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BOLLINGEN SERIES XLV

The Collected Works of Paul Valéry

Edited by Jackson Mathews

VOLUME 10

PAUL VALÉRY

HISTORY AND POLITICS

Translated by
Denise Folliot
and
Jackson Mathews

With a Preface by
François Valéry
and an Introduction by
Salvador de Madariaga

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Preface

IN HIS everyday life, Paul Valéry's appearance and habits were those of the average Frenchman His respect for established social values allowed him to accept them with a deference surprising in a man with so strong a sense of his own worth—a man who was, for that matter, of excellent family, indeed of aristocratic origins on his mother's side This patriotic Frenchman was born of an Italian mother and a Corsican father Genoa, where one branch of his family had settled, was his favorite city, yet it was precisely from Genoa that, at the age of sixteen, he wrote to a friend "You could never imagine how patriotic one feels the moment one is outside one's own country I would never have believed I was so devoted to France." And he went on "Nearly every day in the tram, I pass in front of an old house with a sign on the wall (I can see you beginning to smile) *Medical Dispensary for French Army Hospitals* You will see at once that these six commonplace terms hold a world of memories, a vision of conquest and fame "

That schoolboy exulting in the memory of Napoleon never quite died in Valéry "Patriot" is not strong enough—he was a chauvinist At the sound of a military band passing in the street, he would fall into step An individualist, he complained like all boys at having to do his military service (he

was called up at the early age of eighteen) but he found a certain exhilaration in the disciplined life and even in the morning drill Paul Valery was unquestionably of a Catholic turn of mind which he owed to his upbringing but as a Catholic he was more than agnostic, he was a disbeliever

One day he said to a Protestant friend of his to tease him You Protestants are a lot of (here he used an unprintable perhaps untranslatable word) You kept God and did away with the Pope when you should have done just the opposite It was more than a quip He had a real admiration for the Roman Church as an organization though sometimes he would say it was like a school where the best students are always expelled

He was simple in his tastes and manner of life he worked for a living he was completely unpretentious and deeply understanding yet neither in his ideas nor his actions did he give evidence of any interest in social questions Disorder and insecurity were distasteful to him and he hated excess, this scorner of the lessons of history was in many ways a traditionalist One day, at the family dinner table, he said in fun ' As for me, I'm a government anarchist " A mere boy dared retort to the Academician You're an anarchist because it s easy, and a conformist because it's safe ' Tolerant with his family as with everyone, Paul Valery smiled at this piece of impertinence But it is quite true that conformity and anarchy combined in him in some strange way An alert soldier, a scrupulous taxpayer, a punctilious civil servant an indulgent father, he nevertheless was convinced that there is no such thing as a good government Being acquainted with most of the politicians who governed France between the two world wars he was on good terms with them as men and even indignant at certain vicious attacks on them but he had little

had written up to that point (Valéry had *published* little before 1914, and nothing at all for the preceding fifteen years) would have brought him a reputation all the greater perhaps for coming after his death since the critics could then take the credit for discovering him On several occasions in his youth he had taken an active interest in politics but had lost it in later years His views were typical of his generation which had grown up in the decades after the defeat of 1871 in an atmosphere of constant threat from Bismarck's Germany It was in this atmosphere that he wrote *Une Conquête méthodique* (1897) Yet more revealing perhaps is the importance he attached to Japan's campaign against China (1895) and that of the United States against Spain (1898) These two events struck him as significant One was the first act of power by *an Asiatic nation remodeled and equipped on European lines* the other was the first act of power against a European nation by a nation derived and as it were, developed from Europe

There is no doubt that the Dreyfus Affair played a part in this period of his life It cooled his friendship with Marcel Schwob and caused him to break with Kolbassine, a Russian friend he held in high regard In that famous Affair, which drove all Frenchmen to take sides why was he on the side of the nationalists? No doubt because he was as I have just said at heart a nationalist and because, being so, he rejected the idea that the fate of one man, whatever his merit, could be weighed in the scales against the unity and efficacy of the State It must not be forgotten that Valéry was at the time a young functionary in the War Ministry, that he was also still very much under the influence of the milieu in which he had grown up Furthermore, he was exasperated with certain literary groups most of them favorable to Dreyfus it seemed to him that many of his friends were abusing their

role as intellectuals, in an affair which he believed had nothing to do with ideas His anti-Dreyfus sentiments were far from platonic It was the only time in his life that he ever came close to being militant he even signed an anti-Dreyfus manifesto and contributed to a fund for the widow of Colonel Henry The latter's suicide ought to have thrown some light on the hidden aspects of the Affair and shown him that Dreyfus was innocent But all minds were biased, even one so acute as young Valéry's

Such might well have been posterity's view of Paul Valéry's political opinions, if, instead of reacting to the event of "war" by composing one of the most obscure poems in all French literature—*La Jeune Parque*—he had been killed in the fighting, in which he expected and hoped to take part But after the war, things changed Valéry rose to fame with extraordinary rapidity, though like Proust he had come to public recognition late in life In the light of what has just been said of his part in the Dreyfus Affair, it is well to recall that among those who first recognized his genius and helped to make his reputation were a number of friends who were Jews. As Valéry's thought gradually became known, he was seen to be a rationalist deeply marked by nineteenth-century scientific ideas He moved in milieus considered "progressive" at the time On Sundays at a friend's house in the Place du Panthéon, he would meet with *Léon Blum, Paul Langevin*, or Jean Perrin, he talked on several occasions with Einstein. Being a "European" at a time when the European movement was leftist—in opposition to the nationalists who hated the Weimar Republic—Valéry lectured in Berlin (1926), with the approval of Aristide Briand but to the displeasure of the rightists in the French Academy, to which he had just been elected. Being a nonbeliever Valéry was considered a freemason—

which in France has a clear cut political significance He was violently attacked by the polemical rightists and notably by the leader of the monarchists Léon Daudet whose aggressiveness may be accounted for by the fact that Valéry seemed to those who did not care to look below the surface to have made a political about face

The second World War found Valéry deeply pessimistic For a Frenchman born under the defeat of 1871 the defeat of 1940 was a terrible blow For the first time in his life his family saw him in tears Having by chance been designated in 1931 to receive Marshal Pétain into the French Academy with the traditional eulogy Valery became his friend and by forcing his pen perhaps made of the Marshal the prototype of the warrior as a man of intellect After the defeat Valery at first had confidence in Pétain but very soon recognized that his regime was headed into an impasse He was shocked by the revolting stupidity of the measures taken particularly those affecting Jews and freemasons and he intervened in behalf of several In general he reacted in much the same way as most Frenchmen with the same ups and downs of opinion During the hard winters of the German occupation he listened like many others to the BBC—despite the jamming—and passionately followed on the map the advance of the Soviet and Allied armies When he gave the funeral address for Bergson in 1941 he had deliberately and publicly contrasted the French philosopher s mind and character with German philosophy After the liberation he was disturbed by the peremptory punishment dealt out to some If the victory brought him less joy than might have been expected it was in part because he was already physically broken and in part because he foresaw the difficulties and conflicts to come He wanted the past forgotten he wanted not so much to see

France rebuilt as to see her "built anew " But he saw that men and parties alike were making the same old mistakes, using the same old methods leading to the same disasters

Although the works collected in the present volume were, most of them, dictated by some occasion or by chance, the reader will find that they group themselves around a few great themes the death of civilizations, the relativity of history, the crisis of the mind, and the greatness and decline of Europe

Valéry shows himself to be a penetrating and realistic observer He had a premonition of some of the most decisive developments in the modern world, in certain cases long before they had fully evolved After all, is there any other criterion for judging the value of a prognosis than the fact of its proving true in the event? The instability of modern civilizations, the profound revolution—almost a change of *phase*, in the physicist's sense—brought on by science and technology, the reaction on the mind itself, the transfer of international conflicts from the military to the economic plane, the repercussion of certain ideas spread by the West among less civilized nations—Paul Valéry not only sensed all this beforehand but described it with a foresight the more remarkable for being not so much a matter of intuition as an act of mind He was simply applying in the political field a method of observation and analysis tested long and deeply on himself

It is precisely by virtue of this fact that Paul Valéry's political writings—independently of their form, and even when history has caught up with them—have kept their vigor and actuality The fact that Valéry had a premonition of Europe's troubles after the first and second World War, that

he foresaw the rebirth of Asia the awakening of the underdeveloped countries, the cold war that his too often quoted We later civilizations we too now know that we are mortal has found its full dramatic meaning in the atomic age that now when man is taking leave of the earth speed having made it too small Valery's dictum The era of the finite world has begun takes on a significance which only yesterday would have been unimaginable all this indeed is worthy of note

Yet far more interesting is another fact that without relying directly or exclusively on any of the accepted methods of investigation—mathematics, statistics economics history, sociology philosophy—Paul Valery was able generally to reach the intellectual objectives he had set for himself at the very center of that disconcerting and contradictory reality before his eyes Is it mere chance then that for Valery—a solitary thinker in the dawn—thought had its economy, the intellect its strategy and the mind its politics?

The remarkable thing is that Valery's political thought is only, as it were a by-product of his intense intellectual activity, turned generally more inward than outward It was simply a matter of applying to a particular kind of problem the method he had developed to answer the needs of his solitary, obstinate, almost desperate intellectual enterprise, to which the mountain of notes accumulated in the course of fifty years bears witness

Valery excluded from his field of observation a whole series of topics ordinarily considered important His thought developed in complete autonomy He never hesitated to retrace in his own way a path taken by others even at the cost of seeming behind but the way he chose was entirely his own, affording perspectives others had missed, and often leading

further Few men have had a truer sense of coming events, sometimes a half century before the fact

In May, 1918, he wrote to André Gide "Last night, reread *Das Kapital* . I am one of the few who have read it. This big book has remarkable things in it—you have only to find them It's often short on logic, at times a desert of pedantry, but some of its analyses are marvelous I mean that his method of getting at things is like the one I sometimes use, and I can frequently translate his language into mine"

Valéry and Marx the parallel is not an obvious one Who could be more a stranger to the pace and procedures of German philosophy than the Mediterranean Valéry? Besides, he said repeatedly—taking pride in the fact—that he was not a philosopher For him, a system of metaphysics was simply a product of the mind like any other—like a poem, for instance He pointedly noted that he had never read Hegel

And yet, for Valéry a dialectic of the real did exist *Reality, as he conceived it, is composed of forces in a constantly* shifting equilibrium, any given situation tends to produce its opposite Such a constantly evolving reality sometimes undergoes actual mutations, involving even the mind itself Indeed the milieu is inseparable from the observer, by virtue of their effect on each other This is a strict relativism, in which there is no fixed or permanent system of reference Valéry's dialectic has this peculiarity, that it has no metaphysical extension, it does not open out toward any absolute. The direction of his thought led him to an attitude that was primarily critical This is the fundamental view in most of the essays of the present volume But toward the end of his life, faced with the spectacle of world politics in the years just before the second World War, his views became far more radical

He planned to draw up what he called the "Principles of Planned Anarchy." Just what he meant by the word "anarchy" he took the trouble to define: "Anarchy is the individual's effort to refuse obedience to any injunction the basis of which cannot be verified." In the rough draft he left among his papers we see Valéry attacking every kind of myth, one after the other. The myth of politics: "The art of making people pay for, fight and torture one another for something they neither know nor care about." The myth of democracy: "The only meaning I can see in the word 'people' is 'mixture'; if you substitute for the word 'people' the words 'number' and 'mixture' you will get some very odd terms . . . the sovereign mixture, the will of the mixture, etc." The economic myth: "An economy is not a society." The myth of political power: "No statesman ever measures up to his task, since the task is greater than any man's mind." The myth of the State: "You cannot attack one government without at the same time attacking all possible governments." And this remark, the force of which should not be underestimated: "We must have done with the fatal dogma of national sovereignty." His criticism was aimed at all parties. The Left: "The heart of the weak is hideous; anyone who suffers for a just cause or a creed has a poisonous serpent in his heart." The Center: "The middle groups are those who fear and hate to right and left of them." The Right: "The rightists have never had brains enough to pretend they have a heart." And here is an assault on all three: "Hatred, cruelty, hypocrisy, and graft belong to no single party, stupidity to no single regime, error to no single system."

Did they know what they were doing on a beautiful day in July, 1945, in the presence of General de Gaulle—then head of the provisional government of the Republic—and of

the highest authorities of the State, when they paid Paul Valéry the solemn tribute of a national funeral?

In demonstrating the bankruptcy of all politics, Valéry was not solely negative He was much too realistic for that, and he had too much sense of responsibility He simply believed that methods which had not changed since man's beginning could produce nothing good It was not a matter of "Right" and "Left" The Right tends to keep what is of least value, whereas Revolution destroys with no thought of value, and often merely alters the terms of the problem To Valéry's mind, there was no point in doing away with one myth merely to substitute another

In fact, what Valéry set up in opposition to politics as such was *politics of the mind* To the question "What should we want?" his answer was at once prudent and provisional, since no other could be objectively offered "All politics," he said, "presuppose an idea of man" The idea of man, itself subject to periodic revision, can serve to orient political action if there are regular adjustments to keep pace with the progress of objective knowledge Among his unpublished notes is this one, which I find significant "Man is human only in small numbers, but these need the rest in order to carry on the incessant work of transformation and nonrepetition which distinguishes man from all that is nonhuman" It would be a mistake to give a Nietzschean interpretation to this remark, although, with the exception of Descartes, Nietzsche was the philosopher with whom Monsieur Teste had the closest affinity The transformation Valéry had in mind was to work to the advantage of all, not of the few, by a constant exchange between the so-called masses and the so-called elite The result would be to increase our intellectual capital—an ideal which, for Valéry, was more important than Justice, the lat-

ter to his mind, being always summary He was allergic to the word humanism as he was to any word he thought vague and undefined, he detested it Nevertheless his whole thought was a kind of humanism based not on traditional values but on what might be called *a reasonable use of reason*

In certain respects Valery doubtless belonged to a great line of French rationalists—Descartes Montesquieu and Voltaire It was in honor of Voltaire that he spoke on the last public occasion in which he took part Like the eighteenth-century philosophers he would probably have supported an enlightened despot a man in charge of the State on the condition that he should put his power at the service of the Mind Or perhaps like Goethe he wanted a sort of ideal Napoleon Like Goethe too in witnessing the end of one century and the beginning of another, Paul Valery lived through wars and changes of regime not without anguish for his country and his family, but with serenity obedient to duty and the conventions, accepting honors though not seeking them and at the same time safeguarding his complete freedom for the exercise of his mind Like Goethe again in his passion for the exact sciences, he tried his hand at every subject, from economics to strategy, from art criticism to medicine

Something should be said of Valery's style, which even the finest translation cannot wholly render His prose, sometimes with almost too much magnificence, could clothe a naked thought and hide its subversive force Yet to such showpieces one may prefer certain passages or raw fragments in which—the aridity of the subject notwithstanding—the prose writer is hardly distinct from the poet

FRANÇOIS VALERY

Introduction

If Victor Hugo might be fancied as the Beethoven of French literature, Paul Valéry would be its Mozart Volume, power, development, eloquence, contrast, the roar of the crowds, the passions of the heart, the hope of future days, vast scenery and tumultuous crescendos, man and his destiny, the world of God, all the turmoil of a soul with a thousand voices set by the Lord at the center of things like a sonorous echo—

> *Mon âme aux mille voix que le Dieu que j'adore*
> *Mit au centre de tout comme un écho sonore*

such is the music of Victor Hugo as it is that of Beethoven But Mozart but Valéry whence the secret of their enchantment? *Charmes* was a word that often came under the pen of Paul Valéry (it was even the title of one of his books of poems), and not in the shallow, drawing-room sense which dies a silly-pretty death in *charmant*, but in the original sense of the word which roots it in *magic* Nothing clearer, simpler, more diaphanous than Mozart's music, Valéry's poetry or prose, but what a difficult simplicity! Here, no volume, no show of power, though power is there, hidden under the terse skin of apparent ease, no roaring of the crowds, no outcry of the passions, no developments, no eloquence, no violent contrasts Line, melody, clarity, and a curious purity due perhaps to a distance from the grosser forms of human life.

Nothing more inevitable than this art nothing however, more unforeseeable Why it had to be so but I should never have guessed it we cry out and we do not know why

Or perhaps we do A little at any rate thanks to Paul Valery himself for he has devoted many a page to elucidating his attitude toward life and art In those pages he states his position in clear unmistakable indeed uncompromising terms Let there be no mistake about this Paul Valery knows what he wants he therefore knows what he does not want and he points to it—or rather to him—with no shy finger There he is Pascal A significant choice for an anti-Valery The frontier like every other line of thought in Valery's domain is sharp

And sharp also the light he throws on it The things of the world interest me only as they relate to the intellect everything in relation to the intellect' And he means it Not that he is unaware of the limitations of his choice On this same page he goes on to say "This point of view is *false*, since it separates the mind from all other activities, but such abstract operations and falsifications are inevitable every point of view is false" Fully conscious then of the narrow limits of his path, he enters on his journey with a dogged determination not to be led astray by any allurement or temptation, inspired with a dedication, a devotion, a self-denial closely akin to the virtues usually nurtured by that power he never mentions—a religious faith

How narrow his path is he has taken a peculiar pleasure in describing At every turn in his discussions on the art of writing he insists on the artist's duty to reject the second best, the unworthy, to refuse the dangerous gifts of the subconscious or of inspiration A thought appeals to him in passing He sets it down, pauses, and writes on "A marvelously stimulat-

ing thought But also too immediate—a thought without value—infinitely diffuse—a thought to be spoken, not written"

Note the value attached to the permanent art (writing) in contrast with the transitory pastime (speaking), a trace of which can be felt in another page of the same essay in which he sees in the author the *source*, the *engineer*, and the *restraints*, and the latter, in particular, working against the other two must, he says, "struggle with the purely transitory nature of psychic phenomena to win a measure of renewable action, a share of independent existence"

It must be assumed that the achievement of this independent existence for his work of art, or his creation, would be the aim of Paul Valéry as an artist, as a creator But in this capacity he insists on bestowing the preponderant part to the intellect We have noted how he mistrusts intuitions "Our personal merit—after which we yearn—consists not so much in having the inspirations as in seizing them, not so much in seizing them as in revising them There is a duel in which our riposte to the 'daemon' is often better than his thrust"

Exacting, hard toward himself, determined not to be led or lured astray by fine words or established thoughts, Valéry deals with his mind as the mystic does with his heart, successively shedding every possible ornament, garment, cover, shelter, eager to be left alone with naked truth It is the more entertaining to read his passing, contemptuous remark on religious mystics, the more contemptuous in that he probably did not realize how contemptuous it was "I had dipped into a few mystics One can hardly speak ill of them, for what one finds in their work is only what one brings to it"

And yet, is he not himself a mystic of the intellect? There are pages of his that leave in the mind an echo of the great mystics "When I began to frequent Mallarmé in person,

literature had, for me, come to mean almost nothing Reading and writing were a burden, and I own that something of this boredom has remained with me Self-awareness for its own sake, a clear understanding of this kind of attention, and the desire for a lucid view of my life were with me constantly This secret ailment draws one away from Letters though it stems from them "

After describing the scene that remains to be seen by the eyes of the mind when every illusion has been shed, in terms of such strict purification that they would have warmed the heart of a St John of the Cross he writes If I have led you into this solitude, and even to this state of desperate clarity it is only because the idea I had formed of an intellectual power had to be carried to its ultimate consequence The characteristic of man is consciousness, and that of consciousness is a perpetual emptying, a process of detachment without cease or exception from anything presented to it, whatever that thing may be An inexhaustible act, independent of the quality as of the quantity of things presented, an act by which the *man of intellect* must finally reduce himself deliberately to an indefinite refusal to be anything whatsoever" "And as for glory, no To shine in others' eyes is to get from them the glitter of false jewelry "

Is not all this very similar in both tone and substance to the literature of the mystics? Yet, there is a difference, and an essential one God is not here And in His place we find something not individual but abstractly human the intellect And the intellect is cold Valéry is aware of it, and he sentences firmly "Enthusiasm is not the writer's state of soul"

Certainly not of a writer of his type, for he revels in abstract prose, which he loves and admires, and in which he excels to a degree few men, few Frenchmen even, have at-

tained in the whole history of Letters In his description of France, he writes "*The literary masterpiece of France is perhaps her abstract prose, whose equal is nowhere to be found*" I dare suggest that he was thinking of himself in writing these lines, for he was not modest and he knew his worth

Here, as in many other cases, his aversion to Pascal is illuminating In Valéry's eyes, Pascal had committed, among some other less heinous mistakes, that of setting up an antinomy between *l'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*, while Valéry lives and creates at the very point of the mind where these two rivers of the spirit meet Valéry thinks in mathematical terms to an extent no other French man of letters has ever approached, not even those who, like Pascal himself, were geometricians He is no mathematician His private notes reveal a mind attracted to mathematics by a kind of fascination, yet (I venture to say on an attentive perusal but not a specialized study of these notes) they do not evince that inventiveness or creativeness without which no man can be entitled to be described as a mathematician

He seems, however, to have had a knack for uttering his thoughts in mathematical terms, and his sense of form is akin to that which made Greeks of old conceive geometry as the science of beautiful shapes "Algebra and geometry," he writes, about a conversation with Lucien, Fabre "on which *I am convinced the future* will model a language for the intellect, enabled us, from time to time, to exchange precise signals" In one of his notebooks there is a draft for a table of contents for a treatise on General Mathematics * Even here, in the science of general ideas, he sought the most general *Mathématique Générale*

* May I take this opportunity to express my thanks to Professor Huchère, the Director of the Maison Française of the University of Oxford, who put at my disposal these interesting *Cahiers* of Paul Valéry [S DE M]

It is perhaps owing to this yearning for the most general that Valery was led to attach so much importance to form. In my view (and I beg to be excused for it) philosophy is a matter of form. ... I mean that if I seek an order and an expression that will sum up and compose for me the whole of my personal experience, the inner and the outer, then that is my philosophy and to do that is to seek a form. Form, nevertheless, is for Valery a term containing more substance than its traditional connotation might lead us to expect. A significant passage of his Foreword to Lucien Fabre's poems must be quoted at some length. "Philosophy ... now comes down to five or six problems ... their solution depending on the way in which they are *written*. But the interest of these meticulous labors is not so restricted as one might imagine: it lies in their fragility and in those very quarrels, that is, in the delicate balance of the more and more subtle apparatus of logic and psychology that they force one to use; it no longer lies in their conclusions. To state opinions however admirable, on nature and its creator, on life, death, duration, and justice is no longer to philosophize. ... Our philosophy is determined by its apparatus, and not by its object. It cannot be separated from its own difficulties which constitute its *form*." Here Valery goes on to point out why therefore philosophy cannot "take the *form* of verse without ... corrupting the verse," and so far so good, but hear now his argument: "... the aim of speculation is to fix or create an idea—that is, a *power* and an *instrument of power*." Not altogether as impassive and neutral as that apparatus which we have just been told mattered more than its conclusions!

