

are also essays on Alexander the Great and the surrender to Asian ways that went with his conquests.

Leaving the fourth century, she writes sympathetically of the Stoics and of Plutarch. The Stoics she exalts for bringing to a pitch the Greek tradition of self-mastery and for their talent for moderation (with all his austerity, Zeno, the founder of the school, was not above owning up to a fondness for beans soaked in wine), and Plutarch she portrays with delicacy and devotion, convincing us that he, who in a favorable era would have been a great public man, furnished an eternal pattern for public-spirited men living at a great distance from the center of political power. "You will have no wars to wage, no tyrants to put down, no alliances to consolidate," Plutarch wrote to a young Greek; but he went on to advise his friend to do what he could—"abolish some petty abuse, fight some bad custom, revive some charitable foundation, repair an aqueduct, rebuild a temple, adjust a local tax."

IN A wistful epilogue to a wistful book, Miss Hamilton takes up the curious speculation as to what history might have been if the Christian church had followed not the Roman way, with its emphasis on organization and discipline, but the Greek way, with its emphasis on independence and self-mastery. If the Greek way had been followed, she says, "The cruelties practiced in his [Christ's] name might not—almost surely would not—have defaced the religion of love," and there she leaves us.

There is a great deal left out of this book—and of *The Greek Way* (the two should be read together)—and even the Sunday-afternoon student of Greece will want other books as a corrective (the writer can recommend, as a starter, the section on Greece in Herbert Muller's *The Uses of the Past* and H. D. F. Kitto's Pelican book *The Greeks*), but certainly Miss Hamilton's Greece, perceptively and tenderly drawn, is one we can profitably start with. It is a Greece, primarily, in which the great actors speak their parts on a distant and austere stage, but those parts will live as long as men examine themselves and their destiny.



Berlin Society Before the Wars

HORTENSE CALISHER

A LEGACY, by Sybille Bedford. Simon and Schuster. \$3.50.

These days, in the face of the novel's protean forms and laissez-faire habits, only the impudent or the unsophisticated dare raise the raw question, when a book is presented as a novel, of whether it is one. But if we can no longer ask that a novel take a particular form, or hew to a single one, we may still keep one weathered old stipulation—that it move with a continuous and imaginative sense of life. Anything goes in the novel if that goes. Here, in this brilliantly odd, at times oddly tedious chronicle of the merger of two impressively baroque families in pre-First World War Berlin, everything goes remarkably, except that.

"I spent the first nine years of my life in Germany," the book begins, "bundled to and fro between two houses." There follows a wonderfully plummy description of the inhabitants of one of these—the Merzes, parents of the narrator's father's first wife, who still give their son-in-law an income and his second family a home—very rich upper-bourgeois Jews whose eccentrically stertorous mode of life, so gleefully recognizable to anyone who has ever met it, demands the wittiest reportage, and gets it:

"While members of their . . . world were dining to the sounds of Schubert and of Haydn, endowing research and adding Corots to their Bouchers . . . the Merzes were adding bell-pulls and thickening the upholstery. No music was heard at Voss Strasse. . . . They took no exer-

cise . . . kept no animals . . . and there was a discreet mouse-trap set in every room. . . . Grandmama Merz had never taken a bath without the presence and assistance of her maid. They did not go to shops. . . . In his younger days Grandpapa Merz had gone to board meetings; now he still received . . . an individual who presented himself with a satchelful . . . of bank notes and gold . . . handed to the butler Gottlieb who paid the wages . . . Money, like animals, was not hygienic, and no one was supposed to handle *used* notes . . . everybody was paid straight off the press. The subsequent problem of change was not envisaged."

WE SETTLE down happily to what begins to be a first-rate memoir, semi-autobiography or who-cares-what—something reminiscent of Osbert Sitwell's chronicles, written by a mind more temperately endowed perhaps, and more interested in other people's *longueurs* than its own, but similarly a book in which the interest is in the "painterly" detail of a milieu so insolently rococo that one would never think of carping because the people blend too well with their own *chinoiseries*, or stand too marvelously still.

In the second chapter we meet the paternal side, the Feldens: "The language spoken in his family was French, the temper and setting of their lives retarded eighteenth century; their seat had always been in a warm corner of Baden . . . their home was Catholic Western Continental Europe. . . . They ignored,

despised and later dreaded, Prussia . . ." We find ourselves happily in an eighteenth century vignette, a sequestered landscape full of originals. We might almost be in Isak Dinesen country, a little flatter, perhaps, without the allegorical doubling of the Dinesen imagination.

Then, with the account of Johannes, the gentle Felden son who is forcibly sent to Benzheim, a Prussian cadet institution where boys were reared "in a formative atmosphere of organized hunger, brutality and spiritual deprivation," the story begins. The tale of his running away, pilgrimage home, reincarceration because of political intrigue, and of his subsequent madness, is a moving one, and with it the book moves beyond its first air of accomplished pastiche; we are to have a novel after all.

