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Mann, Erika

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NO GIFT TO GOEBBELS.

LORD VANSITTART GIVES THE FIRST INTERVIEW OF HIS LIFE

Boy

Erika Mann

"Don't do that!", said my progressive, intellectual, originally ~~pacifists, moderately socialist~~ ^(former pacifists all of them, with a socialist flavour -) English writer-friends when I uttered the intention to go and interview Lord Vansittart. "To begin with", they said, "Van is crazy with ^{hatred of} everything German; you have read 'Black Record'; hasn't that told you enough? Besides, he is full of resentment and bound to be very tiresome, because of the way he's been treated; it's no fun, my dear, to have to exchange one's nice, though slightly fictitious, position as 'Chief Diplomatic Adviser' for a mere seat in the House of Lords. Furthermore, we don't like him. His hideous Anti-German articles in the Sunday-Times are being far too widely read; they are dangerous; but if you say so in your interview you ^{will} ~~merely~~ ~~do~~ ~~nothing~~ what we have been doing for some time, while, if you defend the old 'Butcherbird' - that's what he's called the Germans; in 'Black Record' remember? - well, if you defend him, we shall be rather cross with you, my dear; we may even feel compelled to attack you in one of our more decent publications. So better stay away from Denham Place, Denham, Bucks. That's all."

I went just the same and am now looking forward to being attacked by my friends; for I wish to confess right away that Lord Vansittart has deeply impressed me. I shall soon explain, why.

As it takes about 50 minutes to get out to Denham, I had plenty of time to check up Vansittart's own "record", ~~was~~ compiled

Had no title

in various newspaper-clippings I was carrying along. He was ~~not~~
~~an aristocrat~~ by birth, I noticed; plain Robert Gilbert Vansittart
born in 1881, was educated at Eton, entered the Diplomatic Service
at the age of 21, worked his way up in Paris, Teheran, Stockholm, and
Cairo, and ~~joined~~ ^{joined} the Foreign Office ~~itself~~ ^{in 1919}. From 1930
till 1938 he was Permanent Under-Secretary ^{of State} for Foreign Affairs
and considered to be one of the most ~~important~~ important "men
in the dark", the "real power behind the throne", the "great force
back-stage". Why so much influence was attributed to him, had never
been quite clear to me. For the government's Foreign Policy in those
years was clearly the exact opposite of what Sir Robert wanted it
to be. At any rate, "usually well informed circles" agreed that
he was "kicked upstairs", when, in 1938, he had to abandon his
position to be made "Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the British
Government". For, it's alright, - they argued, - to be an Adviser,
if anyone listens to your advice. Mr. Chamberlain, however, never
~~listened~~ listened, - and last of all to Sir Robert who had been
consistently right, where Mr. Chamberlain had been consistently
wrong. The Prime-Minister did not understand much about Foreign
~~affairs~~ Affairs in general; but quite particularly he was admi-
rably ignorant of conditions in Germany; he had never been there,
did not speak the language, and had not the slightest conception
of German psychology, let alone of Mr. Hitler's special kind of
"soul". Vansittart, on the contrary, possessed not only the most
intimate and most solid knowledge of Germany, - a knowledge
~~based on~~ ^{backed by his manifold} personal experiences with Germans at home and abroad, -
but also a strongly intuitive ^{and} insight ^{at least into certain aspects} into the German character.

His predictions regarding Germany were always ^{based on} ~~checked by~~ both, exact and detailed information, and an almost uncanny instinct for the "inner German". What an adviser he would have made, - our "circles" insisted. But, they added, his advise was never ~~followed~~ followed, - in the case of Spain, for instance, as little as in that of Germany. Conservative aristocratic Sir Robert, though far from being "pro-red", recognized that a fascist victory in Spain would be a minor disaster to the Empire; the farce of non-intervention, he argued, was ~~as~~ ^{political} damaging to Britain's ~~best~~ ^{will} interests, as ~~it was~~ ^{as to her moral prestige} ~~humanly repulsive~~. He warned, he protested, - ~~to no avail~~ ^{in vain}.

Maybe, - I thought, he should not have "taken it". Maybe, he should have resigned over Spain, - or, at the latest, over Munich. Maybe Churchill would, then, have called him back, in the spring of 1940 and he would have become a real power. Maybe...

Well, - there I was; this was Denham.

It rained; I had to run across the fields for some ^{eleven} ~~ten~~ minutes and arrived quite wet and ^{dishevelled} ~~dissolved~~.

