

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1960–1975

The following letters do not appear in the third volume of Berlin's correspondence. More annotation may be provided later, but for the time being the texts are made available here for the convenience of readers. Sources are given at the end of letters.

TO JOHN SPARROW

30 September 1960

Headington House

My dear Warden,

I enclose a Notice of Motion which Monteith has asked me to sign. I have done so, with qualms. I should prefer three-fourths myself, and if this is concretely suggested by someone, may rat.

May I make two suggestions – only suggestions, only suggestions –

(a) That dear Stuart be put on the Domestic Committee – the appropriate home for all old Domestic Bursars.

(b) That Con O'Neill, now a widower, be elected to a £50 Fellowship. True, it is said that he is going away as Minister or Ambassador to Finland. Nevertheless he is a bachelor: a tremendous status: and although we could wait until he came back, he might be married then (so far as I know he has no matrimonial plans at the moment), and I think it would be pure gain to lure him back. I should therefore be prepared to conceal my knowledge of his impending move (though someone else may reveal it) and if revealed play it down.

All this will annoy Lionel Butler even more. If you are prepared to face that, so am I.

(c) When are we to meet? Would you please telephone immediately on receipt of this? Please?

Yours, with much *love*

Isaiah

All Souls

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1975–1997

TO VERA STERN

22 October 1965

Princeton University

Dearest Vera,

Thank you very much indeed. On the very next night Madame V. and Rostropovich appeared at Princeton in place of Miss De Los Angeles, who was indisposed in Europe. He played the piano, she sang. She appeared in the same splendid flaming red dress and sang some agreeable Tchaikovsky and some magnificent Mussorgsky (scored for a bass voice) – of all the sopranos in the world she holds a soprano which is emotionally nearer a bass than anyone else – is this an insult? Believe me, I do not wish to insult her – you think I am a little mean to her, but now our friendship is sealed by the fact that unexpectedly they saw me again – embracing – kisses – vows of eternal friendship – and I hope to see them again in New York, or at least him. Relations between them appear to me to be obscure.

But this is really a letter – forgive it being typed. If I hadn't had it typed you wouldn't have been able to read a single scribble, let alone word – to thank you for true friendship, true consideration, being so nice to us both, and in general, for being as and what you are. I must not go further for fear of awakening Isaac's no doubt never wholly dormant jealousy – at least I hope it is not dormant – no doubt jealousy is a base emotion, but its death is a sad occurrence in anyone's life surely – and to ask when you will be back again and when it is that we can meet again peacefully – after I have delivered my Columbia lectures next week, I shall be a new man, carefree, gay and with an unimpeded broad Russian soul. Unless you fear that this may grow to excess – which it may – please let me know here or at the Carlyle, but better here, for the Carlyle forwards very little, and usually to the wrong address.

Thank you again very much on Aline's behalf and my own.

Yours, with much love

Isaiah

Library of Congress, Isaac Stern Papers, box 14

Published 20 June 1968

[Headington House]

Mr Miller's¹ attempted correction of my facts is either irrelevant or mistaken. The two circles of which he speaks, and the very cool relationship between them in the early 1830s, is, perhaps, the most familiar of all pieces of knowledge in the field of nineteenth-century Russian history of ideas. There is not a textbook, however elementary, Soviet and non-Soviet, which does not dwell on this celebrated fact. But it has no bearing upon my description of Herzen towards the end of the 1830s and beginning of the next decade. Mr Miller (relying I fear on some popular exposition) says that Herzen returned to Moscow only in 1842: but this is not the case. He was, it is true, fully pardoned only in 1842, but he was allowed to live in Vladimir by 1838, from which he paid several clandestine visits to Moscow, and he returned to Moscow more or less openly in late summer of 1839. In December he went to St Petersburg and met Belinsky before the year was out; a correspondence between them began almost at once; Belinsky's notorious 'reconciliation with reality' caused a rift, ended only later in 1840. From then on there is an intimate relationship between them which remains uninterrupted despite Herzen's exile to Novgorod in 1841. By 1843 Granovsky, Turgenev and Belinsky all saw a good deal of each other: they all stayed together in Herzen's house in the country. It was during this time that the most passionate disputes about Hegel, Schiller, Schelling etc. occurred; it was the period of Granovsky's famous Moscow lectures, which marked the first great split between the Slavophiles and the 'Westerners'. It was this group of writers of which Herzen was one of the leaders. According to Strakhov, an accurate reporter of Russian ideas, Herzen's philosophical ascendancy was recognised at this time by Bakunin, Belinsky and Granovsky. Mr Miller, who thinks that Herzen remained in exile until 1842, naturally assumes that he could not have met Bakunin on his return, since Bakunin emigrated in 1840. I do not know whether Mr Miller reads Russian. If not, Mr E. H. Carr's excellent biography of Bakunin (pp. 79–89) could inform him that Herzen was immensely impressed by Bakunin, whom he met sometime in 1839–40, and that,

