



LoveReading

**YOU LOVED YOUR LAST BOOK...
BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO READ NEXT?**

Using our unique guidance tools, **LoveReading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

PRIESTS DE LA RESISTANCE

Written by **The Revd Fergus Butler-
Gaille**

Published By **Oneworld Publications**

All text is Copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is brought to you by
LoveReading. Please print off and read at your leisure.

PRAISE FOR

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE ENGLISH CLERGY

A Book of the Year for *The Times*,
Mail on Sunday and *BBC History Magazine*

‘Wonderfully entertaining... A hilarious yet thoughtful reminder that the Christian faith wasn’t always thought incompatible with a sense of humour or a healthy bolshiness.’
Sunday Times

‘Eye-popping tales of lunacy, debauchery and depravity... Butler-Gallie knows whereof he writes, being a curate himself, and he has done a splendid job presenting a smorgasbord of most peculiar parsons.’
Sebastian Shakespeare, *Daily Mail*

‘Entertainingly erudite... But it is also a surprisingly profound work... For all its mischief, Butler-Gallie’s work of lightly worn erudition is a paean to a great English institution, finely tuned to the temper of its representatives, good, bad and indifferent. We should treasure it more.’
Literary Review

‘We have...always kept a special haven for oddballs in the Church of England, as Fergus Butler-Gallie demonstrates in this entertaining compendium... Their foibles cover all bases from absentmindedness to epic drunkenness... I’m glad I read this one. It’s a lot of fun.’

Rose Wild, *The Times*

'A humorous compendium of some of the oddball clergy who have served the Church over the centuries... These thumbnail portraits reveal a very broad church indeed.'

New Statesman

'The Church of England has produced some real oddballs in its time, and this is an entertaining gallop through several centuries' worth of them... Butler-Gallie has done his homework, digging out some rare gems... This is the story not just of eccentrics, but also of a leisured age that is no more.'

Harry Mount, *Spectator*

'It may have the makings of a modern classic... Butler-Gallie chronicles not just Anglican follies, but also human weaknesses which we all share and with which we can perhaps sympathise.'

Catholic Herald

'This is a ridiculously enjoyable book: funny, compassionate, and wonderfully well-written.'

Tom Holland

'A delightful, sympathetic, humorous and earthed cocktail of quirky English clergy.'

The Rt Revd David Wilbourne

PRIESTS DE LA RESISTANCE!

*The Loose Canons Who Fought Fascism
in the Twentieth Century*

THE REVD
FERGUS BUTLER-GALLIE



A Oneworld Book

First published by Oneworld Publications, 2019

Copyright © Fergus Butler-Gallie 2019

The moral right of Fergus Butler-Gallie to be identified as the
Author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988

All rights reserved

Copyright under Berne Convention

A CIP record for this title is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-78607-672-4

eISBN 978-1-78607-673-1

Illustration credits: Dietrich Bonhoeffer © Chronicle/Alamy;
Churchill and Damaskinos © Dmitri Kessel/The LIFE Picture
Collection/Getty; Jane Haining © Historic Images/Alamy;
Pastor Fred Shuttlesworth and Dr King © Bettmann/Getty

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NL

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Oneworld Publications
10 Bloomsbury Street
London WC1B 3SR
England

Stay up to date with the latest books,
special offers, and exclusive content from
Oneworld with our newsletter

Sign up on our website
oneworld-publications.com



To my grandparents, who lived through the dark
times herein described, and who helped foster in me
two great loves – of history and of hope.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: WAR, WITNESS & WHERE WE ARE NOW	1
RESISTANCE PAR EXCELLENCE	9
1. Canon Félix Kir	11
<i>White Wine & Espionage</i>	
2. Abbé Pierre	29
<i>The Miraculous Mountaineering Monk</i>	
RESISTANCE IN THE CRADLES OF FASCISM	45
3. Clemens August, Bishop of Münster and Graf von Galen	47
<i>The Lion of Münster</i>	
4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer	63
<i>Thinker, Fighter, Pastor, Spy</i>	
5. Don Pietro Pappagallo	77
<i>The Forger-Priest of the Esquiline Hill</i>	