The Vansittarts were sitting around the tea-table, listening to the news. "Do you mind?" I was asked. I did not; besides I could feel that the news was sacred in this house; guest, or not guest, interview, or no interview, the news had to be listened to, which gave me a chance to have a thorough look at the place and its silent inhabitants.

Lady Vansittart, I found, was very attractive; in fact she was exceedingly beautiful, - a Latin, rather than an Anglo-Saxon type of beauty, her delicate ivory-face dominated by enormous star-like eyes. The pleasantly plump girl at her side must have been the product of Vansittart's first marriage (with the

daughter of an American General); a young boy-friend of the house
and a ^{woman} ~~female~~ secretary completed the picture, safe for Lord ~~HHHHHHH~~
Vansittart himself who swallowed the news far more eagerly than he
did his tea and toast. Holding his long, clear-cut chin in his hand,
his greyish eyes narrowed with ^(concentration) intensity, he did not let ^{down} his ~~ex-~~
^(features to) ~~pression~~ ^{the expression} change, regardless of the character of the news. I had not
known, but could not but ^(help noticing) notice, that he ^{is} was utterly good-looking,
very handsome indeed. In his ^{more viril} ~~tougher~~, ^{less} ~~herber(?)~~ ^{glamorous}
though no less elegant way ^{he is} ~~he~~ was at least as striking as Britain's
political beauty-king, Anthony Eden. The suggestion that he had re-
signed from the Civil Service because of his age (of 60) ^{seemed} ~~became~~
^{absurd, in front of} quite un-acceptable, once one looked into his strong, ^(brisk) ~~vivid~~ and ener-
getic ~~face~~. ^{appearance}.

"Well," he said, when the ^(broadcast) ~~news~~ was over, "shall we have
our little talk now?" He professed that he'd rather call it a 'talk'
as he had never ^(before agreed to be) ~~done~~ an interview ^{before} and did not quite know
how to ^{cope with the situation} ~~handle it~~. I took this for a joke, ^{but} he explained to me
that, as a ~~(Civil~~ Servant, he had not been allowed to do any such ~~HHH~~
thing; "and I have been 'freed' only recently", he said.

The family withdrew and ~~HHH~~ I got ready for Lord Vansittart's
"debut".

Plunging right into the middle of things, I said that I had
read 'Black Record' and wished to ask two questions in this con-
nection. 1.) ^(contribution) ~~Granted~~ that the famous pamphlet was but a collection
of popular broadcasts ^(delivered with the purpose of bringing home) ~~meant to show to the listeners~~ in the Empire
the character of the enemy, the ^(throughout) ~~true~~ size of the menace, and the
^(for of) ~~litter~~ necessity ^{of} removing that menace once and for all; but did
he not agree that, even so, his excursions into German history which

~~had~~ aroused so much controversy, were in fact a bit "propagandistic" in character? Was it fair to trace Nazism back to the Nibelungen and to call the all but purely German Charlemagne a forerunner of Hitler? And was it useful ^{to exaggerate} ~~not to be fair~~, even in the sphere of "propaganda"?

Lord Vansittart, obviously accustomed to ~~stand up~~ ^{Harry} to this particular question, replied swiftly.

Those excursions, he said, were by no means the most important part of the booklet which consisted mainly of an analysis of present-day-Germany, many of ^{whose} ~~HNH~~ roots ^(nearly as far back as the) ~~must be looked for in the~~ Germany of Frederic the Great and his father, the Soldier's King. When he had descended even deeper into Germany's past, so only, because, in con-

trast to other peoples, the Germans had not changed and certain characteristics of ^{their} ~~HNH~~ earliest days ^{remain} ~~were~~ ^{even now;} significant for ^{of the Teutonic people is} ~~their~~ ^(turbulent) ~~HNH~~ present; in fact, ^{the} ~~these~~ majority ^{are} ~~were~~ still as bellicose and ^{questions used to be is} ~~barbarously aggressive as~~ ^{was} their ancient history; there ~~was~~ ^{is} no-

thing new, nothing accidental, and, therefore, nothing that would necessarily pass in any of Mr. Hitler's repulsive features; the ~~HNH~~

myth of the German Master-Race, ^{is} ~~was~~ as little the "Führer's" ~~own~~ ^{invention} ~~as~~ ^{and} were the glorification of Force and Fraud, the demand for

"thinking with the blood", the contempt of Christianity and Civilisation, the lust of conquest and power for the sake of conquest and power, all of which had been current in Germany way back and long ago. That ~~some~~ ^{may be noticeable in the history of} similar trends ~~also existed in other nations~~ ^{as well,} ~~hardly~~

