

Nationalism in Revival

France and Germany: The Legacy of Charlemagne, by René Lauret, translated by Wells Chamberlin. *Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964. 272 pp. \$4.95.*

France Reborn: The History of the Liberation, by Robert Aron, translated by Humphrey Hare. *New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964. 490 pp. \$8.50.*

IN THE CLOSING months of the Second World War two "life-giving" political myths emerged in Western Europe. Both myths—myths of political redemption—provided a basis for the postwar reconstruction of Europe, though at the outset the credibility, the vitality or the dynamism of either was not apparent. The German resistance to Hitler culminating in the July 20th plot and the French resistance to Hitler culminating in the liberation of France were not successful in achieving their objectives. Without Allied military force neither France nor Germany would have been liberated. In spite of this, the fact of resistance in both France and Germany provided the myth of a "saving remnant," without which an orderly postwar political development would have been impossible. Germany in 1933 had succumbed to the Nazi movement; in 1940 France was to perish at the hands of the political Left no less than at the hands of Nazi military superiority. It is popular today to deny the responsibility of the Left and to retry the Laval and the Petains in the court of public opinion where the niceties of proof are unnecessary. The very violence of "the Liberation," with its appalling reprisals, imprisoning, torturing, executing patriotic Frenchman whose only crime had been to attempt to save as much of France as was possible in the tragic aftermath of 1940, suggests that many in "the Liberation" were liquidating their own guilt as well. Moreover, one can and should question the scope of the German resistance and not overlook the fact that most Germans at least fell into line behind their Nazi masters.

Does this mean that the two "myths" are somehow the inventions of patriotic historians anxious

to retrieve as much of the national past as possible and devoid of the objective importance which modern France and Germany place in them? Nothing is farther from the truth, but only history can reveal the depth and the complexity of these movements of national liberation. However different in the course of their outward development, the French and the German movements had much in common, and Robert Aron's *France Reborn* and Hans Rothfels' *The German Opposition to Hitler* will stand together as the classic accounts of these complex moral and spiritual movements. Aron's account is the fuller of the two, more colorfully written, better documented and more comprehensive, but it lacks the impressive moral grandeur of the Rothfels account. It is more preoccupied with the surface of things and dominated by the commanding figure of de Gaulle. But Aron's account is full of moral and political ambiguities, as no doubt an account of the German resistance would be, had it been a mass movement rather than the work of a political and spiritual elite. We concluded, however, as Aron concludes that "to have survived the ordeals between May 1940 and August 1944, the Atlantic solidarity of France must be profoundly inscribed in its very being."

How much more valid and enduring these myths are than the myth of "the stab in the back" of Germany in the 1920's or the Stalinist myths manufactured by his slavish propagandists or than the Khrushchevian myth of "the defender-hero of the Ukraine" is revealed both in the degree of assent and in the vitality and quality of political action which they have produced.

But as important as the myths themselves is the fact they are national myths. World War II, which it was once supposed had permanently discredited the claims of nationalism, appears twenty years later to have restored it to its historical position as the great motivating force in European political life. In retrospect, the era from 1918 to 1945 now seems to have been an interruption in the development of European nationalism. The great ideological conflict indeed had little to do with national aspirations, although the combatants frequently borrowed the slogans of nationalism and sought to capitalize on its dynamic energies. But the era of ideology passed, and wherever the European consciousness has reasserted itself it has been in the form of a renewed nationalism. Nowhere has this been more evident than in France and Germany; but even in England and Italy and in the Communist East, where ideology is most deeply entrenched, nationalism threatens the ideological establishments with dissolution.

Does the revival of nationalism mean, however, that the renewed nationalism of France and Germany will serve to divide present-day Europe? The great merit of René Lauret's *France and Germany* is the evidence it offers that such is not the case. He undertakes to show that, so far from being rooted in the two millennia of European history, Franco-German hostility is of very recent origin and does not involve either basic attitudes or basic values in either country. In fact their values, like so many other aspects of their national existences, are complimentary rather than contradictory.

Although Lauret's book is filled with the wisdom of hindsight, a rather galling variety of *Besserwisseri*, it is nonetheless a wise book and a much needed corrective to the ingenuous wrongheadedness of much of our foreign policy. But if Lauret's basic assumptions are correct many of his observations in detail are wrong. Certainly his revisionist attitude toward the creation of the Polish Corridor in 1919 would be disputed by many. Moreover, this question is related to a more central one which, stated in his own words, runs: "Would Hitler have gone to war in the west after having won in the east, if France and England had not forced him to it by opening hostilities against him?" His conclusion is that France should not have gone to war in 1939; a conclusion that does much to shatter my respect for the soundness of his judgment in many lesser matters. It would be convenient if we could forget the Nazi episode. France and Germany and all the world would rest so much easier. If the war of 1939-1945 is seen in terms of the dynastic and national wars and the conventional diplomacy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this interpretation would be correct: France and England should have refrained from a war over a disputed area where their interests were not directly involved. But World War II was an ideological struggle, and the drives and dynamism which powered it were not such as are susceptible to rational analysis and rational solution. There is no evidence to suggest that aggressive ideologies that aim at world revolution and world mastery can be turned back by any means less than a resort to force and eventual total defeat.

In saying this we have come full circle. It was indeed resistance to the full range of the implications and practices of the Hitlerite movement by a determined minority in both France and Germany which has made it possible for France and Germany to reclaim their lost dignity and their places in the community of nations. The only valid response to tyranny is total resistance and not partial accommodation, whatever the reason. France and

England in 1939 were no exception to this rule,
nor are Germany and the United States in 1965.

Reviewed by STEPHEN J. TONSON