

THE OTHER KINGDOM

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TRANSLATED AND WITH AN
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the chimney pots to give their passengers an additional thrill at their first sight of Paris. It seemed like a superfluous touch. After the months or even years that they had lived in the monotony of almost certain death, most of the prisoners, when you saw them at close range, looked as if they were beyond feeling thrills of any kind. Even the thrill of knowing that they had survived where so many millions of others had succumbed seemed to cause them less elation than they had expected.

"Unless you had lived through it yourself, you could never understand. All the photographs and documents in the world, even seeing the piles of corpses with your own eyes, would never explain what it was like." The man who told me this had returned—from Belsen, I think it was—so recently that his face still wore the clay-green pallor that was, as much as the number tattooed on his inner forearm, the stamp of the concentration camps. "For one thing, they were nowhere as bad as you think—and at the same time, they were infinitely worse than anything you could ever imagine. I cannot explain that either. Even I, after more than a year there, cannot talk about it without feeling

as if I were making it all up. Either that, or telling a dream that someone else had dreamed."

David Rousset expresses this same distrust of words when he says that the "concentrationees" are set apart from the rest of men by "an experience that is impossible to transmit." Yet the achievement of *The Other Kingdom* is precisely that it does transmit his experience and that the author has succeeded in giving a sober and convincing reality to circumstances that would otherwise remain as unreal as a borrowed nightmare.

The Other Kingdom makes no effort to be a documented arraignment of a system of atrocities of a nature and on a scale that probably has no equal in history. Horror is an inescapable factor of his subject, but the dominant tone of Rousset's book is one of objective sobriety. The fact is that he is much less interested in the camps as atrocities than as a social phenomenon produced by social, economic and political trends that are still at work throughout the world today.

During the twelve years that Hitler was in power—and especially during the last three years of the Nazi regime—concentration camps and their

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subsidary camps sprang up by the hundreds over the length and breadth of the Greater Reich. No accurate statistics as to the total number of people interned in them have ever been compiled. Nor is it possible to determine what proportion of their inmates died. Generally speaking, the SS boast that the only way a prisoner ever left the camps was through the chimney of the crematoriums seems to have been true. One official source * estimates the number of the dead at 26,000,000. At first thought, this figure seems too high. It has, however, been established that some 4,000,000 died in the camp of Auschwitz alone, and another 3,000,000 are reliably reported to have perished at Maidanek. With these figures in mind and remembering the horrible renown that a number of other camps, such as Sachsenhausen, Birkenau, Dachau, Mauthausen and Belsen, enjoyed, it is reasonable to assume that the casualties *must* have numbered in the neighborhood of 15,000,000 at least.

More impressive than the number of dead is the

* See *Camps de Concentration* (Service d'Information des Crimes de Guerre: Crimes contre la Personne Humaine), Paris, 1946; page 197.

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a variety of racial and linguistic stocks ranging from Basques to Buriats and from Ladinos to Lapps. They were divided into six penal categories, distinguished by colored patches sewn on their blouses: green for ordinary criminals, red for political prisoners, black for "asocials" (slackers, prostitutes, procurers, etc.), pink for homosexuals, purple for conscientious objectors, and yellow for the crime of being a Jew.

The camps were under the supervision of the SS, the swank and dread Elite Guard whose black uniforms and death's head insignia were the prime symbol of Nazi fanaticism and terror.

Inside the barbed wire, however, all the officials of the camps—the Kapos (overseers), the *Vorarbeiter* (foremen), *Blockältester* (barrack chiefs), *Stubendienst* (orderlies), and the almost omnipotent *Lagerältester* † in charge of the entire camp—were chosen from among the *Häftlinge* themselves. It was they who were actually responsible

† These prisoner-officials should not be confused with the *Lagerführer*, *Blockführer*, etc., who were members of the SS. See the diagram of the table of organization of the camps at the end of this introduction.

INTRODUCTION

for the administration and discipline of the camps. Some of them were as benign as they dared to be (the SS made it clear that no coddling of their fellow prisoners was in order); most of them were as brutal and tyrannical as even the SS could wish.

In any account of life in the concentration camps it is apparent that the peculiar brand of witless irony that is a part of the normal atmosphere of any war was almost as responsible for the horror of the camps as was deliberate cruelty. At Dora, a subsidiary of Buchenwald, where the prisoners worked in twelve-hour shifts in underground passages without ventilation or water, the SS Christmas present to the prisoners was a splendid Christmas tree, set up in the middle of the parade ground, which the prisoners were allowed to admire for several hours at a time—standing in formation, half-naked with the thermometer skirting zero. A similarly warped concern for their charges' welfare led the SS to provide football fields, swimming pools, daily band concerts, and brothels for men mummified by exhaustion, starvation and beatings. At Buchenwald, the camp brothel was installed in the barracks across the street from the hospital, and

as Rousset sees it, is that they represented a new and different chapter in human experience and one from which we may learn new dimensions of human capacities for evil and good, rightness and wrongness, selfishness and devotion—and that they are a logical, if horrible, development rather than a sport in our social evolution.

Throughout this book one figure repeatedly appears as a sort of tutelary deity of the concentration camps—Ubu Roi. Whether at Buchenwald (which, by the way, was generally admitted to be a “good” camp—the best of them all), Neuengamme, or the extermination camps like Birkenau, Auschwitz and Maidanek, Rousset assures us, the spirit of Ubu reigned. There are some symbols in the literature of any nation that are so complete and perfect in their way as to have no possible equivalent in the vocabulary of other literatures. And King Ubu is such a one.

Ubu is the obese, pedantic, obscene hero of the play Ubu Roi, which the eccentric playwright, Alfred Jarry, is supposed to have written at the age of fifteen and which, produced in Paris in 1896, enjoyed a long run and numerous revivals. Imagine

an *Alice in Wonderland* (especially the scenes in the Duchess' kitchen, at the croquet party, and the trial of the Jack of Hearts) written not by a sedate and kindly Victorian professor but a gang of more than slightly vicious Dead End Kids, and you will have a fair concept of what Jarry's ribald and demented farce is like.

Ubu is an epic character. He is epic in his ruthlessness and greed, his slapstick delight in cruelty, his Falstaffian cowardice and scatological gluttony and even his stodginess. King Ubu (he becomes King of Poland by the simple expedient of massacring the royal family) is the Pope of Unreason, of a grisly unreason devoid of any real merriment. Ubu, with his gross lust to destroy, his retinue of bureaucrats, his Ministry of Phynance, and his Debraining Machine—for scooping out the brains of friend and enemy alike, is so complete a personification of Fascism as a whole and the SS mentality in particular that even physically, in Jarry's own illustrations, he is a composite portrait of Himmler, Goering and Adolf Hitler.

In form, *The Other Kingdom* is something be-

THE PORTALS OPEN AND CLOSE

and savage. Men who bear within them faiths uprooted and dignities undone. An entire race of men naked, inwardly naked, stripped of all culture, all tradition, armed with spades and picks, mattocks and sledge hammers, chained to the rusty ore cars, grubbers of salt, sweepers of snow, mixers of cement; a people gnawed by the lash, haunted by thirst, obsessed by the paradise of long-forgotten foods. The intimate gnawing of degradations. An entire people adrift on the stream of time.

And, in a fanatic projection of shadows, grotesque figures, bellies agape with disjointed laughter: a ludicrous determination to live.

The camps are the realm of King Ubu. Buchenwald lives under the sign of a monstrous whimsicality, a tragic buffoonery. In the first gray of dawn, the unreal platforms under the white glare of the floodlights, the SS swaggering in high boots, gripping their rubber bludgeons, the barking dogs straining at their supple leashes. The men crouching ready to jump from the freight cars, blinded by blows that catch them off guard, reel back, stumble against each other, shove, jump and land, tottering on their bare feet in the dirty snow, hobbled with

FIRST-BORN OF DEATH

THE LISTS HAVE BEEN MADE UP FOR two weeks but nothing has happened yet. Suddenly, at six o'clock one evening, the order comes. Three thousand men are to take the medical examination and put on the blue-striped "transport" uniforms.* The groups congeal in an interminable

* *Transport* was one of the most dreaded words in the concentrationary vocabulary. To be sent "on transport" was to be sent to a destination almost invariably worse than the camp from which one set out. (*Translator's note.*)

When the Americans draw near, we shall see the obligatory flight, headlong and senseless, toward nowhere. Boxcars of a hundred and fifty, a hundred and sixty men, a hideous hunger in their bellies, terror in their sinews. And during the night, the prisoners will massacre each other for half an ounce of bread, for a bit of elbow room. The next morning, the battered bodies in the ditches. At Wöbbelin, guards, armed with clubs, will have to be posted over the dead to kill those who eat the scrawny, fetid flesh of the cadavers. Amazing skeletons with empty eyes trample blindly over heaps of stinking corruption. They lean against a beam, heads sunken on their chests, and stand motionless and mute, one hour, two hours. After a while, the body has crumpled to the ground. A living corpse has become a dead one.

