

moral problems of our day, and at forty-three he has taken on the stature of a sage not only in France, where his intellectual struggles sometimes assume the proportions of Cabinet crises, but in America, too, for one hears that he is one of the heroes of our brighter college students.

The Fall is unquestionably an event, but it is hard to say what the event means, or even what sort of book it is. It has been called a parable, but a parable is a story with a point and here there is little story and no easily discernible point. Even in France, there must have been some confusion as to what *The Fall* meant and whom Clamence was intended to represent, for Mr. Camus has seen fit to add to the English edition an epigraph from Lermontov about his book *A Hero of Our Time* (1839): "'A Hero of Our Time,' gentlemen, is in fact a portrait, but not of an individual; it is the aggregate of the vices of our whole generation in their fullest expression."

This, at least, suggests the considerable way in which the Camus book succeeds. Using some of the techniques of Browning's dramatic monologues, borrowing something of the cynicism and acerbity of a long line of French writers, including La Rochefoucauld and Molière, Mr. Camus does a clean-cut demolition job on human motives, human pretensions, and human virtues; he blasts the average lover, lawyer, politician, and humanitarian sky-high. This has been done before, of course, and no doubt politics, love, and decency will survive, but it is salutary to have it done again by Mr. Camus, who writes with a provocative subtlety that scarcely any other modern writer can match. Some of his ideas are plainly derivative, and a few are even a trifle banal, but most are sharp and fresh, and in circling around them, dropping them, and returning to them, with increasing power and an ever-changing emphasis, he creates a sort of intellectual suspense that is rare indeed.

Lasciate ogni Speranza

So far, so good. In the final monologue, though, it seems to me, Mr. Camus shrugs the whole thing off. He has done what he says somewhere

that Kafka does in *The Trial*—"offers everything and confirms nothing." Until near the end of the book, Clamence—composite or character, symbol or individual, it doesn't matter—genuinely conveys "the vices of our whole generation." Then, as he withdraws to his cloud-covered mountaintop, he deliberately throws suspicion on himself, ticking off the writers of all confessions, including his own, for dressing up the corpse. One winds up wondering what Mr. Camus really thinks of his hero. Is Clamence a megalomaniac, a figure of morbid fun, a chronic liar, a serious spokesman, or none of these, or all of these? One gets no answer.

When Mr. Camus wants to, he can write with great clarity, so one must suppose that it was by design

that he ended an otherwise brilliant book in a haze of spoofery, caprice, and mystification.

It must be added that Mr. Camus, an ambitious writer, is apparently out to create a body of work rather than a series of detached and self-contained novels, and he will undoubtedly have more to say about guilt and innocence, virtue and vice. In *The Fall*, he compares Amsterdam with its concentric canals to Hell with its concentric circles, and he calls his hero Jean-Baptiste. Well, Hell was only the first of three places that Dante visited, and John the Baptist was only a forerunner. It is extremely doubtful that Mr. Camus will leave the girl in the water and modern man sickly surveying his conscience at a derelicts' bar in Amsterdam.

Tourists Never Go There

GOUVERNEUR PAULDING

VILLAGE IN THE VAUCLUSE, by Laurence Wylie. Harvard. \$5.50.

It could be argued, but the argument would not get very far, that our need to know the details of life in Peyrane, a village of the South of France, is not a pressing one. The *Michelin Guide* does not list Peyrane. Perched on a hilltop, the village boasts no restaurant "worth the trip," no hotel terrace "with a view"; no Counts of Provence, no troubadours are buried

in its undistinguished church. The infinitely depressing *Fielding's Travel Guide to Europe* (Sloane) does not list Peyrane either, which is not surprising since the village could hardly provide him with occasion to give counsel as to the best way of making pickups or to warn travelers desirous of witnessing salacious "exhibitions" that they should insist on seeing the dirt before paying. Tourists do not go to Peyrane, and were they to do



so the village people would not know what to do with them.