We have by now heard his voice often enough to have observed the tinge of self-consciousness in it. Valéry is one of

the most deliberate, conscious, and conscientious artists that France has ever produced—which in this particular context means Europe as well He will have nothing but pure gold as raw material, and he will keep it until every inch and carat of it has been wrought into a thing of beauty That is why he seems in a way to be so present in everything he does, though his aim is to detach the work from the author and to make it free from time and space—what he calls by a word often to be found in his essays *incorruptible* His presence itself, however, being purely intellectual, is in a way dehumanized, and though his style is there, he personally vanishes because in fact, though the artificer has worked hard, man the has not entered into the game

How far I feel from my Spaniards! Often, while reading him it has occurred to me that in Spain Valéry might have found a far better anti-Valéry than Pascal Unamuno, for instance, who is everything Valéry is not For Unamuno, the *Critique of Pure Reason* meant nothing unless it were directly referred to the man Kant Here is Paul Valéry on the subject "A man's true life, which is always ill-defined even for his neighbors, even for himself, cannot be utilized in an explanation of his works, except indirectly and by means of a very careful elaboration Therefore no mistresses, no debtors, no anecdotes, no adventures! One is led to adopt a more honest method, that of disregarding such external details and of imagining a theoretical being, a psychological *model* more or less approximate, but representing in some sort one's capacity for reconstructing the work that has to be explained" This passage would have maddened Unamuno and made him overflow with contempt As for being interested in everything from the point of view of the intellect "The intellect? what is that?" he would have asked And he would have answered

himself "Another mask for your passions" The parallel contrast between Unamuno and Valery is fascinating because both could be defined as chemically pure specimens of their respective countries—I had almost said paraphrasing a famous utterance of Unamuno himself, *alkaloids*, respectively, of France and of Spain I may be forgiven for adding that this parallel is especially fascinating for me since Valéry and Unamuno incarnate the analyses of the Frenchman and of the Spaniard I outlined over thirty years ago * But though in many ways so distant, Unamuno and Valery have one feature in common pride

I am not sure, though, that the word fits These words for describing tendencies of the spirit of man have a way of eluding translation They seem to be rooted each in the soil of its own language by long, live roots so that they refuse to be transplanted *Orgueil* comes often under the pen of Paul Valéry For him it is the capital virtue of the writer, the force that makes him keep working hard, relentlessly, and regardless of any reward or hope of it, for the sheer sake of the dignity of his own work And yet at times he seems to consider *orgueil* as a power that drives man away from his art, that stiffens him against any submission to the rules even of his art Valéry has devoted to pride some of his finest pages

"Love, hatred, envy are the lights of the mind, but pride is the purest of them It has shown men all the most difficult and most beautiful things they had to do It consumes all forms of pettiness and simplifies the man himself It detaches the man from his vanities, for pride is to vanity what faith is to superstition The purer the pride, the stronger and more solitary it is in the soul and the more it keeps the mind meditat-

* *Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards* (Oxford University Press)

ing on its works, respecting them, endlessly thrusting them back into the fire of undying desire The aim of art is purified by the attack of a great soul The artist is little by little stripped of his gross general illusions, and his powers perform for him immense invisible labors Ruthless choice devours his years, and the word *finish* no longer has any meaning, for the mind in itself can finish nothing "

How far did this inner, noble pride determine a contemptuous attitude toward others? Often enough, statements can be found in his essays which express a forthright abhorrence of the cheap, the easy, the lazy—at any rate in matters of poetry and general literature He must have felt the need to wash himself clean of the reproach of supercilious superiority which his general attitude to life and art suggested only too naturally in the eyes of his friends and acquaintances and even in his own eyes, for in the first volume of his *Cahiers* I find this confession "My pride is not self-love Did I love myself, I should not drive myself, as I do, by kicks and knocks It is contempt for all, and therefore for others, but not more than for myself" It may, however, be doubted whether Valéry held himself in so much contempt, indeed in contempt at all, unhappy as he may have been now and then about this or that of his shortcomings Here is a note in his own hand which makes me pause and wonder "I have known many poets. Only one was what a poet should be or what satisfies me The rest were stupid or flat, and of an unshakable intellectual cowardice Their impotence, their vanity, their puerility, and their 'grand' and disgusting repugnance for seeing clearly what there is Their superstitions, their pomposity, their dreadful likeness to everybody else, as soon as their job is done, their intellectual servility In one word, they bear all the chains of language, *which, in the present world makes*

villagers, provincials of them All this apart from what is known as literary talent, which lives in perfect harmony with the most acute stupidity " This and other utterances and many an epithet, an aside, a hint in his general discourse seem to me to put beyond any doubt the easily contemptuous nature of Paul Valéry It tallies with my personal reminiscences of that great, captivating, yet somewhat exclusive and fastidious mind The obverse perhaps of his ascetic yearning for perfection in his craft and for devotion to his craft in his life, this distant, cold, easily contemptuous attitude set an inevitable tension between his tastes and ways and the ways and tastes of our multitudinous and platitudinous societies In this perspective, his views could at times even sound snobbish "Every fine style," he notes down in one of his notebooks, "has been acquired in circles or coteries, and all excellent language comes from a pose or affectation, from competition and selection, as the result of refined pride, the aristocratic sense, disdain for the rank and file, and a secret tendency not to be understood by everybody—to create for oneself a difficult mode of speech—a password—a jargon Classical language is a very noble slang"

This should not be taken perhaps without a few grains of salt To begin with, it was written between 1900 and 1902, when the author was in his early thirties, then, he was perhaps, as the French put it, joining the gesture to the word, yielding to a pose and an affectation Yet, in the end, no matter what may be done to reduce this text to its true size and intent, the statement must be considered as yet another document to strengthen the view that Valéry was an exclusive, aristocratic, lofty but also haughty kind of man, apt to find the odor of the crowd too strong for his sensitive nostrils At any rate, no egalitarian

Such was the man who between the two wars arrived in Geneva to serve on the Committee on Arts and Letters of the League of Nations I was then head of the Disarmament Section of the League Secretariat and, as such, in no direct connection with the intellectual activities of the League Nevertheless, in the course of the social gatherings which the meetings of this Committee gave occasion for, I soon came into touch with the members of that body which I was later to join, when I left my post in the Secretariat for a Chair of Spanish studies in Oxford It was by this road that I was able to enjoy the company and friendship of that outstanding genius (a description his hands would have warded off, his tongue rejected dryly, his eyes enjoyed) In 1931 I left the Oxford Chair to take on my post as first ambassador of the Spanish Republic in Washington Transferred to Paris in 1932, I was able to decorate with a Spanish Order Paul Valéry along with André Maurois and Maurice Ravel

My relations with him were always good and cordial, though hardly intimate His friendships were also, one felt, matters for and of the intellect Details, trivialities, ways and means were unseemly in one's relations with him But his conversation was the more enjoyable, the purer, and, to use a word he cherished, the more incorruptible He had a ready wit and a mordant tongue, never mean, but apt to be formidable in its trenchant onslaughts on fools or indeed on merely ordinary people, or those he thought to be so, mischievous also, and with a mischief that was, so to speak, an end in itself, and which shone in his sharp eyes and seemed even to draw sparks from the sprightly hairs of his moustache He used his elegant hands sparingly but with telling effect. There is much excellent self-observation in this sketch I found in his notebooks, "This fellow—tousled hair, wide eyes, pointed nose,

square chin hollow cheek outwardly vague profile He was small in frame of neat well-balanced and proportioned limbs and prone to stoop forward in an attitude of courtesy that seemed to have become set This physical stance was perhaps the outward expression of a disposition to let his adversary formally win in the argument that was on while remaining inwardly unconvinced—a kind of courteous-proud *aloofness very much in tune with his innermost self*

Anyone familiar with his fastidious mind could hardly be surprised if the views he expressed on political affairs did not conform to the egalitarian trends of our days Platitudinous multitudinous—such were bound to be the main impressions the world of our day would cast on his selective and exclusive mind *But when a closer study is attempted of the essays he devoted to these subjects, one is surprised to find another* feature altogether unexpected it would appear that political subjects did succeed at times in clouding his ruthless clarity, in ' corrupting ' his "incorruptible" concepts, in letting his ultra-pure pen write words by no means crystal-clear as to their content

His Preface to the Persian Letters is a case in point It is as delightful a piece of creative literature as any he wrote, a building as neatly conceived and built, as glittering in its lights, as any from that wonderful intellectual architect But the foundations? What are they but the arbitrary design of a fanciful inventor? "A society rises from brutality to order" We begin to wonder Is this a genuine contrast? Is all brutality *lacking in order, all order free from brutality?* Is it a fact that societies are born in disorderly brutality? *We pass on* ' As barbarism is the era of *fact*, so the era of order must necessarily be the reign of *fiction*—for there is no power capable of

founding order on the mere coercion of bodies by bodies. For that, fictional powers are needed."

It would be difficult to find a page richer in unwarranted assumptions and ill-defined conceptions. *Fact*, *fiction*, "order," "coercion of bodies by bodies" seem to me wholly unacceptable terms in this context. *Fact* is tacitly identified with *physical force*, *fiction* will presently reveal itself to be what is often nowadays described as 'values' (the *sacred*, the [illegible], the *legal*, the *decent*, the *praiseworthy*) which Valéry, with a tacit but evident pleasure, betrayed by the *intellectual twist* which he requires in order to achieve his performances, successively symbolizes in five institutions, beginning all with a capital T (the Temple, the Throne, the Tribunal, the Tribune, the Theater), barbarism is equated with the rule of physical force. Not one of these assumptions or implied definitions can survive a perfunctory analysis. Yet on this flimsy foundation, Valéry builds up an enchanting edifice, within which many, most, possibly all of the intellectual relationships are rigorous and correct.

This curious experience may be a pointer to the chief weakness in his political writing: his substratum of faith is not strong enough for political thinking. He is too skeptical, too contemptuous of man in general, too penetrating perhaps, too hard an observer of the weak side of man, but also too indifferent to his yearnings and longings to be able to write with any conviction on political matters, closely allied as they are to the ethical requirements of man as a social being. For some reason or other, *ever since Machiavelli was praised* by Bacon for showing what human relations are instead of pointing at what they should be, a certain type of scientific or positivist student of man has endeavored to eliminate ethics from the world of men in society—as if the need most

human beings feel for decency in behavior were not a part of the picture in its own right as much as the rest There is no denying the fact that Valery is prone to take that point of view in his political writings It leads him to strange utterances, nearly always coined with that clarity in design which is characteristic of his mint nearly always also true and yet unsatisfactory as either incomplete or too sweeping

In his Fluctuations on Freedom for instance written in 1938 Valery does not trouble to discriminate between majority rule and liberty and yet he had by then recently seen the majority of the German people destroy their own liberty and that of the minority and he was soon to live and to suffer in his body and in his mind from an attempt by similar methods to stifle the liberty of France

In his essays on dictatorship one misses the compensating pages which would have completed the picture with an analysis of liberty as an essential requirement of the human spirit This failure of so noble a mind seems to me to be due to his exclusively intellectual outlook At no time does he seem to realize that ideas have roots in the soil of human nature, below the intellect, or if he does realize it, he will not rest until he has cut off these roots as impurities unworthy of "incorruptible" thought This perhaps explains that when dealing with political affairs he is the more satisfactory the wider the scope and the more general the issue he is dealing with

Yet his essays on Europe are excellent Valery should be considered as one of the founding fathers of a United Europe It is a curious confirmation of what I have just said on ideas and their roots that he came to think in European terms when he felt his emotions as a European aroused under the shock

of two world events which seemed to him full of European resonance the Japanese attack on China in 1895 and the attack of the United States on Spain in 1898 These two events, as he himself relates, "shocked" him into realizing the existence of Europe None of your "exclusively from the point of view of the intellect" here Valéry became a European at other and deeper levels than the merely intellectual (just as if he had been a mere Pascal or Unamuno), and the result was a study of Europe which, written as it was shortly after the first World War, reveals a vigorous European spirit, rich in an awareness of the common life of our continent which, had it been more widespread then, might have spared us the second World War and our present miseries

It was this Valéry whom I came to know when I joined the Committee on Arts and Letters of the Institute of Intellectual Co-operation of the League of Nations The Committee had decided to spread among the various elites of the world a better understanding of the intellectual harmony that would be necessary *if the League of Nations was to develop into* something more permanent and efficient than its English name suggested We did not want a League, we wanted a Society But for a society of nations actually to come to life, a society of minds had first to be fostered This was the task the committee attempted by several means, chief of which was a set of exchanges of letters between its members I wrote one of these letters to Valéry, the text of which will be found in this volume together with his answer This answer gathered together a fair number of the leitmotivs of his other political essays "fact" and "fiction", his aversion to politics, the need to define a pure policy for the pure mind, before trying to bring order into chaos—in one word, his intellectual

fiction rising like a palace of transparent ice above the humble low growth of human politics But it is, nevertheless, a superb statement of the theme of understanding between men and nations—that theme which still embodies our prime need and our prime hope, precisely because the society of minds which we advocated is still rent asunder by an abyss But this abyss does it cut across the thought or across the faith of men?

SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA

HISTORY AND POLITICS

Foreword

[1931]

This little collection* is dedicated above all to those persons who have no system and belong to no party and are therefore still free to doubt whatever is doubtful and to maintain what is not

In any case, these are merely occasional studies Some date from 1895, some from the recent past, some from the present They have this characteristic in common—that they are essays, in the truest sense of the word In them will be found little more than the intention of clarifying a few ideas that might really be called *political* if that fine word, so attractive and exciting to the mind, did not arouse great scruples and great repugnance in the mind of this author He has wished merely to make a little clearer to himself the notions that he has received from others or that, like others, he has formed for himself—notions that everyone uses for thinking about human groups, their relations and difficulties with one another

The effort to clarify such matters is assuredly not the business of those men who practice or mix in them This book is the work of an amateur.

* This foreword was written for the first edition of *Regards sur le monde actuel* (1931), a much smaller collection than the present one —J M

I do not know why the action by Japan against China and that of the United States against Spain which followed the first quite closely made a great impression on me at the time * They were only limited conflicts in which forces of only moderate importance were engaged and for myself I had no reason to be interested in such far-off things since nothing in my ordinary occupations and concerns disposed me to be aware of them And yet I felt these distinct events not as accidents or limited phenomena but as symptoms or premises as significant facts whose meaning far exceeded their intrinsic importance and apparent scope One was the first act of power by an Asiatic nation remodeled and equipped on European lines the other was the first act of power against a European nation by a nation derived and as it were developed from Europe

A shock that reaches us from an unforeseen quarter can give us a sudden novel sensation of the existence of our body as an unknown quantity we had been unaware of some part of what we were, and suddenly this brutal sensation makes us realize, by an aftereffect, the unsuspected size and shape of the field of our existence Thus that indirect blow in the Far East and this direct blow in the West Indies made me dimly perceive something in myself that could be affected and troubled by such events I found I was ' sensitized ' to situations that affected a kind of virtual idea of Europe which until then I had not known I held

It had never occurred to me that *Europe* really existed This name was to me no more than a geographical expression It is only by chance that we are reminded of the permanent circumstances of our life, we perceive them only at the mo-

* 1895 and 1898 [P V]

ment when they suddenly alter I shall take occasion later to show to what extent our unawareness of the simplest and most constant conditions of our existence and our judgments makes our conception of history so crude, our politics so inane and sometimes so naive in its calculations This unawareness leads even very great men to conceive schemes by imitation and to appraise them likewise, according to conventions whose inadequacy they do not realize

In those days I had leisure to delve into the gaps in my mind I began trying to develop my sense, my innate idea, of Europe I called upon the little that I knew I asked myself questions I went back for a glance at certain books

I imagined that it was necessary to study history and even to dig deeply into it in order to form a right idea of the present day I knew that every mind preoccupied with the future of peoples was brought up on it But for myself I could see in it only a *horrible confusion.* Under the heading of European history I found merely a collection of separate and parallel chronicles, tangled together at certain points No *method* seemed to have anticipated the choice of "facts," decided upon their importance, or clearly determined the aim to be pursued I noticed an incredible number of implicit hypotheses and ill-defined entities

Since the subject of history is *the sum of those events or conditions which in the past may have come to the notice of some witness,* the methods of selecting, classifying, and expressing the facts that happen to have been preserved are not imposed on us by the nature of things They ought to result from explicit analysis and decisions, but in practice they always give way to habits and traditional ways of thinking or speaking, whose accidental or arbitrary character we are unaware of Never-

theless, we know that in all branches of knowledge decisive progress is made only at the moment when special notions drawn from precise consideration of the objects of knowledge themselves and exactly fitted to connect that observation with the operations of thought and the latter with our powers of action take the place of ordinary language—which is simply a means of crude approximation provided by education and usage That vital moment when precise and specialized definitions and conventions replace meanings that are confused and statistical in origin has not yet arrived for history

In fine, those books in which I sought the means to appreciate the curious effect on me of a few items of news offered me a mere confusion of images symbols and theories from which I could deduce whatever I wanted but not what I needed Summing up my impressions I said to myself that one kind of history aims at nothing more than painting a few scenes for us, on the understanding that such pictures are necessarily located in the "past" This convention has from the beginning produced very fine books, and among these there is no occasion to distinguish (since it is merely a matter of the pleasure or stimulus they provide) between those of real witnesses and those of imaginary witnesses Such works are sometimes of an irresistible *truth*, they are like those portraits whose subjects have been dust for centuries and which still make us exclaim at the likeness Nothing in the instantaneous effect on the reader enables him to distinguish on the score of authenticity, between the tableaux of Tacitus Michelet, Shakespeare, Saint-Simon, or Balzac These men may all be considered creators, or all reporters, as you choose The magic of the art of writing transports us in imagination into whatever epoch it pleases That is why every gradation exists between pure story and pure history historical fiction,

fictional biography, etc Moreover, we know that in history itself the supernatural sometimes appears The personality of the reader is then directly brought into play, for it is his opinion that will admit or reject certain facts, decide what is history and what is not

Another kind of history is composed of treatises so well constructed and reasoned, so sagacious, so rich in profound judgments on man and the evolution of affairs that we cannot imagine that things could have begun and developed in any other way

Such works are marvels of the intellect Some of them are surpassed by nothing else in literature or philosophy, but we must remember that the sentiments and colors with which the first kind charm and amuse us, and the admirable causality with which the second persuade us, come essentially from the talents of the writer and the critical resistance of the reader

We might simply enjoy these fine fruits of the art of history, with no objection to their use, if politics were not wholly influenced by them The *past*, being more or less imagined, or more or less organized after the event, acts on the future with a power comparable to that of the present itself Sentiments and ambitions arise from memories of reading, from memories of memories, far more than they result from actual perceptions and data What is truly characteristic of history is that it plays a part in history itself The idea of the past takes on meaning and constitutes a value only for the man who has a passion for the future The future, by definition, has no image History provides us with the means to imagine it History draws up for the imagination a table of situations and catastrophes, a gallery of ancestors, a formulary of acts, expressions, attitudes, and decisions, and presents them to our

changeableness and uncertainty, to help us *to become* When men or assemblies, faced with pressing or embarrassing circumstances find themselves constrained to act they do not in their deliberations consider the actual state of affairs *as something that has never occurred before*, but rather they consult their imaginary memories Obeying a kind of law of *least action* unwilling to create—that is to answer the originality of the situation by invention—their hesitant thought tends toward automatism, it looks for precedents yields to the spirit of history, which bids it first of all to *remember* even when the case is an entirely new one History feeds on history

It is probable that Louis XVI would not have perished on the scaffold without the precedent of Charles I that Bonaparte, if he had not meditated on the transformation of the Roman Republic into an empire founded on military power, would not have made himself emperor He was passionately fond of reading history All his life he dreamed of Hannibal, Caesar, Alexander, and Frederick the Great, and this man, born to create, who found himself in a position to reconstruct Europe politically—the climate of opinion being ready for it after three centuries of discovery and a revolutionary upheaval—lost himself among the perspectives of the past and the mirages of dead grandeur The moment he ceased to astonish, he began to decline He ruined himself by coming to resemble his adversaries, adoring their idols, imitating with all his might the thing that was their weakness, and substituting for his own direct vision of things the illusory décor of a policy based on history

At the Congress of Berlin, Bismarck, dominated by the spirit of history which he mistook for the spirit of reality, would consider nothing but Europe, took no interest in

Africa, and used his genius and the prestige that made him master of the moment, solely to engage the Powers in colonial interests that would set them against each other, keep them rivals jealously divided, without foreseeing that the hour was at hand when Germany would ardently covet what she had provoked the other nations to share among themselves, thus allying them against herself who had come too late He thought indeed of the morrow, but not of a morrow that had never before occurred

Hand in hand with this overemphasis on someone else's more or less exact, more or less significant recollections, goes an absence or insufficiency of method in the choice, classification, and appraisal of the things recorded In particular, history seems to take no account of the scale of the phenomena it presents It fails to mention the relations that must necessarily exist between shape and size, in the events or situations it reports And yet numbers and sizes are essential elements of description It does not bother about problems of *similitude* This is one of the reasons why the political use of history is so *fallacious What was possible within the space of an ancient* city is no longer so within the dimensions of a great nation, what was true in the Europe of 1870 is no longer so when interests and connections extend over the whole earth The very notions that we use for thinking and speaking of political objects, notions that have remained unchanged in spite of the prodigious change in the number and scope of relationships, have, without our noticing it, become deceptive or inapplicable The word *people*, for example, had a precise meaning when it was possible to assemble *all* the citizens of a city about a mound, or in the Champ de Mars But the increase in numbers, the passage from thousands to millions, has made

of this word a monstrous term whose meaning depends on the sentence in which it occurs Sometimes it describes the indistinct whole never present anywhere sometimes the majority as opposed to the limited number of richer or more cultivated individuals

The same observations apply to the passage of time Nothing is easier than to point out in history books the omission of remarkable phenomena that have occurred so slowly as to be *imperceptible They escape the historian since no document* mentions them expressly They could be perceived and noted only by means of a pre-established system of prior questions and definitions which so far has never been conceived An event that takes place over a century does not figure in any document or any collection of memoirs For example the immense and singular role of the city of Paris in the life of France after the Revolution Or the discovery of electricity and the conquest of the earth by its different uses The latter events, unequaled in human history, appear in it, when they do, less prominent than some other affair more *scenic*, more in conformity (this especially) with what traditional history customarily reports In Napoleon's time electricity had about the same importance as Christianity at the time of Tiberius It is gradually becoming obvious that this general *energizing* of the world is more pregnant with consequences, more capable of transforming life in the immediate future than all the "political" events from the time of Ampère to the present day

It can be seen from these remarks how far our historical thought is dominated by unconscious traditions and conventions, how little it has been influenced by the universal revision and reorganization of every sphere of knowledge in

modern times Historical criticism has, of course, made great progress, but its role has been generally confined to discussing facts and establishing their probability, it is not interested in their quality It accepts them and in its turn expresses them in conventional terms which, themselves, involve a whole tradition of concepts, and these introduce into history the basic disorder that comes from an endless number of observers or points of view Every chapter of history contains a certain amount of subjective data and "arbitrary constants" The result is that the historian's problem is undefined once he goes beyond establishing or contesting the existence of some fact that may have come to the notice of some witness The notion of an *event*, which is fundamental, seems not to have been reconsidered and re-thought as it should be, and this explains how relationships of the first importance have never been mentioned, or have not been sufficiently emphasized, as I shall show in a moment. Whereas in the natural sciences the *accumulated experimentation of three hundred years has refashioned* our way of seeing and has substituted for the observation and simple classification of objects whole systems of specially elaborated notions, yet in the historico-political field we are still at the stage of passive consideration and unsystematic observation The same individual who in physics or biology uses forms of thought as accurate as precision instruments, thinks in politics by means of ambiguous terms, variable notions, illusory metaphors The image of the world that takes shape and operates in political minds of various types and degrees is far from a satisfactory and methodical representation of the present

Despairing of history, I began to think of the strange situation in which nearly all of us find ourselves—mere persons of

good faith and good will involved from birth in an inextricable politico-historical drama. Not one of us, by means of what he can observe in the sphere of his own experience, can put together and reconstruct the law of the political universe in which he finds himself. Even those who are best educated and best situated must think, as they recall what they know and compare it with what they see, that their knowledge only obscures the immediate political problem which consists after all *in determining the relations of the man with the mass of men he does not know.* Anyone who is honest with himself and dislikes speculating on subjects that are not rationally related to his own experience, can hardly open his newspaper without plunging into a disorderly metaphysical world. What he reads, what he hears, curiously transcends what he observes or might observe. The sum of his impressions would be: *No politics without myths.*

So having closed all those books written in a language whose rules were obviously vague even for those who used it, I opened an atlas and abstractedly turned the pages of this portrait album of the world. I looked and pondered. First on the degree of accuracy of the maps I had before my eyes. I found in doing so a simple example of what, sixty years ago, was called *progress*. An old portolano, a map of the seventeenth century, and one of today: these three I thought clearly show its stages.

A child's eye opens first on a chaos of lights and shadows; it turns and gets its bearings from moment to moment within a group of unequal intensities of light, and as yet there is nothing in common between the regions of light and the other sensations of his body. Meanwhile, the small movements of his body furnish him with a quite different mixture

of impressions: he touches, pulls, presses, and within him is gradually formed a total awareness of his own shape. This knowledge is formulated out of distinct successive moments of sensation; the edifice of relationship and expectation is a product of contrasts and sequences. Sight, touch, and act are co-ordinated in a sort of multiple entry table, which is the tangible world, and finally—a capital *event*—it turns out that a certain system of correspondences is necessary and sufficient for a uniform adjustment of all the visual sensations to all the sensations of the skin and muscles. In the meantime, the child's *powers* are increasing and reality takes the form of an equilibrium in which the various sense impressions and the consequences of movement harmonize.

The human race has done precisely as the living child does when he wakens and develops in surroundings whose properties and extent he gradually explores and assembles by successive tries and connections. The species slowly and irregularly has *come to recognize the shape of the earth's surface*, has visited and depicted its parts more accurately, guessed at and verified its closed convexity, found and summed up the laws of its movement, discovered, appraised, exploited the resources and usable reserves of that thin layer in which all life is contained.

Increased clarity and precision, and increased power: these are the essential facts of the history of modern times, and I consider them essential because they tend to modify man himself, and because the modification of life in its means of preservation, dissemination, and communication seems to me the criterion of importance that determines what facts are to be retained and pondered. This consideration transforms our judgments on history and politics, and reveals the gaps and disproportions, the arbitrary inclusions and omissions in them

At this point in my reflections it appeared to me that the whole adventure of man up to our time should be divided into two very different phases, the first being comparable to that period of haphazard groping, of putting out and withdrawing feelers in formless surroundings, of bedazzlement, of sorties into the illimitable, which is the history of the child in the chaos of his first experiences But then a certain order sets in, a new era begins Actions in finite, well-determined, clearly delimited, abundantly and powerfully linked surroundings do not have the same characteristics or the same consequences as they had in a formless and undefined world

It must be observed, however, that the two periods cannot be clearly distinguished in facts themselves One fraction of mankind is already living in the second, while the rest still moves in the first This disparity is the cause of a notable part of present-day complications

Considering the whole of my epoch, then, and with the foregoing observations in mind, I tried to identify those circumstances which were the simplest and most general and at the same time were new.