The men huddle together in the dark in groups of five. Snow is everywhere. The floodlights of the main gate hoot through the blizzard like mighty and barbaric horns. Forty-five thousand prisoners flock toward the parade ground, every evening, without fail. Slowly, Block by Block, in ranks of

ten abreast. The living, the sick and the dead.* Curses gnaw at the lips and are silent before the gods of the main gate. The orchestra, ironic and comical, thumps out the slow march of a haggard people.

It is a universe apart, totally cut off, the weird kingdom of an unlikely fatality. The depths of the camps.

* Literally: at these roll calls the prisoners who had died during the day, elsewhere than in the infirmary, were carried upon stretchers. (*Author's note.*)

STRANGE OBSESSIONS HAUNT THEIR BODIES

YOU DO NOT KNOW THE DEPTHS of the camps." One evening at Helmstedt in the Stube Zwei, the little room reserved for the Kapos. Nobody is there but the three of us: Emil, in his usual place at the head of the table, his back against the partition that separates us from the main office, the Schreibstube; Martin, leaning on his elbow at

Emil's right; and I, straddling the bench opposite Martin. Georg has gone out. Short and stocky, he is the camp carpenter here. He has spent ten years in the camps—for having been too fond of little girls and thinking he had the healer's gift. As a matter of fact, he still does a little laying on of hands from time to time. Right now he is in love with a woman internee and secretly smuggles letters and sometimes a snack of food to her. He runs the risk of twenty-five strokes on the backsides, but he is in love. He is forty-five years old, has the sunburned face of a crafty peasant and an unbelievable propensity for speech-making. From the Schreibstube, the voice of Poppenhauer, the Lagerältester, rises, heavy and vulgar. Thick-set, slow-moving, a neck too fat and short, a massive head with hair clipped very high, he is the perfect caricature of the typical German of the lower bourgeoisie straight out of the pages of *Simplicissimus*. He has been in the concentration camps for a year for having sold electrical appliances belonging to the government on the black market. He lived in the United States for several months and speaks English. Poppenhauer beats his men with all the fervor of an old

army noncom. Franz, before his arrest, used to flog like a madman. He would swoop down on the prisoners in a tornado of fury, drunk with the acrid pleasure of knocking people about, of seeing seven hundred men flee or fall before his single-handed fury. But he had his moments of relaxation and princely generosity. With Poppenhauer there is never any letup. He is finical and mean. His face purple, brandishing his blackjack, he rushes at the prisoners, bashing their heads in asthmatic rage. Every evening he delights in making men, frayed with weariness and hunger, but whose blankets were not folded according to regulations, do "the toad walk." * After which, he is obliged to lie down to ease a cramp in his liver.

Now Alfred, the Kapo of the truck, is replying to Poppenhauer. His voice is curt and dull. He speaks a little French, enunciating each word very slowly. He says that he has a wife in Avignon. It is he who betrayed Franz to the SS and got Poppenhauer appointed Lagerältester in his place.

* A form of discipline in which the victim, maintaining a full squat position and with his arms stretched horizontally before him, tries to run as fast as he can. (*Translator's note.*)

Alfred has a great deal of power because he holds almost all the strings to the local black market and helps the SS in their dealings with it. Evenings, when the men are locked up in the dormitory, he plays Mozart—and well. Sundays he loves to get together with a few other prisoners and sing old sentimental lieder for hours at a time. Only the day before, he beat up Rudolf for making indecent propositions to the priest Heinz, his lover. And right now he is probably turning over in his mind some bloody reprisal against that swine of a Herbert Pfeiffer who, always half-drunk, has nevertheless somehow managed to make Heinz fall passionately in love with him.

There are shouts from the refectory. "Kamou! Kamou! Kamou cigarettes?"

"Delaunay, lend me your *miska*, *nom de Dieu!*"

"*Scheisse Mensch!*"

"*Kbui! Pizda!*"

Someone in the crowd mimics big Toni: "*Yob troion matj, pizda kurva.*" Big Toni's lips purse in a grimace of disdain, and the Russians laugh at him, but they are tickled by it. Toni Brünken, a sadistic brute, our Blockführer. One day he whip-

OBSESSIONS HAUNT THEIR BODIES

when you came back to the Block, you had to push the corpses aside with your feet."

Emil Kunder is a former leader of the German Communist party. He has lived in the camps for years. He is solidly built in spite of his thinness. He can still carry two bags of cement on his shoulders. And his rolling gait is still that of the Hamburg sailor that he was in his youth. But his whole build gives a feeling of determination and shrewdness. Three times he has narrowly missed the gallows.

There is an uproar in the Schreibstube now. Hans, nicknamed the Bulldog, is laying about him steadily with Toni's whip. The Russian yelps. It is the same thing every evening. Walter and Kurt have come in. Walter says a few words in Plattdeutsch to Emil. Walter has spent fourteen years as a prisoner, six years in solitary confinement and eight in concentration camps. Kurt has had ten years in the camps. On three occasions Kurt was on the point of committing suicide, and each time a letter from his wife arrived in time. For hours at a stretch, he has been hung up by his wrists chained behind him, shoulders torn by the weight of his body growing heavier, and more physically

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criminally. He beats them, beats them, wildly, pointlessly, out of fear. For Otto, the Vorarbeiter, is afraid of everything, afraid of the Kapo, of the civilian bosses, of the Wehrmacht guards. Even at night he is afraid in his dreams.

Max the Baker has the fortitude of an ancient Roman. He is a Jehovah's Witness.† He moves like a force of nature, with the same detachment and a great economy of words. But one evening he opened his soul at length to Martin, Lorenz and me. He spoke with dignity, pausing and repeating himself at times, with the slow assurance of a man who has a message to impart. With his lifeless hands, he showed Hitler, the symbol of the Beast of the Apocalypse, doomed to destruction. Max the Kapo lives in the aloofness of the prophets. Calmly for ten years he has dwelt in the camps, refusing the proposals of the SS to set him free. Jehovah's Witnesses do not deny their God. Otto is with his God. It is rumored however that he

† Some six thousand Jehovah's Witnesses were confined in the German concentration camps. During the same period and for the same kind of obstinacy in taking the teachings of Jesus seriously, more than four thousand of them were imprisoned in the United States. (*Translator's note.*)

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE
ARE MANY MANSIONS

THIS INTENSIVE LIFE OF THE CAMPS has its laws and logic. The race of concentrationees recognizes motives of its own that have little in common with the existence of an inhabitant of Paris or Toulouse, New York or Tiflis. But the very fact that this concentrationary universe exists at all is not without importance for the meaning

of the universe of ordinary people, of mankind as men. It is not enough to establish a sort of physical contact with this life so totally separated from the accepted structure of the twentieth century. There still remain its rules to be grasped and its meaning to be understood.

First of all then—like sign posts along new roads—some obvious errors to avoid.

The camps are not all identical or equivalent. The concentrationary universe is organized on different levels. Buchenwald is a chaotic community, a sort of capital not yet entirely built, resembling a boom town by its mushroom, jerry-built sections and its teeming activity. It is a metropolis in that it has its proletariat (the Gustloff plant, the Mittelbau, the Deutsche Autowerke, the quarry, the gardens, the lumbering operations), its swarms of public officials, its capitalists and its underworld.

The capitalists: at the beginning of 1944 Buchenwald had two barracks set apart for so-called invalids, men who were officially classified as nonworkers because of their age or obvious infirmities. Its underworld (in the sense of all those

who did not accept its laws and refused to abide by its established customs): those who in one way or another, illegally for the most part, managed to escape work and elude the control of the police. Their number was relatively large. Most of them (by cultivating a high temperature, preventing advantageously placed wounds from healing, or by skulduggery of one kind or another) managed to secure certificates from the infirmary exempting them from work, and sometimes even from fatigue duty around the camp, for two days, a week, two weeks at the most, but renewable. And lastly, a phalanx of adventurers without any alibi at all, whom the police were constantly hunting down, and who ran the risk of the whip, solitary confinement, or a punishment labor group, the dread Strafcompagnie. This breed lurked about the barracks through the day, hid under the bottom tier of beds, prowled about in search of things to steal, congregated in the latrine Block, which was at once a stock exchange and a market place (bread, tobacco, leather shoes, clothing, knives, gloves, marks) and a cutthroat dive.

