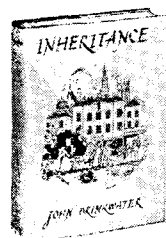


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## Foreign Literature

### Rainer Maria Rilke

BRIEFE AUS DEN JAHREN 1902-1906. By RAINER MARIA RILKE. Leipzig: Insel Verlag. 1931.

BRIEFE AUS DEN JAHREN 1906-1907. By RAINER MARIA RILKE. Leipzig: Insel Verlag. 1931.

RAINER MARIA RILKE: STIMMEN DER FREUNDE. Edited by GERT BUCHHEIT. Freiburg im Breisgau: Urban Verlag. 1931.

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL

WHEN the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke, whose remarkable autobiographical story, "The Note-books of Malte Laurids Brigge," was issued in English not long ago, and whose "Duineser Elegien" are announced in an English translation—when this remarkable writer died in December, 1926, he left behind a very considerable body of correspondence, about two thousand letters, many of them of remarkable literary quality and high significance in relation to a study of the poet's mind and imaginative development. As he himself said in a posthumous note, since he had poured out a part of his nature in his letters, there was no reason why they should not be published. This heavy and responsible, but necessary and welcome task, has been undertaken by the poet's daughter and son-in-law, Ruth Sieber-Rilke and Carl Rilke, and the first two volumes are now available.

The first volume covers the period of Rilke's contact with the sculptor Rodin, to whom he was secretary and on whose work he wrote an excellent appreciation. When the two met Rilke was twenty-seven, a thoughtful, emotional young man, weak in physique—he remained that until the end—deeply introspective and absorbed in the life of the spirit. Rodin was an entirely different type; he was a robust nature, he saw and understood the life of the senses. And the contact, as the editors admit in their preface, brought a good influence to bear on Rilke; he learnt to see "das offene Leben." In one of his own letters to the sculptor, Rilke himself has this significant passage:

C'est le sort le plus tragique des jeunes gens, qui devinent qu'il sera impossible pour eux de vivre sans être poète ou peintre ou sculpteur, qu'ils ne trouvent le vrai conseil, tout enfoncé dans un abîme de délaissement; car en cherchant un maître puissant, il ne cherchent ni paroles, ni renseignements: ils demandent un exemple, un cœur ardent, des mains qui font de la grandeur. C'est vous qu'ils demandent.

But with the passage of time two such different temperaments could not accord completely with each other. The full story of the parting between Rodin and Rilke is not told here; it is to be found in a separate volume of letters and in pages of the poet Lou Andreas-Salomé's book on Rilke. But here we can glimpse the poet's irritation, or that is perhaps too harsh a word; it was the feeling of vague opposition to a genius which, he felt, imposed itself too much on him, fettered his originality. The parting letter, printed in this volume, strikes—after a generous appreciation—the note of emancipation:

Je ne vous verrai plus—mais, comme pour les apôtres qui restaient attristés et seuls, la vie commence pour moi, la vie qui célébrera votre haute exemple et qui trouvera en vous sa consolation, son droit, et sa force. Nous étions d'accord que dans la vie il y a une justice immanente, qui s'accomplit lentement mais sans défaite. C'est dans cette justice que je mets tout mon espoir; elle corrigera un jour le tort que vous avez voulu imposer à celui qui n'a plus de moyen ni de droit de vous montrer son cœur.

Yes, it is Auguste Rodin and Rainer Maria Rilke who are the principal actors in this poignant little drama outlined in this first volume of the poet's letters. The second volume, which covers the years 1906 and 1907, is broader in its interests. Rilke has also widened the circle of his friends and correspondents, and in this volume we meet with such figures as Emile Verhaeren, Ellen Key, Stefan Zweig, and Lou Andreas Salomé—the last of whom, as we have mentioned, maintained her friendship with the poet to the end and produced an excellent book on him after his death. On the whole, however, it is still Clara Rilke to whom he