What struck me at once was a considerable event, a fact of major importance, whose very importance, obviousness, and novelty, or rather singularity, had made it imperceptible to us, its contemporaries

Every habitable part of the earth, in our time, has been discovered, surveyed, and divided up among nations The era of unoccupied lands, open territories, places that belong to no one, hence the era of free expansion, has ended There is no rock that does not bear a flag, there are no more blanks on the map, no region out of the reach of customs officials and the

law, no tribe whose affairs do not fill some dossier and thus, under the evil spell of the written word, become the business of various well-meaning bureaucrats in their distant offices *The age of the finite world has begun* The general census of resources, the gathering of statistics on manpower, the development of media of communication are all under way What could be more remarkable, more significant than taking the inventory, parceling out and linking together every part of the globe? The effects are already immense An entirely new, excessive, and immediate interdependence between regions and events is the already perceptible consequence of this great fact Henceforth we must see all political phenomena in the light of this new situation in the world, every one of them occurs either in obedience or in resistance to the effects of this definitive limitation and ever closer mutual dependence of human actions The habits, ambitions, and loyalties formed in the course of earlier history do not cease to exist—but being insensibly transferred into quite differently constructed surroundings, they there lose their meaning and become causes of error and fruitless striving

The total reconnaissance of the field of human life being now complete, the period of prospecting is giving way to a period of co-ordination The parts of a finite, known world necessarily become more and more interlinked

Hitherto, all politics gambled on the *isolation of events* History was made up of events that could be *localized* Any disturbance had, at one point on the globe as it were, a boundless medium in which to reverberate, its effects were nil at a sufficient distance, everything went on in Tokyo as though Berlin were at infinity It was therefore possible—it was even reasonable—to predict, to calculate, and to act There was

room in the world for one or several great policies well planned and carried out

That time is coming to an end Henceforward every action will be re-echoed by many unforeseen interests on all sides it will produce a chain of immediate events—confused reverberations in a closed space The *effects of effects* which were formerly imperceptible or negligible in relation to the length of a human life and to the radius of action of any human power are now felt almost instantly at any distance they return immediately to their causes and only die away in the unpredictable The expectations of the predictor are always disappointed and that in a matter of months or a very few years

In a few weeks the most remote circumstances can change *friend into foe foe into ally victory into defeat No economic* reasoning is possible The greatest experts are wrong paradox reigns

There is no prudence wisdom or genius that is not quickly baffled by such complexity for there is no more duration continuity, or recognizable causality in this universe of multiple relations and contacts Prudence wisdom and genius can be identified only by a series of successes once accident and disorder are predominant, an expert or inspired game is in no way different from a game of chance the finest gifts miscarry

Hence the new politics are to the old what the short term calculations of a stock market gambler—the nervous spurts of speculation on the floor of the exchange, the sudden fluctuations and reverses the uncertain profits and losses—are to the old patriarchal economy, the slow, careful accumulation of a patrimony The long-pursued schemes and profound thought of a Machiavelli or a Richelieu would today have no more reliability and value than a stock market tip

This limited world, with the numerous and still multiplying links that hold it together, is also a world that is every day more highly equipped Europe founded science, which has transformed life and vastly increased the power of those who possess it But by its very nature science is essentially transmissible, it is necessarily reducible to universal methods and formulas The means it affords to some, all can acquire

But more than that, those means increase production, and *not in quantity alone To the traditional objects of commerce* a host of new objects are added, and desire and need of them are spread by contagion or imitation Soon the less advanced peoples are forced to acquire the knowledge necessary to appreciate and buy these new things, among which are the newest weapons And the use of weapons against them, of course, drives them to procure weapons for themselves They have no trouble in doing so, others fight to furnish them this equipment, and vie for the privilege of lending them the money to pay for it

So the artificial imbalance of power on which European predominance has been based for three hundred years is tending rapidly to vanish And another imbalance based on crude statistical characteristics tends to reappear

Asia is about four times larger than Europe The size of the American continent is slightly less than that of Asia The population of China alone is at least equal to Europe's, Japan's is greater than Germany's

Now, *local* European politics, dominating *general* European policy and making it absurd, has led rival Europeans to export the methods and the machines that made Europe supreme in the world Europeans have competed for profit in awakening, instructing, and arming vast peoples who, before, were imprisoned in their traditions and asked nothing better than to remain so

Just as the dissemination of culture among a people gradually makes the preservation of caste impossible, and as the possibility that commerce and industry can quickly make anyone rich has turned every kind of stable social hierarchy into an outworn illusion—so will it be with superiority based on technical power

We shall eventually realize that there has been nothing more stupid in all history than European rivalry in matters of politics and economics, when compared combined, and confronted with European unity and collaboration in matters of science While the efforts of the best brains in Europe were amassing an immense capital of usable knowledge, the naive tradition of a policy based on history, a policy of covetousness and ulterior motives was being pursued and the spirit of *Little Europe*, by a kind of treachery, handed over to the very people it meant to dominate, the methods and instruments of power The competition for concessions or loans, *for the purpose of sending out machines or experts, of establishing* schools or arsenals—a competition that is nothing but the export far and wide of Western dissensions—is inevitably bringing about Europe's return to that secondary rank to which she is destined by her size, a rank from which the labors and internal exchanges of her intellect had lifted her Europe will prove not to have had the politics worthy of her thought

It is useless to imagine that violent events, gigantic wars, invasions *à la* Temuchin will be the result of our childish and disorderly behavior All we need do is imagine the worst Consider for a moment what will become of Europe when her own efforts have given to Asia two dozen Creusots or Essens, Manchesters or Roubaix, when steel, silk, paper,

chemical products, fabrics, ceramics, and the rest are produced there in overwhelming quantities, at unbeatable prices, by the soberest and most numerous population in the world, its increase further favored by our introducing the practice of hygiene

Such were my very simple reflections, with my atlas before me, when the two conflicts I mentioned and the requirements of a little study I was asked to make, at that time, of the methodical development of Germany, led me to these questions

The great events that have since occurred have not caused me to modify these basic ideas, derived from quite simple and almost purely quantitative observations "The Crisis of the Mind," which I wrote just after the peace, is hardly more than a development of these thoughts, which had come to me more than twenty years before The immediate result of the Great War was what it was bound to be it but accentuated and hastened the decadence of Europe The simultaneous weakening of all her greatest nations, the glaring internal contradictions of principle, the despairing recourse of both sides to non-Europeans, very much like the recourse to foreigners during civil wars, the destruction of one another's prestige by Western nations in their war of propaganda, not to mention the accelerated spread of military methods and means, or the extermination of the elite such were the consequences, for Europe's position in the world, of a crisis long prepared by so many illusions, and leaving behind it so many problems, puzzles, and fears—a situation more precarious, with minds more disturbed and the future darker than in 1913 In those days there was a balance of power in Europe, but today's peace can be thought of only as a kind of balance of weakness, *necessarily more unstable*

I

Mind, World, and History

The Crisis of the Mind

[1919]

First Letter

WE LATER civilizations we too now know that we are mortal

We had long heard tell of whole worlds that had vanished, of empires sunk without a trace, gone down with all their men and all their machines into the unexplorable depths of the centuries, with their gods and their laws, their academies and their sciences pure and applied, their grammars and their dictionaries, their Classics, their Romantics, and their Symbolists, their critics and the critics of their critics ... We were aware that the visible earth is made of ashes, and that ashes signify something Through the obscure depths of history we could make out the phantoms of great ships laden with riches and intellect, we could not count them. But the disasters that had sent them down were, after all, none of our affair.

Elam, Nineveh, Babylon were but beautiful vague names, and the total ruin of those worlds had as little significance for us as their very existence But France, England, Russia .. these too would be beautiful names *Lusitania*, too, is a beautiful name And we see now that the abyss of history is deep enough to hold us all We are aware that a civilization has the same fragility as a life The circumstances that could send the works of Keats and Baudelaire to join the works of Menander are no longer inconceivable, they are in the newspapers

That is not all The searing lesson is more complete still It was not enough for our generation to learn from its own experience how the most beautiful things and the most ancient the most formidable and the best ordered can perish *by accident* in the realm of thought feeling and common sense we witnessed extraordinary phenomena paradox suddenly become fact and obvious fact brutally belied

I shall cite but one example the great virtues of the German peoples have begotten more evils than idleness ever bred vices With our own eyes we have seen conscientious labor the most solid learning the most serious discipline and application adapted to appalling ends

So many horrors could not have been possible without so many virtues Doubtless much science was needed to kill so many to waste so much property annihilate so many cities in so short a time but *moral qualities* in like number were also needed Are Knowledge and Duty then suspect?

So the Persepolis of the spirit is no less ravaged than the Susa of material fact Everything has not been lost, but everything has sensed that it might perish

An extraordinary shudder ran through the marrow of Europe She felt in every nucleus of her mind that she was no longer the same that she was no longer herself that she was about to lose consciousness a consciousness acquired through centuries of bearable calamities by thousands of men of the first rank from innumerable geographical ethnic and historical coincidences

So—as though in desperate defense of her own physiological being and resources—all her memory confusedly returned Her great men and her great books came back pell mell Never has so much been read nor with such passion

as during the war ask the booksellers Never have people prayed so much and so deeply ask the priests All the saviors, founders, protectors, martyrs, heroes, all the fathers of their country, the sacred heroines, the national poets were invoked

And in the same disorder of mind, at the summons of the same anguish, all cultivated Europe underwent the rapid revival of her innumerable ways of thought dogmas, philosophies, heterogeneous ideals, the three hundred ways of explaining the World, the thousand and one versions of *Christianity, the two dozen kinds* of positivism, *the* whole spectrum of intellectual light spread out its incompatible colors, illuminating with a strange and contradictory glow the death agony of the European soul. While inventors were feverishly searching their imaginations and the annals of former wars for the means of doing away with barbed wire, of outwitting submarines or paralyzing the flight of airplanes, her soul was intoning at the same time all the incantations it ever knew, and giving serious consideration to the most bizarre prophecies, she sought refuge, guidance, consolation throughout the whole register of her memories, past acts, and ancestral attitudes Such are the known effects of anxiety, *the disordered behavior of a mind fleeing from reality to* nightmare and from nightmare back to reality, terrified, like a rat caught in a trap . . .

The military crisis may be over. The economic crisis is still with us in all its force But the intellectual crisis, being more subtle and, by its nature, assuming the most deceptive appearances (since it takes place in the very realm of dissimulation) this crisis will hardly allow us to grasp its true extent, its *phase*.

No one can say what will be dead or alive tomorrow, in

literature, philosophy, aesthetics, no one yet knows what ideas and modes of expression will be inscribed on the casualty list, what novelties will be proclaimed

Hope, of course, remains—singing in an undertone

> *Et cum vorandi vicerit libidinem*
> *Late triumphet imperator spiritus*

But hope is only man's mistrust of the clear foresight of his mind Hope suggests that any conclusion unfavorable to us *must be* an error of the mind And yet the facts are clear and pitiless thousands of young writers and young artists have died, the illusion of a European culture has been lost, and knowledge has been proved impotent to save anything whatever, science is mortally wounded in its moral ambitions and, as it were, put to shame by the cruelty of its applications, idealism is barely surviving, deeply stricken, and called to account for its dreams, realism is hopeless, beaten, routed by its own crimes and errors, greed and abstinence are equally flouted, faiths are confused in their aim—cross against cross, crescent against crescent, and even the skeptics, confounded by the sudden, violent, and moving events that play with our minds as a cat with a mouse .. even the skeptics lose their doubts, recover, and lose them again, no longer master of the motions of their thought.

The swaying of the ship has been so violent that the best-hung lamps have finally overturned ..

What gives this critical condition of the mind its depth and gravity is the patient's condition when she was overcome.

I have neither the time nor the ability to define the intellectual situation in Europe in 1914 And who could pretend to picture that situation? The subject is immense, requiring

every order of knowledge and endless information Besides, when such a complex whole is in question, the difficulty of reconstructing the past, even the recent past, is altogether comparable to that of constructing the future, even the near future, or rather, they are the same difficulty The prophet is in the same boat as the historian Let us leave them there

For all I need is a vague general recollection of what was being thought just before the war, the kinds of intellectual pursuit then in progress, the works being published

So if I disregard all detail and confine myself to a quick impression, to that *natural whole* given by a moment's perception, I see . *nothing*! Nothing and yet an infinitely potential nothing

The physicists tell us that if the eye could survive in an oven fired to the point of incandescence, it would see . . nothing There would be no unequal intensities of light left to mark off points in space That formidable contained energy would produce invisibility, indistinct equality Now, equality of that kind is nothing else than a perfect state of *disorder*.

And what made that disorder in the mind of Europe? The free coexistence, in all her cultivated minds, of the most dissimilar ideas, the most contradictory principles of life and learning That is characteristic of a *modern* epoch

I am not averse to generalizing the notion of "modern" to designate a certain way of life, rather than making it purely a synonym of *contemporary*. There are moments and places in history to which *we moderns* could return without too greatly disturbing the harmony of those times, without seeming objects infinitely curious and conspicuous creatures shocking, dissonant, and unassimilable Wherever our entrance would create the least possible sensation, that is where we should feel almost at home It is clear that Rome in the

time of Trajan or Alexandria under the Ptolemies would take us in more easily than many places less remote in time but more specialized in a single type of manners and entirely given over to a single race a single culture and a single system of life

Well then! Europe in 1914 had perhaps reached the limit of modernism in this sense Every mind of any scope was a crossroads for all shades of opinion every thinker was an international exposition of thought There were works of the mind in which the wealth of contrasts and contradictory tendencies was like the insane displays of light in the capitals of those days eyes were fatigued scorched How much material wealth how much labor and planning it took how many centuries were ransacked how many heterogeneous lives were combined to make possible such a carnival and to set it up as the supreme wisdom and the triumph of humanity?

In a book of that era—and not one of the most mediocre—we should have no trouble in finding the influence of the Russian ballet, a touch of Pascal's gloom, numerous impressions of the Goncourt type, something of Nietzsche, something of Rimbaud, certain effects due to a familiarity with painters, and sometimes the tone of a scientific publication the whole flavored with an indefinably British quality difficult to assess!

Let us notice, by the way, that within each of the components of this mixture other *bodies* could well be found It would be useless to point them out it would be merely to repeat what I have just said about modernism and to give the whole history of the European mind

Standing, now, on an immense sort of terrace of Elsinore that stretches from Basel to Cologne, bordered by the sands of

Nieuport, the marshes of the Somme, the limestone of Champagne, the granites of Alsace our Hamlet of Europe is watching millions of ghosts

But he is an intellectual Hamlet, meditating on the life and death of truths, for ghosts, he has all the subjects of our controversies, for remorse, all the titles of our fame He is bowed under the weight of all the discoveries and varieties of knowledge, incapable of resuming this endless activity, he broods on the tedium of rehearsing the past and the folly of always trying to innovate He staggers between two abysses—for two dangers never cease threatening the world order and disorder

Every skull he picks up is an illustrious skull *Whose was it?** This one was *Lionardo* He invented the flying man, but the flying man has not exactly served his inventor's purposes We know that, mounted on his great swan (*il grande uccello sopra del dosso del suo magnio cecero*) he has other tasks in our day than fetching snow from the mountain peaks during the hot season to scatter it on the streets of towns And that other skull was *Leibnitz*, who dreamed of universal peace And this one was *Kant* *and Kant begat Hegel, and Hegel begat Marx, and Marx begat*

Hamlet hardly knows what to make of so many skulls But suppose he forgets them! Will he still be himself? . His terribly lucid mind contemplates the passage from war to peace darker, more dangerous than the passage from peace to war, all peoples are troubled by it. . "What about Me," he says, "what is to become of Me, the European intellect? . And what is peace? *Peace is perhaps that state of things in which the natural hostility between men is manifested in creation, rather than destruction as in war* Peace is a time of creative

*Hamlet's words are in English in the French text —J M

rivalry and the battle of production but am I not tired of producing? Have I not exhausted my desire for radical experiment indulged too much in cunning compounds? Should I not perhaps lay aside my hard duties and transcendent ambitions? Perhaps follow the trend and do like Polonius who is now director of a great newspaper like Laertes who is something in aviation like Rosencrantz who is doing God knows what under a Russian name?

Farewell ghosts! The world no longer needs you—or me By giving the name of progress to its own tendency to a fatal precision the world is seeking to add to the benefits of life the advantages of death A certain confusion still reigns but in a little while all will be made clear and we shall witness at last the miracle of an animal society the perfect and ultimate anthill

Second Letter

I was saying the other day that peace is the kind of war that allows acts of love and creation in its course, it is then a more complex and obscure process than war properly so-called, as life is more obscure and more profound than death

But the origin and early stages of peace are more obscure than peace itself, as the fecundation and beginnings of life are more mysterious than the functioning of a body once it is made and adapted

Everyone today feels the presence of this mystery as an actual sensation, a few men must doubtless feel that their own inner being is positively a part of the mystery and perhaps there is someone with a sensibility so clear, subtle, and rich that he senses in himself certain aspects of our destiny more advanced than our destiny itself

I have not that ambition The things of the world interest

me only as they relate to the intellect, for me, everything relates to the intellect Bacon would say that this notion of the intellect is an *idol* I agree, but I have not found a better idol

I am thinking then of the establishment of peace insofar as it involves the intellect and things of the intellect This point of view is *false*, since it separates the mind from all other activities, but such abstract operations and falsifications are inevitable every point of view is false

A first thought dawns The idea of culture, of intelligence, of great works, has for us a very ancient connection with the idea of Europe—so ancient that we rarely go back so far.

Other parts of the world have had admirable civilizations, poets of the first order, builders, and even scientists But no part of the world has possessed this singular *physical* property the most intense power of radiation combined with an equally intense power of assimilation

Everything came to Europe, and everything came from it Or almost everything

Now, the present day brings with it this important question can Europe hold its pre-eminence in all fields?

Will Europe become *what it is in reality*—that is, a little promontory on the continent of Asia?

Or will it remain *what it seems*—that is, the elect portion of the terrestrial globe, the pearl of the sphere, the brain of a vast body?

In order to make clear the strict necessity of this alternative, let me develop here a kind of basic theorem

Consider a map of the world On this planisphere are all the habitable lands The whole is divided into regions, and in each of these regions there is a certain density of popula-

tion, a certain quality of men In each of these regions also, there are corresponding natural resources—a more or less fertile soil a more or less rich substratum a more or less watered terrain, which may be more or less easily developed for transport etc

All these characteristics make it possible at any period, to classify the regions we are speaking of, so that at any given time *the situation on the earth may be defined by a formula showing the inequalities between the inhabited regions of its surface*

At each moment, the *history* of the next moment will depend on this given inequality

Let us now examine not our theoretical classification, but the one that actually prevailed in the world until recently We notice a striking fact which we take too much for granted

Small though it be, Europe has for centuries figured at the head of the list In spite of her limited extent—and although the richness of her soil is not out of the ordinary—she dominates the picture By what miracle? Certainly the miracle must lie in the high quality of her population That quality must compensate for the smaller number of men, of square miles, of tons of ore, found in Europe In one scale put the empire of India and in the other the United Kingdom the scale with the smaller weight tilts down!

That is an extraordinary upset in equilibrium But its consequences are still more so *they will shortly allow us to foresee a gradual change in the opposite direction*

We suggested just now that the quality of her men must be the determining factor in Europe's superiority I cannot analyze this quality in detail, but from a summary examination I would say that a driving thirst, an ardent and disinterested curiosity, a happy mixture of imagination and rigorous logic, a certain unpessimistic skepticism an unresigned

mysticism . are the most specifically active characteristics of the European psyche.

A single example of that spirit, an example of the highest order and of the very first importance, is Greece—since the whole Mediterranean littoral must be counted in Europe Smyrna and Alexandria are as much a part of Europe as Athens and Marseilles Greece founded geometry. It was a mad undertaking we are still arguing about the *possibility* of such a folly

What did it take to bring about that fantastic creation? Consider that neither the Egyptians nor the Chinese nor the Chaldeans nor the Hindus managed it Consider what a fascinating adventure it was, a conquest a thousand times richer and actually far more poetic than that of the Golden Fleece No sheepskin is worth the golden thigh of Pythagoras

This was an enterprise requiring gifts that, when found together, are usually the most incompatible It required argonauts of the mind, tough pilots who refused to be either lost in their thoughts or distracted by their impressions. Neither the frailty of the premises that supported them, nor the infinite number and subtlety of the inferences they explored could dismay them They were as though equidistant from the inconsistent Negro and the indefinite fakir They accomplished the extremely delicate and improbable feat of adapting common speech to precise reasoning, they analyzed the most complex combinations of motor and visual functions, and found that these corresponded to certain linguistic and grammatical properties, they trusted in words to lead them through space like far-seeing blind men And space itself became, from century to century, *a richer and more surprising* creation, as thought gained possession of itself and had more

confidence in the marvelous system of reason and in the original intuition which had endowed it with such incomparable instruments as definitions axioms, lemmas theorems, problems, porisms, etc

I should need a whole book to treat the subject properly I wanted merely to indicate in a few words one of the characteristic inventions of the European genius This example brings me straight back to my thesis

I have claimed that the imbalance maintained for so long in Europe's favor was, *by its own reaction* bound to change by degrees into an imbalance in the opposite direction That is what I called by the ambitious name of basic theorem

How is this proposition to be proved? I take the same example, that of the geometry of the Greeks and I ask the reader to consider the consequences of this discipline through the ages We see it gradually, very slowly but very surely, assuming such authority that all research, all the ways of acquiring knowledge tend inevitably to borrow its rigorous procedure, its scrupulous economy of "matter," its automatic generalizations, its subtle methods, and that infinite discretion which authorizes the wildest audacity Modern science was born of this education in the grand style

But once born, once tested and proved by its practical applications, our science became a means of power, a means of physical domination, a creator of material wealth, an apparatus for exploiting the resources of the whole planet—ceasing to be an "end in itself" and an artistic activity Knowledge, which was a consumer value, became an exchange value The utility of knowledge made knowledge a *commodity*, no longer desired by a few distinguished amateurs but by Everybody

This commodity, then, was to be turned out in more and

more manageable or consumable forms, it was to be distributed to a more and more numerous clientele, it was to become an article of commerce, an article, in short, that can be imitated and produced almost anywhere

Result the inequality that once existed between the regions of the world as regards the mechanical arts, the applied sciences, the scientific instruments of war or peace—an inequality on which Europe's predominance was based—is tending gradually to disappear

So, the classification of the habitable regions of the world is becoming one in which gross material size, mere statistics and figures (e g , population, area, raw materials) finally and alone determine the rating of the various sections of the globe

And so the scales that used to tip in our favor, although we *appeared* the lighter, are beginning to lift us gently, as though we had stupidly shifted to the other side the mysterious excess that was ours *We have foolishly made force proportional to mass!*

This coming phenomenon, moreover, may be connected with another to be found in every nation I mean the diffusion of culture, and its acquisition by ever larger categories of individuals

An attempt to predict the consequences of such diffusion, or to find whether it will or not inevitably bring on *decadence*, would be a delightfully complicated problem in intellectual physics

The charm of the problem for the speculative mind proceeds, first, from its *resemblance* to the physical fact of diffusion and, next, from a sudden transformation into a profound *difference* when the thinker remembers that his primary object is *men* not *molecules*

A drop of wine falling into water barely colors it and tends to disappear after showing as a pink cloud That is the physical fact But suppose now that some time after it has vanished gone back to limpidity we should see here and there in our glass—which seemed once more to hold *pure* water—drops of wine forming dark and *pure*—what a surprise!

This phenomenon of Cana is not impossible in intellectual and social physics We then speak of *genius* and contrast it with diffusion

Just now we were considering a curious balance that worked in inverse ratio to weight Then we saw a liquid system pass as though spontaneously from homogeneous to heterogeneous from intimate mingling to clear separation These paradoxical images give the simplest and most practical notion of the role played in the World by what—for five or *ten thousand years—has been called Mind*

But can the European Mind—or at least its most precious content—be totally diffused? Must such phenomena as democracy, the exploitation of the globe and the general spread of technology, all of which presage a *deminutio capitis* for Europe must these be taken as absolute decisions of fate? Or have we some freedom *against* this threatening conspiracy of things?

Perhaps in seeking that freedom we may create it But in order to seek it we must for a time give up considering groups and study the thinking individual in his struggle for a personal life against his life in society

A Fond Note on Myth

[1928]

A LADY, my dear a quite unknown lady has written me a very long and rather tender letter, asking me many difficult questions on which she affects to think that I can relieve her mind

She is worried about my attitude toward God and love, whether I have faith in both, she would like to know if pure poetry is fatal to feeling, and asks me if I practice analyzing my dreams as is done in Central Europe, where no right-thinking person fails to fish up out of his own depths every morning some abysmal enormity, some obscenely shaped octopus he is proud to have fostered.

On these and several other doubts, I was able to enlighten or reassure her without serious trouble. I am no great light, but little is needed on great subjects. Besides, the tone is everything a certain elegance appeases, a certain turn of speech uplifts, certain graces beguile the tender soul with pleasure as she reads, not so much asking to be answered—for *that would put an end to the game and take the life out of* the pretext—as to be, herself, questioned.

However, I felt quite baffled by one precise and very particular problem, one of those that cannot be got rid of without a great deal of reading and reflection.

Reading is tedious for me, hardly anything, except per-

haps writing, tries my patience more I am good only at inventing what I need at the moment I am a wretched Crusoe on an island of flesh and mind entirely surrounded by ignorance, having crudely created my own tools and my own arts I sometimes congratulate myself on being so poor and so incapable of the treasures of accumulated knowledge I am poor but a king and doubtless, like Crusoe, I reign over nothing but my own inner monkeys and parrots, but that is to reign nonetheless I believe, indeed, that our ancestors read too much and that our brains are a gray pulp squeezed from books

I now come back to my questioner whom I left suspended for a moment on some nail of time This woman, whose face I have never seen of whom I know nothing but the scent of her writing paper (a powerful scent that gives me a notion of nausea), shows an astonishing insistence in trying to make me explain myths and the science of myth, which she wants me at all costs to discuss and about which I know only what I choose I cannot guess what they can mean to her

If only it had been you, my wise and simple friend, and your curiosity on this point had tried to stir my laziness, you would never have got anything out of my head but sheer banter, most of it impure and the rest frivolous Between people who know each other only in spirit—as is the case with you and me, alas!—nothing counts except that mysterious accord between their natures, words do not count, acts are nothing . .

