

Max Kohnstamm

A European's life and work

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Foreword

“New form of society: not defence of interests, but joint search for the right solution to each problem.... the Nation States [used to] rouse up one against the other. Nationalism, as pseudoreligion, [was] an answer to solitariness. The [new European] institutions make *recherche en commun* possible. This different, non-defensive attitude knows no frontiers, not even [the] frontiers of the sea.’

Max Kohnstamm, at 42 years of age, wrote these words in his diary on Thursday 4 October 1956. It was the core of what he had learned in the past years from his mentor Jean Monnet and from the revolution in international relations he had since been working on.

Max Kohnstamm is a co-founder of the European Union. But do his life and work justify a book devoted entirely to him? Doubts about this are understandable. For a large part of his life Kohnstamm played “second fiddle”, to Jean Monnet, Hans Hirschfeld, Dirk Spierenburg and others. Only twice in his career, at the beginning and at the end, did he have top responsibility, as Rector of the Senate of the Amsterdam student’s union the first time, and then as the first Principal of the European University Institute in Florence. Those were exceptions; more often the story was one of – deliberately chosen – reserve.

By way of example: when he was the designated candidate to lead the second Action Committee for the United States of Europe (the successor to the Monnet Committee) in the 1980s, he assigned himself the role not of president but of secretary, a behind-the-scenes - part. Kohnstamm had the feeling he could be more effective in that position. Moreover, it suited his character not to put himself to the fore too much. He knew he lacked the leadership qualities of his great mentor Monnet. This raises a pair of questions. How does Kohnstamm’s – presumed – modesty fit in with what this book is ultimately intended to do: tell a proper life story? And does the often informal method of pursuing interests practised by Kohnstamm as a lobbyist not make him very hard to grasp as a main character? It is significant that in the academic literature more publications appear about lobbies than about lobbyists.

There is yet another point for possible skepticism. In the 1980s both of us studied at the European University Institute in Florence, a short time after Kohnstamm had left the principalship. We were working on our theses there under the supervision of the famous British economic historian Alan Milward. Milward was proclaiming what was at that time a

revolutionary view about the predominant motives for early post-war European integration. He had little time for the classical historiographical picture of the “great men who created Europe”. In this classic approach, till then prominently present in the professional literature, European integration was portrayed as a necessary, indeed wellnigh inevitable process, guided by important individuals (Monnet, Schuman, Adenauer, Spaak) and the supranational European Commission, which after 1945 managed to make their federalist ideals a reality. European unification was, on this view, not so much a means (for instance, to increase welfare in the countries of Europe) as an end in itself.

Milward and his followers by contrast stressed the central position of national governments and bureaucracies. In this view, the outcomes at the negotiating tables of Europe were the result of quarrelsome consultations among individual States – averse to European idealism – putting their own social and economic gain to the fore. It was only once the national governments concerned had identified common – economic – interests that co-operation was possible; otherwise it was not.

In this presentation the founding fathers, including Monnet and Kohnstamm, played only a useful secondary role. Influenced by the intergovernmentalist ideas of our teacher Milward, we had to overcome a few scruples in order to set to work on our main character. Why, then, should there be this book about Kohnstamm?

For one of our previous publications, *Voor Nederland en Europa*, [*For Holland and for Europe*], we spoke with a dozen or so Dutch officials and politicians who had been at the birth of the European Community in the 1950s and 60s. Max Kohnstamm was one of them. What struck us then was that Kohnstamm could not only tell a fascinating story about what he had done and experienced during his career, but was also an independent thinker with a structured view of international relations in the past, present and future. Moreover, Kohnstamm was not reticent about getting this message over in the press, on television and on radio. He is still doing so to this very day. Even at a very advanced age, he was an active participant in the public debate on international questions, about not just European integration but also, for instance, the United States and the Middle East. Kohnstamm was regularly present in the media to express his concern at the situation in Iraq, before and after the British-American military action in 2003. He has also been heard from in another way, namely through the publication of books of letters, for instance about his stay in the United States and the wartime camps of Amersfoort and St. Michielsgestel. In our view, then, Kohnstamm’s modesty has very much to be qualified. His sense of mission, namely his need to spread and advocate his ideal for European society, is too big for that.

As well as that, we began during our research for this book to ask ourselves whether Milward and his school really had the right end of the stick in their almost exclusive focus on the social and economic needs of national governments and bureaucracies. Had they not gone too far in their underestimation of the ideals of the classical school? Was Monnet (and Kohnstamm in his wake) really an overrated figure, or was it unfair to go so far in minimizing the role of these founding fathers?

What ultimately fascinated us was the impressive interpenetration of Kohnstamm's life and thought. Kohnstamm was indeed for long the man behind Monnet, but he was and is much more than that. He was the son of a distinguished professor, a student leader, a member of the Amsterdam establishment, an America expert, a prisoner of war, private secretary to Queen Wilhelmina and a deviser of early post-war policy towards Germany. Moreover, on several occasions he played the part of the pioneer: as Secretary-General of the first supranational institution in Europe (the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community), as a member of the first group of lobbyists for European unification, as the first Principal of the European University Institute and as a participant from the very outset in the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission (Europe, US and Japan). This book will go into the interactions between Kohnstamm's life story, his career and his personal development, with special attention to the influences from his parental home, his trip to America (which he took as a student in the late 1930s), his wartime experiences and the significance of Jean Monnet in moulding him intellectually.

Born in 1914, Kohnstamm lived actively through the great bulk of the turbulent 20th century. This book sets out his life and work in chronological sequence. Chapter One describes Kohnstamm's childhood and youth in Amsterdam and Ermelo, his time studying at the University of Amsterdam and his trip to the United States. Chapter Two covers the war years, marked mainly by Kohnstamm's detention in the camp at Amersfoort and in the *Herrengefängnis* of Haaren/St. Michielsgestel. Chapter Three deals with his experience as personal secretary to Queen Wilhelmina, while Chapter Four turns its attention to his early official career in the Netherlands, successively as a member of the Hirschfeld Bureau and Head of the Germany Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. An essential thing for Kohnstamm was his years with Monnet: Chapters Five and Six discuss these, with particular attention to his experience in the High Authority of the ECSC and in the Action Committee (the Monnet Committee) respectively. Later, in the 70s of last century, Kohnstamm was appointed as the first Principal of the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, a post he occupied for a period of seven years (Chapter Seven). In the 80s, after Monnet's death,

he revived the Action Committee for Europe, which became known in a new form and composition under the name of the Second Action Committee. This Committee played a notable part in bringing about the European Common Market (Chapter Eight). Each of the eight chapters listed seeks to flank its description of the important events with an assessment of the importance of the period concerned for the personal development of Max Kohnstamm. The conclusion draws up a balance sheet of Kohnstamm's life for and in Europe. What was Kohnstamm's contribution, and what were his most important merits and shortcomings? And how does he himself assess the development of European integration in the past, present and future?

This book does not just set out Max Kohnstamm's life in chronological order, but also seeks to give an assessment of his significance for Europe and for post-war European integration. We are not claiming here to have written a classic academic biography. Certainly, we have done exhaustive research work for the book, using both professional literature and primary sources (archives in the Netherlands and abroad, newspapers, policy memoranda, interviews etc.), but in view of the time available for the research and in consultation with the publisher and with Kohnstamm himself, we decided to write a "reading book", without academic footnotes. References to the literature and sources consulted appear at the end of the book.

We owe our thanks to many people and institutions for their help in bringing this book about. To the fore is the Van den Berch van Heemstede Stichting, which contributed a substantial amount from its funds that enabled a number of archive visits and the recording of interviews. We also received financial support from the ICOG Research Institute in Groningen and the European University Institute in Florence. Particular words of thanks go to Dr. Andreas Frijdal and Ms. Beatrijs de Hartogh of the EUI, who offered us assistance in a variety of ways. Our former student Ms. Geertje Tolsma was of inestimable value in her expert support with the research and the interviews, as well as with her direct contribution to the content of the chapter about the Second Action Committee. Ms. Charlotte Pavillon assisted us in processing the resolutions of the Action Committee, and Mr. Victor van Bentem in preparing the indexes and typing out Kohnstamm's diary from the Amersfoort Camp. Our colleague Dr. C.M. Megens, and Dr. M.L.L. Segers of the University of Utrecht, helped with their comments. Professor Hans Daalder was kind enough to read through the whole manuscript and make extensive comments. Responsibility for the final text of course lies fully with the two authors. Without naming specific names (we would refer to the list of literature and sources consulted), we wish to thank the officials of the archives and libraries in the Netherlands and abroad whom we consulted for the research, and especially the

contemporaries we were able to question about their experiences with Kohnstamm. Our colleagues in the International Relations faculty in Groningen often wondered somewhat bemusedly what the European squad of the faculty was really up to with its Kohnstamm project. We hope that this publication will have been able to give an answer to their questions.

We dedicate this work to Maaïke Harryvan (1997) and Sara van der Harst (2005), the new generation of Europeans. They have the privilege of growing up in a peaceful, prosperous Europe, which our main character helped to create.

Groningen, October 2010

Anjo G. Harryvan and Jan van der Harst

Part 1
1914-45

1. The parental home, student years and journey to America

Father and mother

Philip Abraham Kohnstamm, Max's father, was born in 1874 in a Jewish family in Bonn, Germany. Philip's mother Sarah came from the well-known Wertheim family of Amsterdam. His father Mayer Kohnstamm, known as Max, was born and grew up in a small village in Bavaria. Trained as a bank clerk, he left Bavaria in his youth for Belgium, and from then went in 1864 to Amsterdam, where he entered the employ of the banking house Wertheim & Gompertz as co-partner. In that period he made the acquaintance of Sarah Wertheim, whom he married in 1867. Because of his state of health – he had symptoms of a manic-depressive nature – Mayer and Sarah were able to enjoy their wedded existence in Amsterdam for only a short time, and were compelled to move to Germany, where Mayer received treatment in various sanatoria. While they were staying in Bonn their son Philip was born, their only boy and the youngest of three children.

Because of Mayer's mental condition and declining income the family was regularly forced to move house, and mother Sarah was sometimes absent for long periods to be close to her husband in Germany. After living a few years in Wageningen and Düsseldorf, Philip went through primary and secondary school in Amsterdam. His high intelligence was noted from an early age. Initially he had to make extra efforts to learn Dutch, but very quickly he was so at home in it that he read the complete works of the Dutch author Multatuli with avidity. In 1893, at the age of 18, he went to study at the university in the capital, staying with his uncle Abraham C. Wertheim (his mother Sarah's elder brother) on the Herengracht. 'A.C.' was a partner in Wertheim & Gompertz and a Liberal Party member of the First Chamber and the Provincial States of North Holland, and as president of the Council of Synagogues played a prominent part in the Jewish community. He was also known as a keen lover and sponsor of art and culture. His philanthropy was legendary. Wertheim Park in Amsterdam's Plantage District takes its name from him. The atmosphere in the Wertheim household was rather like that in Lessing's 'Nathan the Wise': a typically liberal Jewish atmosphere, rational and humanistic, with almost innate scepticism towards matters of a religious nature.

At Amsterdam University Philip studied science and philosophy. His physics professor was Prof. Johannes Diderik van der Waals, the later Nobel Prize winner, with whom he took his doctorate in 1901. Despite continuing good connections with his sick father in Germany (who was to die in 1906), he had by then become so rooted in the Netherlands as to decide with conviction to take Dutch nationality in place of German.

Max's mother was a Kessler, Johanna Hermana (known as An), the oldest of six children. She had grown up in the Dutch East Indies in a Dutch Reformed ambience. An's father was an ambitious man – noted by those around him a 'go-getter' – but his career took an anything but smooth course. In the Dutch East Indies he worked as a confidential clerk at the banking and trading firm Wichers and Kerchem, but was dismissed for his rather undiplomatic manners and because of accusations of careless handling of customers' money. Although his name was later cleared, the affair was to dog him for some time and have detrimental effects on his health. After sick leave in the Netherlands and a number of unsuccessful attempts to build a new existence there, he went back to the Indies, where in 1892 he became Director of the recently-created Koninklijke Nederlandsche Petroleum Maatschappij, later Koninklijke Olie (Royal Dutch/Shell). He was to retain this position until 1900, when he died in Naples at the age of only 47.

Kessler and his family had for long known little financial prosperity. The banking adventure had ended in disappointment, and the initial years of 'Shell' were difficult: exploiting oil wells initially in the main required investments, and the yields were modest. Even before Kessler's death this was to change. And some time later his widow, Max's grandmother, was to come into unexpected good fortune thanks to a spectacular revival of Shell under the leadership of its President Henri Deterding. The preference shares that Max's grandmother held had risen enormously in value. With the money she was able to buy the large villa 'Stoephout' in Wassenaar, where Max was several times to stay in his youthful years. Her fortune was also used to set up the so-called grandmother fund, which at the end of the 30s was to help make Max's trip to the United States possible. Max's mother, who in her youth had not been very well off, inherited substantial capital left her by her parents. Money was thus never a problem in the family Max was later to grow up in; it was simply there. Although life in it was in the main abstemious – his mother was never to get rid of the thriftiness she had learned in her young years – the ambience was that of the well-off bourgeoisie, with all its privileges.

The marriage between Philip and An came in 1903. They had met each other for the first time on holiday in Domburg on the coast of Zeeland. At a lottery held there Philip had

given An, seven years younger, a ticket as a present. She won a handkerchief for it and wrote about it to Philip from a boarding school in Bonn, where she was at the time. Such a direct approach was rather unusual at the time. A year later they met again by chance, this time in Germany, whereafter the friendship grew. On the wedding day the handkerchief was incorporated into the bridal bouquet, and much later, after An Kohnstamm Kessler's death, it was found in her night table.

