

(as of 1941), triple hearsay; Welles's assumptions in May, 1943, as to reasons for British policy; queries by Halifax in January, 1944, as to what the Russians were up to; and he paraphrases talks in the following days with Hull, Stettinius, Berle and "other American diplomats" as disclosing that they were "equally puzzled" (though they seem to have been less so than Halifax who "began biting the fingernails of his one hand"). He also quotes Benes in September, 1941 (Fischer had "met" him in the 1930's but this book says no more of that meeting or those meetings) and May, 1943 (both of these revelations, somewhat less than striking, are repeated from an earlier volume). John Strachey in May, 1941, at mess at an airfield near Bath, apparently said nothing worth recording, but after lunch many of Strachey's fellow officers listened in the lobby to "Lord Haw Haw" on the radio and laughed. Fischer saw General Clay three times in September, 1946 (nineteen months after Yalta, the terminal date of this book's story line) when the General on each occasion expressed the hope of achieving a unification of the four occupational zones in Germany (which occasions also had already been reported in an earlier Fischer work).

Louis Fischer had some amiable prejudices. For example, he evidently did not like William Bullitt. In retelling (with surprising restraint for a journalist) the ugly story of Bullitt's self-interested spreading of unsavory gossip about Sumner Welles, he pulls an apt and typically acrid plum from Dean Acheson, who referred to Welles's "malign enemy, William Christian Bullitt, a singularly ironic middle name."

But his hard-ridden hobby-horse (really a hobby night-mare), Soviet communism, leads him to less endearing asides. For instance, a brief (three and a half pages) and irrelevant chapter is devoted to Harry Dexter White, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and the architect of the Bretton Woods Agreements, under which the international monetary relations of the Western world

have been conducted since the end of the war. White, a gallant and voluntary witness in Washington before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee in August, 1948, was denied a five- or ten-minute rest after each hour of grilling, privately requested because he was recovering from a severe heart attack. Three days later he died of this ailment. Fischer, with admirable journalistic precision, recites that, after his testimony, Harry White went by train to New York, where he was ordered by a doctor to go home and stay in bed. The following day he went by train to his country place in New Hampshire and on arrival called a doctor. The following day two doctors came; an electrocardiogram showed definite heart trouble. And the next day, after his physician had visited him twice, White died. At this point precision deserted Fischer. Picking up an item of three months later from the *Boston Globe* in which White's doctor is quoted as saying, "There is nothing to this suicide

talk," Fischer gratuitously comments: "The story of Harry Dexter White's suicide is not proven" (italics added).

As one who remembers with some vividness Mr. White's testimony and sudden death, which occasioned a great deal of public notice, I am led by this shoddy bit of prejudice to point out that—not having seen the stated item in the *Globe*—this is the first time I ever heard that there was any "story" of Harry White's having taken his own life. And I am less than persuaded by Fischer that there was any such story.

In summarizing the quality of *The Road to Yalta*, I cannot resist the temptation to borrow from George Dangerfield, an elegant historian who has also had some connection with Princeton. In a recent review of another book that purports to deal with history he wrote: "As history, it has almost no meaning. . . . one puts it down with an empty feeling."

Felled Oaks: Conversation with de Gaulle by André Malraux

(Holt, Rinehart and Winston; 128 pp.; \$6.95)

Peter P. Witonski

"What is one to do with one's soul if neither God nor Christ exists?" asked the precocious André Malraux in his second novel, *The Royal Way*. Like the other young intellectuals in his milieu he was not particularly concerned with the theological niceties of his conundrum. He had read his Nietzsche and had come to accept the Death of God as a *fait accompli*. Unlike many of his contemporaries he believed that he knew the solution to his own difficult question. Since God is most certainly dead, Man has only one truly meaningful alternative: he must embrace heroism. This was Malraux's answer to his own question, and it was a theme he was to elaborate on in the best of

his early writings, particularly in *Man's Fate*.

But heroism is nothing more than a young man's answer to a young man's question. Ultimately, as Malraux seems to have discovered in his waning years, it is a totally inadequate answer. Malraux's heroic friend Antoine de Saint-Exupéry had wisely declared that heroism was nothing more than the manifestation of one's youthful sense of invulnerability. Old men, like Malraux, are too vulnerable for heroism, although they can still play at being heroes, often with terrible consequences. Old heroes who succumb to such fanciful playacting become Walter Mitty-like travesties of their former

selves, as the seventy-year-old Malraux learned last year when he volunteered to fight for the cause of Bangladesh. But perhaps the young Malraux understood heroism to be something *different* in the first place? We may have confused the grandeur and bravado of his heroic persona with the heroic imagination of his early fiction. Perhaps, because of his own lost sense of invulnerability, he has confused himself?

Today he is no longer the dashing intellectual-adventurer who championed the Chinese revolution, searched for ancient art in the Cambodian jungle, commanded the Republican air brigade in the Spanish Civil War and risked death during the French Resistance. He has become, rather, an aging, occasionally melancholy, former Gaullist political functionary, better known to his fellow countrymen for his success in cleaning the soot off the Louvre than for his past achievements as a soldier, artist and scholar. Many of the same left-wing intellectuals who once fought on his side and praised his books have long since written him off as a reactionary apologist for the Gaullist establishment. "There are two Malrauxs," a trendy French literary journalist recently wrote. "The young revolutionary novelist is still worth reading," he explained, "but the burned-out former Minister of Culture is nothing more than an intellectual joke."

