

No Fear, But Some Reproach 340

by Louis Allen

French Scene: Spring '66

'The king kisses the hands of my lady Abbess', rang the cry across the convent walls. The year, 1602, and the occasion, a hunting trip made by Henri IV in the neighbourhood of the Cistercian foundation of Port-Royal. The abbess in question was just eleven years old, and pattens had to be found for her to stand on to receive the king properly. It was not the abbess he came to see, though, but her father, Antoine Arnauld, who to all intents and purposes controlled the abbey of Port Royal. His daughter, Jacqueline, was only nine when she took her vows in October, 1600, though the request addressed to Rome for her to be made at once coadjutrix of the abbess described her as seventeen. Under these inauspicious circumstances of flagrant royal patronage and deception of the papal authority began the startling career of Angélique Arnauld and the two institutions of Port-Royal which were the most significant phenomena in the religious history of the 'great century' in France.

It is useful to be reminded how this purest of all the religious movements of the seventeenth century began in an atmosphere of simony and corruption, because it goes some way to explain the lazy monastic ideal against which Mère Angélique, a very vigorous, shrewd and forthright French version of St Teresa of Avila, later rebelled, and it also gives us some inkling of the family strength of the Arnaulds and their connections, which enabled Port-Royal to stand up to the Archbishop of Paris and the royal incursions under Louis XIV as long as it did. The names of Pascal and Racine eclipse everything else that came out of Port-Royal; but it needs only a cursory glance beneath the surface to realize what a great and century-long role was played by one single family, the Arnaulds, in the development of French spirituality. A wealthy lawyer, and close to the crown, Jacqueline Arnauld's grandfather, the Advocate-General Marion, selected the abbey of Maubuisson near Pontoise for her novitiate, since the abbess was Angélique d'Estrées, sister of the beautiful Gabrielle d'Estrées, mistress of Henri IV. The abbess seems to have found it convenient to offer Henri IV and his mistress for their *amours*, the shelter of Maubuisson discreet but not too far from Paris. From the abbess, Jacqueline took her confirmation name Angélique, which she was to bear in religion and make famous.

It is sometimes difficult to realize the special part played by Port-Royal, in spite of these dubious beginnings, in the reform of French

monastic life. The question of reform, which had been undertaken in Spain by St Teresa and St John of the Cross, and solved in another and rather more radical way by Henry VIII in this country, was clearly a hundred years overdue when Antoine Arnauld perpetrated his pious fraud on the court of Rome on behalf of his little daughter. Smeared with the ill-defined stigma of Jansenism, and so judged unjustly by following centuries who saw nothing but harshness in its rigid but fervent ideals, Port-Royal has had to survive also the hand of the sceptical historian in the person of Sainte-Beuve. Marc Escholier's book *Port Royal* (Laffont) is an attempt to redress the balance for readers of the twentieth century. The book appears in a series its publisher calls 'The Great Challenges of the Spirit' and it is easy to see how Port Royal fits. M. Escholier's book has many virtues. It is very readable, and this is less of a commonplace virtue than it sounds when one considers the material he digests and makes smooth: the rebarbative Latin pessimism of Jansen's *Augustinus*, the details of the arguments on casuistry in Pascal's *Provinciales*, or the endless squabbles over the signing of the anti-Jansenist formulary. The narrative seems effortless.

There is a reason for this. The writer, to some extent, and in spite of his grasp of sources, is writing hagiography. His case is black and white, and the 'challenge' implied in the series' title is hurled by the devout Christians of Port Royal to the worldliness not only of the age but of their church in the age. No question, for instance, that the elasticity of the Jesuits' moral casebooks, which remain flayed for ever in the prose of Pascal, is the result of an attempt to bring the possibility of God's intervention in human life nearer to sinners and to remove the despair that seems inevitably to accompany the depreciation of human nature in its efforts towards God. It was an age when men were obsessed by the powers and weaknesses of the human will, and the conflict played out between Port Royal and the French court is of a piece with the folly to the world of *Polyeucte*.

Even through the hagiography, the reader feels some misgivings. No-one can have much sympathy with the escapades of Gondi, Cardinal de Retz, the *frondeur* who became Archbishop of Paris, or the calculating Pierre de Marca, Archbishop of Toulouse, who coveted Paris too and therefore complied with Mazarin's wishes to have the bull *Cum occasione* accepted by the French episcopate and clergy and drew up in 1655 the famous formulary, 'I condemn, with heart and mouth, the doctrine of the five propositions of Cornelius Jansenius . . .' The heavy hand of the profane upon the sacred was rarely so evident as in this century, and it is perhaps a little too easy to see its glossy courtly surface and wonder what the rococo gilt cherubs of the Val de Grâce or Versailles have to do with prayer and the love of God. It is too simple to see self-deception in the quietism of Mme Guyon and to decide that the real truth of religion in France in the great century is to be seen in the poisonings and

black magic of the Marquise de Brinvilliers and all her noble associates, or the terrible tortures and ignominies of Urbain Grandier and the Ursulines of Loudun. Thanks to the gifts of Aldous Huxley and John Whiting, I imagine these will be the reality for contemporary Englishmen.

It is a terrible travesty. The seventeenth century was a great missionary century when, whatever we may think of its causation today, the explosion of Europe sent Jesuits (among others) as far afield as Indo-China and the unexplored Far West to suffer hideously for their faith. It was a great age of mysticism and it saw, in the person of Richard Simon, the beginnings of modern Biblical criticism. Here, then, we must feel doubtful about M. Escholier's view of Port Royal. No doubt the Jansenists were accused of heresy on the flimsiest of evidence and by the most invidious prejudice. It is not so much their beliefs, as the *flavour* of their Catholicism, which seems harsh and cold to us today.

