

McMaster's Centenary Conference*

You wonder what Bertrand Russell would have thought of this centenary celebration? Well, I never knew all his thoughts even when he was alive, and I surely can't presume to speak for him now. Perhaps my best response will be to say something about what he was like, and try to see how that connects with the events of this exciting weekend.

He was, of course, a philosopher, a man with an exact and brilliant mind which he loved to apply to the difficult abstractions of philosophy. I expect he would have appreciated the more technical papers

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and would have enjoyed disputing the fine points with their authors. But, despite a lively informal childhood training in philosophy, I have never achieved a real grasp of the subject. I cannot, therefore, comment usefully on this important part of the conference.

For more than half of his life he was also a man of action, passionately engaged in the affairs of the world and in lifelong attempts to increase the happiness of mankind. I think that, if he had been here he might have wished to see a little more attention paid to this aspect of his life. He would certainly have appreciated the careful account of his World War One Pacifism and the lucid dissection of his "political philosophy"; but I can almost see him standing up in the audience and saying, with the utmost courtesy, like I.F. Stone, "Don't just analyze it; *do* something about it."

Stone's talk he would have loved. They seem to me two of a kind - witty, well-read, charming, kindly, totally devoted to doing good by political means, and never despairing of the possibility of doing so. I can picture them walking off together after the talk, swapping stories and planning strategies as they strolled around McMaster's lovely campus.

I am quite certain that he would have been delighted by the archives, so meticulously kept and so magnificently available. This is exactly what he wanted. Not out of personal vanity but because they are concerned with so many vital issues on which people need to know the facts in order to form intelligent opinions. He would have been happy indeed to see so many people at work there in such helpful surroundings.

Perhaps, too, he would have been grateful for the judgment of the speakers on education - that his school was less of a failure than he thought it was. (I might add that, though for him it was a brief and largely regrettable episode in a long life, for me it was a happy introduction to the lifelong fascination of learning.) And I think he might have appreciated the discussion of his religious philosophy more than many of its audience did. Once he began to reflect on religion, his reason would not allow him to indulge in belief in any kind of God. His high moral standards compelled him to despise Christianity as he saw it practised; but I do not think he was happy about it. He was not a man who could live comfortably without faith in something greater than man, even though he could find no philosophical justification for any such belief.

I am quite sure that he would have been delighted by the beauty of the conference setting and by the friendliness of all the people concerned. He would have been deeply touched by the warm atmosphere of affectionate admiration for him as a philosopher and as a man.