And so, my dearest familiar, since I went so far as to reply to that perfumed absence—and God knows why I answered her, what obscure hopes, what hints of sweet risk seduced me into writing to her—I shall pass on to you the substance of what I imagined for her sake I had to feign a knowledge I

do not have and do not envy in those who have it Happy are the possessors thereof! But however solid it may be, unhappy are those who rely on it!

I must first confess to you that when I set about conceiving the world of myth, my mind balked, I urged it on, prodding its boredom and resistance, and as it recoiled under my pressure, glancing backward at what it loves, longing for what *it can do best, and depicting for me only too vividly* all such attractions, I furiously drove it in among the monsters, into all that melee of gods, demons, heroes, and horrible works of nature, all those creatures of the ancients, who set their philosophy as ardently to peopling the universe as we were later to set ours to emptying it of all life In their darkness, our ancestors coupled with every enigma and begat strange children

I was at a loss which way to turn in that chaos of mine, what to fasten on as my beginning, so as to develop the vague *thoughts which that tumult of images and memories,* numberless names, and confused conjectures at once awoke and dismissed in me as I set about my task

My pen jabbed the paper, my left hand tortured my face, my eyes perceived too clearly some well-lit object, and I felt only too strongly that I had no call to write Then my pen, which was killing time in little strokes, began of itself to sketch baroque shapes, hideous fish, octopuses in a tousle of all too fluent and easy flourishes It was creating *myths*, they flowed from my expectant self, while my mind, hardly *seeing what my* hand was inventing right before it, wandered like a sleepwalker among the dark imaginary walls and submarine theaters of the aquarium at Monaco!

Who knows, I thought, whether the real in its numberless forms is not as arbitrary, as gratuitously produced as these

animals in arabesque When I dream and invent without a backward glance am I not Nature? Provided the pen touches the paper and is full of ink and I am bored and abstracted I create! A random word coming to mind has an endless destiny grows organs of phrase and one phrase requires another which may have existed before it it desires a past to which it gives birth in order to be born itself after it is already in existence! And these curves these convolutions these tentacles feelers feet and appendages which I spin out over the page does not Nature in her own way do the same in play when she pours out transforms spoils forgets and rediscovers so many chances and shapes of life among the rays and atoms where the possible and the inconceivable are teeming and entangled?

The mind sets about it in just the same way But it goes one better than Nature, not only does it create as she does but on top of that it *appears* to create It joins the lie to truth and whereas life or reality confines itself to proliferating within the instant, the mind has spun for itself the myth of myths the undefined element of all myth—which is *Time*

But time and the lie could not exist without some sort of artifice Speech is the means required for multiplying in the void

And here is how I finally came round to my subject and evolved a theory for that soulful but invisible lady

Lady, I said to her, O myth! *Myth* is the name of everything that exists and abides with speech as its only cause There is no discourse so obscure no tale so odd or remark so incoherent that it cannot be given a meaning There is always some supposition to give a meaning even to the strangest language.

Just imagine that several accounts of the same affair or

diverse reports of the same event, are given to you in books or by witnesses who do not agree among themselves, though all are equally trustworthy To say that they do not agree is to say that their simultaneous diversity makes up a monster. Their rivalry gives birth to a chimera But a monster or a chimera, though not viable in reality, is at ease in the vagueness of people's minds A combination of woman and fish is a mermaid, and the form of a mermaid is easily accepted But is a living mermaid possible?—I am not at all sure that we are yet so expert in the sciences of life that we can refuse life to mermaids by demonstrative reasoning Much anatomy and physiology would be needed to find anything against them except this fact modern man has never fished one up!

Whatever perishes from a little more clarity is a myth Under the rigorous eye, under the repeated and convergent blows of questions and categories with which the alert mind is armed at all points, myths die and the fauna of vague things and vague ideas wither away . Myths decompose in the light within us made up of the combined presence of our body and the utmost degree of consciousness

See how a nightmare weaves a powerful drama from the various independent sensations working on us in our sleep The hand is caught under the body, an uncovered foot, free from the bedclothes, cools at a distance from the rest of the sleeper, early morning passers-by shout in the street at dawn, the empty stomach stretches and yawns, the entrails rumble, a ray from the great rising sun vaguely disturbs the retina through the closed eyelids . All these are separate and incoherent facts, and there is *no one as yet* to reduce them to what they are and to the known world, to organize them, retain some and discard others, decide their values, and allow us to go beyond them But together they are all, as it were, equal

conditions and must be equally satisfied The result is an original and absurd creation, incompatible with the rest of life, all-powerful and most frightening, *having within itself no means of terminating, no issue, no limit* The same is true of the details of our waking life, but with less unity The whole history of thought is nothing but the play of an infinite number of small nightmares of great consequence, whereas in sleep we have great nightmares of very short, very slight consequence

All our language is composed of brief little dreams, and the wonderful thing is that we sometimes make of them strangely accurate and marvelously reasonable thoughts

In truth, there are so many myths in us, they are so familiar a part of us, that it is almost impossible to pick out clearly in our minds anything that is not a myth We cannot even speak of them without mythifying, and am I not at this moment creating a myth about myth, in reply to the caprice of a myth?

No, my dear familiars, I can find no way of escape from what is not! Speech so fills us, fills everything with its images that we cannot think how to begin to refrain from imagining —nothing is without it . .

Remember that tomorrow is a myth, that the universe is one, that numbers, love, the real, and the infinite that justice, the people, poetry . . . the earth itself are myths! And even the pole is one, for those who claim to have been there thought they were there only for reasons that are inseparable from speech . . .

I forgot to mention the whole of the past . All history is made up of nothing but thoughts to which we attribute the essentially mythical value of representing what was Each instant falls at each instant into the imaginary, and we are hardly dead before we are off, with the speed of light, to join

the centaurs and the angels . . But that is putting it mildly! Hardly are our backs turned, hardly are we out of sight, before opinion makes of us whatever it can!

To come back to history See how imperceptibly it changes into dream as it gets farther from the present! Near us, its myths are still temperate, restrained by not unbelievable documents, material traces that somewhat moderate our fancy But once beyond three or four thousand years before our birth, we are quite at liberty And finally, in the void of the myth of pure time, innocent of anything at all resembling what is around us, the mind—sure only that there was *something*, and forced by its own necessity to presuppose antecedents and "causes" as supports for what is, or for what *it* is—gives birth to epochs, states, events, people, principles, images, or stories more and more naive, reminding us of (or amounting *to no more than) that candid cosmology of the Hindus*, when, in order to support the earth in space, they situated it on the back of an immense elephant, this beast stood on a tortoise, which, in turn, was borne up by a sea contained in *who knows what container*

The profoundest philosopher, the best-trained physicist, the geometrician best equipped with those means which Laplace grandly called "the resources of the most sublime analysis" . *cannot, and knows not how to do otherwise*

That is why one day I happened to write· "In the beginning was the Fable!"

Which means that every origin, every dawn of things is of the same substance as the songs and tales around a cradle . .

It is a kind of absolute law that everywhere, in every place and every period of civilization, in every belief, in every discipline and every relationship . the false supports the true, the true takes the false as its ancestor, its cause, its author, its

origin and end, without exception or remedy—and the true engenders the false, from which in turn it requires to be engendered All antiquity, all causality, all principles of things are fabulous inventions and obey simple laws

What should we be without the help of that which does not exist? Very little And our unoccupied minds would languish if fables mistaken notions abstractions, beliefs, and monsters hypotheses and the so-called problems of metaphysics did not people with beings and objectless images our natural depths and darkness

Myths are the souls of our actions and our loves We cannot act without moving toward a phantom We can love only what we create

That, my dear, was nearly the whole of my discourse to that bodiless woman who may, I fear—though it doesn't displease me—have made you jealous I will spare you a few phrases in the grand style with which I thought it necessary to round off such remarks

I even put a little poetry into the last few moments of my letter A lady cannot be left a prey to naked notions, good-bys must be gilded So I allowed myself to say to my unknown lady that both the dawn and the evening of time, like those of a beautiful day enchanted and illumined by the magic of the sun setting beyond the horizon, are painted and peopled with miracles Just as the almost level light creates prodigious pleasures for the human eye, gorging it with magic, with ideal transmutations, enormous forms borne up elaborately in the heavens, shapes of other worlds, blazing abodes with golden rocks, the purest of lakes, thrones, wandering grottoes superb hells, scenes of faërie, just, too, as those dazzling summits, those phantasms, monsters, and aerial deities dissolve into vapor and decomposing rays so it is with all the gods and

all our idols, even the abstract ones what was, what will be, all that happens far away Whatever our mind wants, the origins it seeks, the results and solutions it thirsts after, all these it cannot help deriving from itself, suffering them in itself Cut off from experience, isolated from the constraints imposed by direct contact, the mind engenders what it needs, in its own fashion

It withdraws into itself and utters the extraordinary From its slightest accidents it spouts supernatural creations In this state, it uses everything it is, a mistake, a misunderstanding, a pun can fertilize it It gives the name of science and art to its power of conferring upon its own phantasmagoria a clarity, a duration, a consistency, and even a rigor astonishing to itself—sometimes even overwhelming!

Good-by, my dear, I was just coming back to the subject of love

A Conquest by Method

[1897]

Prefatory Note (1934)

It was around 1895 that England began to be no longer insensitive to the pressure of German power at the essential points of her economic life and her empire.

She had not been aware until then that she was threatened in the exercise of her vital functions by an eleventh-hour rival, as ill situated on the map as in time. Tarde venientibus ossa, *she would have said, if she had said anything.*

But to be an island, to have coal, political and maritime traditions, a simple and indomitable will, an immense clientele directly or indirectly subjugated, an imposing self-assurance in desires and designs, is not everything. Security brings with it a kind of inertia. The English mind never hesitates to alter what seems bad, *but it can for a long time resist changing what was once* good *and still satisfies it. This trait of the English character is perhaps due to its habitual certainty, hitherto always confirmed by history, that there will be ample time to see and repel any danger, thanks to the sea moat and to the fleet watching it.*

But in an era permeated by the sciences—an era constantly in a state of technical transformation, and in which nothing escapes the drive to innovation, the rage for increased precision and power, in which stability, that sovereign good, is to be found only among decadent peoples—it is not enough to persevere in what is

The English of thirty years ago did not realize, as they say, what the exercise of discipline, of calculation, of scrupulous and unlimited analysis, and an energy better applied than their own were preparing for them in every sphere

The revelation came in a series of articles published in 1895 by The New Review *(which has since disappeared), directed by the good poet W E Henley These articles were from the pen of Mr Ernest E G Williams, and the title he gave to the series was a great success Its three words "Made in Germany" were incorporated into law in a famous Act, at the same time they stuck in the English mind, and there they continued to have some influence until the eleventh of November, 1918*

Surprise, excitement, and a kind of indignation arose when Mr Williams brought out this collection of very detailed studies, dealing in turn with the various spheres of industry and commerce, and revealing the penetration and terrifying progress the rival had made in each domain

Henley had the strange idea of asking a very young Frenchman, who was visiting London and had been recommended to him, to write for his New Review *a kind of "philosophical" conclusion to Mr Williams' work of pure observation, with its assemblage of characteristic details Nothing, until then, could have been further from the young Frenchman's mind than such a perplexing task, which certain very good reasons inclined him to accept, while reason alone commanded him to refuse The reasons had the advantage of numbers He improvised what he could, and here it is*

During the last war, this essay was reprinted in the Mercure de France

WE HAVE been stirred, we have been almost scandalized A more disturbing Germany has been brought to light The English are reading *Made in Germany* by Mr Williams, the

French ought to be reading *Le Danger allemand* by M Maurice Schwob

She used to be a fortress and a school, now she is discovered to be an immense factory with enormous dockyards We suspect too that there are connections between fortress, factory, and school, that these constitute different aspects of the same strong Germany We are learning that the military victories which founded that nation are nothing compared to the economic victories she is now winning already many of the world's markets are more hers than the territories she owes to her army

So we perceive that both conquests are parts of the same system—the silent one superimposed on the resounding We see that Germany has become industrial and commercial just as she became military—deliberately We sense that she has spared no pains If we wish to understand her new and far from imaginary greatness, we must conceive constant application, minute analysis of the sources of wealth, bold construction of the means of producing it, a rigorous survey of favored localities and serviceable roads and, above all, *total obedience*, the *constant devotion* to some simple, jealous, and formidable conception—strategic in form, economic in aim, scientific in its deep preparation and in the extent of its application Such is the over-all view of German operations If we turn now to concrete evidence, the documents, the diplomatic reports, the official statistics, we can admire at our leisure the perfection of detail, having glimpsed the majesty of the broad outline, and appreciate how—when everything knowable was known, when everything predictable had been predicted, when the formula for prosperity had been found—an activity, insinuating or brutal (in turn), both world-wide and continuous, radiated from every part of Germany to

every part of the world, bringing about the *return* of maximum wealth from every part of the world to every part of Germany

75161

That activity is not, as ours is, a sum of individual activities that remain independent, sometimes contradictory, and blindly protected by the State, which dissipates its influence among all, unable to strengthen one without weakening the other Hers is a massive power that acts like water, now by shock and fall, now by irresistible infiltration A natural discipline links individual German activities to the action of the whole country, and so orders private interests that they join together and reinforce rather than reduce and contradict each other This goes to the point of suppressing all rivalry between Germans when the foreigner—the enemy—is present

And so it is a true union, an exchange of useful sacrifices, a combining of energies and skills for the common victory, producing, besides victory, a remarkable co-ordination among the fighting industries and among the various branches of the economic army of the *Vaterland* Against that army we fight like savage tribes against organized troops

Their action is not, like ours, haphazard It is trained. All the sciences are made to serve it It is guided by a careful psychology rather than use force, it prefers to make itself desirable Germany's customer is made to bless the German merchant and even German trade More—the customer must be turned into a friend, a propagandist—which is a profoundly elegant operation Now, this customer is well known Thinking himself free, living in innocence, he has been analyzed without knowing it—though he has not even been touched He has been classified and defined, along with *everyone else in his town, his province,* his country. What he eats, what he drinks, what he smokes, and how he pays, are

known And someone is thinking about his desires At Hamburg or Nuremberg, someone has perhaps drawn graphs representing the exploitation of his slightest whims, his smallest needs This man who imagines that he is living so personally, so intimately, would see himself, on those graphs, as a mere number among thousands of others who *prefer* the same liqueur or the same cloth as himself For there, more is known about his own country than he himself knows Someone else knows better than he the mechanics of his life, what he must have to live on, and what he needs to brighten his days a bit Someone knows where his vanity lies, the luxuries he dreams of, and the fact that he finds them too expensive What he wants will be manufactured for him, champagne out of apples, perfumes out of almost anything The customer does not know how many chemists have him in mind They will fabricate for him exactly what it takes to satisfy his purse, his desire, and his habits, he shall have something of perfectly average perfection For it is through someone's servile obedience to his complex wish that he is to be caught

To create this fabulous product—cheap, but a luxury, easy to procure, either traditional or fashionable—there is a whole army of scientists swarming in the numberless departments of industry. There is no article for which they cannot find a less expensive substitute, no new substance for which they cannot find a use, no science they cannot apply to industrial purposes In a few years, Germany has become covered with factories, railways, canals Her navy, too, starting from nothing, has already reached second place She has admirable ships, she has dockyards and immense inland ports, her shipyards are always busy She sends out astonishing travelers, their inquiries and exploits would do credit to diplomacy and science She has information agencies in every country,

she has merchants' associations that support those agencies, and associations of transport companies that carry the trade of those merchants

The books I have mentioned contain the details of this gigantic *business* They take us into the factories and the markets They bring together amazing statistics At one stroke they unroll the sequence of the years, and by this sudden elimination of time they show at a glance the fantastic expansion of German life The sensation we get is so powerful that we are led to conjecture about the future The mind cannot stop at the last year entered in the statistics and on the balance sheet It *automatically* foresees a still vaster development—imagining a continuation, a halt, a decline, a decadence

The mind goes on, entirely free of the facts, following one of its own laws

At this point, purely speculative research or intellectual inquiry begins It is here that anyone who has absorbed the studies and investigations I have just referred to cannot fail to look further into the phenomena of German expansion for a more general meaning It is the moment for *ideas*, for comparisons, for a tentative formulation of theories All those enterprises, stratagems, public works, and schemes, all those patiently managed undertakings and their results, must, it seems to me, arouse in us—apart from national bitterness—*that special admiration we cannot help but feel for any efficient mechanism*, for any result that has been desired and rationally attained, step by step along the surest road There is something intoxicating about being certain of an outcome, when it is obviously the result of premeditated action In the present case the action is general, and regularly produces a general result unaffected by accidents and individual mistakes

So in Germany s success I see above all the success of a *method* That is what arouses my admiration Let us suppose that an ordinary man sets himself a difficult task—imposing but possible We need endow him with no *genius* no special insights, no inspired vision merely with tireless constant desire and average powers of reasoning but with absolute confidence in reason *That man will do what is required* He will reflect without passion, he will carry out enumerations so complete and reviews so general that all objects and facts will serve him, and finally enter into his personal calculations There is nothing that will not be seen either as favorable or unfavorable, to be either used or eliminated Nothing will be overlooked He will also observe the course of events, the *trend* He will count and classify, then follow with action Then victory But such a man would have too much to do It takes a whole people Every office is staffed by hundreds of persons Every undertaking is supported by the whole mass—and that mass is naturally disciplined Here the social vice of the intelligent, which is refusal of discipline, vanishes A wonderful instrument remains disciplined intelligence And it is now nothing but an instrument

I have taken the example of an ordinary man so as to show the almost impersonal power of methodical conduct, and the better to indicate the great good sense that consists in not speculating on the rare thing, the accident

So there is at last one nation which, in the economic sphere, has tried unremitting reason, that is to say *method*, and the experiment has not come out too badly It shows that the most important phenomena of life can serve as the basis and the subject of sustained mathematical operations—that life is not above human calculation It can be dealt with But

only Germany could inaugurate such a system With her it is not new, it is not surprising, it is organic It has merely changed its object First, Prussia was created methodically Then she created contemporary Germany At first, the system was political and military Then, having fulfilled that destiny, it easily became economic, simply by applying itself Modern Germany, the product of this system, is now continuing to develop it

If, after reading *Le Danger allemand* or *Made in Germany*, we turn our heated and excited minds to the military history of Prussia from Frederick the Great to Field Marshal von Moltke, we cannot escape an impression of analogy, an idea of the system I have been speaking of It will thus be seen how little exaggeration there is in the foregoing suggestions Here as elsewhere, similar developments will be found *perfect preparation*, a generally adequate execution—and always . . results I note that some of those results, bad in themselves, have turned out to be good, for they have all been subsequently used with great care—even defeat has provided experience, a *minimum gain*. This is a regular procedure, which is why I note it

If now we look into the details of the Prussian military system we shall more and more easily recognize the main characteristics of the "Method" It must be sought in the preoccupation with strategy. Tactics are a matter of individuals, and embrace all the hazards of war But the study of the future, carrying foresight as far as possible, carefully weighing the probabilities, everything that tends to reduce chance, to eliminate blind action—these are the remarkable qualities of the military method "Made in Germany." And war itself must no longer break out, end, or be carried on at the mere whim of events or passions War will be made

rationally It will be made for the purpose of putting down a competitor of gaining access to ports It will be a great industrial operation with its financial organization its capital its sinking fund its insurance and above all its shareholders for the indemnities and the millions in spoils will be spread over the whole of Germany and will pay for new canals new tunnels new universities—all the means of recovery so as to start again on a bigger scale

On the field of battle whether economic or military a kind of general theorem dominates methodical action—that is German action The principle is certainly simple It is the merest deduction in logic, almost nothing Here it is The conqueror is always stronger than the conquered This tautology must give food for thought to those who prefer to *speak of combat with equal arms for it can be expressed thus* There is no such thing as equal arms" Equal arms is an old and quixotic idea It is an incomprehensible superstition

From the principle just stated the practical rule for any battle can be deduced at once *plan and bring about inequality* Militarily, the aim is to have the better weapon the faster march, the more favorable terrain etc , but the surest the most obvious of all such means is superiority in numbers that is to say, inequality mathematically visible, and really invincible if the margin is sufficient, if behind an army front there is an inexhaustible depth of reserves of *Landwehr* and *Landsturm* Commercially, inequality must be based on cheapness The problem to be solved—which in most cases is solved—is that of making a cheaper product than the product under *attack* The sciences the various means of transport and substitutes of every kind are to be employed Where the art of war would concentrate the strength of armies and make the weight of huge battalions count, the art of commerce makes use of the lowest price, which has the same effect as

superior numbers, crushing all resistance without fail and putting the enemy to flight

The planning of military preponderance is the work of the general staff In the conception of its famous headquarters is to be found the most striking example of method They are really *factories for turning out victory* Here we find the division of intellectual labor at its most rational, we find specialized minds fixing their constant attention on variations in the slightest possibilities of gain, we find *this kind of research extended to subjects that seem at first unsuited to technical study*, we find military science elevated to the plane of general policy—it becomes the general economy, for "war is made at all levels" The method is relentlessly applied against all countries The territory of each is subjected to a complete analysis, science by science—from geology, which tells the nature of the terrain, its resources, its crops, its roadways and waterways, its natural defenses . to history, which furnishes the basis for psychological and political knowledge and reveals internal dissensions and indigenous ways of thought All countries are thus classified and correctly defined They are reduced to groups of abstractions that can enter into every kind of calculation, those great strips of land, really complex entities swarming with many different individuals, where customs seem so impenetrable to analysis, become *objects of thought*, manageable quantities, marked weights, all of which can be compared, to show which will be heavier or lighter in the scales of war Each nation then is considered as a machine producing military energy and capable of being added or subtracted—in short, varied at the will of the expert

The same kinds of generalization are applied by the commercial general staff Let us now carry our exposition over into the practical field The parallel continues

The same method has created instruments of incompa-

rable power and precision without which the work of the army would be fruitless One example is the information service The military document and the economic document often seem to come from the same agencies The unity of method suggests this Besides precisely because there is a method the economic document is valuable to the military —and sometimes the military document is useful to certain industrialists The transport service has the same dual importance Rapid mobilization necessary to insure the presence of effective numbers in the field requires meticulous study to regulate the speed and distribution of transport The requirements of safety timing and supply are discussed and planned in their smallest details On them rests the whole of the future campaign

German commerce, like the army, is served by the scientific organization of transport If troops must arrive in great numbers products must arrive as cheaply as possible Hence a thousand private agreements accommodations of every kind mutual sacrifices to insure economic mobilization The more we study the whole system of strategy built up by the military general staff, the more we see that the system of production and trade adopted by the German nation is another form of the same tendency, the more also we are led to imagine a single unified activity whose resources are varied, whose success is *regular*, whose aim is clear, simple, and vast Calculated brute force advances because it neglects nothing because it carefully divides all the difficulties so that its whole weight can be brought to bear on each of the smaller fragments In peace it looks more frightening than in war

Field Marshal von Moltke personifies the system He was its director and example It would seem that the profoundest of his schemes was not to die indispensable That is what

distinguishes him from the great generals before him It is the only thing he invented He was above all a man, a man of trust, the engineer of German security and strength The absurd desire to perform miracles—a desire that transfigures the whole of military history—ends with him He deserves a special kind of admiration The elements of his success are to be found in Frederick the Great, in Napoleon, and in the War of Secession (so filled with novelties) He took his method where he found it, and he always found it where victory was a regular result In the depths of his mind dwelt a small number of almost crude moral or political ideas dominating all the rest, the sort of ideas that make the one who holds them so formidable to others, so headstrong, so incapable in himself of anything new, of any sublime variation

But he had inquired into everything He came to power nearly an old man, he had followed the course of the century's politics, had seen all Europe, appraised its armies, made the study of contemporary wars his avocation and understood them better even than those who conducted them. This man became a strategist He dismissed the military ideas of his time He took only its scientific ideas and its material progress, combining these with the best strategy of the past—that is to say, with what, to the end of time, it will be rational to do in war In the use of the railways he saw the extension of Napoleon's famous rapid marches He revised and perfected the ways of exploiting all the resources of an invaded country. He made war where he must, he terrorized the people so as to break down public morale He multiplied the means of getting information, he listened to tips on public opinion and finance, to rumors, the newspapers, the demands of neutrals He was without passion, without genius, and

surrounded with papers The battlefield was not his battle field he should be pictured in a room, in a small occupied town working with his faithful staff He is diligently repairing the accidents and the disruptions caused by the sufferings of *[illegible]* His is a face with no mouth his whole figure is sealed tight a fortress Once however in 1870 he threw his phlegmatic wig in the air on receiving a telegram

This one man's life is a complete lesson It corresponds exactly to what we know of living Germany the most *per[illegible]l* that is systematic—aspect of his mind is to be seen even in her socialist organization For that icy hero the *[illegible]* He warred against it and his strength lay solely in method. Out of this comes a strange idea. Method calls for true mediocrity in the individual, or rather for greatness only in *the most elementary talents, such as patience* and the ability to give attention to everything without preference or feeling Finally the will to work. Given these qualities we have an individual who will always and inevitably get the better of any superior man whatever The latter may think at first that his ideas have won out then he will find them being circumscribed with iron cal precas on then slowly modified and corrected to accord with a logic as faultless as it is unremitting From the bold experiments of a Napoleon, a Lee or a Sherman the second rate man draws the most solid precepts. He sees their actions in the light of an imperturbable scientific criticism. He refrains from relying on himself which makes him more dependable than the great innovators. He methodically rejects sudden inspirations and unexpected discoveries. Time which draws away the resources of luck and outlasts every flash of genius [illegible] bears him out. In short, *[illegible]* After him, other second rate men will come who [illegible] fail to re[illegible] his career it saves them

best and elevates them most When he is gone, everything remains this is a source of great strength for the nation

These considerations may serve to explain the distribution of men and the values they represent, in a modern State Germany today shows superiority in practical achievements and in the sum total of her activity But it would seem that the individual quality of her personnel is mediocre, stable, and moreover, perfectly suited to her general development There, the heroic days are over, deliberately brought to a close They are sometimes used for advertisement and appear in certain useful phrases, but that makes them even more remote The great philosophers are dead, and there is no place any longer for great speculative scientists * Both have given way to an anonymous and urgent science with no general critique or new theories, but fertile in patented products And out of all the discoveries made by those superior men, nothing has been kept but what can be duplicated—nothing but what, when duplicated, adds to the resources of their mediocre successors

That, however, is the new fact a whole national body working as one Rival energies are reconciled and directed outwards The nation's undertakings follow one after another, and in each, everyone does his best The classes of society and the various professions, in turn, take the lead So, in the history of this century, *Germany seems to have* conformed to a carefully concerted plan Each step has extended the scope of her national life She has built herself up, ambition by ambition, and the symmetry of that progress gives to each of her enterprises the appearance of something arti-

* *This sentence* should be struck out, men like Einstein, Planck, etc, make it inaccurate, that is to say, unjust (P V, 1925)

ficial For example she formed her territory by means of well-aimed wars Then she imposed an armed peace on Europe, which all the other States imagined was abnormal Next she put her industry and her trade on a war footing Then she simultaneously created her navy and her merchant fleet Then she suddenly looked around for colonies Like many another German enterprise the famous affair of the Caroline Islands came like a thunderclap It was one detail in some great project Of the same nature was the Emperor's resounding telegram to President Kruger England and the rest of the world were stirred It was then realized that the Transvaal was already profoundly Germanized, Baron von Marschall's views on Delagoa Bay and Beira were called to mind a whole scheme was revealed * And recent books have likewise thrown a sudden light on the intensive development of the whole empire, the first fruits of premeditated war against the wealth of the whole world

We must not disguise the fact that for the leading older nations the struggle will become more and more arduous It has already assumed such a character that the very qualities those nations have always considered most propitious to their life and the principal source of their greatness have become signs of inferiority For example, the habit of seeking to perfect manufactured articles, of encouraging competition in home trade, of improving the workers' lot these are all so many handicaps in the struggle But the question is a much wider one

* In January 18[illegible] people in the Cape were singing

> Strange German faces passing to and fro
> What have you come for we should like to know?
> Looking mysterious as you join the train
> Say now you Uhlans shall we meet again?