And I must confess at once to some unease at the part played by the many members of the Arnauld family during the whole affair. Evelyn Waugh once said that the Catholic Church in America gave the unsuspecting visitor the impression that it was a vast but exclusive Irish club. The community of Port Royal seems to have been a kind of very elevated club for the Arnaulds and their friends. When Angélique de Saint-Jean, Antoine Arnauld's grand-daughter, was being questioned on her beliefs by a civil magistrate she gave first her name in religion and then, when asked for her family name, haughtily answered, 'I will say it aloud, for to confess our name is almost the same as confessing the name of God.'

In all this history, though, what horrifies is the imposition of civil sanctions for unorthodox – or shall we say, echoing M. Escholier, 'questioned' religious beliefs. Duvergier de Hauranne, the saintly abbot of Saint Cyran and friend of Jansen, was imprisoned in a foul cell in Vincennes on the orders of Richelieu and Anne of Austria, the queen mother, for having proclaimed the inadequacy of attrition for the forgiveness of sins. All this, and the persecution and expulsion of the nuns of Port Royal, most of whom had little idea what the debates on sufficient grace were about, and the final destruction of the buildings of Port Royal by Louis XIV, seems unrelated to any acceptable way of settling religious differences. The real shock to the modern conscience is shown perhaps best on the stage, in Montherlant's play *Port-Royal*, when the tranquil cloistered set is suddenly filled with the aggressive colour and noise of royal men at arms and the brutal language of Péréfixe, Archbishop of Paris, whose feeling of social inferiority to some of the nuns, and particularly to the then abbess Mere de Ligny, increased beyond all endurance his anger at their resistance and made him burst out, when the abbess began to interpose some mild objection to his proceedings, 'Shut up, you silly old cat!'

Were they so innocent in the world of politicking and rebellion of seventeenth-century France? It seems pretty clear that the members of the community had placed themselves under the patronage of the arch-*frondeur*, Cardinal de Retz, and had even offered him financial support when he seemed likely to upset the throne of the Bourbons. This was the time when the young Louis XIV was trying to stabilise his power in the teeth of the rebellious nobility (among others the Duchesse de Longueville and M. de Sévigné, friends of Port Royal) who were prepared to tear France apart in their own interests. He never forgot or forgave this alignment of the Jansenists.

M. Escholier brilliantly retraces the careers of Pascal and Racine – a renegade from Port Royal and then a prodigal son – and concludes with the destruction of the Jesuits in their turn in mid-eighteenth century, as a fit retribution, by that very monarchical power which they had both supported and used for their own ends the century before. Finally, the monarchy itself, weakened by the disappearance of that order which spread everywhere the idea of the absolute nature of the royal power, was very soon to fall. Love was the secret of Port Royal, and those who destroyed it were like the Pharisees face to face with Christ and nemesis overtook them. So the century-long epic of Port Royal came to a close. It began, properly speaking, on the day when Jacqueline Arnaud, in religion Mère Angélique, accepted freely the vocation which had been invalidly thrust upon her at the age of nine, and refused to allow her father entry to Port Royal – the celebrated ‘*journée du Guichet*’. It ended on 29 October 1709 when the last nuns left Port Royal des Champs. ‘All the mighty and the powerful of this world,’ writes M. Escholier, ‘united against the law of love. The cleverness of the Society of Jesus and the hostility of the great king compelled Rome to condemn the disciples of Christ. The hope of a resurrection was annihilated; during the struggle between Jacob and the angel, Jacob had won, for his own undoing . . . An easy, and a useless victory. From the end of the reign of Louis XIV, the royal confessors, the courtier prelates, the casuists, had destroyed the love which animated the apostles and martyrs, which mapped out the paths of the Crusades, which built the cathedrals, which inspired the *Pensées* of Pascal’. M. Escholier’s book is an attempt to vindicate the great challenge of the spirit represented by the Jansenist movement, as he sees it. Their adversaries accused them of being inhuman, and that calumny weighs on their memory today. Aren’t we, he asked, in danger of preferring the kind of religion which condemned them? How accommodating it is, the religion which leads neither to the tragedy of Calvary or to the ardent night of Pascal, but to the peaceful meditation of the enlightened humanist, to the learned evolution and the scientific paradise proclaimed by Teilhard de Chardin. We are offered two Christianities: one heroic, destined

for the saints, the other intellectual and comfortable, reserved for the 'bien-pensants'.

It seems churlish to differ from M. Escholier both since his rehabilitation of Port Royal was long overdue – though no doubt it is not *all* acceptable. But one reader still retains a certain sense of uneasiness at the worldly links of that most unworldly of institutions, and wonders if here too is a case when the mixture of sacred and profane was entirely profitable to the sacred. That phrase M. Escholier uses in his final pages confirms this doubt: 'the love . . . which mapped out the paths of the crusades'. Was it really divine love which traced out those bitter, savage paths of barbaric splendour, ruined a Christian Empire, and massacred and pillaged on the very threshold of the Holy Sepulchre?

