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(b. Aberdeen, Scotland, 7 February 1883; d. Watsonville, California, 21 December 1960) *mathematics*.

The younger son of James Bell, of a London commercial family, and Helen Lyndsay Lyall, whose family were classical scholars, he was tutored before entering the Bedford Modern School, where a remarkable teacher, E. M. Langley, inspired his lifelong interest in elliptic functions and [number theory](#). Bell migrated to the [United States](#) in 1902 “to escape being shoved into Woolwich or the India Civil Service” (as he later explained) and was able to “cover all the mathematics offered” at Stanford and graduate [Phi Beta Kappa](#) in two years. A single year at the University of Washington netted an M. A. in 1908; another at Columbia sufficed for the Ph. D. in 1912. The years between he spent as a ranch hand, mule skinner, surveyor, school teacher, and partner in an unsuccessful telephone company. In 1910 he married Jessie L. Brown, who died in 1940. They had one son, Taine Temple Bell, who became a physician in Watsonville. Bell produced about 250 mathematical research papers, four learned books, eleven popularizations, and, as “John Taine” seventeen [science fiction](#) novels, many short stories, and some poetry. He was active in organizations of research mathematicians, teachers, and authors. In religion and politics he was an individualist and uncompromising iconoclast. He remained active in retirement and was writing his last book in the hospital when overtaken by a fatal [heart attack](#).

At the University of Washington from 1912, Bell published a number of significant contributions on numerical functions, analytic [number theory](#), multiply periodic functions, and Diophantine analysis. His “Arithmetical Paraphrases” (1921) won a Bôcher prize. Other honors (e.g., the presidency of the Mathematical Association of America [1931–1933]), editorial duties, and invitations multiplied, but they did not reduce his output. After lecturing at Chicago and Harvard, he went, in 1926, to the [California Institute of Technology](#), where he remained (emeritus after 1953) until hospitalized a year before his death. Bell will be longest known for his *Men of Mathematics* and other widely read books “on the less inhuman aspects of mathematics,” and for *The Development of Mathematics*, whose insights and provocative style continue to influence and intrigue professional mathematicians—in spite of their historical inaccuracies and sometimes fanciful interpretations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Original Works. Typical are his first publication “An Arithmetical Theory of Certain Numerical Functions,” University of Washington Publication, no. 1 (1915): “Arithmetical Paraphrases, Part I,” in *Transaction of the American Mathematical Society*, 22, no. 1 (Jan. 1921), 1–30, and no. 3 (Oct. 1921), 273–275, which won a Bôcher Prize; *Algebraic Arithmetic*, American Mathematical Society Colloquium Publication, no. 7 (1927), which was based on his invited lectures at the Eleventh Colloquium of the American Mathematical Society in 1927; *Before the Dawn* (Baltimore, Md., 1934), which was his favorite [science fiction](#) novel, the only one published under his own name and inspired, he said, by boyhood views of models of dinosaurs in Croydon Park near London; *Men of Mathematics* (New York, 1937), awarded the gold medal of the Commonwealth Club of California; *The Development of Mathematics* (New York, 1940; 2nd ed., 1945); *Mathematics, Queen and Servant of Science* (New York, 1951), his most ambitious popularization based on two previous books, *Queen of the Sciences* and *The Handmaiden of the Sciences*; and *The Last Problem* (New York, 1961), a study of Fermat’s conjecture, which was unfinished at the time of Bell’s death.

II, Secondary Literature. There is no detailed biography. Only the following give more information than appears in *American Men of Science*, *Who’s Who in America*, and *Who Was Who*: an autobiography in *Twentieth Century Authors*, Supp. 1 (New York, 1955), 70–71, from which we have taken the quotations in the article; T. A. A. Broadbent, obituary in *Nature*, no. 4763 (11 Feb. 1961), 443; and a news release from the California Institute of Technology News Bureau (21 Dec. 1960).

Kenneth O. May