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SPHINX WITHOUT SECRET

Outline of a Book

by
Erika and Klaus Mann

PROLOGUE: TWO LETTERS

1.) October, 1944... E.M., U.S. War Correspondent, stationed at Aschen, Germany, to Staff-Sergeant K.M., U.S. Fifth Army, "somewhere in Italy." ... E, for the first time in the "old country" after an absence of almost twelve years, describes her initial impressions. Anticipating a swift advance to Munich (the hometown of the two authors), she wonders what may have happened to the "old gang" there -- all those writers and artists she used to know in pre-Hitler days but of whom she lost track during the years of the Nazi regime. She refers to "Escape to Life" -- a book on German intellectuals in exile -- and suggests that she and her brother write a kind of sequel dealing with the past experiences and present activities of those who stayed behind.

2.) May, 1945... S/Sgt. K.M., Soldier-Correspondent of The Stars and Stripes (Mediterranean Edition), on Special Duty in Munich, Germany, to Miss E.M., Pacific Palisades, Calif. ... While E had to return to the U.S. (where Father Thomas is about to celebrate his 70th birthday), K was transferred from his former outfit to the editorial staff of The Stars and Stripes in Rome and is now "covering" Germany as a special correspondent of that military journal. ... He describes to his sister the nightmarish aspect of their former hometown -- the misery, the destruction. The family home of the Mann, too, has been hit by an Allied bomb: there is nothing left of the once stately ~~house~~ structure but a hollow facade, a charred shell. ... On an open balcony, just in front of what used to be K's room, a strange girl has arranged something like a primitive "home" for herself. A curious conversation develops between the American soldier who spent his childhood in this now ruined building, and the "displaced" young woman who has taken refuge there, for want of any other shelter. The girl discloses to K what happened to the house under the Nazi regime: It was employed as one of those peculiar establishments "for the propagation of the Nordic race." In a casual, matter-of-fact fashion, the girl relates how fair-haired Fränkels and racially immaculate SS men were mated here for the purpose of producing additional cannon fodder for the insatiable Führer. ... What an extraordinary country where the "requisitioned" homes of poets and thinkers are used for breeding experiments! ...

K, walking through the bleak and deserted streets of once-beautiful Munich, cannot help wondering about the strange character of his former countrymen. What about the many artists and intellectuals who used to frequent the hospitable house on the Isar River? Did they know what kind of "entertainment" was being offered in the very rooms where they had once enjoyed themselves in a more civilized manner? And where are they now? It seems all but impossible to locate any of them in this maze of debris and rubble. The black, empty windows of the stricken buildings stare at the wanderer. ... Are there live men hiding in these ruins? Who are they? What do they think? What are we -- what is the world to expect of them? What is the secret behind this sphinx-like silence?

I THE SPHINX

This chapter is to present and clarify the basic theme of the book. What is the present state of mind of the German people in general and, in particular, the German intelligentsia? What, if anything, has remained intact of Germany's ancient culture? What values and traditions have survived the twofold cataclysm of Nazism and War?

There can be no doubt that those questions have a vital bearing on the future of our civilization. For if it is true that a powerful and aggressive Reich will inevitably become a danger to Europe and the world, it is also true that an intellectually and morally paralyzed Germany cannot but breed disaster. Europe will not recover from the shock of the past ten years, as long as its very center is occupied by a vacuum.

If the survival of Europe depends on the eventual rehabilitation of Germany, the future of that particular nation depends to a large extent on its most enlightened, most responsible class -- its intelligentsia. The question of what happened to Germany's leading scholars and educators, artists and inventors, is therefore of general interest and importance.

Surprisingly enough, it is not easy at all to find out what the German intellectuals were doing during the past fourteen years or what they are doing now. We encountered more difficulties in tracing our former friends and associates in the occupied Reich than we did when dealing, in "Escape to Life," with the whereabouts and activities of our fellow refugees. Those who failed to escape but preferred the seeming security and prosperity of the Third Reich to the risks and hardships of exile, have now a remarkable tendency to hide and to lie, to forget or conceal their past, to brush off inconvenient questions.

This chapter will describe how we succeeded, in spite of obstacles, in tracking down those secretive, evasive characters. Travelling extensively in Germany during the past three years -- in U.S.

uniform or as civilians, introducing ourselves under our own name or "in disguise" -- we had ample opportunity to revive old contacts and make new acquaintances.

The following chapters are offered as a summary of our findings, an inventory of the moral and intellectual forces we were able to discover in postwar Germany.