RESISTANCE IN THE OCCUPIED NATIONS	95
6. Bishop Gorazd of Prague	97
<i>'A nation of Gorazds'</i>	
7. St Maximilian Kolbe	113
<i>Heroism & Ham Radio</i>	
8. Sister Sára Salkaházi	129
<i>The Feisty Nicotine Nun</i>	
9. Cardinal de Jong, Koenig Gravenmeijer & St Edith Stein	145
<i>The Ecumenism of Blood</i>	
10. Mother Superior Alice-Elizabeth, Princess Andrew of Greece and Denmark	163
<i>A Tale of the Crown & the Wimple</i>	
11. Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens and All Greece	181
<i>'That scheming Prelate'</i>	
 CALLED AWAY TO RESISTANCE	 197
12. Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty	199
<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican</i>	
13. Jane Haining	215
<i>The Sunshine Spinster</i>	

RESISTANCE AFTER 1945	229
14. Pastor Fred Shuttlesworth	231
<i>Not Raised to Run</i>	
15. Seminarian Jonathan Daniels	243
<i>Martinis, Martyrdom & a Missed Bus</i>	
 EPILOGUE: STRENGTH MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS	 255
<i>Further Reading</i>	263

RESISTANCE PAR EXCELLENCE

'I cannot turn my coat ...'

FRANCE

— CANON FÉLIX KIR —

White Wine & Espionage

It was a crisp September morning when the moment the people of Dijon had awaited for over four years finally came. The Second World War had not been easy for the Burgundian capital. It had seen more than its fair share of violence, sitting as it did near both the demarcation line of Vichy France and the border with the region of Alsace-Lorraine, which Hitler had symbolically reincorporated into the homeland of the German Reich. From German mass executions and Vichy-assisted deportations to acts of sabotage by the Resistance and aerial bombardment by the US Air Force – Dijon had seen it all and now, finally, at about a quarter past nine on 11th September 1944, the end of those horrors, the forthcoming moment of liberation was so close that her citizens could almost taste sweet freedom once more.

Tasting aside (and anyone who has sampled a spoonful of Dijon's eponymous mustard or been anywhere near the infamous regional specialty of an *andouillette* will know that the Burgundians are not ones for subtle flavours), they could certainly hear it. The city had been abandoned by the

German forces in order that they might concentrate their efforts on the defence of the Reich and on the forthcoming counter-attack in the Ardennes. They had also destroyed the town's railway lines four days earlier, meaning that the liberating forces approached the expectant denizens of Dijon by road and were able to drive a large squadron of tanks in open order towards the city, with engines roaring, crews happily chattering, and minimal resistance. In line with the policy insisted upon at the liberation of other major cities by the de facto French leader General de Gaulle, the first troops to set foot in the newly freed Dijon were to be French and the first flag to be hoisted was not to be the Union Flag or the Stars and Stripes but the Tricolore. Although Allied High Command agreed to the terms set out by de Gaulle, they did, perhaps tellingly, order an American armoured division to follow a few miles behind, in case anything got hairy. And so the stage had been set for a great propaganda moment as Free Frenchmen freed Frenchmen. However, de Gaulle and the French military were to have their limelight stolen, not by General Patton nor even by Hitler, but by an altogether more formidable, if somewhat unlikely, figure.

As the noise of the approaching tanks became louder, some of the good folk of Dijon could no longer contain themselves and, rushing past ruined shops and bombed-out homes, made their way to meet the liberation column. The sight that met them was nothing short of extraordinary. For a start, many of the troops were soldiers from France's African colonies, their distinctive red fezzes and elaborately faced overcoats as unfamiliar to the denizens of landlocked, provincial Dijon as their black skin. However, their appearance was positively unremarkable compared to the figure who sat atop one of the tanks as it trundled into the city. The role of Caesar in this mechanised triumph was played by Canon Félix Kir – priest,

politician, Resistance hero, and world-famous consumer of alcohol. Wearing his priest's cassock, his cloak billowing around him and his beret wedged firmly on his podgy, balding head (for, if there was one identity that mattered more to Kir than his priesthood, it was, as we shall see, the fact that he had been born a Frenchman), Canon Kir made his return to the city from which, a matter of months before, he had only just escaped with his life.

