



Books of 1968: A Personal Choice

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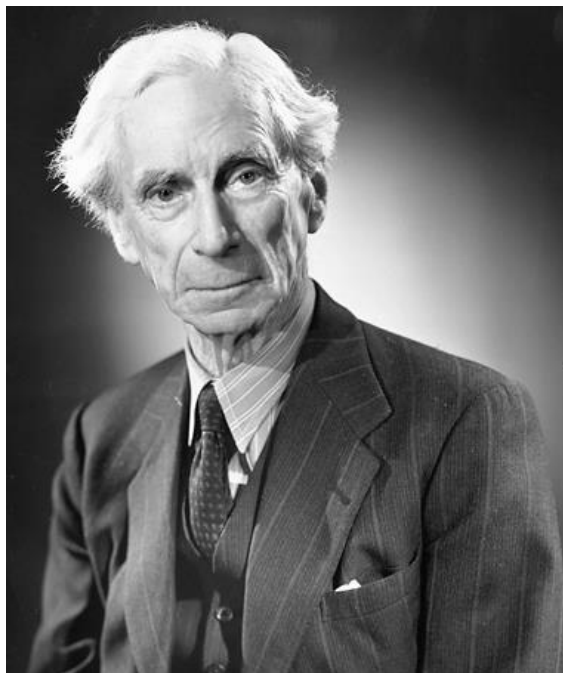
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Contribution to 'Books of the Year: A Personal Choice', *Observer*, 22 December 1968, 17a

OF THE FEW books I have read this year three seem to me remarkable.



The two volumes of Lord Russell's *Autobiography* (Allen and Unwin), especially the first, are unlike anything that either he or anyone else has ever written. Extreme candour about his personal life that contrasts oddly with a highly impersonal style free from emotion, high aristocratic self-confidence, agonised loneliness in childhood, unswerving faith in the intellect as the sole antidote to despair, and pure and beautiful prose – all this makes his autobiography at least the equal of that of his godfather, J. S. Mill. Russell is a far greater philosopher than Mill and as good a writer. The profound sadness of tone in some of his pages reveals a mind and character very different from the bland modern Voltaire of popular (and D. H. Lawrence's) imagination.

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Troubled Loyalty by Christopher Sykes (Collins) is an excellently written account of the life of Adam von Trott zu Solz, a German Rhodes scholar who took part in the 1944 plot and was brutally killed by Hitler. We became friends in his Oxford years, and I liked and admired him greatly. Mr Sykes seems to me to have treated his fascinating, elusive and immensely attractive personality with extraordinary scruple and understanding, especially those aspects of his outlook and behaviour that at times seemed inscrutable to some of his most devoted friends. This book is also valuable for its admirable account of personal aspects of a terrible decade of European history and Anglo-German relations.

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Marx in 1867 (photo: Friedrich Karl Wunder)

Finally I should like to recommend Shlomo Avineri's *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge). This penetrating and authoritative study of Marx and his Hegelian origins discusses with rare clarity a topic which has bred a mass of dark, pseudo-technical and rhetorical patter. Mr Avineri is master of his subject and genuinely adds to the reader's knowledge and understanding.

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