Neuengamme, on the other hand, is strictly a

manufacturing center. From six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night, not a single person has the right to be in the barracks, except a few Kommandos at noon. The internal bureaucracy of the community organization of the camp is reduced to a minimum: one Block leader and two Stubendienst to each building. The sick must be in the infirmary, and everybody who is not on the sick list must work—even the blind and the deaf mutes. The injured, the weak, the old—all those who at Buchenwald remain in the barracks—are posted for "light labor" at Neuengamme and assigned to rope making or to one of the fatigue details (cooking, peeling, disinfecting, post exchange, shoemaking). This rigid rule of work for everybody is written into the very architecture of the camp. An austere style, stark, simple lines. The barracks laid out in a severe alignment on the left side of the concrete parade ground, the infirmary, the showers, the cobbler shop, the storehouse, on the right; and at the far end, the kitchens and the new buildings that were built to house the workers of the Metallwerk and Messap plants. Beyond this and spreading out spoke-wise

from the camp, the canal and the port, are the construction yards that form a continuation of the Klinker works, the factories and the shops, the barges loaded with bricks, cement, and stone rubble shipped in from the ruins of Hamburg, a network of narrow-gauge rails with their traffic of ore cars pushed by men or pulled by a locomotive. Here, the foundations of a new factory building; there, between little mounds of sand and bricks, wide trenches half-filled with water in which prisoners flounder, laying conduits. And still farther beyond, the guards and the dogs, the fields and farms, a flat immensity of space. The tempo of the work is fast, cadenced by the SS, ever present and ever on the lookout. Neuengamme, precise and provincial, is the city of robots.

Yet Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Sachsenhausen, Dachau, are all segments of a whole. They constitute the type of "normal" camps that form the essential core of the concentrationary universe.

The reprisal camps, whether for Jews or Aryans—on the pattern of Auschwitz and Neue-Bremm—are situated in quite different latitudes.

The regime of camps like Neue-Bremm, near

Sarrebrüch, created to punish Aryans, is typified by two basic directives: no work, but rather, "sports"; and a minimum of food. The majority of the prisoners do not work, which means that any kind of labor, even the most arduous, is considered as "gravy." The slightest task must be done at double time. Blows, which are a commonplace in "normal" camps, here are the baton that sets the tempo for every hour of the day—to say nothing of the night. One of the games consists of making the prisoners dress and undress several times a day at top speed and to the tune of the blackjack. Another is to make them run in and out of the barracks while two SS men stand at the door with rubber bludgeons to beat them over the head. In the little rectangular cement courtyard, there are all sorts of sports. The prisoners are forced to spin 'round and 'round for hours under the lash; "toad walk" races are organized, and the losers are tossed into the water tank to the homeric laughter of the SS. Or the prisoners are put through calisthenics at top speed for hours at a time—deep squat with arms extended—fast, faster still, "*Schnell, los Mensch!*"—face down in the mud and onto the feet

again a hundred times without a pause, then run and slosh themselves with water to wash the mud off, and keep the soaking clothes on for twenty-four hours. And always the whip, the blackjack and the boot. The average stay in a camp of this kind is three weeks, and thirty-five to forty per cent of the victims die. The rest are exhausted. More than three weeks is certain death.

The camps for Jews and Poles: extermination and torture systematized on a large scale.

Birkenau, the greatest city of death. Selections * take place immediately on arrival of each new transport: the trappings of civilization set up as caricature to deceive and enslave. Regular weekly selections in this camp take place every Sunday. The long apprehension of inevitable extermination in Block 7. The Sonderkommando † totally cut off

* Selection, in concentration camp parlance, means the choosing, usually on the basis of health or age, of prisoners to be sent to the gas chambers. (*Translator's note.*)

† The "special" Kommando in charge of the crematoriums and gas chambers. They were forbidden to have any contact with the other prisoners. These Kommandos, usually composed of Jews or Russians, received extra rations. Aside from the gruesome nature of their work, the chief objection to being on this Kommando was the fact that, for security reasons, the SS was in the habit of li-

from the rest of the world, condemned to live each second of its eternity with burned and tortured bodies. Terror breaks the nerves so effectually that their agony encompasses every humiliation and every betrayal. And when, inexorably, the massive portals of the gas chamber close, the victims hurl themselves against them in such a mad stampede to live, that when they open once more, the wall of corpses, inextricably intertwined, spills in a cascade over the rails.

In the periods of greatest activity, tens of thousands are herded into the gas chamber every day. The looting of the bodies enriches the Lords of Auschwitz. Amazing fortunes are amassed.

Between these extermination camps and "normal" camps, the difference is not one of nature but only of degree. Buchenwald had its hell: Dora, † the subterranean V-2 factory. Weeks without coming to the surface, sleeping eleven men on two straw mattresses, eating and sleeping in the tunnel

quidating the entire Kommando at frequent intervals (at Auschwitz, every ninety days). (*Translator's note.*)

† Situated at Nordhausen, some seventy-five miles west of Buchenwald. (*Translator's note.*)

THE RED AND THE GREEN

TO SUPPOSE THAT THE CAMPS ARE essentially for political prisoners would be a flagrant error. The politicals (even using the word in its broadest possible extension to include militant resistants, spies, and those who undertook to smuggle people across frontiers) are only a handful among the multitude of others. The dominant color is

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green.* The bulk of the population of the camps are common criminals. Convicts, thieves, bandits of every nationality, fierce and cynical aristocrats, embezzlers, the most lowly laborers in quarries and mines, feel only amazement and contempt for the political internees. The tone, the fashion and the climate of the camps are set by the common criminals. The politicals are the serfs, the fags of all the others.

Even as applied to the "greens," the word "criminal" should not be taken too literally. The Russians, who make up the immense anonymous mass of the camps, include only an infinitesimal minority of individuals arrested directly for political reasons. Some workers, but especially Ukrainian and Russian peasants, deported to work in German factories and subsequently arrested for stealing tools to exchange for tobacco, for thefts of food, for infractions of regulations, for abandoning their jobs, for being picked up on the roads without the proper passports. A wild pack of adolescents, kids in their teens, uprooted from the Soviet system before they

* The badge of common criminals was a green triangle; political prisoners wore a red one. (*Translator's note.*)

against them, hostages, and a very slight trickle of political resisters. A very few manual workers, a scattering here and there of intellectuals. Peasants and a number of artisans, shopkeepers and small landowners snatched from the most remote horizons of the Polish earth, and all or almost all of them fundamentally conservative, passionately anti-Russian, hating the Germans to the point of dreaming up long and complicated tortures for them, but pliant and servile to their masters as long as they remained powerful—joyously and fervently anti-Semitic just short of advocating pogroms in the camps—and incredibly ignorant and chauvinistic.

The Greeks: a number of professors, lawyers, soldiers, and some members of the resistance, intellectuals and bourgeoisie, listless, squalid and nerve-racked; and, in much greater number, a troop of Levantine bandits, black-jowled and with kinky hair, heavily bearded (the Russians on the contrary were almost beardless), thieves and scoundrels, whiners and shirkers, but plucky under the whip.

The Netherlanders: big-boned workers, peasants slow and forlorn, almost always in the infirmary;

hostages, intellectuals, lawyers, tradesmen, a sizable nucleus of Protestants packing their Bible and their God with them; some political resisters, and a few others involved in all sorts of international traffic between Amsterdam and Paris and Paris and Madrid.

The Czechs: men of discipline for themselves and for others, cultivated, loyal to their own little group, active in camp politics: political workers, saboteurs, hostages.

The Danes: hostages, simple souls picked up in police raids, lanky men who died with an astounding facility.

The Luxemburgers: a closed corporation with a kind of freemasonry of their own; at Buchenwald, they were the police.

