

The Spirit of Loyalist Spain

MAN'S HOPE. By André Malraux. Translated by Stuart Gilbert and Alastair Macdonald. New York: Random House. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by BEN RAY REDMAN

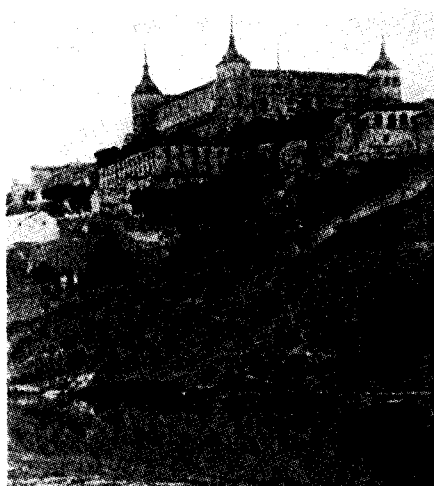
ANDRÉ MALRAUX has lived his best books before writing them. "Man's Fate" was lived in revolutionary China between 1925 and 1927; "Man's Hope" was lived in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary Spain during the first eight months of the war that some call civil, that others call a war against foreign invasion. But these novels have little in common with those other lived books that are autobiographies, or diaries, or reminiscences, or mere jobs of reporting by writers who have hunted adventure for the sake of having something to report. With Malraux the translations from life into literature have been marked by an expansion and projection of the author's self, by an imaginative, purposeful comprehension of a whole body of experience that he had known personally only in part. His activities in Canton did not set the limits to "Man's Fate," and "Man's Hope" is not bounded by his experiences as a flyer for Republican Spain. Malraux, revolutionist and propagandist, has not ceased to be a creative literary artist.

"Man's Hope" creates, or re-creates, nothing less than the anatomy and physiology and mentality of revolutionary Spain; and this mind and body end by revealing what, for want of better or less suspect words, we must still call their animating soul or spirit. If any readers are puzzled as to why Republican Spain, Loyalist Spain, the Spain of the *de facto* and *de jure* government, should be called revolutionary Spain, a little time spent with M. Malraux will set them straight. The Spanish government represents and is the Revolution. Its defenders, actuated by revolutionary ideals, think in revolutionary patterns, express themselves in revolutionary terms, and move along revolutionary lines. They see their fascist enemies not as mere rebels against an established government, but as counter-revolutionists. The reader who does not understand these facts understands nothing of the matter at hand.

Revolutionary Spain, then, as M. Malraux shows it to us, is composed of heterogeneous and normally irreconcilable elements that have been temporarily united in the face of a common enemy and a common danger. At one extreme are the anarchists, the old independents, and the members of the F. A. I.; at the other extreme are the members of the Communist Party, whose true capital is Moscow. And in between there are leftists of all degrees and shades.

This union has produced, or found, a

soul. But what of this soul's mortality, if the union proves as temporary as the threat that has brought it into being? For those who cannot share M. Malraux's faith, there can be only one answer. It needs no cynicism, but only realism, to read the answer in his own record. Victory, for a United Front composed of elements normally hostile to one another, can result only in a resumption of the old hostilities, and in the destruction of the weaker by the stronger forces. The Communist Party, as M. Malraux repeatedly demonstrates, has made itself the directing brain and iron heart of revolutionary Spain. Even in the midst of war it has functioned as an *imperium in imperio*. After victory, it could only be true to itself and to its announced historical mis-



"We see fascist field guns charged by loyalists . . . and assist at the several stages of the siege of the Alcazar." . . . (The Alcazar, from "The Siege of the Alcazar" by McNeill-Moss: Knopf.)

sion. What price solidarity then? New battle lines would be drawn, and the blood of peasants and dialecticians would flow in a new and less noble cause. Meantime, with victory not in sight, the United Front in Spain has given us one of the most magnificent manifestations of the unconquerable human spirit that is yet known to history. And André Malraux is, as yet, its greatest historian and most effective interpreter.

His history is that of an artist who is master of facts, his interpretation that of a believer who is conversant with all the nuances of faith and with all heresies. His method is impressionistic, the method that might be used by an ideal film director, who boldly employed cuts, dissolves, and fades, with a total effect in view. His narrative moves swiftly from front to front, from one group of characters to another, but every move and every character adds substantially to the picture that is being created in the reader's mind, of the people of Spain engaged in revolutionary war.

