her determined chin. One look at her will convince you that she was a formidable personage, a bit of a tyrant, with a biting tongue in her head. Though her nose is aristocratic, the brilliance of her eyes and the roundness of her cheeks radiate a physical vitality and a robust good health of which any farmer’s wife might be proud. On the opposite wall, looking across at her, is the worthy face of Russell’s *far-far*,<sup>12</sup> Lord John Russell, Queen Victoria’s prime minister, “Russell of the Reform Bill”. (“A dull dog”, his disrespectful grandson has been heard to say of him.<sup>13</sup>) With the same outspokenness, Ber-

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<sup>10</sup> [Patricia Russell.]      <sup>11</sup> [Swedish for mother’s mother.]      <sup>12</sup> [Father’s father.]

<sup>13</sup> [“There is no good life of my grandfather, and there couldn’t be, because he was such a dull dog” (letter to Malleeson, 10 Aug. 1918, RA3 596.200330).]

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trand Russell will point to a Duchess of Bedford, magnificently garbed in the court dress of several hundred years ago: "Oh, she was a murderess; but the only punishment she got was that she was told to stay away from Court balls." A man more after Russell's own heart is the family hero, Lord William Russell, who lost his head by the executioner's axe; because death with honour, true to his beliefs, seemed better to him than life with dishonour.

It would take us too long to examine them all, these male and female Russells dating back through more than 400 years of England's history. But there is just one that we must glance at, if for no other reason than this: But for her, England and the world would never have had Bertrand Russell. She is a tall, graceful Duchess of Bedford, wearing a Gainsborough-like dress. It was she who, at a moment when all the male Russells except her husband had died out, presented him with a son and heir, thus ensuring the survival of the family.

Bertrand Russell once wrote that love of England is almost the strongest passion he has.<sup>14</sup> That "almost" is important, for he has at least one passion which is stronger. And that one passion can be summed up in one word: *work*.

To enumerate all his books, with their dates and their titles, would be a job for a professional librarian: let us only say here that his first book, *German Social Democracy*, was published in 1896; his greatest book, the *Principia Mathematica*, in which Prof. Whitehead collaborated with him, was published in 1910 (he had to hire a cab to transport the bulky manuscript to the printers); his *History of Western Philosophy* was published first in America and, in 1946, in England. (The Finnish translation appeared in October or November 1948.) His newest book, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, was published in England in November 1948. Between the above dates, are ranged some 30 or 40 other books of first class importance. And all this work is in addition to his job of lecturing on mathematics and philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge; lecturing also in America; and in most of the capitals of Europe, at one time or another. Sometimes, rather rarely, he takes part in debates in the British Parliament. Nowadays, a certain amount of his time is taken up by broadcasting for the B.B.C. so it is only during the long summer vacation (and, perhaps, for a week or two at Christmas) that he can get up to his cottage in North Wales.

Russell is still a social-democrat in politics. He joined the English Labour Party during the first World War. Before that, he had been a Liberal, like his *får* before him.

Somewhere, in one of his books, you will find these words: "*Den goda livsföringen är den som inspireras av kärlek och ledes av kunskap*"<sup>15</sup>; and somewhere else, in one of his books, you will find these words, quoted from Voltaire: "*Aimer et penser: c'est la véritable vie des esprits.*"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [*Auto.* 2: 17. Malleson had read the autobiography in draft in March 1949.]

<sup>15</sup> [Swedish for "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge."]

<sup>16</sup> [Motto to *Sceptical Essays*.]

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## II. "BERTRAND RUSSELL'S WORKING DAY" (1950)

**H**e is woken at 8.0c. with a pot of China tea on a tray. The tray must have on it nothing whatever except a cup and saucer, a pot of tea, a jug of hot water. He dislikes a tea strainer, though can give *no* LOGICAL reason for his dislike!

8.45. He bathes and shaves.

9.0c. He comes down to breakfast in his dressing gown and slippers. He likes best to eat a boiled egg, boiled 3½ minutes. It must sit in the egg cup with its large side uppermost. In winter he eats porridge *first*. At breakfast he drinks coffee: black, without milk or cream or sugar. He likes, for choice, two loaves on the table: white and brown. Also marmalade and butter (if there IS any butter). Should there also be some Finnish Ham, he is made very happy. But, five minutes after he has eaten, he has completely FORGOTTEN *what* he has eaten! As he remarked (on his return from Russia, I think) "Man does not live on bread alone."