The French (so public rumor had it): people who never wash (and poor Hewitt,† Hewitt of the string quartets of Paris, London and New York, Hewitt the cleanest man in the world, sputtering with rage because the Russian Stubendienst insisted on teaching him how to wash his penis); French

† Maurice Hewitt (1884-), member of the Capet String Quartet and Director of the Institut Capet. (*Translator's note.*)

women, all whores, so the Russians said with roars of laughter, and the men, all perverts. They asked ribald questions and the Germans pontificated on hygiene, clowns in a stupid farce. "Frenchmen," the Poles twitted merrily. "No good. Run away. *Rozumiesz lizopizdy?*"

In the beginning, in 1942-1943, the dominant element was the common criminals: foreign slave labor (either volunteer or drafted) sentenced for theft, black market activities, attempting to escape, or sleeping with German women; black market operators whose activities had been detrimental to the occupation authorities, sellers of weapons, forgers of false identity papers (not out of any political idealism but for substantial profits), guides who exploited the Jews they smuggled across frontiers; a varied assortment of pimps; a few agents of the Gestapo arrested for embezzling or as a result of intrigues within their own organization; fascist volunteers in the SS *Waffen* who had violated military regulations or committed civil crimes. The life of these larvae, once they were tracked down, was a perilous one, and extermination awaited them, in some corner under a rain of kicks

and blows or, slowly, under curses and bludgeons in a Kommando.

With the large convoys that flooded the camps in the latter part of 1944, the number of political prisoners increased. Francs-tireurs, partisans, sent to Sachsenhausen for "the sports," many with a cross marked on their foreheads and cheeks with red lead; Communists interned by Vichy since 1940; Gaulists, doctors (a great many doctors from the beginning), government officials (especially from the services of the Ministry of Food), members of the petty bourgeoisie in great numbers, shipped in in carloads of a hundred or a hundred and twenty—an endless flow of them; railroad workers caught at sabotage and—at the very end, the "notables," the "people of importance," whose arrival raised a tidal wave of fury and resentment at Neuen-gamme, because the SS emptied two Blocks of the infirmary to make room for them. These people were exempted from both work and "sports." A multitude of completely innocent people, their morale undermined with brooding over the flagrant injustice of their lot, were in the camps for trifles like booing a newsreel, having been found in the

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company of people whom the Gestapo had come to arrest, crossing—for business or personal reasons—the artificial frontiers that the Germans had set up in occupied France, or because of anonymous and irresponsible denunciations, for having believed too soon that the Allies were about to land and allowing their names to be included on the lists of some resistance organization without ever having done any more than that—and a goodly number who had done nothing at all. All of these last bore up very badly. They had nothing to sustain them.

Their minds began to crack under the strain; and in the camps, when that happens, it is the end.

The camps were created for German political prisoners, specifically for them. It is only incidentally that they came to be opened to foreigners. When the Master Race launched its Panzers on the roads of Europe, the camps had already become the cornerstone of a new empire. The German political prisoners had served as guinea pigs for the creation of a new science of torture that had now reached its perfection. Consequently, after ten years, their ranks had dwindled. From hundreds of thousands, they had shrunk, in 1943, to only a few tens of

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nothing that can express, plastically and with as much intensity, the inner life of the concentrationee as Rodin's *Gate of Hell*.

By their very number, the criminals exercise a sort of sovereignty. They render any kind of solidarity impossible and illusory. They set up force and fraud as the only natural relations between men. They stir up national prejudices and post great gaudy placards exploiting every local superstition, every individual degradation. Perverse and vile, every appetite becomes a murderous one. The green men have drawn up the charter of values for the concentration camps.

In this sordid destitution, one of the most striking results is the destruction of any hierarchy of age. All the conventions that maintain a certain civility toward older men are wiped out. The old man is subjected to the same constraints as anybody else. It is legitimate for an adolescent to strike and insult him, to drive him out of his place. The old man is an object of derision and contempt because of his weakness. It is only power that counts, power derived from physical strength and guile. We had

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tower. The old man used to slip into the tool closet and close the doors. Lying in the closet, he did not suffer too much from the cold. When he was dragged out, the stench was always terrible. He had certain manias. One day he wanted two potatoes that a Greek was roasting over a brazier. In exchange he offered him his entire ration of bread for the day. It was a fortune and all out of proportion to the real scale of values. The potatoes had not cost the Greek, who had stolen them from a cart, anything. It was a bit of stupid senility on the old man's part. The Greek accepted; he was so afraid that somebody would interfere with his bargain that he almost choked in his hurry to gulp the bread down. But nobody protested. The Russians and Poles, seated in a circle around the fire, with that esteem made up of a cordial mutual contempt, considered the Greek to be a clever fellow.

The social positions that men might have had in civil life had no equivalent in the camps. They ceased to exist and even seemed like ridiculous caricatures, incongruous with the concentrationee as a person. One morning—it was during our delirious

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flight before the advancing Americans—a Frenchman came to see me, bringing another compatriot with him. He begged me to take the fellow into the hospital car or to crowd him in anywhere at all. He was a wreck of a man, a shriveled skin on bones. He had been horribly beaten during the night, and his face and whole body were covered with weals and black and blue bruises. His blue-striped coat was dirty and tattered. His pants, three-quarters torn off him, hung in a fringe above his knees. He was barefoot. His eyes, with that wild concentrationary terror lurking in their depths, implored my help. He told me that he was a lawyer from Toulouse, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that I kept from laughing aloud. For this social designation, *lawyer*, no longer fitted the poor wretch in the slightest. The incongruity of the thought was irresistibly comic. And it was the same with all of us. The man slowly disintegrated in the concentrationee.

SLAVES GIVE ONLY THEIR BODIES

of most of the prisoners was entirely occupied by their obsession with food. They talked incessantly of nothing but cooking recipes. Only military news had a deep interest for everybody. It might mean liberty and life. The distrust that dominated the relations between the prisoners set up strict barriers against any exchanges of opinion. The Communists kept under cover as much as possible, fearing a denunciation to the SS that would send them to the gallows, the Strafkompagnie, or the extermination camp. But the rightists, the adherents of the P.S.F.,* were afraid of the Communists; and after a little experience in the ways of the camps, they did not talk either. When I was on the night shift at Bartensleben, I had managed to get two good militant Communists, Claude and Maurice, taken into my Kommando. We used our spare moments during the night to study the labor movement or to go over the French political situation in 1936. These conversations were broken off by strict order of our Kapo, Emil Kunder. Emil

* Parti Socialiste Français, the leading French fascist party, organized and led by Doriot and heavily underwritten by big business. (*Translator's note.*)

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was afraid that the mere fact of our being seen talking together might attract the attention of the SS and bring about reprisals.

Conditions were better in a large place like Buchenwald. The greater number of prisoners made contacts easier. At Buchenwald, besides the Communist organization, which undoubtedly attained there a degree of perfection and efficiency unique in the annals of the camps, there were also more or less regular meetings of political elements ranging from the Socialists to the extreme right, which led to drawing up a program for common action on returning to France. There were also secret meetings of the Freemasons of the camp, which were held in the little woods inside the camp itself. But all these activities involved only very limited groups and were carried on without the knowledge of the majority of the concentrationees.

It was this very mental asphyxiation, augmented by the brutalities of the criminals, that was the most sinister disease of the camps.

Our ranks were riddled with SS spies. At Helmstedt, a Russian and a German hanged the prisoners, women or men. For each hanging they received

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difficult and the distribution of food a lengthy business. This was the pretext. With Paul reduced to the ranks and sent back to Neuengamme—a step that was taken too hastily, no doubt—the position remained unfilled until Ernst, who according to the plans drawn up at Neuengamme was to take it over, should arrive. For various reasons, neither Emil nor Walter nor Georg wanted to or could accept the position of Lagerältester. So a compromise with one of the criminals had to be worked out, and this gave Franz his great chance. Franz enjoyed a real popularity with the other prisoners. He was affable, cheerful, always had a pleasant word to say and never beat anybody. He promised to hold the position of Lagerältester only temporarily and to relinquish it to Ernst on his arrival. The accord was concluded; the SS accepted the nomination of Franz.

Franz's behavior changed completely as soon as he was in power. His imagination, which was a lively one, showed him all the advantages that he could derive from his new situation. It put him above all base subjections and made him a power in the concentrationary universe. And it was to the

escape was successful the SS would hold them responsible, and at the same time they saw what a chance to increase their own privileges a denunciation would give them. Alfred was chosen to betray his friend. In the eyes of the SS, the outrage was unpardonable. Not only had Franz pulled the wool over their eyes but he, a vulgar excrement, had dared to lift his eyes to an SS woman, and the stupid girl had allowed herself to fall for him. Franz was arrested. His mistress also. Toni Brünken came into the barracks one evening and broke the news in these words: "There has been some dirty business going on here. The man will be hanged." Franz was sent to Neuengamme in irons, and negotiations were begun for naming his successor.

