

Arms and the Manns

Erika and Klaus Mann's "The Other Germany" reveals the tragic weaknesses of liberal logic in support of imperialist war. Some notes on Federal Union.

THE OTHER GERMANY, by Erika and Klaus Mann. Modern Age Books. \$2.75.

LESS than a year ago Erika and Klaus Mann's *Escape to Life* was published. *The Other Germany* is their escape from life. They have written, not an article or pamphlet, but 318 pages defending the Allied cause as a crusade against barbarism. Liberals should study the result. It reveals, among other things, that all the sincerity and humanism in the world are not proof against the embarrassments of liberal logic trapped in the service of imperialism. It also demonstrates that no one can discuss the world, avoiding one-sixth of its territory and millions of its people in every country, without making some remarkably silly statements.

First the authors sacrifice the meaning of their title. It is impossible to establish the thesis that Chamberlain and Daladier are fighting *only* Nazism, not "the other Germany." So, even before beginning the book, we encounter a quotation from Harold Nicolson on the flyleaf: "The German character is one of the finest but most inconvenient developments of human nature." This is startling. Writers of good will and intelligence usually do not subscribe to such generalizations about the character of a people—especially their own people. But the Manns go much further than Mr. Nicolson. In the first sixty pages they revile this "German character" in at least ten direct references. Listen:

No error, which France may or may not have committed [at Versailles] is sufficient to explain the moral and intellectual aberration of the German people. A case of collective insanity such as National Socialism has deep roots in the character and psyche of the stricken nation. [page 33]

To be sure, there is much to abhor in the German people, and during the last few years they have shown their most repulsive features. [page 16]

... that certain tendency toward anarchy, want of moderation, and recklessness which is inherent in the German character. [page 52]

How did the German people earn this fate [of being called Boches and Huns]? What were the shortcomings and vices that caused so much resentment? [page 33]

These are only samples. In addition, the authors accept the charge that Germany was to blame for the First World War. They "hope and pray" that the Allies will win the second.

Nevertheless, the Manns insist, there is still that other Germany. There is the Germany of Goethe, of great musicians, scientists, writers; the Germany that will rise

"when the false, evil, hateful Germany will have been destroyed—and this time for more than fourteen years." It is "the Germany that we simply lump together under the name of 'Weimar.'" It must be rescued from the false, evil, hateful one. By whom? Chamberlain's Britain, Daladier's France.

Let us try to understand: The Manns have experienced the Hitler terror firsthand; they chose exile rather than submission; the horrors which they fled still cross their dreams. Nor do we forget their record of vigorous words and actions on behalf of liberty. It is at least comprehensible that the most imperfect democracy should seem to them better than "the world's nightmare" of Nazism. The danger is, they carry this attitude to a point where one is reminded of the small boy who beat his head against the wall because it felt so good when he stopped. True democracy does not yet exist, they say; at best it is only a hope. But destroy Hitler lest he destroy that hope. . . .

Still, being liberals, they cannot stop with this negative concept. The other Germany must be located more exactly and given its place in world democracy; the democracy itself needs a shot of something positive. How do they do this? "The spirit of Weimar—the European spirit" comes closest to a specific definition of what they mean by their Germany-which-is-not-Hitler. But an *improved* Weimar: one that will accord with the improved Europe which is to emerge in the peace following this war. "Europe hankers after a new order. Such an order will come, after Hitler has been overthrown." And—"The Germans' are to be won back, are to resume their place in the comity of civilized nations." In brief: European civilization has for years been thwarted in its highly civilized mission by the bad boy, Germany. Thrash him, break his spirit, then accept his European self in—yes, Federal Union!

Where, in all this high moral reordering of the world, is an economic program? Where, in fact, is there any real recognition of the economic forces that underly political developments? Or of the further recognition, following upon the first, that civilization is not forced to choose between capitalist democracy and fascism: there is a *third* way open—the way of socialist democracy. Erika and Klaus Mann virtually ignore this.