While the sight was undoubtedly an unusual one, the vision of the doughy, dimpled clergyman trying to maintain his balance on the bonnet of the clunking, camouflaged vehicle was as clear a sign that the horrors of Fascism had finally been defeated as any hoisting of a flag or singing of the 'Marseillaise'. Kir had been the embodiment of resistance in Dijon for the previous four and a half years. From daily acts of disobedience and subterfuge in his (self-appointed) role as a leader of the municipal community to his active role in Resistance sabotage of German military operations, Kir had stared death in the face for the cause of freedom in this corner of Burgundy a number of times. Now he was greeted as a hero.

In fact, Kir had spent the days since he had heard the news of the impending German abandonment of Dijon scurrying on foot over the sixty miles from his hiding place in a small town north-west of the city. When he heard that the French troops were due to roll into Dijon the following morning, Kir, who was, as we shall see, the master of the symbolic act, quickly arranged to secure a place atop a tank, allowing the photographers, journalists, and whoever it is that formulates the annals of local myth and legend, to capture him as the liberator of Dijon for posterity.

And thus was Dijon liberated – in scenes less like *Band of Brothers* and more like 'Allo 'Allo. Ridiculous though he

might appear from such a vignette, Kir was neither a clown nor a charlatan. While stealing the limelight at the liberation of his adopted home town shows his undoubted capacity for sly mischief, it also gives an indication of his sheer ballsiness. It was a character trait he held in spades and, whether it was his refusal to salute German officers or his participation in a jailbreak, his tricking Nazi officials into preserving Jewish property or his taking several bullets from a would-be Fascist assassin, it was one that he would demonstrate again and again during the hellish period of German occupation.

There can be little doubt about what imbued Kir with both such cunning and courage: he had an unwavering faith in himself, no doubt, but, much more than that, he had a staunch faith in Christ. Inevitably, the French Resistance was a somewhat ragtag collection of individuals united by their commitment to fighting Fascism. Through it, Kir found himself routinely having to make common cause with ardent Marxists who decried all forms of religious belief. Kir became used to fielding questions about how it was he could possibly believe in a God that he couldn't see, honing an answer that he deployed in response to many an atheist during his later political career: 'Well, you can't see my arse and yet we know it exists!'

In the Gospel according to St Matthew, Christ sends out his disciples with the instruction to be 'wise as serpents and innocent as doves.' There was undoubtedly an innocence, a childlike quality almost, to Kir's dogmatic faith and yet, as many a German officer or Fascist collaborator found to their detriment, there was also the cunning wisdom of a serpent and the bravery of a lion in the old canon as well.



Félix Kir was born in January 1876, in the little town of Alise-Sainte-Reine, a commune of a few hundred souls halfway between the gold-green vine-covered slopes of Chablis and the sprawling bricks and mortar of Dijon. Kir's father was one Jules Kir, the small town's flamboyant jack of all trades – fulfilling the roles of hairdresser, apothecary, doctor and nurse for its citizens. Young Félix learned from him two things: firstly, that the ability to walk into a situation with a supreme self-confidence qualified one to perform any job, regardless of such petty considerations as formal or legal qualifications; secondly, a deep, abiding love for France. The elder Kir's family had come to Alise a little earlier in the nineteenth century from the province of Alsace-Lorraine, the borderlands which had, just five years earlier, been ceded to the emergent German Empire in the Franco-Prussian War. As a child, the maps in young Félix's school were depicted with 'the black stain', where the 'stolen' territories were painted over with a thick black paint. French children of his generation were taught not to forgive and not to forget.

Along with his charismatic father, another figure who shaped the consciousness of the young Félix was the Gaulish chieftain Vercingetorix, who had been executed by Julius Caesar more than one thousand nine hundred years earlier. Vercingetorix quite literally loomed large in young Félix's life. Eleven years before he had been born, the then French Emperor Napoleon III had ordered the erection of an enormous statue of the semi-naked Gaulish warrior (with a face modelled on his own) on the hillside above Alise-Sainte-Reine which had, as Aleisa, been the site of the Gauls' final defeat by Caesar in 52 BC. As he and his friends would re-enact the great clash of civilisations, the words from Caesar's own account of the battle that were inscribed at the base of the statue must have settled in Félix's febrile young

mind: 'A united Gaul, forming a single nation, animated by a common spirit, can defy the Universe.' Love of his country, combined with a frankly pig-headed refusal to give in to any threat, was to become Félix Kir's signature character trait.