~~did not alter~~ the fact that it ^{is} ~~was~~ Germany, and Germany alone, ^{principles} ~~who~~ ^{those darker ages,} ~~had~~ not only not overcome the thoughts and habits of a ~~passed~~ ^{age,} but had, even cultivated and developed them to their present

unthinkable measure. "People here", he said, "are still inclined to ^{believe} think that ^{what's} ~~and that~~ got to be done ^{5. just} it to remove Hitler and a few thousand "azis from power and all will be glory. They Germans, ^{on the whole, - so} they maintain, are peaceful, amiable creatures who have been mis-educated and misled by a cruel bloodthirsty regime they had not wanted. Well, - they have ^{indeed} ~~indeed~~ been misled and miseducated, ^{through the centuries} - ~~not~~ ^{just} not ~~merely~~ by this one regime which, incidentally, they ~~had~~ wanted and still do want, ~~but through the centuries~~. And the contention that, under the influence of such mis-education, any nation would behave, as they Germans do, does not rid us of the fact that other nations have not exposed themselves to that kind of education, and are, therefore, behaving differently. Don't you see, -" he exclaimed, leaving his seat and wandering through the room, - "don't you ~~SHH~~ realize that victory would be senseless, and all sacrifices would have been in vain, if ~~W~~ we should have to fight another German war in another 20 years? And that we shall have to fight that other war, unless the Germans undergo a complete change of heart? Do not say now, -" he interrupted himself, though I had not ^{made} ~~made~~ any attempt to say anything, - "do not say that the German Republic already represented a promising step in that direction and that things would have proceeded nicely ^{if they} ~~had they~~ not been spoiled by errors on our part. I do not deny those errors; but under no circumstances could the Weimar experiment have ended in any other way, without the fundamental change of heart ~~WHHHH~~ that had never really begun."

"Your critics", I said, ^{insist} "maintain that in 'Black Record' you have entirely omitted ^{the} ~~any~~ brighter, ~~any better~~ and more human ~~HH~~ ^{elements} ~~elements~~ which can be found in Germany ~~as well as~~ anywhere else. You have seemingly forgotten all about Germany's great and numerous

contributions to ^{own} culture and civilisation. You have, - so they say, distorted the truth by telling ^{it} only parts ~~of it~~...."

I did not lower my voice, but waited for an answer.

"Never", said Lord ^Vansittart, "never had it been my intention to write a comprehensive, ~~all-embracing~~ ^{character} characterological study of the Germans." 'Black Record', he said, pretended to be nothing of the kind. 'Black Record' meant ^{to show just} to show two things only: 1.) the enemy ^{is} was formidable and all our efforts ^{are} would be needed to defeat him; 2.) defeat ^{is} was not likely to tame the ~~enemy~~ ^{aggressive mass} enemy whose insatiable ~~bellicosity~~ ^{is} was a matter of long and notorious standing, and had never been ~~affected~~ ^{is} affected by either defeat or victory. His victory of 1871 had produced no more of a pacifying effect ^{on him} than his defeat of 1918. The peaceful, ^{and} civilized elements which undoubtedly existed, and always ^{are} had existed, in Germany ^{are negligible} were of no avail; they ~~were~~ ^{are} were not, and never had been capable of exercising any moderating influence. To rely on them and again stake the fate of humanity on their ability suddenly to acquire such influence, ^{would be} was suicidal. It was all but 'hatred' of Germany which made him thus speak.

"In fact" he said, looking at me earnestly, "it would have been the Germans themselves if we had abandoned ~~our~~ ^{own} illusions better for Germany, if mankind had judged her more hardly and ^{about them - when it still was} ~~time!~~ ^{time.}"

His face was lit with passionate intelligence and intelligent passion. Surely he ^{is} was not a "professional hater" as my friend ^{wanted} ~~would have me~~ to believe. He ^{is} was neither an embittered, nor a frustrated, nor a lonely, ~~nor a disappointed~~ man. Why, then, should he love to hate? His house, - what an enchanting 17th-century-house, - ^{is} was filled with beautiful things, - pictures, carpets, books; he ^{is} was ~~himself~~ ^{himself} an artist, a writer and by no means primarily ~~of~~ the author

