

attracted the angry young intellectuals of the period. Some of them later became famous, notably the literary critic Jules Lemaître, the historian Jacques Bainville, and the novelist Georges Bernanos. Before long, because of its literary flair and sensational articles, *Action française* became a feature of Parisian life. It was estimated that the journal had six times as many readers as purchasers; it was avidly followed by young men in a hurry to destroy the Republic for whatever reason. Described as "the most bizarre mixture of intelligence and vulgarity, science and stupidity," it completely disregarded the ethics of controversy in its violent invective and slanderous attacks.

IDEAS, "endlessly repeated," observes Professor Weber, "furnished justification for the vilest acts." To carry out the "tumult policy" of the Action, adherents were encouraged to break up rival meetings, to beat up opponents, to interrupt lectures at the university, to organize demonstrations, to plaster Paris with posters, and to slap cabinet ministers. To popularize reaction by dramatic appeals to patriotism the Action concentrated its attacks on "the enemy" without: Germany; and on "the enemy" within: Jews, Protestants, and Freemasons, lumped as one.

Surprising and puzzling was the attitude of the Action toward the Catholic Church, as revealed by the writings of Maurras. The prime importance of the Church, he boldly asserted, was political and social, not religious. By combining authority, hierarchy, and discipline the Church constituted "a principle of social order and a necessary ingredient of French unity." Hence it was to be maintained as a vital part of integral nationalism.

Maurras had only contempt for the mission of the Church to save souls. A blatant freethinker and a virulent anti-Semite, this "Catholic agnostic," as he called himself, ridiculed the Gospel of the "Jewish Christ," with its "dreams of justice, of happiness, and of equality." In his view, Christianity, because of its Jewish origin, was both evil and ridiculous. Maurras represented an anomalous attitude toward religion, not uncommon in France: he was a clerical without being a Catholic.

The anti-Semitism of the Action was strikingly evident during the Dreyfus Affair. In its opposition to the demand for a revision of the case, the Action asserted that Dreyfus, being a Jew, had been rightly condemned; his guilt or innocence was irrelevant. To question the judgment of the military tribunal was to question the honor of the army, something no patriotic Frenchman would do. *France d'abord!*

Professor Weber devotes considerable space to the fortunes of the Action during the interwar period. As a result of its patriotic support of the government during the First World War the Action won many recruits. Before long, however, it suffered serious setbacks. The Catholic Church now wished to be saved from friends whose royalism impugned its loyalty to the Republic and whose paganism cast discredit on its mission. In 1926 Pope Pius XI condemned the movement, and forbade Catholics to be its supporters. Later the *Action française* was placed on the Index, along with the books of Maurras.

An even more serious setback was the appearance of a powerful rival on the radical Right, the fascist Croix de Feu. The new generation of angry young men derided Maurras & Co. as too intellectual and too old. The "dynamic, alert, resolute" enemies of the Republic now flocked to the Croix de Feu, which promised "virile actions" instead of virile words.

With the defeat of France in 1940 and the establishment of the Vichy régime the Action experienced a "divine surprise." Its ideas and policies were

accepted and applied by the "hierarchical and authoritarian" government of Marshal Pétain. Paradoxically, the ultra-nationalist Action opposed the liberation of France, claiming that it would result in "the emergence of Masons, Jews, and all the political personnel eliminated in 1940." To be saved by the Germans was bitter but tolerable.

When France was liberated by the Allies, the Action, along with Vichy, went out of existence. Its famous journal ceased publication. The Action's demise caused hardly a ripple on the surface of French politics.

The Action Française was the last gasp of organized royalism in France. As a political movement it was significant but not important. Never had it been a force to be reckoned with. It was regarded as more of a nuisance than a threat to the Republic. Its significance lay chiefly in that it voiced the ideas of a dying cause in a manner to arouse national attention. As Professor Weber acutely observes, the Action was "a traditional movement preaching violent change, a minority movement in a mass age, an intellectual movement tackling a demagogic task." Only in France. . . .

From Napoleon's Fall to De Gaulle

***The French Army*, by Paul-Marie de la Gorce, translated by Kenneth Douglas (Braziller. 568 pp. \$10), and *Sixty Days That Shook the West: The Fall of France, 1940*, by Jacques Benoist-Méchin, translated by Peter Wiles (Putnam. 559 pp. \$7.95), offer clashing views on recent French history. Alexander Werth's numerous books on that country include "France 1940-1955" and "The De Gaulle Revolution."**

By ALEXANDER WERTH

IN NO other major country of the world—the United States, Britain, Russia, or even Germany—has the army been such a chronic social and psychological problem as in France. The "problem" goes a long way back — perhaps to those Napoleonic Wars, a performance the French army was never able to repeat but which, nevertheless, left it with a kind of superiority complex that even the lamentable defeat of 1870-71 was unable to destroy.

Paradoxically, the French army was never more popular with the national-

ist French bourgeoisie than after 1870-71; a large part of this class saw in it both the main "force of order" that had crushed the Paris Commune and the weapon of *revanche* that would, some day, recover the lost provinces of Alsace-Lorraine. This nationalist sentiment reached its peak in the Boulangist movement, when the bourgeoisie (and even some of the proletariat) went mad over "the man on horseback."