Max's parents had a happy marriage. His father was fondly called 'Blackie' by his mother, because of his dark hair and beard. She still kept calling him that even later once his whole head of hair had turned white. The fact that Max's father had a Jewish background and his mother a Protestant one was not a problem. Philip Kohnstamm, as a Jew, had been brought up in agnostic surroundings; for instance, he never went to synagogue. Partly because of the influence of A.C. Wertheim, he was a man of humanism and the Enlightenment, not of (Jewish) orthodox ideas. Nonetheless, this did not prevent him from developing a strong religious interest in the course of the years. Later he once wrote that he was grateful not to have come into contact with the religious world in his youth already: 'the sacred has not become commonplace to me from being imposed on me too early, has never been rendered over-familiar and devoid of effect by dull, misunderstood childhood memories.' Moreover, he went on, he would 'never have truly learned to understand other people's doubts if [he] had not experienced them [him]self in a much stronger form.' In 1914, when he was 42, he was confirmed as a member of the Dutch Reformed Church. This was an extraordinary step in those days and was not understood by everyone. Some wondered what a Jew had to do with Christianity, and why when it came to Scripture he could not be content with the books of the Old Testament.

This was indeed an important point. Kohnstamm had acquired a great interest specifically in the New Testament, because in it, as he himself said, he had 'met a person, Jesus Christ, who has become my Guide.' This was the time in which his biblical personalism, about which he was to write a book in 1934, arose. The core of this idea is the personal relation as expressed vis-à-vis God, Christ and one's fellow man. His theological interest was directed from the outset at the question of how the human person could through Jesus come to a meeting with the 'Person of Persons', namely God. Max's father's faith was intellectually founded. His mother's was simpler: from childhood onward she had been convinced of the existence of a direct relation with God. She needed no mediator in the person of Jesus in order to have the feeling of being in God's hands.

Philip Kohnstamm was a many-sided, dedicated academic. The tale is told that on his wedding day, while the wedding procession was standing ready, he was still busy completing a difficult chapter in one of his books. The year he got married he also became assistant to Van der Waals in the Natuurkundig Laboratorium [physics laboratory] in Amsterdam. He was already not confining himself to the sciences alone. In 1904 he published an adaptation of the *History of Philosophy* by the philosopher Prof. C. Bellaar Spruyt, whom he admired and who had earlier in his seminars made him acquainted with the life and thought of Immanuel Kant. Kant's philosophy was to have fundamental influence on Kohnstamm's thinking. In 1908, on Van der Waals's retirement, he was appointed extraordinary professor of thermodynamics at the University of Amsterdam.

Amsterdam

Max Kohnstamm was born in May 1914 in Amsterdam. Not long after, the First World War was to break out. His mother, with her personal faith, had said about the time of Max's birth – and half-promised – that her son would become a missionary if the Netherlands stayed out of the war. This promise was not kept despite four years of Dutch neutrality, even if Max's later zeal for Europe was indeed referred to by many as mission work. During the war the Kohnstamm family lived in Nieuwe Keizersgracht, close to the Jewish quarter. The nearby Weesperstraat was a small, busy street, never chic, with typical Jewish shops and shopkeepers. If as a child you ran past Mr. Ricardo's sweetshop, he would call you in to give you a sweet. Trams numbers 7 and 8 went along the narrow street on a single track; they were able to pass each other only on the bridge. There was a striking quiet on the Sabbath when the people, dressed in their best, went to the synagogue. There were two of these, a German one and a Portuguese one. It was a very matter-of-fact environment. There were certainly signs of discrimination and anti-Semitism, but without any real venom in it yet. Sometimes a joke was made of it, and Kohnstamm père as a Jew was unable to become a member of the capital's 'Great Industrial Club'; but he didn't want to anyway.

Max was the second-to-last in a family of six children. He had three older sisters – Margaretha Jacoba Johanna (known as Puck, born 1904), Dinah Elisabeth (Dineke, 1906) and Sarah Carla (Carla, 1911), an elder brother, Geldolph Adriaan (Dolph, 1908), and a younger sister, Johanna Augusta (Uus, 1917). Mother ran a complete household, with a nanny, two maids, a charwoman for heavy work and a seamstress – as was proper at the time among the well-off bourgeoisie. She had her hands full. Bringing up a family of six children meant not just bustle but also strains. Summer saw a search for rest in the Veluwe district, in the province of Gelderland. Max's father and mother had had a large wooden

house built there in Ermelo, to their own design, shortly after their marriage in 1907. Here the family was later, in the course of the 20s, to take up residence permanently.

Young Max was somewhat unhappy in his Amsterdam years. This is not because he felt alienated in the big city. At the time a child was able to run freely through Amsterdam, there being little traffic. Max learned early on to like the city and city life, but he was also a dreamer. When Miss Philips in his primary school – the Wilhelmina Catharina school on Weteringschans – asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, he answered most decidedly: ‘a farmer.’ When she looked surprised he responded: ‘Yes, a farmer, but not to work. I’m going to go and lie under a tree and dream and look at the blue sky.’

At primary school he did not do any too well, and already had difficulty keeping up in first grade. He could not learn anything by heart; the multiplication tables were a calamity for him. His parents, especially his mother, worried a lot about this. Mother Kohnstamm could keep silent for long periods while Max, doing his homework, got his sums wrong or did them too slowly. This made little Max very unsure of himself. He became aware as a boy that there was a pattern of expectations he was unable to meet. His parents decided to move him from the Wilhelmina Catharina school to the Montessori school on De Lairessestraat, near the Concertgebouw. This was a new school at the time, the first of its kind in Amsterdam, where progressive families – Wibaut, Keppler, Pimentel, Boissevain – sent their children. A little further up was the Amsterdam Lyceum, which Max’s big brother and sisters went to. He often went along with them on the back of a bicycle to their school and then took the tram back. Amsterdam was then still a small town, easy to get about. The meadows began after the De Lairessestraat, and behind the Montessori School you could catch tadpoles.

At the little Montessori School, with a total of around 25 pupils, Max came under the watchful protection of the Headmistress, Rosy Joosten-Chatzen. It was at this time that Max made his first little school friends, among whom his classmate Jan Keppler was the closest. The nurturing of self-confidence was important, since that was just what young Max lacked. When he was around 10, his parents had him tested by the famous Hungarian psychologist Geza Révész. He confirmed that Max had difficulty counting and learning figures by heart, but also found that the boy had very fast reactions. It had in fact already been noticed how quickly and independently Max had climbed out of the canal when he had accidentally fallen in once as a little boy. He also had great imaginative capacity. At the age of 11 he filled up three exercise books at school with a story of a 123-day round-the-world trip he had done as a ‘correspondent of the *Handelsblad*’. The journey went by boat from Europe to Australia,

from there to the US and then back to Europe. There were graphic descriptions of all that the correspondent had seen and experienced on the way.

At home Max lacked warmth and security. His mother was not relaxed in the busy family life, and his relation with his father was distant. Kohnstamm *père* was not affectionate, not the type you could go and sit on the knees of as a little child, or have a romp with. When he was at home he would withdraw to his study. This was forbidden ground for the children, except for an odd time on Sundays or on St. Nicholas Eve [5 December, the main gift-giving occasion for the Dutch – the folk version of the saint's name, Sinterklaas, is the origin of English Santa Claus]. It was a period when Max's father was vigorously seeking his academic direction. He was a professor of thermodynamics, but also had a great interest in questions of a theological, philosophical and pedagogical nature. In 1918 he was appointed as special professor of education in Amsterdam. Eight years later he was to resign his professorship of thermodynamics in order to be able from then on to devote himself fully to pedagogics. But theology and philosophy too continued to form a considerable part of his academic work. One illustration of his many-sidedness and broad interests was the setting-up of the journal *Synthese*, a joint initiative with lawyer Paul Scholten and philosopher and theologian A.J. de Sopper.

As Max grew older, his bond with his father was to become stronger, but during his childhood there was mainly distance. Max had no close contact with his elder sisters and brother either, all four of whom went to the Amsterdam Lyceum, but he did with his younger sister Uus. His bond with her was the strongest. There were separate worlds between the older children and the younger ones. Max's brother Dolph, later a chemist who worked for years at AKU-AKZO, was sometimes 'intolerable' in his adolescence, felt Max. Max often looked for warmth elsewhere, such as from grandmother Kohnstamm, who welcomed him with tea and cakes. At least nothing was expected of him there.

The hustle and bustle at home was heightened still further by the taking in of Austrian children, who stayed for some time with the Kohnstamms in the 20s to build up their strength. One of them was Walter Kotschnig, whom Max was to meet again later in the late 30s during his visit to the United States. There was also family regularly about the house, sometimes for quite a while, such as Max's German cousin, Bubi Kohnstamm. He, by contrast with what was usual in the Kohnstamm family, was accustomed to talk freely about God. When he was asked about this once he said, "if you try to restrain me there, you'll rob me of half my language!" Max got along well with this cousin from Munich.

There were also Max's father's political contacts. In 1905 he had joined the Liberal Democratic Federation (VDB), a party he chaired for a number of years from 1919 on. Despite his links with the VDB, a progressive liberal federation of independent electoral associations, he was in practice, in terms of social and political commitment, closer to the thinking of the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDAP). This commitment was of religious inspiration, through his world-oriented faith, convinced as he was of the decisive influence of people's spiritual attitudes on their political choices. Nonetheless he did not feel attracted to denominational politics, an attitude that probably cost him the professorship in ethics and religious philosophy at Groningen in Autumn 1922. The Education Minister, J. Th. de Visser (CHU), torpedoed him with the argument that a physicist ought not to be doing theology. Nor was Max's father much in favour of the "zuilen" ["pillars": the ideological or denominational groupings in Dutch society that many wished to keep largely separate]; thus, at the end of the educational dispute in 1920 he set himself up as a strong advocate of public schooling. He was a renewer, a "breakthrough man" *avant la lettre* [the 'doorbrak' or breakthrough was an attempt to overcome the political divisiveness of Dutch society in the years after World War II]. It is therefore hardly surprising that later, after the end of the war, he immediately joined the newly-created Labour Party (PvdA) into which the SDAP and VDB merged. His ideal of a single democratic and progressive party combining the most heterogeneous ideological positions had thus reached fulfilment.

In the house a real culture of discussion prevailed, often with special guests such as the Leiden physicist Paul Ehrenfest, who played an important part in the development of quantum mechanics. Ehrenfest, of Viennese Jewish origins, had a special sense of humour, and treated the elder Kohnstamm and the children on an equal footing. He himself had a difficult private life, with great concerns about his mentally-handicapped child. In 1933 he was to commit suicide, partly under the influence of the rise of National Socialism. The great physicist Albert Einstein also visited the Kohnstamms once. For little Max those were fascinating experiences, although he was not at the time always able to follow the scope of the discussions. His father had no objections if he, as a six- or seven-year-old, cautiously joined in the conversation. His only condition was that Max should not immediately start saying, "I don't like these potatoes," or something like that.

Ermelo

There was a great difference between Max's Amsterdam years from 1914 to 1926 and the later Ermelo years (1926-33). Max was twelve when the family moved from Amsterdam to Ermelo. The Kohnstamms went to live in the wooden house on Schapendrift, which they had

had built earlier and where they had spent many long summer vacations. Five of them moved there: the two elder sisters and brother Dolph had since left home. Max was suddenly the eldest – and only – son at home.

Particularly the relationship with his mother changed with the move. In Ermelo she was more relaxed than in Amsterdam and had more time for the children. Of all the servants from the Amsterdam time, only one kitchen help was left, but precisely this fact had a positive effect on his mother's humour. Max now entered into an intense relationship with her and was undoubtedly the apple of his mother's eye. At this time he started to call her 'maatje [mummy]' instead of mother. Later, he addressed her in his American letters as 'darling'. Using familiar forms of speech to parents was not usual at the time. But the Kohnstamm children did.

Max had just completed primary school while still in Amsterdam but did not, by contrast with his sister Uus, immediately go to secondary school. Instead he first attended a 'seventh grade' in the public school at Harderwijk. His father's affinity for public schooling presumably had something to do with this. In the Veluwe, a strictly Protestant district, this school was a small one with only a few pupils. It was headed by Mr. Van Ree, who taught various age groups in a single classroom. Max learned a lot from him. Van Ree had had tuberculosis and had been moved from Rotterdam to the Veluwe for his health. He earned only 100 guilders a month, but he really knew how to live. With his wife, he took long journeys, but above all he lived for music. Van Ree would have liked to become a conductor, and sometimes, in evening dress, he conducted Utrecht's city orchestra. Every year he organized a performance of a Passion or an Oratorio, such as Hayden's *Jahreszeiten*, in the garrison barracks at Harderwijk. He brought many prominent singers and musicians to Veluwe. The famous soprano Jo Vincent, for instance, stayed in the Kohnstamm house on Schapendrift in Ermelo more than once. It was with Van Ree that Max for the first time heard the St. Matthew Passion, in Naarden. Part of Max's musical education can be traced to this period.

He found school easier going here than during his time in Amsterdam. After the 'seventh grade' Max went to the Christian Lyceum in Harderwijk. He easily got through 'gymnasium alpha'. His self-confidence had increased and the good atmosphere at home encouraged his school performance.

Max has not kept any special friendships from his secondary school. The Lyceum had a mixed population of pupils: as well as farmers' boys and girls, there were also children

of the local notables of Harderwijk there. But both the classes and the sexes lived in separate worlds. The farming population went to church twice every Sunday, and the boys and girls walked along different sides of the Zuiderzeestraatweg. Surprisingly, religious education at the school was not very orthodox in nature, an exception in the otherwise doctrinaire Veluwe.

Despite the 'gender segregation', Max formed a close friendship outside school with Willy Ruiters, the daughter of a confectioner. She was not at his school but was taking a preparatory class for teacher's training college. The two of them played tennis, skated and rode bicycles together. It was Max's first real friendship with someone of the female sex. It was real calf-love, a shy friendship: there was no kissing in it. At home, Max had had sex education from his father, but sexual association with a girl was absolutely inconceivable at that time, at their age. In the final year of secondary school Willy took some distance, something that rather saddened Max. Later contact was restored again, and was maintained until an advanced age.

In Ermelo too a range of guests kept calling: the eminent lawyer Paul Scholten, the Protestant theologian and vicar Jan Roose (who had baptized Max's father in 1917), VDB party comrades, the editorial board of the periodical *Onze Eeuw* [*Our Age*] of which the elder Kohnstamm was part, and many family members. Two uncles on the Kessler side had senior positions in business life: Uncle Dolph was Director of the steel company Hoogovens and Uncle Guus was Director and President of Shell. With Uncle Dolph Max once drove in an open Lancia from IJmuiden to Ermelo. That was quite an undertaking at the time, since it was an adventure to get over the little wooden bridge over the river Eem near Baarn safely. Max had more contact with the Kesslers than with the family on his father's side. This was particularly because his cousins, male and female, in the Kessler family were more or less around the same age as him, whereas the Kohnstamms were older. In the Kohnstamm-Wertheim family a great part was played by Aunt Dinah, who was unmarried and often came on visits to Ermelo. Aunt Betty, who was married to the Marxist-minded physician Carel Stokvis – whose practice was among the poor – was another person with whom there was a lot of contact. Both of these aunts were later to die in Auschwitz.