[R V]

Germany owes all to something that is most antipathetic to certain temperaments—particularly to the English and the French That thing is *discipline* It is not to be despised It sometimes has another name in intellectual matters it is called method, and I have already too often called it by that name An Englishman or a Frenchman can invent a method They have proved it They can submit to a discipline, that, too, they have proved But they will always prefer something else For them, it is a last resort, a temporary measure or a sacrifice For a German it is life itself Moreover, Germany as a nation happens to be a recent entity Now, all peoples who reach the estate of great nations—or who resume that status in an era when there are already great nations enough, more ancient and more civilized than they—tend to imitate in a short time what has required centuries of experience for older nations, and to this end they organize themselves entirely by deliberate method—just as every city deliberately constructed is always built to a geometrical plan Germany, Italy, and Japan are examples of nations that have made a new beginning, very late, based on a scientific concept as accurate as it could be made by studying contemporary progress and the prosperity of their neighbors Russia would offer the same example if her immense territory were not an obstacle to the rapid execution of such an over-all scheme

In Germany, then, we find both a national character with a bent for organization and division of labor, and a new State wanting to rival and then to surpass the older States It must be admitted, in fact, that she has displayed an uncommon energy and application in this task

I have attempted to show the system behind this great undertaking by comparing its military aspect with its economic aspect, but examples from other domains would have

brought us to the same conclusions German science could have served as well There too segmentation classification the imposition of discipline on the objects of knowledge is the reigning principle There too amazing instruments multiply the output laboratories each more specialized than the last the endless bibliographies the lessons in *omni re scibili the men lost for a whole lifetime in the depths of obscure* questions all these constitute a national science com*pletely at one with the country that generously supports it*

The question of method may therefore be considered in the abstract Whenever the term is heard everyone thinks of a kind of recipe or rule of thumb for passing from a definite given condition to another Everyone thinks of method as excluding trial and error and as consisting in the strict observation of certain prescribed rules adopted once for all, after initial and supposedly adequate reflection And everyone is necessarily impressed by the power of such a thing It is easy to show that with the help of procedures of this kind, the risks of an enterprise are reduced to a minimum Surprises can be foreseen A good method contains an answer to every possible case, and that answer is influenced as little as possible by sudden occurrences and unexpected problems But of all these virtues, the following are the most interesting a well-made method greatly reduces the need to invent It makes research cumulative For example an industrialist wants to supply a particular country with a certain product Instead of *inventing* the form of the object, he makes inquiries The form is *given* by the taste of the future consumer He then calls on the scientists in his pay to reduce, scientifically, the cost of production, etc In the end, once the object has been manufactured, distributed and sold, we shall see that it has *required the successive application of nearly every kind*

of human knowledge, and that it has taken from each what was needed for the relative satisfaction of the customer and the absolute satisfaction of the manufacturer. Nothing is simpler than this operation, and yet only in Germany is it totally and rigorously applied. It is a matter, obviously, of conforming strictly to the nature of things, neglecting nothing: a matter of logic. The necessary must be done, and whereas the manufacturer who has no method will make a poor syllogism and do poor business when he asserts (let us suppose) that any *good* product must *sell*, therefore . . . etc., another, more astute, will reconcile logic and luck by refusing to leave the definition of a *good* product to vagueness and chance. *He will go and find it in the book of the customer's heart.*

In Germany, moreover, such accurate methods are easier *to apply than in any other country. I spoke of discipline.* There, it is native, and its virtue is to determine a man's place and the scope of his activity. In the army, as elsewhere, the *idea is that each man must be able to do all he can. That is* to be achieved only by constraint, and the limits imposed a priori on each are precisely based on the individual's highest yield. If a soldier must remain in the ranks, this is because, detached and on his own, he has less energy. A battalion of five hundred men is stronger than a gang of a thousand. The most striking fact about the German army, so planned and regulated in its smallest functions, is the intensive cultivation of limited initiative. Soldier and officer alike *must* do what seems right to them from moment to moment in combat. There is a kind of sliding scale that scientifically determines the freedom allowed to each successive rank. The results of discipline resemble those of method. Discipline multiplies individual efforts. It provides a simple, sure solution to every

individual case. It absolutely compels the discovery of everything that can be discovered. All it asks is obedience and *never anything extraordinary*. It diminishes the role of chance.

The reader has perhaps accused me of exaggeration. To which I shall reply that if—even in Germany—things are not happening just as I have presented them, they will do so. I shall also say that I have merely faced what the whole world knows and drawn my conclusions. The reader will perhaps have felt annoyed or uneasy at seeing me attribute overwhelming importance to method, so fatal to all imagination, so drab on the whole. Yet I shall not conceal my opinion. I believe that what we are witnessing is only the beginning of method. I should like to show its possible, or if you will, *its hypothetical role. We have seen it triumph in the political,* military, economic, and scientific fields. But the reader has taken refuge in the realm of the mind. He likes to think that metaphysics, the arts, literature, and the higher sciences remain inviolate, safeguarded by the exceptional quality of the men who excel in them or draw inspiration from them. The scientific method, for example, does not guarantee that the scientist will evolve a new theory or create a new image of the world. It may well increase his chances, but it can do no more than regulate what is *already* discovered. On the other hand, it is by unexplored paths and from uncontrolled events that ideas come. We have the theory of many a phenomenon, but we still lack the theory of theory. In literature and art, we have the same old apparent spontaneity, the same obscure origins, the same absence of any general procedures. The phenomena of choice, substitution, and association are scrupulously *ignored*. Yet I would wager that, *in the minds* of all those who are constantly engaged in doing or making

something, some kind of method is created and developed All the great inventors of ideas or forms seem to me to have employed individual methods I mean that their power and their mastery were founded on the practice of certain *habits* and conceptions which disciplined their whole thought Strangely enough, it is precisely the observable features of this inner method that we call their *personality* It is of little importance, however, whether that method is or is not conscious All this would be a great subject for research, and for a book—*The Art of Thinking*—which has never really been written The creators of formal logic were, of course, trying to do just that, but what they managed to discover was a wonderful instrument of analysis—not of discovery itself

Suppose that book were written—and I see no reason why it should not be. Suppose, if you will, that several of those great minds I mentioned should, from practicing their inner methods, become conscious of them (such a thing has happened) and should, insofar as language will allow, divulge them We should then see extended to the domain of intellect the same procedures that Germany now applies to the life of society In literature we should see cases of methodical collaboration, with division of labor and the rest Balzac tried it In art we should see the artist working directly on each of the senses, on each of the psychological needs of his public, aiming straight at his man Wagner did it

Yet such a book would bring to a point of extreme precision the functioning of that curious law which makes a man a genius to others One is handsome, one is a genius only to others Japan must think that Europe was made for her And by virtue of a rational scheme already in operation in Germany, we should doubtless see the final triumph of all the mediocrity on earth Method in all things would lead to a

great saving in superior individuals And what a curious result, if the results of that new order of things were in every way more perfect, more powerful, more pleasant than what we have today

But I do not know I am merely unraveling consequences

Unpredictability

[1944]

FOR AT least a hundred and fifty years, more than one people in the world has been a prey to the desire, or need—sometimes the rage—to refashion its social structure. More than one system born of reflective thought, the conscious fruit of *someone's meditation, has offered to replace the various empirical* solutions of the problem of getting men to live together. But it is only in the last few years that we have seen what had never been seen before: types of political, judicial, *and economic organization conceived in complete spiritual* sovereignty, by the light of a student's lamp—like poems or some other gratuitous labor of the intellect—energetically and literally applied, holding sway over immense territories and *hundreds of millions of persons.*

This is a tremendous "new fact."

I must explain what I mean by this. I was tempted to say "transcendent fact," but I dislike using certain terms whose overtones startle the mind—either hypnotizing it or putting it on guard, which are opposite but similar effects that should both be avoided.

I shall instance the history of science, which I divide into two periods, one ending in 1800, the other coming down to the present. Until the time of Volta, scientific research and spec-

ulation had from the beginning been practiced on identical phenomena For example no one had yet observed or even imagined that mechanical or chemical effects or effects of light or heat could occur along the length of an oddly twisted wire In any case the very idea then held of science implicitly excluded *the possibility of absolutely unpredictable facts*

In that state of knowledge one could speak of the *universe* and the *unity of nature* without doubting that one knew what one was saying There were such things as *time space matter, light* and a quite precise distinction between the inorganic world and the other and the expression *to know everything*, which is the complement of the word *universe*, seemed to have a meaning and to be a perfectly clear delimiting expression Laplace was able to imagine a mind powerful enough to embrace, or to deduce from a finite number of observations, all possible phenomena past and to come

But once an electric current was set going, the era of *entirely new facts began* Each new fact was in its own way an attack on the theoretical structure of universal dynamics, which was thought to have been conceived in the widest possible generality The very notion of *physical theory* has in the end been seriously, if not definitively, compromised First of all, the mental imagery that had done such good service lost all its meaning once speculation was concerned no longer with subphenomena assumed to be similar to the phenomena directly observed, but rather with "things" that in no way resemble the things we know, since they only send us signals which we interpret as best we can Furthermore, our language, and hence our logic, our concepts, our causality, our principles, have been found wanting all this intellectual material will not fit into the nucleus of the atom, where everything is without precedent and without shape Debatable

probabilities have taken the place of definite and distinct facts, and the fundamental distinction between observation and its object is no longer conceivable.

What has happened? Simply that *our means of investigation and action have far outstripped our means of representation and understanding*.

This is the enormous *new fact* that results from all the other *new facts*. This one is positively *transcendent*.

The absolute novelties now coming into play in every order of things—for all things are now in some way dependent upon industry, which follows science as the shark its pilotfish—must inevitably result in a strange transformation of our notion of the future.*

The past (as history) is a piece of imagination based on records. The future used to be a personal combination of more or less documented imagining and whatever knowledge one might have of the present—a sort of impure computation in which one's feelings, hopes, and intuitions necessarily played an undetermined but considerable part. But all prediction is conservative; it demands that we be as we are in whatever future it constructs. That is why I wrote a long time ago, "We are backing into the future." The fact is that every idea that comes to us is compounded of ideas that have been used already. Every expression is an arrangement of already existing words. The possibility of imagining a future implies that this particular product of the mind may be resolved into molecules of memory. This is proclaimed in many a banal saying, "you can't change human nature," "history repeats itself," etc. And, *thanks to the crude simplifications that make the writing of history possible*, it used to be easy to perceive recur-

* Here, of course, is meant the *practical future*, where our plans with their imaginary but presumably realizable details are situated. [P.V.]

rence or repetition of events, analogous situations on which as many philosophies of history as you like could be founded, and nearly all the arguments and ready-made expressions that politics could need to get a notion of itself, to propose its programs and policies, justify its aims and define its ideals. In those days it used to be commonly said that "history is experimental politics." This was a slight on the good name of true experiment: it confused the recital of facts of merely traditional importance with the direct observation of a *controlled* system in which well-defined acts can be performed to obtain a result or an answer of a definite kind. In any case, it would not seem that the race of men whose history has been in the making for a very long time have profited much from experience, or experiment, of the historical kind. The contrary might be maintained. I mention here, incidentally, that I do not know that anyone has made an "objective" study of political thought in general. It is a handsome subject. It would be interesting to show how the use of stimulants in the form of various abstract words, undefined but illustrated with bright or violent images, is indispensable. Also, it would be well to examine the controlling ideas, or rather metaphysical notions, for whatever they may be worth—for example, each of them presupposes a certain *conception of man*, the collation of these and the comparisons that would result could teach us something about the quality of the minds that make it their business to lead the world.

Thus, any prediction we are able to make can only be, by the very nature of all prediction, more or less historical, it excludes, consequently, everything that is so new that our vocabulary must lack even the words to conjecture about it. Our vocabulary is, in effect, only a form of history reduced

to assimilable, usable, and living elements Since, henceforth, we must deal with the *new*, of the irreducible type I have mentioned, our future is endowed with *essential unpredictability*, and this is the only prediction we can make

All this smells of paradox But if we return in thought to a slightly earlier time, which I lived through—say, 1890—and try to conceive what (1) the best minds of that time, and (2) the brains best equipped to produce the amazing developments in invention and organization that followed, could have imagined as likely to be seen in 1944, then we should find (1) that nothing in their circumstances gave them the slightest hint, the slightest idea of the prodigious novelties we now know, and furthermore (2) that nothing in the very substance of their creative sensibilities, their power to dream, presaged the totally unexpected things that in fact happened

Unpredictability in every field is the result of the conquest of the whole of the present world by scientific power This invasion by active knowledge tends to transform man's environment and man himself—to what extent, with what risks, what deviations from the basic conditions of existence and of the preservation of life we simply do not know Life has become, in short, the object of an experiment of which we can say only one thing—that it tends to estrange us more and more from what we were, or what we think we are, and that it is leading us we do not know and can by no means imagine where

Remarks on Intelligence

[1925]

IT HAPPENS that someone has been asked whether there is a *crisis in intelligence*, whether the world is becoming stupid, whether there is a distaste for culture, whether the *liberal professions* are suffering, perhaps dying—their strength declining, their ranks thinning, their prestige gradually diminishing, their existence more and more thankless, precarious, and near its end

But this same someone is taken aback by such questions—he was far from thinking about them He has to get hold of himself, turn around, and face them, he must rouse himself from other thoughts and rub the eyes of his mind, which are words

"Crisis?" he says first of all, "what exactly is a crisis? Let's take a look at this term!" A crisis is the passage from one particular mode of functioning to another, a passage made perceptible by signs or symptoms During a crisis, time seems to change its nature, duration no longer gives the same impression as in the normal state of things Instead of measuring permanence it measures change Every crisis involves the intervention of new "causes" that disturb the existing equilibrium, whether mobile or immobile

How can we fit the idea of *crisis*, which we have now briefly reviewed, with the notion of *intelligence*?

We live on very vague, very crude notions, and, moreover, they live on us What we know, we know from the operation of what we do not know

Necessary and even sufficient though they are for quick exchanges of thought, there is not one of these incomplete and indispensable notions that can bear close inspection Once our attention settles on one of them, we find in it a confusion of widely differing usages and examples that can never be reconciled What was clear in passing, and readily *understood*, becomes obscure when we fix on it, what was whole breaks down into parts, what was with us is against us A slight turn of some mysterious screw shifts the microscope of consciousness, adds the element of time to increase the magnifying power of our attention, and finally brings our inner confusion into focus for us

Dwell, for example, however slightly, on words like *time*, *universe*, *race*, *form*, *nature*, *poetry*, *etc* , and you see how they divide to infinity, becoming incomprehensible A few moments ago we were using them for understanding each other, now they change into means of confounding us. They took part, without our knowing it, in our plans and actions, like limbs so tractable that we forget them, until reflection sets them against us, transforms them into obstacles and difficulties It seems, in fact, that words in movement and in combination are quite different things from the same words inert and isolated!

This general and indeed remarkable character of our instruments of thought is what engenders nearly all philosophical, moral, literary, and political life—all that activity which is as useless as can be, but also as helpful as can be in developing *the subtlety, profundity*, and *proper action* of the mind. Our enthusiasms and aversions depend directly on the vices of our

language, its ambiguities promote differences, distinctions, and objections, all the sparring of intellectual adversaries And fortunately they also prevent minds from ever coming to rest We can observe, as we turn the pages of history, that a dispute which is not irreconcilable is a dispute of no importance

Intelligence is one of those notions that derive all their value from the other terms coupled with them, by affinity or contrast in some discourse It is contrasted at various times with sensibility, with memory, with instinct, with stupidity Sometimes it is a faculty, at other times a degree of that faculty occasionally it is taken to be the *whole* of the mind itself, and is given the whole vague lot of the mind s properties

During the last few years this word, already encumbered with several quite different meanings, has, by a kind of contagion frequent in language, contracted a new and entirely foreign sense I hardly think we are to be congratulated on extending the word *intelligence* to refer to a whole class of persons in society, and to translate in this way the Russian *intelligentsia*

The phrase *crisis in intelligence*, then, may be understood to mean the deterioration of a certain faculty in all men, or only in those most gifted in that faculty, or who *should be*, or again, as a crisis in all the faculties of the average mind, or further, a crisis in the *value* and prestige of intelligence in our society, present or to come And finally, it may also be seen, if we include the new meaning borrowed from the Russians, as a crisis affecting a class of persons with respect to the quality, the number, or the living conditions of its members

It remains to be seen which of all these differently defined sorts of "intelligence" is the one supposed to be in jeopardy.

The *someone being questioned sees at once five or six* possibilities He senses that the slightest further inquiry would bring out others He wanders from one point of view to another, from crisis to crisis, from a crisis in one's *faculties*, to a crisis in *values*, to a *class* crisis

1 *On Intelligence as a Faculty*

Let us first worry about whether man is becoming more stupid, more credulous, more weak-minded, whether there is a crisis in comprehension or imagination But who would warn him of it? Where are the signs of such a decline in mental power? And, if there were any such signs, who would have the legitimate right to interpret them?

Yet this strange question does not fail to suggest a few ideas Here, for example, is a kind of problem that I shall state just as it comes to me. There can be no question of solving it

It is to inquire in what way modern life—the inevitable machinery of modern life and the habits it inflicts on us—may modify on the one hand the physiology of our minds, our perceptions of all sorts, and above all what we do with our perceptions, or what becomes of them inside us, and, on the other hand, the place and function of the mind itself in the present condition of the human race

We might examine, among other things, the development of all the means for gradually delivering the mind of its more painful labors the recording devices to relieve the memory, *the marvelous machines that spare the brain its* labors of calculation, the symbols and methods making it possible to reduce a whole science to a few signs, the admirable facilities for making us *see* what formerly we had to *understand*, the direct registering of visual images so that they can be reproduced at will, whole sequences of them, according to the

very laws of their proper succession—and how much else!
We might ask whether so much help so many powerful aids are not gradually reducing our powers of attention and the capacity of the average human being for mental effort whether continuous or of specified duration

Look at our arts for example We complain of having no style we console ourselves by saying that our descendants will discover that we had one of some sort

But how could we possibly develop a *style*—that is how would it be possible to acquire any consistent form any general formula for construction and decoration (which are always simply the fruits of fairly long experience and of a certain continuity in taste needs and methods) when impatience rapid execution and sudden changes in technique beset all our works and when *novelty* has for the past century been required of every production in every genre?

And finally where does this demand for the new come from? We shall return to that later on For the moment let us leave such questions to multiply of themselves

Impatience I was saying Farewell to all labors endlessly slow three hundred years for a cathedral, whose interminable growth curiously accommodated the successive variations and embellishments actually seeming to seek and as it were unfold them high in the air! Farewell to painting as the final product of a long accumulation of transparent labors—of clear thin layers each waiting week after week for the next regardless of *genius*! Farewell to the perfecting of language to meditating on literary problems to the refinements that used to make a writer's works comparable at once to precious objects and to precision instruments! We are now *committed to the moment* to effects of shock and contrast and almost compelled to seize upon whatever flashes into the

mind from any chance stimulus, suggesting precisely that We look for and appreciate the *sketch*, the *study*, the *rough draft* The very notion of *completion* has almost vanished

. . . .

