PUBLISHED IN PARIS

A LITERARY CHRONICLE OF PARIS IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

RICHARD ALDINGTON
LOUIS ARAGON
DJUNA BARNES
SYLVIA BEACH
KAY BOYLE
HART CRANE
HARRY AND CARESSE CROSBY
NANCY CUNARD
H. D.
LAWRENCE DURRELL
FORD MADOX FORD
ERNEST HEMINGWAY
EUGENE JOLAS
JAMES JOYCE
D. H. LAWRENCE
ROBERT McALMON
ARCHIBALD MacLEISH
HENRY MILLER
ANAIS NIN
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER
EZRA POUND
GERTRUDE STEIN
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
AND OTHERS

HUGH FORD

FOREWORD BY JANET FLANNER

VI

Gertrude Stein's
PLAIN EDITIONS

When Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas decided that the time had come to publish the unpublished works of Gertrude Stein, the author was in her fifty-sixth year, and although many of her writings had already appeared in print, beginning with *Three Lives* in 1909, nearly all had been issued by small presses in limited editions and several of them the author had subsidized herself. The problem, Henry McBride, editor of *Creative Art*, told her, was that she was an author who had a public but no publisher. That was hardly news to Miss Stein, who reminded McBride that while publishers were "awfully fond" of keeping her manuscripts, they also gave them back whenever she asked for them, and, unfortunately, magazine editors very often did the same. In fact, she had learned early that publishers could be annoying even when they were paid to print your book. The owner of the Grafton Press, for example, with whom she arranged to have *Three Lives* published, objected to "some pretty bad slips in grammar" in her text and recommended she correct them before the book went to press or, if she was unwilling to make the changes herself, that she permit him to send someone to her who would. When the "man from the Grafton Press" turned up in the rue de Fleurus, he came face to face with the formidable figure of an outraged author who commanded him to instruct his superior that the stories in *Three Lives* must be printed exactly as she had written them. She did, however, take the publisher's suggestion to change the title from *Three Histories* to *Three Lives*. In 1914, Claire Marie, a small New York publishing firm devoted to "New Books for Exotic Tastes," published *Tender Buttons*. An advance brochure announced that the author "is a ship that flies no flag and

William Aspenwall Bradley, American literary agent, Paris, 1935.
COURTESY OF MRS. WILLIAM A. BRADLEY

she is outside the law of art, but she descends on every port and leaves a memory of her visits." While the author's experiments in getting "the same sort of feeling out of things" that she had "gotten out of people" caused a mild furor, her book received few critical notices and had no discernible influence on writers. Of the many publishers Miss Stein knew, only one earned her everlasting gratitude. He was John Lane, who, at his own expense, published two editions of *Three Lives*, one in England in 1915, the other in the United States in 1920. Mindful of Lane's magnanimous gesture when she wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Miss Stein recalled that he alone among publishers ("like Holland he is unique") had chosen to be an adventurer, and for it he had reaped the rewards of living well and dying a "moderately rich" man. The fourth

edition of *Three Lives*, brought out under the direction of John Rodker, appeared in 1927, and one admirer, the author's faithful friend, Carl Van Vechten, considered it "more gay than the others and . . . typographically the most beautiful." But by the late twenties compliments like this had become almost commonplace. After the appearance of the American edition of *Three Lives*, she had received congratulations from the greatest writers of England and France but, welcome though they were, the important question for her was always whether or not the book was selling. The difficulty—and it was the same one she had had with the Grafton edition—was getting her work into the hands of booksellers.

Agents were more of an annoyance than a problem, and although there would be one who would serve her devotedly and would arrange for the sale of her one and only bestseller (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*), her opinion of them probably deviated little from the verdict she set down in *Everybody's Autobiography*: "I don't know that literary agents are anything, that is to say, I have had them but they have never been able to sell anything of mine." Certainly she had reason to be disappointed in the years prior to the First World War when she had asked Van Vechten to show her writing to agents in New York, all of whom complained that they could do nothing with one so advanced. In 1922, without an agent, Miss Stein subsidized the publication of *Geography and Plays* (Four Seas Co., Boston), which, like *Three Lives*, drew the usual parcel of praise from friends but few reviews and no enquiries from publishers. For close to two years in the mid-twenties, the tireless and devoted surrogate agents Jane Heap and Van Vechten labored to place *The Making of Americans*, before Miss Stein herself made arrangements with Robert McAlmon to publish the ill-starred Contact edition of the book in 1925; and the following year, after delivering her successful lectures at Oxford and Cambridge, and again acting on her own, she placed her address, retitled *Composition as Explanation*, with Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. Finally, at the end of the decade she had arranged to have a small limited edition (two hundred copies) of *An Acquaintance with Description* printed by the Seizin Press operated by Laura Riding and Robert Graves in Majorca.

With the little magazines Miss Stein fared somewhat better, notably in *Transatlantic Review* and *transition*. Earlier in the decade, Harold Loeb had printed her short piece, "Wear," in *Broom*, his international magazine of the arts, and long before that, in 1915, Van Vechten had sold a Stein story ("Aux Galeries Lafayette") to Allen Norton for his new

magazine *Rogue*. The *Little Review* printed her shorter pieces from time to time as did *This Quarter* when it was directed by Miss Moorhead and Walsh, but Titus printed nothing by Miss Stein after he took over the magazine. Critical evaluations of her work appeared periodically. American critics were not as unfriendly to her as one might suppose, that is, when they deigned to recognize her. In 1923, both Edmund Wilson and Kenneth Burke wrote serious considerations of several of her books, Wilson in *Vanity Fair*, Burke in the *Dial*, but it was the transplanted American Elliot Paul who provided, in her words, the "first seriously popular estimation of her work." Paul, an itinerant staffer for the Paris *Tribune* who wrote occasional literary and music reviews while working as proofreader and night editor, devoted three long articles to a detailed analysis and explanation of Miss Stein's art and, one gathers, thereafter gracefully assumed the role of her defender and interpreter. According to the young publisher Joseph Brewer the situation in England was dismal. Not only had Stein not yet reached London, but in the few critical notices she had received she was still being "reviewed as though she were mad or a fool." The only remedy Brewer could think of, might be for Miss Stein to spend some time there. Not inclined to go to England to rectify by her presence what Englishmen ought to be able to do for themselves, she remained at home and, in time, Brewer came to her.