We are introduced to the war on that July night in 1936, when the Railroad Workers' Union at Madrid rang up one station after another along the Northern Railroad to learn, from profane and abusive relays up and down the line, that the fascist revolt was in full swing and was claiming new towns and territories hourly. We take leave of it, some eight months later, with the defeat of the Italians and Moors at Brihuega. Malraux makes us witness those eight months of civil war in all its phases. We watch the revolvers being doled out to the anarchists of Barcelona, and listen to that newest weapon of organized frightfulness, the radio loud-speaker. We see fascist field guns charged by loyalists in light touring-cars, follow the deadly maneuvers of the *dinamiteros*, "the last body of men who can face the machine on equal terms," and assist at the several stages of the siege of the Alcazar. We are present at the routs of Toledo and Malaga, and are taken to Madrid during bombing and bombardment. We fly with the International Air Force (no one has ever described all the sensations of war flying better than Malraux), cheer the appearance of the first Russian pursuit planes over Madrid, and cheer again when the old Spanish crates come sweeping in formation over the battle lines of Guadalajara. We wait with men who are waiting to be shot, three by three, by a fascist firing squad. Our eyes are riveted upon death in its grisliest and most grotesque forms; we remember the blood of a butcher slaughtered on his own counter, the lifeless body astride the battering ram, the man who wriggled like a cockchafer, and the other man whose mouth kept opening and shutting like that of a suffocating fish. We are shown the ugliest of wounds in all their horridness and horror. Thanks to Malraux, we penetrate to the heart of courage and of cowardice. And Malraux—I say it after sober thought—has described men at war, and the physical incidents of war, as truly as any writer I have ever read, and more movingly than any other.

But if this were only a book of action, it would be only half the book it is. It is also a book of thought, and in it is some of the most significant thinking of our time—thought of which we must all take notice, thought that is making history. A review cannot do justice to it. One must listen to Garcia and Manuel and Hernandez and Magnin and the "Negus" and the rest. I will quote only one colloquy. Hernandez asks why the revolution cannot be brought about by "the most humane element of mankind." And Garcia replies: "For the simple reason, my dear fellow, that the most humane people don't stand for revolution. They stand for public libraries and . . . cemeteries. More's the pity!"

Those who believe that they belong to the most humane element of mankind are the last who can afford to ignore "Man's Hope"—if there are any who can afford to ignore it.

An Intellectual Vacation

PHILOSOPHER'S HOLIDAY. By Irwin Edman. New York: The Viking Press. 1938. \$2.75.

Reviewed by DAVID MCCORD

IT must be admitted in the beginning that Dr. Edman's book is one which many of us would like to write in pattern, and one which a great many others in its present accomplishment will read with interest if not with profit. "Philosopher's Holiday" is plainly a seductive title; behind the title is the gentle and encouraging apology; and behind the apology a score of chapters full of the kindest sort of invitation. There is little pretension. Perhaps that is why I expected more than I found.

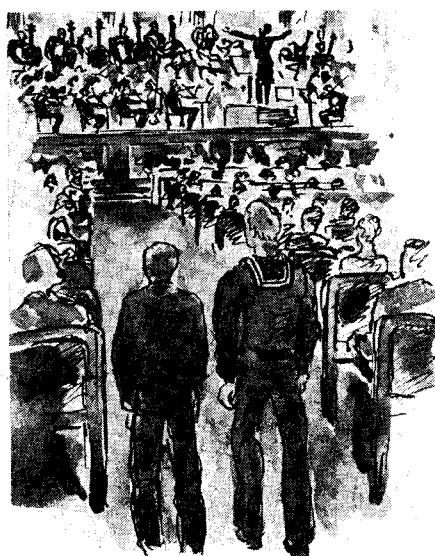
What I found (what most readers will find) is the inner report of a sensitive, educated man who has encountered in his forty-few years a not abnormal amount of human souls, catholic literature, good music, and exposed himself to European travel. This man has read the books, heard the symphonies, indulged in theories, grown angry from injustice, answered responsive voices, dreamed in the foreign twilights common to more people than most of us admit. He has seen, done, and heard so much of the right thing that more than one reader of his notes will wonder why he has not told us more about it. I can think of a number of writers who, with the same set of symbols, the identical stimuli, would fail of producing for the layman half so good a book. But Dr. Edman happens to be a philosopher of attainment and report: his position endows him with primary access to certain mysteries of life—or at least we think it does. It is therefore a little disappointing to the reader to be able to draw most of his conclusions in advance.