The Mirage of the Holy City

The case has been examined again by a French historian and novelist with first-class gifts for the task: Zoé Oldenbourg,¹ already well known for her work on the Cathars, and little likely therefore to have a soft spot for the unclean mingling of politics and religion. 'Wherever religion and barbarism are mixed together, it is always religion which triumphs; but wherever there is a mixture of barbarism and philosophy, it is barbarism which wins the day . . .' Miss Oldenbourg shows clearly that the first part of Rivarol's aphorism is far from the truth. The Crusades were a moment in time when religion and barbarism, the barbarism of the feudal knights of Europe, were joined together in an unhappy alliance for the ruin and downfall of Christian Byzantium, and hence for the breach in the defence of Christendom which allowed the Turks, many centuries later, to reach the very walls of Vienna.

But Zoé Oldenbourg is no Gibbon – and I mean that to her credit, no question here of the dry contemptuous distaste of the historian surveying a waste of blood and brains in a futile expedition at the behest of some wild religious vapourings. Nor does she simply give yet another narrative of the various crusades as individual expeditions. Her intention is to set the Crusades against a skilfully depicted background of the life of mediaeval man, to see what kind of ideas urged them forward and from what society they sprang – and, perhaps even more interesting, what kind of society, a rare hybrid of east and west, the military presence of the Franks in Syria created.

To one reader at any rate, she has made comprehensible what previously seemed only a vain chauvinistic fantasy, the feeling among historically-minded Frenchmen that they had some special rights in the Near East derived from the century in which the Frenchmen of the Middle Ages introduced that encapsulated Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem into the affairs of Islam. Feisal's supposed repartee to a French official claiming rights in Syria in 1919 because

¹*Les Croisades* (Gallimard).

of the Crusades – ‘But we won the Crusades’ – no doubt seemed very funny to the English bystander; and de Gaulle’s irritation with what he assumed to be General Spears’s attempts to unseat the French in the Levant during the last war seem likewise to be the pirouettings of a more than usually sensitive *prima donna*. Or at least so it appeared to me until I read *Les Croisades*. For the first time, I felt what the impact of the idea of recovering Jerusalem must have been and what the almost century-long Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem achieved in creating a memory of the historical presence of France in the Levant . . . in its perilousness, a presence not unlike that of the State of Israel today, as Mlle Oldenbourg points out.

‘The phenomenon of the crusade was peculiar in that, for once, a “holy war” was waged in an apparently disinterested way, without any real necessity, and without the impulse of a great leader or a prophet. In short, the first crusade was, to take nothing but the bare facts, a fairly extravagant adventure which by chance — and because of its very extravagance — did not end in catastrophe and finally succeeded beyond all expectation.

That adventure — which, with the years, became wide enough to involve, more or less deeply, the conscience of the whole of Catholic Christianity — had as its *raison d’être*, its aim, its motive, its justification, the mirage of the holy city: Jerusalem. Jerusalem alone still gives to that long sequence of horrors and atrocities, of wars and feudal guerrillas, of military expeditions which were unsuccessful more often than not, an *éclat* which time, in spite of everything, has not tarnished.’

But Mlle Oldenbourg is not concerned with vague impressions. She looks for the trigger of the crusades and finds it, naturally enough, in the conjunction of a feudal bellicosity, of German origin, and a religious motive. The ordinary man’s life, nasty, brutish and short to a degree (30 to 35 was the average expectation of life) and vulnerable to the hazards of famine, disease and pillage, was transcended and yet bound together by his religion. He was a religious man in the way modern Europeans are French or English, workers or middle class: man was first and foremost a member of a society of the faithful and aware of himself as a religious being, the notion of man and humanity coming later. The nobility too, was pious, and yet had its own powerful values which were independent of religion. The dominating warrior class was exclusively of Germanic origin, not only in England but even in Latin countries like France, Spain and North Italy; and the Normans had replaced Byzantine or Arab rulers in Southern Italy and Sicily. Germany and Bohemia, though Christianised, were under strong pagan influences, and the whole of feudal society, through its rulers, was to some extent a tributary of the old German paganism. The old Gods, like Odin, may have been banished by Christianity, but the warlike values for which they stood still controlled the feudal aristocracy.

How should this find an outlet? To some extent, it never did, other than in turning in upon its own society and rending it. Hence the perennial conflict between 'clerks' and knights, a systematic antagonism which has no parallel in Byzantium or Islam. Piety – or rather obeying the rules – coexisted with the grossest cruelty. Mlle Oldenbourg quotes a passage from the epic *Raoul de Cambrai* to illustrate this, and it has a most fascinating modern resonance: Raoul returns with his knights from burning a convent with all the nuns still inside, and sits down to eat. He demands meat, and his knights, horrified, exclaim 'Do you want to *kill our souls*? Today is Good Friday!' Much against his will, Raoul gives up his meat: he doesn't wish to offend God. . . . For men like this, the only real virtue was in fact physical courage, and many a bishop in armour and on horseback and many a war-like monk obviously shared this view. French chivalry is interesting in that, against a background of real poverty of ideas, it felt the discrepancy between what it really admired and what its religion taught it to admire. The idea of a holy war found a greater echo in France not simply because French chivalry was the most bellicose but because it was the most tormented by the need to find a moral justification for its passion for war. The hero must have a good conscience to be fully heroic: he must fight to defend his country and his faith.

