

20 PERSPECTIVE/BOOKS

PORTRAIT OF AN IMPROBABLE PURITAN

By R. C. RICHARDSON

THE DIARY OF BULSTRODE
WHITLOCKE, 1605-1675
EDITED BY RUTH SPALDING
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CONTEMPORARIES OF BULSTRODE
WHITLOCKE, 1605-1675:
BIOGRAPHIES, ILLUSTRATED BY
LETTERS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS
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Bulstrode Whitelocke, lawyer, parliamentarian and ambassador, has long been known to historians through their estimates of him (like those of his own contemporaries) have contrasted sharply. Dame Veronica Wedgwood clearly admires this "man of great learning and judgement" whereas for the dismissive Carlyle in the 19th century he was "Dull Bulstrode" and "Dryasdust". David Underdown has described him as "that inveterate time-server . . . always at hand if a compromise was needed". For Blair Worden he is the "conformist . . . trimming . . . pompous arriviste lawyer". But Whitelocke was his own historian and wrote and re-wrote prodigiously despite a busy career in politics and the law. His *Memorials of the English Affairs*, dealing with the reign of Charles I, the Interregnum and the Restoration of 1660, was first pub-

then she has doggedly pursued Whitelocke, the "Bulstrode Nuisance", as the large number of her friends and neighbours acknowledged in the introduction must assuredly have come to regard him. The sheer labour involved in bringing out this superlative edition of the *Diary* has obviously been colossal. But the achievement is more than one of effort. Assiduous searching brought to light new materials in Sweden and Ireland. County Record Offices, country houses and churches were patiently combed. The standard of editing in the published work is exemplary and the reader is further assisted by the companion volume on *Contemporaries of Bulstrode Whitelocke* which brings together approximately 1,000 biographies of individuals who figure in the *Diary* and includes generous extracts from correspondence and other documents in the voluminous collections of Whitelocke papers. The index is systematic and comprehensive.

The historical importance of the *Diary* is enormous, partly because Whitelocke's public career spanned the momentous years of the English Revolution. With the exception of the Barebones Parliament he was an MP in every parliament between 1641 and 1659, he served on numerous committees, and held high-ranking office. Whitelocke, however, was no enthusiast of civil war: "when the Head warred against the Members and the Members against the Head. When Protestants against Protestants, En-



relations. (William Cooke, employed as a steward on Whitelocke's Fawley estate in Buckinghamshire and "held the ablest man for such business in those parts", gave honest, forthright advice to his master that was heeded, and he was sorely missed after his death in 1653.) Estate management, investment and borrowing, agricultural improvement, diet, travel, sports

with Secretary of State John Thurloe and was frequently consulted by Cromwell. He knew John Milton both as a writer and civil servant and was on close terms with John Selden, "that prodigy of learning of his age".

The high point of Whitelocke's career was his mission as Ambassador Extraordinary to Sweden in 1653-54.

house and estate at Fawley were plundered by marauding royalist troops who seized livestock, timber, stores, household goods, and coach and horses. (He estimated his losses at £10,000.) After the Restoration Whitelocke's fortunes went into uninterrupted decline. He held no further public office or seat in Parliament, old friends deserted him.

lished in 1682 and went through two later editions. His *Essays Ecclesiastical and Civil* appeared in 1706, while the first edition of his absorbing *Journal of the Swedish Embassy* was issued in 1772.

Whitelocke's copious and long-running diary, however, has never before been published. Indeed it disappeared for 145 years after his death and resurfaced – how it is not clear – in the library of the Marquess of Bute at Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire, in 1820. S. R. Gardiner planned to edit it for publication and a complete transcript of the bulky, double-column, one third of a million word original was made. But the Marquess of Bute died in 1900, Gardiner followed in 1902, the diary transcript was lost, the diary itself was quietly forgotten, and all thought of publication was abandoned.

The diary was accidentally rediscovered by Ruth Spalding in the course of researching her biography of Whitelocke (published in 1975). Since

brothers against brothers, sons against fathers and fathers against sons, sought the destruction of one another, then was this great Creature near the slaughter of itself... All were wearied out with Civil War, with the plundering of houses, depopulating of towns".

The *Diary's* value as a source extends in many other directions as well. Much is said here, for example, about marriage-making, the role of women, and child-rearing (Whitelocke was three times married and had 17 children), about household management, family life, kinship networks, and hospitality. His second and third wives were both commended for their business skills, as was Whitelocke's mother. "She was so expert in business that whilst her husband was employed in public affairs he wholly trusted her with the management of his private affairs, contracts with tenants, receipts and disbursements..." Interesting light is thrown, too, on master-servant

and patronage, legal and medical practice, London life, local politics, patronage, precedence disputes, education and religion are among the many other subjects considered in these crowded, miscellaneous, frank and indiscriminating pages. The *Diary* is an enthralling rag-bag.