writes his fullest and most penetrating criticism; and in these letters it is another great artist for whom the poet expresses his appreciation and, in appreciating, brings vividly before us. This is Cézanne, whom Rilke knew in Paris. There are in particular two letters in October, 1907, numbers 191 and 200, in which Rilke gives a remarkable word-picture of the painter and an explanation of his artistic development and significance. He describes his passion for work, his simplicity, and even some of his technical procedure—and all from the point of view of an artist in words who knew very little about art in other media, but is for that reason all the more appealing to the general reader. Other interesting touches in these letters refer to Rilke's lifelong attraction towards Russia, and from one letter here, written from Capri, it appears that he was on that island at the same time as Maxim Gorki, but did not meet him, one may presume because, as he suggested, Gorki was too much the "Westler," the genuine Russian in him ruined by his fame in the West and his adherence to international Socialism.

The volume of "Stimmen der Freunde" on Rainer Maria Rilke is more than a series of pious appreciations. It shows what a wide circle of friends Rilke possessed among intellectuals, not only in Germany, and several of the chapters are real aids to critical appreciation of various sides of the poet's genius. Thus Paul Lepin discusses Rilke's relation to his native Prague and the Slav element in his nature; Hermann Blech discusses the same subject with more particular reference to Rilke's relations with Russia, his visit to which marked an important epoch in his work. Otto Heuschele contributes appreciation of Rilke as a letter-writer, and a detailed study in one of Rilke's most important collections of verse, his "Duineser Elegien." These were written near Duine, on the Adriatic coast near Trieste, and it is of particular interest to read Gert Buchheit's study of the landscape of that region, now associated for all time, we believe, with one of the most important volumes of modern German poetry. The final essay in the volume is Paul Valéry's personal tribute, a reminder of the fact that Rilke not only knew and loved France, even wrote not a little French verse, but has received more appreciation in France than any other German poet for the past fifty years, or more.

### Foreign Notes

Three more volumes of the *Histoire Générale*, edited by Professors Halphen and Sagnac (Paris: Alcan), have appeared. Vols. VII and VII\*, treating of "The End of the Middle Ages," are written by Professors Halphen, Pirenne, and several others. Vol. XV, by Prof. George Weill, bears on The Awakening of Nationalities (1815-1868). Besides the reshaping of Europe after the Napoleonic wars, it contains chapters on the intellectual movement, the economic and social development, colonial expansion (England, France, Russia), and finally on the United States and South America. These three volumes (carrying to ten the number of tomes of a prospective twenty) display the qualities of thoroughness and accuracy, clearness and compactness that recommend the whole series.

These important foreign books in the field of political and military history and biography have been recently published: "DENKWÜRDIGKEITEN ZUR REICHSKANZLERZEIT." By Fürst Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe. Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. 1931.

The third volume of Hohenlohe's *Memoirs* (postponed 25 years) deals with his time as Chancellor, 1894-1900. More of a contribution in some ways than the Bülow *Memoirs*, as it is entirely of genuine and unretouched material (but no breezy narrative). The first two volumes were published by Macmillan in 1906.

"LE MINISTÈRE CLÉMENTEAU." By GÉNÉRAL MORDACQI. Paris: Plon. 2 vols. 1931.

Diary of Mordacqi who was Clémenteau's Chef du Cabinet militaire and dealt with all military matters. Apparently a first-rate contribution, much more important than Clémenteau's own memoirs.



## The New Books

The books listed by title only in the classified list below are noted here as received.

### Fiction

**THE PETLANDS.** By NARD JONES. Brewer, Warren & Putnam. 1931. \$2.

The growth of a Western city from muddy paths and false-front shacks to a metropolis of monolithic skyscrapers and chain stores offers ample scope for colorful, vibrant story-telling. When that city is Seattle, the point of departure for Klondike gold fields, and the principal characters are three generations of adventurers, the stage is set for a full-bodied saga. Unfortunately, by the time Mr. Jones gets his tale in black and white the effervescence and reality have vanished. Son, father, and grandfather Petland are cardboard figures speaking with the naturalness of a ventriloquist's dummy.