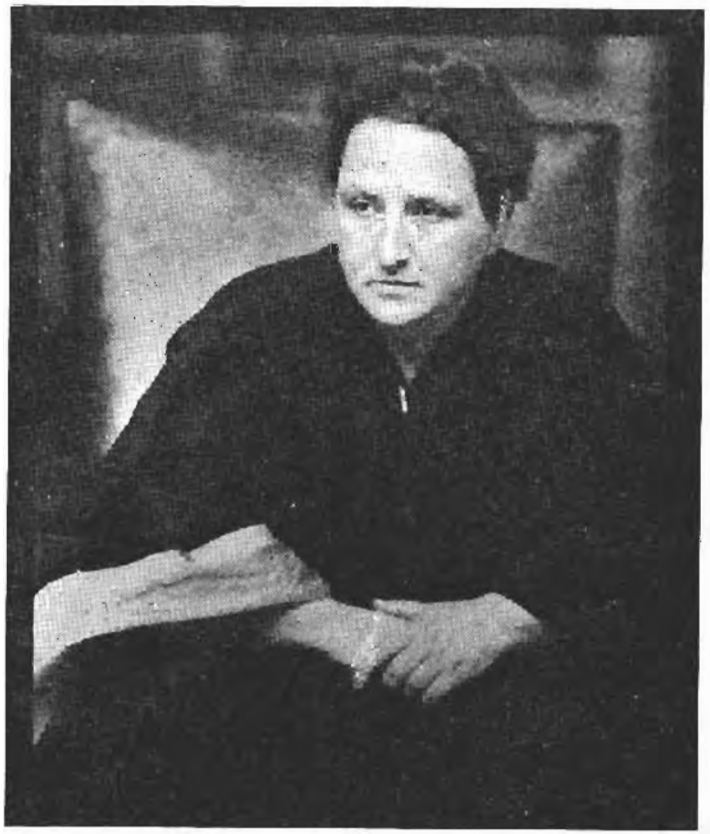
When Miss Stein and the publisher met in Paris in 1928, they discussed the "possibilities of his firm printing something of hers." Though Brewer "promised nothing," she told him she had just written a "shortish novel called *A Novel*, and was at the time working at another shortish novel," *Lucy Church Amiably*. She gave him a summary of *Lucy* which, intended as an advertisement, roused so much opposition to the project among the publisher's associates that it was abandoned. Still determined to publish something by Miss Stein, however, Brewer suggested that the first book ought to be a collection of "short things." If that was what he wanted, she replied, then he could have "all the short things she had written about America and call it *Useful Knowledge*." Before the end of the year Brewer had the book out, a stylish volume bound in unfinished black cloth, and bearing the seal "2 Rivers," a snobbish frill of Brewer's making intended to increase sales and offset the absence of the limited-edition designation, which the author had opposed. If, as seems likely, Miss Stein expected Brewer to be at least as adventurous as John Lane, she was disappointed. When she asked him to print still another edition of *Three Lives*, he refused, and after carefully reconsidering *Lucy* concluded

that that, too, would be too risky to take on. Sales of *Useful Knowledge* (calculated to the end of 1928), had come to only 226 copies (the printing had been 1500), and despite the fact that the accommodating John Lane had purchased 500 sheets, Brewer's firm had already lost a thousand dollars on her book, and "could easily have lost more without gaining more." To William Bradley, now the author's agent, Brewer confided that though he and his associates would have liked to build up a market for Miss Stein, even if doing so meant breaking even, "we [were] reluctant to sacrifice our desires to our necessities." She was "a pure luxury" they could not afford, and putting out *Lucy* might have meant risking losing another thousand dollars. While at the time Brewer purportedly wept at the "necessity" of letting her go, Miss Stein later wrote resignedly of the matter: "I suppose this was inevitable." Like others, "instead of continuing and gradually creating a public for Gertrude Stein's work he procrastinated and then said no."

While Miss Stein and Brewer had been conferring, William Bradley learned from his friend Ford Madox Ford that Miss Stein wanted to speak with him about her literary matters. What she had finally decided to do was to ask Bradley to become her agent. She had also decided that the time had arrived to make money out of her writings, and that, as she told him, would be Bradley's main responsibility. Hers was a challenge unprecedented in the agent's experience and one that would test both his patience and persuasive powers mightily during the next five years. To discover which publishers might make his new client's work pay, Bradley sent out manuscripts to Little Brown, Macaulay, Viking, and Harper's, all of which, after expressing varying degrees of interest, returned them, with regrets. For a while it looked as though the moribund *The Making of Americans* would be the only one to have an American printing. On a visit to Paris, Lee Furman, president of the small Macaulay Company that had published *The American Caravan* (1927) containing Miss Stein's story, "Mildred's Thoughts," for which she had received $18.70, expressed interest in publishing a shortened version of *Americans*. For many months, however, Miss Stein refused to make revisions, hoping that Bradley would find someone who would take the uncut version. But after three firms had turned it down and Bradley advised her that Furman was still interested, she consented to make some reductions. In mid-1930, a shortened manuscript reached Furman, who speedily returned it, complaining that even revised it was too long—200,000 words—and that the revision was less effective than the first draft. He could not justify putting money into a

book on which he was sure there would be insufficient return. Bradley, shaken by the news, commiserated with Miss Stein by saying she should "feel a certain relief at having escaped from the hands of such a crew." And Elliot Paul, who had helped the author and Bradley pare *Americans* to what they considered publishable proportions, observed that what publishers said they would do while they were abroad they very often did not do when they returned home. Of Furman, he had once noted: "It's alright when he is over here, but when he gets back the boys won't let him." Who the boys were Miss Stein did not know. But Paul was right. "In spite of the efforts of Robert Coates and Bradley nothing happened."