Take their section on the Weimar republic, which contains a good deal of lucid, progressive analysis. The Social Democratic leaders' surrender of revolutionary strength, their cowardice toward and ultimate collaboration with subversive reaction, are set

down in some detail. Now, there was a political party which fought—valiantly, without compromise—against these betrayals. Two of its forerunners the Manns admire, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. They were "able and willing to soften the unrealistic and often utterly irresponsible radicalism of the leftist opposition and to lead its adherents toward a lawful and democratic policy." Aside from the wholly distorted effect of limiting these two revolutionists' role to one of moderation, this is an extraordinarily oversimplified picture of tactical differences in the left movement. However, let the Manns continue. Liebknecht and Luxemburg, they say, should have fled the police, escaped death—to "preserve their moderating influence for the future." Still shaking their heads over this piece of revolutionary shortsightedness, the authors proceed to fill pages with the gruesome story of what happened during Weimar to hundreds of people who were *not* "irresponsible" and "unrealistic"—not Communists at all. The authors conclude grimly: "They were consistent, these gentlemen of the right. They did away with everyone who appeared troublesome or dangerous." Consistent, yes—terribly and fearfully more so than these two liberals who disdain leftist opposition while they despise the timidity of Social Democracy.

Do not forget, though, that Weimar (improved) is the authors' conception of a Germany that will take its place in the new Europe. The German republic, they tell us in italics, "*was far from bad*." Under its reign, art and music, drama and literature flourished again. The constitution was not followed, but just the same it was a wonderfully humane, democratic work—full of excellent intentions. Above all, there was that spirit of liberty, which fights on today by "your side." In their entire discussion there is scarcely a word to remind one of the root cause of Weimar's miserable failure—the impossibility of erecting a truly democratic state on an exhausted, Junker-ridden economy.

I have dealt at some length with their treatment of the republic because it reveals an attitude which is crucial to the tragic nonsense of their—and other liberals'—Pan-European arguments. This section on Weimar is not so absurd. Despite the illogic quoted above (and there is more of it), their treatment has a surface persuasiveness of fact and philosophy. The Manns—*pere, fils, et fille*—have always examined superstructures with an exceptional talent of originality and cultural understanding; they have been guided by an instinct toward order, reason, humane-

ness. Now, however, they are looking at more than a superstructure: nothing less than a crisis of the capitalist world. Nazism is part of that crisis and so was Weimar. The authors did not, and do not yet, regard the German republic as more than a phase of purely German history. In discussing it they often exhibit a way of thinking that seems to date back to their own Weimar days, when it was easier for them to criticize a democracy stringently. This was a time when no action, no real taking of sides, was required of them. Radicalism was "sterile and orthodox" but hardly important. The Nazi peril did not seem close until it actually arrived. As for Weimar's imperfections, why, the alternative to a faulty democracy was simple and happy: a better democracy. In short, they had very little economic insight—which did not prevent them from making some positive contributions through their devotion to democratic forms.

But now, at this time, that lack of economic understanding is all-important. It may be unfair to say that they prefer not to understand; we can say, however, that people who face economic realities honestly are on the path to socialism—for which, plainly, the Manns have no liking. Certainly no one who lacks economic insight can interpret a world crisis. This is exactly what the Manns try to do. They substitute culture and character for material forces and achieve a Dorothy Thompson. Weimar becomes a portion of Germany represented by the European spirit which in turn represents Western civilization.

In such a fashion their love of liberty is turned into a song of reaction. Civilization! they cry. Culture! Character! All of history is written for them in these three terms. To be sure, these are wonderful concepts, full of richness and promise—but only when they are integrated with reality, the material facts of life. The Manns tear them out of any meaningful context. I suspect some of the conclusions they reach will make their liberal friends wince. This business of "German character," for example—does it not smell a little of Hitler? People who respect historical truth will hardly like to see the Reformation interpreted as a stubborn German resistance to Renaissance humanism (in this connection the authors complain that "all great events of German history . . . are always 'deeds of liberation' and at the same time interfere with the development of Europe, obstacles in Western man's path toward his goal"). Admire Karl Marx or not, you will agree that it is a weird sort of special pleading to praise him only in order to condemn "the Germans" for their hostile unacceptance of his ideas. And the most fanatical moralist, I should think, would be embarrassed by the frenzied moral clichés which they throw into every paragraph of their closing chapters. (Even good taste becomes an Allied virtue.) "Dignity of man . . . the European ethic . . . human morality . . . the concept of Law . . . human claim to lib-

