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**"An American Soldier revisiting his former homeland". A
Causerie, written for Radio Stockholm.**

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Sendetermin

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"AN AMERICAN SOLDIER REVISITING HIS
FORMER HOMELAND"

A CAUSERIE, WRITTEN FOR
RADIO STOCKHOLM
BY
K l a u s M a n n

For the programme
"Nattöppning" December
30:th 1947,
92:30 Swedish time.

"You can't go home again"...: It was a great American writer, the late Thomas Wolfe, who chose this phrase as title for one of his novels.

"You can't go home again"...: These words were in my mind -- haunting me like a nostalgic tune, a melancholy leitmotiv -- while I was touring occupied Germany, in 1945 and 1946.

More than twelve years had elapsed since I had left the country, together with my family. That was back in 1933 -- the fatal year of Hitler's coming to power. While the vast majority of our former compatriots was jubilant about the enthronization of their beloved "Führer;" while the blinded, misguided nation hailed the establishment of the gangster regime, a handful of clear-sighted people recognized the tragic gravity of the situation. To us, exile was a matter-of-course, under the circumstances. We simply felt quite incapable of breathing the air in our Nazi-infested homeland.

Did we hope to return?

Well, in the beginning we may have indulged in illusions. Yes, it was an illusion to believe -- as we tried to do, for some time -- that the Germans would ever revolt against Hitler, that they w i s h e d to get rid of him. The awful truth is that the Germans adored their Führer -- up to the present day, in fact, quite a few of them have remained faithful to him and would be only too happy if they could have him back...

The war Hitler waged against the civilized world was in fact the war of the German people. They supported him wholeheartedly, with a steadfastness, an enthusiasm that would have been worthy of a better cause.

By 1939 and 1940, even the most dogged optimists had to give up

their long-cherished hope for a German revolution. Clearly, the Germans were neither willing nor able to liberate themselves and the world from Hitler and Hitlerism. More firmly established than ever within the aggressive Reich, Hitler and Hitlerism had to be defeated from without.

Of course, we German refugees -- the first victims and most inexorable enemies of Nazism -- were eager to contribute our bit to the fight against the Brown Plague. I was happy and proud, therefore, to join the army of my new country, the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, and to be sent overseas -- first to North Africa, then to Italy, where I served with General Clark's FIFTH ARMY. Subsequently, I was transferred to the editorial staff of the American military newspaper, THE STARS & STRIPES, MEDITERRANEAN EDITION, then stationed in ROME, ITALY.

It was that newspaper -- a publication, incidentally, of remarkably high journalistic standards -- which sent me to my former homeland, Germany, as a soldier-correspondent. That was early in May, 1945, just a few days before the official German surrender. I went over the Alps by jeep, and, after short stops in Innsbruck, Salzburg and Berchtesgaden, approached MUNICH, the city where I was born and spent my entire childhood.

What a strange, nightmarish experience! -- to walk through those once-familiar streets, now reduced to masses of ruins and rubble... With most of the characteristic landmarks missing, I could hardly find my way from the city center to the suburban district on the ISAR River where our former home is situated.

As the residential outskirts have in general been spared by Allied bombs -- in Munich as well as in other German ^{towns} cities -- I hoped to find our house intact. It was a spacious and handsome villa my father had had built for himself, shortly before the outbreak of World War One. In 1933, the Nazis took it away from us, along with everything else we owned in Germany. Maybe some Party bigshots ^{war} ~~were~~ still occupying ^{our former home. 7/50)} ~~the house. It~~

it certainly would be fun to throw them out in person!

But I was to be disappointed. The building -- even though it appeared fairly well-preserved at the first look -- turned out to be an empty shell, with its inside all burnt out, its roof destroyed, its staircase in pieces. Obviously, the place had been hit by a bomb. What a pity! I would not have the pleasure of expelling any Nazi invaders. No human being could possibly live in these ruins.