Modern man is sometimes overwhelmed by the number and magnitude of his means Our civilization tends to make it impossible for us to dispense with a whole system of miracles produced by the impassioned and combined labors of a great number of very great men and a host of lesser ones Each one of us feels the benefit, bears the burden, and inherits the whole sum of this age-old capital of truths and formulas Not one of us is able to do without this enormous inheritance, yet, not one of us is able to carry it There is no man now living who can even conceive the crushing whole of it That is why political, military, and economic problems are becoming so difficult to solve, why leaders are so rare, and errors of detail so far from negligible We are witnessing the dying out of the *man who could be complete*, as well as of the man who could be materially self-sufficient. There is considerably less self-determination, there is a decline in the sense of mastery, and a corresponding increase of confidence in teamwork, etc

The machine rules Human life is rigorously controlled by it, dominated by the terribly precise will of mechanisms. These creatures of man are exacting They are now reacting on their creators, making them like themselves. They want well-trained humans, they are gradually wiping out the differences between men, fitting them into their own orderly functioning, into the uniformity of their own regimes They are thus shaping humanity for their own use, almost in their own image

There is a sort of pact between the machine and ourselves,

like the terrible contract between the nervous system and the subtle demon of drugs The more useful the machine seems to us the more it becomes so and the more it becomes so the more *incomplete* we are the more incapable of doing without it There is such a thing as *the reciprocal* of the useful

The most redoubtable machines perhaps are not those that revolve or run to transport or transform matter or energy There are other kinds not built of copper or steel but of narrowly specialized individuals I refer to organizations those administrative machines constructed in imitation of the *impersonal aspects* of the mind

Civilization is measured by the increasing size and number of such structures They may be likened to huge human beings barely conscious, hardly able to feel at all, but endowed to excess with all the elementary and regular functions of an inordinately oversized nervous system Everything in them having to do with relations, transmission, agreement, and correspondence, is magnified to the monstrous scale of *one man per cell* They are endowed with a limitless memory, as fragile as the fiber of paper That is where they get all their reflexes, which are laws, regulations, statutes, precedents Not a single mortal is left unswallowed into the structure of these machines, to become an object of their functioning, a nondescript element in their cycles The life or death the pleasures and works of men are details means, incidents in the activity of these beings, whose rule is tempered only by the war they wage against each other

Each of us is a cog in one of these groups or rather we belong to several different groups at once, surrendering to each of them a part of our self-ownership and taking from each a

part of our social definition and our license to exist We are all citizens, soldiers, taxpayers, men of a certain trade, supporters of a certain party, adherents of a certain religion, members of a certain organization, a certain club

To be a member . is a remarkable expression As a result of the more and more precise and minute analysis and carving up of the human mass, we have become somehow quite well-defined entities As such, we are now no more than objects of speculation, veritable *things* Here I must utter certain awkward words, I am obliged, though with a shudder, to say that *irresponsibility, interchangeability, interdependence*, and *uniformity*, in customs, manners, and even in dreams, are overtaking the human race It seems that the sexes themselves are bound to become indistinguishable except in anatomical characteristics

All the foregoing remarks must now be brought together and related to our idea of *intelligence as a faculty*, and we must ask ourselves whether our regime of intense and frequent stimulants, disguised forms of punishment, oppressive utilities, systematic surprises, overorganized facilities and enjoyments is not bound to bring on a kind of permanent deformation of the mind, the loss of certain characteristics and the acquisition of certain others, and whether, in particular, *those very talents* which have made us desire all this *progress*, as a means of employing and developing themselves, will not be affected by abuse, degraded by their own handiwork, and exhausted by their own activity

Among living intellects, some spend themselves in serving

the machine, others in building it, others in inventing or planning a more powerful type a final category of intellects spend themselves in trying to escape its domination These rebellious minds feel with a shudder that the once complete and autonomous *whole* that was the soul of ancient man is now becoming some inferior kind of *daemon* that wishes only to collaborate, to join the crowd to find security in being dependent and happiness in a closed system that will be all the more closed as man makes it more closely suited to man But *this is to give a new definition of man*

The whole disturbance in our minds today shows that great changes are coming in our idea of ourselves

11 *On Intelligence as a Class*

Let us consider for a moment what I shall call *intelligence as a class*

Everyone is well aware that there is a certain tribe known for its special relation to the mind No one can give a complete, simple, and definite description of it It is a social nebula still to be resolved But it is one of those vague nebulae that, the more closely they are looked at, the more their contours dissolve and their forms melt or slip away There is always something left over that cannot be either fitted into their general shape or separated from it

But this species complains, therefore it exists

Intellectuals, artists, members of the various liberal professions some of these are fairly useful to the animal life of society, others are useless (and among the latter perhaps are the most excellent, those who elevate our race a little, giving us the illusion of knowing, of advancing, of creating, of

resisting our own nature) These days we hear that there is a depression in the value of such men, a decline in their prestige, that they are being exterminated by want Their existence is, in fact, closely linked with a culture and a tradition which are threatened with an uncertain future, because of the present revolution in the affairs of the world

Our civilization is taking on, or tending to take on, the structure and properties of a machine, as I indicated just now This machine will not tolerate less than world-wide rule, it will not allow a single human being to survive outside its control, uninvolved in its functioning Furthermore, it cannot put up with ill-defined lives within its sphere of operation Its precision, which is its essence, cannot endure vagueness or social caprice, irregular situations are incompatible with good running order *It cannot put up with anyone whose duties and circumstances are not precisely specified* It tends to eliminate those individuals who from its own point of view do not exactly fit, and to reclassify the rest without regard to the past or even the future of the species

It has already begun to attack the ill-organized populations of the earth Moreover, there is a law (a corollary of that primitive law which turns need and the sense of power into aggressive impulses) decreeing that the highly organized must invariably take the offensive against the poorly organized

The machine—that is, the Western World—could not help turning, one day, against those ill-defined and sometimes *incommensurable* men inside it

So we are witnessing an attack on the indefinable mass by the will or the necessity for *definition* Fiscal laws, economic laws, the regulation of labor, and, above all, the profound

changes in general technology everything is used for counting assimilating leveling bracketing and arranging that group of indefinables those *natural s litaries* who constitute a part of the intellectual population The rest more easily absorbed will inevitably be redefined and reclassified

A few remarks will perhaps clarify what I have just written

It was never more than indirectly that society could afford the life of a poet a thinker an artist whose works were unhurried and profound It sometimes uses them as fake servants or nominal functionaries—professors curators librarians But the professions are complaining every government official s small freedom of decision is being more and more reduced there is less and less *play* in the machine

The machine neither will nor can recognize any but professionals'

How is it to go about reducing everyone to professionals?

There is a world of fumbling involved in trying to determine the characteristics of those who specialize in the intellect!

Each of us uses whatever mind he has An unskilled laborer uses his *from his own point of view*, just as much as anyone else, a philosopher or a mathematician If his speech seems crude and simple-minded to us ours is strange and absurd to him and everyone is an unskilled laborer to someone else

How could it be otherwise? Besides every man dreams at times or gets drunk or both, and in his sleep as in his cups the ferment of images and their free and *useless* combinations make him a Shakespeare—to what degree is unknown and unknowable And our laborer, stunned by fatigue or alcohol becomes the playground of spirits

But you will say *he does not know how to use them*

Which simply means that he is a laborer from our point of view, though a Shakespeare from his own When he wakes, all he lacks is knowing the name of Shakespeare and some notion of literature He is unaware of himself as a creator

And who would dare put, or not put, a fortune teller, a master of ceremonies, or a circus clown in the category of intellectuals?

Who will maintain that more intelligence is expended in one head than another, that more intelligence and more *knowledge are needed in teaching than in business* speculations or in creating an industry?

We must make up our minds to dabble in examples. While dabbling we sometimes splash up a few drops of light

In questions that are by nature confused, and are so for everybody, I find it permissible—perhaps laudable—to present, just as they are, the tentative efforts, the half-formed notions, and even the rejected and refuted phases of one's thought

I have sometimes seen very surprising definitions of the intellectual Some include the accountant and exclude the poet Some, if taken quite literally, are so inclusive that they are unable to exclude those beautiful machines so clever at making calculations or squaring curves, and far superior to many brains

The thought of such computers suggests a reflection I shall make in passing

There are certain intellectual activities that may lose *rank* because of progress in technical procedures As procedures become more exact, as the practice of any profession is grad-

ually reduced to the application of a specified number of means, precisely determined by examining the particular case, the personal value of the "professional" has less and less weight. We know the part played in a great many fields by individual skill and secret processes. But the progress I am speaking of tends to make results independent of these peculiar personal qualities.

If, for example, medicine were one day to reach, in diagnostics and the corresponding therapeutics, a degree of precision that reduced the practitioner's role to a series of definite and well-regulated acts, the doctor would become an impersonal agent of the science of healing, would lose the *spell* that comes from the uncertainties of his art and from that personal magic we inevitably suppose that he confers on it, he would henceforth take his place alongside the pharmacist, who has always ranked slightly below him because a pharmacist's operations are more *scientific*, being performed with scales.

It might be said—to use an odd term borrowed from the language of the law—that certain intellectuals are *fungible*, and others are not. The former are already caught up in the machine, or nearly so, being interchangeable and able to be taken one for another.

Of course, men are never absolutely interchangeable. When they are at all, it is only approximately.

Anyone who cannot be replaced by another—for the reason that he is unlike any *other*—is also one who fulfills no undeniable need. So we find in the intellectual population these two remarkable categories: *intellectuals who serve some purpose* and *intellectuals who serve none*. For man's bread, clothing, and shelter, and his physical ills, neither Dante, nor Poussin, nor Malebranche could do anything whatever. Con-

versely, bread, clothing, shelter, and the rest have a tendency to shun such men The subsistence of the greatest men is scarcely to be justified by anything but *words*

The problem of *intelligence as a class* is far from being a new problem The present situation, as they say, makes it extremely urgent, more urgent than ever before Yet nothing is farther from being new

Its history is easily summarized

The opportunity or the necessity of rewarding the mind, in the guise of certain individuals, with a definite place in the social structure has in every age raised a fundamental difficulty which by its nature cannot be overcome It lies not only in making the right definition but also in being obliged to make inevitable judgments of *quality* At every attempt, we come up against the insoluble question of *gauging the best* In scientific jargon we might call it *aristometry*.

Since everyone uses the mind he has, the first decision must show that there are certain uses of the mind that can serve to distinguish a particular class, but then, some account must be taken—or not taken—of the value of such uses, that is, of particular works and even of work in progress

A bad mason is still a mason. A bad mechanic is still a mechanic But an occasional artist, a scholar unacknowledged by other scholars, an unwitting philosopher, a self-styled poet   what are they?

And what is an artist, a scholar, a philosopher, or a poet during the period of his inner preparation or while he is waiting for recognition?

Descartes began publishing in his forty-eighth year, Johann Sebastian Bach, when he was over fifty Until then, the former was an ex-soldier and *rentier*, the other a church organist Two men who in the end produced works known to

all, managed to subsist up to the moment of their flowering thanks only to the *lack of precision in the social definitions of their day*

I have a few more words to say on the history of this problem

From time immemorial it has been given a simple practical even crude solution which consists in defining intelligence by courses of study The more a country holds on to its earlier ways—the more *static* it is—then the more heavily if not exclusively it relies on definition in terms of regular studies

The *intelligence class* consists in this case, of those who have completed their studies, and studies mean diplomas i e, material proof Scholars pundits doctors, degree-holders of every sort these make up the intellectual class it can thus be described in the clearest possible way (*since it is a material way*), and its membership can very easily be counted Such a system is excellent for preserving and transmitting knowledge, but mediocre if not bad for increasing it It may also happen that the material proof turns out to be more durable than what it proves—than the zeal, curiosity, and mental vigor of the man who, by means of it, becomes a member of the lettered class

Among the inconveniences of the system let us mention man's tendency to become fixed in an initial attitude I am told that in America it is still possible to change careers at any age, to move from *liberal* to *manual* occupations and vice versa

From this ancient, practical distinction we pass easily to the modern notion of the *liberal professions*

These, it seems, are the professions befitting a free man

A free man was not supposed to live by the work of his hands. A liberal profession was the opposite of a manual profession. Yet a surgeon uses his hands, though gloved. A pianist lives by his hands, painters and sculptors try to live by theirs. *All such professionals were formerly regarded as workmen.* Veronese, when summoned to testify before the Inquisition at Venice, replied to the question about his profession: *Sono lavoratori!*

Today there is a profound change. The surgeon is no longer confused with the barber, nor the artist with the artisan, and the social hierarchy formerly based on esteem—on the supposed degree of nobility in occupations—has shifted. Surgery ranks much higher than a number of professions where the hands are used merely for writing.

You see how many unanswerable questions can be raised in the simple attempt to form a clear idea of the place accorded in the modern world to intellectuals, or to those who by tradition are presumed to be intellectuals.

Every thrust at the difficulty brings an immediate riposte. Nevertheless, before gauging the extent and describing the symptoms of a particular illness, we must try to recognize its victims. As you have seen, I have tried in vain to characterize the intellectual, and to discover the sure marks of a liberal profession.

This kind of speculation is sometimes as diverting as a parlor game. It has the infinite range of the unexpected. The ultimate source of our surprise consists in the great fact I was dealing with a few pages back: a new society has caught an old society *flagrante delicto*, a more powerful and rigid organization is attacking a less powerful and looser organization. Analysis loses its way in the complexity of relations and

distinctions it is obliged to note, or introduce, when it attempts to grapple with such conflicts Although it feels deeply convinced of the frailty and even the futility of all moral and political speculation, it nevertheless perceives much that is very grave and almost painful in this *critical* disorder, which it cannot manage to define Can we be sure that bread

that all the things essential to life may not one day be denied those men whose disappearance would in no way disturb the production of that bread and those things? The first to perish would be all those who cannot defend themselves by folding their arms The rest would do likewise, or go back to practical work, overtaken by the rising poverty, and the progress of their extermination would, for some supreme observer, demonstrate the actual hierarchy of the true needs of human life at its simplest

Politics of the Mind

[1932]

I PROPOSE to evoke for you the disorder in which we live. I shall try to show you the reactions of a mind as it observes that disorder: how, when it has taken the measure of what it can and cannot do, it turns inward to reflect, and tries to *picture for itself that chaos, to which, by its very nature, it* is opposed.

But the image of chaos is chaos. Disorder is therefore my first point; it is this I ask you to think about. A certain effort is needed, for we have come to be accustomed to it, we live on it, we breathe it, we add to it, and sometimes we feel a real need for it. We find it all around us and within us, in the newspapers, in our daily life, in our manners, in our pleasures, even in our knowledge. It sustains us, and what we have ourselves created is now dragging us whither we do not know and do not wish to go.

Our present situation, which is our own handiwork, necessarily prepares the way for a certain future, but a future we cannot possibly imagine, and that is a great novelty, deriving from the very novelty of the present we live in. We cannot, or can no longer, deduce from the past even a glimmer, a faintly probable image of the future, since in a few decades and at the expense of the past (that is, by destroying it, refuting it, deeply modifying it) we have recast, reconstructed, and

implemented a state of things whose most remarkable characteristics are without precedent or example

Never was there a transformation so prompt and so profound the earth has been entirely reconnoitered explored exploited I would even say entirely appropriated the most distant events are now known on the instant our ideas about matter time and space and our power over them are all conceived and used quite otherwise than before Where now is the thinker the philosopher the historian (even the profoundest wisest most erudite) who would today risk making the slightest prophecy? Where is the politician or the economist we would trust after the errors they have made? We can no longer clearly distinguish between war and peace abundance and want victory and defeat And our economy fluctuates every day between an unlimited increase in *tokens* of exchange and a sudden return to the primitive system of savages barter

Sometimes when I think of the condition of men and things at once so brilliant and so dark so active and so abject I remember an impression I once had at sea It happened that a few years ago I was on a voyage with a naval squadron The squadron having started from Toulon and heading for Brest was suddenly, on a fine day, caught in a fog in the dangerous rock-strewn approaches to the Île de Sein Six battleships and about thirty smaller ships and submarines were suddenly blinded and brought to a halt, at the mercy of wind and current in the midst of a field of reefs The least shock could have *upset* those citadels of armor and artillery The impression was striking those great ships prodigiously equipped manned by men of courage, knowledge, and discipline, with everything that modern technology can offer in the way of power

and precision at their disposal, suddenly reduced to impotence in the half-light, condemned to anxious waiting by a bit of mist that had formed over the sea.

This contradiction is much like the one we are faced with in our time: we are blind and impotent, yet armed with knowledge and power, in a world we have organized and equipped, and whose inextricable complexity we now dread. The mind strives to clear up the disturbance, to foresee what it will bring forth, to discern in the chaos the imperceptible currents, the lines that will eventually cross to become the happenings of tomorrow.

At times it wants to keep whatever of the past seems essential, what it knows, and thinks civilized life cannot do without. At times it resolves to make a clean sweep, to construct a new system out of the world of man.

On the other hand, the mind must think of itself, of the conditions of its own existence (which are also the conditions of its growth), of the dangers that threaten its virtues, powers, and possessions: its freedom, its development, its depth. These are the two preoccupations which, as I was inquiring into them, suggested my somewhat vague and mysterious title, *politics of the mind.*

I should like simply to show that these questions exist. I have no intention of going into them deeply, no intention even of trying to circumscribe a subject of such vast extent, which, far from becoming simpler and clearer upon meditation, only becomes the more complex and cloudy as our attention dwells on it. If we explore even superficially all our spheres of activity, the fields of human ability and knowledge, we observe in each the signs of crisis: an economic crisis, a crisis in science, a crisis in arts and letters, a crisis in political freedom,

a crisis in manners I shall not go into details I shall simply point out one of the remarkable features of this situation *the modern world with all its power its prodigious technological capital, its thorough discipline in scientific and practical methods has never managed to provide itself with a system of politics a code of morals, an ideal or a code of civil or penal laws in harmony with the ways of life it has created or even with the ways of thought gradually being imposed on all men by the wide dissemination and development of a kind of scientific spirit*

Everyone today who is more or less informed of the works in critical analysis that have renewed the foundations of science elucidated the properties of language the origins of the forms and institutions of social life, understands that every notion, principle, or *truth* as one used to say, is subject to review, revision, recasting, that every action is conventional that every law, written or otherwise, is no more than approximate

Everyone tacitly agrees that the *man* in question in constitutional or civil law, the pawn in political speculations and maneuvers—the *citizen*, the *voter*, the *candidate*, the *taxpayer*, the *common man*—is perhaps not quite the same as the man defined by contemporary biology, psychology, or even psychiatry A strange contrast is the result, a curious split in our judgment We look on the same individual as both responsible and irresponsible, we sometimes consider him irresponsible and treat him as responsible, depending on which of these fictions we adopt at the moment, whether we are in a juridical or an objective frame of mind In the same way, we find that in many minds faith coexists with atheism anarchy of feeling with doctrinal views Most of us have several different opinions on the same subject, and these may easily alternate in our judgments within a single hour, depending on the stimulus of the moment

introduced into man's world in so few years has very nearly abolished all possibility of comparing what happened a hundred and fifty years ago with what is happening today. We have introduced new forces, invented new means, and formed entirely different and unexpected habits. We have canceled values, dissociated ideas, destroyed sentiments that seemed unshakable, having survived twenty centuries of vicissitudes; and to talk about such a novel situation we have only age-old notions.

In short, we are faced with confusion in the social system, in the verbal material and the myths of all kinds inherited from our ancestors, and in the conditions in which we live—conditions that are intellectual in origin, quite artificial, and moreover essentially unstable, for they are directly dependent on further and ever more numerous creations of the intellect. Here we are then, a prey to this confused mixture of *boundless hopes (justified by our incredible achievements)* and *immense disappointments or sinister expectations (equally justified by our incredible failures and catastrophes).*

But I must now complete this panorama of disorder, this composition of chaos, by picturing for you something that both observes and contributes to it, can neither endure nor deny it, and that, by its nature, never ceases to be divided against itself. I mean the *mind.*

By this word "mind" I do not at all mean a metaphysical entity; I mean quite simply a *power of transformation* which can be isolated and distinguished from all other powers simply by considering certain events around us, certain transformations in our surroundings that can be attributed only to a very different kind of action from that of the known energies of

Nature, for it consists, indeed, either in setting such given energies against each other, or in combining them

The opposition or coercion involved is such that it results either in saving time or saving our strength or increasing the power, precision, freedom, or length of our lives So you see, there is a way of defining the mind that does not involve any metaphysics, but simply gives that word the irreproachable status of a notation, making of it somehow the symbol of a group of quite objective observations

Certain of the transformations worked by this power define a higher sphere The mind not only applies itself to satisfying instincts and indispensable needs, it also makes a practice of speculating on our sensibility Is there any more remarkable feat of transformation than that which takes place in the poet or the musician when they transpose their affections and even their sadness and distress into works, poems, musical compositions—the means of preserving and communicating the whole of their sensory life by the roundabout way of technical artifice? And, just as the mind can change its sorrows into works of art, so it has managed to change man's leisure into games. It changes simple wonder into curiosity or a passion for knowledge The amusement it finds in making combinations has led it to build profoundly abstract sciences The first geometricians were doubtless men whose calculations and figures diverted them in private, and who had no idea that one day the results of their austere pastimes would have a use that of elucidating the structure of the world and discovering the laws of Nature

In the same way, it was by a unique exploitation of the resources of the transforming mind that fear itself came to give birth to astonishing creations Fear built temples—fear

itself was changed at last into those wonderful supplications in stone, those magnificently meaningful structures that are perhaps the highest human expression of beauty and will So, out of the affections of the soul, out of leisure and dreams, the mind makes higher values, it is a veritable philosopher's stone, the transmuting agent of all material or mental things

The single characteristic I have selected to define it, and the examples I have just given, now make it possible for me to say that man's mind has involved him in an *adventure* of a kind that seems bent on leaving further and further behind the original conditions of man's life, a kind that seems endowed with a paradoxical instinct tending in quite the opposite direction from all the other instincts—since the latter, on the contrary, always tend to bring the human being back to the same point and the same condition

It is this strange instinct that tries somehow to remake the milieu in which we live, and to give us occupations that are sometimes excessively remote from those imposed on us by the pure and simple concern for our animal existence, it creates new needs, it gives us numerous artificial needs, it introduces alongside the natural instincts I mentioned, alongside the several goads of vital necessity (instinct means *goad*), many other impulses In particular it has created a quite remarkable need to accumulate experience, to assemble and record the various kinds, to make structures of thought from them, and even to project them beyond the present, as though trying to get hold of life where it does not yet, or can no longer, exist.

Allow me to point out in passing one of humanity's most extraordinary inventions (and it is not a recent one) I am thinking quite simply of the invention of the *past* and the

future These are not natural notions, natural man lives in the moment, like an animal The nearer a man is to Nature, the less do past and future figure in his mind An animal doubtless feels that it exists between a minimum of past and a minimum of future—just that bit of each needed to sustain a desire until a sensation satisfies it, or to sustain a sensation of need until an act fulfills it Duration is here reduced to the intervals of tension or action originating in a stimulus and ending in a quick organic response Of course various incidents may come in between these limits of duration, but it is always *by the quickest way* that the irritated sensibility excites an act to appease it

It is different with man by expanding the moment, by using imagination to generalize the present, by a sort of abuse, man *creates time*, and in doing so he not only sets up perspectives before and after his intervals of reaction but, what is more, *he lives but very little* in the moment itself His principal home is in the past or in the future He never confines himself to the present except when forced to do so by a sensation pleasure or pain It may be said of man that *he continually feels the need of what does not exist.* This is a non-animal condition, and wholly artificial since in fact it is not absolutely necessary to life No doubt the invention of "time" can often be useful But to use it is, in itself, somehow contrary to Nature. Nature is indifferent to individuals If man prolongs or betters his life he is acting *against Nature*, and his act is of a kind that sets mind in opposition to *life*

Now, the intellectual exercise of foreseeing is one of the essential bases of civilization Foresight is at once the origin and the instrument of all undertakings, large or small It is also, presumably, the foundation of *all* politics It is, in short, a psychic element that has become indispensable to the organ-

ization of human life To an observer watching from outside humanity man would generally seem to act without any visible aim as though seeing into another world as though responding to the influence of invisible things or hidden beings *Tomorrow* is a hidden potentiality Those are some examples Foresight is the inner being as it were of every action which that observer I mentioned cannot understand because he can see only what is visible

Furthermore not only has man acquired the ability to take leave of the present moment thus dividing against himself but he has at the same time acquired another remarkable ability though one not equally developed in all individuals I mean that, in varying degrees he has become *conscious of himself* This consciousness makes it possible for him to be detached at moments from *everything* even from his own personality the *self* can sometimes look on its own person almost as some strange object Man can observe himself (or thinks he can), he can criticize himself, and control himself This is an original creation an attempt to create what I shall make bold to call *the mind within the mind*

Let us add to this summary description of the mind as I have conceived it, and as I have just now presented it—in terms of such firsthand observations as the creation of *time*, the creation of a *pure self*, a self distinct even from identity, even from memory, even from the personality of the subject—let us add to these the notion of the richest resource man has discovered in himself that *universality* which he feels is his and on which all his speculative life, all his philosophic or scientific or aesthetic life depends Even in the practical sphere, the projection of his activity and his cravings, the opportunities he must grasp, the game he must play, the road he must follow, the

precautions he must take all this requires developed skill, practice, a whole training in the *possible* The possible is a kind of faculty

Man speculates he makes plans and theories What is a theory if not precisely the *use of the possible?* Is not the practice of foresight, which I spoke of just now, a remarkable application *of this faculty? But there is a particular kind of foresight* that I must mention in passing· not only does the mind try to foresee external phenomena and events, but it strives to foresee itself, to anticipate its own operations It strives to predict all the consequences of the data gathered by its own act of attention, and to discover the law they obey This is because there is in the mind some peculiar horror (I nearly said *phobia*) of *repetition What is repeated in the mind never belongs to the mind itself* The mind tends never to repeat, it detests reiteration, although it sometimes reiterates by accident On the contrary, it always tends to find a law of sequence, to approach the limit (as mathematicians say)— that is, to dominate, surmount, and somehow forestall a prospective repetition It tends to reduce infinity to a *formula* by identifying the elements that make it up The science of mathematics is at bottom, and to a large extent, only a science of pure repetition It grasps the mechanism of repetition and summarizes it

So the mind seems to abhor and shun the very process of *deep organic life—which (unlike the mind) requires repetition,* requires that the elemental acts on which vital exchanges depend be repeated *our life is based on the regular recurrence of a few reflexes* Knowledge, on the other hand, implies a will opposed to the particularity, the singularity of moments Knowledge tends to absorb the particular case into the general law, repetition into formula, differences into averages and

large numbers In doing so the mind stands quite in opposition to the behavior of our living machine

Notice that *living*—in spite of widely held opinion in spite of the notion of life we get from newspapers theaters and novels—is an essentially monotonous practice A show or a book is mistakenly said to be living when it is rather disorderly when it gives us the unexpected the spontaneous in flashes and exciting effects These are only superficial characteristics the fluctuations on the surface of sensibility but the basis beneath these semblances the substance of such accidents is a system of periods or cycles of transformation that take place outside our consciousness and generally in the dark depths of our sensibility

In the mind itself, our memory, our habits our automatisms of every kind, are the signs of that deep quiescent life, but the infinite variety of external circumstances finds in the mind resources of a superior order In particular, the mind creates both order and disorder, for its business is to provoke change In doing so, it develops within an ever vaster domain the fundamental law (or at least what I consider to be the fundamental law) of sensibility, which is to introduce into the living system an element of imminence, of always impending change

Our sensibility has the effect of interrupting at every moment, a kind of sleep that tends to overcome us, in harmony with the deep monotony of the functions of life We have to be shaken, warned, waked up at each instant by some irregularity, some event in our surroundings, or some change in our physiological rhythm, and we have organs, a whole specialized system that calls us back unexpectedly and frequently to *the new*, prompting us to find the adjustment that suits the circumstances, to find the attitude, the act, the move-

ment, the twist that will annul or accentuate the effects of novelty This system is our senses

The mind, then, borrows from sensibility (which provides the initial spark) that trait of changeableness required to set in motion its power of transformation

An animal, quietly at rest, hears an unusual noise, this is an *event* He pricks up his ears, straightens his neck, anxiety takes hold of him, the *power of transformation* spreads all over his body, brings him to his feet, his ear finds the direction, and he is off *It took but a murmur* In the same way, a mind that is alert to phenomena, a mind in which familiarity has not dulled sensitivity, is aroused, *caught* by some simple event (an object falling), intellectual concern overtakes it, is communicated to its whole potential of questions and conditions . Newton lived for twenty years in the forest of his calculations.