Again, brother Dolph, with whom contact was gradually improving, would bring his student friends from Amsterdam home to Ermelo. By comparison with the Amsterdam period, Max was now better able to enjoy conversation at table and house parties. He began, thanks to his father, to develop an interest in politics. In international terms, these were the years of the Treaty of Locarno, Stresemann, Briand, the Wall Street crash and the

first signs of the rise of National Socialism. Max's father had in 1923 been a co-founder of the *Herstel-Europa-Comité* [Restore Europe Committee] which – following British economist John Maynard Keynes – advocated building up German industrial production so as to enable Germany to pay off its war debts and thus avoid international isolation. Max's father loathed the French occupation of the Ruhr and was amazed at the lack of economic underpinning of the French claims to reparations from Germany. He wondered whether the creditors really had sufficient receptive capacity to absorb the payments. By now appointed Chairman of the Restore Europe Committee, Kohnstamm Sr. was given the honourable task of doing an economic study in consultation with European capitals on the appropriateness of the demands. At an international conference in Paris a report by the Committee was discussed, in which Kohnstamm and his people called on the European governments to choose between one of two alternatives: either put Germany's export industry under an international authority, or if that was not possible waive huge annual unilateral payments by Germany. The advice was not to be followed, for lack of political will at government level. The Dawes Commission too, dealing with the same range of problems, failed to find a lasting solution for the German question, with all the consequences that was to have for international politics. Kohnstamm Sr. was later to say with a sigh that 'the world, and Europe in particular, [would have been] spared an enormous amount of damage and shame if only what we produced ... could already have been accepted by the governments.'

This episode is interesting for several reasons. First, it shows the older Kohnstamm's active and direct involvement with topical European political issues. Until then his interest had had a primarily national orientation, partly because of his chairmanship of the Liberal Democratic Party, but his research into the payment question brought a permanent change in him. This was of course also reflected in the content of the discussions that took place chez Kohnstamm. Second, the topic is striking: Max's father perceived that solving the Franco-German question was crucial to bringing about world peace. Continued slighting of Germany had a counterproductive effect in this context, and an international framework was needed in order to bring about a breakthrough towards peace. One of the delegates at the Paris conference had told Mr. Kohnstamm, 'Je vois bien; vous êtes un bon Européen.' This was precisely the set of issues that his son Max was to tackle a good 20 years later, after the end of the Second World War. There can be no doubt that he was greatly influenced in his assessment of European political relations by his father.

In Ermelo these topics and others were exhaustively discussed, and Max had the feeling that his contributions were being increasingly appreciated. His contacts with his father were deepening. His father was starting gradually to regard him as an equal partner in

conversation, and Max in turn began to feel the pressures from his erudite father less. He also found it pleasant that his father was more often at home in Ermelo than previously. In the period from 1926 to 1931 father Kohnstamm was working on his philosophical and pedagogical magnum opus, the trilogy *Schepper en Schepping* [*Creator and Creation*]. Partly because of this, his star was rising in the academic firmament, both nationally and internationally. This was no sinecure, since in those days pedagogics was still regarded by many as an unscientific discipline. Philip Kohnstamm had to overcome stiff resistance to get his subject accepted in broad circles.

Although his first great success did not come until after the Second World War, Max's father was being talked about in the 30s in relation to his socially-relevant research in the area of education questions. He was seen as the founder of empirical education studies in the Netherlands. He had a special interest in the development of popular (adult) education and vocational training for girls. He also did studies, together with his colleagues, of the thinking and learning schoolchild. Accordingly, he advocated the deployment of the pupil's personal disposition through a free combination of subjects, which ought not to be dominated by any single subject. He also criticized the memorizing of pat knowledge and the rote learning of curriculum material, and advocated schools with a looser classroom structure, as in the Dalton Plan. In 1929, in *Persoonlijkheid in wording* [*The Growing Personality*], part 2 of *Creator and Creation*, he laid the foundation for a Christian education on a personalistic basis. In this book he set the training of the conscience at the centre. In this view education as an individual and education as a member of society were two sides of the same problem: in both cases the goals to be chosen are rooted in a consistent view of life and ideology. Here it is the family, not the school, that ought to be responsible for the child's religious education. Philip Kohnstamm was wary of the imposition of religious conviction by the school.

Philip Kohnstamm was no 'ivory tower' scholar. In the summer holidays children from Amsterdam's Jordaan district often came to stay in Ermelo, to build up their strength at home with the Kohnstamms. For these children outdoor life was a great experience; some had never walked on grass. These groups of children staying were no exception: all through the year the house on Schapendrift was busy with guests from the most diverse origins. It seemed as if the hospitable Kohnstamms were never alone there among themselves.

In 1932 Max's father accepted a special Chair in pedagogics at the University of Utrecht, where he also taught philosophy. His educational ideals and his philosophy were closely connected with each other. Influenced by the philosopher Kant and the theologian

H.W. Witteveen, he had an ethical, peace-oriented worldview, with a great interest in social questions. For instance, he advocated a State pension, and supported Talma's social-security legislation, which particularly benefited the lower social classes. His broad views were also expressed in an open attitude towards a range of church people, from liberal tendencies to the Reformed Federation, the right wing of the Dutch Reformed Church. Max became gradually acquainted with the scope of these topics too. Through his father, he also became interested in the activities of the Dutch Student Christian Association (NCSV) and later, as from the 1940s, in the World Council of Churches.

Philip Kohnstamm was a gifted academic, who impressed interlocutors with his supple mind and far-seeing views. He cut a better figure in debate and personal conversation than in public lectures. In personal dealings he was charming and amiable, but not a man with a light touch. Just like his own father, he was burdened by bouts of severe depression. The first of these happened in a period of overstress during the First World War while he was helping to bring refugees from bombed Antwerp to Amsterdam by lorry. Later he was regularly to suffer from them, when he would 'disappear from circulation' for a while. His son Max knew the problem was coming on the moment his father started to whistle. This ushered in a period of extreme agitation, which then turned into depression. In the period at Ermelo his father would then withdraw into the garden house for as long as the attack lasted, mostly two weeks or so. According to Max, the depressions had no lasting effect on the family, and his contacts with his father were not disturbed by them.

Home life was not a tale of nothing but gravity and difficulties, although the serious side was definitely present to a marked extent. Thus, now and then the family would go on holiday, initially in the Netherlands, and later often with Germany as the destination. Twice they went camping in the Eifel, and Max went to stay four weeks on his own with a pastor in Saarbrücken. That meant that in his youth – bearing in mind the presence of German and Austrian guests in Amsterdam and Ermelo too – he had heard a lot of German spoken. That gave him a sense of familiarity, but at the time he had not yet formed any definite picture of Germany. In 1934 his parents went on a trip to the *Schwarzwald*. That was still possible then; two years later going to Germany on holiday was something that could no longer be thought of.

At this time Max developed a great love of nature and sport. The Veluwe district offered inspiring surroundings for a nature lover. He liked cities, but in Ermelo he discovered the beauty of life outdoors. The greater part of his later life was to be spent living in the country. What Ermelo was in his younger years, Luxembourg and Fenffe were to be later.

Max's favourite sporting activity was skating. Along with his sister Uus and friends, he took long trips on the neighbouring Zuiderzee, during the frequently severe winters of the time. It was therefore not surprising that Max should meet his later wife Kathleen for the first time on ice (see next chapter). In 1928 he took the chance to attend the Olympic Games being held in Amsterdam.

Those were happy, carefree years, on the eve of the great crisis that was to break out in the 30s. It was an uncomplicated, tranquil world. There was not yet any television, and in the Kohnstamm home there was not even a radio. There was a telephone, Ermelo 75, but it was used only very sparingly. The ordinary means of communication was the letter. Mother Kohnstamm owned a car for local use. For longer distances trains were taken. In his student years Max very often travelled from Amsterdam to Ermelo. He did so in a train with open-platform carriages, and the last section, from Amersfoort on, was on a slow local train that stopped at at least eight stations. His mother would then be ready and waiting with the car to pick him up.

After the difficult Amsterdam years, in personal respects Max had found his way. His relations with his parents and with the other children – now mostly away from home – had deepened considerably. In Max's case there was no troublesome puberty. He did not rebel against his father and mother, not even when he grew older. There was no reason for that. He felt he was treated by them as by a grown-up young person. Admittedly, quite a few people had questions about the special bond between Max and his mother. Was this tie not perhaps a bit too close for a growing lad?

College Days

After his school-leaving exams in Harderwijk Max went to Amsterdam to study in 1933. the option for this city was a matter of course. He had after all spent the first twelve years of his life there, his father taught at the university there and his brother Dolph had gone to Amsterdam to study chemistry. Leiden might perhaps also have been a possibility, but the Amsterdam student body seemed to him to be broader-minded than the Leiden one, which was known for its conservativeness. What was less obvious was what field of study to choose. Max swithered between ancient languages and history. He ended up choosing history, partly because of the stimulating lessons in the subject at his secondary school. He also discovered that History meant fewer lectures to attend, which he saw as a plus. His intention was at the time to become a history teacher after university.

In his first year Max hardly studied at all. Nor did he need to devote much time to his studies in later years either. The level was not very high, and the then history professors at Amsterdam University did not have the reputation of such as their Leiden contemporary and colleague Johan Huizinga. Hendrik Brugmans (General History) and Nikolaas W. Posthumus (Political and Economic History), while in Max's view certainly knowledgeable in their subjects, were not great scholars. In Amsterdam the classicist David Cohen did stand out positively for the inspiring lectures he gave. Cohen was later to become known during the war in another capacity, namely as one of the two chairmen of the Jewish Council. The famous but controversial (Marxist) historian Jan Romein was to be appointed only at the end of Max's time at the University of Amsterdam. It was with him that Max took his last exam.

Early on in the course Max had to make a choice between classical and modern history. He felt that modern history would be more useful if he was to become a teacher later. Before taking teaching qualifications it was usual at the time to take courses in Dutch as well as History. But the lecturers in the Faculty of Dutch Language and Letters at the time, Jacob Prinsen, Andries Anton Verdenius and Nicolaas A. Donkersloot, made just as little impression on Max as a young student as did their colleagues in History. Prinsen was in Max's words 'totally past his prime' and Donkersloot (pseudonym: Anthonie Donker), while good at poetry readings, had no special qualities as an academic. So he regularly skipped the lectures. Max and his friends took the position that lecture attendance ought to be inversely proportional to intelligence. 'Night lectures', i.e. those before 10 the morning, did not do at all in their eyes. The months when he really studied were the holiday months, at home in Ermelo. That was where he wrote his required papers. In that pre-war period the Dutch universities still had a very marked elitist character. University was reserved to a select group and classes were small. Max had six or seven contemporaries in History, including Loe de Jong, later Director of the Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie [National Institute for War Documentation], and the foremost Dutch historian of the Second World War. Students went in three-piece suits to the examinations, which were always held orally and at the professor's home, and had to be registered for by postcard.

The quality of studies was mediocre in Max's opinion, but social life in Amsterdam made up for a lot. In his college years he made many friends, especially through the Breeroo Debating Society, of which he became a member immediately he arrived, through his brother Dolph. In Breeroo he got to know people like Oscar Stibbe, Anne van der Goot and Ernst van der Beugel. His old pal from the Montessori School Jan Keppler was also in the club. Another student friend Jaap Kalff was a member of the Beets Debating Society.

It was particularly with Ernst van der Beugel and Jaap Kalff that Max developed a close friendship at the time. Ernst van der Beugel, later State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, studied economics and was originally a bit of an outsider in Breeroo. At the 'blooming', the traditional recruiting session for the club, Ernst was not exactly going to be welcomed with open arms. This had to do with the background he came from. His father (Theodor Max) van der Beugel had not gone to university – his father having been a costume maker and theatrical hairdresser – and as a reorganizer of bankrupt businesses was a rising star in the firmament of the Amsterdam banking world. He was a partner in Labouchère en Co., and in the 1930s, for instance, it was he who ensured that the De Hoge Veluwe park came into the hands of the State. The elder van der Beugel was not the type for 'a yacht in the Mediterranean', but he did not belong to the old ruling class either. Being purely Jewish, he occupied a delicate position in the financial world of the time. Because of his origins, Ernst was regarded as a *nouveau riche*; moreover, he had gone to commercial school rather than a grammar school or 'HBS', where middle-class children went. Partly for this reason, he had difficulties in his first year. Max, four years older, regularly had to push him to come along to the drinking sessions at the club. But after the initial difficulties Max built up a close relationship with him, and especially they laughed a lot together. Ernst was able to make totally invented but authentic sounding speeches in Hungarian or Chinese, and was known to wide circles for his songs and his performances at parties. Moreover, he knew and loved classical music. It was through him, and earlier through Van Ree, that Max got his musical education, something he had not had at home. The atmosphere in Ermelo was not very musical. Even in their Amsterdam years the Kohnstamms had seldom or never gone to the Concertgebouw. Together with Ernst van der Beugel, Max regularly went to concerts. They first went to the Van der Beugel home to listen to recordings of the pieces they were to hear, since Ernst had an enormous collection of gramophone records.

Through Ernst Max also came into contact with the van der Beugel family. Their house in Viottastraat, with a car in front of the door, offered him an opening on the world. Theodor van der Beugel had business contacts everywhere in Europe and was in continual touch with people abroad. It was the first time Max had heard anyone telephoning far-off places like Budapest or London. Van der Beugel belonged to the world of *haute finance*, but he also – and this was rather unusual in those circles – voted SDAP (Labour), subscribed to the left-wing newspaper *Het Volk* and placed strong emphasis on social justice. Despite their differing backgrounds, Max was thus able to establish a link to his own father's world of thought. Van der Beugel had a second home in France, partly meant as a place of refuge in the event war should break out. As a Jew, he and his family were very much aware of the

threats that were developing in the 1930s. But there was also room to relax. Thus, he regularly went to spas in places like Marienbad, in today's Czech Republic. Max went along on one of these journeys once, with Ernst and his father. Very stubbornly – from opposition to the Germany of the time – the two youths held back their urine until they were over the Czech border, 'so as not to fertilize German soil'. In compensation they gleefully hurled cigarette ends out of the car onto German land. In Marienbad it was a game for them always to choose the most expensive dish from the restaurant menus.