But as I was standing there in the garden, contemplating somewhat nostalgically what used to be the happy home of my youth, I discovered, not without surprise, that the place was not quite deserted, after all! There was a girl on the balcony just in front of my former room, on the second floor. She was watching me suspiciously.

"What are you doing up there, Fräulein?" I asked her in German, but with a slight American accent.

She shrugged her shoulders, sullen and distrustful. As I repeated my question, she said, still with the same peevish and weary expression: "Why, I'm living here -- can't you see that? I'm bombed out; my parents are dead, my fiancé too -- killed in Russia; I have no place to stay. This balcony is all right, as long as it doesn't rain... Want to come up?" she suggested with a wry, yet inviting smile.

I wondered how I could reach the second floor / since the staircase was gone; but she pointed out to me a kind of ladder -- quite an ingenious device she had constructed herself, as she informed me / not without pride.

"Do you know whose house this used to be?" I enquired, having joined her on the balcony.

"I suppose it belonged to some writer," she explained, rather indifferently. "One of those who didn't get along with the Nazis -- so of course, he couldn't keep the house. Then the SS took it over; they had a Lebensborn established here."

Much to her surprise, I didn't know the meaning of that romantic-soun=

ding German term -- Lebensborn. According to her explanation, a Lebensborn was a place where racially qualified young men and equally well-bred young women collaborated in the interest of the German nation. -- "There was nothing frivolous about it," the girl assured me -- speaking maybe out of personal experience. "They didn't do it for the fun of it -- just for the propagation of our Nordic race. Many fine babies were begotten and born in this house..."

"So that's what they were using this house for," I said. "Interesting. Very interesting indeed."

"Yes, a Lebensborn certainly was an interesting place," the girl agreed, and added: "You can stay here over night, if you don't feel like going back to your billets. It's really quite cozy here. Almost like home, you know..."

I thanked her for her kind invitation which, unfortunately, I could not accept. It is true, my good old balcony was rather a cozy place; but for one reason or other, it didn't quite look like home to me...

Strolling through the bleak, deserted city, I could not help wondering whether it would be possible to locate any of my old friends in these ruins. Did I really want to find any of them? How could I know how they had behaved, during those past years of terror and disgrace? There were indeed good reasons to suspect that most of them had conducted themselves in a more or less objectionable fashion...

But then, I was in Germany as a reporter -- not as a private tourist. I had to get some stories for THE STARS & STRIPES...

Dutifully, I remembered that Emil J a n n i n g s , the movie actor, had his home not very far from Munich -- on the Lake of St. Wolfgang, near Salzburg. He and his attractive wife, Gussy Holl -- formerly married to Conrad Veidt -- used to be great friends of ours. An interview with old

Jannings, I thought, would certainly make good copy. So I drove out in my jeep.

"Now listen, Emil," I said to him, right as I entered his house, "I'm here as a newspaper man -- not ^{but} as a friend! I don't ~~care~~ know whether you were a Nazi, and frankly, I don't care. I want a story -- that's all."

Far from being hurt or insulted, he overwhelmed me with his cordiality. How happy he was to see me! Didn't I remember the fun we had had together? That Christmas Eve in Hollywood, eighteen years ago? And that delightful carnival in Munich? Yes, those were the days...!

A Nazi -- he, Emil Jannings? How utterly absurd! How ridiculous! -- "It is true," he admitted, "I played in one of those Nazi propaganda films, Ohm Krüger. But I was forced to do so -- don't you see? Dr. Göb= bels himself blackmailed me into accepting the role. He hated me -- Göb= bels did! It would have been suicide to disobey his orders. Don't forget, I have a Jewish grandmother..."

Did I believe his tales? Well, not altogether, but to a certain extent. Jannings is a pretty good actor... Besides, it was somehow touching to see the jolly old fellow again. The atmosphere of his house where I had spent many a pleasant weekend; Gussy's amusing chat, the exquisite Rhine wine to which he treated me -- all this was liable to soften my attitude, to render me more gentle and reconciliatory than I had meant to be.