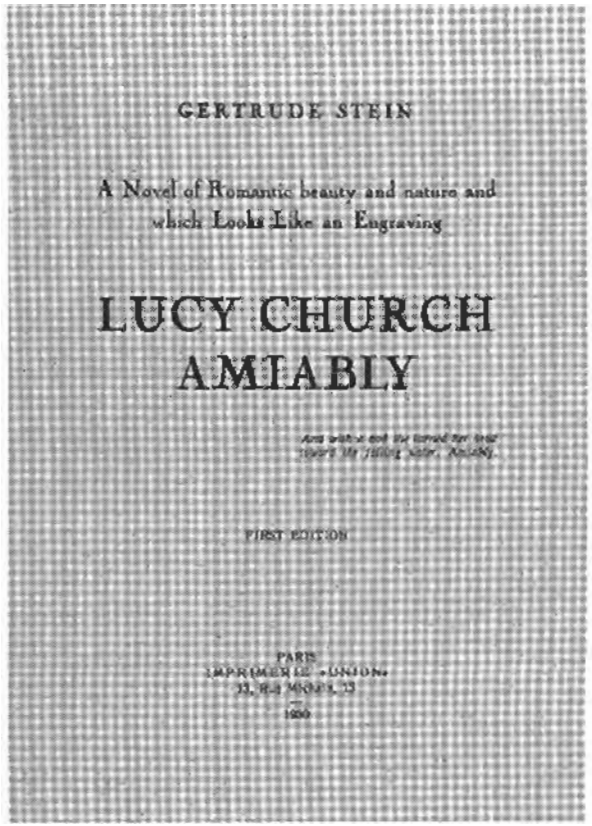
It can only be assumed that the disappointment over the collapse of Brewer's plan, and then Furman's, and the trouble Bradley was having placing her work contributed to Miss Stein's decision to start her own publishing company. The chance of somebody else turning up with proposals like Brewer's or Furman's seemed remote, and even if someone had she probably would have greeted them skeptically. Also, the Paris-based publishers she could approach about publishing a book had shriveled to a few. The alternative, of course, she had known about for years: like others, she could publish her own books. Whether the idea first came to Alice B. Toklas or to Gertrude Stein hardly matters, but it was Miss Stein who made the decision to sell a Picasso painting to finance the new enterprise, and after posting an urgent request to Van Vechten to inquire whether his New York "picture man" would consider buying a Picasso ("girl sitting on horse") for twelve thousand dollars, she herself managed to sell the artist's *Woman with a Fan* to Marie Harriman (wife of the future governor of New York) for an undisclosed amount. While the loss of the Picasso made Miss Toklas cry, the proceeds made possible Plain Editions—the name Miss Stein gave their joint business. She could hardly wait to tell her friends the news. "Here we are in business," she wrote Van Vechten, "at least Alice is the imaginary editor and I am the author but then I have always been the author and she has always been the manager but now in despair at using up our energies to shove the unshoveable we have concluded it will take less energy and get more results if we do it ourselves." Despite such optimistic assertions, neither woman knew anything about publishing, a fact Miss Stein admitted in the *Autobiography*: "All that I knew about what I would have to do, was that I would have to get the book printed and then to get it distributed, that is sold." As the news spread that Paris was about to have another publisher, the women were overwhelmed with advice and offers of help. Bradley supplied a list



Gertrude Stein, Paris, 1930s.
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

of bookstores he had procured from Random House and promised another of college and university bookshops, and suggested they advertise in *Publisher's Weekly* and subscribe to the magazine. But while all this was unquestionably "wise advice," the "real difficulty," as Miss Stein had discovered many years earlier, would be finding ways to get Plain publications to the booksellers. With the help of Ralph Church and "a kind friend" who supplied another publisher's list of booksellers, Miss Toklas began sending announcements to bookshops in England and the United States containing instructions on how to order Plain books directly from Paris.

It was decided that the author's most recent work, *Lucy Church*

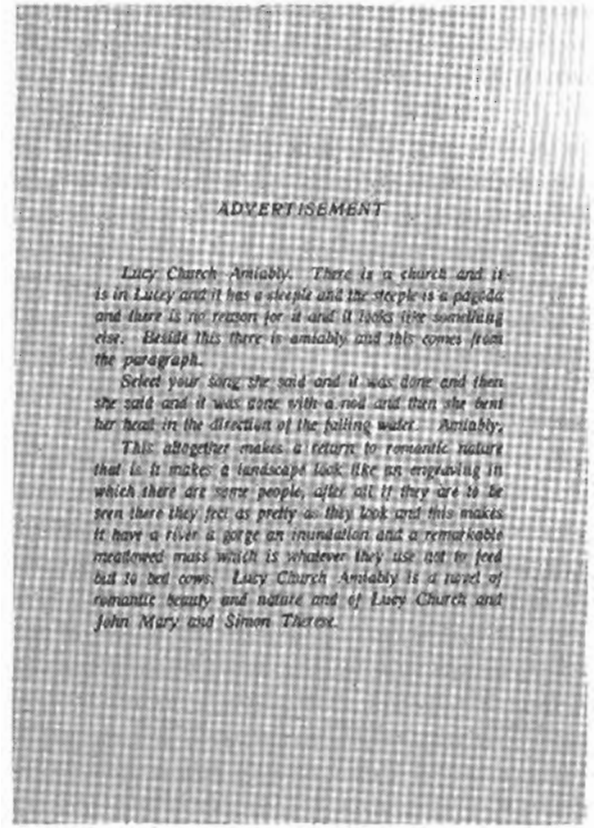

GERTRUDE STEIN

A Novel of Romantic beauty and nature and which Looks Like an Engraving

LUCY CHURCH AMIABLY

FIRST EDITION

PARIS
IMPRIMERIE UNION
13, RUE MÉCHAIN, 13
1930


ADVERTISEMENT

Lucy Church Amiably. There is a church and it is in Lucy and it has a steeple and the steeple is a pagoda and there is no reason for it and it looks like something else. Besides this there is amiably and this comes from the paragraph.