¹ To whose letter in the same issue IB is replying.

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1975–1997

whatever Herzen's opinion of Bakunin's moral character, the personal bonds between them were lifelong. Indeed, it was Herzen alone who made it possible for Bakunin to go to Germany in 1840, by lending him a sufficient sum of money; and it was Herzen who saw him off at St Petersburg, and thereafter followed his writings and career in the West with rapt attention, as his letters testify. These were the companions of Herzen's intellectually formative years, the society in which the Russian intelligentsia was born, as Mr Miller could learn if he turned to the classical work on this subject, Annenkov's *A Remarkable Decade*. The fact that Bakunin physically left it, although he remained in correspondence with its members, is neither here nor there.

There is, of course, no reason why anyone but specialists should take any interest in the identity of Herzen's intimate friends during these years: of these men, with of course Ogarev;² while the names of earlier friends (the 'circle' before 1834), e.g. Sazonov, Pocheka, Noskov, fade out of Herzen's letters. But since Mr Miller challenges my thesis, I am bound to restate these facts. The fact that Belinsky or Katkov (whose family were old friends of Herzen's parents) lived in Petersburg, while Granovsky and Herzen lived in Moscow, did not prevent them from living an intense common intellectual life, sustained by correspondence and frequent visits. It is for these friends that the letters and articles from Paris after 1847 were written. These are 'the men of the forties' to whom, all his life, Herzen was conscious of belonging. So much for Mr Miller's 'glaring factual error'. I do not wish to question Mr Miller's good faith: he clearly thinks he is exposing a terrible howler. The facts, however, are what they are. Mr Miller's apparent ignorance of them does not alter them.

[Isaiah Berlin]

TO JOHN SPARROW

15 July 1969

Headington House

Dear John,

You must surely know, whatever you may say, that a letter from you (I do not say 'such as yours', because to put a letter into a

² This passage appears to be garbled.

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1975–1997

class, or any personal relationship into general terms – ‘such friendship as yours’, ‘the type of relationship that I have with you’ etc. – seems to me to destroy almost all that is of value; I need not enlarge on that – ‘such a sensibility, intelligence etc. as yours’ would easily grasp the point) gave me pleasure without end. Not only because every time one offers something in a public market one remains skinless, and peculiarly vulnerable, for a time at least, and any mention of one’s name, particularly in public, causes one to wince, criticism of course is terrible, and even praise in one’s peculiar condition is something that one tends to look in the mouth; but you must know all this yourself too well, nor do I believe those who say they never read reviews (like Virginia Woolf or Iris Murdoch). I say it because you are a very incorruptible and very fastidious critic, and friendship does not blind you to the object and its properties. You may say, and you do say, that this is not the kind of subject with which you can claim expertise; that your approval may be motivated by moral and political agreement etc. All this may be so, but your sense of quality – of what’s what – of what comes up to standards of the finest possible differences between the fourth-rate and the third-rate, or the first-rate and that which transcends it – is as acute as any that I know (general term again! but here I think in place), and therefore this kind of sentiment from you does something – indeed a very great deal – to counteract the appalling self-depreciation and lack of confidence from which I have suffered all my life, and from which I suffer still to an extreme degree. I never think that anything that I do is *any* good – this is not an exaggeration. That is why after every lecture or talk I have ever delivered, I am possessed by a strong sense of shame. I feel the jig is up, they can see through me, it’s no good going on, these are hollow words, the whole thing is a pathetic fraud. This may be an exaggerated description, but nothing less than that quite describes the humiliation that I constantly suffer. If anything critical is said I always believe it to be absolutely true and probably an understatement, however indignant I may feel; this seems a contradiction, but it is so. If praise is uttered I feel it to be genuinely more than my due – the critic must have missed something, he must be thinking of something else, or be particularly well disposed towards me, or wish to prop me up in what he sees to be my pathetic condition, etc. I despise no one so much that harsh words from such a quarter do not affect me at all,