To be precise, the Petlands were not pioneers. Grandfather Robert went to Seattle and from there to Alaska by train and steamer. He returned with a small fortune, gained not by striking it rich on some snow-clad waste, but from an unromantic machine shop where he sold a device to thaw the ground for gold miners. He invested in Seattle realty and waited for the city to grow. His son Nort became a professional gambler, owner of a string of card rooms in Seattle's wild young days. When reform put a stop to that, he built a hotel, and later went into the wholesale grocery business. Meantime, Bobbie, his son, was growing up; growing older to develop artistic ambitions, to flounder around with the wrong girl, and finally to marry the right one. The curtain falls on his resolve to enter the grocery business with his father and to fight the chain stores.

Quite evidently, the author has endeavored to write something comparable to Edna Ferber's "Cimmarron." In none of his episodes, however, has he succeeded in conveying the staccato action, the upward rush of an empire in the building. He has, unintentionally, removed the glamor from a stirring place and period.

**STRANGE BROTHER.** By BLAIR NILES. Liveright. 1931. \$2.50.

This is less a novel than a piece of special pleading. Mrs. Niles asks us to cultivate compassion and understanding in our attitude towards all those strange brothers—the men who in spite of themselves are drawn emotionally to their own rather than the opposite sex. Mark Thornton, the central figure in the narrative, is a well educated, intelligent young man who, for most of the book, is able to conceal his innate sexual antipathy to women under a disguise of normality. Mrs. Niles follows his thoughts and emotions, giving us thereby a full exposition of the life that such a person might lead today in New York, or, for that matter, in any sizable American city. Not only is Mark Thornton painstakingly explained—almost diagrammed—but other, less inconspicuous, types of homosexuality are brought to our notice. As a result, a panorama of abnormality is unraveled with the utmost tolerance and sympathy, though never with approval.

Such subject matter is, even today, on the borderland of the unmentionable, and it partakes inevitably of the bizarre and the sensational. We are, therefore, often confused in our judgment of the merits of the novel by the (in this day and age) faintly disreputable exoticism of the novel. When the book settles itself in our minds, however, there is a definite critical residuum; a weak narrative, structurally unsatisfying, manipulated to the necessities of the all-important didacticism; for this narrative, a background of some distinction—Harlem, the lower East Side, New York here and there—wherein Mrs. Niles shows most clearly her very real talent for lively and atmospheric description; and, over all, her statement, "Look—these are our strange brothers," and her plea, "Be kind and understanding to them, for their sorrow is great." Altogether, "Strange Brother" is interesting and informative, though not particularly meritorious as a novel.

**MOONBLIND.** By Theodore Wilde. New York: Rudolph Field, 128 Lexington Avenue.

**THE COUNTRY CHILD.** By Alison Uttley. Macmillan. \$2.

**WOMEN FOR SALE.** By Chile Acuna. New York: William Godwin. \$2.

**THE LONE STAR OF COURAGE.** By George L. Knapp. Dodd, Mead. \$2.

**LOVE AMONG THE CAPE-ENDERS.** By Harry Kemp. Macaulay. \$2.50.

### Religion

**THE TRIAL OF JESUS OF NAZARETH.** By MAX RADIN. University of Chicago Press. 1931. \$3.

In this book, Max Radin, professor of law in the University of California, has attempted an interesting task. He has undertaken an impartial examination of the evidence offered in the Four Gospels concerning the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus, in the light of all that is known about the Jewish and Roman legal customs of the period. The most interesting result of his labors is their independent corroboration of the generally accepted conclusions of Higher Criticism. Thus of the four witnesses he finds Mark entitled to the greatest credence, Luke and Matthew less reliable, while the testimony of "John" is thrown out of court by its numerous errors and the writer's evident unfamiliarity with actual conditions in Judea. The story, given in Luke alone, of Pilate's sending Jesus to Herod for examination, Professor Radin is inclined to accept because of historical evidence indicating that Pilate, who had recently lost his political backers in Rome, had good reason to try to curry favor with Herod, his former enemy, just at that particular time. But all of the Gospels, even including that of Mark, offer a great deal of hearsay evidence for which the writers could have had no adequate substantiation. Rejecting such items, Professor Radin finds no entirely convincing proof of the accepted tradition that Caiaphas and the priestly party were insincere hypocrites twisting the law to suit their private ends. They may have been within their technical legal rights and no more villainous than those eager to sentence every "disturber of the public peace" today.

