

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

GERMAINE TAILLEFERRE*

ARRIVING in this country a few weeks ago from the south of France, I can only add my testimony to the evidence which has already reached the United States concerning my country. Notwithstanding their staunch spirit of resistance, the people under German rule today are increasingly bowed down under their burdens. By achieving the physical decline of the French, the Nazis hope that spiritual collapse will ensue. However, after two years of quasi-famine, France remains proud and great, although the necessity of liberation grows daily more urgent, since the exhaustion of reserves that are now so low is almost at hand. The immediate problem is to preserve human beings, as well as their cultural patrimony.

Since France, once so self-sufficient, is now plundered, life has grown cruel for everyone. The obsession of finding food, the exhaustion created by insufficient diet, the weariness caused by standing in endless queues in front of empty shops, the lack of clothing and of heat, all these evils imposed by the implacable will of the occupant, contribute to the prostration of the people. Every gesture, no matter how simple, is a painful effort full of strain. Innumerable and contradictory decrees make each person a delinquent. The inevitable practice of the black market (although it is so scantily supplied) is a classic example. One lives surrounded by suspicion and mistrust, fearful of agents-provocateurs.

To listen to the American or English broadcasts is an offense severely punished by prison; denunciation is encouraged by bribes of money premiums and additional ration cards. Yet innumerable French men and women do listen to the broadcasts, however blurred they may be. Those who do not own a set capable of picking up short-waves, are informed by those who do receive the news, through the underground. Sometimes this news stirs up premature hopes, as during the recent summer months, when, excited by broadcasts of statistics on American production and by the achievements of American and British aviators in France, we were led to expect a landing on our own territory and a prompt liberation.

* Mlle. Tailleferre left Marseilles late in September and after a thirty-three day journey arrived in New York.

As to politics, the old parties and subdivisions have now disappeared. Today there is one clear-cut demarcation, between those who collaborate and those who do not. The quasi-unanimity of the French people is anti-Nazi; and the fact that all people work, or seek work, by no means indicates the state of their allegiance to the actual regime.

Among collaborators I need not mention the politicians, business men or the smart set; history presumably will take care of them. Most of the names of the artists who collaborate are also familiar to readers of MODERN MUSIC which has already published several articles on that subject. Propaganda in general tends to spotlight those who collaborate only as they become public apologists of the new regime. Some of these bear great names, most of them are old. They have given way to their rulers without courage, and without greatness, largely to satisfy immediate needs and to alleviate privations of material comforts – heat, means of locomotion, food; also to satisfy that vanity so dear to artists who have often been frustrated in their youth.

Others, unknown before, both young and old, have yielded for the additional reason that their connection with the new regime has brought a remedy to the obscurity in which they were previously held. All are enticed by money and the approach of power. Many opportunists collaborate meekly, seeking any excuse. Notwithstanding the intense publicity that has been given their behavior they have, as yet, won no important following.

For an artist to work under these conditions is almost impossible. The mere effort of subsisting wastes time and absorbs energy. The means to work are also lacking. From personal experience I can refer to three forms of musical activity: concerts, radio, cinema. Musical composition is made practically impossible through lack of music paper. For more than a year I sought in vain to find paper in Lyon, Marseilles and Nice on which to copy an orchestral score. Among composers, the Jews, many of whom were prominent, particularly in the cinema industry, have been the object of additional restrictions. The production of their work is now prohibited; and neither they, nor their heirs, are allowed to receive authors' royalties, even those accruing before the anti-Semitic rulings.

Concerts are difficult to organize. Instrumentalists are not as yet properly re-grouped. The scarcity of transportation makes the circulation of musicians, of soloists, of conductors, an unattainable goal – except, of course, for those who collaborate.

The case of Paul Paray, conductor of the Concerts Colonne (internationally famous under that title but now re-named because the creator, Edouard Colonne, was a Jew) should be underlined. After the Armistice, Paray was appointed to conduct the Marseilles orchestra. He soon received instructions to cancel the hearing of a work by the Jewish composer, Paul Dukas. After refusing to comply, Paray later received formal instructions to discharge all his Jewish instrumentalists. Thereupon he informed the authorities he would resign because of his feeling of solidarity with the ensemble. Paray now conducts the symphonic orchestra in Monte Carlo, which is subsidized by the principality of Monaco and independent, at least as far as music is concerned. Paray is a courageous man at a moment in history when courage is not to be expressed by a romantic attitude, but by a deliberate and obstinate deed.

Private initiative is handicapped by general conditions. There are, of course, some exceptional instances; notably that of the Countess Jean Pastré who, in her Chateau of Mont Redon near Marseilles, supports and maintains more than forty helpless artists of all ages and creeds; without her, these men and women would have been hopelessly lost. Notwithstanding innumerable, increasing difficulties, her kindness and her charity extend to all. She also organizes concerts and lectures and lately gave a first hearing to a very fine score by Jacques Ibert written for *Midsummer Night's Dream*. She has also arranged recitals for artists such as Pablo Casals and Clara Haskil and lectures by noted critics such as Gerard Bauer.

Radio obviously has been under Vichy control. However, the purely technical contribution brought to the radio by musicians does not always indicate their political affiliation. It sometimes represents merely a concession to the need of making a living. The instrumentalists in radio are in general the same as those who play in public concerts, and many deserve admiration for their perseverance.

The orchestras have been hard hit by the anti-Semitic laws prohibiting instrumentalists or soloists to work. Despite their hardships and physical sufferings, the orchestra men in the non-occupied zone have performed very fine concerts.

In the cinema industry, production has dwindled to almost nothing. After the Armistice, confident in the fiction of autonomy of the unoccupied zone, a number of producers tried to work at Nice in the studios built a few years ago by Rex Ingram. Indeed, in July 1940, conditions appeared favorable to the production of films beyond the control of the Nazis. A

number of directors, writers, actors, engineers, and others necessary to the craft had escaped from the invader. All essential human elements were available, but once again the implacable will of the occupant paralyzed all effort. Studios needed modernizing and repair, and the means therefore had to come from the occupied area. These were of course not granted. The Germans demanded the return to Paris of the producers, their help and casts. Then the constraint became total through censorship, racial discrimination, refusal of technical means from the chemical industries for the developing of films. Even such items as nails and scenic effects, and materials for costumes – everything was lacking, since the non-occupied area is industrially non-productive. Attempts were made but all inevitably proved failures. For cinema artists there was therefore no choice other than enforced idleness or a return to Paris. This is only one instance in many of methods used by the Nazis to put down resistance.

What can I add now to all that has already been said of the artist and his relation to society? Two years of experience under German rule have taught me that all expressions of pride, dignity, spirit, aspiration of the human will, in one word, all the effort of the free mind, can be made only clandestinely. The artist and the intellectual in general have a bitter choice. They must be silent, pursue the most discreet opposition or else collaborate, even for publication of their most abstract works. German rule, faithful to the tradition of totalitarian regimes, strangles the spirit. It is a historical truth that the human mind makes its greatest progress under freedom. Under servility, its concessions to the ruling power have always debased it, without even helping to consolidate tyranny. The history of the spirit of man is that of the conquest of political and metaphysical freedoms. France has striven for centuries for freedom, material and spiritual; today she suffers, but hopes and believes that her liberation will come from her true Allies.