'During the days of the 15th and 16th July (1099), the "soldiers of Christ", masters of the holy city, scoured the streets and alleyways, the gardens and courtyards, breaking down the doors of houses and mosques, and killing, killing, everything which came to hand – not soldiers this time – they were already dead, some treacherously – but civilians, men, women, children, old people. The Jews were locked in their synagogue and burned alive, the whole Jewish community of Jerusalem perishing in the flames. The mosques were profaned, *imams* and *ulemas* slaughtered, holy books destroyed. Women and children were massacred without pity.' No doubt there had been massacres performed by the Saracens themselves, no doubt they too had very recently profaned Christian churches; even so, this hardly explains the extent of the massacre, such that one of the crusader chroniclers, William of Tyre, wrote that 'the conquerors themselves were smitten with horror and disgust . . .' And while the massacre raged, the barons – Godefroi de Bouillon, Raymond de Saint-Gilles, Tancred, Robert of Normandy – adaptable, like all soldiers, once the battle was over and done with – took themselves off, broken with fatigue, soaked with blood and sweat, to wash and change their clothes, go to the Holy Sepulchre and give thanks to God and Jesus Christ.

Mlle Oldenbourg leaves few of the heroes of the past untouched. Saladin may have been chivalrous, but he was also a poisoner of wells, Richard the Lion Heart slaughtered three thousand helpless

prisoners . . . Could anything good come out of all this? Yes, with all its faults – the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. In spite of the artificiality of its creation, the ‘kingdom was something other than a place of pilgrimage guarded by Christians of the West, good or bad; it was a state, a mediaeval, feudal state, jealous of its independence, proud of its usages, and forming, with a rapidity which may surprise us today [*would it?*] a complex but lively national feeling’: The nobility were nearly all of French stock, and looked to the ruling French dynasty for support; but they intended to be, and were, masters in their own kingdom. Their manners changed, softened, in the course of time. The material splendour of the Islamic East passed on to them, by a not unfamiliar osmosis, an art of living which they had not thought possible. Mlle Oldenbourg even, hesitantly, advances the possibility that courtly love, with its respect for women, may have come to Europe from this orientalisised Latin state. Whatever be the truth of this, the crusaders in civilising themselves in the east which they had entered with fire and sword, ‘discovered a form of respect for women which did not exist in the west’.

This is where the interest of Mlle Oldenbourg’s book lies. As willing to ‘demystify’ as any rationalist historian, she is not blind to the atrocities committed in the name of Christ; but she is not blind either to the manifold possibilities of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, as the meeting place of Europe and the Levant, a focus of tolerance for different customs and beliefs. But after ninety years it was gone. All that remained was a glorious epic in the history books of the West, the memory in Islam of a struggle against a savage aggressor and in Byzantium the nightmare of brutal butchers destroying the legacy of Justinian. ‘. . . This kingdom, ephemeral as it may have been, represents the positive aspect of the movement known as the crusades; it was a state of secondary, but not negligible, political importance, rather artificial but by no means an illusion; a state whose chances of enduring were weak but not non-existent. . . .’

The Crusades themselves acted, says Mlle Oldenbourg, in yet another way: they were a catalyst for the national pride of the peoples of the West. ‘United in the struggle for the same cause, they learned to know each other better and to detest each other more, as they learned to detest their great rival and ally, the Empire of Byzantium. A deep national pride feels the need to seek something other than the glory and prosperity of the country, and to transcend the very idea of country. From this point of view, the impulse given by the Crusades was one of the factors in the creation of European nationalism.’ Clearly, as Mlle Oldenbourg also remarks, ‘The ambiguity which brooded over the initial aims of the crusades was never completely dissipated.’

Michel Mohrt's Crusade

No doubt not all French soldiers have been under the necessity of finding some external moral approval for their military careers or actions, and to some extent we may consider General Massu consulting his confessor before applying a 'strong-arm' policy in Algiers rather exceptional. And, too, there has always been a strong vein of scepticism about the acquisition of military glory both in literature – Montaigne, Voltaire, Stendhal, Erckmann-Chatrion (now oddly revived by the publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert) – and, on another level, in the folksongs resurrected by Yves Montand. Stendhal in particular, with his own personal disappointment after doing a Hannibal in the wake of Napoleon ('The Saint-Bernard, is that all there is to it?') transfers that disillusionment into the splendid Waterloo episode of *La Chartreuse de Parme* where the young Fabrice del Dongo, filled with a wild passion for Napoleon, takes part in Waterloo without really knowing he has done so, and has his horse stolen from him by the soldiers of the Emperor's army.

The ironically entitled *La Campagne d'Italie* (Gallimard) by Michel Mohrt is firmly in the dry, Stendhalian tradition, though one senses that M. Mohrt's case is very much that of a love-affair with the army which has gone wrong. The parallel is no doubt conscious on M. Mohrt's part, though his irony is in a lower key than Stendhal's, and the narrative element, unlike that of *La Chartreuse*, is really stripped to the bone. Talbot, the hero of *La Campagne d'Italie*, is a Fabrice-like young reserve officer serving in the last days of peace before 1939 with a regiment called the Royal Piedmont, and the book tells of the gradual dissipation of his ideals. This does not, though, arise from the usual sources. Parades and drill and military show are actually meaningful, pleasurable, to Talbot, and he is not too depressed by the endless manoeuvrings for place and promotion. Most of his service is in fact on the Riviera, and his time is spent in the traditional adulterous flirtation with the wife of a captain in the same regiment. She has a child by him, and she and the child both die shortly after the birth, as he turns to another half-serious, half-casual affair. The son snatched from him is paralleled by the glory he will never know when the ludicrous episode of Italy's entry into the war finishes with the French surrender and the return to barracks of an untried army. Nothing in the army except the occasional perfection of a drill or the ecstasy of brief moments of being in command of men really lives up to what he had expected, and as the order of peacetime military life gives way to the untidy chaos of war he begins to doubt that the army has provided him with the inner security he lacks.