Peyrane is just a French village. But Thomas Hardy's villages are just English villages, if much more dismal than most; Turgenev's villages are just villages in Russia that one cannot even find on a map; Ignazio Silone's villages are just villages in southern Italy. And the writer does not even have to be great. A man who reports accurately and honestly will be, in his way, as interesting and as useful as the artist whose account is always heightened, illumined, and interpreted.

IF YOU are going to Peyrane you are not simply passing through on your way elsewhere. [The road climbs the hill to the village and stops dead.] You must have some reason for going there."

In Mr. Wylie's case there was no "if." With his wife and children he went to Peyrane and lived there for a year. His reason for going seems clear: He was bored to death, and exasperated beyond telling, by generalizations about a nation he had known and liked. Floods of political, literary, and pseudo-philosophical reporting have been reducing France to a dreary intellectual screen on which disincarnated figures fight each other to a standstill. The conversation overheard from France has been between petulant ghosts: Simone de Beauvoir chattering about women, Sartre chattering about despair and the heroism that must be made to spring from it; or it has been the endless chatter of the politicians—about taxes, about making or unmaking Europe, or about lost grandeur. No one has been talking about people simply earning a living, or about the young couple taking a weekend in the country, driving their 2 CV Citroën, riding their tandem bicycle, hiring a rowboat on the Marne. And no one has been speaking of the villages except to say that the villagers cannot be brought to pay their taxes.

Mr. Wylie, one suspects, got fed up with the conspiracy to persuade him that there is no life anywhere in France. He went to Peyrane.

THE GREAT French historian Fustel de Coulanges, whenever one of his students proposed some sweeping

generalization, would stop him short. "Have you a text?" he would ask. *Village in the Vaucluse* is a text Fustel would have enjoyed. It is meticulous and precise documentation that the inhabitants of a definitely situated community in France, in our times, are living with prudence, humor, enjoyment, and dignity. They also have their troubles, their griefs, and their failures. The men play at the game of *boules*, the volunteer firemen have their annual banquet, the children study very hard in school. In this admirable book the people of Peyrane are fat or thin, young or old; they even have faces, for Mr. Wylie, at their own request, took their pictures. With this text as a base, an optimistic generalization about the stuff of which France is made is more than permissible.

BEST

desk dictionary on the market. That's the American College Dictionary. Kept always up-to-date.

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE DICTIONARY

Choice of fine bindings from \$5.75
At all bookstores. **RANDOM HOUSE**

National Book Award Winner

FOR NON-FICTION

"Mr. Kennan is a poet as well as a philosopher. The Russia of 1917 comes alive under his persuasive touches."

—N. Y. TIMES BOOK REVIEW

"A remarkable performance . . . absorbing for the general reader."

—N. Y. HERALD TRIBUNE

560 pages, with 16 pages of illustrations and 4 maps. \$7.50

GEORGE F. KENNAN'S

Russia Leaves the War

Vol. I. of Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1920

Order from your bookstore
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS



Somber Lunacy, Stern Illogic

GORE VIDAL

AN INTIMATE JOURNAL OF THE DREYFUS CASE, by Maurice Paléologue. *Criterion*. \$4.50.

In October, 1894, the young Maurice Paléologue, ambassador and Academician-to-be, was assigned by the French Foreign Office to act as special liaison between the Quai d'Orsay and that curious moral melodrama, *l'affaire Dreyfus*. As the scandal unfolded in all its puzzling intricacy, Paléologue kept a journal which, published now for the first time, captures as perhaps no other account does the day-by-day tension of a five-year crisis that was to split the political and the social life of France, leaving scars to this day unhealed.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus was an ordinary, rather unappealing man whose only distinction before his tragic case was his appointment to the general staff. He was the first Jew ever to be accepted in the inner circle of an army that was traditionally anti-Semitic, romantically tracing its descent from those lively opportunists, the Crusaders of the Middle Ages.