Max's friendship with Jaap Kalff was of a different nature. He came from a different background than Ernst van der Beugel; he was more serious and withdrawn, and, for example, not often seen in the pubs. Max felt a great closeness to Jaap, who was a sort of brother for him. Kalff's mother suffered from depressions, and partly for this reason Jaap often came to visit the Kohnstamms. Even when Max was in the United States later, he dropped by in Ermelo and would then read the letters that Max had sent his family.

Max was happy with his choice of Breeroo. He had also been 'bloomed' for UNICA, a more respected club, and it was not easy to say no to it. Yet his option for Breeroo was understandable, given the loose, none-too-intellectual atmosphere that prevailed in it. He needed his student years in order to become a man of the world, after his sheltered youth in a serious, erudite atmosphere. Breeroo was in the midst of life: in political terms it would, to use today's terminology, be called left-liberal.

At the outset Max had to fight his way into student life; he came over as a greenhorn in Amsterdam. For instance, he had never drunk a glass of beer and knew no bad words. His immersion was rough, but things turned round quickly, thanks to Breeroo. Ernst van der Beugel relates: "In the club you saw each other more or less every day. You ate together and you went for a drink with each other every day. As a freshman you had to turn up for a drink at 6 o'clock, and twice a week beer was drunk at 11. If you didn't appear they phoned you up. Friday night was a special evening. First the club went for a drink in the Carlton-corner, close to the Mint, then we ate together in the Poort van Cleef (now called Port van Cleve), then we went to Tuschinski's, then back to the Carlton-corner and finally to the club bar." Max was not known as a barfly, but he could still hold his own with the other young people. So if studies were not too great in quality, he did not find that a terribly bad thing. He had enormous freedom, and learned a lot specifically from the extracurricular activities. That was how, for instance, he made the acquaintance of De Tocqueville's works, of Erika Mann's cabaret and of Kurt Weill's *Dreigroschenoper*.

Max had various female friends in Amsterdam, among whom Yvonne de Bussy was the closest. He got to know her through the NCSV (Dutch Student Christian Association). She was the daughter of Mrs. C.L. de Bussy, who was to play an important part in resistance to Hitler's Germany and in 1938 was already active in helping to bring Jews out of the German concentration camps over to England. Max's friendship with Yvonne, just as with Willy Ruiters in Harderwijk, was purely platonic. He was shy and laggard in his contacts with members of the female sex. Also, he abhorred the idea of an early engagement, something he often saw happening around him. Particularly because of social circumstances, people were sometimes engaged to each other for six or seven years or even longer before finally being able to marry. He saw that as an abomination. Moreover, Max's mother had promised him the tidy sum of a thousand guilders if he did not get engaged until he was 30!

This last point merits further explanation. Ernst van der Beugel has noted that mother Kohnstamm had great influence on Max's choice of female friends, since "she was afraid of losing her influence." At the end of the 1930s Max was very friendly with Elske Bos, but this girl was not to his mother's taste, so things fell apart. Van der Beugel states, with some exaggeration, that in Ermelo "relations between the sexes were handled in an eighteenth-century fashion." There was no flirting, and relationships were entirely out of the question. This was something in no way out of the ordinary at the time. Among student colleagues in the Breeroo gentleman's club there was no question of sexual relations with members of the female sex, and "if you went to the ladies, that was just for fun." There was very little talk of girls at all. In Leiden things were different, according to van der Beugel. Leiden was less puritan, and there it was not unusual to go out "on the town" with a girl.

During his student years Max lived in various places in Amsterdam: on the Nieuwe Keizersgracht (close to his former parental home), above the club bar in Sarphatistraat, in Euterpestraat, and along the Amstel near the corner with the Keizersgracht. He had no material problems, receiving as he did a princely allowance of 150 guilders a month. For a room one would pay some 25 guilders at the time, so that quite enough was left over. Max never cooked at the time himself: even making a cup of tea was something entirely special. His landlady made his bed. He had a group of acquaintances who regularly asked him to dinner. The Moes family, friends of his parents, had children of his age, often invited him and took him with them to the Concertgebouw and to the Carré theatre. At weekends Max almost always went off to his parents' house in Ermelo. That was usual at the time, though most people did not go so regularly as he did. He found it wonderful going back home. Nor did he miss very much, he felt, since at weekends the Amsterdam student world was dead, and the club bar was shut.

Religion played a marginal part in this world. Apart from Yvonne de Bussy, there were only a few students who shared Max's interest in the NCSV, and there was nobody in the club who regularly went to church. In this respect too his student years diverged from what he had grown used to at home.

In his third year of studies Max became chairman of Breeroo. Subsequently, in 1936, after he had passed the exams for his bachelor's degree, he was elected from a list of some 60 students to Rector of the Senate of the Amsterdam student's union. This was an important moment. Later it was to turn out that the Rectorate was the only time in his life he was ever elected to anything. His election can be explained in various ways. First, the burden of study played a part. It was clear that the new Rector could not be a medical student, since they simply had too little time left for other activities. History was seen as a relatively easy subject, not taking much time. Furthermore, it was an unwritten law that the Rector had to be from one of the major debating societies, and Breeroo came into that category. On top of that, there were two different factions in the student body, the "Reds" and the "Whites", who alternated in filling the post of Rector. "White" meant Conservative, a group associated with the Catholic club Hera that took symbolism and ritual very seriously. Max belonged to the "Red" wing, which to be sure also followed the "*mores*", but was less formalistic. Max was successor to the "White" Joseph Luns, later Minister of Foreign Affairs. Luns had in turn followed the "Red" Henk Bongers Jr., the son of W.A. Bongers, the first professor of Sociology and Criminology in the Netherlands. Luns was regarded by some people, including Max, as reactionary; the two had little contact during their student years. In their later careers they were to have rather a lot to do with each other, but even then the terms of their relations remained stiff.

According to his own statements, Max did not have to fight for this election. During his student years, partly because of the background of his parental family, he had garnered a certain respect. Ernst van der Beugel talks about Max's "natural disposition". This made it "not a debatable point at all that Max would become Rector". He was "an obvious leader, with a special talent for making difficult problems clear. On every topic he had the ability to go to the root, to bring out the essentials. When he opened his mouth, you listened. It was never boring to listen to him. With many people you have the feeling your attention is going to sleep if you listen to them, but never with Max," says van der Beugel. And again: "he was of the stuff of which leaders are made. It was a matter of course. He never had to push things to get anywhere." Before he accepted the Rectorship, Max assured himself of the

support of his bosom friend Jaap Kalff, who was to take on the important post of Secretary (*abactis*) in the Senate.

In his inaugural speech on 28 October 1936, Max put the importance of and desire for community to the fore. But he also referred to the ever-growing threats in the world. He said:

“Our social future is very uncertain. The idea of war is growing more familiar to us every day. As we await the day when we shall become involved in it with our own lives, we can follow the madness in South America, in Africa and in Spain. We have grown as familiar with race hatred and crisis as with food and drink. Every newspaper we open seems to bear witness to this craziness. It has permeated even our bookshelves, we see it in paintings and we hear it in music. Science, in which previous generations of students had a trust that seems to us childish, is leaving us completely in the lurch in the face of the threatening chaos. In a society that has lost all style, the rise of the hordes is threatening even the bulwarks of culture we had thought impregnable. In the middle of all this, are we perhaps to stand among the group of cynical onlookers, recruited from every rank and class? Then where so many are talking we might as well maintain a decent silence. But that is not what our place is!”

Later, during the war, these words were to be used against him by the German occupiers. During his Rectorship there was a large, successful celebration in 1937, around the theme of turning away from National Socialism. During the period Max regularly organized dinners and lunches at which professors and students were brought into contact with each other. These did not shy away from dealing with sensitive topics.

Despite shining intellectually, Max was rather wild during his student years, especially in traffic. In 1933 he was involved in a motorbike accident, and later he had a small car, in which he drove round rather recklessly. The following anecdote about his student behaviour comes – once again – out of Ernst van der Beugel's stock. During their college years David Röell, then Director of the Stedelijk Museum, invited four Amsterdam students – Max, Ernst, Bob Everts and Joghem van Loghem – to organize a summer exhibition on modern art, with 25 works by still-living painters. The intention was that for the purpose a group of painters that most appealed to students of the time should be approached. In Max's car, over six months or so some 200 painters spread over the whole country were visited. Neo-realism was strongly represented in the selection: Dick Ket, Charley Toorop, Edgar Fernhout and others. In this context a visit was also paid to the female painter Gisèle van Waterschoot van

der Gracht, who lived in a magnificent house with her (first) husband, also a painter (many years later she was to marry the ex-mayor of Amsterdam A.J. d'Ailly). The four students soon put paid to a small keg of young Hollands gin, so that their reason was not totally clear. After a while Max was the only one who was still able to bring out something coherent. About one painting by their host he said: "Sir, I think the colouring is a bit dark." He was answered that it might perhaps be a bit different if he would take off his sunglasses! Max was the leader of the group and has kept from this exercise a painting by Gisèle – a portrait of her dog – that still hangs today in his house in Fenffe.

The comments by art critics on the exhibition were rather severe. The *Algemeen Handelsblad* for 14 July 1937 wrote about a "remarkable assemblage" of modern art in the Stedelijk Museum, where as far as the painters were concerned "it was mostly those absent that struck us". The reviewer continued:

"The Amsterdam students have not made any effort to pull out the less loved, though not on that ground less lovable, from the darker corners into full light; they did not wish to take on any leadership as far as the evaluation of art is concerned. They have confined themselves to seeking to give an account of the generally recognized, or at least known, and to give testimony to it. For the students themselves this self-investigation was presumably useful and important, but for the public it is of course more curious than interesting. Under these circumstances one can hardly expect anything particularly new."

The summer exhibition lasted a good two months, but according to the *Algemeen Handelsblad* "one or two weeks would have been quite long enough". Max and his companions were undoubtedly not very content with this review, but at the time there were more important things to get worried about, especially increasing concern at the economic crisis and the rise of National Socialism. At home in Ermelo this concern was frequently expressed by Max's father. Before the First World War he had still been strongly influenced by progressive thought, inspired as he was by ideas of an ethical direction, as shown also by his participation in the editorial board of the journal *Onze Eeuw* [*Our Age*]. But the outbreak of World War I had brought out his first great doubts. In 1917 the elder Kohnstamm was already writing, rather far-sightedly:

"National egotism is flourishing more luxuriantly than ever; we are further removed than ever from a law-governed community of peoples. Everywhere, for economic and political reasons, resounds the call for a dictator, a strong man.

This mental condition ... will dominate the politics of the future, and that is why we are threatened with a period of still sharper *realpolitik* of force externally and oppression of minorities internally. It is our duty not to shut our eyes to this, but, despite all resistance, to stand firmly by our ideals: a community which – as Kant put it – never regards a human purely as a means to the ends of other human beings, but honours the personality in each human being and guarantees and promotes its free development.”

A striking point is the reference to the importance of a “law-governed community of peoples”, a theme that was later to take a central place in the work of his son Max. The above quotation still speaks of some hope, but the crisis of the 1930s and the rise of National Socialism made the elder Kohnstamm’s view of the world notably more pessimistic. He did not agree with the way the Colijn government was tackling the financial and economic problems. In his economic thinking he remained close to the SDAP, and was convinced of the importance of government intervention in economic life. In the second half of the 30s he was given a chance to put his ideas into practice when he was commissioned to give consideration to a project to help the long-term unemployed. In 1936 he founded the Instituut Voor Individueel Onderwijs [Institute for Individual Education], intended for the training of young unemployed people in the crisis period.

As a philosopher he very quickly recognized the danger of National Socialism and also published about it.¹ His world had from the outset been strongly German-oriented and he knew Germany well. He had been born there, had family living there and kept up all sorts of contacts there. One of his daughters – Max’s sister Dineke – was married to a German, Herbert Hausmann, a Social Democrat who had served under centrist politician Heinrich Brüning and in 1933 resigned from the civil service. Hausmann knew immediately that things were going wrong, in part because of the contacts he had with the *Bekennende Kirche*, the critical movement within the Evangelical [=Lutheran] Church in Germany. But no practical remedy was available to combat the danger. It was clear that the “Versailles policy” towards Germany – about which the “Restore Europe” Committee already mentioned had expressed its concern – had totally failed. In the 1930s the elder Kohnstamm, along with, among others, Schermerhorn and Geyl, became a member of the anti-fascist association *Eenheid door Democratie* [Unity through Democracy]. Shortly before the outbreak of war he was much affected by a book by Hermann Rauschning, *Die Revolution des Nihilismus* [The Revolution of Nihilism]. The author was a repentant *Gauleiter* from Danzig, who had known the Third

¹ Ph. A. Kohnstamm, *Psychologie van het anti-semitisme* [Psychology of Anti-Semitism] (1934); *Het nationaal-socialisme als geestelijk gevaar* [National Socialism as a Spiritual Danger] (Assen 1936).

Reich from the inside. Kohnstamm was gravely shocked by Rauschning's detailed description of the collective psychosis that had got Germany in its grip.