The article on Jannings I wired to my paper was certainly not a ^{just} eulogy, (may have been) but it ~~was~~ rather on the mild and lenient side. I ventured to suggest that Jannings had probably been as anti-Nazi as he could without jeopardizing his position and bank account.

As a result of my story in THE STRAS & STRIPES, I got an avalanche of letters from people who had followed Janning's career during the Hitler years. Had I gone mad? -- those correspondents asked me ~~me~~ indignantly,

or had Mr. Jannings bribed me with a handsome amount of money? Why else should I try to whitewash that notorious scoundrel? Didn't I know that he had been one of the worst? ~~That he had acted as an informer, had turned over people to the Gestapo!~~ ... With one of the angry letters I found a booklet enclosed -- a biography of "Ohm Krüger," the anti-British hero of the Boer War. The pamphlet opened with an introduction, written by Emil Jannings, in which the actor expressed in the most fervent and flowery terms his profound gratitude to the Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment, Dr. Paul Joseph Göbbels, under whose auspices, and thanks to whose generosity, he, Jannings, had had the privilege of appearing in that great, patriotic film... And so forth, in the same servile vein.

And with the author of that shameful document I had had a friendly chat and a bottle of wine! The idea was positively sickening.

I decided to be more careful, from now on. Beware of old friends!

When I went to see R i c h a r d S t r a u s s -- again for strictly journalistic purposes -- I preferred to remain anonymous, / or rather, to introduce myself as "War Correspondent Smith from Chicago." I hoped the old gentleman, to whom I had once been presented many years before, would not recognize me in American uniform -- which, in fact, he didn't.

The conversation with Strauss took place in the garden of his beautiful villa in Garmisch, near Munich. The great composer -- looking remarkably well-preserved, considering his high age -- ~~he~~ received my companion and me with a kind of patronizing graciousness, / all smiling self-assurance.

"Yes, I'm feeling fine," he cheerfully answered our polite question. No, the Nazis had never bothered him. -- "That is to say," he corrected himself, "they have never given me any s e r i o u s trouble. Of course, there were minor nuisances -- some of them quite disturbing.

For instance, they wanted me to put up a bombed-out family from Munich here in my private residence." He pointed at the large house which he was then occupying with his son and daughter-in-law. "Imagine! Strangers in my home! Outrageous, isn't it?"

There was something at once disarming and amazing about his naive selfishness. To him, nothing in the world seemed to matter, except the personal affairs of Dr. Richard Strauss -- ^{his comforts} ~~his health~~, his income, ~~his~~ ~~comforts~~, and his fame. -- "Baldur von Schierach was an excellent man," he would say, unblushingly. "He really appreciated my music. Frank was a good fellow, too -- full of understanding for my work." (The gentleman he referred to was Governor Frank of Poland, the high Nazi official personally in charge of the gass chambers of Auschwitz. Composer Strauss once wrote a beautiful hymn praising the virtues of War Criminal Frank.)

Hitler? No, Dr. Strauss didn't think that Hitler was so good. "His musical tastes were deplorably one-sided. Wagner, and Wagner again! Hardly ever did he go to ~~see~~ hear any of my operas..."

I looked at him, flabbergasted. Could I ever enjoy Rosenkavalier and Salomé again, having listened to his shockingly callous talk?

What strange country this was, where even the creative artists, even the geniuses seemed to have forgotten the language of humanity!

Well, I would go on exploring that mysterious land which is Occupied Germany, in the hope to find men more sincere than the great actor Janings, more humane and generous than Richard Strauss, the master composer. But even if I met, or re-met, some people whose thoughts and words were still intelligible, still acceptable to me, they would constitute just a tiny minority ~~of~~ of congenial souls within the vast mass of strangers.

Yes, I felt a stranger in my former fatherland. There was an abyss separating me from those who used to be my countrymen. Wherever I went in Germany, the melancholy tune and nostalgic leitmotiv followed me:

YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN...