SHORTLISTED FOR THE SAMUEL JOHNSON PRIZE FOR NON-FICTION

Village of Secrets

DEFYING THE NAZIS IN VICHY FRANCE

CAROLINE MOOREHEAD

'A story of courage and determination, of heroic individuals'
Sunday Telegraph

VINTAGE

Contents

About the Book

High up in the mountains of the southern Massif Central in France lie tiny, remote villages united by a long and particular history. During the Nazi occupation, the inhabitants of Le Chambonsur-Lignon and the other villages of the Plateau Vivarais-Lignon saved several thousand people from the concentration camps. There were no informers, no denunciations, and no one broke ranks. Together, the villagers held their silence, and kept persecuted people – resisters, freemasons, communists and above all Jews, many of them children and babies – from danger. During raids, the children would hide in the woods, their packs on their backs, waiting to hear the farmers' song which told them it was safe to return. After the War le Chambon became one of only two places in the world to be honoured by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among Nations.

Just why and how le Chambon and its outlying villages came to save so many people has never been fully told. But several of the remarkable architects of the mission are still alive, as are a number of those they saved. Caroline Moorehead travelled across the world to interview these people, and searched archives that few have seen, to bring us the unforgettable testimonies of many of those involved in this extraordinary account. It is a story of courage and determination, of a small number of heroic individuals who risked their lives to save others, and of what can be done when people come together to oppose tyranny.

About the Author

Caroline Moorehead is the biographer of Bertrand Russell, Freya Stark, Iris Origo and Martha Gellhorn. Well known for her work in human rights, she has published a history of the Red Cross and a book about refugees, *Human Cargo*. Her biography of Lucie de la Tour du Pin, *Dancing to the Precipice*, was shortlisted for the Costa Biography Award in 2009. Caroline's most recent book was *A Train in Winter*. She lives in London.

Also by Caroline Moorehead

Fortune's Hostages
Sidney Bernstein: A Biography
Freya Stark: A Biography
Beyond the Rim of the World: The Letters of Freya Stark (ed.)
Troublesome People
Betrayed: Children in Today's World (ed.)
Bertrand Russell: A Life
The Lost Treasures of Troy
Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the History of the Red Cross
Iris Origo: Marchesa of Val d'Orcia
Martha Gellhorn: A Life
Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees
The Letters of Martha Gellhorn (ed.)
Dancing to the Precipice: Lucie de la Tour du Pin and the French Revolution
A Train in Winter: A Story of Resistance, Friendship and Survival

List of Illustrations

The maps were drawn by Bill Donohoe.