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Mingled with the holy water is an ounce of the rarest French perfume. Rebounding from the German character, the authors find a romantic satisfaction in Gallic tradition. These French, they are so intelligent; their way of life is so charming—"why should the Germans be the only ones to sin and suffer?" Klaus Mann, in the *Nation* of December 16, expressed ecstasy over the poet Jean Giraudoux's appointment as commissioner of information. How typical of the French, to select this "delicate and winged voice" to present their cause! The Manns have probably learned since from the papers that book-burning is now part of the French way of life. Do they know that Daladier's first action after the outbreak of war was to raid a Parisian boulevard bookshop which specialized in anti-fascist literature by former citizens of the Third Reich, many of them representing the Other Germany? Have they discovered how many of those same writers are in French concentration camps? (Heinrich Mann, according to latest reports, is permitted to remain at liberty only "in consideration of his advanced age.") The shouting of holy crusades is hard on winged voices.

Much of the rhetorical pother in the book's last section arises from panic as well as unreality. Democracy, culture, civilization *must* be saved—for whom and to what purpose?—therefore, Europe *must* unite. The authors' ideas for achieving such unity are admittedly vague; every concrete suggestion they do make can be dismissed by simply writing after it: how? They are not sure whether the USSR would fit into a United States of Europe—perhaps it had better serve as a buffer between Europe and Asia. (Anyway, if Western man isn't saved through the war against Germany there will be a century of barbarism followed by some new form of civilization. This new civilization would probably have an "Asiatic cast"—in which case "we" would not feel at ease in it.) There is almost no other mention of the Soviet Union; but, then, as the authors explain, Europe is their subject. Which leads them straight to the United States of America. Thus: ". . . the economic, political, and moral interests of America and of Europe's democracies are identical." So: "Europe and America belong together. American civilization and morality has its origin in the very Europe now threatened and forced to defend itself." Indeed, "some Europeans . . . believe that the younger, sounder, more vital American nation is destined and able to take over the initiative of a civilization which has grown weak and tired in the 'Motherland,' Europe."

These are fine-feathered phrases. But it takes more plumage than that to make the buzzards of war look pretty.

Of course, the authors assure us, they do

not want America actually to enter this war. Only non-military support is asked of us; our great role comes after the conflict, in the era of reconstruction. We seem to have heard this before. Indeed, the Manns quote their American acquaintances on it. As an American, then, let me say to these two writers: "We don't think it is good for your civilization to be saved by American capitalism." That was done once before, less than two decades past. The result was no less unfortunate for American life than for the peoples of Europe. Our capitalism offers no hope at all for the future of American civilization; how then can it save Europe's?

BARBARA GILES.

The Nineteen-Thirties

SINCE YESTERDAY, by Frederick Lewis Allen. Harper & Bros. \$3.

WITH this companion volume to *Only Yesterday*, Mr. Allen moves forward to become a celebrated annalist. He repeats for the nineteen-thirties what he achieved with verve and piquancy for the preceding decade. Out of the torrent of events he reconstructs the years of our national life from the panic in 1929 to the outbreak of war last September. As a deftly executed almanac the work is absorbing. As interpretative history the book is less than satisfactory because it fails to delineate main currents and give them their significance both in terms of space and analysis.

To relate the story of the United States for the past ten years is a gigantic task in organization of data. Mr. Allen, however, can shift almost imperceptibly from remarks on the Federal Reserve indices for industrial production to the influence of Mae West's curves on women's undergarments. His usage of transition sentences is incredible. No sooner have you emerged from a page on technocracy, than he will have you nibbling at some momentary craze that had the country trembling. With the greatest ease you swing from the first Roosevelt inaugural to the bank holiday, to Max Baer's knockout of Schmeling, to the unemployed, the skiing mania, the retreat from the churches, women's hats, fads in miniature golf, carousing in night clubs, the Hauptmann trial, and back to what Congress was doing for the CCC camps. The compilation of hundreds of items—sexual, sociological, political, recreational, technological, economic, artistic—are all woven into a texture smooth as satin.

The narrative is kept from sprawling by craftsmanship rather than a unifying idea of the time and its meaning. In a sense Mr. Allen cannot have perspective, writing as he does so closely to events. But even if he were recounting the first decade of this century I venture that he would produce the same kind of book. As a middle-class humanist democrat schooled in the work of the Beards he can show genuine sympathy for the man without a job. His is also a charitable