Much later, Johannes reappears; the almost forgotten politically expedient arrangement by which he had been kept hibernating for thirty years, although mad, as a commissioned officer in the army explodes at last into the great Felden Scandal with which the book ends. He is the "legacy." But with that early account of his youth, any sustained novelistic impulse seems to have ended.

Variations on an Open String

Once we take up the story of Julius, the dilettante Felden brother, of his marriages, first to a Merz daughter, second to Caroline Trafford, the narrator's English mother, we are awash in a highly complex story told in jerks and patches, emerging with bewildering virtuosity in any number of styles, each of them done well. Mrs. Bedford can write with a historian's expertise and a journalist's objectivity, with an interior decorator's antic extravagance or the fat detail of a duchess compiling a cookbook, and at times with impressionistic softness—although the courtship scenes, which the blurb calls "Renoir paintings come alive," are rather more like Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* in which almost everyone is fully clothed. Meanwhile the dialogue takes to an elision resembling the Ivy Compton-Burnett manner without the meat, for where the powerful elisions of Compton-Burnett are the reductions of a mind

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packed deep with the mordant lore of human mistakes, Mrs. Bedford's are skitteringly thin.


One ends by wishing that she would either blend her styles or choose one of them. For her people become lost in variations akin now more to tapestry than to painting. Julius, who is reported a bore, remains one. Caroline is everything—beautiful, aristocratic, wild, true, and gallant too, according to the highest standard open to an English heroine (“Caroline is an English gentleman”)—and she remains in that limbo reserved for characters who are everything. Both Julius and Caroline have been immobilized by the writer's mercurial objectivity. At times it seems that she is the only person in the book who isn't standing still.

MRS. BEDFORD is a writer of such obvious parts, of so many entertaining and intelligent ones, that it seems churlish to remark either that there are almost too many of them here for a satisfying whole or that the most interesting one by far is the veiled personality of the writer herself. However, in fiction one ought never to be given time or scope enough to ask the intrusive lethal question “Is this partly true?” and one asks it often here.

But one remembers, also, in how many different ways a novel can succeed or fail. American novels, when they do not succeed, tend to go invertebrate. The English recede, with more taste, to the skeleton. If this novel has an insistent nonfictional rattle at the back of it, it is the rattle of some very elegantly manipulated bones.

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Some of Them

Were Young and Happy

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN, by Henriette Roosenburg. Viking. \$3.50.

Perhaps not since the days of Peter the Hermit and the People's Crusade have such strange and diverse folk been present in such numbers in the territory of another country as in Germany in the spring and early summer of 1945. There were the slave laborers, the newly freed P.W.s and political prisoners, the numerous foreigners who had found their way into the Wehrmacht, and, of course, the Russian, British, Canadian, French, and U.S. Armies.

As though to compensate for all the man-made destruction, there was never a spring like that one. For days on end the sun was soft and warm; the sky was cloudless blue; the fields which by some magic of survival had been sown amid the thunder of collapse turned from brown to pastel and then to deeper green. The towns still stank of destruction, but the countryside had the rich aroma of reviving life.

IT WAS fortunate that nature was so benign—or perhaps only that the war ended in the spring and not the winter—for tens of thousands of the involuntary residents of the Reich promptly put their freedom to use by going home. The Autobahnen and every main road had two lines, one going north or east and one going west or south. In addition many rode or flew, but by far the most dramatic migration was of those who had no claim on transport or who couldn't wait. They put their possessions in a baby carriage or a rucksack and started home on foot.

This migration is the backdrop for Miss Roosenburg's book. Different people saw the war from different places and have told about it as they knew it—from Ike at SHAFF on down. Miss Roosenburg saw it as a member of this thin column of walkers that stretched to the horizon.

It was supposed by all who saw

these lines that the people were heavily freighted with sorrow, deprivation, and the other burdens of life. This was certainly not true of the author. Still in her twenties, she had been a member of the Dutch Resistance. At the end of the war, with two other Dutch girls of her own generation, she was under sentence of death in a prison at Waldheim near the Czech border. They had been under sentence for many months, but because of some unexplained inefficiency the Nazis had never carried it out.

Suddenly and miraculously they were free. There was an infinity of perils between themselves and their homeland—a ravaged countryside in which food would be hard to find, a myriad of Russian soldiers in an exceedingly frolicsome mood, and the danger of long detention in the D.P. camps that were being organized for people precisely in their situation. The three girls acquired first one and then a second Dutch lad as companions; managed to tame the Russian animal spirit without succumbing to a fate that—having faced a genuine rather than a hypothetical choice—they had some difficulty in regarding as worse than death; foraged for food with consummate skill and success; at one point floated luxuriously along the Elbe for several days in a rowboat; and eventually arrived in Holland. To tell more would be to spoil a skillfully told story.

IT is probably wrong to look for serious historical purpose in a book like this, but I hazard that there is a little. Eventually some worthy scholar will write a history of the great sorting out of populations in 1945. Miss Roosenburg's book will remind him that not to all of these pilgrims was it a time of terrible pain and tragedy. In some cases the human spirit responded to deliverance with rare gaiety.