The author's irony is unobtrusive, deferential, and the reader feels that a personal ideal has somewhere been frittered away, the dash into Piedmont doesn't recapture the glorious morning of Arcole, Rivoli, Lodi and Marengo of a century and a half ago.

Before the outbreak of war, the officers of the Royal Piedmont have lived the kind of idyllic existence that was compounded either of a refusal to face facts or a resolution to ignore them, buried in the cocoon of comfort that the year's breathing space after Munich provided. I was very much reminded – though style and theme are utterly different – of the life of an isolated unit of the French army somewhere in the Vosges, which was evoked by Julien Gracq in *Un Balcon en forêt* some years ago. The little unit rapidly becomes a world of its own, insulated from the war by the great forests, as Mohrt's officers are insulated from the prospect before them by the undemanding frivolity of Mediterranean life. It's a gentleman's war, provided the term is not too strictly defined. . . .

Le Roi des Rats

'Gentlemanly' is probably the last adjective that could be applied to Maillard (or, as he thinks of himself, P'tit Con) the hero of Maurice Frot's *Le Roi des Rats*. The book is written in what is at first glance an impossibly rebarbative prose, and in the irritating oil-gusher technique of Céline and Henry Miller, with the obscenities of both. But Frot is not twisted with sinister propagated hatreds like Céline, nor devoured by his own genitals, like Miller. The hatreds are fierce, but they are acceptable, because they are directed against the mystification of the Schweik-cum-Figaro who is the narrator of the story.

When reading *Salammbô*, Saint-Beuve complained he was always having to reach for the dictionary, and I felt the same irritation with Frot, since an *argot* glossary must be on hand for every single paragraph of this linguistic tumult, which seems to me head and shoulders above most of the carefully knitted prize winners of its year. To translate it into English would be an impossible *tour-de-force* and yet someone should undertake it. Rarely has it been possible to get so far under the skin of the ordinary soldier of that filthiest of wars, the French struggle against the Viet Minh, with flashbacks into the grubby reality of Maillard's institutional childhood in the days of Vichy and a youth illuminated only by sexual encounters. But Frot's book is not simply a first person narrative of a war – it is a vast pamphlet of anger and pity, anger at the futility of killing, the horror of torture and the animal-like conditions in which the killing is done, and pity for the ravaged people whose country has, in two decades, been turned into a tropical desert by the clash of remote and merciless conflicting interests.

Frot intercalates Maillard's memories and narrative with those of Lee, a Viet who is intent on avenging the death of the woman he loves at the hands of the French. Lee himself is killed by Maillard. But to say all this gives the false impression that the book is merely a linear narrative of military events. It is not, the whole thing is lived too intensely for that, with an immense efflorescence of metaphor

and colloquialism, in the head of Maillard (and Lee) not unreminiscent of *The Naked and the Dead*.

Jean Giono's France

For both Frot and Michel Mohrt, in one way or another, that enigmatic and significant year 1940 which decided the destinies of France and England for ever, is the crucial year. Jean Giono's memories of the futilities of war go back further, to 1914-1918. The trenches made Giono a pacifist the next time, which complicated his life considerably after the Liberation when he fell from favour – and rightly so, I think – because of his ambivalent attitude to the German occupation. The public silence turned him in on himself, and sent him back to old manuscripts written along very different lines from the quasi-Lawrentian earth worship of his 'Pan' trilogy. Here too, as with Mohrt, the flavour of Stendhal is very strong, not so much the ironic detached observer as the Stendhal with a tremendous zest for Italy and life. Giono has retailed, in what are at times almost pastiches of the master (*Angelo, Le Hussard sur le toit, Le Bonheur fou*) the story of a young *carbonaro* exiled in Restoration France. This very conscious and very successful imitation of the adventurous side of Stendhal has revealed in the pacifist of the thirties and forties a brooding interest in violence which has in its turn enabled him to depict with vivid and shattering accuracy one of the most important battles of the Renaissance, the defeat of Francis I at Pavia (*Le Désastre de Pavie*, Gallimard, 1963) and to introduce to modern readers that blood-thirsty soldier of the Wars of Religion, Blaise de Monluc. His latest book, *Deux Cavaliers de l'Orage* bears the date 1950, a year before the publication of *Le Hussard sur le toit*, which argues a tremendous versatility. The theme is raw – the strength of men, but not in relation to women, who play little part in the book other than as bystanders, a kind of Greek chorus of crones and young wives. Marceau Jason is a shrewd man of the hills, but his shrewdness in selling mules and freeing his younger brother from conscription by (literally) some horse-trading in the barracks gives way to a series of variations on his muscular strength – he fells a runaway horse with a blow from his fist, defeats a wrestler who had heard of this feat and wants to pit himself against Marceau's reputation, then defeats the two best wrestlers the region can produce, stops a tree falling on his body during a storm by holding it off with his bare hands for two hours – and so on. And all the while this great mountain brute of a man is like a dove with his younger brother – until the day when 'Mon Cadet', eager to try the mystery of strength himself, tackles Marceau and wins.

Anything which breaks into their closed ring of more-than-brotherhood is extirpated by Marceau. This 'Mon Cadet' accepts, and indeed, himself goes out to rescue Marceau in the storm. So

that perfection resides in those moments of being alone together in the forest, riding, riding, as if it could go on for ever.

As with much of Giono, the primitive underside of French provincial life is violently and yet casually revealed, as in the accounts given of visits to the town by one of the women when she was young and the harvesters had come through, scythes and sickles swinging, ready to tear the town (and themselves) to pieces before returning for the winter into their hovels in the mountains. You get the impression of a France untouched by religion or any form of civilization, buried in the seasonal rites of the earth and the house, brusque, harsh and – unwillingly – somehow admirable in its stark difference.