Félix was a bright, mischievous child and, in common with many of the more intelligent children of the lower middle classes, his route to an education that reflected his natural ability was through the schools run by the Church. His innate theatricality and sharp intellect meant that he was soon selected for ministry and, after a period of study at seminary in Dijon, was ordained a priest in 1901. The following twenty-seven years of his ministry consisted of the increasingly portly cleric pottering around the Burgundian countryside as parish priest in a succession of villages and small towns. Kir was well liked, and had his pastoral side, but he seemingly spent most of this time enjoying the region's distinctive cuisine and excellent wines (he was a stone's throw from Chablis, Beaune and Beaujolais), as well as disappearing with his bathing costume and dedicating entire summer days to floating lazily down the Ouche, a tributary of the Rhône that flows through the region. Although his bishop complained that he ought to move to Dijon itself and do some more quantifiable work (namely editing the diocesan newspaper), which somewhat shattered his rural idyll, Félix Kir's pre-war existence was hardly a taxing one. He became well known in Dijon itself, developing his distinctive beret-cassock dress combo and maintaining his thick, rural Burgundian accent, with its distinct, rolled 'r's lending a particular richness to his catchphrase as it echoed around Dijon's cafés and churches: 'Je vous offrre un blanc de cassis.'

His work for the bishop paid off and he was given the honorary title of canon and became active as a representative

of the national Catholic political movement in the region. His role took him across the regions of eastern France. When he travelled to give his speeches or celebrate Mass, he would sometimes take with him, among his other pieces of priestly paraphernalia, a case containing a bottle of the Burgundian Aligoté wine and a bottle of the blackcurrant liqueur cassis. His evangelistic task was twofold: to sell the cause of political Catholicism to the masses and to introduce their palates to his region's favourite tippie. Kir, proud of his nation, proud of his faith and proud of his region (and her alcoholic charms), was the picture of contentment in the years between the First and Second World Wars. But behind the easy charm and laid-back attitude was an increasingly calculating political brain. It would take a combination of both these aspects of his character to navigate the whirlwind that was about to be unleashed on Félix Kir's idyllic little corner of France.



Canon Kir was sixty-three when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that both his nation and their French allies were at war with Nazi Germany in the early autumn of 1939. Many would be thinking about retirement at such an age, but Kir had been living the easy life since at least the turn of the last century, and his career as a Resistance fighter, politician, swindler and saboteur was only just about to begin. On Monday 17th June 1940, Marshal Pétain, newly appointed Premier of France, announced that fighting against the forces of Nazi Germany would have to cease, having contacted Adolf Hitler some hours previously to offer France's surrender. Not long before Pétain's announcement, Robert Jardillier, the Mayor of Dijon,

hurriedly stuffed a few belongings into a suitcase, bundled them into a waiting car and, leaving some scribbled orders for his citizens to either evacuate or surrender, left for the town of Autun, where he stopped briefly before continuing south. Once safely within the *zone libre*, he became, despite the fact that he was ostensibly part of the left-wing Socialist party, a stalwart supporter of Pétain's collaborationist Vichy regime.

Abandoned by their supposed political leaders both nationally and locally, the people of Dijon now faced the prospect of being overrun by the oncoming German forces. A small group gathered to act as municipal representatives, namely an elderly army colonel, a professor of English literature, a retired merchant navy commander, the Head of Dijon's Chamber of Commerce – and Canon Kir. This motley collection of civic sort of dignitaries was hardly the Justice League. Yet it was to them that the administration of Dijon fell. Technically, the group had nominated Paul Bur, the bearded President of the Chamber of Commerce, as the mayor. However, it was not in the nature of Canon Kir to play second fiddle. Consequently, when the colonel commanding the first German regiment to arrive in the city made his way up to the mayor's office, he found, sitting amid the chaos of papers and other debris that the flight of Jardillier had left behind and, as ever, resplendent in his flowing clerical cassock, none other than Canon Félix Kir.

The jackbooted colonel marched down the room towards the ornate desk behind which the clergyman sat, his stare fixed ahead, like a bullfrog in black silk. Perhaps it was the shock of the invasion, the colonel doubtless thought, but, in fact, Kir was just getting ready to catch his fly. 'Heil Hitler!' shouted the colonel, expecting a formal surrender or similar. Instead, the priest behind the desk just kept on staring. 'Heil

Hitler,' the German repeated. Still nothing. Slightly bemused, the colonel decided to try a more human response – after all, Pétain's instructions had been for the French authorities to cooperate as peacefully as possible with the occupiers. Perhaps a little of the old Teutonic charm would ease the old cleric from his seat? He stuck out his hand. Kir looked dismissively at it and said nothing. By now even the disciplined exterior of the Wehrmacht's finest was beginning to crack in the face of this Gallic hauteur. In broken French, the colonel demanded an explanation for this manifestly rude behaviour, given that the city's authorities were hardly in a position to offer any form of resistance. Kir, steadily maintaining his steely stare, reprimanded the officer for his failure to knock on the mayoral door and proceeded to explain that Dijon was a city of the first rank and, as such, he would not shake hands with any officer 'below the rank of a general'. Whether a general was eventually found, or whether Kir made a rare climbdown to engage with the colonel, history does not record, but the incident set the tone for what was to be a tempestuous four years, pitching the fat, bibulous priest against the full might of the occupying forces.

Kir set about making life as difficult as possible for the Nazis. He made early contact with the Resistance, forging unlikely working relationships with all sorts of individuals – including a number of Communists to whom he had been famously rude during his career as a Catholic political figure. He even managed to persuade the other members of the ragtag municipal authority to follow his lead, with Paul Bur eventually resigning his role of mayor in 1942, protesting that he could not help in the running of a city 'where the French are shot every morning'. Kir and his colleagues ensured that Resistance fighters had places to

hide, that shipments designated for the German troops stationed in the city mysteriously ‘went missing’ and that the citizens of Dijon could continue their love of rich cuisine through a thoroughly organised mass circumnavigation of German-imposed rationing. Although obfuscation was his preferred *modus operandi*, Kir was not beyond using his natural earthy charm to achieve his aims as well. The German officer in command of Dijon was shocked when one day he received a note from the normally irascible canon, politely suggesting a particular building for use as a space for storing military supplies. Pleased that it would save him the difficult and unpopular task of requisitioning space, and sensing a mellowing in the little black bullfrog’s attitude to the occupiers, the German willingly consented to Kir’s suggestion. The canon had, in fact, hoodwinked him again, persuading him to keep his stores in the city’s synagogue, ensuring that it would not be demolished as per the orders of the Nazi high command. Kir arranged for the Torah and other artefacts to be hidden before making his suggestion and turning the building over to the German forces, making the Nazi commandant the unlikely saviour of Dijon’s Jewish community’s house of prayer. When, in 1945, survivors of the Holocaust returned to Dijon, they were able to call on Canon Kir, reclaim their holy books and return to the space in which they had worshipped prior to the hell that had been unleashed on them by Nazism. Almost no other community from the shattered remnants of European Jewry was able to do the same.

Kir eventually found himself involved more and more in the operations of the Resistance. In particular, he relished his role in an audacious scheme to liberate prisoners from the Longvic internment camp just down the road from Dijon. Slave labour was a key part of Nazi infrastructure from Calais

to the edge of the Caucasus. Not only were political prisoners and captured Allied troops used in the construction of the Nazi death machine, they were also available to pliant local authorities for more menial tasks. The self-appointed clerical factotum of Dijon was not, as we know, renowned for his constructive 'live and let live' attitudes. However, as a result of his near-constant badgering, the Nazis eventually gave him access to the pool of labour available at Longvic, which predominately housed French prisoners of war.

Over the course of the summer of 1940, the sight of the frog-like cleric striding purposefully towards the great barbed-wire fences of the camp became a familiar one. He would arrive, be monumentally rude to the guards on duty and then present a series of requests printed on official mayoral headed notepaper (which, of course, he had no actual right to use) for men to be released for prolonged periods of work on increasingly extravagant infrastructure projects. The prison guards, assuming such audacity had been sanctioned by someone higher up the command chain, would consent, leaving the canon to turn on his heel and stride back towards Dijon, Pied Piper-like, with a train of confused prisoners behind him. Once they were safely 'at work' on projects (the end dates of which invariably never made their way to the camp commandant), Kir would arrange for some of the men to disappear, either reuniting them with their former comrades in arms in the Resistance or arranging for escape routes into the neutral nations of Spain or Switzerland.

