

Herald and News Book Reviews

Literary Highlights

BERTRAND RUSSELL: THE PASSIONATE SKEPTIC. By Alan Wood. Simon & Schuster. \$3.50.

"Never feel absolutely sure of anything," Russell said; that is the constantly reiterated and salutary theme of this passionate biography of a passionate skeptic.

Born in 1872 in a family of unusual aristocratic distinction, Russell hardly waited out his childhood to give proof of that bawky, challenging spirit by which he is known enviously to our literate world. He took nothing for granted, not even 4 as the sum of 2 plus 2; and for a time, curiously, afraid he could never learn what x and y in algebra meant, he thought of quitting the study of mathematics for good.

But it was his indefatigably inquiring mind, and in the very field of mathematics, which earned him his reputation in the highest places as a philosopher and which, in more immediate concerns, earned him fame in the market place and square.

LEARNED AND POPULAR

Some lucky men make a name among the learned, and some among the popular. Russell did both; and the secret of it was, as Wood notes, that Russell was not high hat with those phenomenal brains of his, that he brought his coruscating intelligence to bear a like on the abstruse problems of logic and such other popular items as war and peace, sex and marriage, education and so on.

Russell may not, as Wood claims, have "made the greatest advances in logic since Greek times," but he has certainly cleared away a lot of misty rubbish about a priori knowledge; and in his (with A. N. Whitehead) great "Principia Mathematica," we discover, as we never did before, some things we simply cannot know. If the area of knowledge is smaller, it was never so comfortably dependable.

He showed some extraordinary insights. As long ago as 1896, at the time of his first book, "German Social Democracy," he made

an uncanny prophecy of the rise of a Hitler when he said "the bourgeoisie dreads socialism more than it dreads military dictatorship." Already in 1920 he defined communism as a religion that might lead to persecution, and in the same year he forecast China's switch to imperialism and warned of the possibility of communism there, too.

But the controversial Russell as the man in the street knows him is the man who passed judgment not on logic but on behavior, where we are all much touchier.

He opposed World War I and went to jail for it. He believed "good" and "bad" had "no objective validity," that all we know for certain we know through science and that science itself cannot prove anything is right or wrong. Though he was brought up Puritanically, he persuaded himself, apparently without trouble, that freedom in marriage was as logical as freedom elsewhere. When someone accused him of not believing in marriage, however, he retorted: How silly, since I've had four of them.

NO COMPROMISE

Once while running for Parliament he refused to visit a sick party worker whom he disliked just for the sake of restoring party unity, nor would he put in an appearance at church in order to win votes—religion, he said, was "the desire to believe a lot of nonsense in order to make yourself comfortable." A New York lawyer in a suit to keep him from teaching at the College of the City of New York called him every name he could think of and then some: "Lecherous, salacious, libidinous, lustful, venerous, erotomanic, aphrodisiac, atheistic, irreverent, narrowminded, untruthful and bereft of moral fibre." Needless to say, Russell didn't get the job.

Whether or not you agree with Wood's praises, he accepted the daring challenge of Russell's complex dual role in the public arena and the secluded academy and turned out a biography stimulating and, fortunately, understandable.

Angry Young Writers Decry British Trait Of Moderation

By NORMAN MOSS

LONDON (AP)—Literary hoodlums or voices of inspiration?

In Britain, these days, that is the question hanging over a group of young writers called "The Angry Young Men" who are pouring scorn on the nation's hallowed institutions.

In highly polished—but venomous—prose they have struck out at the royal family, the nation's political leaders, the Anglican church and the class stratifications of British society.

Angry themselves, they have aroused anger in others—and praise as well.

Recently a leading Anglican churchman, hailed "the angry young men" as divinely inspired.

The Rev. Simon Phipps, chaplain of Trinity College, Cambridge University and once a frequent escort of the Queen's younger sister, wrote in the Sunday Times about the young writers:

"Our God is a consuming fire. Whenever He has sent fire from heaven into the hearts and onto the lips and through the deeds of men, it has been at some crisis of inadequacy and failure of the church."

"I believe He is speaking now through the anger of young men and women, whom we do well to attend."

Britons are indeed attending to their anger.

INTELLECTUALS

To set out their ideas a number of the group recently wrote essays for a book called "Declaration," intended to tap the thoughts of the younger generation. It also gives a good view of the Britain of the 1950s as seen through an intellectual gunsight.

The leader of the group is John Osborne, 28-year-old playwright. In his essay, Osborne described the symbol of royalty as "the gold tiling in a mould of decay," and said the Anglican church has never taken a stand on an important issue for "simple social decency, let alone gospel."

Kenneth Tynan, influential 30-year-old theater critic, cited Brit-



JOHN OSBORNE, 28-year-old author of "Look Back in Anger," now playing on Broadway, is a leader among the literate young British critics of a life they find soft, woolly and smothering.

ish movies as a symptom of British feebleness.

Contrasting them with American films, he said they refused to criticize seriously any aspect of the present order of things and added: "We (British) draw a line somewhere. You might even say as a joke we draw it everywhere."

The youthful anger is vented, not against an environment that is harsh and brutal, but against one they find soft, woolly and smothering. The voices they denounce are those of moderation rather than of excess: hypocrisy, lethargy, smugness and prissy gentility.

The angry young man of this generation does not march in demonstrations or in picket lines, as his father did. He does not

join any organization, political or otherwise.