Such criticism, of course, is unfair. There is only one André Malraux, and the juxtaposition of his early revolutionary politics with his later advocacy of Gaullism only serves to confuse matters by drawing our attention away from his literary works, something which French literary pundits delight in doing. Nevertheless, the old Malraux sheds a great deal of light on the young Malraux, simply because old age seems to have stripped away much of his philosophical posturing. It is now clear to us that Malraux was never as interested in heroism as he was in heroes. He has replaced the dead Judeo-Christian God with a pantheon of heroes, and they seem to have appeased his troubled soul for

many years now. At first these demi-gods appeared as the fraternity of brave men who dominated his early fiction. Later they took the form of the great masters whose works decorated *le musée imaginaire*. Finally, in his old age, the ersatz gods have become more concrete, and strangely less godlike. The anonymous heroes who peopled his early work have given way to the great political heroes

of the twentieth century—Mao Tse-tung, Jawaharlal Nehru and, above all, Charles de Gaulle. Malraux has found food for his soul; hero worship has taken over from God worship.

This at least seems to be the point of his most recent published work, *Antimemoirs*, of which the present volume is a fragment. These memoirs, Malraux confided in his preface

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to the first volume, were, like Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, to speak to us from the grave. Nothing more, he promised, was to appear in his lifetime after the publication of the first expurgated volume. He has broken his vow and decided to publish these fragments now, he says, for reasons that "will be clear to anyone who reads them." And the reasons are indeed more than clear. In publishing *Felled Oaks* Malraux is delivering a short but eloquent message to General de Gaulle's political heirs: the General is dead, and there can be no Gaullism without him. No mere politician—certainly not the hated dauphin, President Pompidou—can take his place. As for the so-called Gaullist Party, it is composed of a gang of political parvenus, feasting on the General's glorious reputation.

The antimemoirs are exactly what they claim to be, a compendium of antimemorial jottings, telling us virtually nothing about the author. They are laced with bits of autobiographical data, fragments of unfinished novels, and dominated by the author's numerous encounters with the great intellectual and political giants of our century. At times they remind one of Johann Peter Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe*; they are equally self-serving and Olympian in tone. Like Eckermann, Malraux fails to extricate his own eccentric opinions from those of the individuals he is interviewing. Quite often Malraux the interviewer seems to succumb to Malraux the fiction writer. It is to Malraux's credit that he has anticipated this criticism. "This book," he says of *Felled Oaks*, "is an interview in the same way that *La condition humaine* (*Man's Fate*) was a report: that is to say, not at all." It is, rather, a dialogue between a man of history and a writer of fictions.

Whether or not Malraux is always accurate in reporting the General's words—and I have grave reservations about his accuracy—one still senses something of the Man of June 18th in these pages. However, it is not always de Gaulle who puts on the mantle of France. At times Mal-

raux himself lapses into his own imitation of the General, as when he recounts the story of the simple peasant woman who tried to gain entrance to the church at the General's funeral. The guards refused to let her pass until Malraux turned to one of them and said: "You should let her through: it would have pleased the General. She has the voice of France." But aside from such lapses, Malraux reserves the patriotic invocations for the General's lips.

De Gaulle, he would have us believe, was more at home among the simple farmers and shopkeepers of Colombey-les-deux-Eglises than in the company of the mighty movers of the world. In this he differed greatly from his hagiographer. The de Gaulle who emerges from these pages is a man who was saddened when he overheard one of his young nephews say of the coming of Christmas: "If Uncle Charles comes, that'll be fine, but we won't be able to have fun." He is a lover of cats, who philosophizes about their movements and attitudes. He cites the French comic strip *Tin-tin* to make a point.

When not revealing his scorn for most French politicians, de Gaulle philosophizes about the simple and the profound. "Have you met the parish priest of Colombey?" he asks Malraux.

He's a good priest. He said to me about extreme unction, "I have nearly always found the same attitude, especially among women: 'Vicar, I'll do as you say, but you know, it's not terribly important. I have never done harm to anyone; the good Lord won't refuse me.'" I realize it would be interesting to determine exactly what Catholics do believe. Men hardly know when they are dying; still, this priest is right. There are more Christians who believe that God will welcome those who have never done evil than there are Christians who believe in hell. We are too ready to accept the idea that men believe in their banners. Each of us had his little personal faith in his own little bag, believe me—Marxists as well as Catholics. . . .

But it isn't quite the same thing: to each his own Republic. The chimeras of the spirit remind me rather of fashions.

One wishes that we had more of de Gaulle's casual wisdom in this book. Each time the old man seems to have something interesting to say, Malraux pops in with some comment about Trotsky or Marx or Eastern mysticism.

The de Gaulle of *Felled Oaks* is a complete pessimist, convinced that France is finished. He makes such comments as: "The French no longer have any national ambition. . . . They have broken their contract with history." While I have no doubts that the General thought his fellow countrymen an ungrateful lot, it is important to remember that he entitled the last series of his own memoirs, dealing with his last years in power, *Memoirs of Hope*. The message delivered by de Gaulle in those last volumes was one of optimism and hope, quite different from the pessimism and despair that pervade Malraux's book.

The pessimism of this volume is the pessimism of old André Malraux confronting his hero, his god. Perhaps it is the pessimism of a man who is no longer positive about his heroes? De Gaulle was a man of a different faith, and it is a tribute to their mutual loyalty that they managed to remain as close as they undoubtedly did. De Gaulle, the devout Catholic, and Malraux, the atheist, must have had more in common than politics, but what it was is nowhere to be found in these pages. As a collection of fragments this book fails to make it on its own, although it may look better in the context of the completed antimemoirs. In French the book is as beautifully written as anything Malraux has ever penned, but the English translation is awkward and sometimes inaccurate. While it may not interest scholars of contemporary French politics, it will certainly interest those who remain curious about André Malraux's religion of hero worship.