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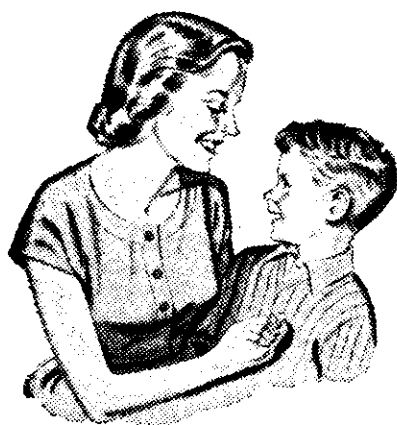
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BOOKS

The Wise Old Man

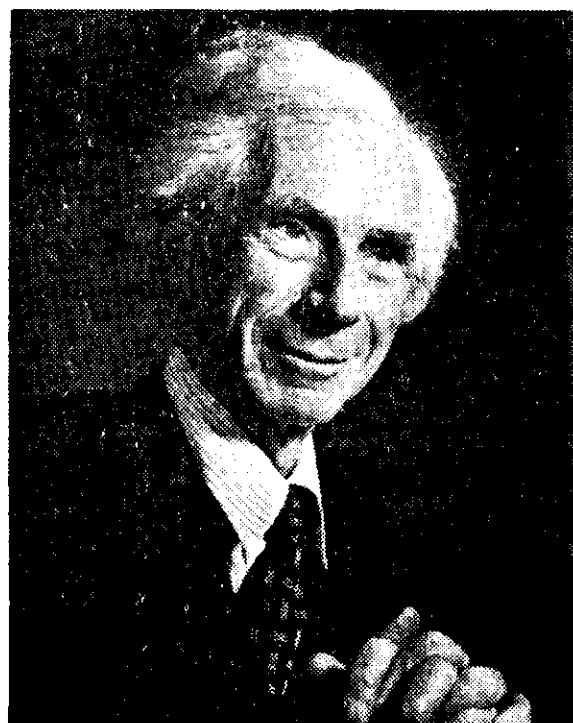
BERTRAND RUSSELL:
THE PASSIONATE
SCEPTIC, by Alan Wood;
Allen and Unwin, Eng-
lish price 21/-.

(Reviewed by F.A.J.)

NO living Englishman is more revered as a Wise Old Man of the Tribe than Bertrand Russell. Those who were stimulated by his books at a time when they were forming their basic standards and attitudes—and this is especially true of many who grew up between the world wars—must be forever in his debt. I know that as a young man my own attitude sometimes came near idolatry. A biography of the old sage is an important event, and for me Alan Wood's book has a special interest since I met the author while he was writing it. When he told me then that his interests were becoming "more and more academic and less and less practical," he revealed a bias which colours this biography and will find fuller expression in a study of Russell's philosophy he is preparing. At the start he argues that the philosopher's way of looking at the universe is the most exciting way, and the chapters outlining the development of Russell's philosophy seem to me, as a general reader, among the best in the book.

Although there can be no doubt that Russell will be influential longest as a philosopher, his short-term influence has been greatest as a writer and broadcaster on social questions, so it is a pity that Mr Wood is least satisfactory—irritating sometimes rather than merely provocative—when he examines some of the more controversial social issues Russell discussed. Up to a point Mr Wood's opinions are, like his style, a stimulating reflection of a lively mind; but they become a fault when they come between Russell and us—as, for example, when he explains his dislike of Russell's views on sex and marriage. Undoubtedly Russell makes some complex questions seem simpler than they are; but I am sure that in asking for a more matter-of-fact attitude to sex he meant not, as Mr Wood seems to think, that he really believed the subject uninteresting, but that it should be as freely discussed as other appetites as an antidote to our frequent morbid preoccupation with it.

Similarly, Mr Wood's view that Russell's near-pacifist attitude before the last war was due (to condense his argument) to a technical miscalculation in applying his utilitarian moral philosophy seems to beg the question; for in Power Russell ventured beyond utilitarianism in saying he thought he would refuse to gas immense numbers of children and do other such "horrible things" even if he were persuaded that that would preserve democracy and that nothing else would. Later he was to prefer an atomic war to world conquest by Russia. The last word has not been said on Russell the moralist in the



"The over-all impression is of . . . superhuman brilliance"

world of practical affairs, though Mr Wood, it must be admitted, raises an interesting point in the conflict between the philosopher's official view that "good" and "bad" were subjective judgments and his fierce moral stand on many issues.

Important and interesting as these questions are, the general reader will want most to discover Russell the man, and it's "an extraordinary man" rather than oracular political and social theories, says his biographer, that we find when we have read all that Russell has to say. The man is here all right in this biography, in rich and fascinating detail, all the richer since Mr Wood, a good journalist (as he rightly insists Russell is), does not despise a certain amount of gossip. But those who come looking for a man as human and fallible as the rest of us will be disappointed. Mr Wood mentions the hardship Russell suffered at one time and another, his unhappiness as a child and a youth, his sensitiveness and his kindness, his ordeal in America during the war; but the overall impression is of a man of almost superhuman brilliance who would never let the world get the better of him. Seeking Russell the man in this book I hoped and more than half expected to discover an affection for him to match my admiration and gratitude. It is not, I am sure, Mr Wood's fault that this hope was not fulfilled.

CHILD OF TWO RACES

WAR IN THE BLOOD, by Salvador de Madariaga; Collins, English price 15/-.
WHITE MAN'S TEST, by Pierre Boulle; Secker and Warburg, English price 14/-.
SEPTEMBER MOON, by John Moore; Collins, English price 15/-.

ANCIENT Mexico, modern Malaya and timeless Herefordshire make a varied enough bracket for most people. Don Salvador de Madariaga, the brilliant diplomat turned novelist, continues in War in the Blood the story