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M. Andre Maurois' Reminiscences of Pre-Vichy France

He Writes with Mellowness About His Own 'Best of All Possible Worlds'

Reviewed by
Klaus Mann

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER.
By Andre Maurois. Harper. \$3.

ANDRE MAUROIS, member of the French Academy, is a highly civilized gentleman, the very embodiment of suaveness and dignity. He looks and behaves like the dean of a university where only nice and wealthy young men are admitted. Remarkably shrewd and cautious, he would never pronounce a rash, daring word. His personal manners, like his literary style, are sedate but not without a certain dapper elegance. He has no sense of humor—not a trace of it. If he had, he would giggle about certain passages in his autobiography.

Not that these "intimate memories" make dull reading; quite the contrary, they contain a lot of clever remarks and colorful observations. Especially instructive and entertaining are the first five chapters with their lively descriptions of childhood, college, military service. The background is a provincial corner of France, about 1900. Maurois' father was an Alsatian manufacturer named Ernest Herzog. When the Germans annexed Alsace, after the French debacle of 1871, he moved with his family to a small town, Elbeuf, near Rouen, in Normandy. Young Emile Herzog (alias Andre Maurois) had a penchant for literature; his favorite author was Kipling, who represented to him "the idea of a necessary hierarchy." His own career as a writer, however, had to be put off: the "necessary hierarchy" compelled him to enter his father's mills. The future biographer of Shelley found himself "at 23 the independent and uncontested head of a vast industrial domain." One is not surprised to hear that "this power and responsibility transformed my life and, to some extent, my character." As for his character, it might have suffered still more, if it had not been for the soothing and purifying effect of Beethoven's music: "The necessity of giving orders had tended to harden me. Beethoven called me back to kindness, charity and love."

The spirit of love touched him not only through the medium of Beethoven's harmonies but also in the more palpable form of a great, stirring romance. The young lady in question, Janine de Szymkiewicz, was of Russian descent and "beautiful as the heroine of a fairy tale." The young industrialist called her "the Sylphide" and made her Madame Herzog. The marriage took place in Paris on October 30, 1912. Two years later the young husband became a French liaison officer in the British Army—an experience which stimulated him to write his first book, "The Silence of Colonel Bramble." Before it could be published the author had to secure the consent of the French Mission with the British Army. "You can't bring it out under your own name," he was told. "The English officers might recognize themselves and be offended. We give you our moral authorization, but you must use a pseudonym." That is how Emile Herzog became Andre Maurois.

The story of Maurois' first mar-

riage is undoubtedly the emotional and literary climax of his book. Janine died in 1924. The moving simplicity with which Maurois describes the circumstances of her end proves, with unassuming eloquence, the depth and bitterness of his sorrow. However, "life must go on," as the title of the following chapter indicates.

Life goes on and brings new successes, new contacts, and also a new wife. Maurois produces one best-seller after the other. His biographies of Shelley and Disraeli make him famous on five continents. He travels about—feted and applauded in all the European capitals and in the United States. He makes friends with English lords and French marshals. He organizes, cherishes, expands his fame—tenacious, cautious, doggedly ambitious. His supreme aspiration is a seat in the Academy. He will get it.

IF THE Janine episode is the most human and most engaging part of the book, its most ridiculous intermezzo is certainly the chapter called "The Capitol" describing Maurois' elevation to the rank of official immortality. His pride and joy are inordinate, childlike, naive—almost disarmingly so. I like the solemn tremolo in his voice when he tells us: "To be chosen by one's elders and one's peers to sit in the company to which Corneille and Racine, Voltaire and Victor Hugo, Taine and Renan had belonged, seemed to me a consummation devoutly to be wished." What he forgets to mention is that such minor talents as Stendhal and Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, Baudelaire and Mallarme, Proust, Gide and Claudel, were not deemed worthy of the membership. And what he cannot conceive is that such academicians as Voltaire and Victor Hugo would have withdrawn from

the "majestic institution" if they had lived to witness its disgrace and the distortion of its character. Henri Bergson and Edouard Herriot acted in the spirit of Voltaire and Victor Hugo; they renounced the titles and decorations now depreciated and polluted by foreign conquerors and by interior traitors. But Andre Maurois prefers his Academic honor to his honor as a French patriot, a democrat, and a Jew. And why? Because he is "unpolitical."

"We must cultivate our garden," he advises his wife, who wonders about what may be in store for

France and for the world. The matrimonial dialogue takes place after a party to celebrate a birthday of Mme. Maurois. The Duke and Duchess of Windsor were among the guests. The Maurois and the Windsors are on friendly terms. "They invited us to spend Christmas of 1938 at their house at Cap d'Antibes," Maurois reports proudly, "and gave us a real English Christmas dinner. . . . In Paris they took us to a concert by Stokowski, the Duke much embarrassed because he had orchestra seats and had never been in the theater before except in a royal box. They came a number of times to have

dinner with us, and to please the Duke I invited the politicians whom he wished to meet." Of course, even the most unpolitical host would ask a few politicians in order to please the Windsors.