Alfred called a meeting of the Kapos. The discussion took place in the Schreibstube. In this same room, three weeks earlier, these same men had gathered to celebrate Franz's birthday with a party. He was thirty-seven years old. At that time they had praised the master, repaying him in flattery for his favors.

Alfred defended his own conduct in the name of morality and collective security. The Kapos lis-

tened gravely. The presence of Toni Brünken, the Blockführer, prevented any political prisoner from being officially put in power. Georg would perhaps have been the only acceptable candidate, but he was too fond of his tranquillity at Schacht Marie, and he had "organized" a few things for himself at the mine and established certain amorous relationships that he would not have cared to break off. So it was once more a question of arriving at a compromise with one of the criminals. Alfred could not be considered as a possible candidate for the position of Lagerältester. He was too involved with the SS to have the confidence of the political prisoners. It was more than probable that he would slip through their hands as soon as he was appointed. And a Lagerältester has power over all the other Kapos in the life of the camp. As a reward for his treason, Alfred was named Kapo of the trucks, and approved by the SS. It was a handsome price. It gave him a hand in everything that concerned relations between the bakery and the kitchen, the supply system of the whole camp and contacts with the women prisoners' Block. Whoever held this position was at the hub of all the intimate intrigues of

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the camp, and his contacts with the civilians gave him numerous opportunities for graft. As Franz's successor, the Kapos finally settled on the newest and most insignificant man among them, Poppenhauer. They figured that his dependence on their support would assure their control over him. The nomination was accepted by the SS. The Poles, for their part, set to work and got the Blockführer to reinstate Yup. It was therefore one of the conditions of Poppenhauer's appointment that Yup should become Blockältester once more. Poppenhauer had neither prestige nor ability. He was a mediocrity in every way. He was never able to stand on his own feet. Yup contrived to make use of his weakness to increase Polish influence, and to a great extent he succeeded in by-passing Poppenhauer. The subsequent struggle was therefore between the German group, which felt its position threatened and which was, in fact, losing ground, and the Polish faction under Yup. These internal quarrels allowed the Russians to better their condition considerably.

The inside story of the camp is the story of this

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bureaucracy, the passions that run through it, the intrigues for power, the adventures of its top-ranking personnel in the complex network of SS schemes. For the rank and file of the concentrationees, it spells corruption and violence, exploitation of appetites and hatreds, accentuation of national and personal quarrels, and a sinister intensification of the horror of the life of the camps.

GODS DO NOT MAKE THEIR
DWELLING ON THE EARTH

THE SS ORGANIZATION IS A THING quite apart from the camps. The SS controls the roads that lead to the concentrationary universe. In the pine-covered hollow stands the watchtower with its alert machine guns. Along the tree trunks beside the road the barbed wire is strung. Like milestones, skulls and crossbones are on watch. One

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terror of inhuman realms. At the center of this empire, forever invisible, a brain unifies and controls all the police resources of the Reich—and Europe—and dominates with absolute will every possible aspect of the camps—the brain of Himmler and his intimates. Towering walls of pigeonholes, skyscrapers of dossiers, the most trivial matters catalogued in Himmler's antechambers. From these offices comes a signature, the order of life or death for the concentrationee. Not according to his department in the camps—only the Obersturmbannführer are judges of that—but because of a dead life, often one abandoned months or even years ago, and which seemed to have already been judged. Because of those unknown extensions of a dead life that continues a remote and threatening existence of its own in some inaccessible office. There a case is never finished, never closed. The trial goes on, expands, fattens upon personages born of itself, without any reason ever being formulated. An order arrives. A simple decision without any commentary or explanation. The order bears the stamp of the master. The commandant of the camp knows nothing about the affair. The Oberscharführer

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deriding priests, capitalists and Jews (exploiters all, and profiteers) in incendiary colors, bedeck the portals of the camps. Would-be humor, SS humor. The SS officer in charge of the camp bears the title of Schutzhaftlingsführer. Blatant label, like peals of demented laughter that never cease: the Schutzhaftlinge ("persons under protective custody") are none other than the political prisoners. The SS bible teaches, it appears, that the political prisoners have been put into the camps to protect them against the righteous wrath of the populace. The SS second-in-command, the Unterschutzhaftlingsführer, completes the local high command.

Under this double authority are placed: the Oberscharführer (first sergeant), the Scharführer (sergeant), the Rapportführer and, at the bottom of the structure, the SS troopers assigned either to guarding the camp or to some particular administrative function, like the Blockführer responsible for one or more buildings.

It was a fixed principle that, within this framework, the actual management of the camps should be turned over entirely to the prisoners themselves. The SS limited its functions to supervision and con-

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tached to the project. But, in the case of work projects as in that of camps, the SS issued the directives. They passed on plans and orders to the prisoner-officials in charge and held them responsible for all details of practical organization. These officials were answerable to the SS and could be dismissed from their posts, whipped, or sent to a Strafkompagnie if they did not succeed in carrying out the tasks assigned.

This system relieved the SS of most of their work and left them free to devote their time to their own internal bureaucracy and their own special interests. But the reasons for it went deeper than this and had more far-reaching consequences. The existence of an aristocracy among the prisoners, enjoying powers and privileges and wielding authority, made any unified opposition impossible. Finally, it constituted—and in the concentrationary universe this was its sufficient and definite justification—a marvelous instrument of corruption. The metaphysics of punishment peculiar to the SS demanded the existence of this aristocracy as an absolute necessity.

THE MYSTICISM OF THE SS

It is only normal that, when all the vital forces of a social class are the stake in the most total warfare ever yet conceived, the adversaries shall be rendered incapable of doing any harm and, if necessary, exterminated. The purpose of the camps is indeed physical destruction, but the actual aim of the concentrationary universe goes far beyond this. The SS does not conceive of his adversary as a normal man. The enemy, according to the philosophy of the SS, is the physical and intellectual embodiment of the Power of Evil. The Communist, the Socialist, the German liberal, the revolutionary, the resisters in foreign countries, are the *active* manifestations of Evil. But the very existence of certain peoples, of certain races, such as the Jews, the Poles, and the Russians, is the *static* expression of Evil. It is not necessary that a Jew, a Pole, a Russian, actively combat National Socialism: he is by birth, by predestination, a non-assimilable heretic doomed to hell-fire. Death therefore is not enough. Only expiation can assuage and soothe the Master Race. The concentration camps are an amazing and complex mechanism of expiation. Those who are to die go to their deaths slowly, at

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a rate so calculated that their physical and moral disintegration, realized by degrees, shall make them finally aware that they are creatures accursed, incarnations of Evil, not men. And the high priest of this punishment feels a secret pleasure, an inner thrill of ecstasy, in wrecking their bodies.

This philosophy alone explains the inspired niceties of the tortures, the intricate refinements that prolong them, their systematization, and all the other elements that go to make the camps what they are. The presence of the criminals; the brutal lumping of all nationalities while abolishing any possibility of understanding between them; the deliberate mixture of all strata of society and of all age groups; hunger, beatings, fear permanently drilled into every brain—all these are but so many factors whose logical result, without any need for further intervention, can only be that total dissolution of the individual which is the ultimate expression of expiation.

Such a philosophy is not a fortuitous one, a mere sop to unbalanced brains. It fulfills an important social function. Death by itself gives forth but little terror. The long silent rows of gallows have only

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or a workyard, and the men must be found working—and at top speed. If there was no work to do, they tore down what they had already built and built it over again. Thus the SS made it clear that the purpose of the prisoners' labor was not the accomplishment of any given task, but to keep the objects of their "protective custody" under the tightest and most stultifying restraint.

This concept of inferior beings, organically wicked, was so natural and inborn among the SS and went along with such contempt, such a long familiarity with every form of depravity, and such complete reliance on the power of their system to crush all human dignity, that they came to consider it a favor to a prisoner to assign him to some chosen task—which explains the burlesque idea of relegating some of the prisoners to laboratory research projects.

This inner certitude that they were predestined to rule and that it was a sacrilege ever to feel the slightest doubt of their mission stirred the SS to insatiable rages against the women prisoners. That they should so much as exist was an act of defiance that sent them into paroxysms of fury. And the

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sharp necessity for expiation, mingled with all the sexual impulses that were given free rein, explains the reprisals against them.