Max and Ernst van der Beugel shared Max's father's feelings. In 1933 when Hitler seized power in Berlin they immediately took a pessimistic line and were convinced of the seriousness of the situation. But the idea that things would come to a World War, which Germany might even look like winning, had not yet entered their minds. The weakness of Britain and France was underestimated at this stage. Very soon, these countries' technical lag was to enable Hitler Germany to win the *Blitzkrieg*. "Munich 1938," the pact between Hitler and Chamberlain, constituted the great watershed for Max. He found that the British and French had betrayed the cause, and like his friend Ernst was bewildered that "in many places in the Netherlands the flag was hung out" to celebrate the fact that the pact had maintained the peace. After the invasion of Austria and the first pogroms in Germany, this was in their eyes a shameful betrayal. Surprisingly enough, his father was not in agreement here: he stated that Britain was – understandably – not yet mentally in condition to intervene on the Continent. Later he was to admit that he had not seen this correctly. This is one of the few times that father and son differed in opinion with each other on an important political point. Generally Max let himself be influenced by his father's choices, as can be seen from his orientation towards the Vrijzinnig-Democratische Bond [Liberal Democratic Alliance], his interest in the economic ideas of the SDAP and his analysis of the question of German reparation payments. It was not until during his trip to the United States at the end of the 1930s that the bond with his father was to become looser.

American Journey

How did Max Kohnstamm come to undertake this journey, which was after all rather unusual at the time? In Amsterdam he had written a paper on "America" (the term 'United States' was very seldom used at the time) based on the works of Alexis de Tocqueville, whom he had read in French and much admired. He had lived with and worked on de Tocqueville for weeks and weeks. He was an admirer of the philosophy of the American Revolution more than of the French one. His interest in America also had to do with every historian's dream of being able to become absorbed totally in another time and another civilization. This did not work with the Middle Ages, according to Max, since they could be looked at only from outside. America was a totally different civilization, but nonetheless one he could "sneak into".

At a conference of the World Council of Churches that was in the course of being set up, his father had heard that a scholarship was available for a study year at the American University in Washington DC. Max applied successfully for this grant, and was thus able to begin his major journey in October 1938. Max was accompanied by his friends to Amsterdam station in an open car with an oompah band. Then came the long sea journey from Rotterdam to New York. On the ship Max was all of a sudden overcome by homesickness, but he was also thoroughly aware of how exceptional this experience was, and curious about what awaited him in the unknown world.

An acquaintance of his father's, Dr. Ernest Johnson, met him in New York and went on to open many doors for him. His father too, from the home front, ensured introductions through his contacts in the YMCA and the World Council of Churches. His father also kept the financial situation under control. On top of his study grant, Max was able to lay claim to money from the grandmother fund, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

From New York Max went directly to Washington, then still a small town. The American University, a graduate school, greatly disappointed him. It was accommodated in a dilapidated building in which only evening courses were held. There was no form of student life, certainly not the intensive social life he was accustomed to in Amsterdam. Several professors and also some fellow students were working for the New Deal agencies linked to the government, and turned up at the university only sporadically. Max very soon felt the urge to broaden his view and look beyond just Washington and the university. He formed a plan to make a closer study of the social and economic situation of the country by taking a trip through the Southern States. He corresponded with his father about this; he agreed, on condition that Max would do something useful and not just confine himself to sightseeing. A serious research theme had to be formulated.

Seeking guidance about his journey and research theme, Max made use of the many introductions he had available, particularly to journalists and academics. Walter Kotschnig, professor at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, an old acquaintance of the family, gave him advice to concentrate on one aspect of the New Deal: labour and industrial relations. This suggestion was gratefully accepted by Max. He then secured agreement from the American University, even if there was no intention of making this the basis for a Master's degree. Thus, in February and March 1939 he was able to journey through the country to deepen his knowledge about the chosen topic and about the New Deal. For the trip, Max bought a second-hand car in Washington for 150 dollars. With it, he made the long

journey from Washington through the Southern States and then from Pittsburgh back to New York.

On his journey he received an ambiguous picture of the US. Initially, he saw a country that had been hard hit by the consequences of the Great Depression that had started in 1929. He was much struck by the grinding poverty in the South, particularly among the black population, and by the discrimination the blacks were exposed to. His indignation about this brought him to the conviction that only a radical political transformation could bring an end to this sorrowful situation. He also got worked up at what he saw as the excessive power of particular economic interest groups, the unbridled consumption among the rich upper stratum, the superficiality and the hustle and bustle. He went on about these things at length in the numerous letters he wrote back home to Ermelo. His father was struck by the poverty that Max had met with in the South, but in one of his answering letters he asked his son the question whether he really had enough comparative material available: "Have you ever looked at things in the outer suburbs of Amsterdam or among our clodhopping farmers as closely as you have in the South there? I'm much afraid a lot of that would really not be to your liking." The elder Kohnstamm had accumulated considerable knowledge about this himself through his academic research into unemployment and social differences. Max had to admit:

"I know nothing about the 400,000 unemployed – I've never spoken seriously with even one of them. Here, I have done. I know nothing about the housing conditions. To me, the Kolkje and Burgwallen neighbourhoods were picturesque. Here, the slums certainly aren't. But perhaps in Holland I ought increasingly to ask myself how people in those houses think about them."

At the same time Max was also discovering the positive sides of America. The beauty of the country, and its problems, taught him other dimensions in thinking and feeling. Even if the trade unions were not yet fully accepted there, he nonetheless felt that class struggle in the US was dwindling. America had in a very short time, between 1932 and 1940, gone through a social revolution that in Europe had taken a hundred years. Europe's social legislation they had accomplished over there in a brief six years. Europe was, as it were, being overtaken on the left by the US. Among Americans there was a strongly prevalent feeling that they were going to improve the world, that they could do so, that government could, and that government could play a positive part in social life. It was the achievable society to the fullest. Max concluded from this: 'The new society will be built here, if anywhere at all.' He praised the pragmatism and the freedom to experiment that was available. He was also

struck in Americans by their can-do attitude, their openness to criticism, their friendliness and their 'touching lack of complication'.

This lent Max a different vision of the Netherlands. The Netherlands at the time was 'a lifeless affair'. Max was considerably angered at the Dutch government's feeble attitude after Italy's invasion of Albania in April 1939. 'With this, Holland has given up its right to exist,' he wrote, emotionally laying down the law the way he rather often did in such situations. In the Colijn government Max looked for but did not find 'leadership and the longing for justice'. He found that: 'Despite the thousands of objections I have against America, there is so much more feeling of life here.' He pointed to the failing liberal economic policy of the Dutch government. 'Even without any great social awareness you would know from looking at the Dutch situation with its enormous unemployment that something was wrong here.' Compared with it, the New Deal was a genuine revolution. The active State that the SDAP preached in anti-capitalist vein was being practised in America by the revolutionary group that was in power. And he could see with his own eyes that it was working. The New Deal did not just have a psychological effect but was also bringing concrete economic results.

A fine illustration was supplied by David Lilienthal's book about the Tennessee Valley Authority, one of the great public works. To the question whether the New Deal and the public works had really meant anything for them, the inhabitants of the Tennessee Valley answered: 'Yes sir, they saved my life. My cows are milked electrically now.' Max was impressed by the vigour of President Roosevelt, who had given the country hope again after the Depression. Unemployment was not really ended until re-armament during World War II, but in the US everything seemed possible, even in racial and social respects. To give one example: Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife, organized a concert at the time, at which the famous black singer Miriam Anderson performed. For the times, those were path-breaking events, on which Max looked open-mouthed – and with open eyes.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of this journey on his life and his thought. It was the opening up of a world. Max's life until then in Ermelo and Amsterdam had not been cramped, but nonetheless America was in every respect an eye-opener. There he encountered not just a country, but a whole continent. It broadened his views, and his fixation on the Netherlands faded away. His awareness that there was a part of the world called Europe emerged then, just as did his awareness of European division, in sharp contrast with America's unity. His ideal of Europe, which he was later to develop further, arose first in the US.

For his personal development too this American journey was important. He experienced enormous freedom there. He saw that young people there were rougher than in Europe. Sometimes this did indeed go pretty far – Max noted with surprise and some irritation how children would push their parents around – but it was also refreshing. America helped him to become independent and to look further than the limited world of the Schapendrift in Ermelo. He became more independent of his parents. This was important, because he had never known a real puberty, a phase of setting himself apart. He felt during this journey that from being his parents' son he was increasingly becoming their partner. The letters he sent home showed increasing self-awareness, and sometimes even irritation about what his parents wrote to him in their letters back.

In later phases of his life he profited from the experiences he had accumulated in the US. He himself says that without this journey he would later never have dared to ask his wife Kathleen to marry him, afraid as he was of the possible reaction of his mother. His wartime letters from Haaren and Gestel too (see the next chapter) sometimes display two versions of Max: the normal one, and an 'American kid' who was much more brazen and dared to go much further. Seen in retrospect, it was a piece of good fortune that the American University had no campus, since otherwise he would have had to miss this important experience.

Max continued his reconnaissance journey through the US from April to July 1939, now in a northwards direction: first to New England, from there to Detroit and Chicago and finally to Iowa. During this journey he met – at Yale University – the great theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who had caused a furore with his book *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. Originally he had wanted to continue his journey to California. During his stay in Washington he had got to know Jane Hillebrand, a graduate student in Economics at the American University. Max and Jane had become friends, to the point that he had formed the plan to go and visit her at the end of his stay, in California, where she came from. At the last moment this visit fell through. He heard in a letter that Jane had got engaged to Spencer Thompson, whom he also knew from his time in Washington. This was a shock for him. Although Jane had said that they lived 'in different worlds' and had from the outset warned against any too-high expectations, he had begun to feel rather a lot for her. In the Netherlands he had also developed a close friendship with Yvonne de Bussy, but his feelings for Jane were nonetheless of a different nature. He was sure of his feelings for Jane.

In their letters his parents had made it clear that they did not look too favourably on a visit to Jane in California. Max, understandably, responded extremely bitterly to his mother in this connection, as can be seen in one of his letters. His parents' objections were partly because of Jane's religious background – she belonged to the Christian Scientist Church – but probably mostly caused by the threatening political situation in Europe. His father, who had been fighting ill health during Max's absence, felt that he ought to come back to the Netherlands, certainly if he was no longer able to accumulate further useful learning experiences. He was apprehensive that the journey would end up turning into mere tourism. Max did not agree with that, feeling that he was hard at work. But ultimately he too was of the opinion that he had to go back to the Netherlands. Apart from increasing concern about his father's health, he noted that the threat of war did not cease to grow. From America Max closely followed the terrible things that were happening on the Old Continent. And although there was sometimes hope – for instance Roosevelt's State of the Union address in 1939, where he indicated that America would commit itself to the 'survival of European democracy' – the chance of a German attack on Western Europe was becoming steadily greater. Remaining in the US would at that time and in that situation have amounted to desertion in the face of the enemy.

2. War years

Graduation under the Occupation

On 10 May 1940, the day Max Kohnstamm took his last exam in history at Prof. Romein's home, German troops invaded the Netherlands. As for most of the Dutch, that meant for Max a period of confusion, dejection and rage about the invasion and the ensuing occupation.

Developments originally came at breakneck pace. The departure of the government and the Royal Family, the capitulation, the fall of France and the fall of Dunkirk: all of these happened within just a few days. The war seemed lost and the future uncertain. But alongside the shared feelings and the consequential sense of togetherness, there was also a distinction. On the one hand were those for whom the Occupation meant a personal threat, among them members of the partly Jewish Kohnstamm family; on the other, their fellow countrymen who did not run any personal danger, or not directly.

For the Kohnstamms, flight was one of the options that were discussed in those hectic days of May. Uncle Dolph Kessler, Director of Hoogovens, had a ship lying in harbour

at IJmuiden that he offered to the family to escape to England on. Max's father decided not to take advantage of the offer: 'Here is where my duty is, here I am a professor. I am not going.' And so the family stayed in the Netherlands. Father and Mother Kohnstamm went to their house in Ermelo, where they were to spend the whole period of the occupation. Shortly after the capitulation, they divided their assets among their children. Max, who had just graduated, was thus able to stay living in Amsterdam with no financial worries. Originally he stayed in Euterpestraat, but in autumn he moved to a flat along the Amstel at No. 228, in the section between Keizersgracht and Herengracht.

The hectic days of May and the capitulation were followed by an unreal apparent normality. It was an atmosphere where everyday life resumed its ordinary course, but also the dangers and threats that Kohnstamm and his friends so emphatically feared crept in. The first anti-Jewish measures that the occupiers introduced in the summer of 1940 were of refined marginality, such as a ban on 'non-Aryans' taking part in civil air defence, and measures against homosexuals. Their refinement lay in the fact that these novelties, received in the country with a bit of a smile, were at the same time actually making a start on setting parts of the population in opposition to each other.

The dangers of the occupation were also central when shortly after the invasion Kohnstamm was asked to take on the Chairmanship of the Dutch Student Christian Association (NCSV). To his question whether they were aware that his appointment might bring the NCSV into danger, he was given the answer: 'Yes, we are aware of that, but we do not want to take any account of it.' This attitude was to prove typical of Kohnstamm's circles of students and friends. At the NCSV summer camp he led at Nunspeet that summer, the first racial measures taken by the occupiers were treated anything but humorously. In the fight against spiritual confusion, Kohnstamm was involved as NCSV Chairman in the setting-up of the Dutch Student Federation (NSF). This made an attempt to bring the traditionally rival student associations together in co-operation, through mutual ties and new constructive attitudes as a response to the occupation.

Among part of the population the danger of gradual normalization of the occupation or becoming accustomed to it was clearly present. "Like a chap falling from the 70th floor of a skyscraper saying as he zooms past the 39th, 'It's going better than I thought,'" said Ernst van der Beugel, ridiculing such ostrich-like behaviour. This section of the student community also reacted with shock to the defeatist tone of 'On the Boundary Between Two Worlds', the pamphlet that former Prime Minister Colijn had published in June that year.

Under Kohnstamm the NCSV became one of the first sources of resistance to the occupation in general and to the division of society that was starting in particular. "Understanding the fact that what is going on here is a rolling-up procedure, that was the point," said Kohnstamm later, describing this. "It was a clamp with fatal screws that were slowly being turned tighter." This resistance very quickly, albeit undesirably, proved to be right. Towards the end of the year the grimmer face of the occupation came to the fore, with a ban on teaching by non-Aryans, as part of the total dismissal of Jews from public positions. These measures by the occupiers affected Max and his family directly. His father was forced by them to resign his professorship.