### Travel

**OUT OF THE BEATEN TRACK.** By MAJOR C. COURT TREATT. Dutton. 1931.

If you have not read one of the recent books on African hunting and travel, you will probably say that this particular one is interesting and exciting. If you have read a number of such books, you will probably say that this one is just another book on Africa. Spearing lions has been so well written up that Major Treatt's rather jumbled account of a primitive elephant hunt seems flat. A good deal is known about the Shilluk people; and while Major Treatt's description of the Dinkas is interesting, it does not add a great deal to our knowledge of these Sudanese tribes. He does not know how to make the most of his material. In the hands of a more experienced writer, many of the episodes described in this book might make vivid reading. But English is a bit too much for the Major. Witness,

Digging a hole three feet deep in the ground, we covered this with a dome-shaped structure of supple sticks placed close together; and this skeleton roof we then plastered with a first coating of mud.

This may seem mild, and it is compared to the following:

Pitching my own bivouac on the only piece of ground standing a foot or so above the swamp, my wife took charge of the main camp some six miles further south and arranged with the Dinkas that they should cut the necessary poles from the forest, eight miles away, and bring them to the working party which was detailed to build the bridge under my supervision; and after innumerable delays this timber was collected and the poles, lashed together into tripods with bark rope, were carried into the river.

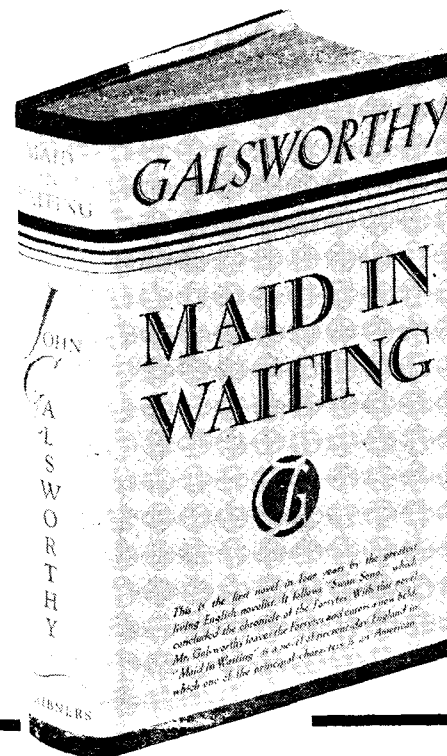
The pictures may be artistic, but, considering that Major Treatt is a specialist in animal photography, the selection is not a happy one.

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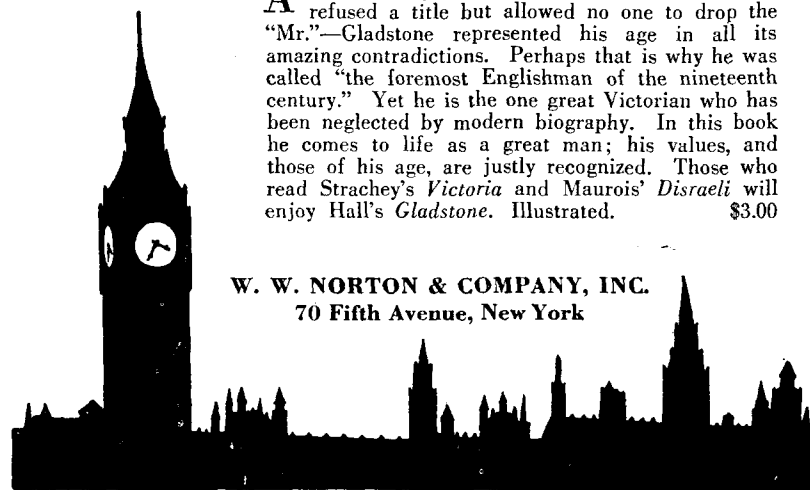


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