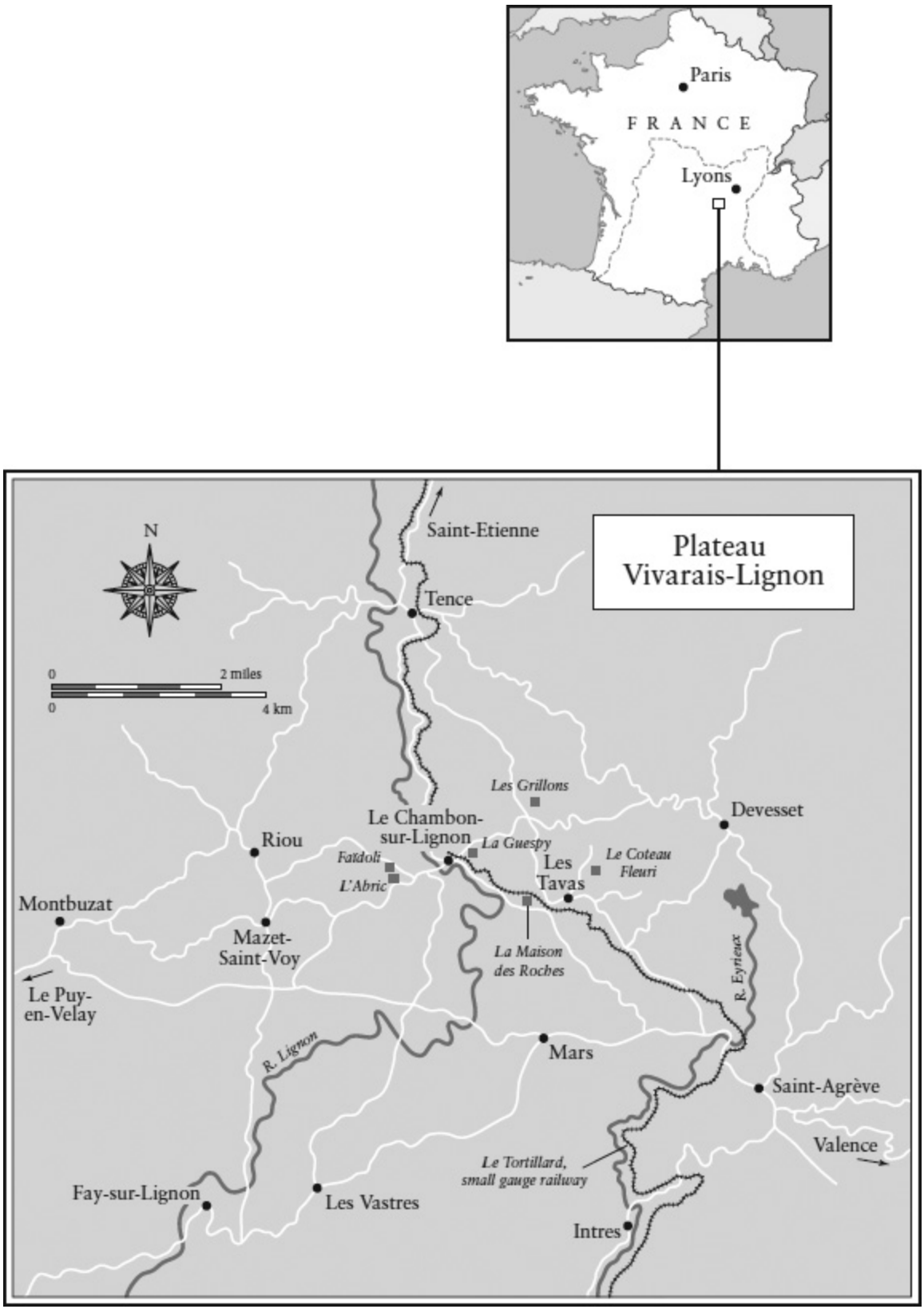
20 Miss Maber and her companion Jeanne Carillat
21 Lamirand visits the Plateau, 15 August 1942. Bach is in uniform next to him (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
22 Madeleine Barot's escape plan (private collection)
23 Edouard and Mildred Theis
24 The *Kommandantur* in Le Puy, 1941 (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
25 Oscar Rosowsky (private collection)
26 Emile and Solange Sèches and their class at Tante Soly, 1942 (courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)
27 Praly and companions (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
28 Armand and Bella Nizard, with seven of their nine children, 1928
29 Daniel and Suzanne Curtet (private collection)
30 Genie and Liliane Schloss
31 Theis, Darcissac and Trocmé, in Saint-Paul-d'Eyjeaux
32 Lucie Ruel, 1945 (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
33 Part of Madeleine Dreyfus's notebook (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
34 Joseph Bass with some of le Service André, 1944 (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
35 Robert and Henriette Bloch with their two sons, summer 1942 (courtesy of the Chambon Foundation)
36 Daniel Trocmé
37 La Maison des Roches
38 The Francs with three Jewish children and a shepherd boy. Pierre Cohn stands directly in front of Madame Franc (Private collection)
39 A group of children in the mountains behind le Chambon
40 Virginia Hall and her *corps franc Diane*
41 Liberation in le Chambon, 1945
42 Georges and Lily Garel in Switzerland after the war

Land occupied by Italy until 1943

Vichy France

French land occupied by the Nazis

■ Internment camps


Paris
FRANCE
Lyons
Plateau
Vivarais-Lignon
N
0
2 miles
0
4 km
Saint-Etienne
Tence
Les Grillons
Devesset
Le Chambon-
sur-Lignon
La Guespy
Le Coteau
Fleuri
Les
Tavas
Faldoli
L'Abric
Riou
Montbuzat
Mazet-
Saint-Voy
La Maison
des Roches
R. Eyrieux
Le Puy-
en-Velay
R. Lignon
Mars
Saint-Agrève
Valence
Le Tortillard,
small gauge railway
Fay-sur-Lignon
Les Vastres
Intres