Max had been working since the invasion and his graduation in June as a freelance historian for his uncle Dolph Kessler on a commemorative volume about Hoogovens, which in 1944 would be marking a quarter century of existence. In the meantime he was looking for a post in education. He seemed to have succeeded when he was offered a teaching post at the Amsterdam Lyceum, headed by Rector C.P. Gunning. But as a consequence of the latest race legislation by the occupiers, this appointment was unable to go through. This was a blow that once again underlined for Max the seriousness of the situation: if the war were not won, the future looked absolutely without prospect. Fears of further repression against Jews and half-Jews were inevitable, but this was a blow that Max fortunately did not have to bear in solitude. Perhaps even more than before his graduation, Max's group of friends centring around Breeroo and the NCSV became his social support. In the first year of the occupation they sat together and debated a lot. Thus, there was vigorous discussion of the possibility and desirability of a student strike against the ban on teaching by non-Aryans. Max came out as an advocate of such a strike.

In the meantime the harassment of and threats to the Jewish part of the population were going further. The 'no Jews wanted' notices began to appear. Owners of catering establishments, theatres and cinemas were forced to display them. The second year of the war started with marches and provocations by the NSB [National Socialist Movement] and WA [the National Socialist Party Militia], leading to large-scale fights with Jewish defence squads. Amsterdam's Jewish Quarter was shut off by the occupiers with barbed-wire fencing, and in February 1941 the first raids followed. A few hundred young Jewish men were driven by force to Jonas Daniël Meijerplein, a city square, and from there taken as hostages to the camp at Schoorl and interned there. All but a few of them were to perish in the camps at Buchenwald or Mauthausen.

The raids were the last straw. Amsterdam's working population rose in revolt. On 25 February a general protest strike broke out, that largely paralysed both private business life and the public sector. Two days later, the occupiers' Deathshead Regiment broke the strike with bloody violence.

As an expression of mass resistance and unanimity among the population, the February strike had been an 'anxious celebration'. At long last something had been done against the injustices, and on a scale that few would previously have expected possible. But at the same time the strike clearly brought it out that the occupiers were prepared to act ruthlessly against any who dared to stand in their way. The deportations continued, and new anti-Jewish measures were implemented. One of the possibilities that still remained was organized underground resistance. The flourishing of the illegal press acted as an alternative to the *gleichgeschaltet* daily newspapers of the occupiers. But among many the naïve optimism of the first months of the war had by now given way to fear and submission.

His rejection of such resignation and defeatism induced Max – who as a student had not been actively involved in the February strike – to organize a series of critical lectures on the 'Characteristics of the Dutch Spirit' in autumn 1941. In the lecture hall of the University of Amsterdam, speakers for the series included the scholars Telders, Romein and Van Regteren Altena. Kohnstamm himself added a brief word of protest, reciting the sixth couplet of the Wilhelmus national anthem, with the line that left nothing to be desired in terms of clarity 'drive out the tyranny that wounds my heart quite through'. This was a dangerous action that was bound to stamp him as 'anti-German' in the eyes of the occupier. Along with the other label the Germans sought to apply to him, 'half-Aryan', it brought Kohnstamm personally into the danger zone.

He briefly considered going underground, but soon rejected the idea. Max Kohnstamm stayed living and working in his flat on the Amstel, gave and organized talks, often on an explicitly Dutch topic, and socialized with his friends from the NCSV and the students' union. Both organizations dissolved themselves in the course of 1941 when new German regulations compelled them to throw out Jews. The NCSV continued illegally. The Club's self-dissolution became both an explicitly political act and a dreadfully studenty 'prank'. In order not to leave anything of value behind, the club was utterly demolished by its members, including the piano. When someone asked 'give me a high C', he was handed the C-string that had been pulled out of the grand piano.

Thus, the second year of the war was a confusing, threatening yet sometimes hilarious time for Kohnstamm. He later called it 'an existence frittered away'. There was also one bright point. Kathleen Sillem was the name.

Kathleen

Max's first meeting with Kathleen was on 13 January 1940, when he was doing the eleven-lake skate trip in the province of Friesland with two of his friends from the club. The group had previously taken from the club's bar a long flagstaff with a banner on it that allegedly came from the 1831 Ten Days Campaign [against the recently independent Belgians]. The day before, during the train journey to Leeuwarden, where the group was to stay with a club colleague who was by then married, while changing trains in Zwolle Max saw a married couple with their daughter. The girl struck him: she wore knee shorts and limped a little. In the next train for Leeuwarden, when he looked over the backs of the seats in front of him he saw her sitting a little further forward. The next day, in fine weather, they did the eleven-lake trip. Kohnstamm's group started late, since they had been engaged in some jollification the night before in Leeuwarden. Flourishing the flagstaff, the group skimmed along the long straight canal between the two lakes at Fluessen and Sloten, with the same girl from the train following after them along the ice, which was otherwise empty. And Max Kohnstamm, who before his trip to America had been so markedly shy with his dealings with girls, politely offered her a hold on the flagstaff to pull her along. The 17-year-old Amsterdam schoolgirl Kathleen Sillem, for this proved to be her name, was going on ahead of her parents, who weren't feeling so well that day. The four of them skated all the way to Sloten and waited for Kathleen's parents there. Introductions were made, and after the end of the trip, back on the Slotermeer lake, they played tag on skates. Max was rather impressed that Kathleen still had the energy for that after the skating trip.

The elder Sillems had a camera with them, and a few days later Max was invited by the Sillem family to come and look at the photos they had taken. This he did at their home in Van Dijkstraat, close to his flat in Euterpestraat.² The Sillems proved to be a lively, happy family with six children, of whom Kathleen was the eldest. The family belonged to the Amsterdam patrician class, but by contrast with the Kohnstamms was not academically oriented. Mr. Sillem earned his living in banking and securities trading, emphatically by way of breadwinning rather than vocation. His passion was nature. The atmosphere in the Sillem household did have many similarities with the one in the Kohnstamms': mutual respect and even familiarity in relations between parents and children. In religious terms too there were

² After the war, the Euterpestraat was renamed after the resistance fighter Gerrit van der Veen.

points of contact. Mr. Sillem was Lutheran, and Mrs. Sillem, née Boissevain, was a Christian Scientist, a denomination Kohnstamm had already made the acquaintance of on his American journey.

In Kohnstamm's circle of friends, which Kathleen was gradually to come to form part of, she was initially the odd one out. In the first place, at the age of 17 she was somewhat younger than the twenty-something members of Breeroo and the NSF. On top of that, she came from a non-university background. She was taking a vocational course in Arts and Crafts and played a lot of sport too, especially tennis and hockey. The sporty impression she had made on Max, eight years her elder, in Friesland turned out to be spot-on. Although Kathleen's mother forbade her daughter from accepting the invitation from one of Kohnstamm's club fellows to go with him to a club ball – a girl of 17 was too young for that – Max was invited to Kathleen's 18th birthday, on 26 June 1940.

The birthday party was marked by the weird combination of experiences during the first months of the occupation. With a large basket of cherries, Max cycled with Kathleen and her 17- and 18-year-old friends, male and female, from Amsterdam via Muiden over the old road to Bussum. There the day was spent in celebration, including a swimming party in the local swimming baths. A wonderful day on which the war, the occupation and the threats could be pushed entirely into the background – for as long as it lasted.

Kohnstamm and Kathleen sought each other out frequently. He became a welcome guest of the Sillems on Van Dijkstraat. After his move to the flat on the Amstel he came by every so often for lunch. From the winter of 1940 onward they took long skating trips and walks together. On Max's birthday in May 1941, which he celebrated in Ermelo, he presented Kathleen to his group of friends. He arrived with her from Amsterdam on a tandem bicycle. Thus, in the course of 1941 it gradually became clear that their feelings were going beyond those of mere friendship. But for the moment things remained there. Max was not yet ready to say the big word. On the one hand, he was ruled here by an uncertainty that prevented him from pushing himself forward. 'You're always busy with something but you never finish it,' said one of his aunts that he quoted later. 'That was also true of my relationship with Kathleen.' He was also faced with one possible dilemma: under the circumstances of increasing repression of non-Aryans, was it responsible to express his feelings for her? 'Could I put that onto her? I bore that mark. You could infect people.' In January 1942 Max and Kathleen went for walks in the snow in the dunes near Santpoort. He was staying there at his Aunt Go's, one of his mother's sisters. She immediately twigged when he got home, and said: 'You've been out with a girl.' Conversely, Kathleen too seemed

not unaffected. She forgot to change trains that evening when going back home, and ended up in Alkmaar. That was the last time for a long while that the two were to see each other. A week later, Max was arrested.

The Amersfoort Camp

On the evening of 30 January 1942 Max Kohnstamm was walking home at night through a snow-covered Amsterdam. He had dined with the Veth family, friends of his parents, who lived on the Keizersgracht and invited him over every now and then. Back at his place on the Amstel, he went in through the basement as usual. There he unexpectedly found awaiting him in the doorway his landlady, Mrs. Sluiter, in tears, along with several policemen who said they had orders to arrest him. Via the police station, Kohnstamm was transferred the same night to custody in a prison on Leidseplein Square. The following day he was taken to the barracks of the *Sicherheitsdienst* in Amsterdam-South, and then with 80 or so companions in misfortune to a transport with an unknown destination. The trucks, covered with flapping tarpaulins, that carried the group of men through the freezing cold eventually came to a halt at a complex of huts on the moor near Leusden, surrounded by barbed-wire fencing and equipped with watch towers. With much shouting, the guards, from the Dutch SS, hounded the prisoners out of the trucks. Amersfoort Camp, known in the occupiers' jargon as *Polizeiliches Durchgangslager Amersfoort*, PDA for short, was to be the setting for an overpowering experience.

Amersfoort Camp was an army camp of the Dutch Armed Forces and had been taken into use by the occupiers after the capitulation as accommodation for arrestees. It was extremely starkly fitted out. Around the parade ground stood wooden sleeping huts with associated toilets and washrooms. The huts were packed full with wooden bunks, and the only other furniture was a few tables. In January 1942 some 600 detainees were held there, a number that would rapidly be exceeded in the course of 1942 and 1943 with the building of new stone huts.

Since August 1941 Amersfoort Camp had been a hunger camp. A piece of bread and a bowl of thin cabbage soup constituted the daily menu on which the prisoners had to seek to keep themselves alive. They were not allowed to receive food packages from outside. At the time of Kohnstamm's arrival, three out of ten were suffering from starvation edema.

Kohnstamm did not know what had befallen him, nor what he could expect from the situation. He had of course heard about concentration camps in Germany, but the fact that they also existed in the Netherlands was new. It was originally unclear why he and his companions in misery had been arrested. He certainly quickly noted that among his fellows were Amsterdammers of name and reputation, well known to Kohnstamm too, such as his former history professor Jan Romein, Headmaster Gunning of the Amsterdam Lyceum, the sociologist and Americanist Den Hollander and the jurist Hoetink. Gradually the explanation came out: in response to an attack earlier in January on a section house of the National Socialist Student Front in Amsterdam by the underground, the occupiers had decided on a group arrest in the Amsterdam academic milieu, particularly the parts of it that were regarded as being anti-German. Unbeknownst to him, Kohnstamm had been emphatically assigned to that category by the occupiers. Alongside Kohnstamm himself, four other Amsterdam students had been picked up and taken to Amersfoort Camp.

Thus, Kohnstamm and his fellow Amsterdammers were held prisoner in the concentration camp at Amersfoort as so-called punishment hostages. They were by no means the only category of prisoners. Jews, gypsies, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, clerics, travelling people, the work-shy, black-market traders who had been caught, 'ordinary' criminals and many others were detained there by the occupiers, mostly pending transfer to detention elsewhere. One group kept separately was made up of 100 or so Asiatic Russians. Taken prisoner of war by the Germans, this group was given even harsher treatment than the ordinary camp dwellers. Neglected like animals, starving and mistreated, the remaining 77 of them were finished off with gunshots behind the camp in the early morning of 9 April 1942.

Until 'Amersfoort' the war and the occupation had affected the student from a well-off background in the main intellectually: in his hopes and expectations, his fears and his sense of justice. The uncertain duration of his stay and whether his future was to be inside or outside the camp increased this spiritual burden still further. But a physical dimension was superadded to it. Like all the prisoners, Kohnstamm had his head shaven, had to swap his clothing and shoes for an old army uniform and a pair of crude wooden clogs, and was subjected to a labour and starvation regimen.

Apart from the physical trials, it was particularly the mental torture imposed under the guise of 'disciplining' that was to stay with him. Among central things here were parades lasting for hours, to which the prisoners were subjected daily. Anyone who did not stand precisely on the proper spot or carry out the orders ('Richt euch!', 'Die Augen links!' 'Mützen

ab!', 'Augen geradeaus!') [Attention!, Eyes left!, Caps off!, Eyes front!] incorrectly or too slowly could expect verbal abuse and slaps or blows with sticks from the camp bosses Berg and Nelis and their guards. As well as that, the prisoners were forced endlessly to repeat useless activities such as carrying snow from one side of the camp to the other and then back again.

The combination of forced labour and undernourishment, Kohnstamm learned, forced one to be extremely sparing of bodily energy. Some prisoners succumbed to want and exhaustion. In later years Max's fellow prisoner Professor Jan Romein said he had Kohnstamm to thank for his life, since he had taught him to save calories and only shift snow if the 'white mice' (the term the prisoners used to indicate the camp guards) were actually present.

Mistreatment and illnesses were also among the privations that the prisoners had to endure. Kohnstamm too spent some time in the dysentery hut. That was not all that bad, since the Germans left the patients there alone because they did not dare go there for fear of being infected themselves. Together with Rob de Vries, a student from Delft, he read the little Bible they had smuggled out of their regular hut. Not without reason, the two of them concentrated on reading and analysing the Book of Job, the story of the man who, once healthy and prosperous, was visited by every conceivable torment but remained upright because he knew he was in God's hands.

The wretched treatment by the camp authorities by no means meant that the mutual relations among the prisoners were all rosy. There was stealing, pushing to get extra spoonfuls of food and betrayal of other prisoners to the camp authorities. The 'urban communists' of the CPN, who held the power in Kohnstamm's hut, carried on a battle of their own against the 'country communists' of the rival OSP. There was fighting and intimidation.

Kohnstamm had been caught up into the world of Hitler's concentration camps. He had no idea how long it might last nor whether this trial might come to some good end. How was a young man from a well-off background, who until then had known no poverty or want, able to put up with such suffering? How was he able to dominate his despair?

