

NOTES ON LIFE AND LETTERS

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Notes on Life and Letters by Joseph Conrad

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JOSEPH CONRAD

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AND LETTERS**

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BOOKS BY JOSEPH CONRAD

ALMAYER'S FOLLY
AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS
THE NIGGER OF THE "NARCISSUS"
TALES OF UNREST
LORD JIM: A ROMANCE
YOUTH: A NARRATIVE
TYPHOON
FALK, AND OTHER STORIES
NOSTROMO: A TALE OF THE SEABOARD
THE MIRROR OF THE SEA
THE SECRET AGENT
A SET OF SIX
UNDER WESTERN EYES
A PERSONAL RECORD
'TWIXT LAND AND SEA
CHANCE
WITHIN THE TIDES
VICTORY
THE SHADOW-LINE
THE ARROW OF GOLD
THE RESCUE
NOTES ON LIFE AND LETTERS
THE ROVER

WITH FORD M. HUEFFER

ROMANCE: A NOVEL
THE INHERITORS: AN EXTRAVAGANT
STORY
THE NATURE OF A CRIME

NOTES ON LIFE AND LETTERS

BY
JOSEPH CONRAD



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DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1924

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I DON'T know whether I ought to offer an apology for this collection which has more to do with life than with letters. Its appeal is made to orderly minds. This, to be frank about it, is a process of tidying up, which, from the nature of things, cannot be regarded as premature. The fact is that I wanted to do it myself because of a feeling that had nothing to do with the considerations of worthiness or unworthiness of the small (but unbroken) pieces collected within the covers of this volume. Of course it may be said that I might have taken up a broom and used it without saying anything about it. That certainly is one way of tidying up.

But it would have been too much to have expected me to treat all this matter as removable rubbish. All those things had a place in my life. Whether any of them deserve to have been picked up and ranged on the shelf—this shelf—I cannot say, and, frankly, I have not allowed my mind to dwell on the question. I was afraid of thinking myself into a mood that would hurt my feelings; for those pieces of writing, whatever may be the comment on their display, appertain to the character of the man.

And so here they are, dusted, which was but a decent thing to do, but in no way polished, extending from the year '98 to the year '20, a thin array (for such a stretch of time) of really innocent attitudes: Conrad literary, Conrad political, Conrad reminiscent, Conrad

controversial. Well, yes! A one-man show—or is it merely the show of one man?

The only thing that will not be found amongst those Figures and Things that have passed away, will be Conrad *en pantoufles*. It is constitutional inability. *Schlafrock und pantoffeln!* Not that! Never! . . . I don't know whether I dare boast like a certain South American general who used to say that no emergency of war or peace had ever found him "with his boots off;" but I may say that whenever the various periodicals mentioned in this book, called on me to come out and blow the trumpet of personal opinions or strike the pensive lute that speaks of the past, I always tried to pull on my boots first. I didn't want to do it, God knows! Their Editors, to whom I beg to offer my thanks here, made me perform mainly by kindness but partly by bribery. Well, yes! Bribery. What can you expect? I never pretended to be better than the people in the next street or even in the same street.

This volume (including these embarrassed introductory remarks) is as near as I shall ever come to *deshabille* in public; and perhaps it will do something to help towards a better vision of the man, if it gives no more than a partial view of a piece of his back, a little dusty (after the process of tidying up), a little bowed, and receding from the world not because of weariness or misanthropy but for other reasons that cannot be helped: because the leaves fall, the water flows, the clock ticks with that horrid pitiless solemnity which you must have observed in the ticking of the hall clock at home. For reasons like that. Yes! It recedes. And this was the chance to afford one more view of it—even to my own eyes.

The section within this volume called Letters explains itself though I do not pretend to say that it

justifies its own existence. It claims nothing in its defence except the right of speech which I believe belongs to everybody outside a Trappist monastery. The part I have ventured, for shortness' sake, to call *Life*, may perhaps justify itself by the emotional sincerity of the feelings to which the various papers included under that head owe their origin. And as they relate to events of which everyone has a date, they are in the nature of sign-posts pointing out the direction my thoughts were compelled to take at the various cross-roads. If anybody detects any sort of consistency in the choice this will be only proof positive that wisdom had nothing to do with it. Whether right or wrong, instinct alone is invariable; a fact which only adds a deeper shade to its inherent mystery. The appearance of intellectuality these pieces may present at first sight is merely the result of the arrangement of words. The logic that may be found there is only the logic of the language. But I need not labour the point. There will be plenty of people sagacious enough to perceive the absence of all wisdom from these pages. But I believe sufficiently in human sympathies to imagine that very few will question their sincerity. Whatever delusions I may have suffered from I have had no delusions as to the nature of the facts commented on here. I may have misjudged their import: but that is the sort of error for which one may expect a certain amount of toleration.

The only paper of this collection which has never been published before is the Note on the Polish Problem. It was written at the request of a friend to be shown privately, and its "Protectorate" idea, sprung from a strong sense of the critical nature of the situation, was shaped by the actual circumstances of the time. The time was about a month before the entrance of Rou-