Alfred North Whitehead
Lowe, Victor

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Preface

Victor Lowe died on November 16, 1988, leaving behind the unfinished manuscript of the second volume of his life of Whitehead, of which the Johns Hopkins University Press had published the first volume in 1985. Some years earlier Victor had appointed me his literary executor. We talked occasionally about his progress in the intervening years, but he gave little indication of how far he had gotten on the project and said little about his plans for the unwritten portions. It was clear that he was working as hard and as continuously as his health would allow, and that his main hope in life was to finish the book. As a second best, he wanted to be sure that what he had written would be published.

The condition of the manuscript was as follows. Up through Chapter XI it was written and footnoted, essentially ready for publication. Chapter XII had been begun, and what was written, though scant, was fairly polished. Beyond that there was nothing: no rough drafts, no sketches, and very little in the way of written or printed material for the later chapters. In our last conversation Victor said he had written nothing about The Adventures of Ideas, and I have found nothing about any of the other books and papers Whitehead wrote after Process and Reality. A transcription of Whitehead’s letters to his son and daughter-in-law had been made, and the appendix on the second edition of Principia Mathematica had been written. Victor planned other appendices, but neither they nor material for them could be found. In effect, Whitehead’s biography from 1910 through 1929—the years of his most creative philosophical activity—had been completed and the period beyond that barely touched.

Victor planned to end the book with a new assessment of Whitehead’s philosophy as a whole. He asked me to say that while he still thought the interpretation he had given in his earlier Understanding Whitehead was sound, he wanted to amplify it in parts and to add to it. At the time of his death he had written nothing of this assessment for the book. He had, however, written an essay for the collection edited by Ernest Wolf-Gazo, Process in Context (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988). Pro-
fessor Wolf-Gazo kindly sent me a copy, and I have used that, with the kind permission of the publisher, as the final chapter.

The only other addition I have made is a very brief conclusion to Chapter XII, chronicling Whitehead’s years after the publication of Process and Reality. I have made no attempt to go beyond the few materials—newspaper clippings and other ephemera—which I found in Victor’s files. The years from 1929 to 1947 do not seem to have been especially eventful ones in Whitehead’s outer life. Victor might have corrected that judgment; but only he could have written the missing chapters.

Thus the book is incomplete, as Victor feared it might be; but I hope not too seriously so. Thanks to his exhaustive investigations we know as much as it is possible to know about the life of a man who had the bulk of his papers destroyed. And for the understanding of Whitehead’s work, what is missing is surely not as important as the part Victor wrote.

I do not know who the people are whom Victor would have thanked had he lived to complete the biography. I am sure he would have repeated and added to the list of those to whom he expressed gratitude in the Preface to the first volume, and on his behalf I thank all those who contributed the reminiscences and other material that went into the making of this one. Particular thanks are again due two people who cannot receive them, T. North Whitehead and Jessie Whitehead, who in 1965 gave Victor blanket permission to collect and use whatever material he could find that he judged useful for the biography they knew he was working on, and who gave him access to the letters from Whitehead that form Appendix B, as well as to numerous family photographs from which the ones published here were selected.

I do know that there were many people who helped me make this second-best outcome possible. Mrs. Bennett Gold, Victor’s secretary, helped me sort out Victor’s files and papers, and located a good deal of indispensable material. Peter Batke of the Johns Hopkins University Computing Center retrieved whatever was in the by now aged-looking computer Victor used, thereby finding the only copy of a whole section of one chapter. Sue McElvaney put most of the manuscript into the maws of a more up-to-date computer in record time and with astonishing accuracy; and what she did not do, Edna Ford did with equal skill. Cynthia Requardt is an admirable and helpful custodian of the Whitehead material Victor entrusted to the Special Collections Division of the Milton S. Eisenhower Library, the Johns Hopkins University. The letters and photographs reproduced in this volume are on temporary
loan to the Special Collections Division. Nancy Thompson checked the transcription of the letters from Whitehead to his son and daughter-in-law against the originals in the Special Collections Division, and managed to decipher some of the more intractable bits. Jennifer Welchman checked the page references in the footnotes and endnotes, making corrections where necessary.

At a time when Victor felt that there was more to be done than he could finish, he found a research assistant, Dr. Leemon B. McHenry, now of the Philosophy Department at Central Michigan University. Dr. McHenry was the principal author of Chapters V and VI, and Victor wanted to record his gratitude for Dr. McHenry’s able work.

Two other philosophers gave a great deal of time and thought to answering questions and making suggestions about the manuscript. George L. Kline and Donald W. Sherburne generously brought their unsurpassed expertise in Whitehead to the assistance of a non-Whiteheadian. They helped from beginning to end in assessing the general state of the manuscript, in ironing out matters of detail, and in making some important decisions about the final shape of the book. I have not always taken their advice, but it is only thanks to their assistance that I have some hope that the book has been made as worthy of its predecessor as it could have been.

To Jack Goellner and the staff of the Johns Hopkins University Press I am most grateful for the expedition and skill with which they have handled all the many tasks connected with actually publishing the manuscript. Penny Moudrianakis, who edited the manuscript with sensitivity and unfailing good sense, has my special gratitude.

Finally, my thanks go to Alice Lowe. Her determination to see the book published and her generosity in facilitating the preparation of the manuscript continued the care she gave Victor while he was working on it. Victor wished the book to be dedicated to her. She more than anyone else made it possible for him to complete as much of it as he did.

J. B. Schneewind