After breakfast he dresses. His tie is often rather crooked (as in Roger Fry's oil painting of him<sup>17</sup>). His garments are not smart: they cover his thin body, that's all.

When he is dressed, he goes to his study. By that time the post has arrived. He gets, as a rule, about 20 letters: 19 of them being from people all over the world: people he has never met. He writes about six words on each letter by way of reply; and about once a month he sends those letters to a typist in London who turns his six words into some kind of a reply. So people have to wait rather a long time before they hear from him. His *personal* letters are written in his own hand: he cannot type, cannot drive a motor, cannot mend an electric lamp. The Americans think that he is the last living man on earth who does not use a typewriter! He deals with his publisher himself: he is efficient at all business connected with his books. At *other* business, he is *less* efficient. His *History of Western Philosophy*, published 1946, sold about 63,000 copies. His *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, published 1948, sold about 19,000 copies. His *BBC Reith Lectures*, 1948, published under the title *Authority and the Individual*, sold about 29,000 copies. These figures are for sales in ENGLAND. All were also published in America—where *History of Western Philosophy* became a "best seller". All are also published in most other countries, including Finland.

When he has dealt with the post, he reads the newspaper; or he may read it beforehand. When he lived in N. Wales, he read the *Manchester Guardian* (first of all), and later in the day *The Times*. When he lived in London, he read the *Times* first; the *Manchester Guardian* later. *Nowadays* he lives at Richmond, Surrey, with his eldest son, his daughter-in-law (daughter of a famous American poet) and their three small children.

When he has read the newspaper, he works for the rest of the morning. He

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<sup>17</sup> [Circa 1923; now in the National Portrait Gallery, having been purchased in 1970.]

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writes quickly and with greatest ease: seldom needing to make any corrections. The same is true when he dictates lectures to a secretary. He has never employed a full-time secretary: he hires one now and then, whenever specially needed.

**1.0c.** He eats his lunch. He hates salt but adores pepper. When he eats a hot Indian curry, he *adds* pepper to it. He says he dislikes milk in any shape or form; frequently enjoys food containing milk, but is unaware that any milk is in it. He dislikes most green vegetables—except peas. Fruit *bore*s him. He never eats it for breakfast, but he likes bananas with preserved ginger as a sweet. Though he says he dislikes sugar, he is fond of chocolates, chocolate puddings and sweet dishes. He likes meat of all kinds. Dislikes salads and never touches them. After lunch he drinks a *large cup* of black coffee.

**2.30.p.m.** In the p.m. he sometimes sits in his armchair by a huge fire and sleeps until teatime.

**4.0c.** He goes into his living room and drinks a pot of tea: eats nothing. If he has visitors, and if it is not pouring with rain, he may go out walking for a couple of hours. If he is alone, and it is raining, he probably has tea in his study and works afterwards; or reads. His favourite reading is detective stories, or other light books which rest his mind.

He was born on 18 May, 1872, near Tintern in Monmouthshire. In 1948, he was still able to walk ten miles a day; and still able, with a good deal of effort, to climb a mountain. He learnt to swim almost as soon as he learnt to walk; and has swum all his life; and still does. As a child, he was fond of skating.

**6.0c.** He may work—or read—if he has time before his evening meal. He likes to dine at 8.0c; but more often has to dine at 7.0c—since most daily servants prefer that hour. He drinks black coffee after dinner; and practically never works after dinner; and seldom works on Sundays. But if there is some world crisis, he may do either or both. On Sundays he reads the *Observer*. In religion he calls himself an Agnostic. In politics he still votes Socialist—he was educated as a Liberal; joined the Fabians (Fabian Society, founded by G. B. Shaw and the Sydney [*sic*] Webbs)—it was not until the middle of the First World War that he joined the Independent Labour Party—previously *Labour Movement*. If the English Labour Party became more extreme than they now are, he would probably cease to vote for them.

**8.30.** After dinner he either reads, or plays chess with his family, or sits talking with visitors. He is gregarious: likes being with people, especially if they are witty and/or learned. He does not like being alone. He likes people who are clever enough to laugh at his jokes, however learned the jokes may be.

