

friends, in Flaubert as well as myself. You can see that one should die for no cause, that one should live with any government there is, no matter what one's antipathy to it, and believe in nothing but art, confess no faith but literature."

So many writers since, of considerably less talent than the two Goncourts and whose names cannot even be mentioned in the same breath with Flaubert, have professed (and still profess) a similar outlook, that it is worth our while to seek the origin of this apparent disillusionment and detachment from life. I say "apparent" because in Flaubert's case at least (he was a great writer) there was no detachment, but a bitter battle to the death with that bourgeois society he hated so violently.

The Goncourts knew Balzac personally, their diaries are full of anecdotes about that vital and Rabelaisian genius. Flaubert, like themselves, also overlapped him in his creative work. Whence comes the great difference between the master and the disciples, a difference not in time but in outlook that divides them like a gulf? The energy engendered by the Revolution and its heroic aftermath had died out by the advent of Flaubert's generation. The bitter struggle of classes and the real predatory character of capitalist society had become so clear that they aroused only disgust; whereas Balzac, still inspired by the creative force that built this society, sought only for understanding.

The democratic and Jacobin ideals of '93, in the mouths of the liberal politicians of the nineteenth century, had become intolerable and monstrous platitudes. The real leveling character of capitalism was becoming apparent, its denial of human values, its philosophy of numbers that covered its cash estimate for all things human and divine. The old aristocracy whose corruption Balzac had drawn in such masterly fashion was nothing but a decayed shadow of its old self, an obscene ghost muttering and grumbling in the forgotten drawing-rooms of provincial country houses, or else indistinguishable from the new nobility of hard cash. Socialism, only known to Flaubert and his friends in its Utopian form, seemed to them as stupid and unreal as the worst extravagances of the liberal politicians who daily in word and deed betrayed their great ancestors. (That Flaubert considered them great ancestors there is plenty of evidence: "Marat is my man," he writes in one letter.) Socialism was only another form of the general leveling of all values which so revolted them, and rendered the more disgusting because of its sentimental idealizing (it seemed to them) of the uneducated mob.

The period of 1848 saw the end of many illusions. Who after that bitter experience would ever again believe that fine words could butter parsnips? The June days, in which the Paris workers took the spinners of phrases at their word and fought in arms for liberty, equality, and fraternity, were the writing on the wall. Flaubert was a novelist, not a student of the social history and economic

Prewar Vision

Down dark ways my feet are led
guided by the reckless blind
past the houses of the dead
beyond the limits of the mind.

Strident orchestrated fear
trumpets shrieking out my name
crazy drums drove me here
nerves commanded and I came

through the gravedge deathsweet smell
of the spectral frontline camp
where beneath a silent spell
countless murdered armies tramp

to the wind's marshaling.

A squad front a company back
struck in mirth these shadows swing
breathless bones to mock attack

precise and perfect. No mistake
disturbs deadlock with defeat
no thrust allows ranks to break:
from this last field is no retreat.

I wheel and run defy wind
leap wire jump trench shrilly
scream

wild to leave that place behind.

I fall entangled in the dream.

Before me no room for doubt
my own head barring escape
grinning mouth nose eaten out
eyesockets agape.

JOSEPH KEHOE.



machinery of mankind, and to him the June days merely proved that flirting with empty slogans roused dark forces that were a threat to the very existence of civilized society. The dictatorship of the blackguard Louis Napoleon which followed was just a dictatorship of blackguards, the apotheosis of the bourgeois, and all that could be expected from the follies of preceding years. So the *Education Sentimentale* is a bitter and mercilessly ironical picture of the end of all the fine illusions of the liberal bourgeoisie, illusions which the red flag and rifle shots of June, 1848, shattered forever. After that, the vulgarity of the Empire. Nothing would be the same again, and one could resign oneself to the long process of social decay and destruction of civilization by this stupid and miserly bourgeoisie, with its wars, its narrow nationalism, and its bestial greed.

