

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Courant in Göttingen and New York—The story of an improbable mathematician*, by Constance Reid, Springer-Verlag, New York, Heidelberg, Berlin, 1976, 314 pp. + 16 pp. photographs, \$12.80.

Richard Courant's life was split into two very different parts on August 21, 1934, the day when he arrived with his family to take up residence in the United States. Ms. Reid tells the story of his life in this absorbing book, in some respects a sequel to her well-known biography of Hilbert. Urged by some of Courant's associates and admirers, she agreed to assist him in preparing his reminiscences at a time when he was already in his eighties. However, as she reports on her third page, "it very soon became clear that I had come too late for the project which Friedrichs had had in mind. Courant had neither the vigor nor the desire to go back over his life meaningfully . . . much as he admired what Klein had done [i.e. in compiling his collected works (Reviewer)], Courant could not bring himself to do something similar. He took comparatively little satisfaction in his past achievements. He was concerned about the future of mathematics and of the institute he had created, and he was frustrated and unhappy because he could no longer help. Not only did he lack the physical and mental energy, but mathematics had passed him by." Nevertheless, from her numerous conversations with Courant and his associates, from documents available to her in Courant's files, and from her extensive work on Hilbert's life and times, she found that she had enough material for a book about Courant. As it now appears in print she calls it a "life-story" rather than a "biography". The distinction is a valid one. In writing a biography she would have needed to go farther afield for her material, consulting additional sources less intimately involved with Courant and his circle. The second part of Courant's life can hardly be put in final perspective without such a broader background. The first half of his career, as student, professor, and administrator at Göttingen, where he was guided by his loyalty and admiration for Klein and—above all—Hilbert, does not seem to require quite the same amount of biographical probing. It is the details of his subsequent attempt to reestablish in America the lost paradise of Göttingen with its high traditions and congenial intellectual atmosphere that merit closer and more extensive examination if the latter half of his life is to be properly understood.

Ms. Reid is to be thanked for the very useful service she has performed in putting down a coherent account of the information she has gathered about Richard Courant. At the same time she is sure to entertain many a curious