It is thought that Kir's bold ploy helped to break out nearly five thousand prisoners over the course of the war. Given the sheer volume of men that Kir was requesting for his mysterious municipal projects, it was hardly a surprise that the Germans soon twigged that something was amiss.

With a number of Kir's Resistance escapees now being recaptured, the canon's complicity was discovered and, in a fit of rage, the German commander sentenced him to death. However, with an increasingly volatile French population in the region and a sense of the regard in which the doughty Kir was now held, the Nazi high command for the region decided, in the cold light of day, to imprison him instead. In the end, even this was transmuted to house arrest after barely three months, such was the influence and support that Kir had acquired during his period of unlikely prominence.

Félix Kir had not sipped his last blanc de cassis just yet.



When, after the war, it was suggested by an individual of a more placatory disposition that Canon Kir might take a more conciliatory approach to his politics, he pointed to his cassock and shot back, 'I cannot turn my coat – it's black on both sides.' By that time, he had learned the hard way that stubbornness gets you everywhere.

In 1943, he was briefly imprisoned a second time on the (well-founded and accurate) suspicion that he was still closely involved in operations, from gun-running to propaganda manufacture, for the Resistance. His second imprisonment gave him the perfect vantage point to watch with glee as British planes executed a bombing raid on the Longvic airfield, allowing another batch of prisoners to escape. Unable to remove the obstacle of Kir by legal prosecution, flattery or persuasion, the Gestapo turned to more violent methods. Wary of making a martyr and, no doubt, giving the consummate showman yet another public platform, they decided against a trial and execution. Instead, they recruited a number of young French Fascists, eager to

please their German ideological allies, to do the dirty work and assassinate Kir, thus removing the troublesome priest once and for all. But wherever would they find him?

Kir was in the kitchen, fixing himself a snack, perhaps with a blanc de cassis on the side, at 9 p.m. on 26th January 1944, when the doorbell to his modest apartment rang. Unwilling to be separated from his evening collation, Kir allowed his housekeeper, Alice Cordier, to open the door. Raised voices could be heard, there was a scuffle and through the door of the kitchen burst a masked youth who, with a cry of 'Retribution!', fired five shots at the canon. Lying on the floor, Kir made a calculation; he knew that he had been hit at least twice and was aware that the magazine would contain a sixth bullet which, if administered at close range, would undoubtedly kill him. Whether it was a stroke of quasi-theological genius, fight or flight kicking in, or just the effect of an evening on the cassis, Kir summoned all his strength and, with a great noise, hauled himself up so that he was facing his attackers head-on. Convinced that they had just witnessed a miraculous resurrection, the collaborators made like the Roman soldiers in the Garden and fled. In fact, Kir was badly wounded and bleeding heavily. Mme Cordier managed to contact some of the clergyman's fellow Resistance members and have him spirited away to the Sainte-Marthe hospital, where it was discovered that only the presence of his wallet, filled with papers to help him circumnavigate the authorities, had prevented a bullet from hitting his heart. The wallet was not the only thing that had stopped the bullets meant for Kir – the stove on which the canon was cooking up his late-night snack subsumed the other shots. Kir kept the piece of ragged kitchen equipment as a memento, often showing it to official visitors when he later became mayor.

Wartime Dijon was a hub of spies and double agents and it didn't take long for the news of the failed assassination and the truculent canon's presence in the hospital to come to the attention of the Gestapo, who sent a group of henchmen to finish the job. By the time they arrived, however, Kir was gone, spirited away in the dead of night and taken on a gruelling journey across the Burgundian countryside to a Resistance safe house (itself an impressive achievement for an overweight man in his late sixties who had just been shot). There he spent the following months recuperating until his re-enactment of another biblical incident – namely the Triumphal Entry – in September that year.