**1. a.m.** He seldom goes to bed before 1. a.m. He is fond of good sherry and good whisky. Until the First World War, he was a Total Abstainer. When he goes to bed, he reads himself to sleep with a detective story. That happens quite quickly. He dreams *every* night of his life. He sleeps “like a log”: very soundly.

He has travelled widely and has lectured in China, Australia, America and most of the European countries. He went to Russia soon after the 1917 Revolution, expecting to like the Bolsheviks, but discovered that he hated them. What

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he most hated was their cruelty and their cocksure dogmatism, and their stupidity which makes them try to do things by force rather than by skill. And he has hated them, increasingly, ever since he got to know them in their own country. When he returned to England from Russia, he wrote a book: *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*. In 1950, that book was republished—without a word being altered.<sup>18</sup> It was first published in 1920.

In April 1918, the English Government put him in prison for six months, because he opposed World War No. 1. In 1949, the King conferred on him the Order of Merit (O.M.), the highest honour possible for a civilian to obtain. (Only 24 persons are allowed to have it at the same time. Other O.M.s are T. S. Eliot; and Professor Gilbert Murray; G. E. Moore the philosopher.) In 1950, he won the Nobel Prize. He is at present writing his Autobiography—which he first began, in prison, in 1918.<sup>19</sup>

### III. "SPRING IN LLAN FFESTINIOG: POST-WAR HOME OF EARL RUSSELL, O.M." (c.1959)

I thought it as perfect a cottage as I had ever seen, even in the glorious surroundings of North Wales; but it is true that my visit happened on a day of most rare spring sunshine, with a great wind blowing in from the sea.

I had motored across the mountain road from Bala Lake, and I found Lord Russell's cottage without the slightest difficulty: it stands almost on the brow of the long hill winding up from the coast. It had been used—until the last war—as the village schoolhouse. Its main feature, therefore, is the long "schoolroom", which has been converted into a combined library and living room.

The outside of the cottage is of rough Welsh stone, rising from a wide, flagged terrace upon which stand a row of stiffly clipped trees. The background is Moelwyn Mountain. The view from the cottage windows is of the whole beautiful Vale of Ffestiniog, with its waterfalls and its rivers flowing to the sea.

The inside of the cottage seemed to me as perfect as its outside and its surroundings. One entered through a welcoming door of glass behind which a pastel, greyish-blue woven curtain hung. The small entrance lobby gave, on the "schoolroom" side, into the dining room which connects directly with the long, shiningly modern kitchen, all-electric, and with windows facing up a wooded hill, up the steep garden, and into the surrounding orchard—lavishly starred with daffodils.

We went, first, down a long narrow passage, passing Lord Russell's study on our way into the living room, which has views back and front: up to the steep hillside at the back, and down across the valley at the front.

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<sup>18</sup> [1949. On the contrary, Russell corrected a fair number of misprints and altered many instances of "Communism" and "Communist" to "Socialism" and "Socialist".]

<sup>19</sup> [The 1918 draft of an autobiography does not survive.]

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The main feature of the living room is the immense Welsh granite fireplace, generously stacked with local logs (although there is also central heating—electric). All the many windows were curtained in thickly woven stuff the colour of ripe corn. A large green sofa faced the open fire, and two roomy armchairs flanked it. A tall, parchment-shaded lamp, stood behind each armchair. Book shelves, built on top of cupboards, ran the whole length of the room, and also across both its ends: to the right of the fireplace, the shelves housed many treasures from the renowned Doves Press. The room was a perfect one in which to read either by day or by night.

The floor was covered in that attractive coarse Norfolk matting which reminds one of the reeds cut from the Broads. The walls—all white, in common with the whole cottage interior—had only one picture: a large engraving of a Duchess of Bedford ancestress. It hung, in a heavy giltwood frame, above the fireplace. The tall and graceful Duchess is depicted leaning lightly against a garlanded column, while at her feet a charming little negro boy plays.

A wide desk, together with some rustic three-legged stools, and a solid Victorian table carved with the monogram of Viscount Amberley (Lord Russell's father), were the only other bits of hardwood furniture. A third, upholstered armchair, was set invitingly before the blazing fire.