This is not to be unfair. After all, "Philosopher's Holiday" can mean a holiday from philosophy, as a carpenter's holiday, is a holiday from hammering. "But in comparison with the final truth of things which a god might know," says the concluding sentence in the book, "even the most serious philosophy would seem a child's play too." Dr. Edman may contend on evidence that "such meditations as have crept into these pages are the veriest holiday triflings." Granted! but I wish they had reached the depths for which any reader may see that he is searching.

There is no doubt that the book renders an attractive flavor and was well worth the writing. It has the entertainment which the author hoped it would have. It has a sense of adventure, and it sets up the right vibrating in the chords of personal experience. We may easily identify ourselves with many things in nearly every chapter. But I wish I could not as easily identify his Plato, poetry, and music. One likes to hear the wreathed

horns of some other Tritons, haply unknown. Once, as an undergraduate in philosophy, I absentmindedly signed a paper "David Hume," perhaps out of feeling for a Scot whose Christian name I had the luck to share. My teacher (like Dr. Edman, a great Platonist) gave it the necessary public attention; and I fear that some of those who will come to share Dr. Edman's holiday will wish that he had permitted himself some voyage farther away from the classroom to which (with its more elementary figures and illustration) he is absentmindedly returning again and again. His Latin pun of *Eheu fuges, eheu fuges*, in the midst of some musical memories, permits us to remark that in his more palestral moments he is showing us but Whitehead sepulchers.

No reviewer would care to pick these textual flaws were he not convinced of the good things on the good side. The



Jewell V. Jones at Carnegie Hall. (From the jacket of "Philosopher's Holiday.")

chapter on Little Older New York, for example, is wistful in reflection and penetrating in detail. His two best characters, M. Platon, the physician-philosopher, and Jewell V. Jones, the sailor-philosopher-milkman, are not only worth acquaintance, but will remain long in the mind. I greatly enjoyed his chapter on former students and his observations on love in Luxembourg (nearly as good as Donald Moffat, the specialist in the field). The long chapter called "Sane Englishmen" is an extension of its remarkable prototype in his admired Santayana ("Soliloquies in England"). Dr. Edman doesn't say it with the Santayana wit and cadence, but his conclusions are sound and less snobbish than the master's. Finally, it is curious that a love of Santayana and a natural love of verse as well as of music has not made Dr. Edman a finer craftsman in prose. He allows himself some strange

twists of sentence; and it is entirely impossible to overlook such writing as this on page 118: "He seemed older than he had been, but he had always seemed grown up. He had, I had heard, had various reasons for discouragement, both personal and professional, since he had left college." There is nothing else nearly so bad as that. "The arts are the languages of men," he says elsewhere very beautifully. Let one keep but the sound of his honey of Hymettus.

David McCord is the author of several books of essays and verse, including "Oddly Enough" and "Bay Window Ballads."

Men and Machines

F.O.B. DETROIT. By Wessel Smitter. New York: Harper & Bros. 1938. \$2.50.

Reviewed by LOUIS ADAMIC

WAITING in a long line before the Holt automobile plant in Detroit, two young workers get into conversation, and by a ruse manage to slip into the employment office ahead of the others and get jobs. Bennie, the narrator, is an old hand at motor assembly; Russ, fresh from the timber lands of upper Wisconsin, is unbroken to the servitude of mass-production machinery.

With Bennie as his assistant, Russ's first job is to run the manipulator, "a kind of derrick that handles chunks of hot steel." Russ, who has a gift for engineering, learns to work its various levers as if he were playing an organ. But the manipulator is outmoded, and Russ is put on the belt where he has to put so many nuts per minute on motors streaming by him. This job is maddeningly monotonous, requires no intelligence, only a habit of certain hand movements.

Then comes a layoff and months of inactivity, cold, hunger, bewilderment, squabbles with his wife, who once wanted to go clamming with him, but now that there is a baby feels differently. When the plant opens again, Russ—who was like a giant among dwarfs, a Paul Bunyan of Detroit, because he wanted to be a man, to run machines and not have them run him—is changed. He is never broken to the machine; he is broken by it.

This is not a new story, but it is newly and well told by a young man who for years worked in a Ford factory. He writes from the inside with powerful feeling. Machines and workers are vividly described in a simply told, restrained, but intensely moving narrative. There are two episodes in this book—a fight between Russ's manipulator and a crane operated by another worker, and the situation on the assembly line when a man commits suicide—that are downright amazing, utterly different, surpassing in drama anything else I know of in literature of this kind. For them alone this book should not be overlooked, nor for what as a whole it implicitly involves—something of the story of millions of workers in America.