The people of Dijon did not forget Kir's leadership in their most trying hour. In 1945, he was elected both Mayor of Dijon (officially this time) and as an MP for the wider region and awarded the *Légion d'honneur*, France's highest decoration, begrudgingly bestowed by General de Gaulle, who would never forgive the canon for his scene-stealing cameo during Dijon's liberation. The authorities also pursued, arrested and eventually executed the men (whom Kir always referred to in later years as 'those Fascist fuckers') responsible for the shooting of the cleric (and his stove) back in 1944.

The memory of his singular bravery never faded, ensuring him re-election without any challenge by Gaullists or Socialists until his death in 1968. He relished the limelight and ruled over Dijon as his personal fiefdom, routinely making use of his mayoral privilege to force traffic policemen to hand over their distinctive white batons and hats, evicting them from their podiums, in order to play havoc with the city's traffic by way of amusement. He even found time to actually complete some of the extravagant infrastructure projects for which he'd requisitioned all that manpower

during the war. One such was the construction of a large lake at his favourite bathing spot along the Ouche, which was, of course, christened 'Lake Kir'.

Kir's wartime experiences made him a great advocate for peace between nations. He was one of the first mayors in Europe to champion the twinning of towns, in particular reaching out to cities on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Given his own stoutly clericalist conservative views, he found an unlikely friend in the form of Nikita Khrushchev, who had helped keep up the spirits of another city that suffered the assaults of Nazism – Stalingrad. Khrushchev was intrigued by the tales of the gutsy cleric (and, as a Russian, was impressed by tales of his voluminous capacity for alcohol). The two exchanged letters and the Soviet leader even went so far as to visit Dijon during his trip to France in 1960. De Gaulle was apoplectic that the canon was about to steal his limelight again and so, when the car arrived to pick up the cleric turned mayor for Khrushchev's visit, the orders from the Élysée Palace were to instead drive an increasingly irate Kir in circles round the Burgundian countryside. In the end, the canon did get to meet his unlikely pen pal in Paris and, again, in 1964, when he was treated to the full force of Soviet hospitality on a trip to Moscow. Indeed, such was the strength of the link that the local Communist Party refused to field any candidate against Kir from then on.

Alongside his political commitments, Kir also maintained a vociferous interest in local Burgundian food and, more especially, drink. Well into his late eighties, Kir would take several hours over his lunch, almost always washed down by a blanc de cassis, a whole bottle of red and a slurp of sparkling white to finish, before – astonishingly – returning to his desk for an afternoon's work. He was notoriously fussy about the exact measures for an authentic blanc de

cassis, even going so far as to pour every single drink out himself when a twinning delegation visited from Skopje in Macedonia and he discovered that the mayoral staff had prepared the town's speciality incorrectly. Indeed, such was his reputation for serving and consuming the drink that in 1951 a producer wrote to the canon to ask if they could market their version of the blanc de cassis as a 'Kir'. Unable to resist the offer of both self-publicity and ready access to complimentary alcohol, Kir happily consented and so a new phrase began to echo through the grand chambers of the Mayor's palace, still in that lilting Burgundian accent, of course: 'Je vous offrre un Kirrrrrr?'



By the time he died, aged ninety-two and still Mayor of Dijon, he was a household name, not just in France but all over the world. To say that Canon Félix Kir was a man of many faces would be an understatement – he was a priest and a politician, a speechwriter and a spy, a wine-guzzler and a would-be martyr. He upstaged presidents and generals, hoodwinked commandants and put the fear of God into collaborators. He gave the Church over sixty-five years of ministry, he gave his nation decades of political service and he gave the world over half a century of blackcurrant and white wine hangovers. But far more impressive was his ministry to the people of Dijon in those troubled years of the Second World War. He gave them leadership, he gave them courage and, perhaps most importantly, he gave them hope. From saving synagogues to jailbreak coordination, all while slightly pissed, Kir was more than just a light in the darkness. He was a veritable firework bursting forth in the dark night-time of twentieth-century Europe.

In the Gospel according to St Matthew, Christ sends out his disciples with the instruction to be ‘wise as serpents and innocent as doves’. Very few of those disciples can claim to have lived up to this instruction with quite the same bombastic *joie de vivre* as Canon Félix Kir.