
Book Review

The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein, Volume 1. *The Early Years, 1879-1902*. John Stachel, ed. Separate English Translation, Anna Beck, translator. Princeton University Press, 1987. 433 + lxvi pp. Cloth \$52.50. Translation \$22.50, sold only with original.

Einstein wished no monument; this monument is one he would have accepted. It is for the ages. One checks to see if he has been given a fair treatment: He has. The volume is attractive, and the editing perceptive and informative without being intrusive; the translation is an entirely appropriate and insightful compromise between the literary and the literal (though relegated to a paperback and imperfectly proofread).

The earliest extant writings of Einstein, marginalia written between the ages of 12 and 16 in textbooks on geometry and calculus, concern the relation between the finite and the infinitesimal, the discrete and the continuous, themes closer to his later quantum studies than to his relativity. He returns to them near the end of his life. But his first essay, written at age 16, is on the propagation of light in the ether.

The book is a time machine. Reading it, we become time travelers and even peeping toms. The greatest number of selections are the 51 premarital love letters of Albert Einstein and Mileva Marić. They stimulate our impertinent curiosity: Why does Albert sometimes call himself Johonzel or Johannels? Whatever became of his first child, Lieserl? The same letters also whet our appetites for the feasts of reason to come, as when in one of them the youth surmises that there must be oscillators in solids that shape both their specific heats and their optical properties, for all substances that obey the specific heat law of Dulong and Petit are opaque.

The largest single item consists of Einstein's notes on the physics lectures of Prof. H. F. Weber in Zurich.

By the end of the period of this volume we come to his remark, "I am now working eagerly on an electrodynamics of moving bodies, which promises to become a capital paper." And shortly after, his advertisement for his services as tutor: "Trial lessons free." We are forced to consider what it must have been like for one man to send both messages, and to be grateful for his earthiness, his sanity, and his sense of humor.