The chapter 'Les Courses de Lachau' in which the women sit together in the house awaiting the return of the two men seems to me one of the most brilliant things Giono has ever done. It is narrated entirely in conversation between two old women and two young ones, and reminds the reader of Rabelais' *Propos des buveurs*, in its casual unnamed beginnings, and reaching, in the words of the two old women, the epic, riverine, limitless flow of language of *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. As the day wears on, and the women realize uneasily that their men have not come back, the air is full of menace; but what has happened is merely that the elder brother has killed a runaway horse and waited to see it butchered so that he can bring a quarter home. The menace seems momentarily damped – but it is kept in reserve for the final discovery, which we had begun to dread, of the elder brother killing the younger by slashing him to pieces with a bill hook and then dying himself.

Marxists and Christians

The co-existence of two kinds of understanding, two views of life, running parallel but unable to ignore each other; this is the theme of and the problem dealt with by Roger Garaudy's book *De l'anathème au dialogue* (Plon) in which he makes an attempt to break down the barriers of mutual incomprehension between modern Marxism and the Church. The effort had already been made from the Catholic side, by the review *Sept* and writers like André Mandouze but in the cold war atmosphere of ten to fifteen years ago this tender unlikely plant had little chance of survival. The Vatican Council has given M. Garaudy, already known as a critic of poetry and painting, the idea of a *rapprochement* at certain levels.

The tension that exists between Church and State in Poland makes one wonder how far the dialogue could go with *either* partner in a position of real power – the concessions have been made by individuals or parties where a more pluralist view is still possible, like M. Garaudy in France or the Communist Party in Italy. But where it seems likely that the factual coexistence of the Church alongside a Marxist-socialist form of the state is likely to endure, it seems unwise to close one's ears to pleas for understanding. An

interviewer in *Arts* (Pierre Jancard) showed in spite of himself that M. Garaudy's sincerity emerges even through the flippancy of weekly journalism:

Jancard: Roger Garaudy, you are a convinced and determined Marxist, and yet you have addressed yourself to the Council in a work called 'From anathema to dialogue'. Is the conclusion of your dialogue the recognition by the Vatican of Marxism as a religion?

Garaudy: Certainly not. The Vatican has never said anything of the sort, and none of us could accept such a formulation! But the way in which Pope Paul VI has put the problem of atheism makes dialogue easier. He did not consider atheism as a kind of error or crime; we have left behind the eighteenth century when it used to be proclaimed that an atheist couldn't be a decent human being; the Pope has tried to put the problem of different conceptions of the world. And I believe that the Council – it is perhaps one of the most positive aspects of its work – has admitted for the Church the possibility of living in a pluralist world, i.e. in a world where atheism, especially Marxist atheism, would constitute one of the possibilities offered to man. In my view, this is immensely hopeful.

Jancard: Shall we see the Pope saying Mass in Red Square in Moscow twenty years from now?

Garaudy: No, certainly not! What I think is this, that if Catholics try to deepen their faith – and I have the impression the Council has begun this task: even if the answers have been timid, at any rate the questions have been put – if Catholics try to deal with the problems of efficacy, let us say the historical dimensions of man, and if the Marxists try to absorb into *their* vision of the world the dimensions of subjectivity, of transcendence, which Christianity has brought into it, there are, I think, possibilities of convergence. In other words, if a Catholic is a better Catholic, and a Marxist a better Marxist, the dialogue will be made easier.

Jancard: Let us go a little further. Can we imagine, in the twenty-first century, the election of a Marxist pope?

Garaudy: Once again, no. There would be no sense in that. I do not know if there will still be a Pope in the twenty-first century, but if there is, I think he will then have understood the necessity of integrating into the vision of the Catholic world the values which were those of the Marxists. It will not be a victory of one over the other, but a victory for the whole of mankind. That is how real convergences can operate, not by some form of eclecticism or other, by some mingling of principles, but by an effort made by each community to integrate what is best in the other. Which one of the communities will 'envelope' the other? In my view, that is the problem of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.'

L'affaire Ben Barka

There is little doubt that Garaudy's plea would have had a much greater and more durable repercussion among the French public at large than it has had – though it has been widely commented on – had it not, like almost every other issue in French and international life, had to take a back seat for the 'affaire Ben Barka'. In my last article (*New Blackfriars*, December 1965), discussing new trends in spy stories, I quoted John Le Carré as saying 'Spying is everywhere, and so it is spying which best reflects the society of our day.' I didn't realize how apt it was. While that article was in the press, one of the biggest judicial scandals in France since the Dreyfus Case – and she has seen some – was making its debut and has since taken on enormous unforeseen proportions.

In the Boulevard Saint-Germain, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the world, let alone in Paris, and in front of one of the best-known political cafés, the Brasserie Lipp, a leading leftwing North-African politician and former Speaker of the Moroccan Parliament, Mehdi Ben Barka, was kidnapped in broad daylight and later, according to all the indications, assassinated. The first reaction was one of indignation that the internecine quarrels of Arab politicians should be solved in this way in a country not their own. The next, a flood of accusations by France and counter-accusations by Morocco against the secret services of the other. And, later still, disquieting revelations about the Moroccan and French secret services' collusion in the affair, and about that uneasy frontier where it becomes difficult to distinguish the agent from the hardened criminal.