It might be thought that between Flaubert's theory of god-like objectivity of the artist and Balzac's theory of the natural history of social man, there is no great difference. In fact, there is all the difference in the world. Balzac's scientific views were possibly naïve and incorrect, but in his view of life he was truly realist. He looked at human society historically, as something struggling and developing through its struggles. In Flaubert, life becomes frozen and static. After 1848, you could not observe and express life in its development be-

cause that development was too painful, the contradictions were too glaring. So life became for him a frozen lake. "What appears beautiful to me," he writes to his mistress. "what I should like to do, would be a book about nothing, a book without any attachment to the external world, which would support itself by the inner strength of its style, just as the world supports itself in the air without being held up, a book which would be almost without a subject, or in which the subject would be almost invisible, if that is possible. The most beautiful books are those with the least matter. The nearer the expression comes to the thought, the more the word clings to it and then disappears, the more beautiful it is."

ONCE this view was accepted, the way was clear for the new "realism" which took the slice of life and described it minutely and objectively. But life, of course, proved too restive a creature to slice up artistically, so the novelist grew finicking about the choosing of his slice, demanding that it be cut off such a refined portion of life's anatomy that in the end he came to describe little more interesting than the suburban street or the Mayfair party. Revolting against the narrow view imposed on their vision by this theory, others drew their inspiration from Freud and Dostoevsky in order to give us the poetic picture of their own stream of consciousness. So in the end the novel has died away into two tendencies whose opposition has as little about it that is important to us as the mediæval battles of the schoolmen.

Flaubert, however, was an honest man and a great artist. If his successors were content to avoid the task of mastering the reality of their age and substitute the "slice of life" or the subjective stream of consciousness, he was not prepared to make any such easy surrender. His letters are the confession of a most frightful struggle with a life, a reality, that had become loathsome to him, but which nevertheless must be mastered and given artistic expression. No man has ever raged against the bourgeoisie with the hatred of Flaubert. "I would drown humanity in my vomit," he writes, and he does not mean humanity as a whole, but only the capitalist society of nineteenth-century Europe, immediately after the Paris Commune of 1871.

Letter after letter describes his struggle to find expression. He takes two months to write the tavern scene for *Madame Bovary*, the duration of which in the novel itself is only three hours. Over and over again he mentions that in the last month he has written some twenty pages. Can this be explained simply by his devotion to the perfect phrase, to the exact word? Is it an artist's conscience which will be satisfied with nothing less than perfection in style? Hardly that. He himself says that the works in which the greatest attention has been paid to style and form are mostly second-rate, and in one place declares outright that he is not sure if it is possible to find a criterion for perfection in style. When he writes of the great authors of the world, it is enviously:

"They had no need to strive for style, they are strong in spite of all faults and because of them; but we, the minor ones, only count by our perfection of execution. . . . I will venture a suggestion here I would not dare to make anywhere else: it is that the very great often write very badly and so much the better for them. We mustn't look for the art of form in them, but in the second-raters like Horace and La Bruyère."

Yet Flaubert did not live in physical and mental agony, shut up in his country home among people he despised, because he was a second-rate artist seeking formal perfection. No, he was a great and honest artist striving to express a world and a life he hated, and his whole artistic theory was the result of the compromise enforced on him in that struggle. "Art must in no way be confused with the artist. All the worse for him if he does not love red, green, or yellow, all colors are beautiful, and his job is to paint them. . . . Look at the leaves for themselves; to understand nature one must be calm as nature." Or again, the famous letter in which he sums up his

credo: "The author in his work must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere; art being a second nature, the creator of this nature must act by similar methods; in each atom, in every aspect, there must be felt a hidden and infinite impassibility."

FLAUBERT himself failed utterly to live up to his precepts. Such a god feels neither love nor hate. Flaubert's whole life was animated by hate, a holy hatred of his age which was a kind of inverted love for man deceived, tormented, and debased by a society whose only criterion of value was property. He gave his view of that society at last in the irony of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, a novel which arose out of his scheme for a *Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* in which you were to find "in alphabetical order on every possible subject everything which you need to say in society to be accepted as a respectable and nice fellow."