I sat in it and, gazing around, was at once attracted by two very distinctive bowls: a large metal one—probably from Peking;<sup>20</sup> and a most exquisite, dark blue and white china one—from Persia. The latter, very much smaller than the former, was mounted on a delicate Oriental stand. A polished leather box, which had been used by a former Lord Russell, fitted exactly into a window ledge. On the ledge opposite, a dark pottery bowl was filled with growing tulips just coming into full flower and making a brave splash of scarlet.

In Lord Russell's small study (next door) the shelves held mostly "work books": one whole wall of them from floor to roof. A Victorian desk, set into the window recess, took up most of the space and left room for one armchair and a couple of severely upright ones. But the austerity of this small study was delightfully contradicted by a bunch of family photographs, together with others of famous and erudite men. A fascinating collection of small ivory figurines and chessmen inhabited the ledge above the fireplace. The study curtains hung in rich folds of faded maroon silk which, in its youth, might have been magenta. By far the largest and most striking picture in the room was of a great seagull with wings outspread in full flight against a background of stormy greyish blue. A lovely thing—admirably set off by its exceedingly dark frame.

Amongst those portraits hanging above Lord Russell's desk there was (as one would expect) a head of Leibniz—on whose work Lord Russell is the greatest living authority. There was also a signed portrait of the famous Cantor,

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<sup>20</sup> [There is a metal Chinese bowl in RA, but it was a later gift from Edith Russell.]

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mathematical genius—now, alas, dead.<sup>21</sup>

Except for the Duchess of Bedford in the living room, all the other Russell ancestors were strictly confined to the walls of the dining room: Lord William Russell, the family hero; and, above the fireplace, between old silver candlesticks, an enlarged head and shoulders of “Grandmother Stanley” (Lady Stanley of Alderley), of whom it has been written—quoting from *Hamlet*—that she had “*An Eye like Mars, to threaten and command*”.

This formidable Lady Stanley of Alderley had been born a Dillon. (The first Viscount Dillon had been created a Banneret in 1599.) Her commanding eye was inherited by her daughter—Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle—born 1845, died 1921—of whom a delightful biography was recently published (December 1958) by her daughter, Lady Henley.<sup>22</sup> Another of Lady Stanley of Alderley’s daughters was the fascinating Kate, Lord Russell’s mother, who died when he was a very small child. Her portrait, also, was to be seen hanging in the Ffestiniog study: a gentle, gracious lady who, nevertheless, was of a sufficiently serious and intellectual turn of mind to have dubbed the late Mrs. Sidney Webb as a social butterfly. The portrait of Kate Amberley is an exquisite thing, her bent head seen more or less in profile, the delicate lines of the picture rather faint on the slightly faded, pale grey paper.<sup>23</sup>

Although I was only a stray visitor passing through Ffestiniog, I was nevertheless allowed a glimpse of the upstairs rooms: all of them small, two of them square. The other, with window looking down the valley, was narrow but larger, and had rush green velvet curtains and bedspread, old mahogany and oak furniture and—how surprisingly!—a spinet. On the white walls there hung a few magnificent prints of the great trees of California—where, for a time (between 1938 and 1944) Lord Russell occupied the Chair of Philosophy in the University of California.<sup>24</sup> One was also reminded, by a bright-coloured print hanging above the stairs outside the upstairs rooms (it was of a Chinese monster, dragon or such) that, between 1920 and 1921, Lord Russell had also occupied the Chair of Philosophy in the Government University of Peking.

It was not very long after my visit to Ffestiniog that Lord Russell moved down south for a time, to Richmond in Surrey. But he very soon moved north again, back to Merioneth, though not to settle at Ffestiniog; for, by that time, he was needing a somewhat larger house in which to accommodate his grandchildren who came visiting during their holidays from school. And his newest home (Plas Penrhyn, Penrhyndeudraeth) has the advantage of being not only larger but also very much nearer to the sea.

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<sup>21</sup> [No images of these heroes—which often included Spinoza and Frege—are in RA.]

<sup>22</sup> [Dorothy Henley, *Rosalind Howard, Countess of Carlisle* (London: Hogarth P., 1958). Russell contributed “Lady Carlisle’s Ancestry”, pp. 13–23.]

<sup>23</sup> [Probably the drawing by George Howard, September 1864, in *The Amberley Papers*, ed. B. and P. Russell (London: Hogarth P., 1937), 1: 307 opp.]

<sup>24</sup> [Russell was at UCLA in 1938–40.]

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