of "propaganda"-pieces like "Black Record"; he ^{is} was fond of ^{composing} writing French verses; he had written numerous plays and film-scenarios ^{in fact} and even ~~his~~ ^{his} statesmanship certain artistic features were unmistakable. ~~He felt as clearly as he thought.~~ ^{Feelings and concepts in politics are not without emotions as vivid and definite as his ideas.} ~~And it was not hatred~~ ^{is} what he felt, but anguish, the deep and burning anguish of a man who has long seen and foretold the disaster, ^{and} ~~had known how it could have been avoided,~~ ^{the means} ~~but had to live and experience, how even now, when it had engulfed his world, people did not want to grasp its nature.~~ He hates Germany as little as I do, - I thought. But too deeply had I (myself) experienced the agony of an all-important knowledge which nobody ^{those} wanted to share, as not to understand his feelings. ~~He~~ ^{yet} ~~while~~ ^{realized} ~~we~~ ^{murderous} Germans, who know the deadly menace of Hitler's "Revolution of Nihilism", had been ^{lived} ~~unhappily~~ living so far removed from the power-centres of this earth, that we could never have dreamed ^{of} ~~to~~ ^{ing} alter the course of events. ~~On the strength of our knowledge,~~ The British Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs ~~had indeed been entitiled to~~ ^{was} hope that his knowledge would be put to use. How ~~terrible, how truly~~ ^{painful!} ~~insufferable~~ ^{the} to watch from his elevated position catastrophe closing in. He had endured it, bravely, nobly, ~~and~~ ^{loyally}. ~~Could he, now-~~ ^{can} ~~ever, now be blamed, for finally having taken "his coat off", as he~~ ^{at last,} ~~himself put it - for having abandoned~~ ^{finally} that diplomatic cagyness which has never yet succeeded in conquering the truth by hiding it? For even now, so he felt, people were not being told the ^{complete and forcible} ~~full impact of the~~ ^{entirely fail to} ~~truth; even now they could not grasp the real~~ ~~size of the danger.~~ ^{is} And if it ~~was~~ ^{do} kind and generous on their part to devote, as they ~~did~~ ^{is}, so much thought and friendly ^{consideration} ~~concern~~ to the very nation who ~~was~~ ^{is} out to destroy them, ^{is} was it not also a bit ignorant and luxuriously sentimental? "Most people" Vansittart had

written in one of the articles my friends ^{thought} ~~thought~~ so "hideous",
"are confusing their minds ^{by} ~~but~~ talking and thinking far too much about
Germany. Do not always be wondering how to be safely just to her.
Make up your minds that you are going to be just to Germany's victims
first and to Germany after. That is vital."

~~XX~~
~~XX~~
~~XX~~
~~XX~~
~~XX~~

It would have been difficult for me to continue
and "question" Lord Vansittart, if I had still remembered that it was
an interview I had come for. Yet I was so absorbed ⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ ~~by~~ the urgency of
~~the subject~~ ^{and the intensity of the personality who discussed it with}
me, that I forgot all ^{my} ~~about~~ being a reporter.

"But what" I asked, ^{finally} ~~finally~~ arriving at what I had intended to
be my second question, "what ^(then) ~~are~~ the conclusions to be drawn from
your characterisation of the enemy? Surely, as ^{a man of action} ~~an active politician~~
you must have thought of the practical steps that ^{ought to} ~~need~~ be taken if,
this time, peace is to last?"

"Surely, - I must have thought of that.." ^{with a strangely}
repeated Vansittart, ~~smiling faintly~~ ^{absent-minded} ~~smile~~.
"But why haven't you said so?"

He reminded me of the fact that the discussion of 'Peace-Aims' had
not yet been officially opened when he delivered his broadcasts; the
entire complex ^{was then still} ~~had been taboo~~ - especially so for Civil Servants. Fur-
thermore, the superstitious belief ^{concerning} ~~the peace~~ ^{was wide-spread} ~~was wide-spread~~. The
Germans, - people assumed, - would fight
longer and harder, if and when they knew Britain's plans for the "day
after". People did not yet want to see that the Germans would fight

precisely as long and as hard as they possibly could, regardless of what "we" said, or did not say. For all their splendor and glory, the Germans ^{are} ~~were~~ fighting with their backs against the wall and would never admit defeat before the complete collapse of their military machine ^{is} ~~was~~ obvious ~~to everyone.~~ — even to them.

"It may be true, though" I remarked, "that, if only the Government, ^{a more or less clear-cut vision} ~~have certain clear, if necessarily flexible and adaptable ideas of what has to be done~~ to go after the cease fire, those ideas need not be discussed now, when the war is still far from being won."