Chronology

1939

1 September	Germany invades Poland
3 September	Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia and France declare war on Germany
26 September	French government outlaws Communist Party

1940

29 February	Ration cards introduced
21 March	Reynaud replaces Daladier as prime minister
13 May	German army crosses Meuse and enters France
18 May	Reynaud appoints 84-year-old Pétain deputy prime minister
24 May	British Expeditionary Force falls back on Dunkirk
10 June	French government leaves Paris. Italy declares war on France and Britain
14 June	Germans enter Paris
16 June	Reynaud is replaced by Pétain
22 June	Franco-German armistice signed at Rethondes
23 June	Hitler visits Paris. Laval becomes deputy prime minister

1 July	Pétain’s government moves to Vichy
22 July	Vichy government begins to review citizenship
13 August	Freemasons banned from many professions
27 September	Germany demands census of Jews in occupied zone
3 October	First Statut des Juifs, defining Jewishness and banning Jews from certain occupations
22 October	Jews in Baden and the Palatinate rounded up, deported to France and interned
24 October	Pétain meets Hitler at Montoire
5 November	Creation of Nîmes Committee

1941

March	Vichy sets up the Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives (CGQJ) under Xavier Vallat
14 May	First *rafle* of Jews in Paris
2 June	Second Statut des Juifs
22 July	Vichy law authorises confiscation of Jewish property and enterprises
29 November	Vallat sets up the Union Générale des Israelites de France (UGIF), supposedly to let Jews manage their own affairs
11 December	Germany declares war on USA

1942

20 January	Wannsee meeting commits Reich to Final Solution
4 February	Formation of the Service d’Ordre Légionnaire, predecessor to the Milice

1 March	Start of Allied bombing of France
19 March	Vallat sacked from CGQJ, replaced by Darquier de Pellepoix
27 March	First train of Jews leaves Drancy for Auschwitz
29 May	Jews over the age of six in occupied zone ordered to wear a yellow star
30 June	Eichmann arrives in Paris to implement Final Solution
16–17 July	*Rafle* of Jews in Paris, *Opération Vent Printanier*. 12,884 people arrested
5 August	Start of deportations of Jews from southern zone
10 August	Lamirand visits the Plateau Vivarais-Lignon
13 August	Switzerland closes its borders to Jewish refugees
August	Letters of protest from French prelates
September	Pastor Marc Boegner directs Protestants to save Jews
8 November	Allied landings in North Africa
11 November	Germans invade southern zone

1943

January	Combat, Libération-Sud and the FTP join forces as the Mouvements Unis de la Résistance (MUR)
18 January	Siege of Leningrad lifted
24 January	Germans destroy Vieux Port of Marseilles
31 January	Milice founded, with Darnand as secretary general
16 February	Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) introduced

9 July	Allies reach Sicily
25 July	Mussolini replaced by Badoglio
8 September	Germans take over Italian-occupied *départements* in southern France
13 October	Italy declares war on Germany

1944

22 January	Allies land at Anzio
6 June	D-Day landings
7–10 June	German massacres at Tulle and Oradour-sur-Glane
15 August	French and Allied troops land in Provence. Progressive liberation of France by Allies, French armies and Resistance begins
17 August	Last train of Jews leaves Drancy for Auschwitz
24–25 August	French forces enter Paris. Germans surrender
1 September	French troops reach le Chambon
23 October	Britain, USA and Canada officially recognise de Gaulle’s government

Principal characters

The pastors

André and Magda Trocmé and their children Nelly, Jean-Pierre, Jacques and Daniel in le Chambon
Edouard and Mildred Theis in le Chambon
Daniel Curtet in Fay-sur-Lignon
Roland Leenhardt in Tence
Marcel Jeannet in Mazet

The rescuers

Mireille Philip, who ran the network taking children to Switzerland
Georgette and Gabrielle Barraud, owners of the Beau Soleil
Dr Le Forestier, the doctor of le Chambon
Miss Maber, an English teacher at the Ecole Nouvelle Cévenol
Oscar Rosowsky, medical student and master forger
Mme Déléage, placer of children for the OSE
Mme Roussel, Catholic who concealed Jews in le Chambon
Pierre Piton, boy scout who guided Jews to Switzerland
Emile Sèches, proprietor of Tante Soly
August Bohny, Swiss director of La Guespy, L'Abric and Faïdoli
Daniel Trocmé, director of Maison des Roches
Charles Guillon, mayor of le Chambon
Roger Darcissac, teacher in le Chambon
Marie Exbrayat, proprietor of an ironmonger's shop in Fay

