



André Maurois is one of France's greatest living writers. He is most famous for his biographies—"Ariel" (the life of Shelley), "Byron," "Disraeli," "Dickens," "Proust," "The Titans" (a biography of the three Dumas), and "Lelia: the Life of George Sand," which was an outstanding success in this country. He also is internationally known for his memoirs, essays, plays, and fiction, including "The Art of Living," "The Miracle of America," "The Miracle of England," and "The Miracle of France." Born in 1885, he is a member of the French Academy and the Legion of Honor.

most of my favorites in the dark. I suppose it is difficult for the reader to imagine my heartbreak at discovering there was nothing left of a library it had taken 40 years to collect. I looked at the empty shelves with despair. The room looked strangely naked. I suddenly felt I should be able to work no more. My tools had been stolen.

I asked the concierge: "What did they do with my books?"

"I don't know. First came two civilian experts who had a look at the books. They looked amazed. Then the following morning they came back with three large trucks. Everything was carefully packed. I suppose they intended to sell them."

"If that is the case," I said, "they are disposed of by now and scattered. There is no hope to recover any of them. What on earth shall we do?"

My wife up to that time had remained silent. Her eyes were full of tears, but she looked extraordinarily resolute.

"Don't worry," she said. "I promise you that before three years you will have a better library than ever. Meanwhile, you'll work on a novel. That you can do out of your head, without any books. As to biographies, your next was to be Marcel Proust?"

"Yes. And you remember I had gotten together the finest Proust collection."

"You'll have it again. Starting tomorrow, I'll attend all sales of books and visit all secondhand booksellers."

"And the money?"

"Your publishers will advance the money, I am sure."

THAT VERY MINUTE I knew she would succeed. And I also knew much more. Her simple determination made me realize that no material loss is irreparable. On my way to Paris I had seen many towns destroyed by bombing. All railway stations seemed smashed to pieces. Bridges had been blown up. Suddenly I felt sure that millions of Frenchwomen and Frenchmen at this very moment were saying like my wife: "Don't worry. Before three years, or perhaps ten, our town, our bridge will be rebuilt—finer than ever."

A few hours later something else happened that was also an inspiration. The news of our return had gotten around quickly. Many literary people knew my library had been stolen. Soon there was a ring at the door. We opened. It was one

of the most famous French writers of the time, carrying a big parcel of books.

"Perhaps," he said, "perhaps, it's indiscreet to intrude upon you when you have just arrived, but I wanted to say at once how glad I am to see you back. Also," he added shyly, "I know you had my books inscribed to you by me." He looked at the empty shelves. "So I thought it might be a beginning of your new library if I gave you a new collection."

BEFORE THE DAY was over, three more fellow-writers had called, each of them bringing his gracious gift of books. Also an American friend brought us a beautiful copy of Bacon's "Essays" which I still treasure. It was not until the last visitor had left that we were able, my wife and I, to sum up the situation.

"You were very courageous," I said, "and people have been very good to us. I can confess now that I feared returning to this empty house. It meant the end of so much we loved. And, of course, it proved painful in many ways. But at the same time I now feel more confidence than ever in the future of our country, in our own future."

"Yes," she said, "people are good. It's only when one is very unhappy that one fully realizes their kindness. And look at this!"

"What is it?"

"A blank paper tablet. It was brought by an unknown lady who said: 'In case he wants to start working.'"

"How nice! Well then, I will."

I sat at my desk and began an article. It was strange to see the large table that had once been littered with papers so empty. On the enormous shelves around me, the few gift books we had received looked like shipwrecked men swimming in the vast sea.

As I was writing, I had to verify a quotation from Shakespeare. Instinctively, I got up and went straight to the spot where there should have been a Shakespeare. Then I remembered—but the loss was painful no more. I felt what my wife had said would come true. She would rebuild a library finer than ever.

Nowadays, many years later, I know we were right to trust in the future. Both my country and my home have been restored. I shall never forget the brief and unmistakable moment when love and friendship gave us the inspiration we so urgently needed.

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