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Erika Mann

June 7, 1951

Dearest Freda:

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Your very sweet letter of May 8th reached me some weeks after a troublesome operation, and two days prior to my departure for good old Billings Hospital, Chicago, where I endeavoured -- not unsuccessfully, or so it seems -- to get around another piece of silly surgery. Hence my tardiness in thanking you. I am happy, indeed, that you were not yourself really fond of Werth's "Obit". But I keep being convinced that Gide never "partially defended Fascism" or "at least implied a distinct sympathy for it". There is, as far as I remember, one solitary sentence in his Journals (which, I admit, I read some time ago in French and may not recall in every detail) saying something that amounts to "perhaps, - who knows?, - all this will eventually turn out to have been to the better..." For the rest, Gide's actions would seem to make his general attitude perfectly clear. He left Paris just as soon as the Hitlerites were approaching the city; his house in the south of France was - under "Vichy" - a renowned refuge for all ~~Hitler~~ who had fallen into Nazi - or Pétain disgrace, - with the natural exception of the Communists with whom he had indeed ~~fallen~~ quarrelled, but who never constituted, as Alec seemed to imply, the whole of the French résistance; even so, he hated his séjour in Vichy domains, and did so vehemently enough to depart the minute "our" invasion of North Africa had made it possible for him to take himself to other shores. By then, as Werth surely realizes, he was a very old man for whom any such flight meant no particular fun.

Besides, as I said before, I hold no passionate brief for the bloke, either "politically" or from a human point of view. I merely felt - as did my father - that the thing went too far. You are right, though, and the Nation's subsequent publications served admirably to restore the "balance". That I shall never again be able to read Mr. Werth's reports with a completely trusting eye is a matter of small importance.

Thanks again for writing and for doing one of the rarest things -- admitting that there might, after all, have been something to the "good but severe" things I said.

Yours as ever cordially

20/7/51



Erika