Lulu Ruel, proprietor of a café in Mazet, and her daughter Lucienne
Dorcas Robert, proprietor of a café in Yssingeaux
Virginia Hall, SOE and OSS agent
Léon Eyraud, organiser of the Maquis
Jean, Eugenie, Roger and Germain May, proprietors of the Hôtel May
Jean Deffaugt, Mayor of Annemasse

The children

Hanne Hirsch and Max Liebmann
Simon and Jacques Liwerant
Jacques and Marcel Stulmacher
Genie, Liliane, Ruth and the girls from Roanne
Pierre Bloch
Gilbert Nizard and his brothers and sisters
Madeleine Sèches of Tante Soly

The Justes

Abbé Glasberg, rescuer at Vénissieux
Père Chaillet, of Amitié Chrétienne
Madeleine Barot, general secretary of Cimade
Joseph Bass, of the Service André

The Jewish rescuers

Madeleine Dreyfus, of the OSE
Georges and Lily Garel, of the OSE's Circuit B
Liliane Klein-Liebert, social worker with the OSE
Georges Loinger, conveyer of children to Switzerland
Andrée Salomon, of the OSE

Germans and collaborators

Inspector Praly, policeman in le Chambon
Major Schmähling, commander of German garrison in Le Puy
Robert Bach, prefect of the Haute-Loire
René Bousquet, Vichy chief of police

To Anne and Annie, companions on my travels

Village of Secrets

Defying the Nazis in Vichy France

Caroline Moorehead

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

The memory of the world is not a bright, shining crystal, but a heap of broken fragments, a few fine flashes of light that break through the darkness.

Herbert Butterfield

In searching for an explanation of the motivations of the Righteous Among the Nations, are we not really saying: what was wrong with them? Are we not, in a deeper sense, implying that their behaviour was something other than normal? . . . Is acting benevolently and altruistically such an outlandish and unusual type of behaviour, supposedly at odds with man's inherent character, as to justify a meticulous search for explanations? Or is it conceivable that such behaviour is as natural to our psychological constitution as the egoistic one we accept so matter-of-factly?

Mordecai Paldiel

Foreword

In the spring of 1953, *Peace News*, a fortnightly magazine aimed at America's pacifist community, carried an unusual story. It was about a half-French, half-German Protestant pastor called André Trocmé who, between the arrival of the Germans in Paris in May 1940 and the liberation of France in the summer of 1944, helped save some 5,000 hunted communists, Freemasons, resisters and Jews from deportation to the extermination camps of occupied Poland.

Posted to the remote parish of le Chambon-sur-Lignon, high in the mountains of the Eastern Massif Central, Pastor Trocmé, as *Peace News* told it, so inspired his Protestant parishioners with his absolute faith in pacifism that, lit up by a 'conspiracy of good', they took in, hid, fed and smuggled to safety in Switzerland those whose names appeared on Nazi death lists. Many of those rescued were children.

As the Cold War was beginning and fears of global conflict were spreading, here was proof that Gandhian non-violence could work. More than that, the story was a perfect weapon in the struggle to find meaning for the Vichy years, by minimising collaborators and celebrating resisters. In the same way that the plateau of Vercors, where the Maquis briefly established a free government, became a symbol of heroic resistance, le Chambon could become one of selfless morality. In this '*pays de grand silence*', where generations of Huguenots had kept quiet when it was dangerous for those who were not Catholics to speak out, 'non-violent resistance to the Hitler–Pétain system was born'. A complaisant regional prefect and a good German officer, along with a number of feisty but not always prudent local

inhabitants, completed the cast of characters. It was not long before people began using the phrase ‘banality of good’ to describe the modesty and ordinariness of the Chambonais, in counterpoint to Hannah Arendt’s overused words about evil. In the wake of the *Peace News* story came eulogies, newspaper articles, memoirs, documentaries and films, and they have never stopped coming. In 1988, le Chambon became the only village in the world to be honoured by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. A myth was born.

There is one problem: all was not quite as it seemed.