After that came the Dreyfus Affair, marked by a clash between the genuinely democratic forces of the Third Republic and the army hierarchy, supported by the right-wing parties, and when the former finally won the hard, ten-year-long battle, the army may be said at last to have fully submitted to the Republic, though many leading soldiers continued to have a marked distaste for the *laïque* and anticlerical Republic and found an outlet for their nationalist ambitions in the conquest and administration of Madagascar, Morocco, and other recently acquired colonial territories.

As Paul-Marie de la Gorce clearly shows in his admirable and brilliant study of the French army from the 1890s to the present time, the French officer corps was not openly "antirepub-

lican," but the top echelons were largely unsympathetic to the Republic; and it was not till the 1914-18 war that something in the nature of a complete reconciliation set in between "country" and "army" in the face of the deadly danger threatening France. Not even then were relations altogether smooth between the army and the Republic; in a towering fit of temper Lyautey resigned the post of Minister of War, shouting obscene abuse at the Chamber of Deputies, while Clemenceau made his famous remark about war being "too serious a business to be entrusted to the generals." And, soon after the war was over, there was the clash over the Rhineland problem between Clemenceau and Foch, who accused the "Tiger" of betraying France's most vital interests under pressure from Woodrow Wilson and Lloyd George.

For France, which had lost 1,500,000 men, Pyrrhic indeed was the victory of 1918 (won, moreover, only with the help of her numerous allies) and the country went in the main, and very understandably, profoundly pacifist. Although in the 1920s France built up an anti-German system of alliances with Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other East European countries, her main obsession was the fear of another German invasion; hence the vast sums that were spent on building the Maginot Line, which gave France a false sense of security for years.

So deep was France's pacifism that she did not react sharply even when, in March 1936, Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland, thus striking a deadly blow at France's whole system of alliances; for once the Rhineland was fortified by

Germany there was very little France could do to help her Eastern Allies. Thus came the *Anschluss*, Munich, and the annihilation of Poland. M. de la Gorce deals in considerable detail with the conservative "continuous front" doctrine of the top French army leaders, particularly Pétain and Weygand, and with the conceptions of modern warfare of men like the (then) Colonel Charles de Gaulle, and with the reasons why de Gaulle remained almost a solitary voice crying in the wilderness. All this is familiar enough; more remarkable is M. de la Gorce's examination of how in the 1930s the army leadership — and particularly the middle-rank officers — went thoroughly "political" for the first time. Among France's captains and majors and colonels, scared of Communism and the Popular Front, Fascist tendencies became so strong that, when it came to a showdown with Germany in 1940, their hearts were not in it. M. de la Gorce argues that although many soldiers, overwhelmed by the modern German weapons, "let themselves be taken prisoner with deplorable ease," it is also true that "many demobilized soldiers kept their memories of officers taking flight in automobiles, leaving the men they commanded to be captured."

The French officer corps sided almost unanimously with Pétain, so that we have the paradoxical spectacle (a little like 1871) of an orgy of nationalist flag-waving while the wretched Armistice Army of 100,000 men posed as the backbone of the "National Revolution" of Vichy. When, in 1942, the Germans occupied "Vichy France," the Armistice Army (with rare exceptions) meekly surrendered.

It was only thanks to de Gaulle — and Britain and the USA — that the French army was able at last to rehabilitate itself in its own eyes. Even so, 1940-42 had left it with a terrible inferiority complex, and this was not counteracted by the 1945 victory, in which France had played only a minor part.

It needed further rehabilitation. First there was Indo-China, which ended in the disaster of Dien Bien Phu; then Tunisia and Morocco were also lost, and Algeria remained the last hope.



France and her new toy.

—Culver.

Army leaders took an active part in overthrowing the Fourth Republic, and threatened to overthrow de Gaulle's Fifth Republic when they saw that the general was preparing to abandon Algeria.

Today, for the first time since 1830, the whole French army is concentrated in Europe, and it is now, thanks to de Gaulle, undergoing a badly needed process of psychological re-education and readaptation. M. de la Gorce's glimpse into the future is as fascinating as the rest of his book. One only regrets that the translation is a little clumsy at times.

I do not share some critics' enthusiasm for Jacques Benoist-Méchin's book on the fall of France in 1940. Perhaps I am a little prejudiced against the author.

As a top-ranking collaborator with the Nazis, he was, not surprisingly, sentenced to death for treason in 1947 (a fact which, by the way, the publishers are careful not to mention). As a member of Doriot's Nazi Party, and as the most pro-Nazi of all Pétain's ministers, Benoist-Méchin was keener than most of the Vichy leaders to join in Hitler's war against England.

Those postwar trials were something of a lottery. Far less guilty men, such as Georges Suarez, the brilliant biographer of Briand, were shot; Benoist-Méchin was reprieved, and is now able to pose as a respectable academic gentleman. Coming from him, I find the subtle little cracks at Reynaud and de Gaulle and Churchill in the course of his (mostly familiar) story distasteful.

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1037

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1038 will be found in the next issue.

FGHKLMBPO QCPHNG AF

SFOMNF LOG QMFXO, OPM

KPNG LOG NLD.

ZPHAFXM

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1036

The greatest mistake is the trying to be more agreeable than you can be.
—BAGEHOT.