^{stale} Vansittart nodded, as if listening to a familiar, somewhat faded and outworn melody. "I know, I know," he said, ^{and added} ~~saying~~ that I had produced one of the two arguments ^{frequently employed by} ~~current amongst~~ his critics. The first, he said, consisted ^{is} ~~in~~ the accusation that "Black Record" ^{is} ~~was~~ nothing better than 'a gift to Goebbels'. It ^{is} ~~was~~ easy to give that one the lie, ^{many} ~~as~~ months have past since ^{has been released,} ~~publication of~~ the pamphlet, without Goebbels ever having referred to it. He probably knows why. As for the second argument which ^{is} ~~was~~ based on the 'don't-hatch(?)—your-chicken—before-they-are-caught—idea', there seemed ^{is} ~~to~~ be something popularly convincing to that. However, his, Vansittart's, reasons for advocating that the silence be broken and certain decisions be taken ^{are} ~~were~~ no less ^{impressive} ~~convincing~~. In fact, he felt they carried more weight. One could summarize them as follows:

- 1.) the steps that must be taken immediately following the collapse of Hitler's war-machine, must be prepared ^{politically as well as} ~~both, practically and psychologically~~. Not only must plans be set up now, but people must also be informed of such plans. For, unless they realized in advance that, with the signing of the armistice, nothing ^{will} ~~would~~ yet be settled, they ^{may} ~~would~~ be unwilling to face their new tasks.
- 2.) There existed the danger, particularly in a Democracy, and more particularly during a war which fully absorbed the when the bomb comes.

8 nation's attention, - the danger, ^{that} ~~that~~ things which were not being discussed, were not being thought ^{of} either. ~~We might go on postponing the discussion of the peace-settlement, because a) we were too busy with the war, b) this discussion would be a 'gift to Goebbels', and c) this discussion was simply 'premature', - and might thereby completely lose sight of it. But~~ nothing could be more dangerous ~~than that. It must not be permitted to happen. His efforts were devoted to the removal of that particular danger. So far he had merely been trying to make people understand, why their full cooperation would be needed for the 'peace-effort', as well as for the war effort. The moment was near, when they must be told, what this cooperation would consist of.~~

"What will it consist of?" I asked; / ~~How do you visualize~~
— the 'peace-effort'?"

vansittart said that he'd rather not go into details now; ^{is} But it was clear, even from the highly generally phrased Atlantic Charter, that a hard, tiresome, ^{and tedious} ~~even~~ dangerous peace-job ^{is} ~~was~~ ahead of us. According to Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill there ^{will} ~~would~~ have to be "unilateral disarmament"; this already showed parts of that job. For how could "we" disarm Germany, without guarding her closely, without supervising her industrial output, without keeping quite a few people in Germany for quite some time? However, it ^{is} ~~was~~ evident that more ^{will} ~~would~~ have to be done. It ^{is} ~~was~~ fortunate that Russia, as well, as those 14 countries on the continent Hitler had ^{will} ~~would~~ overrun, ^{will} ~~would~~ also have their say in the matter. They ^{will} ~~probably~~ agree that Germany must be 'deprussianized', that the centre of power must be shifted away from Berlin, that the Prussian spirit must disappear from the German schools and universities and that we must do everything in

our power to bring about in Germany that complete change of heart without which no peace could ever last. Germany must be re-educated, rather than punished, but re-educated to the score. This could not be done without the most elaborate preparations, and even then it ^{may} ~~would~~ take a long time. "You are still young" he said; "you may yet see that peaceful, sensibly organized, decent world. ~~for which we all strive~~; I shall not live to see it; as long as I live, however, I shall go on fighting for it; for it is the one thing worth living, fighting and dying for."

It started getting dark outside in the old garden; I had to go back to London. "Many thanks;" I said; "I enjoyed it very much" but I felt ashamed, while I said it. "Enjoyed" is not the right word" I added; "it is rather a comfort to know that you are at work".

It is a comfort. Hardly ever before have I met a statesman, a "politician", who combined so much knowledge, so much insight into the affairs of this world, with so much heart, so much feeling for its inhabitants. I remembered that he once wrote: "The simple use of the heart in Politics is not always easy, it will even be suspect."

What was it, I wondered, that my nice intelligent friends suspected him of? Was it the "simple use of the heart in Politics"? I did not hope so. Maybe, I thought, that, like Churchill, Lord Vansittart was too brilliant, too formidable, too unconventional to be easily accepted by the general English public. Churchill, too, had had to wait for ~~many~~ his hour to come, - to wait for many ⁿ painful years. But, then, my friends, the vanguard of British intelligentsia, were not "the general public". Why did they refuse to und~~erstand~~