Whitelocke's public career brought him into close contact with the leading figures of the day. He acted as one of Parliament's Commissioners in the fruitless negotiations with Charles I at Oxford and Uxbridge, and concluded that the King "showed great abilities in his apprehension, reason and judgement, but his unhappiness was to trust others' judgement more than his own, to his prejudice". As an Oxford student Whitelocke had come to know the future Archbishop Laud. As a fledgling lawyer he and Edward Hyde (later Lord Chancellor Clarendon) became firm friends. William Prynne knew and disliked Whitelocke and plotted revenge after the Restoration. In the Interregnum the diarist worked closely

with... what he at first considered a remote, politically insignificant northern backwater and with suspicions about why he was being sent there. (Cromwell indeed became Lord Protector in Whitelocke's absence.) None the less it is clear that although he disapproved of some of the things he saw in Sweden, Whitelocke revelled in the experience of being there and in the added importance which the mission gave him. (The tone was set by his departure from England with a retinue of one hundred.) He quickly settled into the rituals of international diplomacy and showed great skill and dignity in negotiation. Very rapidly he acquired the confidence of Queen Christina and her ministers and his mission to Sweden was crowned with success. Returning to England, he "bid adieu to those pomps and vanities" – but how he had enjoyed them while they lasted!

There were low points, too, in Whitelocke's career. Scarcely had civil war started in 1642 than his country

plummeted, his financial position was desperately weakened, and he was increasingly racked by painful illness and melancholy.

Ruth Spalding's 1975 biography of Whitelocke described him as an "improbable puritan" on the grounds that in various ways he did not conform to the puritan stereotype. That no doubt says more about the inadequacies of the stereotype than about Whitelocke himself. Certainly he emerges from these pages as a highly complex figure: able, versatile, generous, devout, sometimes overweening or neurotic, easy to take offence, and not always very likeable. His diary provides a major new source for the study of 17th-century politics and takes its place alongside the diaries of Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn and Ralph Josselin as a fascinating "private history" and self-portrait.

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SHELF LIFE

Science literacy is a concept that must appeal to any devotee of science. It combines positively two highly meritorious elements. Science, we feel, is the door to material progress. Literacy, so we are told, is the door to cultural progress. Open them together, and we can walk confidently into the future, with a guardian angel on either side. It is a more stirring rallying cry than "public understanding of science", which does smack a little of that carefully forgotten schoolroom where most of us wisely

decided that we might as well give up a subject that we didn't really understand.

What scientists mean by SL is something like "being able to follow a scientific argument", or "get the hang of an account of a scientific idea", or "know enough of the meaning of the words being used to catch the general drift of a scientific statement". But the parallel with "reading-and-writing" literacy is difficult to sustain. The range of levels of sophistication concealed in terms like "scientific argument", "scientific idea", or "scientific statement" is simply enormous. How are you on the Fokker-Planck equation, or liposomal doxorubicin, eh? A formal definition of SL would probably consign us all, from the president of the Royal Society downwards, to the Outer Darkness of almost complete ignorance and illiteracy.

Some would say that we need SL to give us the "scientific world picture". Yes, that would be instruc-

ive, but even if "the scientists" could agree on it amongst themselves it would be partial, in both senses of the word – incomplete and biased. The same applies to the commitment of the SL movement to making people understand "the scientific method" or "the scientific attitude". This is usually interpreted as a commitment to "hard science" techniques, such as laboratory experiment and statistical analysis, as distinct from the more speculative, descriptive, or even empathic, methodologies required for the analysis of human behaviour and institutions. In spite of ritual health warnings about the uncertainty and limited applicability of scientific knowledge in human affairs, the natural scientists' version of SL often fosters a scientific ideology of naive realism and technological progress – an ideology which basic literacy in the social sciences would soon deconstruct.

Much of the enthusiasm for SL is

thus transformed into boundary work for the natural sciences on the social scene. Quite apart from the naïve expectation that science would be more generously funded if people understood it better, there is the perennial claim of science to ultimate expertise. Surely, people who understand science ought to accept the scientific arguments by which controversial issues can be closed. Unfortunately, the scientific testimony on many important issues is uncertain and divided. Scientific rationality is a frail craft in a stormy sea of social interests and power relationships, and is quickly broken up into war clubs to be brandished by the contending parties.

Finally, SL undervalues practical experience gained in a skilled profession – farming, teaching, doctoring, building, managing, etc. Many people have very expert knowledge which may be just as relevant to a controversial issue as the opinions of scientists, whose work has been

mainly with questions from which the real life has been carefully bracketed out.

I have always been, and continue to be, an advocate of almost all the activities that are undertaken under this label: school teaching of and about the sciences; presentation and discussion of matter related to science and technology in the mass media; reviewing the state of knowledge and initiating debate on controversial issues; trying to understand and explain, in simple terms, the nature of science as a human activity, and so on.

If the term "science literacy" is just a code for this complex of activities, then let us have a great deal more of it. But we ought not to brush aside some of the implications of the term itself, and of the way that it is often interpreted.

JOHN ZIMAN