A further remark · the work which the mind spurs us to do, the modifications it imposes on its surroundings (whether Nature or human beings), these are the means by which the mind tends to communicate to human beings, and to Nature, precisely the same characteristics it recognizes in itself Have you noticed that all our inventions tend either to save our energies, or to save repetition (as I have said), or, again, to remove our bodies from their natural conditions, to impose on them, for example, speeds of a magnitude constantly approaching the mind's speed of perception and conception?

People used to say "as quick as thought" Rapidity seemed to belong to perception But today we know many kinds of speed greater than that In the time that elapses between the sight of an object and the memory or recognition it evokes, light has traveled thousands of miles and our car has done ten yards on the road Thought, then, seems to have cleverly

found the means of making things go as fast as itself. This is one way in which the functional properties of the mind have influenced the course of invention.

But my aim is not only to characterize the mind; it is above all to show what it has made of the world and how, in particular, it has produced modern society, in which both order and disorder, equally and for the same reason, are its handiwork. In the human world, the mind finds itself surrounded by other minds, each is, as it were, the center of a multitude of others like it; it is *unique* and yet it is only a unit in that indeterminate number: *it is at once incomparable and commonplace*. Its relations with all the others are one of its most important occupations. These relations are part of the contradiction I just pointed out. On the one hand, the mind is opposed to the mass; it wants to be itself, and even to extend, endlessly, the domain in which the *self is master*. On the other hand, it is forced to recognize society, a world of wills and human hopes all limiting one another, and sometimes it wants to perfect, at other times to destroy, the order it finds there.

The mind abhors groups, it does not like political parties, it feels itself diminished by the agreement of minds; indeed, it feels that it gains something from disagreement with them. A man who needs to think like his fellows is perhaps less *intelligent* than the man who detests conformity. Besides, we know very well that all agreement is unstable. We know that division lurks in all groups; schism, objection, distinction are, for the mind, acts of vitality that never fail to crop up, once agreement has been reached. The mind, then, regains its freedom by way of mental reservations and afterthoughts; it stands up even against the facts, against the evidence; it is, above all, the rebel, even in the act of bringing order. That is because it conceives *the real* as a kind of disorder to be brought

to an end But, in the world today, the mind requires no great effort to find a use for its constructive instinct The political scene offers endless opportunity

All politics imply a certain idea of man In vain do we limit political objectives, make them as simple or as crude as possible, all politics still imply a certain idea of man and of the mind, and a conception of the world Now, as I have already indicated, in the modern world the difference between the idea of man proposed by science and philosophy and the idea of man implied in our legislation and all our political, moral, or social notions, is increasing There is already an abyss between them

If we should translate anything of a social and moral order into the precise terms used in science, the discord between the two ideas would be obvious one would be the product of recent objective research, founded on *verifiable* evidence (which is the exact meaning of the world "scientific"), the other, a vague and confused notion, in which ancient beliefs, the customs of every age, abstractions from a thousand years back, the economic and political experience of many peoples, and a host of more or less venerable sentiments, all oddly intermingle and combine Let us give an example if we tried to apply, in the realm of politics, the ideas about man which we find in the current doctrines of science, life would probably become unbearable for most of us There would be a general revolt of feeling in the face of such strict application of perfectly rational data For it would end, in fact, by classifying *each individual, invading his personal life,* sometimes killing or mutilating certain degenerate or inferior types *

* A recent piece of legislation in a certain foreign country has fulfilled this prediction by prescribing several such strictly rational measures [P V]

I do not know whether man will ever consent to so purely rational an organization I chose this example purposely exaggerated only to show the remarkable contrast between certain conceptions now coexisting and competing in our minds each with its own strength and linked either with tradition or progress Actually this antinomy between scientific *truth* and political *reality* is something quite new The gap did not always exist There have been periods when the conception of man held by the judge and the statesman or embodied in laws and customs and that formulated by the philosophy of the time were not contradictory

I said just now that the mind is characterized by a power of transformation that tends to alter the original animal condition of the species and that as a result it has managed to build for itself a kind of world quite different from the world as it originally was It is not surprising therefore that the mind is a prey to numerous perplexities brought on by the conflicts and contradictions that inevitably arise between the kind of progress I just spoke of and the fundamental nature of man the nature he started with Side by side with the real enigmas that face us in things themselves we find others posed by our own handiwork by the accumulation of our own creations

A great many of our present difficulties derive from the vigorous survival of a kind of mystique or mythology which is less and less in agreement with facts but which we do not know how to get rid of We constantly feel both its dead hand and the necessity for it A struggle is going on in us between the past represented by that mythology, and a sort of future trying to take shape in us Never has the struggle between yesterday and tomorrow raged so furiously as today You

might indeed discover a few faint suggestions of it, certain *prefigurations*, in history, for example, at the end of ancient times, at the beginning of Christianity, at the time of the Renaissance, or at the moment of the French Revolution

But the scale of events has curiously altered The further we go, the more we feel the widening gap between the two aspects of the mind's activity, the one of transformation and *the other of preservation*

Let me first say that the whole social structure is founded on *belief* and *trust* All power is based on these psychological traits It may be said that the *social*, the *judicial*, and the *political worlds*, are essentially *mythical worlds*, that is, worlds in which the constitutive laws, principles, and relationships are not the result of observation or notation or direct perception, but, on the contrary, draw their vitality, their strength, their power to compel or restrain, from us, *and their vitality and power are all the greater as we are the more unaware that they have their origin in us, in our own minds*

To believe in the human word, spoken or written, is just as indispensable to human beings as to trust in the firmness of the ground Certainly we do doubt it here and there, but we can doubt it only in particular cases

An oath, a contract, a signature, the institution of credit, and the relations which all these imply, the substance of the past, our sense of the future, the teachings we receive, the plans we make—all these things are by nature wholly mythical, in the sense that they are wholly based on the cardinal principle of our minds, *not to treat as things of the mind things that are of the mind only*

Now, the essential character of our indispensable mythology is this it is the means of making *unequal* exchanges—of exchanging spoken or written words for merchandise, of ex-

changing a bird in the hand for a bird in the bush of exchanging present and certain *for future and uncertain* and what is still more remarkable of exchanging trust for obedience enthusiasm for renunciation and sacrifice sentiment for action

In short of exchanging the present the palpable the ponderable the real for imaginary advantages But the growth of the positivist mentality a growth resulting as you know from the ever tighter organization of the world where measurable things more and more dominate the scene where the vagueness of *vague things* is more and more obvious the growth as I said of the positivist mentality is undermining the ancient foundations of society

It must be acknowledged that our ruin has been hastened by the greatest minds (Voltaire, for example) Even in the sciences the task of criticism has proved singularly necessary and fruitful The greatest minds are always skeptical minds Yet they do believe in something *they believe in whatever makes them greater* This was the case, for example, with Napoleon, who believed in his star, that is in himself Now, not to believe in the common beliefs is obviously to believe in oneself and often in oneself alone

But to clarify this glimpse into the *fiduciary life* of the world founded on confidence in man and in the future, and to give you a sense of the very real importance of the imaginary, I should like to show you how *power* itself which is ordinarily thought to result from force, is essentially a spiritual value

Power has only the force we are willing to attribute to it, even the most brutal power is founded on belief *We credit it with the ability to act at all times and everywhere, whereas, in reality, it can only act at one point and at a certain moment* In short, all power is exactly in the position of a bank whose

existence depends on the sole probability (incidentally, very great) that all its clients will not come at once to draw out their deposits *If, either constantly or at any particular moment, a certain power were summoned to bring to bear its real force at every point in its empire, its strength at each point would be about equal to zero*

Notice too (and this is an even more interesting consideration), that *if all men were equally enlightened, equally critical, and above all equally courageous, no society would be possible!*

Trust, credulity, inequality of intellect, and fear in a thousand forms are here equally indispensable And to these essentials must be added greed and vanity—and other virtues —the condiments, the psychological accessories to those psychological bases of society and politics

But I want to give you a rather striking (though purely fanciful) illustration of the fiduciary structure which is necessary to the whole edifice of civilization, and which is the work of the mind

Suppose (and this supposition is not mine, it was made, I think, by an English or an American writer whose name I have forgotten, and whose book I have not read, I am merely borrowing the idea, which I found a long time ago in some review of the book)   well, the author in question supposes that a kind of mysterious disease attacks and quickly destroys all the paper in the world No defense, no remedy, it is impossible to find any means of exterminating the microbe or of countering the physiochemical phenomenon attacking the cellulose The unknown destroyer penetrates drawers and chests, reduces to dust the contents of our pocketbooks and *our libraries, every written thing* vanishes

Paper, you know, plays the part of a storage battery and

a conductor, it conducts not only from one man to another but from one time to another, carrying a *highly variable charge of authenticity or credibility*

Imagine, then, that paper is no more no more bank notes, bonds, treaties, records, laws, poems, newspapers, etc At once the whole life of society is struck down, and out of the ruins of the past we see the future emerging, the potential and the probable—*pure reality*

Everyone immediately realizes that he is reduced to his own sphere of perception and action In each individual future and past draw incredibly close together, we are reduced to the radius of our senses and our immediate acts

It is easy to imagine this example of the enormous role played by verbal and fiduciary values Nothing could more impress upon us the fragility of world order and the *spiritual nature* of social order than this fantastic supposition

But I shall now make another, a far less fantastic supposition, which ought on that account to be more impressive instead of decaying from some disease, a sort of tuberculosis of paper (that fragile basis of so many things), suppose now that the *basis of that basis* should weaken and collapse—I mean the trust, the confidence, the credit we give to written paper, thus giving it all its value Such a thing has happened before, but never to the universal extent we must unhappily recognize in our day We are no longer in the realm of supposition We have seen solemn treaties trampled under foot, others shorn of all force in a day, States, *all States*, are seen to fail in their obligations, to repudiate their signatures, to threaten or repay their creditors with the "abhorred vacuum"

We have seen legislators constrained to release individuals themselves from obligations imposed on them by private contracts

I make so bold as to say—an extraordinary thing!—that gold itself, *gold* is no longer fully possessed of its immemorial and mythical sovereignty, yet once it seemed to contain within its precious and weighty atom the refined essence of confidence! .

What we have, then, is a general crisis of values Nothing escapes, either in the economic or the moral or the political realm Freedom itself has ceased to be fashionable Even the most up-to-date opinions, which used to clamor for it furiously fifty years ago, today deny and immolate it! . . . The crisis is spreading to everything science, civil law, Newton's mechanics, diplomatic traditions Everything is affected by it I am not even sure that love itself is not coming to be evaluated in a very different way from that of the last half-dozen centuries. .

In short, a crisis of confidence, of fundamental conceptions—there is indeed, a crisis of all human relationships, that is to say, of the values given or received by minds

But that is not yet all, we must now envisage (and it is with this that I shall end) a crisis of the mind itself. I shall not speak of the particular crisis in the sciences, which seem now to despair of their ancient ideal of explaining the universe as a unified whole The universe is breaking up, losing all hope of a single design *The world of the ultramicroscopic seems* strangely different from the world as an agglomerate mass, in the former, even the identity of bodies is lost . . . Nor shall I mention the crisis of determinism, that is to say, of causality

I am thinking, rather, of the dangers that are so seriously threatening the very existence of all the higher values of the mind

It is clearly possible to conceive an almost happy condition

for humanity or at least a stable pacified organized comfortable condition (I do not say that we are anywhere near it), but in conceiving such a state we realize that it brings with it or would bring a most tepid intellectual temperature in general *happy people have no mind* They have no great need of it

If then the world is moving down a certain incline and has already gone some distance down it we must from now on *recognize that the conditions are rapidly vanishing in which and thanks to which the things we most admire in man's most admirable works so far have been created and had their influence*

Everything now conspires against the chances of creating what might be or rather might have been, noblest and most beautiful How can this be?

To begin with it is easy to observe in ourselves a diminution a kind of general clouding over of sensibility We moderns are not very sensitive Modern man has blunted his senses, he puts up with every kind of noise, as we all know, he puts up with nauseating smells, with violently contrasting or insanely intense lighting, he is subjected to perpetual vibration, he feels the need of brutal stimulants, strident sounds, the strongest drinks brief and bestial emotions

He tolerates incoherence, he lives in mental disorder On the other hand, the work of the mind to which we owe everything has become sometimes too facile Co-ordinated mental effort is today equipped with powerful instruments to make it easier, sometimes to the point of doing away with it We have invented symbols and built machines to save attention, to relieve us of the patient and difficult labor of the mind and such methods of symbolization and rapid depiction can only continue to multiply *Their aim is to do away with the effort of thinking*

Finally, the conditions of modern life tend inevitably, implacably, to make individuals all alike, to level character, and, unhappily yet necessarily, the average tends to decline *toward the lowest type* Bad money drives out good

Another danger I notice that credulity and naiveté are developing to an alarming degree I have noticed in the last few years a number of new superstitions that were nonexistent in France twenty years ago and now are gradually coming *even into our drawing rooms We see very distinguished* people knocking on wood and practicing other exorcisms and fiduciary acts Moreover, one of the most striking characteristics of the world today is *futility* I may say, with no risk of being too harsh, that we are torn between futility and anxiety We have the finest playthings man has ever possessed the motorcar, the yo-yo, the radio, and the cinema, we have everything that genius could create for transmitting, with the speed of light, things not always of the highest quality What amusements—never so many toys! But what anxieties—never so many alarms!

And lastly, what chores! Chores concealed in comfort itself! Chores that from day to day are only multiplied by our efficiency and our concern for the morrow, for we are caught by the ever more perfect organization of life in an ever tighter net of rules and constraints, many of which we never notice! We are by no means aware of all the things we obey The telephone rings, we hurry to it, the clock strikes, an appointment calls us Think of the work schedules, the timetables, the growing demands of hygiene, even the standardization of spelling, which used not to exist, even regulated street crossings, and think what they mean in terms of their effect on the mind Everything commands us, everything puts pressure on us, everything prescribes what we have to do and

tells us to do it automatically Testing our reflexes has become the important test of the day

Even the fashion industries have put fantasy under discipline under *regulations* to control copying whereby the secret schemes of business rule the aesthetics of the day

In short in every way we are circumscribed dominated by a hidden or obvious regimentation extending to everything and we are so bewildered by the chaos of stimuli obsessing us that *we end by needing it*

Are these not detestable conditions for the future production of works of art comparable to those which humanity has created in preceding centuries? We have lost the *leisure to ripen* and if we look into ourselves as artists we no longer find that other virtue of our predecessors in the creation of beauty the aim to endure Of the many beliefs I have said were dying, one is already gone that is the belief in posterity and its judgment

We are now at the end of this review of disorder, which has been rapid and perforce without order Perhaps you are expecting me to draw some conclusion We like a play to end happily, or at least to end. You shall have prompt satisfaction on the latter point For the other, I repeat that my subject is precisely the impossibility of concluding The need for a conclusion is so strong in us that we irresistibly and absurdly import conclusions into history and even into politics We cut out patterns of events to make well-rounded tragedies, we want a war, when it ends to have a clear-cut ending There is no need for me to tell you that unfortunately this desire is illusory We believe, too, that a revolution is a clear solution, and we know that this is not true either These are but crude oversimplifications

The only conclusion to a study of this kind, to this glimpse of chaos, the only conclusion that might be desirable would be a prediction or presentiment of some sort of future. But I abhor prophesying. Some time ago someone came and asked me what I augured of life and what I thought things would be like in fifty years. As I shrugged my shoulders, the questioner lowered his sights and his prices, and said: "Well, where shall we be in twenty years?" I replied: "*We are backing into the future*," and I added: "How much could anyone have foreseen in 1882, or 1892, of what has happened since that time? In 1882, fifty years ago, it was impossible to foresee the events and discoveries that have profoundly transformed the face of the earth." And I added, further: "Sir, in 1892 would you have foreseen that in 1932, in order to cross a street in Paris, you would have to seek the protection of a six-month-old baby—negotiate a street-crossing under the safe-conduct of an infant?" He replied: "No, that is something I shouldn't have foreseen either."

In short, more and more it is becoming useless and even dangerous to make predictions based on evidence from yesterday or the day before, but it is still wise, and this will be my last word, to be ready for anything, or almost anything. We must keep in our minds and hearts the will to lucid understanding and precision of mind, a sense of greatness and risk, a sense of the extraordinary adventure on which mankind has set out, departing perhaps too far from the primary and natural conditions of his species, and headed I know not where!

On History

[1931]

HISTORY is the most dangerous product evolved from the chemistry of the intellect Its properties are well known It causes dreams, it intoxicates whole peoples gives them false memories, quickens their reflexes, keeps their old wounds open, torments them in their repose, leads them into delusions either of grandeur or persecution, and makes nations bitter, arrogant, insufferable, and vain

History will justify anything It teaches precisely nothing for it contains everything and furnishes examples of everything

How many books have been written entitled "the lesson of this, the teaching of that"! Nothing could make more absurd reading, after the events that actually followed, instead of the ones the books told us would be the way of the future

In the present state of the world the danger of letting oneself be seduced by history is greater than it ever was

The political phenomena of our time are accompanied and complicated by an unexampled *change of scale*, or rather by a *change in the order of things* The world to which we are beginning to belong, both men and nations, is only *similar* to the world that was once familiar to us The system of causes controlling the fate of every one of us, and now extending over

the whole globe, makes it reverberate throughout at every shock, there are no more questions that can be settled by being settled at one point

History as it was formerly conceived was pictured as a group of parallel chronological tables, between which certain transverse accidentals were sometimes marked here and there A few attempts at synchronization produced no results, apart from a kind of demonstration of their futility What was happening at Peking in Caesar's time, or on the Zambezi in Napoleon's time, happened on another planet But *melodic* history is no longer possible All political themes are now intermingled, and each event as it occurs immediately takes on a number of simultaneous and inseparable meanings.

The policy of a Richelieu or a Bismarck loses its way and its meaning in these new surroundings The notions they employed in their schemes, the aims they could propose to the ambition of their peoples, the forces that figured in their calculations, all these have become unimportant The chief business of politicians was—and still is, for some—*to acquire territory* Force was applied, the coveted land was taken from someone, and that was that But who can fail to see that those enterprises which used to be limited to a talk followed by a duel followed by a pact, will in the future inspire such inevitable generalizations as *nothing can ever happen again without the whole world's taking a hand*, that no one will ever be able to predict or circumscribe the almost immediate consequences of any undertaking whatever

All the genius of the great governments of the past has been exhausted, rendered impotent and even *useless* by the enlarged field and the greater number of connections between political phenomena, for there is no genius, no vigor of character or intellect, no tradition—even the British—that can

henceforward pride itself on countering or modifying at will the mood and reactions of a human world in which the old *geometry of history* and the old *mechanics of politics* no longer in the least apply

Europe makes me think of an object suddenly transported into a more complex space where all its known characteristics, though remaining the same in appearance, are subjected to quite different *relations* In particular, the forecasts that were possible, the traditional calculations, have become emptier than they ever were

The aftermath of the recent war* has shown us events that would formerly have determined for a long time, and precisely *in the direction they indicated*, the shape and progress of general policy, but now, after a few years and in consequence of the number of parties engaged, the enlargement of the theater and the complication of interests, those events are deprived of their energy and absorbed or contradicted by their immediate consequences

We must expect such transformations to become the rule The farther we go the less simple and predictable the effects will be, and the less any political operations and even interventions of force—in a word, obvious and direct action—will turn out as they were expected to do *The sizes, areas, and masses involved, their relations, the impossibility of localizing anything, the prompt repercussions, all will more and more impose a policy very different from the existing one*

Effects are so rapidly becoming incalculable from their causes, and even contradictory to their causes, that henceforward it will perhaps be thought puerile, dangerous, and senseless to look for the causal event, to try to produce it or prevent it; perhaps the political mind will stop thinking in

* That of 1914-18 [P V]

terms of events, a habit that is essentially due to history and sustained by it. It is not that there will be no more events and even "monumental moments" in time, there will be immense ones! But those whose function it is to anticipate them, to prepare for them or against them, will necessarily learn more and more to be wary of their sequel. It will not be enough to have both desire and ability to engage in an undertaking. Nothing was more completely ruined by the last war than the pretension to foresight. But it was not from any lack of knowledge of history, surely?

Historical Fact

[1932]

My Young Friends,

FIRST of all let me tell you about a memory of a memory. The remarkable and thoughtful address we have just heard reminded me of a little scene once described for me by the great painter Degas.

He told me that when he was a small child his mother took him one day to the Rue de Tournon to visit Mme Le Bas, widow of the famous Member of the Convention, who shot himself on the Ninth Thermidor.

The visit over, they were slowly making their way to the front door, accompanied by the old lady, when Mme Degas suddenly halted, strongly moved. Dropping her son's hand, she pointed to the portraits of Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint-Just which she had just recognized on the walls of the vestibule, and she could not help exclaiming in horror: "What! Do you still keep those monsters' faces here!" "Hush, Célestine!" Mme Le Bas replied warmly. "Hush! They were saints!"

And that, my dear young people, may be easily related to what M. Lanson was telling us. In a few words, Professor Lanson has put before you in a most striking manner the contrasting opinions of several historians of the first rank, concerning the men and events of the French Revolution

He has shown you that those experts on the Terror agreed with each other precisely as Danton agreed with Robespierre —although with less extreme consequences I do not say that the impulses of the mind are one bit less positive in writers than in men of action, but in normal times the guillotine, luckily, is not at the disposal of historians

Yet I shall not conceal from you that if the deeper meaning of philosophical quarrels and even literary polemics were looked into, traced back to the heart by some relentless analysis, there is no doubt that we should find at the root of our opinions and our favorite theories some strange source of implacable determination, some obscure blind will *to be right* by exterminating the enemy Convictions are simply and secretly murderous.

You have seen, then, in the quotations and the precise comments brought together for you, how different minds proceeding from the same data, bringing to bear on the same documents their critical powers and their talents for imaginative organization—and moreover animated (I trust) by an identical desire to reach the truth—are yet divided and opposed, repelling each other almost as violently as political factions

Whether historians or partisans, men of learning or men of action, they make themselves—half-consciously, half-unconsciously—infinitely sensitive to certain facts or certain characteristics, and completely insensitive to others, which would hamper or destroy their theories, and neither the degree of cultivation of their minds, nor the solidity and amplitude of their knowledge, nor even their loyalty, nor their profundity seems to have the slightest influence on what might be called their *capacity for historical dissent*

Whether we listen to Mme Degas or to Mme Le Bas, or

to the noble, pure, and gentle severity of Joseph de Maistre or to the great, fiery Michelet or to Taine or Tocqueville, or to M Aulard or M Mathiez there are as many opinions as persons, as many points of view as pairs of eyes Every historian of that tragic period holds out to us some severed head as the object of his partiality

What could be more remarkable than that such dissensions should persist, in spite of the quantity and quality of the work done on the same remnants of the past, and that they should even get worse, and that minds should grow more *hardened* and *divergent*, *in* that very work *which ought to* lead them to the same conclusions?

In vain do we increase our efforts, vary our methods, broaden or limit the field of study, examine things from a distance, or probe the microscopic structure of an epoch, ransack personal archives, family papers, private records, contemporary newspapers, municipal decrees, these various developments do not converge, they find no single idea as their limit The final term of each is the nature and character of their authors, and only one proof ever results from them, which is the impossibility of separating the observer from the thing observed, and history from the historian

There are, however, points on which everybody agrees In every history book there are certain propositions on which the actors, witnesses, historians, and factions are united These are strokes of luck, true *accidents*, and it is these accidents these remarkable exceptions all taken together, that constitute the unquestionable part of our knowledge of the past These accidents of agreement, these coincidences of consent define "historical facts"—but not entirely

Everyone agrees that Louis XIV died in 1715 But in 1715 an infinite number of other observable things occurred which

would require an infinite number of words, books, and even libraries if they were to be preserved in written form. We must therefore *choose*, that is, agree not only on the *existence* but also on the *importance* of the fact, and the latter is capital. Agreement on existence means that men can *believe* only what seems to them least tainted with humanity, and that they consider complete agreement so unlikely that it justifies eliminating their personalities, their instincts, their interests, their individual vision—all of them sources of error and potential falsification. But since we cannot retain everything, and since we have to free ourselves from the infinitude of facts by judging their relative interest for the future, the decision on importance inevitably reintroduces into the historical work the very thing we had just tried to eliminate. As your classmates in Philosophy would say, importance is completely subjective. Importance is a matter of discretion, as is the value of testimony. One may reasonably think the discovery of the properties of Peruvian bark more *important* than such and such a treaty concluded at about the same time; and, indeed, today in 1932 the consequences of this diplomatic instrument may be totally lost and, as it were, diffused in the chaos of events, whereas fever is still with us, the marshy regions of the globe are being increasingly inhabited and exploited, and quinine has perhaps been indispensable to the exploration and settlement of the whole earth, which is, *to my mind*, the dominant fact of our century.

You see, I too am making my own criteria of importance.

Besides, history demands and implies many other biases. For example, among the rules of the game there is one that is so readily thought to be significant in itself and capable of use without precaution that I caused a scandal some time ago by trying to find the exact expression for it.