No doubt by the time this is in print, Judge Zollinger and/or the French press (*L'Express* already seems to have done more than the police to uncover the affair) will have revealed its full ramifications insofar as they ever *will* be truly known. And the King of Morocco will either have short-circuited his own responsibilities in the affair by breaking off diplomatic relations with France, or will have sacked General Oufkir, his Minister of the Interior, who is publicly accused of assassinating Ben Barka himself, or Oufkir will have deposed the King and taken over the government in what has become a too familiar pattern in North Africa as elsewhere. With all these provisos – and a final one that there is still a good deal of speculation about the facts – here is the story as far as it can be pieced together, largely from *L'Express* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. First, the situation in Morocco. Hassan II was in a state of perpetual boycott by all the political parties, with the Parliament and Constitution suspended and the King dependent on the army. The Minister of the Interior was – and still is – an army general, Oufkir, formerly a colonel with the French and said to be involved in the kidnapping of Ben Bella by the French during the war in Algeria, in collaboration with an Air France official (and secret agent of French counter-espionage) called Antoine Lopez, at that time in Tangier. Realizing the risks

involved in having a man like Oufkir in such a position of power, Hassan thought it advisable to attempt a reconciliation with the exiled leftwing leader Medhi Ben Barka, Oufkir's sworn enemy. Oufkir got wind of the king's intentions and decided to have Ben Barka 'removed'. The latter spent his time between Paris, Geneva and Cairo, and Oufkir preferred to obtain the co-operation of the French secret services since they owed him a good turn and since it seemed to be the Fifth Republic's policy to co-operate with the existing African governments, particularly if they were rightwing, by making difficulties for political exiles. The head of the Moroccan Secret Service, Shtuky, went to Paris, contacted Antoine Lopez, now an official at Orly (where many English tourists must have come across him), and also Georges Figon, a one time Resistance hero and later an intellectual criminal à la Jean Genét. Lopez and Figon (who had spent fifteen years out of the last eighteen in prison) represented two different branches of French Intelligence: the former, the S.D.E.C.E. (Service de Documentation et Contre-Espionnage) and the latter the 'polices parallèles' or 'barbouzes' which had been created as an organisation of devoted Gaullists to crack the OAS infiltration into the French Armed Forces. Lopez reported to Major Finville who in turn reported to Air Marshal Jacquier and hence to M. Pompidou, the Prime Minister. Figon reported to the lawyer and Gaullist deputy Pierre Lemarchand, himself connected with the Munich kidnapping of the OAS Colonel Argoud. Together with a journalist, Philippe Bernier, also present at the talk with Shtuky, Figon pretended to be producing a film on decolonisation with Ben Barka playing a chief part. This was to provide the pretext for meeting Ben Barka in Paris, after a preliminary encounter in Cairo.

It is assumed Oufkir thought up the project in the early summer of 1965. Already by October the S.D.E.C.E. (Finville) was fully informed by Lopez of what has happened, i.e. at Finville's level it was known that the Moroccans intended to kidnap Ben Barka and 'have him disappear'. Finville discussed the situation on October 8th with General Jacquier, his superior, and it was decided to persuade Oufkir to work with them alone, cutting out Figon and the 'barbouze' organisation. Lopez asked for and obtained the co-operation of two policemen, Souchon and Voitot, telling them the job was official and on behalf of the S.D.E.C.E. Not wanting to let a profitable chance slip, Figon insisted on remaining in the affair and he and Bernier arranged a rendezvous with Ben Barka on Friday, October 29th, at half-past twelve in the afternoon. On a signal from Lopez, the two policemen 'arrested' Ben Barka as he left the Brasserie Lipp. It so happened that a Moroccan student, M. Azemmouri, was with him, otherwise the kidnapping would never have been heard of again. Ben Barka was hustled off in a police car to a villa at Fontenay-le-Vicomte, south of Paris. Figon arrived by taxi

later in the day, and a phone call was put through to Rabat, where Oufkir was dining with King Hassan, to the effect that 'the parcel has been delivered'. The next day, Oufkir arrived at Orly airport, met Shtuky, and was taken to the villa.

At this point, everyone's plans went seriously askew. The original idea was for Oufkir to 'take delivery' of Ben Barka and have him shipped to Morocco. What in fact happened was that Oufkir, enraged by the sight of his enemy, stabbed him several times, and then left for Rabat on Sunday morning, promising to return in three days with a payment of 700,000 francs for the French agents. To report what had happened in the villa Lopez rang up Finville, who arranged to see Caille, a police commissioner in direct link with the Prefect of Police (Maurice Papon) and an intimate friend of Roger Frey, the French Minister of the Interior. Before he saw Finville, Caille got in touch with Lemarchand and insisted that Figon be produced for interrogation. This took place, and Figon gave *his* account of events, incriminating Lopez. By the evening of Tuesday, November 2nd, the head of the Sûreté and the Prefect of Police were fully informed of how the affair had developed. The Minister of the Interior, Roger Frey, was fully informed too, not only from these official police sources, but from Lemarchand, who is a close friend.

But others were moving too. The Moroccan student had given the alarm, and Ben Barka's brother had begun to make official enquiries about his brother's disappearance, thinking still in terms of kidnapping and not assassination. An investigating magistrate, Zollinger, began the public investigation of the affair, though he was hampered by a complete lack of information about what Frey and his officials knew. He asked to see Figon, whom the police were supposed to be looking for; but no formal arrest was made.

