

Mr Wall's territory this time includes so much that is starred in Baedeker that the familiar catalogue might be wearisome had he not deliberately restricted his range and confined himself to those places and those works of art which are attractive to a writer whose knowledge of Italy is not simply that of a savant, still less that of a tourist, but rather of one whose intimate knowledge of contemporary Italy is fortified by a wide and yet exact scholarship.

For the visitor to Italy who wants a living picture, Mr Wall's two volumes can be warmly recommended. Not even the fullest guide book can cover Florence, Siena, Bologna, Milan, Pisa (to mention but a few of the places included in this book) but Mr Wall's discrimination is such, and his sympathy is so real, that he provides an introduction as valuable as it is delightful to read.

I.E.

RAINER MARIA RILKE: His Life and Work. By F. W. van Heerikhuizen. Translated from the Dutch by Fernand G. Renier and Anne Cliff. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 25s.)

In his last chapter but one, van Heerikhuizen quotes from a letter written by Rilke: 'Art is superfluous. Can art heal wounds, can it rob death of its bitterness? It does not calm despair, does not feed the hungry, does not clothe the freezing.' Such questioning gives the measure of Rilke's problem as a poet and indicates, too, the recognition, springing from humility, of a fundamental truth. The life and work of this cosmopolitan German pose for us the problem of the validity of the poetic experience *qua* religious. When devotion to art is so intense that life is lived almost purely in terms of artistic integrity, understood as essentially a religious pursuit, it may be wondered whether the sacrifice entailed is worthily made, for that sacrifice is not confined to the life of the artist. In the case of Rilke, for instance, the fear of limitation caused him to live apart from his wife and daughter and his progress towards love and humanity must have been a bitter thing not only for himself.

The Rilke that van Heerikhuizen so patiently builds up for us is neither 'saint' nor 'hero', but an intuitive artist, an essentially one-sided man, yet whose perceptions, whose intuitions, have extraordinary value. Van Heerikhuizen claims that his own approach to the German poet is intuitive. What he gives us is an intimate experience of Rilke, a sort of re-creation of the poet, of the stages through which he passed from the inside, as it were, in so far as his insight enables the Dutch writer to put himself in the place of the poet. Thus it is with strong sympathy that he approaches his subject, but not without a certain critical detachment. His book is concerned, not with a study of form, not with the use of language, but with the perception of being, with

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intuitive truths, and with the struggle of a man in the face of the conflicting exigencies of life and art. We see an individual very much at the mercy of phenomena, submitting himself to them without choice, without preference, feeling intensely the fascination of the forms of life, yet supremely concerned to preserve the integrity of a rigorous conception of art from the encroaches of life and love, at the same time conscious of the necessity to live vitally so that the matter for transmutation into art should be essential experience. The tension was not resolved until the burst of creative activity in February, 1922.

Van Heerikhuizen is scrupulously careful to preserve the contradictions and complexities, the changing phases of Rilke, and most anxious not to make a unity out of a multiplicity, not to simplify his task by a false lucidity. He refuses to see any system in Rilke's work, he sees none in the *Duisener Elegien*, he does not make the mistake of imagining that Rilke is a thinker. He is an intuitive artist and therein lies his value for van Heerikhuizen. He obviously represents for him the finest type of modern man. The last chapter deals with the poet's hostile attitude to Christianity, which the Dutch writer is obliged to characterise as 'unhistorical'. His very choice of word reveals van Heerikhuizen's 'modernity', of which he is proud. What Rilke writes of Christianity is not 'untrue', but 'unhistorical'; it is true for Rilke and therefore assumes a subjective truth in this Rilke-centred world. It is both the strength and the weakness of this work that it is Rilke-centred. As an aid to the understanding of the poet it is undoubtedly of great value, but it leaves those unsatisfied for whom intuition is not the most valid criterion in their relationship to the world. Not all of us will agree with van Heerikhuizen's concluding hint that it is the inspiration of such as Rilke that is most needed in the world today.

ERNEST BEAUMONT

THE LETTERS OF ELIZABETH MYERS. Edited by Littleton Powys.
(Chapman and Hall; 18s.)

Elizabeth Myers died in May 1947 at the age of thirty-four, after nearly nine years of illness. She was twenty-five when she was first attacked by tuberculosis, and from then on she was never less than semi-invalid and often much worse; yet despite this she wrote three novels of great originality and vitality, a large number of short stories, articles and reviews, learnt Greek, and acted as literary adviser to her publishers: an amount of activity no less than heroic for one who could write, in 1944, 'I have very little pain but the worst thing about T.B. is the weariness it brings, and sometimes when I creep about so tired that I've nearly lost the sense of my own identity, then I should be glad to be free of my lungs and this tiresome body.' (page 213.)

This volume of letters edited with a very useful Introduction and