Select your song she said and it was done and then she said and it was done with a nod and then she bent her head in the direction of the falling water. Amiably.

This altogether makes a return to romantic nature that is it makes a landscape look like an engraving in which there are some people, after all if they are to be seen there they feel as pretty as they look and this makes it have a river a gorge an inundation and a remarkable mentioned mass which is whatever they use not to feed but to fed cows. Lucy Church Amiably is a novel of romantic beauty and nature and of Lucy Church and John Mary and Simon Thaxter.

Title page (*above*) and advertisement (*opposite page*) of *Lucy Church Amiably* by Gertrude Stein (Plain Editions, 1930).
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Amiably, would lead off. In this novel, subtitled "A Novel of Romantic beauty and nature and which Looks Like an Engraving," which Miss Stein had composed leisurely in Bilignin in 1927, almost nothing happens, and the impression, finally, is one of joy and contentment in the natural beauties of the pastoral landscape of the region through which the author roamed. Externally, the book resembles a novel—most chapters are of equal length and sentences and paragraphs are recognizable units—but it is little more than what the author herself called it, "a landscape . . . in which there are some people." To do the printing the women sought out Darantière, whose estimate must have been too high, for the contract was awarded to another printer who thought "he could make it pay." Miss Stein insisted that *Lucy* be bound in blue and that the whole book should

look like the blue copybooks used by French schoolchildren, and which for some time she had used for her own writing. In late spring, Miss Toklas delivered the manuscript to the Union Printery, 13 rue Méchain, and in June, in Bilignin, author and publisher began poring over the proofs. They found the printing most unsatisfactory, and when the finished book was delivered their disappointment was compounded. Besides the poor quality of the printing and a large number of typographical errors, Miss Toklas complained that the book "would not stay closed" and, when opened, "its back broke." About the only thing that pleased them was its appearance—it did look like a French copybook. And for the author, at least, there was the rare and delightful experience of wandering about Paris "looking at the copies of *Lucy Church Amiably* in the

windows and coming back and telling [Miss Toklas] about it." Except for the French translation of *Ten Portraits*, *Lucy* was, up to that time, the only one of her books ever displayed in a bookstore window. Using stationery bearing the letterhead "Plain Editions" boldly printed across the top, Miss Stein announced to friends that the new publishing company had produced its first book and, as usual, asked for any assistance they might be able to give. She told Henry McBride that it would be "more than appreciated" if he would write some of his "deeply appreciated remarks about the book and the edition," and to Bob Brown she sent a packet of subscription blanks and asked for the names of more buyers and booksellers. "Our idea is to grow," she told Brown, and added encouragingly that orders had begun arriving prepaid, an indication, she thought, that "they really do read it."

Six months after *Lucy* had been released (January 1931), Miss Toklas and Miss Stein began preparing the second Plain book, this one a collection of the author's pronouncements on writing composed the same year called *How to Write*. This time she wanted the book to resemble an "eighteenth-century copy of Sterne which she had found once in London, bound in blue and white paper on board," in the form of an Elzevir; and to make sure that the work would be properly done Darantière was hired to do the printing. Meanwhile, Miss Toklas notified booksellers that a second Plain book would soon be on the way, and an assistant, Elem du Pois Taylor, recommended that follow-up letters be sent to booksellers and that renewed efforts be made to advertise Plain books and, if possible, get them reviewed. With most of their money going into printing, however, Miss Toklas had to rule out advertising, especially if she hoped to publish several additional Stein books. Reviews continued to be a troublesome matter. There were plenty of humorous references to Miss Stein's work, but disappointingly few serious evaluations, and although Miss Stein took comfort in the belief that when she was quoted it meant her "sentences get under their skin," such references did little to enhance her reputation. Also, those writers who did admire her work, and said so in congratulatory letters to the author, seldom made an effort to shape their appreciation into a review. One exception was Robert Coates, who wrote a favorable commentary on *Lucy* for the *New Yorker*. Typical of some local reviewing was Waverley Root's estimate of *Lucy*, written in mock-Steinese, in which he commended the Advertisement (close to a blurb) as being "less difficult than all other parts of *Lucy Church Amiably*." After quoting the Advertisement, Root concluded: "This is less

difficult than other parts. This is more simple. But then it is all simple. She said by repeating you can change the meaning you can actually change the meaning. Repeat. But then it it it is all simple. It is all simple. It is all simple. It is all. Simple."

When Miss Stein and Miss Toklas saw what Darantière had done with their second book they could not hide their displeasure. Even the masterprinter, it seemed, was capable of faulty workmanship. Although the overall "bookmaking" was acceptable, the binding had been poorly molded. Obtaining a "decent" commercial binding in France seemed to be nearly impossible, perhaps because French publishers covered their books mainly in paper. Moreover, Darantière had not managed to fit the pages together properly. What had gone wrong, Miss Toklas wanted to know? His apologetic explanation did little to mollify her, but it was a "classic answer" both women would long remember: "What can you expect, Madame? It is machine-made, it is not done by hand." As usual, letters praising the new book followed its appearance. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote that he was halfway through *How to Write* a second time and had learned "a lot as we all do from you." The main business, however, was a vigorous effort to get the book into bookstores, and the means the two women chose was a rather pretentious, if not intimidating, circular letter:

> It is an undisputed fact that the influence of Gertrude Stein upon the generation of young writers of to-day has been the most vital force in American letters. A book from this pioneer on her technical approach to art and theory of writing is at this moment of the utmost interest and significance. This book is now ready. In *How to Write*, Gertrude Stein dramatises, analyses [*sic*] and gives examples of the modern approach to Grammar, Sentences, Paragraphs and Vocabulary. Copies of *How to Write* are sent on consignment post paid: the book, 395 pages, sells for $3.50, 40% discount, bills to be settled quarterly.