Flaubert, like Dickens, was a great writer faced with the problem of giving a true picture of a society whose very premises were

rapidly becoming a denial of the standards of humanism once looked on as our common heritage. Dickens solved his problem by the compromise of sentimental romanticism. English conditions made it inevitable for him. Flaubert, who lived in the France of June 1848, of the Third Empire, the Franco-Prussian War, and the Commune, had to take another road. Not only his own temperament, his uncompromising honesty, forbade the path of sentimentality (how easy that would have been for a less great man, Daudet was to show), but the harsher reality of French life irrevocably closed that path for him. He stood apart from the struggle, with infinite pain created for himself an unreal objectivity, and tried to isolate by means of a purely formal approach, certain aspects of life. Poor Flaubert, who suffered more terribly than any writer of his time in his effort to create a picture of life, who more than any man felt the real pulse of his age, yet could not express it, this man of deep passion and intense hatred, has suffered the sad fate of becoming that colorless thing, the highbrow's example of the



SEEING AMERICA FIRST
XI—Eviction

Herb Kruckman

"pure artist." Why we should admire a "pure artist" more than a "pure woman" is one of the mysteries of the age. Why not just an artist, and a woman? They are both interesting and they both suffer, but not in order to be beautiful.

There was one contemporary of Flaubert's who went through the same agony of creation, who tormented himself for weeks in order to find the precise words to express the reality he was determined to dominate and refashion in his mind. This other artist wrote and re-wrote, fashioned and refashioned, loved and hated with an even greater intensity, and finally gave the world the mighty fragments created by his genius. His name was Karl Marx and he successfully solved the problem which had broken every other of his contemporaries, the problem of understanding completely the world of the nineteenth century and the historical development of capitalist society.

"From form is born the idea," Flaubert told Gautier, who regarded these words as being "the supreme formula" of this school of "objective" realism, worthy to be carved on walls. Content determines form, was the view of Marx, but between the two there is an inner relationship, a unity, an indissoluble connection. Flaubert's ideal was to write a book "about nothing," a work of pure formalism, in which the logical was torn apart from the factual and historical. In its extremest form, as developed by Edmond de Goncourt, Huysmans, and others, this became a pure subjectivism, which converted the object into the passive material of the subject, the novelist, who in turn was reduced to a mere photographer.

Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law and a keen critic of the French realists, has contrasted the two methods:

Marx did not merely see the surface, but penetrated beneath, examined the component parts in their reciprocity and mutual interaction. He isolated each of these parts and traced the history of its growth. After that he approached the thing and its environment and observed the action of the latter upon the former, and the reverse. He then returned to the birth of the object, to its changes, evolutions, and revolutions and went into its uttermost activities. He did not see before him a separate thing for itself and in itself having no connection with its environment, but a whole complicated and eternally moving world. And Marx strove to represent the life of that world in its various and constantly changing actions and reactions. The writers of the school of Flaubert and Goncourt complain of the difficulties the artist encounters in trying to reproduce what he sees. But they only try to represent the surface, only the impression they receive. Their literary work is child's play in comparison with that of Marx. An unusual strength of mind was called for in order to understand so profoundly the phenomenon of reality, and the art needed to transmit what he saw and wished to say was no less.

Lafargue rightly estimates the creative method of Marx, and correctly shows the deficiencies of Flaubert's method, though he does not understand that Flaubert himself in his heart of hearts was aware of its deficiencies. Neither does Lafargue realize the forces which drove Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers to

adopt their artistic method. The diary has some interesting light to throw on this last point. In 1855, Edmond writes that "every four or five hundred years barbarism is necessary to revitalize the world. The world would die of civilization. Formerly in Europe, whenever the old population of some pleasant country had become suitably affected with anæmia, there fell on their backs from the North a lot of fellows six feet tall, who remade the race. Now there are no more barbarians in Europe, and it is the workers who will accomplish this task. We shall call it the social revolution."

In the midst of the Commune he remembered this prophecy.

What is happening [he wrote] is the complete conquest of France by the working-class population, and the enslavement of noble, bourgeois, and peasant beneath its despotism. The government is slipping out of the hands of the possessing classes into the hands of those with no possessions, from the hands of those who have a material interest in the preservation of society, into the hands of those who have no interest in order, stability, and conservatism. After all, perhaps in the great law of change of things here below, the workers, as I said some years ago, take the place of the barbarians in ancient society, the part of convulsive agents of destruction and dissolution.