The appointment of Dreyfus was an experiment in liberalism, and, needless to say, it was resented by many officers, among them Colonel Sandherr, the splendidly egregious chief of counterintelligence who resolutely maintained that Jewish racial loyalties could never coincide with French interests. But Sandherr was overruled and Dreyfus was accepted as a probationer in January of 1893.

IN THE fall of 1894, an agent of counterintelligence stole from the German Embassy a memorandum, the famous *bordereau*, listing a number of secret and semi-secret French military documents for sale. Moving rapidly and with stern illogic, Sandherr and his assistant, Major Henry, decided that Dreyfus was the spy. His handwriting, the fantastic M. Bertillon of the Sûreté

declared, was the same as that of the *bordereau*. Later, when the defense revealed obvious dissimilarities, Bertillon confidently maintained that Dreyfus had of course tried to disguise his writing. At subsequent trials, when the handwriting of Ferdinand Esterhazy, the actual spy, was found to be identical with that of the *bordereau*, the army blandly proposed that Dreyfus had deliberately imitated Esterhazy's hand. This sort of somber lunacy was to mark the entire affair.

THROUGH Paléologue's eyes we observe the various stages of the crisis: The leak to the newspapers that forced the army to court-martial Dreyfus on no more evidence than the *bordereau* and a false accusation by Major Henry. The exile to Devil's Island. The efforts of Dreyfus's brother and wife to reopen the case. The apprehension of Esterhazy as the real spy. The army's crude exoneration of Esterhazy. The ugly hysteria of anti-Semitism. The rallying of French intellectuals to Dreyfus's defense (the word "intellectual" was coined at this time to describe those artists and scholars who, in sudden articulate congress, wanted justice done). The exhibitionistic but useful attack on the government by Zola; his subsequent trial and conviction. The political and emotional alienation of the intellectuals (and where will *that* end?) from the bourgeois life of the nation. Major Henry's forged evidence against Dreyfus; his arrest and suicide. Everything is recorded with dry clarity in Paléologue's journal.

And there are revelations, too. Esterhazy, that remarkable melodramatist, was not the only spy. There was another, whom Paléologue does not name, a high-ranking officer "now commanding troops." There is also a brilliant portrait of the clever, temperamental President

Casimir-Périer, whose dislike of the War Minister, General Mercier (a marvelous figure beautifully preserved in the amber of Proust's *Jean Santeuil*), contributed so much to the final trial in '99 when Dreyfus, again found guilty, was pardoned and finally reinstated. One learns, too, in a fresh way, what one has always suspected: that certain high-ranking generals like Gonse were, simply, stupid and that Dreyfus had bad luck in his lawyers; the first, Demange, lacked energy while the second, Labori, was a demagogue whose thundering manner hopelessly antagonized the court. One is also grateful to find that at least Paléologue and the Foreign Office were aware from the beginning of the spuriousness of certain letters forged by Major Henry purporting to be from the German Kaiser to Dreyfus—a shocking naïveté on the part of those military men and journalists who took for granted that emperors correspond intimately with minor secret agents.

THIS JOURNAL is certainly the most interesting record published so far of the Dreyfus case. It unfolds like a classic mystery novel, the reader knowing no more at any given moment than the narrator—an ideal form in which to render legal complexities. Yet, for all of Paléologue's clarity, one has at times the uneasy impression that he is disingenuous. He confesses right off that he destroyed the original manuscript from which this narrative was taken. He also admits to certain rearrangements of the text, in the interest, no doubt, of verisimilitude.

But Paléologue was an artist as well as a diplomatist, and one must allow him a certain license in his evocation of the past. His attitude, in any case, was beautifully civilized and it is his posthumous gift to the world to remind the living once again of the profound significance of this melodrama. He poses the issue clearly: Does any institution, whether it be the general staff of an army or the governing arm of the body politic itself, have the right, for its own convenience, to sacrifice a man without real regard for his innocence or guilt? It is especially useful now to be reminded of the way another age met and resolved a perennial issue.