A few booksellers, apparently afraid they might be caught with an oversupply of Plain books, tried to head off shipments before they left Paris. Miss Steloff, whose Gotham Book Mart had kept large stocks of Plain Edition books on hand, made efforts to stem the flow after Miss Toklas informed her that her shop had "by its orders successfully proven the possibilities in the sales of Plain Editions," in appreciation of which she proposed to consign to dealers like the Gotham an undisclosed number of copies of the "books of Gertrude Stein which have so far appeared."

Alice B. Toklas, Gertrude Stein, and W. G. Rogers, Nimes, 1937.
COURTESY OF MILDRED WESTON

Though Miss Toklas and the author had been disappointed with *Lucy* and *How to Write*, there was nothing wrong with the next Plain book, a poem of Miss Stein's pleasingly called "Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded," a title that came to the author, according to Miss Toklas, "in the dining room of a hotel at Bourg [near Belley] when two guests of the hotel at two different tables were disagree-

ing." Printed in Chartres, on handmade peach-leaf paper, in an edition of one hundred copies, it was the one Plain book that sold out immediately. Typical of the compliments this time was Lindley Hubbell's appreciation that it was "what a poem should be," and that it had the "loveliest format of any of the [press'] books." Miss Stein's poem had already appeared in the Winter number of *Pagany* (Boston, 1931) under the confusingly alliterative title "Poem Pritten on the Pfances of Georges Hugnet." In the same number was a poem by Hugnet called "Enfances," which he had sent to Miss Stein in the summer of 1930 and, in return, had received a "translation" in Stein English. Astonished and pleased at the same time, he wrote at once that what she had done was not a translation, it was something else, and it was better. "I more than like this reflection, I dream of it and I admire it. And you return to me hundred-fold the pleasure that I was able to offer you. . . ." Around the same time, however, Hugnet confided to Virgil Thomson, who had introduced him to Miss Stein, that he believed he might have friends who were too strong; but to Thomson, Miss Stein explained that her method in "translating" Hugnet's poem was to set down a "mirroring of it rather than anything else, a reflection of each little poem." Hugnet's remark to Thomson presaged the quarrel that would eventually end his friendship with Miss Stein.

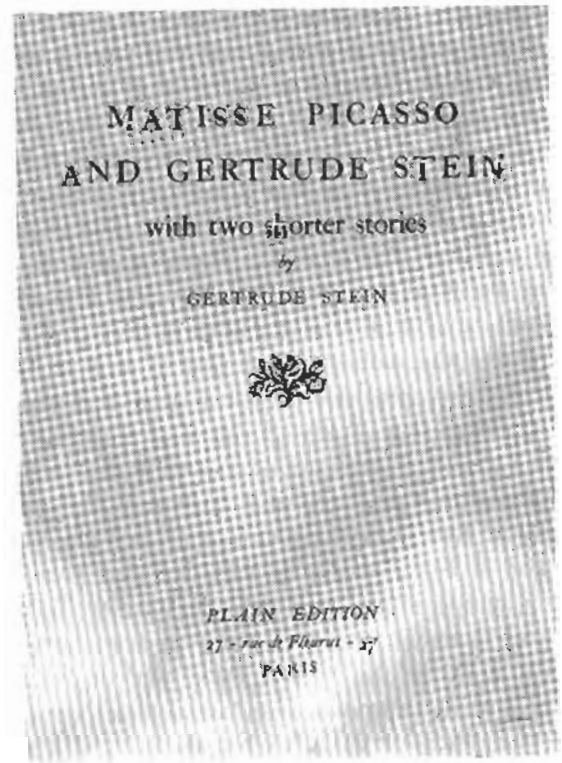
Besides being a poet, Hugnet was the publisher of Editions de la Montagne, which had brought out a half dozen volumes of modern prose and poetry, including two by Miss Stein, a translation of selections from *The Making of Americans* (translated by Hugnet), and *Ten Portraits*, printed in English and French, and illustrated by "portraits of the artists and of themselves and of the others drawn by them, Virgil Thomson by Bérard and a drawing of Bérard by himself, a portrait of Tchelitchew by himself, a portrait of Picasso by himself and one of Guillaume Apollinaire and one of Eric Satie by Picasso, one of Kristians Tonny the young Dutchman by himself and one of Bernard Faÿ by Tonny." *Ten Portraits* appeared in the spring (1930) and, as Miss Stein later said, both of Hugnet's volumes "were very well received and everybody was pleased." That fall *Pagany* had accepted Hugnet's "Enfances" as well as Miss Stein's "translation"; she still referred to the poems as the "two Enfances." In Paris, Hugnet was preparing to issue both poems, with illustrations by Picasso, Marcoussis, Tchelitchew and Tonny, in what promised to be another distinguished addition to Hugnet's series of limited editions. But before the project could be finished, a disagreement arose between the publisher and Miss Stein over the layout of the subscription blank Hugnet