Meanwhile Frey was invited to meet Oufkir at a dinner at the Moroccan Embassy in Paris. The affair having become public, Frey refused and his place was taken by Papon, the Prefect of Police and Frey's *chef de cabinet*, Jacques Aubert. During the dinner, Oufkir summoned a Moroccan officer, Major Dlimi, and instructed him to pay a part of the promised 700,000 francs to the agents who had carried out the *coup*. Figon did not, apparently, receive what he had expected, and began to brood.

On Thursday, November 4th, General de Gaulle was to announce his candidature for the presidency on television. On the morning of that day, he received a letter from Ben Barka's mother begging him to take up the case of her son's disappearance. Frey and Foccart, who looks after the President's relations with police and counter-espionage organisations, were summoned to give an account of what they knew. Discretion and silence seem to have been the result of their visit, given the closeness of the elections; but De Gaulle replied to Ben Barka's mother, saying he would find out the truth and punish those responsible. The magistrate Zollinger was still

patiently plodding through interrogations of the smaller fish in the affair (and getting only partial answers)—Lopez and the two policemen who arrested Ben Barka at his request. Not before January, after the press has taken a hand on its own account, did Zollinger have a full account of what took place. On January 10th, he visited the villa at Fontenay-le-Vicomte where Ben Barka had been taken; but General Jacquier, head of the S.D.E.C.E., who had a full dossier on the affair, kept it to himself. De Gaulle was not informed of the full extent of the case until Michel Debré (not at the time a member of the government) told him what he had learned by private enquiry. Soon much more was to be revealed.

Figon, having incriminated Lopez, feared that Lopez's organisation would kill him, and to ensure that what he knew would be passed on, he made a tape-recorded account of most, but not all, of the affair, and this was published on January 10th in the weekly magazine *L'Express*. The account specifically named General Oufkir as the assassin of Ben Barka. From that date the Zollinger enquiries began to involve public and police personalities, and the fact was revealed that what Zollinger was painfully discovering had been known in government circles two months before, at any rate by November 3rd. The magistrate insisted that Figon be found, and on January 12th de Gaulle himself told the governmental agencies to help Zollinger get to the bottom of the 'whole wretched, unbearable business'. The police entered Figon's flat on Monday, January 17th, and found him lying dead. It was announced that he had committed suicide, which of course nobody believed — like that of Stavisky, it would have been really *too* convenient. The autopsy talked of a shot fired through the skull 'from a short distance away' (not 'point-blank') and through the right side of the head. Figon was left-handed. . . .

Lemarchand, Figon's lawyer and, in his capacity as agent, 'employer,' denied to Zollinger that he had had anything to do with the kidnapping, and declared to the *Express* investigators that the S.D.E.C.E. was trying to kill two birds with one stone: co-operate exclusively with the Moroccan intelligence for its own purposes, and involve Lemarchand in revenge for his anti-OAS activities during the campaign in Algeria. The anti-Gaullist sector of the S.D.E.C.E. would, by implicating Lemarchand, discredit his party, and de Gaulle indirectly, at a crucial time during the elections.

The balloon went up even more spectacularly for having been suppressed for so long. Zollinger not only had Major Finville arrested, but put out an international warrant for the arrest of General Oufkir. As Minister of the Interior, Oufkir would no doubt receive the summons and have to arrest himself. . . . Momentarily, the King protected him, and declared the French were attempting to discredit Morocco. A group of writers protested against the silence of French police and ministers. François Mauriac was to be one of

the signatories, much against his will, because he did not wish to do anything which might damage the prestige of de Gaulle at a critical time. Frey saw him, and indicated that the American CIA was involved and that de Gaulle could not be held responsible, so Mauriac withdrew his signature – a withdrawal which brought down upon his head the scorn of the left-wing in France: ‘Crucified by vocation and by profession’ wrote Yvon Le Vaillant in *Nouvel Observateur*, ‘crucified this time between his passion for Justice and his passion for Charles de Gaulle, split in two between his friends and his master, and told to choose, he has chosen to rally himself unconditionally to the latter – he has chosen servitude. That great wounded voice which God gave him has given forth an enormous QUACK!’

The busy comings and goings between Paris ministries and Hassan’s holiday residence at Ifrane had also given rise to speculation among Moroccans. ‘If we are so guilty, and deserve to have our name dragged in the mud, what are your ministers negotiating for?’ was the natural question they put. And, too, there was an official Moroccan line on the affair: Ben Barka and the French police (and de Gaulle?) were fomenting a plot against the Moroccan monarchy. The idea was to pretend Ben Barka had been kidnapped, compromise Oufkir (who would only have been in Paris at the time out of pure coincidence . . .) and cause such indignation in the country that Oufkir would be overthrown, and Ben Barka, produced out of hiding, would then take over Morocco. Oufkir, with his lines into French intelligence circles, got wind of the plot, stepped in with his own strong-arm men, and anticipated a phoney kidnapping by staging a real one.

It is not known, of course, if Ben Barka is still alive or not – hope must now be very faint, if any credence can be given to Figon’s account of Oufkir’s knifing him in the villa at Fontenay-le-Vicomte. And even if he is alive, the thought of what may be happening to him is not a very pleasant one.

Whatever the final upshot of the affair, and whatever the indications referred to by *The Guardian* of possible (and plausible) Chinese negotiations with Ben Barka, the events themselves have shown to what lengths rival intelligence services will go to defend their respective domains. They have shown how de Gaulle’s wartime dependence on secret services, like Soustelle’s, or Passy’s organisation in Duke Street, has lasted into the Fifth Republic. The arms which are supposed to defend the state can often end up by throttling it.