II RELIGION

Religious faith as an element of resistance under the Nazi regime: the role of the Protestant and Catholic opposition. Also -- to stress a less pleasant aspect of a complex situation -- some remarks about the extreme nationalism of the German clergy. Cardinal Preysing of Berlin as an exponent of the nationalistic wing; Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich as an exponent of anti-Nazi Catholicism. ... This chapter is to contain, as one of its main features, an elaborate portrait of Pastor Niemöller dwelling on both his past record and present activities (particularly his recent lecture tour in the U.S. and its political implications). ... Another representative of German Protestantism to be dealt with in a detailed manner is the Swiss theologian, Karl Barth -- the most important religious thinker, perhaps, in modern Europe. Having spent the years of Nazism in his native Switzerland, Barth is now active as a teacher and preacher in Germany again.

The concluding part of this chapter is to be devoted to the ever topical, ever painful subject of anti-Semitism -- still very much alive in Germany today.

III EDUCATION

Almost ten years ago, one of the authors of this book tried to analyze, in a study entitled "School for Barbariland," the educational methods of Nazism. The question we will attempt to answer in this chapter is whether those schools for barbarians have been replaced, in postwar Germany, by a more civilized, more constructive type of pedagogy. Unfortunately, the situation we will have to describe does not look too encouraging. The shortage of technically qualified and politically reliable teachers; the scarcity of adequate school books; the poor physical and mental condition of German youth -- all these disturbing, baffling elements, and many others, are to be discussed in this context. Some critical passages will have to deal with the educational policy of our Military Government (if M.G. can boast any such thing as a policy in educational matters!). But however gloomy and alarming the outlook may be on the whole, we shall make a point of registering and stressing any promising fact or symptom, any sign of good will.

The second half of this chapter is to deal with German universities --

concentrating (as it will be our policy in this whole part of the book) on the western and, more especially, the U.S. zones of occupation. Heidelberg, Munich, and Marburg may serve as characteristic examples. The peculiar lack of any clear line or purpose, the intellectual confusion and nihilism will have to be stressed in this context, as on other occasions. ... Among the academic leaders to be singled out are the great philosopher, Karl Jaspers, in Heidelberg (boycotted by the Nazis on account of his Jewish wife and his liberal views) and the celebrated historian, Meinecke, who, at the age of 80, showed more courage and steadfastness than most of his younger colleagues. ... There will be a special passage on German physicists and "atomic experts" -- those working at home as well as those active in other countries.

IV LITERATURE

This chapter is likely to become the longest one of the book, as literature, in Germany as elsewhere, is the most significant and representative manifestation of cultural life. While plain Nazi stooges (and there still are plenty of them active in Germany today!) may be disposed of with a few sentences, it may be worthwhile to dwell on the more complex psychology of such talented opportunists as Novelist Ernst Glaser ("Jahrgang 1902") and of such dangerously muddle-headed romanticists as Philosopher Ernst Jünger -- both of them leading literary figures in our Occupation Zone. ... Another fascinating, if depressing, case to be discussed in detail is that of Gerhart Hauptmann, modern Germany's greatest dramatist who sold out to the Nazis and recently died in misery and solitude. ... A more impressive figure is Ricarda Huch, 83-year old poet and historian -- one of the few contemporary German writers (if not the only one!) deserving our full respect. (Detailed description of the visit we paid to her in her home at Jena, in the Russian Zone.) ... Another much-quoted, if more problematical, German anti-Nazi author to be dealt with at length is Ernst Wiechert. Although an ardent patriot and rigid conservative himself, Wiechert came twice in conflict with extreme German nationalism -- first under the Nazi regime; then, more recently, in the "de-Nazified" Reich. His cautious allusions to the collective guilt of the German nation antagonized the allegedly "repentant" and "reformed" German public. Wiechert -- in 1940 a martyr; in 1945 the hero of the literary scene in Germany -- is today an embittered exile in Switzerland.

To be pointed out: the complete absence of any new literary movement. Contrast to the last postwar period with its noisy but stimulating literary experiments.

Information about new publishing houses, magazines, etc.

Criticism of our (non-existent) literary policy in occupied Germany: American officials -- missing their best chance of promoting democratic ideas -- do nothing to stimulate literary life. Characteristically, no books by German refugee writers are available in Germany today.

From there, transition to the complex issue of the relationship

between exiled German writers (most of them now citizens of other countries) and their former colleagues in the Reich. Little contact. Hostility on the part of the Germans. Only two refugee writers of any reputation are working for the Allies in non-Russian occupation zones. (Carl Zuckmayer for the U.S.; Novelist Alfred Döblin for the French.) ... German literary milieus do not really want literary refugees to return -- except in some very exceptional cases. Example: German writers want our father to give up his U.S. citizenship and come back to the "old country" where, they argue, his prestige would be useful to the "Fatherland." To be discussed in detail: recent controversy between Th.M. and group of semi-Nazi literati calling themselves the Inner Emigration (Walter von Molo, Frank Thiess, etc.).

