

REVIEWS

Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir. NORMAN MALCOLM; with a Biographical Sketch by GEORG HENRIK VON WRIGHT. *Oxford University Press.* 12s. 6d.

Wittgenstein died in Cambridge on April 29th, 1951, three days after completing his 62nd year. Many false, and some absurd, legends have sprung up about him, and some of them have been widely circulated. It is therefore most desirable that there should be a brief biography of him by an absolutely trustworthy, competent, and scrupulously accurate person, who knew him well and admired him and his work, and who has set himself to ascertaining the available facts. All these qualifications are possessed to a pre-eminent degree by Professor G. H. von Wright, and the biographical sketch which he contributed in October 1955 to Vol. LXIV of *The Philosophical Review* is a model of its kind. It is reprinted in the book under review, and occupies the first 22 pages of it. It is written in an English style of such excellence as few Englishmen and hardly any Americans nowadays manage to attain.

Von Wright does not confine himself to a bare record of facts. He gives his own estimate, which is very high indeed, of Wittgenstein's personality and intellect and of his earliest and his later contributions to philosophy. As to this I can only say that nothing impresses me so much about Wittgenstein as the impression which he made on such fine characters and such eminent philosophers as, e.g., Moore and von Wright.

As there is a legend that Wittgenstein was received *in articulo mortis* into the Roman Catholic Church, and as that legend is false, I take this opportunity to state, on the authority and with the permission of Dr. Bevan, in whose house Wittgenstein died, the relevant facts. I will premise by saying that, in view of the fact that Wittgenstein came of a family who were converts from Judaism to Roman Catholicism, that he was himself baptized in that religion, and that on more than one occasion he had seriously considered entering a monastic order, there would have been nothing surprising if he had (like Talleyrand) reverted to Roman Catholicism on his death-bed. The actual facts, as stated by Dr. Bevan, are these. Several of Wittgenstein's close associates were converts to the Roman Church. One

of them had a friend, a Dominican monk, whom Wittgenstein had known and liked. When Wittgenstein lay dying it was decided, after some discussion among his assembled friends, that this Dominican should say the prayers for the dying in his room. After the death the question arose whether there should be any religious service in connexion with the burial in St. Giles' cemetery in Cambridge. One of his friends recalled that Wittgenstein had once told him, with strong expressions of approval, that Tolstoy (though not an orthodox believer) had, on the death of his brother, instructed the village priest to say the usual prayers at the graveside. It was thereupon agreed that the Dominican should be asked to say some prayers at Wittgenstein's funeral, and this was accordingly done. It appears from several statements in the book under review that, although Wittgenstein had a profound admiration for St. Augustine and his works, his own leanings were less towards Catholic orthodoxy than to certain of the more extreme forms of Christian heresy, as expressed, e.g. by Tolstoy and by Kierkegaard.

The greater part of the book consists of a personal memoir by Professor Norman Malcolm of Cornell University. Malcolm first came to Cambridge from U.S.A. for post-graduate study in the Michaelmas Term of 1938. He attended Wittgenstein's lectures and came into increasingly close personal touch with him during the period which ended with his return to U.S.A. early in 1940. He was enabled to stay longer than would otherwise have been financially possible through the generous help of Wittgenstein. They corresponded thereafter with each other, first during Malcolm's Instructorship at Princeton and later during his service in the U.S. navy. After a brief and rather chilling meeting in May 1945, when Malcolm utilized 35 hours' leave from his ship to visit Wittgenstein in Cambridge, the two did not meet again until the autumn of 1946, when Malcolm, accompanied by his wife, took up residence for a second time in Cambridge until the summer of 1947. During that period they saw a great deal of each other, and they corresponded regularly thereafter. In July 1949 Wittgenstein went to U.S.A. as guest of the Malcolms, and stayed with them until October, when he returned to England after a period of serious illness. He continued to correspond with Malcolm, writing his last letter thirteen days before his death.

Wittgenstein was plainly a formidable person, who called forth much admiration and great devotion in some of those who were in regular touch with him, but did not hesitate to chasten those whom

he loved. He demanded complete frankness in speech of his friends, but sometimes reacted with rather childish annoyance when they responded to that demand. It was difficult for anyone who attended his lectures and discussion-classes to publish anything in philosophy without incurring the charge either of surreptitiously borrowing his ideas, or of wilfully or ignorantly misrepresenting them, or of both. An original thinker may well pray to be delivered from his disciples and admirers, but the vehemence and duration of Wittgenstein's reactions to their supposed peccadillos seemed often to be altogether out of proportion to the occasion.

All this is illustrated, but by no means over-emphasized, in the course of Malcolm's memoir. But the affection and awed admiration which Malcolm felt for Wittgenstein, and the respect and liking which Wittgenstein felt for Malcolm, shine out with their own light against the background of occasional ungraciousness and constant nervous strain. There are many agreeable and even playful incidents recorded. My impression is that there was for Wittgenstein little or no region intermediate between a state of high and concentrated seriousness and rather simple and sometimes almost crudely 'low-brow' interludes. I suspect that this, rather than the alleged 'artificiality' of the conversation at the High Table of Trinity, made the latter so distasteful to Wittgenstein. That conversation is the talk of men, all fairly eminent in their respective subjects, relaxing after a fairly tiring day's work. It presupposes common traditions, going back to undergraduate days, and habitual 'family' jokes and allusions, and it moves in a sphere equally remote from high seriousness and from horseplay. A major prophet may be an excellent fellow, but he will hardly make an excellent Fellow. And, to pass from the general to the particular, one for whom philosophy is a way of life will find it difficult to associate on easy terms with those (like myself) for whom it is primarily a means of livelihood.

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Goethe's Faust: A Literary Analysis. STUART ATKINS. *Harvard University Press and Oxford University Press*, 35s.

This is an embarrassing book to review. We must welcome any study which celebrates *Faust* as a living work; even more heartily must we welcome a study which sets out to commend *Faust* to the general reader (and Professor Atkins gives all his quotations in English). The trouble is that Professor Atkins seeks to secure for *Faust* a literary-critical virtue—of closely knit unity—which it doesn't