had designed and sent her for approval. It read: "Georges Hugnet Enfances—Suivi Par La Traduction De Gertrude Steiu." According to Virgil Thomson, a witness to the episode, Miss Stein regarded Hugnet's action as disloyal. It was disloyal to print her name in smaller type than his, and it was inconsistent to call her work a translation when Hugnet himself had said it was something more; furthermore, she believed their work should be put forward as a collaboration. Hugnet, stunned and determined not to give in to her, replied that placing her name beside his would "give the impression of a collaboration," which was precisely what their working together had not been. He also feared that if the word translation were dropped in favor of "another term like adaptation, transposition," people might think that his poem was a translation of an original work by Gertrude Stein. The lines were drawn. Miss Stein refused to accede. Hugnet, with a book in the offing, asked Thomson to intercede as "his agent." Miss Stein, hoping to avoid a face-to-face exposure with Hugnet in *Pagany* (their poems were originally scheduled to appear in the magazine on facing pages), wired Boston to stop the publication of the two "Enfances," but her request arrived too late, and there was only enough time to rewrite the title. Meanwhile, Thomson, learning that Miss Stein would consider as fair a title page on which "the two names were of equal size and no reference was made to 'translation,'" actually worked out such a page and showed it to Hugnet, who, after some negotiations, settled for a revision that would contain the names of both authors printed at the top and at the bottom of the page (his at the top), "with the title centered and equidistant from both." Despite the care with which they were conducted, Thomson's deliberations failed. Looking over the pages he had designed, on which Hugnet had written "I accept," Miss Stein nodded and said, in a businesslike way, "This seems all right to me." Did Miss Toklas approve? Miss Toklas did not. Reading Hugnet's jotting, she merely said: "It isn't what was asked for." And that ended the joint publication Hugnet had planned.

Delighted with the way *Flowers* had turned out, Miss Toklas was determined to maintain the same high quality in the remaining books on the Plain list, and once more she turned to Darantière for help. Would he, she wondered, be able to produce inexpensive but well-printed books that could be sold for low prices in America? Too often Miss Stein's books had ended up in the hands of collectors rather than with students, librarians, and fellow writers. "Gertrude Stein wants readers not collectors" was the sense of what Miss Toklas wanted Darantière to understand, and he could

help by telling her how to obtain a good printing for little money. What Darantière proposed was that all future Plain books be set by monotype, a "comparatively cheap" process, after which he would "handpull" the books "on good but not too expensive paper" and have them bound in "heavy paper" like that used for *The Making of Americans*, and then slipped inside little boxes covered with yellow paper of the same shade used on the cover of *Americans*. Would all this, she wondered, mean another expensive book? Not at all, the printer assured her. But here was another promise that could be broken as easily as some had been in the past, and although this good printer had told her not to worry, worry she must until she had proof of what he had promised had actually been done. The next book on the Plain list was *Matisse, Picasso and Gertrude Stein*, to be followed by *Operas and Plays*.

Besides the title essay, the former contained two short stories, "A



Title page of *Matisse Picasso and Gertrude Stein* by Gertrude Stein (Plain Editions, 1933). PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Long Gay Book" and "Many Many Women," both of which dated from the first decade of the century. In the title piece, Miss Stein placed herself in the company of two great artists, but how they related to each other artistically and spiritually was not clear, perhaps because, as the author admitted later in an interview, halfway through the book "words began to be for the first time more important than the sentence structure or the paragraphs." Darantière printed five hundred copies and began distributing them in February. Like other Plain books, this one measured six-by-seven inches, and was bound in plain brown covers, soft, but this time, as proposed, the book was confined in a yellow slipcover, on the outside of which, both on the front and the spine, appeared the full title and the author's name.

The last Plain book was the four-hundred-page volume *Operas and Plays*, which obviously brought Miss Stein immense satisfaction. "I have been agitated for a long time about the problem of narrative," she wrote Bob Brown while still working on the book; it was the only thing she had not been pleased with in *How to Write*, where she had discussed, rather opaquely, the technical problems of grammar, narrative, and vocabulary. In the new book, though, she was almost certain that she had solved the problem in the series of plays. Of the operas included, the most important and successful was unquestionably *Four Saints in Three Acts*, on which her friend Virgil Thomson had set to work in 1927, putting her words to music and receiving in return her encouragement and approval. The theme was the religious life, the "peace between the sexes, community of faith, the production of miracles." Thomson announced the work completed in 1928, and the following year it was published in *transition*, but it was not until 1934 that it would have its first public performance, in the Avery Memorial Auditorium of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, an event that preceded by nine months the author's triumphal return to America.

In the summer of 1932, while the final two Plain books were going through the press, Miss Stein was at Bilignin working on the book that would have a profound effect on her life and career. Shortly before she died in 1946, Miss Stein admitted that when she had been asked to write an autobiography (probably by Bradley) she had refused, but then "as a joke" had started to write one anyway. She also said that writing it gave her a chance to try out some new theories of narrative, which, unlike poetry and exposition, was "in itself . . . not what is in your mind but what is in somebody else's." What she had done in the amazingly short period

of six weeks was to compose an anecdotal history of her life with Alice B. Toklas (or vice versa), using the speaking voice of Miss Toklas and re-creating her point of view. She described it as "her autobiography one of two. But which it is no one which it is can know."* That cryptic description to the contrary, Miss Stein had written to be understood.

Letters from Bilignin kept Bradley informed of the progress of the new book, and the agent, sensing its great commercial possibilities, urged Miss Stein to let him see the manuscript as soon as possible, suggesting in order to save time that she send it to him in two installments. Miss Stein did even better and began forwarding it chapter by chapter. With each, Bradley's enthusiasm increased and when the second installment had arrived he wrote that "wild horses couldn't keep . . . [him] from reading it at once!" When Miss Stein returned to Paris in December, Bradley announced that, if she had no objections, he was ready to send her manuscript to Harcourt Brace; she had none, but if the book had a British publication she wanted the Bodley Head (John Lane's successors), for sentimental reasons, to be the publisher. In mid-January (1933), Bradley heard from Alfred Harcourt. Enclosed with his acceptance were contracts for the author. Harcourt reported he had followed Bradley's injunctions and had read every word of the book. His suspicions concerning the authorship had been "aroused by the extraordinary gifts of style," but he had "played fair" and had not succumbed to the temptation to turn to the end to confirm them. However, he added, at the moment he had reached that point he had been interrupted by his wife who, coming into the room and hearing him cursing under his breath, had asked, "What's that that's so good because when you begin to 'Jesus Christ' it's a good manuscript?" For an hour he had made her stay around while he read bits of it aloud. The *Autobiography* would round out what Harcourt called the picture of an extraordinary group of people, among whom were Lincoln Steffens and Mabel Dodge Luhan, both of whose memoirs his firm had just published. Along with an advance of five hundred dollars for the author, Harcourt advised the agent that the Literary Guild had taken the book and would