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1975–1997

nor respect anyone so much that I think praise from such a quarter is literally just. You may imagine therefore, that however much I may think that you have overpraised me – and I do – I am infinitely grateful for a gift which I genuinely need, if I am to go on. I have a feeling that, as David Cecil has so often said about himself, having never been in fashion, I am now distinctly out of it; that what I write about and what I say is so remote from the mood and the language, whether of professional philosophers or passionate advocates in universities, or the press, that I am thought of as a respectable relic of an obsolete period. Of course I console myself with the thought that posterity – someone, one day – will perceive in things that I write a thin rill of a civilised tradition, gone underground perhaps, which connects me in however small a way (and I am not suffering from false modesty in saying this) with various thinkers whom I respect. But this is true of all minor poets, writers etc., hence your words lift me, I do not know for how long, from such self-pitying contemplation to the thought that perhaps I *have* got something to say, perhaps my adversaries are not as formidable and certainly not as intellectually impressive as they seem to some – perhaps what I am doing is not useless, perhaps one ought to go on and on and do what I am doing now, which is to publish my collected works in paperbacks, one by one, instead of an impressive shelf like ALR. Hence my gratitude. That is only one reason for it. The other is wholly personal – I am absolutely delighted that you should have written me this letter and shall never, never forget it. And there may be real truth in it – a grain – two grains – I feel it may have been worth it after all.

And now the old friends and the dinner party: 5 November is no good to me for then I have a College meeting as I do on the first Wednesday of every month; 19 November I have to address an audience in Cambridge; 12 November would be excellent, but would you not consider Tuesday the 4th, 11th or 19th [sc. 18th?]?

Yours, with deep devotion, my dear old friend (this is the opposite of the usual occasion – but it is a true and apt description)

Isaiah

All Souls

TO JOHN HABAKKUK

12 May 1974

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1975–1997

[Headington House]

Dear Mr Vice-Chancellor,

May I inform you that I intend to retire from my post as President of Wolfson College in the course of the academic year 1974–5, most probably before the beginning of Trinity Term 1975, but in any case before the beginning of Michaelmas Term of that year. This decision has been made known to the Governing Body of the College, and I understand that it proposes shortly to submit the name of the person whom it would wish to recommend as my successor for the consideration, in the first instance, of the Trustees of Wolfson College, and, if approved by them, to the Hebdomadal Council for its consideration. The Vice-Gerent of the College will doubtless be in communication with yourself on this matter in due course.

Yours sincerely,
[Isaiah Berlin]

PS [to cc to John Sparrow] My successor will in fact, I believe, wish to enter upon his duties during the Easter vacation of 1975. I have been offered the Presidency of the British Academy: as you know, I have only one further ambition in my uneventful life, and if that helps towards realising it, why, then, I suppose I should not hesitate: though it is by no means a sinecure, and rough waters from the Left are, I gather, expected ... My dear old friend, what do you advise me to do? I have never failed to take your advice, save once, and even then I thought you were perfectly right but I had no real choice in the matter (if you are curious enough to know to what it is I am referring, ask me at our next meeting – I shall have my answer ready).

Do advise me,
I.B.

All Souls

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