The blind hatred that ordains and presides over all these enterprises is the outcropping of all the rancors, all the thwarted petty ambitions, all the cravings and despair engendered by the extraordinary dissolution of the German middle class in the period between the two wars. To attribute it to any racial atavism is only to echo the very fallacy on which the SS mentality is based. At each economic cataclysm, each financial collapse, whole sections of German society crumbled away. Tens of thousands of persons were torn from the traditional forms of existence to which they physically belonged, and condemned to a social death that was a degradation and a torture for them. Amid the corpses of faiths and the haunting memory of erstwhile comforts, the most established intellectual horizons gone askew, there remained only an extraordinary nakedness made up of impotent rage, and a sullen and criminal thirst for revenge.

National Socialism endowed all the turpitudes released by the earthquake in German society with

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past it had played a decisive part in the physical destruction of German political groups. With the war, its scope was considerably broadened and diversified. All Europe now furnished contingents for the camps and in steadily increasing numbers. The planet-wide extension of the war, by obliging the SS to expand the activities of the so-called labor camps, gave the bureaucracy a new and very substantial base for development. A numerous personnel was required to manage, organize and discipline this inconceivable Babel. To deal with the variety of tasks, the composition of the bureaucracy was modified and its functions given new significance. It became possible for men who were not common bandits or calloused hangmen to enter its ranks. Because of this fact, the fight to the death for control entered into a phase of new and broader compromises, while becoming even more ferocious. The possibilities afforded by the greater number of fields in which the man power of the camps was used allowed the corruption of this aristocracy to reach new depths.

13.

DOMINIONS AND POWERS

FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY, IT IS POSSIBLE to consider the bureaucracy of the camps as divided into three distinct levels. First a sort of "municipal administration" which controls and organizes each of the enormous concentrationary communities. At the head of this unity is the Lagerältester, the "elder of the camp," and under his

orders the Blockälteste and, in certain cases, assistant Block leaders. "Elder of the camp" is merely a title and has nothing to do with age or seniority. The Lagerältester is one of the most powerful aristocrats. By his position, he controls the principal internal activities of the camp and is thus placed at the center of intrigues and information. Legally, he can break any of the high-ranking bureaucrats under his orders.

The lowest level of the "municipal" bureaucracy includes the room leaders, the Stubendienst, responsible for the cleanliness, discipline and the distribution of food in each room, and finally the Läufer (messengers) and Dolmetscher (interpreters).

Such is the basic framework of the concentrationary communities. About this structure are grouped three other services: the food supply, the hospital, and the industries attached to the camp.

The personnel centered about the kitchen and under the command of the kitchen Kapo enjoy considerable autonomy and authority. They include cooks, bakers, and the numerous officials in charge of bringing supplies into the camp, keeping

accounts, and distributing food. This organization owes its power in part to its control of food supplies—the highest form of wealth—and in part to its contacts with civilians. Even the most minor position in the kitchen carries with it a great deal of influence. The kitchen Kapo is therefore a man of very great importance, exercising an influence that is often decisive, and surrounded by a large number of satellites recruited from among the high and middle bureaucrats.

The importance of the infirmary comes principally from the multiple roles that it plays in internal intrigues and in its relations with the SS, and secondarily, from the fact that medical supplies can be a precious currency in dealing with the civilians. The Kapo of the infirmary, without wielding powers comparable to those of the Lagerältester and the kitchen Kapo, nevertheless enjoys a very high consideration. The various factions into which the aristocracy is divided are much concerned with seeing that their own agents are placed on the infirmary staff. This explains why the responsible positions at the infirmary are allotted, not according to any medical competence, but because

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of affiliations with existing groups and according to the strength of these groups. Aside from the Kapo of the infirmary, the important posts are those which control the various medical services and admissions and discharges. The authentic doctors, most of whom are foreigners and a great majority of them French, have no authority. They have no power to decide who shall be admitted or discharged. They may suggest, propose, give an opinion. They will be heeded only to the extent that their advice does not run counter to any existing schemes. The position of the doctors attached to the infirmary, their permanence, their duties, depend entirely on the nature of their personal relations with the Kapo and the heads of the services. Consequently, there are numerous and incessant intrigues. The importance of the Kapo of the infirmary in relation to the personnel derives not only from his power to dismiss any doctor at any time, but also from the fact that, through his personal relations with the Kapo of the kitchen, he has extra rations and of better quality at his disposition. Thus it often happens that operations are performed and

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Or when relations with the SS, for one reason or another, become too tense and there is danger of losing one's position or being sent on a bad transport. To drop out of circulation for two or three weeks, or sometimes more, often gives things time to blow over by themselves. The offices of the infirmary may also be discreet depots for the black market. When interfactional strife becomes too bitter, the infirmary may provide a speedy and discreet means of liquidating an adversary. Finally, sometimes, with the connivance of the Kapo of the infirmary, it is possible to change one's identity by taking that of a dead man.

The Kapo of the Krematorium may be called upon to play his part in these schemes. Plundering the corpses of such things as gold teeth, bridge-work and tattoo designs* (if the SS have not intervened first) affords him a valuable medium of exchange. Sometimes even more curious deals take

* Human skin embellished with tattooed designs was a prized curio. It may be recalled that Frau Koch, wife of the SS commander at Buchenwald, carried her collector's hobby so far as to have prisoners with interesting tattooings slaughtered and lampshades made of their skins. (*Translator's note.*)

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in the main square of Neuengamme, and I am ready to wager that many a man regretted that Robert Darnand ever made his discovery.

Finally, rounding out this table of organization (the Blocks, the kitchen, the infirmary and the Krematorium), are the industries working for the camp: the exchanges, Effektenkammer, disinfection, the organization of packages, the shoemaking shop and other services. These subsidiaries are of secondary, but not negligible, importance. Each of these services represents a certain number of sinecures for the high-ranking officials to distribute among their followers. Second, they are sources of profit to the aristocracy in their black-market dealings (valuables deposited by the prisoners on their arrival in camp, luxury foods extracted from the prisoners' packages from home).

In addition to the "municipal" organization, the administration of the camps consists of a veritable "Ministry of the Interior," grouped under three different headings: the Schreibstube, the Politische Abteilung and the police.

The Schreibstube is made up of bureaus varying

are often false, but it is enough for them to check some of the really serious cases against the Gestapo records. It is a labor-saving device. It is also a trap. Some trusting souls may give themselves away.

And then the Lagerschutz, the police, whose duties are to enforce the SS regulations for the camp—punishing violations of the rules, assuring discipline and tracking down those who may try, in one way or another, to avoid work. It is they also who execute the sentences imposed by the SS.

Here again, all these offices afford the high-ranking bureaucrats an opportunity to place their own followers in soft jobs. They also provide a very favorable ground for establishing relations between the bureaucrats and the SS and learning news from the outside world and the decisions of the upper SS administration regarding the future of the camp. All this information can be turned to account in laying the groundwork for and carrying out internal political schemes. The Politische Abteilung offers even more specific advantages. It makes it possible to learn the approximate political hue of the new arrivals and hence to detect adversaries and lukewarm sympathizers and to camouflage friends.

For a faction to have its own agents placed in the Politische Abteilung is therefore extremely important.

Running parallel to the internal administration of the camps, is the very impressive administration of the labor detachments. At the top are two bodies: the Arbeitseinsatz, which plans the work projects, and the Arbeitsstatistik, which distributes the work. The concentrationees at the head of these organizations receive their directives from the SS, who in turn are in liaison with the upper governing bodies of the Reich. The projects in question are not merely those in the immediate vicinity of the camp, but in widely separated regions where new enterprises are being set up. Transports may be sent two hundred or two hundred and fifty kilometers away and still remain under the authority of the offices of the mother camp. The Kapo of the Arbeitsstatistik is the head of this administration. Under his orders are the Kapos and the Vorarbeiter. The Kapo commands a fairly large group of workers. It is his job to maintain discipline and production. He is responsible to his superior and to the SS. He deals directly with the civilian super-

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visors, the civil engineers and the Feldwebel who inspect the works. *In principle*, neither civilian nor military personnel has any direct contact with the prisoners, and all orders and sanctions must be channeled through the Kapo. How effectively this rule is observed depends on the actual authority of the Kapo. The Kapos are exempt from all manual labor. The *Vorarbeiter* are under the orders of the Kapos. They supervise work teams. In principle, they are supposed to work; in practice they seldom do. The *Kommandos* are labor detachments varying in size.