Many Jews and resisters were indeed saved – but certainly not 5,000; and they had been saved not by non-violence but by a remarkable adventure in imagination and cooperation. It was not the only adventure of its kind, but the area’s very remoteness and the tacit support of almost every one of its inhabitants makes it stand out. There was a fairly decent prefect and a less than murderous German officer, but neither could be described as good. There was not just one village, le Chambon, but half a dozen others across the whole plateau of the Vivarais-Lignon, as well as many outlying hamlets, and not one Protestant pastor but 24, along with members of other Protestant faiths, like the Darbyists and the Ravenists, descendants of followers of the Plymouth Brethren, as well as Catholics and many who professed no religious faith at all. Doctors, teachers, university professors, students and a large number of boy and girl scouts all played key parts. And André Trocmé himself was a far subtler, more troubled and doubting man than the myth suggested. Hero to some, mythomane to others, Trocmé, who died in 1971, has become a figure of renown.

As ever, the truth, inasmuch as it can be established 70 years after the event, is considerably more interesting. The myth has much diminished reality. It has also given rise to an unceasing flow of feuds, jealousies, backbiting,

calumnies, hearsay, claims and counterclaims and prejudice, pitting Catholics against Protestants, armed resisters against pacifists, civilians against Maquisards, believers against agnostics, those who seek glory against those who wish to remain silent. To this day the topic is as heated as it was in the years in which it first turned into an explosive mixture of local politics and historical rivalry. Nor did it help when, in 2004, President Chirac called le Chambon '*la conscience de notre pays*'.

What actually took place on the plateau of the Vivarais-Lignon during the grey and terrifying years of German occupation and Vichy rule is indeed about courage, faith and morality. But it is also about the fallibility of memory.

Part One

Escaping

CHAPTER ONE

Mea Culpa

WHEN AARON[1] LIWERANT brought Sara, his fiancée, to Paris from her parents' house in Warsaw in the summer of 1926, France was a good place for refugees. The French government was welcoming, granting naturalisation to the many Poles, Russians, Galicians and Romanians who came to fill the jobs in industry and mining left vacant by the high number of French casualties in the Great War. The international bookshop on the Left Bank sold books and papers in Russian and Polish. The French proved welcoming too to the Germans, Austrians, Italians and Spaniards arriving in the wake of the rise to power of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco, and some of the refugees went off to work in agriculture in the south.

Aaron was a leatherworker, and Sara covered the clasps he brought home from the workshop with silk, and sometimes with leather. Their first child, Berthe, was born in April 1927; a son, Simon, followed in November 1928. Though Aaron and Sara occasionally talked of the day they would be able to go back to Poland, they naturalised the two children and made them French citizens.

The Liwerants occupied two rooms, with no bathroom and a shared lavatory, in Belleville, which, along with the Marais and the 11th, 12th and 18th arrondissements, was home to most of the foreign immigrants in Paris, and particularly to the Jewish families like theirs working in fur and textiles.

Aaron’s sister had also settled in France and she too had French citizenship, but neither she nor Aaron and Sara saw themselves as observant. To be Jewish[2] in France in the 1920s and 1930s was to enjoy the legacy of the French Revolution, which had conferred equal rights on all the country’s religious minorities at a time when such tolerance was shared only by the new United States of America. The Liwerants thought of themselves as equals, loyal citizens of a strong, emancipated republican state.

Aaron and Sara Liwerant, with their children

Though the family spoke Yiddish at home, Berthe and Simon were bilingual in French. France was their home; neither had known any other, though they listened with interest to the stories of their grandparents in Poland and of the pogroms that had driven their mother and father into exile. After school, Simon helped his mother cover the

clasps for Aaron’s leatherwork, and with the one-franc coins she gave him, he bought stamps, usually of aeroplanes.

The elections of 1936 had brought Léon Blum, a Jew and a socialist, to power with the Front Populaire, which welcomed immigrants and did much to improve conditions for French workers, but also sparked off strikes and violent confrontations. By now, France had a greater percentage of foreigners than any other country, including the United States. And when the world economic recession, which came relatively late to the country, brought high unemployment to French industry, workers began to feel hostility towards the very men and women they had so warmly welcomed not long before.