V MUSIC

Standards of musical life still comparatively high: not even Hitler could destroy time-honored musical tradition in Germany. Good opera productions, concerts. (Survey of most important musical organizations.)

In this field, like in all the other domains of creative culture -- lack of young talent. The musical scene dominated by the "grand old men." Foremost among them: Richard Strauss. Interview with him at ~~Munich~~ Garmisch (Upper Bavaria) to be described in detail. (His staggering selfishness and disarming naïveté. Complete absence of social or political consciousness.)

Other composers to be presented: Franz Lehar -- a character from another era, living in a curious dream world of bals masqués, champagne suppers, cute little comtesses, dashing lieutenants and fatherly emperors. ... Hans Pfitzner (author of the opera ~~"Parsifal"~~ "Palestrina") -- not very well-known in this country, but interesting both as a musician and as a character. (A vicious reactionary -- and an inspired romantic. Biloious, arrogant, hysterically nationalistic, but at the same time cultured and sensitive: in short, a typical German artist....)

The impressive array of great virtuosi who played for the Führer: Wilhelm Furtwängler (a significant and characteristic case, to be discussed in detail), Conductor Clemens Krauss, Pianists Edwin Fischer, Wilhelm Backhaus, Elly Ney, Giesecking, etc. (The delicate problem of Denazification in the sphere of art, alluded to on previous occasions, may be elaborated upon in this particular context.)

An important section of the music chapter will have to be devoted to the intriguing case of Richard Wagner, the idol of German nationalism and a genius enjoying world-wide popularity. Description of a visit to Bayreuth and a conversation with Winfried Wagner, the composer's daughter-in-law and one of the most fanatic devotees of the Führer.

VI ART

To be emphasized -- here as on previous occasions -- the contrast between the present sterility and the artistic boom following World War I. In 1919: the hectic vogue of Expressionism, Dadaism, etc; now, complete stagnation. ... The public still inclined to accept the Nazi notions of "degenerate art," "cultural Bolshevism," and so forth. Experimental art unpopular with the German masses.

(Käthe Kollwitz,
Most of the old guard died (Max Klee, Nolde, Barlach etc) or left Germany (George Grosz, Max Beckmann). Young talents (if there are any!) follow the example of their literary colleagues and specialize either in a sort of idyllic escapism (landscapes, love scenes in the old romantic manner) or in a more timely but rather depressing form of apocalyptic realism (air raids, battle fields, etc). ... The few survivors of the older generation (Karl Hofer, René Sintenis) continue to work along their accustomed lines. ... Description of a visit to the sculptor, René Sintenis, in Berlin. A young American buys a statuette from her -- for a carton of cigarettes!

From there, transition to the unsavory theme "Black Art Market." GIs and U.S. civilians purchasing Baroque sculptures, Gothic tapestry and modern paintings for candy bars and canned butter. ... On the other hand, the Germans were in the habit of amassing art treasures on an even larger scale and without paying even as much as a piece of chocolate. Some remarks about the Nazi art collections and "beautiful spoils" (as Janet Flanner called them in The New Yorker).

VII THEATER RADIO PRESS FILM

In the sphere of the theater, the contrast between the boom of the early Twenties and the present barrenness even more striking. Lack of both new plays and new actors. No inspired directors; Max Reinhardt has no successor. Best Berlin productions are weak repetitions of pre-Hitler patterns. Some brilliant actors of the "old guard." Outstanding among them -- versatile, sophisticated Gustaf Gründgens, "the German Noel Coward." Formerly married to E.M. Having been discovered by Max Reinhardt, he became later a favourite of Hermann Göring and something like a theatrical czar in the Third Reich. The Russians first arrested, then released him. The recent triumphant come-back of this indestructible climber to be described in detail. ... Another colorful figure among the "old-timers" -- Emil Jannings. Our ~~first~~ visit to him. The once world-famous movie star invents a Jewish grandmother and an anti-Nazi record.

Dance -- the great fashion after the last war --, much less popular and less lively now. Venerable "revolutionaries" like Harald Kreuzberg and Mary Wighman (the latter badly compromised ~~as a~~ as a militant Nazi) still are the leading figures.

Film, handicapped by technical conditions. Russian plans to revive the UFA. The Bavarian EMELKA produces news reels under

U.S. auspices. American film officer, who meant to encourage production of German film, could not find an adequate script. Anti-Nazi films (even so cautious ones as the Swiss production "Last Chance") unpopular with German masses.