The Kapo of the *Arbeitsstatistik* enjoys considerable authority. In many ways, his powers are greater than those of a minister of the interior in a democratic government or even than that of a high official in a dictatorship. He has the power of life and death over the prisoners. It is he who decides the assignments of the *Kommandos* and has the final word on the composition of the transport lists. By putting a man on a *Kommando* that is tough, because of the exceptional ferocity of the Kapo or the guards, he can send him to a death none the less certain for being deferred. In theory

MAN DOES NOT
LIVE BY POLITICS ALONE

FOR SUCH A SYSTEM TO CONTINUE to exist, there must be rewards and privileges. There are, and they are considerable. First, food. Even the pettiest bureaucrats have some official advantages. The Vorarbeiter have an extra liter of soup, as do the medical orderlies, the Dolmetscher, the Läufer, the Stubendienst, and all the other

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minor appointees of the administration. They are also entitled to a larger ration of bread, margarine, and a better portion of sausage or jam, as the case may be. This is an assurance of holding out better, living longer. The Kapos and the higher officials enjoy even greater privileges of this nature. At Helmstedt, they received the same ration as the soldiers. As for the top-ranking bureaucrats, they rate the same food as the SS. These official advantages are impressively supplemented by graft. All the personnel that gravitates about the kitchens and is concerned with distribution of food manages to appropriate appreciable quantities of food for its own use and for the benefit of its satellites. The room leaders, the Stubendienst, and the Dolmetscher follow their example. The Vorarbeiter has some authority. He can make things easy for a man on his detail—or he can beat him. So the men try to win his favor. If they receive packages from home, they share them with him. If not, they give him cigarettes, and tobacco is a most acceptable form of currency. The Kapo, on a larger scale because his powers are much greater, receives the same sort of tribute—as do the Block leader and

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room leader, who hand out extra chores and blows. Moreover, prisoners who receive packages are obliged to share them with their superiors lest they be stolen from them altogether. As a result, the bureaucrats on every level are distinguished by a physical vigor and bulk that contrasts with the emaciation of the lower orders.

The bureaucrats also have rooms to themselves, with beds and closets. In some cases, as at Neuen-gamme, a special Block is reserved for them. They have their own personal mess kits and knives and forks. Nobody who has not lived in those stinking, overcrowded dens where, in the stale sweat of filthy bodies, men are piled together, two, three, sometimes five or six, to a single straw mattress—sodden clusters dangling one above another, in four or five tiers of badly joined planks, choking with dust, and in a turmoil of shrieks and blows—no one who has not lived this can possibly understand what even the poorest room, with a little tranquility and a mattress of one's own, can mean. To be obliged, for want of so much as a shelf to keep them on, to carry on one's person all the scanty indispensable possessions one has collected with such

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pains. To live in fear that mattresses, planks, blankets and shoes may be stolen at any moment and to have to stand guard over them constantly, unable to move about or so much as stir from the communal bunk. To be obliged to wait for hours on end for one's turn at a mess kit, to fight to get it and to keep it—a filthy *miska* out of which dozens of men have already eaten and into which one of them has pissed perhaps. What a relief to escape from all these sordid preoccupations! What an envied privilege, precious as a crust of bread!

The bureaucrats are beaten less than the common run of the prisoners. They beat the others. And the higher their rank, the fewer blows they receive and the more they give. This too increases a man's chances of survival. The aristocrats are armed: *gummi* clubs and blackjacks; and this alone is enough to give them an assurance completely unknown to the lower classes. They are better dressed and consequently a little more like human beings.

They do not work and are not subjected to the extraordinary slave market that takes place every morning when the Kommandos are made up—yet another ordeal of terror that they escape.

MAN DOES NOT LIVE BY POLITICS ALONE

a man like themselves and he had treated them brutally. They ganged up on him and left him unconscious on the floor. When the news reached the bureaucrats, they were frightened. Poláčěk no longer bore his title, but he had been one of themselves. The Russians' behavior threatened them. Franz and the whole group of Kapos descended on the seven hundred terror-stricken men in the dormitories. They were drooling with rage. Blackjacks fell in all directions, gouging red furrows across necks and backs. The men rolled on the floor, milling in a helpless stampede, scrambled under beds, ran, trampled each other in corners, howling with terror. The order was given to strip naked. Clothing was thrown everywhere, hurriedly, very hurriedly. The naked pack ran out into the courtyard, came back into the barrack, went out once more, came back again, panting, driven mad by the blackjacks. It went on for two hours. The men's ribs ached, the Kapos were pale with fatigue. Only their rage and fear carried them on. Toni Brünken had reduced Poláčěk to the ranks, but he condemned the men to spend the night stretched naked on the concrete. The fear

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of their masters must be instilled into the innermost depths of their brains.

The SS lords have their appetites. The prisoners are excrements, but there is money to be made even out of excrement. Quite a lot of money in fact. And the bureaucratic excrements may be very useful in this sort of operation. The bureaucracy does other things besides running the camps. The top men are deeply involved in the SS dealings with the black market. Berlin sends cases of cigarettes and tobacco to pay the prisoners. Truckloads of food are sent to the camps. The prisoners are supposed to be paid every week; instead, they will be paid every two weeks, or once a month. The number of cigarettes will be cut down, and a list will be drawn up of "bad" workers who will receive nothing. The men will be dying for tobacco? What of it? The cigarettes will go to the black market. Meat? Butter? Sugar? Honey? Canned goods? Feed them more red cabbages, beets, rutabagas, pieced out with a few carrots, and they will get along all right. It is pure goodness of heart to give them anything. As for the preserved goods, a judicious

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ket for lumber. Somebody might need an electric adding machine. A word to the Kapo Georg or Hans would fix that. The SS was very nice about it that time that Hans killed a Pole in the sand pit. He was only a Polack, it is true; but, just the same, if they had put in a report . . . Berlin is getting quite fussy about such matters these days. Things are coming to a sorry pass. The fact is that Hans has become very co-operative lately. Just last week he turned in two interesting reports—very interesting—on a Feldwebel and a couple of guards. It's funny how these soldiers can't seem to take it. They are already fed up at the beginning of the sixth year. Hans the Kapo . . .

Strange bedfellows. The curious partnership between the SS and the top officials among the prisoners. The SS feels only infinite contempt for them; but there are some deals that cannot be put over without their help. Consequently, they must be allowed a few liberties too. A permissible margin of legitimate graft. Nothing will be said, of course; but they are quick to catch on—too quick.

Not that the SS are afraid of any prisoner, no matter what his rank. If a scandal broke out, the SS

A NEW ASPECT OF CLASS CONFLICT

The upper hierarchy of the bureaucrats is therefore recruited only among Germans. No one else can aspire to these positions. The very great majority of the aristocracy is composed of Germans. But when the scope of the camps was expanded to include all Europe, some foreigners had to be admitted into the aristocracy. Poles attained the rank of Blockältester and Kapo. All higher ranks than these were closed to them. Czechs and Luxemburgers rose to very high ranks in police and clerical positions. Very rarely, and then only in camps where there were pronounced French majorities, a few Frenchmen became Kapos and sometimes assistant Block leaders. Neither the Russians nor any of the others ever rose higher than Vorarbeiter.

The last two years saw a bitter struggle develop in the aristocracy between the Poles and the Germans.

The same period was marked by a rise of the Russians toward places of power. But the fundamental conflict which split the aristocracy asunder until about 1943 and which, though it died down somewhat subsequently, still went on, was the ruthless struggle between the German political pris-

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oners and the common criminals. The history of that struggle is strewn with corpses.

The political prisoners were mostly Communists, Social Democrats not being at all numerous in the concentrationary universe. The early years of the camps were incomparably more terrible than the period that we knew. The struggle for power had therefore been very literally a matter of life and death for the German political prisoners. The extraordinary expansion of the concentration camps as a result of the war aided the German Communists in two ways. First, it obliged the SS, for lack of other capable administrators, to admit them to high positions in the camps which had hitherto been held only by the criminals. Second, the diversity of work in the camps permitted them to accept certain posts without irreparably compromising themselves. 1942 and the beginning of 1943 saw the almost complete triumph of the political prisoners over the criminals.

