

Holding the Stirrup

Elizabeth von Gutenberg

SYNOPSIS

In an older day it was customary for a woman to hold her husband's stirrup when he mounted to go into battle. That gesture became a **symbol of her fidelity and courage** while he was gone. Elisabeth was reared in the aristocratic tradition – a summer home in the 500 year old castle of Tann and a winter home in Nurnberg, **member of the Old World society of Berlin and Budapest**, host to Bruno Walter, Kaiser Wilhelm and Emperor Karl of Hungary and eventually wife of the Baron George Enoch von Guttenberg, the leader of the ‘White Army’ that liberated Munich from the Spartacists after the first World War.

But more than nostalgia for the grace and security of the past, Elisabeth's life story reflects world events from the turn of the century to the present, **from the decline of the Hapsburgs to the tragic aftermath of the Third Reich.** It is a **story of heroism and self-sacrifice – the struggle waged by a nobility** which, for all its faults and omissions, was the last bulwark of Christianity in Hitler's Germany, and the last organized defender of the human rights and dignity which Hitler brought to such a terrifying end. It was this nobility which implemented the famous plot to assassinate Hitler, a plot in which Elisabeth's cousin, Claus Stauffenberg, and many good friends lost their lives. The drama of this great conspiracy, together with the personalities and secret machinery which almost made it work, is the high point of the book. Elisabeth writes lovingly of her visits to the cities and courts of Europe ; of her castle homes ; of her friendship with the peasant girl, Theresa Neumann Konnersreuth, who bore the holy sign of the stigmata ; of her **romantic and deeply spiritual devotion to her husband**, who, even after his death in the German Navy, was never quite apart from her ; of her sons and daughter and of the rich, friendly commonplaces of family life in a time gone beyond recall – except for a book such as this.

REVIEW

Contrasting sharply with the rather bleak democratic age in which we now live, this book is a paean of praise for aristocracy and nobility. It demonstrates how **aristocracy is an organic**

and necessary part of every normal or traditional society, and how its loss – which has more or less occurred in Europe in the last 50-80 years – has inevitably entailed a **fatal impoverishment**. In retelling the history of Germany in the 20th century, this book makes very clear what it is precisely that has been lost, and how this loss, coupled with the almost **total exclusion of religion from the public domain**, has led to the **end of authentic European culture**. One has to add, sadly, that this collapse would never have been possible without a long-brewing and insidious degeneration within the aristocracy itself.

In the personal lives of the authoress and her husband, Baron Enoch von Guttenberg, the aristocratic virtues clearly emerge. One may single out four principal characteristics : **love, duty, piety, and exemplary courage**.

The story told in this book roundly exposes the vulgar superficiality and heartless cruelty of both Communism and Nazism. It paints a poignant picture of the draconian oppression of the German people during the Nazi years (1933-1945) and of their extreme sufferings during and following World War II. It vividly brings to mind the similar fate suffered by the Russian peoples under Lenin, Stalin and their successors from the 20s and 30s up to the time of Gorbachev and the fall of Communism in 1991. The general view in the Western countries is that the Germans brought this suffering upon themselves, by making it possible for the Nazis to gain power. That's as *may be*, but one must not forget that without the imposition on them by the Allies of the thoroughly unjust Treaty of Versailles, the conditions for the success of the Nazis would never have existed.

In this book, one finds oneself in the company of bishops and archbishops, barons and baronesses, dukes and duchesses, princes and princesses, and even kings and queens. One is also in the company of sinners and saints – for instance the blessed Theresa Neumann of Konnersreuth, who was befriended by Baroness von Guttenberg. **This evocation of the last stages of a heroic age now gone forever** – an age so very recent, and yet harbouring qualities now undreamt of – is a unique reminder of what has been lost, and a painful laying bare of the destitute state of political correctness into which society has now been committed.

I recommend this book highly. You will find it both moving and truly beautiful. It's definitely one of the most fantastic autobiographies I've read. Thoroughly Catholic and an excellent example of **forgiveness, fortitude, and above all, charity**.