As for radio and press, our Information Control Division has tried its very best to purify and revitalize those mediums of "enlightenment and propaganda" -- formerly abused by Goebbels --, not without comparatively gratifying results. The radio programs, even though far from being very original, are in general on a fairly high level. There is practically no censorship -- a fact of which the Germans sometimes take advantage: German broadcasts are not always free of anti-Allied cracks and jingoistic slogans. ... The same is true of the neo-German press; yet it has to be admitted that some of the newly established papers -- for instance, the American-licensed Berlin "Tages-Spiegel" -- can compete with any metropolitan journal anywhere in Europe. (Notably successful also the American-operated "Neue Zeitung" in Munich, founded by Hungarian-born Novelist Hans Habe.)

VIII THE IRON CURTAIN

While the preceding chapters were primarily, if not exclusively, dealing with conditions in the western and southern zones of occupied Germany, we will now try to analyze the cultural policy of the Russians, dwelling in particular on those features in which their approach differs from ours.

In contrast to our authorities, the Russians fully appreciate the propagandistic potentialities of culture. While we leave cultural initiative to Germans (who don't use it or use it for dubious purposes), Russians stimulate, direct, supervise cultural activities -- employing trustworthy Germans (Communist intellectuals who spent the past twelve years in the Soviet Union) as their agents and tools. ... Outstanding among repatriated Communist writers: Poet Johannes R. Becher; Novelist Theodor Plivier; Playwright Friedrich Wolff. Becher in charge of power Kulturbund, a cultural organization publishing monthly magazine, Der Aufbau, arranging exhibitions, lectures, shows etc.

Our impressions of cultural life in the Russian Zone. Theater and concerts in Leipzig, Dresden, Weimar. ... Visiting the Goethe House in Weimar, accompanied by Red-Army officers. ... Talk with the Dean of Jena University. ... Attending classes in country schools. ... Newspapers and radio more lively, more provocative in the Russian Zone than in ours -- but strictly propagandistic.

IX CENTERS OF GERMAN CULTURE OUTSIDE OF GERMANY

If the cultural scene in postwar Germany is rather on the bleak and desolate side, certain traditions of Germanic culture have survived and are being developed in other countries which do historically not belong to the Reich -- notably Austria and Switzerland.

visiting Vienna, we find the Austrian intellectuals more conscious of their own cultural legacy and mission than they were before the "Anschluss." Signs -- however modest and muddled! -- of a coming "Austrian Renaissance." More talented young writers, artists, musicians in Austria than in the Reich proper; more cultural initiative. (New magazines, experimental theaters, etc. Samples.) ... Plans for a revival of Salzburg Festivals. Salzburg vs. Bayreuth.

Similar impressions in the German-speaking part of Switzerland: there, too, emphasis on "sound Swiss tradition," in contrast to intellectual tutelage of Greater Germany. Danger of provincialism and complacency, but also promises of a well-balanced, truly popular culture continuing certain German traditions without the typically German hysteria and arrogance. ... Conversation with Hermann Hesse -- embodying some of the finest qualities (but also some of the more problematical features) of both nations.

X GERMANY AND EUROPE

Germany today a cultural vacuum (nihilism as the inevitable aftermath of Nazism) -- the Sphinx without a secret. ... How are conditions in other European countries? Condensed survey of cultural forces and tendencies in France, Italy, The Low Countries, Scandinavia, Czecho-Slovakia. ... Conclusion: moral and aesthetic standards in those countries, too, unbalanced and confused ("Existentialism" -- the German-inspired movement of the French vanguard -- as a typical sample); but more intellectual integrity and creative imagination there than in paralyzed Germany.

Conditions for reawakening of European culture (apart from political and economic considerations): First, German intellectual imperialism, Nazi spirit has to be overcome, exterminated -- thoroughly, once and for all. (This condition has not been fulfilled as yet, as the case of "Existentialism" exemplifies only too clearly.) Second, German culture -- purged of its objectionable elements -- has to become an active factor again and play its legitimate and indispensable role within the framework of European civilization. If Europe needs a politically and economically stable Germany -- it needs a culturally active Germany as well.

(In these concluding passages the issue of Pan-Europe may come in, if only in an indirect way, as an aspect and possible solution of the cultural problem. The question, "Pan-Europe -- Now?" cannot be answered in the affirmative -- not even in the interest of European culture, to say nothing of any political considerations. The cultural and moral state of Germany, if nothing else, speaks decidedly against the realization of such a scheme, for the time being. It will be necessary, however, to underline in this context both the fundamental unity of European civilization (Pan-Europe must and will materialize, eventually!) and the vital significance of Germany's contribution, in the past and -- we hope! -- in the future.)

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