Simon was 10 when Léon Blum’s government fell in 1938, amid much rhetoric about the perils of world Jewry and personal slander against the Jewish Blum, a Proustian figure with floppy straight dark hair, a neat moustache and spats, who was referred to by some as a parasite and a vagrant, a pervert and underminer of ‘healthy male virility’. Searching for culprits for the country’s ills, some of the French began to see in the three million foreigners, and especially the foreign Jews, the perfect scapegoats; the river of anti-Semitism and xenophobia that poured out in pamphlets, books and articles peddling rumours of secret societies, satanic rituals and fifth columnists, and which so many believed to have vanished for ever in the post-Dreyfus years, was suddenly turning out to have merely gone underground. The words of the elderly former prime minister Raymond Poincaré, ‘After the Dreyfus affair, anti-Semitism will no longer ever be possible again in France’, began to sound a little foolish.

It was somehow more seductive, though alarming, to listen to the royalist intellectual Charles Maurras announce, in the right-wing, nationalist *L’Action Française*, that ‘One thing is dead: it is the spirit of semi-tolerance accorded to the Jews . . . a formidable *à bas les Juifs* is smouldering in

every breast and will pour forth from every heart', or to follow the spiteful attacks of his colleague, the scruffy, rodent-like Céline, the specialist in children's diseases. Maurras himself was a short man, with a stutter and a neat goatee; his young activists, the Camelots du Roi, were thugs.

France, the two men agreed, had for too long been exploited and betrayed by internal enemies, in numbers they likened to a tidal wave. Their undoubted verbal brilliance lent their ideas a certain legitimacy. When, in May 1939[3], Edouard Daladier's new government spoke of 'ferreting out, identifying and expelling' the illegal foreigners, there were many happy to listen to him. A leading member of the radicals, Daladier had been moving steadily towards the right. Jewish immigration had reached 'saturation point'. Ten thousand Jews should be sent 'elsewhere'. In Belleville, the Liwerants and their Jewish neighbours lay low, hoping that such sentiments would pass, as they had done before. The declaration of war in September 1939 did not trouble them greatly, nor did the *drôle de guerre*, the phoney war, even if the Catholic writer Georges Bernanos observed, before emigrating to South America, that it really was not *drôle* at all, but mournful. Some 40,000 Jewish men had enlisted in the French army. In March, while the war seemed stalled, the government passed to a dapper barrister with a keen interest in sports called Paul Reynaud.

Simon was 12 when the Maginot line, France's impregnable barrier of cement and steel, was outflanked by the Panzers in May 1940. Within days, the German army was advancing on Paris, driving before it a wave of terrified citizens and defeated military recruits, while in Paris the government gathered in force in Notre-Dame to offer prayers for divine intervention. Sara had just given birth to her third child, a boy they called Jacques. Escape was not an option for her, but she persuaded Aaron to join the exodus

south, the eight million people who fled from their homes before the German advance, to see for himself what possibilities existed for the family away from Paris. He was soon back, recounting how he had got as far as Orléans and that he had escaped attention from the military by putting his belongings in an abandoned pram and pretending that it contained a baby. For a while, as the German occupiers in Paris appeared to be behaving so correctly towards the country they had overrun, the Liwerants continued to feel safe, though they marvelled at the sight of the German women who arrived with the troops as secretaries and office workers, dressed like American airline hostesses, with their 'lumpy athletic figures'. They had changed the 'w' in their name to a 'v', which they thought made it sound more French.

Like the rest of France, Sara and Aaron felt reassured by the declarations of France's new leader, the elderly veteran of the Great War, 84-year-old Maréchal Pétain, the aloof and immaculate embodiment of the legacy of the great French victory at Verdun. Pétain had a neat little moustache, a soft belly, and pale blue eyes, and he held himself, as befitting an *ancien combattant*, very upright. They shared his desire for a new moral order, a National Revolution, in which fecund and stable families would redeem the Blum years of profligacy and too much liberty. It sounded comforting when he spoke of his 'beloved France' and his decision to bestow on its people 'the gift of my own person'; like naughty children, they would have to redeem themselves through pain and collective mortification. 'You have suffered . . .' he told them, 'you will suffer more . . . your life will be very hard.' The Liwerants liked the idea of a country in which people returned to the land they had abandoned in favour of city life and had more children, even if it seemed peculiar that the ills that had apparently caused the ignominious French defeat included paid holidays, Pernod, the white slave trade, strikes, gambling, bathing suits, democracy and