FOR an unpolitical novelist, Maurois has a surprising lot of highly political contacts. He prides himself on having known, more or less intimately, the whole array of leading statesmen both English and French. He discussed Dante with Mussolini and life in general with Georges Clemenceau. Among his old acquaintances are men like Andre Tardieu and Marshal Pétain. But the same Maurois who was not too unpolitical to oppose the People's Front is now too dreamy and detached to admit that there might be something wrong with Vichy. Grandiose and noncommittal, he insists that he is faithful to his country, not to a doctrine nor to a sect: he just loves France, and that's that. "What France? The France. There is only one. The physical, spiritual, living France; the France of the villages and the cities . . . the 'France of Pascal and of Valéry.' Is it the France of General de Gaulle? Or is it the France of Marshal Pétain?"

It is Vichy France. Maurois' alleged lack of political interest is a political trick. He does not come out against Pierre Laval because he is not against him. He even avoids mentioning the name of Hitler—not because he is in favor of him (how could he be?), but because Vichy believes in Hitler, and Maurois believes in Vichy.

The publishers of "I Remember, I Remember"—slightly perturbed, perhaps, by their author's "unpolitical" attitude—emphasize the fact that "all the books of Andre Maurois have been banned by the Nazis in a special decree, an honor easily understood for he is, in his quiet manner, one of the most efficient defenders of the civilization they mean to destroy." I believe, however, that the Nazis would have no objection to the quiet manner of Andre Maurois, if it were not for the disturbing accident that his real name is Herzog.



The nostalgia of a Paris that is no more. Maurice Utrillo's painting, "View of Sacre Coeur."

A Grim, Tragic Tale of Men Under the Nazi Heel

Reviewed by
Kay Boyle

HOSTAGES. By Stefan Heym. Putnam's. \$2.50.

THE scene of the book is Prague, following the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia; the story begins with the disappearance of a German officer from a popular river-front cafe. The action is swift, the plot ingenious, the characters unmistakable after each has had his quick, clever sentence or two of introduction. The familiar rosy-cheeked, brutal young SS men click heels, slap faces and place under arrest everyone who is found in the cafe at the time of the drunken officer's extinction by murder or suicide.

The story proceeds—with rather amateurish deviations into underground activities—with the fate of five of these hostages who are seized in the cafe and imprisoned in a single cell. There are two romances in it—one that develops in connection with the actual plot, and one that emerges piece by piece from the past in the conversation of two of the hostages awaiting

death. There is murder and blood and thunder in this book—and there is without any doubt a sensational movie in it. But of depth of feeling or nobility of expression, there is none at all.

The author, Stefan Heym, is a young German journalist whose contributions to leading democratic papers necessitated his flight from Germany, and later from Czechoslovakia, and who succeeded, in 1935, in reaching the United States. Heym's father was taken as hostage in his place in Germany, and committed suicide after his release. Here are all the elements of agonized reality, and yet—despite them—the book Stefan Heym has written has an incurably flippant, journalistic tone. His approach is theatrical, his men and women types, not people for an instant. At what should be, in the work of a writer of impassioned or convincing expression, the most solemn and impressive moments in his narrative, Heym turns awkward in the reader's presence and resorts to clowning—as in the scene on page 319 describing the peasant Janoschik's return to the cell after hours of excruciating torture on the rack.

For the telling of the latter portion of his story—the story of the five hostages and their questioning by Gestapo Commissioner Reinhardt—Heym has turned to a method used with brilliance and profound psychological sentence by Arthur Koestler in his "Darkness at Noon." This method focuses the questioned and the questioner, the prisoner and the prisoner in the ruthless light of an electric lamp, picking them—and the official stenographer—momentarily out of the blackness of the night and the chaos of the political scene.

It is one way, and a dramatic way, of probing the ideology of a regime and the unreconcilability of an individual to that regime, but Heym's manipulation of it is a poor show indeed. Behind that stark light he has placed Commissioner Reinhardt with none of the mastery, none of the insight, none of the tragic inevitability with which Koestler's examining magistrate, Ivanoff, faced his victim. On the blinding side of the light, Heym's Dr. Wallenstein fumbles the role and waffles the professional lines of

Koestler's Rubashov, while the same dawn creeps across the prison windows, and Wallenstein—without reality of his own—emulates even Rubashov's last pathetic shuffling down the long corridor toward death.

I am not, in this review, dealing with an evaluation of Nazi ideology or behaviorism; but with one man's interpretation and arrangement of their history. There have been, and there will be again great books to tell us the parts of that history with nobility and power. Stefan Heym's is not one of these books, and it is a grave thing—as has been done in certain instances in the press—to link his name with the names of such other exiled writers as Mann, Werfel and Feuchtwanger. It is a lamentable indication of lack of judgment and wartime loss of equilibrium to speak of Stefan Heym's book in the same breath that one speaks of Anna Seghers' recently published "The Seventh Cross," which gives us with emotional depth, with restraint, and with vision and power all the insidiousness of that same regime, as well as the dogged and intrepid daring with which it is opposed.