NO CAUSE, NO SLOGAN

That he is angry he knows. He can easily find things he does not like. But he cannot easily find a slogan to paint on a placard, a demand to throw up before society.

New York theatergoers can see such a figure in Jimmy Porter, frustrated hero of Osborne's play, "Look Back in Anger." From contemplation of the present, Jimmy looks back half wistfully, not only on the picture postcard serenity of Edwardian England, but also on the turbulent decades that preceded his own.

"People of our generation are not able to die for good causes any longer," he says at one point. "We had all that done for us in the '30s and '40s, when we were still kids."

"There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big band does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned grand design. It'll just be for the brave new nothing-very-much-thank-you."

There is another group of undeniably angry young men here who look deeper, and see a rot infecting, not just Britain, but the whole of Western civilization.

Most famous of these is Colin Wilson, the 25-year-old self-educated prodigy in a turtleneck sweater who won fame last year with his philosophical book "The Outsider."

All of these in one way or another see a religious solution to what they call the world's disease. But they have scant respect for ordinary churchgoing Christianity.

Theirs is the anger, but is theirs the future?

The Rev. Phipps, in his Sunday Times article, accepted painfully the criticisms that his church is standing aside from the heart of today's problems. But he found cause for optimism in the fact criticism was coming not only from outside.

"Here is the point of hope; that inside as well as outside the church there is anger," he said.

BIRD IMMIGRANT

One of North America's best loved birds, the black-capped chickadee, actually is an immigrant, coming here several million years ago.

Current Best Sellers

FICTION

BY LOVE POSSESSED, Cozzen.

BELOW THE SALT, Costain.

RALLY ROUND THE FLAG, BOYS! Shulman.

THE EDGE OF DARKNESS, Chase.

ON THE BEACH, Shute.

NONFICTION

KIDS SAY THE DARDEST THINGS, Linkletter.

BARUCH: MY OWN STORY, WHERE DID YOU GO? OUT, Smith.

PLEASE DON'T EAT THE DAISIES, Kerr.

TO LIVE AGAIN, Marshall.

'MUSIC MAN' HAD TROUBLES

NEW YORK (AP)—Adds "The Music Men" to the wry list of smash Broadway hits that had pre-opening financial troubles. When the Meredith Willson musical comedy was in the planning stage, one of the potential backers approached was the Columbia Broadcasting System, which had gotten into show business by underwriting the cost of another great success, "My Fair Lady." According to trade sources, however, network executives felt the new prospect was "too corny" to find boxoffice success. Other backers put up the necessary \$300,000—and the heavy demand for tickets following rave notices makes it likely that the entire investment will be returned by March 15, after which the show can gross a capacity profit of \$17,000 per week.

Lewis Carroll's Nonsense Rhymes Recorded

"He thought he saw an elephant."

That practiced on a life.

He looked again and found it was

A letter from his wife.

"At length I realize," he said,

"The bitterness of life."

If T. S. Eliot had written those lines, dozens of scholars would still be trying to ferret out their meaning, but since they were written by Oxford mathematics professor Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, no explanation is necessary.

Their meaning, if any, is abundantly clear to millions of moppets, who immediately recognize the opening lines of "The Mad Gardner's Song," one of the many nonsense rhymes that Carroll penned to amuse the three little daughters of an Oxford dean.

In one of the most amusing spoken-word records to come along in quite a while, Caedmon records has called on Cyril Ritchard, Stanley Holloway and Beatrice Lillie to recite some of Carroll's more famous passages. All three responded enthusiastically to the assignment and Ritchard in particular seems to have thoroughly captured the wonderful mixture of pomposity and nonsense that has made Carroll a favorite with adults and children alike.

On the opposite side, the same trio of British comedians savors the nonsense rhymes of Edward Lear, whose "Owl and the Pussy Cat" has become a minor masterpiece. Again, the result is

charming and genuinely humorous.

This month Caedmon records also has released its two volume album of Shakespeare's "Merchant of Venice," with an excellent cast of 22 British actors headed by Michael Redgrave in a brilliant portrayal of Shylock, the money lender who tried to exact his pound of flesh.

On a level of excellence with RCA Victor's "Hamlet," the Caedmon production, ably directed by F. D. Smith, is a worthy addition to the growing sound library of Shakespeare on records.

MGM Records, which previously concentrated on popular mu-

sic with several successful sallies into the classical field, also has launched an ambitious program of spoken-word albums.

Called the "Arcady Series," the firm's opening venture includes Alec Guinness reading selections from Jonathan Swift, including several long passages from "Gulliver's Travels," and Sir Ralph Richardson reading condensations of two of Joseph Conrad's finest short novels, "Heart of Darkness" and "Youth."

MGM also offers two modern authors, William Faulkner and Carson McCullers, reading from their own works. Both are valuable additions to the literature of our times.

Miss McCullers is heard in moving passages from her novel and play "Member of the Wedding" and from her novels "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter" and "Ballad of the Sad Cafe."

Nobel Prize winner Faulkner reads selected passages from "The Sound and the Fury" and "Light in August."

Lexington Records, distributed by Vanguard, continues its excellent series of poetry readings with Theodore Marcuse reading "Poetry of Shelley and Keats" and Yale University professors John Pope and Helge Kokeritz reading passages from Beowulf and Chaucer in authentic Old English and Middle English respectively.

The result is a joy to poetry lovers and a boon to young scholars, who might not have come to terms yet with these two immortals.

