



Isaiah Berlin: Letters 1928-1946 (v. 1)

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Isaiah Berlin is one of the towering intellectual figures of the twentieth century, the most famous English thinker of the post-war era, and the focus of growing interest and discussion. Above all, he is one of the best modern exponents of the disappearing art of letter-writing. 'Life is not worth living unless one can be indiscreet to intimate friends,' wrote Berlin to a correspondent. This first volume inaugurates a long awaited edition of his letters that might well adopt this remark as an epigraph. Berlin's life was well worth living, both for himself and for the world. Fortunately he said a great deal to his friends on paper as well as in person. Berlin's letters reveal the significant growth and development of his personality and career over the two decades covered within them. Starting with his days as an eighteen year old student at St. Paul's School in London, they cover his years at Oxford as scholar and professor and the authorship of his famous biography of Karl Marx. The letters progress to his World War II stay in the U.S. and finally, his trip to the Soviet Union in 1945-6 and return to Oxford in 1946. "Emotional exploitation, cannibalism, which I think I dislike more than anything else in the world." To Ben Nicolson, September 1937 "Valery delivered an agreeable but dull lecture here. He said words were like thin planks over precipices, and if you crossed rapidly nothing happened, but if you stopped on any of them and stared into the gulf you would get vertigo and that was what philosophers were doing." To Cressida Bonham Carter, March 1939 "I never don't moralize." To Mary Fisher, 18 April 1940 "I only feel happy when I feel the solidarity of the majority of people I respect with and behind me." To Marion Frankfurter, 23 August 1940 "Certainly no politics are more real than those of academic life, no loves deeper, no hatreds more burning, no principles more sacred." To Freya Stark, 12 June 1944 "Nobody is so fiercely bureaucratic, or so stern with soldiers and regular civil servants, as the don disguised as temporary government official armed with an indestructible superiority complex." To Freya Stark, 12 June 1944 "My view on this is that you will not find life in the country lively enough for persons of your temperament. Life in the country in England depends entirely on (a) motor cars (b) rural tastes. As you possess neither, it is my considered view that apart from a weekend cottage or something of that sort, life in the country would bore you stiff within a very short time." To his parents, 31 January 1944 "This country is undoubtedly the largest assembly of fundamentally benevolent human beings ever gathered together, but the thought of staying here remains a nightmare." To his parents, 31 January 1944 "I am a hopeless dilettante about matters of fact really and only good for a column of gossip, if that." To W. J. Turner, 12 June 1945 "England is an old chronic complaint: every day in the afternoon in the left knee and the left leg below the kneecap, tiresome, annoying, not bad enough to go to bed with, probably incurable and madly irritating but not necessarily unlikely to lead to a really serious crisis unless complications set in." To Angus Malcolm, 20 February 1946

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