* The authorship of the *Autobiography* puzzled Bradley. Was she Miss Stein or Miss Toklas? Later, of course, he assumed the book had been written by Miss Stein. Recently, however, George Wickes revealed that Miss Toklas once told him that at Gertrude's insistence she had started to write a book of memoirs to be called "My 25 Years with Gertrude Stein," but had found the writing so troublesome that she had accepted Gertrude's help in making revisions and later allowed Gertrude to take down her words and revise them as she went along. As far as Miss Toklas was concerned, the *Autobiography* had always been Gertrude's book.

pay six thousand dollars two months after it was published, that sum to be divided equally between author and publisher.

With the publication settled, Miss Stein instructed Bradley to look into the possibility of placing her book with the *Atlantic Monthly* for serialization. In her opinion, the *Atlantic* was the best of the American magazines, and it was also the one that for years had consistently rejected everything she had submitted. Not even sponsors as powerful as Mildred Aldrich had helped her breach the formidable resistance maintained by the *Atlantic*'s editor Ellery Sedgwick. It was time to strike again and now, instead of a piece of hermetic writing, she would advance with a potpourri of anecdotes. In February, the once redoubtable fortress cracked. The *Atlantic*, Sedgwick wrote, would publish Miss Stein's *Autobiography*. "There has been a lot of pother about this book of yours," he told her, "but what a delightful book it is, and how glad I am to publish four installments of it! During our long correspondence, I think you felt my constant hope that the time would come when the real Miss Stein would pierce the smokescreen with which she has always so mischievously surrounded herself. The autobiography has just enough of the oblique to give it individuality and character, and readers who care for the things you do will love it. . . . Hail Gertrude Stein about to arrive!" The triumph inspired Miss Stein to issue more instructions to Bradley. First, he must induce Harcourt to reprint her Plain Editions books. Although she had grudgingly allowed Bradley to exclude from her Harcourt contract a clause that would have bound the publisher to publish *The Making of Americans*, she saw no reason for waiting to press him to print her other books, especially since the *Atlantic Monthly* serials had already stimulated sales of Plain Editions. Harcourt, however, could not convince himself that he could publish more Stein books at a profit. Importing booksellers would no doubt satisfy the demand for the more esoteric Stein, but he told Bradley to wait until the *Autobiography* was out for his final decision. Bradley concurred and urged Miss Stein not to hold the knife to Harcourt's throat, even though the *Autobiography* must have seemed a "virtual godsend to him." The publishing business was insecure, he reminded her, and she might press what she considered an advantage too far. But Miss Stein brushed his admonitions aside, and with the help of Lindley Hubbell arranged to have *Three Lives* published in Bennett Cerf's Modern Library series.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas came out in August 1933. The following month it was published in England. As expected, reviewers

and a large audience responded enthusiastically, delighted to discover that Stein could be read and understood and enjoyed, and charmed by the anecdotes and intimate revelations and disclosures. Even the "gnarled and soured" Samuel Putnam, noted Bradley with amazement, confirmed the majority opinion in the *New York Sun*; and, in Paris, Waverley Root heaped honors on the "hometown" author. Miss Stein was at last being read, Root suggested, because she could at last be read, and what readers could now discover was the mystery of Gertrude Stein, the person of the legend so long denied. On this point Miss Stein once told Harcourt that the things people do not understand "attract them the most." Beyond that, Root conceded she had written a brilliant, clever book, a *tour de force*, unambiguous, witty, all told in language simple and precise and devoid of ragged fringes of meaning. Before her book had been out a month, she reminded Bradley of Harcourt's willingness to consider *Americans* once the *Autobiography* had appeared. Bradley sent the revised version to New York in September, and a month later Harcourt sent word back that he would publish it, although not with much enthusiasm, probably in September 1934; he could not, however, give Miss Stein an advance. In view of the record sales of the *Autobiography* (even Harcourt admitted he did not believe Gertrude Stein would be so popular), an advance was probably the last demand she would have made. As of the end of October, 5,900 copies had been sold in America, and 535 in England; besides her accumulating royalties, the author had received her share of the Literary Guild payment (three thousand dollars) and an amount nearly as large had come from *Harper's Bazaar* for the first installment of the *Autobiography*.

Bradley was as jubilant over the success of the book as the author. Handling it, he told her, had given him the "most exciting episode" in his life as an author's representative. Alongside it everything else seemed "a trifle tame by comparison" and probably would continue to do so until she entrusted him with a second book to handle. Of course he was also happy because he had obtained for her what she wanted. Miss Stein, however, was not so sure he liked what she had. Being a success and earning money from her writings had made her happy too, but at the same time everything had begun to change inside her. Success, elusive for so long, had arrived precipitously and had disturbed the pattern of her life. "Suddenly it was all different, what I did had a value that made people ready to pay, up to that time everything I did had a value because nobody was ready to pay." Her old friend Henry McBride had once said he hoped she would

never have any success because it spoiled one. Now that she was a success he told her he was pleased, but Miss Stein understood what he had meant. "The thing is like this, it is all a question of the outside being outside and the inside being inside. As long as the outside does not put a value on you it remains outside but when it does put a value on you then it gets inside or rather if the outside puts a value on you then all your inside gets to be outside. I used to tell all the men who were being successful young how bad this was for them and then I who was no longer young was having it happen."