From the outset, his intellectual processing of his fate had a predominant part played in it by the awareness that the Amsterdam hostages were rather a select society. There were distinguished academics such as the well-known jurist Hoetink, the Americanist Den Hollander, and the outstanding historian Romein. But there were also school headmasters

and others with socially responsible positions. Kohnstamm wore his prison number with a certain pride, as he later did the red patch that marked him as a 'political prisoner'. The criminals and black-market traders had a black patch on their overalls, the Jewish prisoners a yellow one, etc. Kohnstamm experienced the red patch as a sort of badge of honour, an 'accolade'. He was no longer an unemployed academic, he had joined the circle of 'good patriots', he now belonged to the anti-German élite of the Netherlands!

However that may be, his pride was important. Kohnstamm and his fellow Amsterdamers were convinced of the importance of maintaining their own dignity. They had to do so especially vis-à-vis the German camp bullies, and their Dutch henchmen who endeavoured to deny the prisoners their humanity by treating them as contemptible objects. Each one of them had to draw their own boundary. For instance, Kohnstamm refused to lick his plate, however great his hunger was, whereas others felt that that was waste. The point was to demarcate the boundaries of one's own integrity, on pain of being destroyed by the camp system.

An important thing in this context was the conversations that could be carried on in the free half-hour after the evening 'meal'. Kohnstamm would talk, among others, with Hoetink and Den Hollander about the future of the Netherlands and of Amsterdam's municipal university after the war. One object of conversation was the possible creation of a 'Seventh Faculty' at the university, for political science. Nothing of the kind yet existed in the Netherlands; Max had brought the idea back with him from his American journey. With Den Hollander he talked about setting up a Holland-America Institute. It was conversations like these that kept expectations for the future alive.

What the camp regime was aimed at was breaking the prisoners by withholding and continually denying them basic human rights, so that gestures of humanity towards fellow prisoners became of essential importance. This applied to the illiterate communist OSP-supporting Friesian agricultural labourer in the next bed to his. The night that Kohnstamm caught dysentery, was freezing cold and afraid he might die, this man covered him with his own blanket and an improvised extra blanket of newspaper.

Kohnstamm stayed alive. His will to survive was strong. But the lack of prospects in his fate and the constant struggle with death made an impression on him. One day, after the last parade he was made to work by the camp authorities during the evening meal. He had to haul the body of a dead fellow prisoner to the camp gate on a sled with a rope. Behind him went a 'white mouse', with his weapon at the ready, accompanied by a fearsome huge hound. What a comic picture this has to be, thought Kohnstamm, ploughing on through the

snow: a half-dead man is pulling a corpse through the snow, with behind him a white mouse and a dog. Will I still find my bit of bread later, or will it already have been stolen?

A good half century later, Kohnstamm found among his papers a poem about that evening, probably written a few months after he was freed from Amersfoort. In a clear reference to the sufferings of Christ, he poignantly brings out the way prisoners in the camp were thrown back upon themselves:

Lijkenshuur in Amersfoort

Corpse shed in Amersfoort

Als ik eens voorbij de laatste honger zijn zal

When once I'm over the last hunger

En voorbij de laatste pijn

And over the last pain

Zal ik dan niet God en mens verlaten

Shall I not then be forsaken by God and man

God en mens verlaten eenzaam zijn?

God-forsaken, man-forsaken, lone?

En ik zie ze neergesmeten in dat kille duistere kot

And I see them thrown down in that cold dark hovel

Soms de doodvermoeide uitgeteerde harde lijn

Sometimes, the dead-tired, emaciated hard line

Van gezichten eens door vrouwen toch beminde

Of faces once loved by women, after all,

Zal ik dan niet God en mens verlaten

Shall I not then be forsaken by God and man

God en mens verlaten eenzaam zijn

God-forsaken, man-forsaken, lone?

Ja, ik weet wel dat de man van smarten

Yes, well I know the man of sorrows

Stuk gebroken aan het kruis verging

Died broke to pieces on that cross

Dat de vrienden vluchtten en de vrouwen verre waren

That friends were fled and women far away

Toen hij God en mens verlaten

When he, by God and man forsaken,

God en mens verlaten eenzaam hing

God-forsaken, man-forsaken, hung alone

Maar die kou, dat vuil die vaal versleten deken

But this cold, this dirt, this pale worn blanket

Dat voor hen tot in de dood

Ridiculous and

bespottelijk en verachtelijk zijn

contemptible for them, even unto death

Zal ik dan niet God en mens verlaten

Shall I not then be forsaken by God and man

God en mens verlaten eenzaam zijn?

God-forsaken, man-forsaken, lone?

Putting this experience into poetry gave 'Amersfoort' a lasting image in Kohnstamm's memory, marked by the corpse shed and snow-covered parade ground in the evening twilight.

Kohnstamm's Christian faith that he had acquired at home thus played a significant part in interpreting and processing what was happening to him. Knowing himself to be, like Job, 'in God's hands' was an important strength to him in order not to abandon himself to despair. But on the other hand, how were the horrors of the Amersfoort camp to be reconciled with God's presumed mercifulness? God's answer to Job was not able to convince Max. It was on such reflections that at Amersfoort the 'horizontalization' of Kohnstamm's worldview began; it was later to lead to 'agnosticization', the abandonment of the faith he had acquired from his father, with his personalistic attitude towards God. For if God cannot be seen as a person and Creator, what are we then left with? This question was to continue to pursue him for the rest of his life. Some half a century later he wrote in his diary, looking back: 'from vertical to horizontal. At the beginning, there in the snow: that corpse, of someone totally unknown, that I dragged onward while thinking about my bit of bread had died much more lonely on his cross than had Jesus. There at least there were the weeping women. If I have time in my life I'll maybe write something more about that road – have I gone to the end of it? *I don't know* [English in original].'

Kohnstamm's stay in the Amersfoort Camp was to last a full three months. On 20 April 1942, Hitler's birthday, his unexpected liberation came. *Aussenstellenleiter* Willy Lages had travelled from Amsterdam to Amersfoort to address the hostages. After a bombastic speech in which he expressed the wish that those to be released had learnt from their stay and would henceforth refrain from unsound activities, the unexpected happened. Kohnstamm and a few dozen fellow prisoners were given their clothes and other personal belongings back and were free to go and to stay where they wanted. Kohnstamm retrospectively called it one of the paradisiacal experiences he was able to experience already in this sublunary world: the journey from the camp gate, continually looking back to see whether they were really letting him go, on foot past the little church of Oud-Leusden and over the low Amersfoort hill, past the fragrant spring flowers and blossoming shrubs along the road to Amersfoort and then just managing to catch the train to Ermelo where his mother, informed by a telephone call from Max's friend Kettner, was waiting for him at the station.

Intermezzo 1942, in Ermelo and Amsterdam

Back home, Max Kohnstamm was given a hero's welcome. As thin as a rake, having lost 25 kilos since his arrest in January, he wanted most of all to get back as soon as possible to Amsterdam, to his friends and especially to Kathleen. For with all its privations, his stay in

the camp had had its positive side. Labouring in the quiet of the toilets and sculleries he had had to clean, Kohnstamm had, partly because of this 'accolade', seen the light: Kathleen was the one. He had to act. Direct contact with her had not been possible in the camp. He had been able to send and receive a letter only once a month. The letters of course went to and came from his parental home.

Kohnstamm therefore wanted to get to Amsterdam as soon as possible, but his body called him to order. That months of undernourishment call for the greatest possible caution was something not then generally known. On the day after the feast in honour of his safe return, with bean soup, meat loaf and apple tart, Max's stomach was totally upset, and in the following days additional symptoms of exhaustion also took their toll. Diarrhoea, cramps and extreme tiredness had their effects. It was eventually to take a good three weeks of bodily rest and gentle cycling around the area before the patient was fully recovered and able, in the second half of May 1942, to undertake the journey to Amsterdam. 'All the same,' he wrote to Kathleen from his sickbed, 'I believe that Amersfoort, once I am physically better again soon, will have made me stronger for the weeks? months? years? of occupation that are still before us. I had much extremely pleasurable contact there too, with many other people, contacts that did after all give me the feeling that in the Netherlands, when the Netherlands are the Netherlands again, I shall certainly be able to find the place that just at this moment is nowhere to be found. We lived on plans for the future, you know? We created and worked out journals, institutes, new professorships, government regulations and all sorts of things, getting ready for the great day.'

Back in Amsterdam in his flat on the Amstel, Kohnstamm started working again on the memorial volume about Hoogovens. He looked for the proper opportunity to give his feelings for Kathleen a name. This was no small task. The relationship was, his experience told him, too young not to be vulnerable. According to the usages in his circles, he had never yet walked hand in hand with her, far less given her a kiss. His friend Jaap Kalff talked to him to give him a warning, after a congenial evening together in early July with Kathleen and her bosom friend Saskia Moes: 'If you don't ask Kathleen then I will.' He was of course joking, to stir Max up. As it were, clapping him on the back and saying, 'Get on and do it, finally.' The very same evening Kohnstamm wrote to Kathleen asking her to go out for an excursion with him the following weekend.

But by the time Kathleen had received his letter and the big words could have been spoken, Kohnstamm, a bare three months after his liberation from the Amersfoort Camp, had once again been arrested by the occupiers.

On the morning of Monday 13 July, the day after Kohnstamm had sent his letter to Kathleen, he woke up to find his landlady, Mrs. Sluiter, weeping by his bedside. Right behind her came a German soldier. 'Sind Sie Max?' he asked. The fact that he used Kohnstamm's first name in a way aroused confidence, as did his telling him that he should take time to get clothing, shaving kit and the like together and pack. In other respects, this arrest was like a bolt from the blue. Hadn't Kohnstamm, as he was convinced, 'Schuldigkeit getan' [done his bit]?

The occupiers took a different view. Kohnstamm was considered useful as a hostage. This time he was not a punishment hostage but a *Zivilgeisel* [civilian hostage]. That meant not an active member of the Resistance but a citizen taken hostage preventively, who could be shot if the Resistance got up to anything. Once again arrested and brought to the *Sicherheitsdienst* central office in the then Euterpestraat, Kohnstamm was transported to camp at Beekvliet in Haaren in the province of North Brabant. Kohnstamm was to remain imprisoned for a full two years, from early July 1942 to September 1944, as a civilian hostage in the hostage camps at Haaren and St. Michielsgestel not far away, also sometimes simply called Gestel.

Haaren and St. Michielsgestel, July 1942 – September 1944

'Hitler's Herrengefängnis' was what Kohnstamm later called the complex of buildings of the seminary of Beekvliet te Haaren and the neighbouring buildings at St. Michielsgestel that had been annexed by the occupiers. And 'Gentlemen's Prison' is a good label. Here there was nothing like the dehumanizing regime of the camp at Amersfoort: the prisoners got good food, heads were not shaven, they could keep their own clothes. Still more, the hostages were treated with respect and consideration. The internees had their own radio station, tennis courts and a hockey field and held regular drinking sessions. Moreover, they were able to correspond with the outside world, as a rule as intensively as they wanted, even if letters were censored now and then. Periods of leave, short visits, hospital stays and material support from outside were all permitted.

All this led to the remarkable position that the hostage camps of Haaren and Gestel were to be nothing less than places of material and physical well-being in a Netherlands hit by the deprivations of the war. Kathleen still recalled vividly after half a century how, travelling back by train to Amsterdam after a visit to her friend Max, she felt diffident about openly consuming the smoked-eel sandwich she had been given in Gestel to take along with her.

Kohnstamm's correspondence, especially his letters to his parents and Kathleen, brought together in 2005 by Edmond Hofland in the book *Max Kohnstamm. Brieven uit 'Hitlers Herrengefängnis' 1942-1944*, [Max Kohnstamm. Letters from 'Hitler's Herrengefängnis' 1942-4], offers a fascinating picture of this new episode in the life of the young historian: 'being a spectator at one's total ease, in the most peaceful surroundings you could imagine, and being able to do nothing, nothing.'

For in Haaren and Gestel, the role of hostage proved to be that of a 'caged onlooker'. It was, to boot, a renewed Nazi German torture, even if this was of quite a different nature than in the camp at Amersfoort. The thousand or so hostages had to stand surety with their lives for 'calm and order' in occupied Holland. By 'calm and order' the occupiers had in mind above all the absence of any Resistance activity.

That the occupiers meant it was shown a month after Kohnstamm's arrival in Haaren. In early August 1942 the underground Resistance blew up a railway bridge in Rotterdam in the course of an attack on a German goods train. The occupiers reacted to this by announcing that if the villains responsible did not reveal themselves, a number of hostages would be shot. The atmosphere in Beekvliet became grim and fearful. 'The whole winter long in Amersfoort I was never so scared,' wrote Kohnstamm to his parents. On 15 August the occupiers carried out their threat: five of Kohnstamm's fellow hostages were shot dead. Later in the year, on 16 October, a further three hostages in Haaren were to be shot.

Two weeks after his arrival in Beekvliet, that is, still before the threatened shootings in August 1942, Kohnstamm had asked his girlfriend Kathleen Sillem, by now 20 years old, in writing to become his wife. He had put this letter inside a letter to her parents, with the request to pass it on to Kathleen, who was staying in Wassenaar; or else not to, should the Sillems be of the opinion that Kathleen's feelings for Kohnstamm were no less but also no more than those of friendship. 'Because,' he later explained, 'I thought that while I loved her, if there was nothing on her side, why should I bring her into the uncertainty that this letter from a hostage was bound to cause?' In her answering letter Kathleen asked for time. Max's proposal had indeed come upon her rather suddenly. In the subsequent correspondence between the two of them, Kathleen had, Max found, turned from a girl into a young woman in only a few weeks.

August 1942 thus became an emotional month. On the one hand there was his flourishing, and now declared, love for Kathleen, which Max put into a flood of letters to her. On the other was the permanent threat of death inherent in his hostage status. 'While you

were playing tennis you were thinking, “Is this my final ball?”” as he put it. The letters from Kathleen did cheer Max up. ‘I don’t believe I’ll have to wait long,’ he wrote to his parents. ‘Oh that God may not just let us see this promised land, but also go and live there.’