Neither Flaubert nor the Goncourts saw the working class as anything but a purely destructive agent. They did not suffer from any illusions about bourgeois society, they hated its greed, its narrow nationalism, its lack of values, its general leveling tendency and degradation of man, but they saw no alternative to this society, and here is the fundamental weakness of their work. After Flaubert, critical realism could progress no further, for his tremendous labors had exhausted the method. Either the novelist must again see

society in movement, as Balzac had done, or he must turn into himself, become completely subjective, deny space and time, break up the whole epic structure. There was also a further difficulty, one that had been growing for more than a hundred years, and was now reaching its acutest tension, the difficulty of a unified outlook on life, of the ability to deal with human character at all.

The great novelists of the Renaissance had not felt this difficulty. For them, humanism had given direction to their ideas and inspired their work. The Renaissance produced its great philosophers, though at the end of the period rather than the beginning, in Spinoza, Descartes, and Bacon. Certainly, even here the main division in human thought is apparent in the conflict of Descartes and Spinoza, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was not yet so violent as to destroy all philosophic unity. The English and French realist novelists on the whole had a similar view of life, their work in consequence gains in completeness and force. In the nineteenth century, however, the period when all the violent contradictions of the capitalist social system become clear, when wars and revolutions destroy the last feudal strongholds in Europe and the modern nations are formed, there is no longer any philosophical unity. Kant and Hegel have so developed idealism that it temporarily overwhelms the realist, materialist philosophies. The century is one without a unified view of human life, so that it becomes more and more difficult for the novelist to work except in a minor, specialized way, by isolating some fragment of life or of individual consciousness. Flaubert's letters are full of this feeling, and he describes his vain efforts to master the philosophers, his rifling of the works of Kant, Hegel, Descartes, Hume, and the rest. All the time he feels the desire to get back to Spinoza, as the Goncourts felt the desire to get back to the dialectic thought of Diderot. But in the end they give up the search for a philosophical basis as being impossible of fulfilment in the contemporary world.

It is the tragedy of Flaubert and his school that they so continually and acutely felt their own insufficiency, were so conscious of the great superiority of the masters of the past, Rabelais, Cervantes, Diderot, and Balzac. Sometimes they almost blundered on the reason for this, and there is a passage on Balzac in the Goncourt diary which comes so close to the truth, and is so significant for the writer today, that it will perfectly sum up the argument.

I have just re-read Balzac's *Peasants*. Nobody has ever called Balzac a statesman, yet he was probably the greatest statesman of our time, the only one to get to the bottom of our sickness, the only one who saw from on high the disintegration of France since 1789, the manners beneath the laws, the facts behind the words, the anarchy of unbridled interests beneath the apparent order, the abuses replaced by influences, equality before the law destroyed by inequality before the judge, in short, the lie in the program of '89 which replaced great names by big coins and turned marquises into bankers—nothing more than that. Yet it was a novelist who saw through all that.



J. E. Hollier

Conversations in Germany

*What the traveler sees and hears explains
the recent growth of popular disaffection*

By William Johnston

APPROACHING the border of Germany, we gradually divested ourselves of incriminating books, scribbled notes, and magazines. We discarded all evidence of our cultural interests lest we become suspect. And fortunately we did so, for our baggage was minutely examined.

As we passed station after station, Hitler's pictures, both in full face and profile, more severe than he had ever appeared before, more sharp, dissolute, and maniacal, peered at us from counters, walls, and mirrors. Every news-stand was covered with posters showing sly old Jewish men with long beards and enormous noses tearing the dresses off little Aryan girls, their breasts exposed, desperate fear clutching their faces; posters with huge-nosed Blum, Litvinov, and Benes supporting one another; posters depicting Hitler with flaming sword saving Germany from the horrors of an international Bolshevik-Jewish invasion.

Station after station . . . and in contrast, lovely German towns, solidly constructed as though to withstand ages of wear, the gentle, verdant fields, the cultivated surfaces of hills, lush and rich with growing grain, passing my train window as they did in 1929—but with this difference, that as I stared at the horizon, I could see beyond it the hundred concentration camps, the burning of books, the brutal beatings, murders, and sadistic orgies, that have made of beautiful Germany a military camp, and of scholarly Germany a corpse.

About four hours northeast of Berlin, a neatly dressed, tall, middle-aged German woman entered our second-class compartment, sat down near the window, placed her small traveling bag on the seat beside her, and with weary but dignified gestures slowly removed her gloves. I continued to read my German newspaper, raising my eyes now and then to look at her. The gloves removed, she gently patted them smooth on her lap, let her hands rest heavily on them there, and turned toward the window. Her thin face showed strain in tight creases at the corners of her mouth and along her nose and eyes.