The possibility of going on a lecture tour in America had first been mentioned to Miss Stein sometime before the *Autobiography* appeared, and after its scintillating success the subject came up again. Harcourt told Bradley that several universities and colleges were interested in having the author come to lecture. But Miss Stein was uncertain. She had long believed, for good reason, that Americans would rather see her than read her; it was the personality that interested them, not her work. "After all," she said, "there is no sense in it because if it were not for my work they would not be interested in me so why should they not be more interested in my work than in me. That is one of the things one has to worry about in America." She would postpone a trip for awhile. In the meantime, though still unsettled and easily distracted, she tried to get back to her writing. A *divertissement*, ghoulishly titled "Blood on the Dining-Room Floor," went poorly; however a long, discursive, generally uninformative book she started writing during the winter called *Four in America*, portraying Ulysses Grant, Wilbur Wright, Henry James, and George Washington as Americans who, like herself, had never quite succeeded in accomplishing what they might have done, progressed better and helped divert her attention from the disruptive world of commercial success. Not entirely, however, for she stepped up her efforts to find publishers who would print her other books in the United States, and she urged Bradley to go after Harcourt again. The publisher, however, stood firm. He rejected the Grant section of *Four in America*, saying it was too confusing; he wondered whether Miss Stein could not supply "more open books" like the *Autobiography*. When Bradley went to the United States in the spring (1934), she hoped that the agent would accomplish more in face-to-face discussions with Harcourt and other publishers. But Bradley's reports were hardly optimistic. The sale of *Americans* had been only one-quarter of that of the *Autobiography*. It would be unwise, he advised, to continue pressing Harcourt to take *Four* or *Geography and Plays*, especially since

Americans had actually retarded the sale of the *Autobiography*. Meanwhile, in order to protect her best interests, he had proposed that Harcourt consider a "confession" and a "lecture" book. But Miss Stein would not be placated. Harcourt, she retorted, must understand that her reputation was based on books like *Four* and that what Bradley had called a "confession," the "open and public" books, were really "illustrations for the other books, and that illustrations should be accompanied by what they illustrate." Harcourt, in her opinion, ought to be ready to risk publishing some of her "real kind of books" if he wanted to go on with the volume of essays and later the "confessions." He should be willing to publish both kinds of books. What her writing was, she insisted, was just commencing to be understood and a book like *Four* would help.

While Bradley had been trying to satisfy both his client and Harcourt, Miss Stein had been in touch with Bennett Cerf of Random House, to whom she had already sold *Three Lives* and who, shortly after she had signed the contract with Harcourt for the publication of the revised edition of *Americans*, had cabled he wanted to bring out the unabridged edition in the Giant Series of the Modern Library. It was an opportunity she very much regretted missing. Cerf, however, had other tantalizing proposals for her, the main one being an offer to become her American publisher, and, if she agreed, to begin their association with the publication of the lectures (under "some intriguing title") she intended to deliver on her American tour. Further, Cerf offered to take over Plain Editions and sell all the unsold stock "at the regular published price less the usual 40% discount to dealers," the "entire proceeds" of which would be turned over to the author. All that he had proposed would be carefully reviewed when Miss Stein came to America. Although delighted with these developments, she nevertheless told Bradley she still hoped Harcourt would do what Cerf had promised he would do, and she hoped everything could be settled with Harcourt before her arrival. Cerf's offers and Miss Stein's last charge to Bradley exacerbated relations between her and the agent. Moreover, Miss Stein had complained to Bradley that she felt she was not being well served. Rejecting the assertion that he had done her "publishing programme 'incalculable harm,'" Bradley charged that she had never even had "such a programme—except that which I have sought to establish for you—only the publication of individual books here and there, according to circumstances." If they had reached an impasse, it was of a "strictly personal, i.e., literary, nature" and had "nothing to do with the practical questions involved." Bradley was certain Miss Stein's friends would agree

with him that "no necessary relation" existed between the two categories of her work—the "open" and the "real" books—and that "to seek to create a purely artificial one for your publisher would be fantastic, if not fatal."

Three months before Gertrude Stein arrived in America to begin the lecture tour she had all but decided not to make, Bradley, his patience gone, gave up trying to advance Miss Stein's interests. Not only had she continuously found fault with the plans he had made for her tour but she had grown increasingly critical of his work as her literary representative, notwithstanding his success with Harcourt. Each had finally charged the other with bad faith. Miss Toklas, taking over for her friend, asked Bradley to return to her everything belonging to Miss Stein. In reply Bradley instructed Miss Toklas that any future correspondence should be sent to his lawyer. Just before the quarrel that led to the breakup, Bradley had told Miss Stein that by refusing to go to America she was giving up a chance to get rich. Apparently getting rich no longer had the same appeal it had when she first came to him. "I do want to get rich but I never want to do what there is to do to get rich"; and lecturing in America was one of the things she thought she did not want to do, at least not until she had the reassurances of two longtime friends—Carl Van Vechten and William Rogers—that America was ready for her and she for America. The trip to the United States, no doubt undertaken timorously, was a personal triumph that exceeded all her expectations. It rekindled her affection for her native land and capped the success of her bestselling book by reacquainting her with the masses of Americans who, instead of ridicule, granted her the respect due a visiting celebrity. She basked in the adulation. "It is very nice being a celebrity a real celebrity who can decide who they want to meet and say so and they come or do not come as you want them." One who did come was Bennett Cerf. When Miss Stein asked whether he still intended to be her American publisher, he replied that when she decided each year what she wanted published he would "publish that thing." Bravig Imbs, who at one time was part of her inner circle, once observed that Gertrude Stein "never lost hope that one fine day a publisher would come rushing to the salon and carry off her manuscripts." The adventurer John Lane had carried off *Three Lives*. Now another adventurer, the one of her fancy, had materialized and promised to carry off not only everything she had written but everything she would ever write. "Just like that," Miss Stein said. "Just like that," Cerf replied. And so "happily very happily" Miss Stein and Miss Toklas boarded the *Champlain* and sailed for home.