Joyfully, he announced to Kathleen on 10 September that he would be leaving Beekvliet temporarily for medical treatment of his varicose veins in the town of 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch):

Oh my dear little girlfriend, I’m utterly crazy, frantic to the point of singing out loud (know what I mean?) yes, just put on an angry look, terribly angry, and tell me, ‘Come off it – can’t you ever leave me in peace?’ Of course I know I promised you yesterday evening to leave you in peace a little, but I’m really over the moon, you know. Because, because, because, I’VE GOT VARICOSE VEINS!!!!!! AND I’M GOING TO DEN BOSCH!!!!!’

Seldom in medical history can the illness of varicose veins have been approached in such a positive light as at that moment. But Kohnstamm had a point, and he proved to be right. Later that September Kathleen went with her parents to 's-Hertogenbosch. In one of the treatment rooms full of medical apparatus in the general hospital there she told him she wanted to be his wife, and was kissed by Max for the first time. And during his ten days of leave on medical grounds the couple were together as much as possible, cycling and going for walks in the surroundings of the town.

The engagement of Kathleen Sillem and Max Kohnstamm was an event of the first order in public circles too. Hundreds of family members, friends, acquaintances and other fellow countrymen congratulated the young couple orally, in writing, with flowers, with presents and in other ways. For many of them, their congratulations to the young couple were also a way of expressing hope the Netherlands would be able to overcome its occupation.

For Kohnstamm, this breakthrough in the relationship area meant that for the next two years, alongside his life in Haaren and Gestel, he constructed a second, life, one in letters, with his fiancée and later wife, Kathleen. The couple were to be able to meet another few times in the course of his hostage period, notably when he had a subsequent operation in the same hospital in August 1943. And occasionally Kathleen was also allowed to visit her fiancé.

His other life, as a hostage in Beekvliet, was marked by an emphatic, sometimes desperate, endeavour to lend existence in the camp as meaningful as possible an intellectual and spiritual content. With his fellow hostages, Kohnstamm took part in discussion groups and attended church services, lectures, theatre performances and concerts. He himself in the course of his stay gave talks on, among other things, the American War of Independence and E.H. Carr's book *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939) on the causes of the Second World War. Over the camp's radio network, he gave a lecture entitled 'Amsterdam and its poets'.

In the discussion groups he made the acquaintance of a selection of prominent Dutchmen: members of Parliament, captains of industry, intellectuals, ministers and other government people, including the later Prime Minister Schermerhorn. Much of the exchange of ideas concentrated on the setting up of the post-war political system for the Netherlands. With J. Linthorst Homan, Kohnstamm organized a discussion circle on social and economic questions. He received great support here from his talks with J.W. Meyer Ranneft, former Vice-Chair of the Council of the Dutch Indies, who inspired Kohnstamm to do research leading to a possible PhD thesis on the historical development of the image of the East Indies in the Netherlands.

Of course there was also attention to Holland's position in the coming international order. Kohnstamm saw this in pre-eminently Atlanticist terms, advocating 'a very strong Anglo-American hegemony': 'We will indeed have to give up a part of our sovereignty, though not to a Utopia but to a strong Anglo-American alliance, in which we will of course be heard, though not as the equal of Britain; nor as the equal of, say, Switzerland either, which after all has no interests in Asia. We must in God's name look at these things realistically.' Thus, life in the camp offered room for study, but also for friendships. With Henk Brugmans, later Rector of the College of Europe in Bruges, Kohnstamm held exhaustive conversations during long walks round the football field.

On the other hand, Kohnstamm could get terribly angry at his fellow hostages, at their forced conviviality and jollity. The camp had 'amazingly many plebeians, and still more amazingly many bridge players who saw the war only as rationing'. Kohnstamm resumed contact with other 'eggheads', people he knew from his period in the earlier camp. From the outset, thus, the comparison, and the contrast, with the camp in Amersfoort imposed itself, and the comparison went against Beekvliet: 'Spiritually too of course the memory sometimes arises, and compared with it all of this is dull and boring. The mood most resembles a cruise ship. You hang around a bit, chat a bit. But in Amersfoort we didn't chat. When we got the

chance, we swooped on each other intellectually. Everything had a fierceness, in both joy and misery, that is remote from here.'

That set the tone for many of his letters back home. Vegetating in a hotel, idling in an old folks' home, feeling as if you were buried alive, looking on from a cage – to mention just a few of the descriptions in his letters – all brought him down. In fits and starts he would lose the illusion that any meaningful work could be done, and he too gave himself up to playing chess or bridge.

His father and mother in turn tried to comfort their son and cheer him up. He was sent packages of books and food, which he sometimes sent back: 'We are still so ridiculously well off here.' In 1944 Max's parents expressed their concern that their son was exhibiting spoilt behaviour. He himself believed that there was some truth in that. He had by now turned 30, without ever having had a proper job, without ever having experienced the ordinary rough-and-tumble of life. And such an unusual, if you wish spoilt, position was bound to influence his behaviour; it could not be otherwise.

This belief was consoling for Kohnstamm. Following what he had learnt in Amersfoort, he was chasing after a dialectical solution: the relation of tension between God's omnipotence and the terrors he had had to face: 'He conquers, He is superior in power. But He is also the complete killjoy, the Man that again and again stands against you. And somewhere deep inside you you know that this all-powerful enemy is your Father, that your life has meaning only if He stands against that life and drives it in a direction you didn't want to go in.' Despite his crises of faith and wrestlings with belief, this theological interest of his remained unabated. Until the end of his period as hostage Kohnstamm was to continue to enjoy the preachings of the parson he admired, J.J. Buskes.

Another thing that helped was conceiving and discussing plans for the future. With his Amersfoort companion Den Hollander he again took up the plans for an America Institute in Amsterdam, partly as a possible employer for Kohnstamm himself, since in the meantime he had come to the conclusion that he was not a true historian. A subject like political science attracted him more. Other possible types of employment for the period after the war were also discussed, including editorship of a provincial newspaper.

Max had already warned his father in October 1942 that Kathleen and he were in complete agreement that there was no reason whatever not to go further than engagement and get married right away. In talks with his father-in-law to be, he had discussed the

possibility of a wedding. Since in the meantime the occupiers had banned weddings between 'non-Aryans' and 'Aryans', and Kohnstamm as a 'half-Aryan' counted as a 'non-Aryan', a legally valid marriage was no longer possible. However, the couple refused to resign themselves to this. When Kohnstamm unexpectedly received a few days' leave in late February 1944, the two approached the Reverend J.P. van Bruggen in Amsterdam, a fellow Beekvliet hostage who had since been freed, and was also the father-in-law of Kohnstamm's friend van der Beugel, with the request to bless their marital relationship. On Monday 28 February, accordingly, a sober wedding ceremony took place in Kohnstamm's flat on the Amstel. For safety reasons none of the parents, other family or friends were present. After a Bible reading, the pair said their 'I do' to the question whether they were willing to be man and wife in the sight of God.

Their intention was to conclude a legal civil marriage as soon as circumstances permitted. The couple had already found an official in the Town Hall prepared to take cognizance of their marital intentions. On the reverse of the notification form stands the following text:

'I, the undersigned C. Zaagsma, Registrar of births, marriages and deaths in Amsterdam, hereby declare that the marriage notification on the obverse has been shown to me! In connection with the regulations currently in force and with the safety of bride and groom, no record of the marriage declaration has been made, while the marriage announcement has not been made. Amsterdam, 26 February 1944.' Signed: C. Zaagsma.

In view of the circumstances this declaration by Zaagsma can be seen as a courageous act, since it was certainly not without risk for his own person. After the liberation, in September 1945 the marriage was again registered and made valid in the legal sense.

At the end of 1942 the hostage camps in Haaren and St. Michielsgestel housed around 1500 prisoners. During 1943-4 small groups of prisoners were continually released, so that the figure gradually came down: in June 1943 there still remained about 400 hostages, and by December 1943 140. Kohnstamm, who had been moved in early Spring 1943 from Beekvliet to a smaller camp in Gestel nearby, was among the last ten hostages who, having in the meantime been transferred to the concentration camp of Vught, were released on 13 September 1944.

Why were the occupiers so reluctant to set Kohnstamm free, whereas most of his fellow hostages had been freed again after often only a few months in that position? Kohnstamm himself for a long time thought that it was primarily the label 'half-Aryan' that was the source of the difficulties. Moreover, as he made clear in correspondence with his father-in-law Sillem, he was not prepared to sign a declaration of loyalty to the occupiers. Only later, after the liberation, did the real explanation come to light: the *Sicherheitspolizei* in Amsterdam fiercely resisted the release of Kohnstamm applied for by Sillem as from October 1942, '*aufgrund seiner absolut antideutschen und antinationalsozialistischen Einstellung*' [because of his absolutely anti-German and anti-National-Socialist attitude]. Right up to the present Kohnstamm feels an understandable sense of pride at this statement. Together with the *Grosses Verdienstkreuz mit Stern* [Grand Cross of Merit with Star] that Germany's post-war democratic government was to award him in gratitude, he conserves this document in a special little box separate from his general archives of documents.

On the day of his release from Vught, Kohnstamm wrote to his parents: 'Dear darlings, I am *free, free, free, free, free, free, free, free, free!!!* Lots of love, Max.' Thereafter, an intensely happy Kohnstamm was to settle with his young wife in the flat on the Amstel, to resume life again, for better or for worse. An attempt to visit Ermelo would be problematic, wrote Kohnstamm to his parents: the trains were not going, bicycles had been 'brutally requisitioned', and the boat trip over the IJsselmeer was even more dangerous than by train. The food scarcity worsened into what was later to be called 'the hunger winter'. With his father-in-law, Max Kohnstamm took hunger trips to the Wieringermeer [a polder in the north of Holland] to buy food from the farmers there. Father Sillem had developed an apparatus to suck remains of oil out of tanks. With the oil, he and his son-in-law would then go and approach the farmers. With Kathleen, Father Sillem also sometimes took food trips to the east of the country, close to the German border. Fortunately, Breeroo and NCSV members in the north of the country also helped them with food, since in those days the black market was impossibly expensive.

Eventually, in May 1945, came the liberation, which for the Kohnstamms meant the end of the terrors. It was announced by food drops over Amsterdam and other big towns. From the window of Amstel 228 one could see how the aeroplanes were throwing out their packages. Towards the evening of 5 May came the report of Germany's capitulation. The new freedom was real and tangible. There was no longer any *Sperrfrist* [curfew]: it was again possible to walk about the streets in the evening. There ensued a few confusing days, until the Allied troops reached Amsterdam.

All the same, one of the many shooting incidents of those days still came close to taking the Kohnstamms' life. Bitter and drunk German *Kriegsmarine* squads who had boarded themselves up in the Grand Club on the corner of the Kalverstraat shot at the crowds celebrating on 7 May on Dam Square. To shelter from the hail of bullets, Kohnstamm dragged his wife with him behind a lorry. 'It was the last time we had to creep away.' The following day came the entry of the Canadian liberators: Amsterdam, and the Kohnstamms, were finally free.

Lasting effects

The influence of Kohnstamm's war experiences on his thinking and action was considerable. Amersfoort was a confrontation with lawlessness, on a scale unknown to him until that date. There Kohnstamm grasped once and for all the point that the law and the rule of law are the sole protection of human life against injustice. As he himself later put it: 'there [at the Amersfoort Camp] I understood that where lawlessness enters in, Hell starts.' Civilization is not a natural product but a product of culture; it is a victory over human nature. Human beings carry dangerous elements within themselves, even if not all human elements are dangerous. Human nature in itself cannot be changed, but the circumstances that influence behaviour can. When people are thrown back upon themselves, they are capable of destroying each other. A meeting of human beings is not a naturally peaceful happening. Human truth, dignity and ethics proved in the Amersfoort Camp to be highly context-dependent. For Kohnstamm this emphasized the point that the rule of law constitutes a necessary condition for civilization.

If civilization is nothing but a fragile veneer on top of human nature, then people are capable of practically anything once they are sufficiently deprived, intimidated and threatened. This, according to Kohnstamm, implies that 'people can in a very short time be turned into beasts.' A saddening nadir of this was to be seen in the Soviet prisoners in the Amersfoort Camp, who, starving to death and in fear and exhaustion, degenerated into a closed group of constantly shouting and fighting half-animals. But the converse can also be the case, that people in dreadful circumstances can be capable of incredible acts of shared humanity and faith. Of these, for Kohnstamm the great example was pastor Titus Brandsma. As he later told his nephew Philip A. Idenburg:

'There was one genuine saint in Amersfoort: Titus Brandsma, a Friesian pastor. I am not in general very much for that sort of thing, but if there's any person I've

known that ought to be declared a saint, then as far as he is concerned I'm for it. Brandsma was a man who, starving and all, risked his life by being among the huts in the evening to comfort people. That man was put on a transport to a concentration camp in August 1942 and died there. When I heard that, I wrote about it in a letter to Father and Mother that I [was] full ... of hate.'

In his personal life, the war conditions were decisive for the emergence of his feelings for Kathleen and his putting a name to them, and thus also for a loosening of his close bond with his mother. Although she had developed a good understanding of Kathleen, Mother Kohnstamm proved in the first weeks after the wedding to have trouble handing off her son to another woman. Probably, Kohnstamm was to think later, a big wedding party with all the trimmings would have made it easier for her to bid farewell to Max as her son.

For Kohnstamm, the war years were also significant for the many personal contacts he had with prominent and future members of government, intellectuals and artists. Both in Amersfoort and in Haaren and Gestel he entered into a network of personal relationships from which he was able to draw great profit in the coming decades.

But the most important continuing effect of the war years in shaping Kohnstamm is perhaps in giving him motivation. Although by a small miracle Kohnstamm himself, his father – who had kept hidden in the woods around Ermelo when danger threatened – and his mother and brothers and sisters had all survived the war, this was not true of his wider family. His aunts Dinah and Betty Kohnstamm, his father's sisters, had been arrested during the occupation and carried off to Germany. After the war it proved that what had been feared had become reality. Shortly after their arrival in Auschwitz both had been put to death by the Nazis.

This tragedy made a crushing impression on Kohnstamm. His later zeal for European unification must above all be seen as his working for a better world in which law would determine inter-state relations rather than power. In such a world it would be inconceivable for completely innocent old women to be dragged out of their houses, put on transports and then gassed.