A little later, when she had finished with the moving landscape and glanced at my valise on the rack, I wondered whether I should attempt to speak to her. European train compartments are conducive to conversation; one need but introduce oneself, and all barriers usually disappear; but this woman seemed so tired, so removed from any desire to talk or exert herself as she rested her head against the back cushions, that I thought it best to continue reading.

But after a page or two, observing that her

eyes, gentle and inquiring, were focused on mine, I closed the book and smiled.

She was first to speak, her voice hesitant and guarded.

"You are an American?" she asked.

"Yes, I am," I answered.

She leaned slightly toward me, inquiry deepening in her eyes.

"You are coming from Poland?"

"Yes." I watched her closely. "And from the Soviet Union."

A flutter passed over her face. Her lips tightened. "So?" It was partly question, partly formal interjection.

She didn't add anything else, but continued to look at me, her features expressionless, her head bent forward, shadows lengthening beneath her sunken eyes.

I waited. Then after a moment, accepting her silence as permission, and choosing the most innocuous incidents lest she, a confirmed Nazi, make the remainder of the journey to Berlin too unpleasant with argument, I began the story of my visit there.

As I passed from one bit of information to another, her eyes were intent upon me; and while I described the new society, its theaters, children's palaces, food stores, and altered attitudes, she listened silently, stiff in her seat, her body turned toward me. Only when I pictured the freedom of the Russian women did she say anything, and then the "So?" again, this time with a little note of surprise in her voice. It indicated nothing to me, for her features were still expressionless.

But as I continued, mentioning details of their lives, their work, their evenings of study and pleasure, I observed that she was sinking into the corner of her seat, her entire body was losing its quality of stiffness, as though a compressed spring had been softly released within her.

Was she warming to my story as a sympathizer might, I asked myself, or was she just relaxing through weariness as she listened to the description of a country that she, as a German, might some day endeavor to possess? But before I could directly question her, two young men in labor-camp uniforms entered the compartment. She turned her face to the window. They sat down. I resumed my reading.

A half hour later we entered a station. She rose, took her valise, and with a slight nod beckoned to me as she passed through the door. I got up and followed her down the entire length of the corridor, wondering, as she approached the end, whether she had really beckoned.

Turning abruptly at the steps, she grasped

my hand, and in a rush of whispered words, her eyes roving the vestibule behind me, said, "Thank you, Comrade," and then she was gone.

EXCEPT for some vacant stores on Friedrichstrasse and the disappearance of the trees on Unter den Linden, Berlin had changed little in outward appearance—the part of Berlin I saw.

I had been warned by previous travelers not to walk through the working-class districts—"S.S. men concentrated there pick up a visitor on sight."

The sightseeing bus, crowded with middle-class Germans, had taken us from the heart of the city through the respectable Tiergarten, past numerous department stores and cafés, to Templehof airdrome, and was now retracing its way to the station.

My companion, an anti-fascist American, asked the announcer if he intended showing us anything else.

"Some more public buildings and Hitler's house again."

"What about the rest of Berlin? I heard it was a big city."

"Read the program," was the curt answer.

"What a frame-up," Jim said, peering down at the paper in his hand.

A man seated ahead turned and stared sharply at him.

"Careful," I whispered. "You're not home."

"Don't I know it," Jim laughed.

He had similarly laughed, but with greater satisfaction, during luncheon when the waiter had refused him a second portion of meat though he had offered to pay for it. "The law forbids," the waiter had quietly said.

Through the Tiergarten again and then into the crowded center, with its government buildings, hotels, and stores. There were few workers to be seen, and during the entire journey only one Jewish-looking person; but he was so nattily dressed that he might have been the Italian attaché.

The streets were filled with vari-colored uniforms worn by S.S. men, S.A. men, youthful aviators, labor-camp workers, Reichswehr soldiers, and women in tight-fitting suits with Sam Browne belts—all saluting so that at times the streets gave off a moving blur of half-raised arms.

Parading groups of young girls passed with troopers at their head; tractor-drawn trucks wove in and out of traffic; army cars, readily convertible into tanks, sped by; armored motorcycles skirted the bus; three truckloads of black-uniformed, helmeted S.S. men roared