But they could capitalize on the circumstances only because they had formed themselves into a solid and homogeneous group. Serious crises were in store for them. These crises rose in part from

tained their integrity and self-respect to the end—though it was amazing that they did. I have mentioned Erich, the leader of Block 48 at Buchenwald. His father, mother and brother had all fallen under the blows of nazism. His father had been hanged before his eyes. I lived with the Kapo Emil Kunder every day for more than twelve months. I never saw him strike anybody. Never for a moment did he weaken in his revolutionary convictions. He always remained the leader that he must have been at Hamburg during the insurrection. And yet, for years on end, he lived all the ignominies of the concentration camps. Walter was another man whom I knew intimately; and I know that in the worst moments, in the times of the most harrowing dejection, he was always true—and more than true—to his faith as a revolutionary. Kurt, who managed to survive thanks to Emil's protection and who, every night, from the ruins of his shattered nerves, cried out his wife's name for hours, never beat anybody. Ernst, who was commonly believed to be a Spaniard because of his profile and dark complexion, won the hearts of his men by his natural smile and the sane, wholesome life that he bore within

him in spite of long years of hell. I came to feel for these men, in spite of and perhaps because of whatever weaknesses and failings they might bear within them, and which quickened their sympathies for all the suffering around them—I came to feel for them an affection founded on my discovery of Man, beyond all degradations, vile but magnificent, precious for his own sake and outside of all creeds and conventions. Emil, Walter, what a profitable example I found in your lives and what a lesson of true strength in all defeats!

The Communist group functioning in the camp kept up contacts with all the other concentration communities. The constant coming and going of transports facilitated liaison and intelligence—with delays, of course, amounting sometimes to several months. The German Communists had learned to work patiently in the flow of time. This long distance collaboration was an asset in the struggle against the Greens. If some criminal official was ousted and sent to Buchenwald because of some scandal that the political prisoners at Neuengamme had been able to play up, one of the prisoners in the

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transport reported all the details to the political group at Buchenwald so that they could take whatever steps were necessary to deal with the newcomer, to ostracize or perhaps to kill him. The Greens knew this. One of the most effective weapons against the Greens was this counter-terror employed to the limit of all the means that the camps afforded. The criminals were sharply divided among themselves, their ranks rent by greed. The political prisoners took advantage of these dissensions and compromised with one faction in order to crush another, making use of favorably inclined criminals (who, in the beginning at least, obtained the ear of the SS more easily) to undermine the Greens with the SS. But their most decisive weapon was exploitation of the foibles of the criminals themselves. By playing on their passions and lack of self-restraint, it was possible to make them incapable of maintaining enough discipline and production to keep the SS from breaking them. The positive counterpart of these tactics was for the political prisoners to prove themselves capable administrators. Thanks to their connections, their solidarity, their better developed personalities, the political prisoners had great advantages on their

mun, which must vary with the conditions of the moment, and persuade the inspectors and the guards to accept it. It called for a great deal of tact and diplomacy.

With a partial victory won and a number of key positions under their control, the German Communists developed their secret power in all the great concentration centers. It afforded them a broad and remarkable platform for resistance. If one of their number was broken by the SS and orders issued to assign him to hard labor, there was no question of protesting against the sentence; but all along the line and at every level, the order was sabotaged. Some Kapo, a fellow Communist, would take him into his own Kommando and make things easy for him. After a while, he would be reinstated.

All of this worked out to the advantage of the prisoners as a whole. Even the most debased political prisoners, those who beat their men cruelly, were never quite such bloodthirsty savages as the common criminals. As a result, the conditions of life in the camps were notably improved. Foreign Communists stood a better chance of survival. The German Communists showed always a real spirit of

international solidarity. As soon as foreign Communists were identified as such, the camp officials arranged that they should not be sent on transports and assigned them to relatively good jobs. In the barracks, the Blockältester was warned and either let them alone or sometimes gave them a few privileges. Of course, in the last six months of 1944, when the huge convoys of prisoners were pouring into the camps, these rules could not be applied in all cases, but foreign Communist leaders always received special consideration.

At Buchenwald, the secret central committee of the Communist group was composed of Germans, Czechs, a Russian and a Frenchman. Its power was considerable.

The German Communists held fervently to their attitude of 1933. They still felt a keen hatred for the Social Democrats. Their relations with the few Social Democrats interned in the camps depended on personal impressions and were usually good. But as far as I know, the Social Democrats were never accepted into their group. They hated priests and regarded professional soldiers with suspicion. I have said that Erich, in spite of the risks, did not

economic extension of the USSR. They refrained from taking any position on the dissolution of the Comintern and, in general, on all recent problems.

From 1944 on, they concerned themselves with the conditions that the end of the war would create. Their great fear was that the SS would liquidate them all first. And this was no groundless fear. I am far from being acquainted with all their plans to cope with this possibility. The two factors of the problem were protection against the SS and protection against the common criminals who made up the mass of the population of the camps.

At Helmstedt, Emil had set to work seriously on the soldiers who guarded us. One of the Feldwebel was a former Communist, another a Democrat. An agreement with them was reached. They promised that, as long as they were there, the soldiers would not fire on the prisoners even if the SS gave the order. In the eventuality of a suspension of hostilities while the Allies were still far from the camp, the soldiers were to take over, kill the SS, and arm the German Communist group and a nucleus of foreigners for whom, in Emil's eyes, I was to have the responsibility.

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But the soldiers left, and the weeks of horror at Wöbbelin resulted.

The end of the political prisoners' administration was not without significance in a defeated Germany. The last weeks at Wöbbelin were anything but reassuring. A number of transports happened to be assembled in the camp, and the men knew little about each other. Hunger raged. The distance from the kitchen to the infirmary was about two hundred meters; it took a dozen armed men to protect the buckets of soup being carried to the patients. Every day acts of violence occurred in the vacant lots that surrounded the barracks. As soon as the food had been distributed, groups of ten or a dozen men would form and go about attacking the weak and any lone persons they found, to rob them of their food. There were three cases of cannibalism, and a guard had to be set up around the morgue. There were no medical supplies of any kind; men died in heaps. Soon it was difficult to carry the corpses away. The odor around the places where the dead were piled was frightful. Every night there were outbursts of raving madness in the "convalescent"

AND THE WATERS WERE ABATED

those that one saw walking in the streets. Nobody thought. I remember that evenings when I happened to report my conversations with civilians or soldiers to Emil, he would give a shrug of impatience. "Ach! their brains have been drained empty." And it was true, much truer than even he himself suspected. It was as true as he felt it to be, in his muscles before he was conscious of it. And it is this that explains the departure of the political prisoners.

Of course, it is true that they were afraid of the Russians—all of them. And not without reason. At Wöbbelin the prisoners were such a mixed lot and so little acquainted with each other that there was no counting on any distinctions being made in case of an uprising. Every man that wore an armband as a badge of office would have been massacred without pity. And that indeed was the motive for their flight. Near Hanover, all the Kapos and Vorarbeiter were massacred. The Russians ate the thigh of Gärtner, the revoltingly brutal Kapo of Dora.

But if the political prisoners made no attempt to act, it was because all about them the country was dead. There were not even half a dozen men

AND THE WATERS WERE ABATED

the same extent, among those who were the most imbued with Nazi demagogy. The real weapon was terror.

Here in France, in spite of the occupation, we do not even yet know what terror is, permanent and universal terror. Not only did it crush the old parties morally and physically, but it got so that everybody was afraid to speak and finally ceased to think. Not only was the opposition stamped out, but the classes were disintegrated in their component elements. The German proletariat lost all concept of its social function and all consciousness that it *could* take an initiative and intervene in the crisis. Its reaction went no further than desertion and a sort of slow-down strike born in the main of weariness and surrender. Everybody dropped the reins.

The concentration camps left Germany drained of all substance.

THE DEAD STARS
PURSUE THEIR COURSES

THE CONCENTRATIONARY UNIVERSE shrivels away within itself. It still lives on in the world like a dead planet laden with corpses.

Normal men do not know that everything is possible. Even if the evidence forces their intelligence to admit it, their muscles do not believe it. The concentrationees do know. The soldier who has spent months under fire has made the acquaintance

DEAD STARS PURSUE THEIR COURSES

sixty-six who never weakened and finally came through victorious.

All this is no small recompense.

On the positive side, it is still too soon to reckon the value of our experience as concentrationees, but already it promises to be a rich one. Dynamic awareness of the strength and beauty of the sheer fact of living, in itself, brutal, entirely stripped of all superstructures—living through even the worst of cataclysms and most disastrous setbacks. A cool, sensual thrill of joy founded on the most complete understanding of the wreckage, and consequently incisiveness in action and firmness in decisions, in short, a broader and more intensely creative vigor.

For some it brought confirmation; for most, a discovery—and a compelling one: the mainspring of idealism run down, in the destitution of the concentrationary universe, punctured delusions reveal the dependence of man's condition on economic and social structures, the true material relations that determine behavior. In its ulterior expression, this knowledge tends to translate itself into precise ac-