Do I dare speak to you of *dates* which once so cruelly ruled over every examination? Do I dare disturb your youthful notion of causality, by reminding you of that old sophistry, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, which plays so great a part in history? Shall I tell you that the numerical sequence of dates has the same great but limited value as the order of the alphabet and that, moreover the succession of events or their coincidence has no meaning except in each particular case and within the limited area where those events may, *from the point of view of some witness*, act or react one on another? I should be afraid of astonishing and shocking you if I insinuated that Micromegas, were he to wander at random in Time and fall from ancient Alexandria at the height of its glory into an African village or some hamlet in France today, would necessarily suppose that the brilliant capital of the Ptolemies was three or four thousand years *later* than the agglomeration of huts or hovels whose inhabitants are our contemporaries

All such assumptions are inevitable I am criticizing only our negligence in not making them explicit, conscious, palpable to the mind I regret that no one has yet done for history what the exact sciences did for themselves when they revised their fundamentals, searching with the greatest care for their axioms and numbering their postulates

This is perhaps because History is above all a *Muse*, and we prefer that she should be so At this point I can say no more ... I honor the Muses

It is also because the *past* is an entirely mental thing It is nothing but images and beliefs Notice that we use a kind of contradictory procedure for evoking the various figures of the different epochs On the one hand, we need the free use of our ability to pretend, to live other lives than our own, on the other, we must restrain that freedom in order to take

account of documents, and we make an effort to arrange and organize past events by using our own energy and our own forms of thought and attention, things *essentially of the present*. You can observe this in yourselves every time you are overtaken by history and think historically, every time you allow yourself to be inveigled into reliving the human adventure of some past era, your interest in it is wholly sustained by your feeling that things could have happened entirely otherwise, could have taken quite a different turn. At each moment you imagine a *next moment* unlike the one that actually followed: that is, for each imaginary present in which you place yourself, you conceive a different future from the one that actually took place.

IF Robespierre had won?—IF Grouchy had arrived in time on the field of Waterloo?—IF Napoleon had had Louis XVI's navy and a man like Suffren ... IF ... always IF ...

This little conjunction *if* is full of meaning. In itself, perhaps, it holds the secret of the most intimate link between life and history. It imparts to the study of the past the anxiety and expectation that define the present. It confers on history the power of novels and tales. It allows us to share in that *suspense in the face of uncertainty* which is the principal sensation of great lives, of nations in battle when their fate is at stake, of ambitious men when they see that the next moment will mean the crown or the scaffold, of the artist about to unveil his statue or order the removal of the trusses and props that still support his building ... .

If this element of living time were removed from history, we should find that its very substance—*pure* history, history composed of *facts* only, those incontestable facts that I have mentioned—is quite pointless, for facts by themselves have no meaning. From time to time, someone says to you: "This

is a fact You must bow before the fact " What he is saying is "You must *believe* you must believe because man has had nothing to do with it It is things themselves speaking *It is a fact* "

Yes But what is to be done with a *fact*? More than anything else, a fact is like the Pythian oracles or those royal dreams that Joseph and Daniel, in the Bible, interpret for their terrified kings In history, as in everything else, what is positive is ambiguous What is real lends itself to an infinite number of interpretations

That is why De Maistre and Michelet are both possible, and that is why, perhaps, when they speculate on the past they become oracles, augurs, prophets, adopting the same grandeur of style and the same sublimity of language, while they confer on the past all the living profundity that in truth belongs only to the future

And so, within ourselves, looking backward and looking forward, grasping the past or sensing the future are much the same thing, for we cannot help oscillating between images, and our perpetual present is like an interval between equidistant suppositions, one assuming the past and the other presuming a future.

You young people now before me make me dream of *times I shall never see, as well as those I shall see no more* I look at you and see myself at your age, and am tempted to foresee

I have been talking to you far too long about history, and nearly forgot to tell you the essential thing, which is this: the best way to get an idea of the value and use of history—the best way of learning to read it and use it—consists in taking one's own experience as typical of all knowledge of past events, in drawing from the present the model for our curios-

ity about the past What we have seen with our own eyes, what we have personally experienced, what we were and what we did—these should provide us with the questionnaire, drawn from our own life, we shall then ask history to fill it out, and she must do her best to answer when we ask her about times we never lived through *What was it like to live in such and such a period?* That, at bottom, is the whole question. All the abstractions and notions you find in books are empty if you are not given the means of discovering them in your own experience

But when we look at ourselves historically—*sub specie historiae*—we are led to a certain problem, and its solution will immediately affect our judgment of the value of history *If history is anything more than a diversion for the mind,* it is because we hope to draw lessons from it We think we can deduce from knowledge of the past some foreknowledge of the future.

Let us now match this pretension with our personal history, and if we are already several decades old, let us try to compare what has happened with what we expected—the event with the anticipation

I was in Rhetoric Class in 1887 (Rhetoric has since become the First Form or Senior Class a great change, which could give us much to reflect on)

Well, I now ask myself how much of what has since happened could be foreseen in 1887—forty-five years ago?

Note that we have the very best conditions for historical experience. We have at our disposal perhaps an excessive quantity of data books, newspapers, photographs, personal recollections, and numerous eyewitnesses. History has not generally been put together out of such a wealth of materials

So, what could be foreseen? I merely pose the problem

And I shall point out no more than a few features of the time when I was doing my Rhetoric

In those days we saw in the streets a great many animals hardly ever seen nowadays except on racecourses, and not a single automobile (Let us note here that according to certain scholars the use of the horse for traction did not become widespread until the thirteenth century thus freeing Europe from porterage, a system requiring slaves This comparison allows you to conceive of the motorcar as an historical fact)

In 1887 too the air was strictly reserved for real birds Electricity had not yet lost its wires Solid bodies were still fairly solid Opaque bodies were still quite opaque Newton and Galileo reigned in peace Physics was happy and its references absolute Time flowed by in quiet days all hours were equal in the sight of the Universe Space enjoyed being infinite, homogeneous, and perfectly indifferent to what went on in its august bosom Matter felt that it had good and just laws and did not suspect for a moment that in the realm of the ultramicroscopic certain of them could change, to the point of losing in that abyss of division the very sense of law

All this is now but dreams and smoke All this has been transformed like the map of Europe, like the political face of the planet, like the appearance of our streets, or like my own schoolfellows—those who are still alive—who, when I last saw them, were students more or less, and who are now senators, generals, deans, presidents, or members of the Institute

The latter transformations might have been foreseen, but what of the others? Could the greatest scholar, the profoundest philosopher, the most calculating politician of 1887 even have dreamed of what we now see, after a mere forty-five years? We cannot even conceive what operations of the mind

dealing with the historical material accumulated in 1887, could have deduced from even the most informed knowledge of the past, even a crudely approximate idea of what exists in 1932

That is why I shall take care not to prophesy I feel too keenly, and I have said so elsewhere, that *we are backing into the future* That, for me, is the surest and most important lesson of history, for history is the science of things that do not repeat themselves Things that repeat themselves, experiments that can be performed again, observations that are identical, belong to physics, and to some extent to biology.

Yet I would not have you think it fruitless to meditate on the past in its pastness In particular it shows us the frequent failure of predictions that are too precise, and, on the other hand, the great advantages of a general and constant *preparation* which—without claiming to determine or defy events, for these are invariably surprising or develop surprising consequences—makes it possible for men to maneuver readily against the unexpected

You young people are starting out in life, and you will find yourselves involved in a very interesting period An interesting period is always an enigmatic one, promising little repose, prosperity, continuity, or security We live in a critical age, that is to say an age in which a number of incompatible things are found together, none of which can either vanish or prevail This state of things is so complex and so new that no one today can boast of understanding it—which does not mean that no one does so boast All the notions we thought solid, all the values of civilized life, all that made for stability in international relations, all that made for regularity in the economy . . in a word, all that tended happily to limit the uncertainty of the morrow, all that gave to nations and in-

dividuals some confidence in the morrow all this seems badly compromised I have consulted all the augurs I could find of every species, and I have heard only vague words contradictory prophecies curiously feeble assurances Never has humanity combined so much power with so much disorder so much anxiety with so many playthings, so much knowledge with so much uncertainty Worry and futility divide our days between them

It is for you now, my dear young people to make a start in life and shortly in your work There is no lack of tasks In arts letters science in practical affairs, in politics you can and you should consider that everything is to be rethought and redone You will have to count on yourselves far more than we had to You must therefore equip your minds, which does not mean that learning is enough There is no point in possessing what you have no intention of using, thus making it part of your thought It is with knowledge as with words A limited vocabulary, but one with which you can make numerous combinations, is better than thirty thousand words that only hamper the action of the mind I am not going to offer you advice Advice should be given to the very elderly, and the young often do so Allow me, however, to ask you to listen to one or two further remarks

Modern life tends to spare us intellectual effort just as it does physical effort For example, it replaces imagination by images, reasoning by symbols and writing or by machines and often by nothing It offers us every facility, every *short cut* for arriving at our goal without making the journey And this is excellent, but it is also rather dangerous It combines with other causes, which I shall not enumerate, to produce—how shall I put it—a certain general diminution of value and effort in the realm of the mind I wish I were wrong, but my

own observation is unfortunately confirmed by others. When machines reduced the necessity of physical effort, athletics fortunately came along to save and even to glorify the muscular man. We should perhaps consider the utility of doing for the mind what has been done for the body. I dare *not tell you that everything that requires no effort is a waste of* time. But there are a few atoms of truth in that cruel sentence.

Here at last is my final word: history, I fear, scarcely enables us to foresee, but combined with independence of mind, it can help us to see. Look at the world today, and then look at France. Her situation is singular; she is fairly strong, and is regarded with no very friendly eye. It is important that she should count on herself alone. Here it is that history intervenes to teach us that our internal quarrels have always been fatal to us. When France feels united, nothing avails against her.

The Outlook for Intelligence

[1935]

A LITTLE over two years ago, in this same place, I had the honor to speak on what I called "Politics of the Mind." You may remember that under this title (which is not exactly clear) I was concerned over the present state of things in the world, and was inquiring into the facts of which we are the witnesses and agents, dealing not so much with their political or economic character as with the situation they have created for affairs of the mind. I dwelt (perhaps at too great length) on this critical situation, and I said, in effect, that a disorder to which no end could be imagined was observable on every hand. We find it around us and within us, in our daily habits, in our manners, in the newspapers, in our pleasures, and even in our knowledge. Interruption, incoherence, surprise are the ordinary conditions of our life. They have even become real needs for many people, whose minds are no longer fed, it would seem, by anything but sudden changes and constantly renewed stimuli. The words "sensational," "amazing," commonly used today, are the kind of words that describe an era. We can no longer bear anything that lasts. We no longer know how to make boredom bear fruit. Our nature abhors a vacuum, any kind of empty space on which, in the past, minds knew how to project the image of their ideals—their Ideas, in Plato's sense. This state of things, which I called

"chaotic" is the combined result of the works and the accumulated labor of men. Of course it points to some kind of future, but one that is absolutely impossible for us to imagine; and among many other innovations, *this* is one of the greatest. We can no longer deduce from what we know any notion of the future to which we can give the slightest credence.

Within a few decades, in fact, we have destroyed and created so much, at the expense of the past—refuting and disorganizing it, reorganizing the ideas, methods, and institutions it had bequeathed us—that the present seems without precedent or example. We no longer look on the past as a son looks on his father, from whom he may learn something, but as a grown man looks on a child. At times we might even fancy reviving the greatest of our ancestors for the pleasure of instructing and astonishing them.

I often find amusement in imagining the resurrection of one of our great men of the past. I offer to be his guide and walk with him through Paris. I listen as he presses me with questions, or exclaims with wonder. By such childish means, I force myself to feel astonished at what I see every day without astonishment, and so feel the immense difference which the passage of time has made between life in the past and life today. But I soon feel helpless in my role as a guide. Just imagine all you would need to know if you had to explain to some resurrected Descartes or Napoleon our present way of life, to make him understand how we can manage to live in such strange conditions, in surroundings he would surely find rather frightening and even hostile. My helplessness is a measure of the change that has taken place.

I can here touch only lightly on the enormous question of the changes, beyond all foreseeing, which have so profoundly

transformed the world and, in a mere few years, made it unrecognizable to any observer who has lived long enough to have seen it otherwise I must stress the short time it has taken to bring about such tremendous changes and above all I would have your minds dwell a little on the causes that have been most powerful in this sudden mutation I am thinking of all the new facts, entirely new prodigiously new facts that have come to light since the beginning of the last century

Before that time scientific research had dealt only with well-known phenomena—that is phenomena that had been *perceptible since the beginning of time, and moreover directly perceptible* Of course, the notion of the universe had been changing profoundly, and so had the notion of science itself correlatively but the quantity of observable phenomena on the one hand and man's powers of action on the other, had not perceptibly increased Now, in 1800, I think, the discovery of the electric current, by means of that admirable invention the battery, opened up the era of new facts that were to change the face of the world It is not without interest to pause at that date, to reflect that it is only a hundred and thirty-five years ago that this revelation took place You know its wonderful sequel how the whole field of electrodynamics and electromagnetism was opened up to the passionate curiosity of scientists, how its applications have multiplied, how the relations between electricity and light were discovered with all the consequences in theory that followed, and finally radiation, the study of which has called into question all our physical knowledge and even our habits of thought

Now think how many are the radically new and unpredictable facts that in less than a century and a half have startled our minds from the electric current to X rays and the various

forms of radiation discovered since Curie, add to these the many practical applications, from telegraph to television, and you will understand by reflecting on this absolutely new thing that has come into the world of man in so short a time (and whose possibilities seem limitless) *what an effort of adaptation is required of our race, limited for so long to considering and using phenomena that had been accessible to firsthand observation from the beginning*

I shall now tell you a little story to underline the idea I am proposing, which is, in short, that the human race is entering a phase of its history in which all prediction becomes—by the sheer fact of being a prediction—a risk of error, a suspect product of our minds

Imagine, then, that all the greatest scientists down to about the end of the eighteenth century—the Archimedes, the Newtons, the Galileos, and the Descartes—are gathered in some part of the lower world, and a messenger from earth brings a dynamo *for them to examine at their leisure* They are told that this apparatus is used by the living to produce movement, light, or heat They look at it, they set it going Next, they take it to pieces, and inspect and measure each part In short, they do all they can . . But they know nothing about the electric current, they know nothing about induction, they only know about mechanical transformation. "What are those coiled wires for?" they ask They are forced to recognize their incompetence So, all knowledge and all human genius, united in the face of this mysterious object, fail to discover its secret, fail to guess the new fact established by Volta, and other facts discovered by Ampère, Faraday, *et al* . . .

(We must not fail to notice here that all those great men

who have just shown themselves incapable of understanding a dynamo fallen from earth to the lower world, have done exactly what we do when we inspect a brain, weigh it dissect it, cut it into thin slices and submit these prepared sections to histological examination Our natural transformer remains incomprehensible to us)

Notice too that for my story about the dynamo, I have chosen minds of the first magnitude reduced to incompetence by their radical inability to explain an apparatus whose operation and use are today familiar to so many and have even become indispensable to the life of society

In short, we have the privilege—or the truly interesting misfortune—of witnessing a profound, rapid, and irresistible transformation of all the conditions of human action

You should by no means imagine that our predecessors could have witnessed such obvious and extraordinary changes during their own lives Some forty years ago, a friend of mine, in my presence, was making light of the well-known expression "period of transition," and said it was an absurd cliché. "Every period is a transition," he said At that point I picked up a piece of sugar (the conversation occurred after dinner), showed it to him, put it in my cup of coffee, and said

"Do you imagine this lump of sugar, which has been in the sugar bowl for quite a long time, and quite at peace, is not in the process of experiencing sensations of an entirely novel kind? Is it not, at the moment, in a period which it might call 'transitional'? Do you imagine that a woman expecting a child does not feel in quite a different state than before, and that she cannot call this part of her life a period of transition? I hope she can, both for her sake and the child's"

And today I say

"Do you imagine that a man who lived through the years

from 1872 to 1890, for example, and then from the years 1890 to 1933, would not feel some difference of rhythm between these two periods of his life?"

I do not wish to recount all that has been profoundly modified, altered, and replaced in the last thirty years—having shown you the essentials of that picture of transformation two years ago. I shall simply say, by way of summarizing my thought and introducing the subject I shall deal with today, that some thirty years ago it was still possible to examine the things of the world *in historical perspective*, that is, everyone in those days expected to find in the present (the present of those days) a fairly intelligible sequel and development of the events that had taken place in the past. Continuity reigned in their minds. With no great difficulty, models, examples, precedents, and causes could be found in documents, memoirs, and historical works. This was general, and apart from a few innovations of an industrial order, the rest of what made up civilization was quite easily linked with the past. But during the thirty or forty years we have just lived through, there have been too many innovations in every field. There have been too many surprises, too many things created or destroyed, and too many great and sudden developments have brutally interrupted the intellectual tradition—that continuity I spoke of. More and more numerous problems every day, perfectly new and unexpected problems have arisen on all sides, in politics, in the arts, in science. In all human affairs, all the cards have been reshuffled. *Man is now assailed by questions that no man before had imagined*, whether philosopher, scientist, or layman, everyone has somehow been taken unawares. *Every man belongs to two eras.*

In the past, the rare innovations that occurred were merely

solutions or answers to problems or questions that were ancient if not immemorial But our kind of innovation consists not in the answers but in the true novelty of the questions themselves in the statement of problems, not in their solution

Hence that general sense of helplessness and incoherence that pervades our minds keeping us on the alert, in a state of anxiety to which we can neither become accustomed nor foresee any end On one hand is the past that can neither be abolished nor forgotten but from which we can derive almost nothing that will orient us in the present or help us to imagine the future On the other hand there is the future without the least shape Every day we are at the mercy of some invention, some accident, either practical or intellectual

One has merely to look back at a pile of newspapers a few months old to see how consistently events can, in a few days, confound the prognostications of the most competent men Must I go so far as to add that a competent man is coming to be a man who makes mistakes, and does so while obeying all the rules? I cannot help thinking of that brain trust that was organized in America and, after a few weeks, broke up, still arguing

On all hands, all over the world, in every field of endeavor, we can see nothing but projects, plans, experiments, tests, and tryouts, all of them hasty

Russia, Germany, Italy, the United States are like vast laboratories in which research proceeds on a hitherto unknown scale, where the attempt is being made to fashion a new man, to give us a new economy, new manners, a new life, even new religions And the same is true in the sciences, the arts, in all human affairs

But, confronted as we are with a situation at once so agonizing and so stimulating, the question of human intel-

ligence itself arises, the mind is faced with the whole question of intelligence—its limits, its preservation, its probable future—and for the mind this is the paramount question of the day

In fact, the disorder I spoke of and the difficulties we are now considering are simply the obvious consequences of the intense intellectual development that has transformed the world The origin of this crisis is a matter of labor and capital—the capital of ideas and knowledge, and the labor of minds What we can easily discover at the root of the economic and political phenomena of our time are thought, research, argument—the intellectual labors A single example the introduction of hygiene into Japan has caused the population of that empire to double in thirty-five years! A few notions have built up, in a mere thirty-five years, an enormous political pressure

So the mind, functioning furiously and as though on the *blindest impulse, producing implements of great power, has* brought about tremendous events, on a world-wide scale, and this transformation of the human world has taken place in no order, on no pre-established plan, and above all without *regard to human nature*—the slow pace of its adaptation and evolution, and its fundamental limitations It may be said that *everything we know*, which is to say, *everything we can do*, has finally been turned against *what we are*

And now we are faced with a question we need to know whether this world, prodigiously transformed but also terribly shaken up by so much power so imprudently applied, can now take on a *rational order, can quickly return to, or* rather quickly arrive at, a bearable state of equilibrium In other words, can the mind get us out of the plight it has got us into? (Notice that the word "rational" which I used just now is, after all, equivalent to the word "quickly", for an

equilibrium is bound to return as it did after the fall of the Roman Empire but that took several centuries And it was brought back by events whereas the question I am putting is whether the mind itself acting directly and immediately can *rationally* that is *quickly* bring back a certain equilibrium within a few years)

So the whole question comes down to this can the human mind master what the human mind has made Can the human intellect save both the world and itself My object then is a kind of examination of the mind s current value and its future or probable value that is the problem I have set for myself—and shall not solve

No! You must not imagine that I can even think of solving it there is no question of that I cannot pretend even to state it for you completely, or clearly, or simply The more this question has grown in my mind the more complex I have seen that it is But without trying to simplify what is the opposite of simple or to clarify a thing whose very function is to clarify and which is in itself so obscure, I do mean to give you a sense of the question itself, and to do this, it will be enough, I hope, to show the way in which modern life, the life of most men affects their minds—influences, stimulates or wearies them I say that modern life affects the mind in such a way that we may reasonably feel great anxiety for the survival of intellectual values

The working conditions of the mind have, in fact, suffered the same fate as all other human affairs that is to say, they share in the intensity, the haste, the general acceleration of exchanges, as they do in all the consequences of the incoherence, the fantastic flickering of events I confess that I am so frightened by certain symptoms of degeneration and debility

which I observe (or think I observe) in the general trend of intellectual production and consumption, that I sometimes despair of the future! I am sorry to say that I sometimes dream that man's intelligence, and all else by which he deviates from the animal, might one day fail and humanity insensibly return to an instinctive condition, to the uncertainty and futility of the ape The mind might gradually succumb to the same indifference, inattention, and instability that many things in the present world, in its tastes, manners, and ambitions, either display already or give us cause to dread. And I say to myself (without believing it).

"All human history, insofar as it is a manifestation of thought, will perhaps have been merely the result of a sort of *crisis, an aberrant growth, like one of those sudden mutations* to be observed in Nature, which disappear as oddly as they came. There have been unstable species, monstrosities of size, power, and unwieldiness, that have not endured Who knows if all our culture is not a hypertrophy, a 'sport,' an untenable development, which a few hundred centuries will have sufficed to bring into being and to an end?"

This is doubtless a very exaggerated notion, and I express it here only to give you a sense, in a few rough strokes, of just how far one may be preoccupied with the fate of the intellect Yet it is only too easy to justify such fears All that is needed to show you the real seed from which they spring is to point out a few of the dark spots on the horizon of the mind

Let us begin by examining the faculty which is fundamental, which is mistakenly contrasted with the intelligence, but which is actually its real motive power; I mean the sensibility. If the sensibility of modern man is greatly compromised by the present conditions of his life, and if the future seems to

promise an ever harsher treatment, we may be justified in thinking that our intelligence will suffer profoundly from the damage done to our sensibility. But how is the damage being done?

Our modern world is completely occupied with the increasingly thorough and effective exploitation of natural energies. Not only do we seek them and use them to satisfy the eternal necessities of life, but we use them to excess, and are so stimulated by our excess that we create entirely new needs (and some that no one would ever have imagined), out of the very means intended to satisfy these needs, which were nonexistent before. In our present state of industrial civilization, it is as though having invented some substance, we should also, on the basis of its properties, invent an illness to be cured by it, a thirst to be appeased, a pain to be killed. So, for purposes of gain, we are inoculated with tastes and desires that have no roots in our deep physiological life but rather result from psychic or sensory stimuli deliberately inflicted. Modern man is drunk on waste—too much speed, too much light, too many tonics, stimulants, drugs... too frequent sensations, too much variety, too many echoes, too many facilities, too many wonders, too many of those incredible push buttons that put tremendous consequences within reach of a child's finger. All contemporary life is inseparable from these excesses. Our organism, subjected more and more to constantly new physical and chemical experiments, reacts to the forces and rhythms inflicted on it almost as it would to an *insidious poison*. It gets used to its poison, and soon craves it. Every day it finds the dose too little.

In Ronsard's time, the eye was content with a candle, or even a wick soaked in oil. The scholars of that age, who liked to work at night, could read—and what scrawls!—or write

with no trouble at all by a feeble, flickering light Today, the eye calls for twenty, fifty, a hundred candlepower The ear requires all the powers of the orchestra, tolerates the wildest dissonances, gets used to the thunder of trucks, the whistling, grinding, and throbbing of machines, and sometimes even wants to hear them in concert music

As for the most central of our senses, our inner sense of the interval between desire and possession, which is no other than the sense of duration, that feeling of time which was formerly satisfied by the speed of horses, now finds that the fastest trains are too slow, and we fret with impatience between telegrams

We crave events themselves like food that can never be highly seasoned enough If every morning there is no great disaster in the world we feel a certain emptiness "There is nothing in the papers today," we say We are caught red-handed We are all poisoned So I have grounds for saying that there is such a thing as our being intoxicated by energy, just as we are intoxicated by haste, or by size

Children think a ship is never big enough, a car or an airplane never fast enough, and the idea of the absolute superiority of quantitative greatness, an idea whose naiveté and crudeness are obvious (I hope), is one of the most characteristic ideas of modern man If we inquire how the mania for haste (for example) affects the powers of the mind, we can easily discover, around us and within us, all the risks of intoxication.

About forty years ago, I pointed out as a critical phenomenon in the history of the world the disappearance of free land, that is to say, all the free territories were finally occupied by organized nations, which meant the end of property belonging to no one But it may be remarked that, in accord

with this political phenomenon free time also vanished Free space and free time are now mere memories The free time I have in mind is not leisure as generally understood Apparent leisure is still with us and indeed is protected and propagated by legal measures and mechanical progress to keep activity from encroaching on free time Working days are measured and their hours counted by law But I say that our inner leisure which is something quite different from chronometric leisure is being lost We are losing that essential peace in the depths of our being that priceless absence in which the most delicate elements of life are refreshed and comforted while the inner creature is in some way cleansed of past and future, of present awareness of obligations pending and expectations lying in wait No cares no tomorrow no inner pressure but a kind of repose in absence a beneficent emptiness that brings the mind back to its true freedom Here it is concerned only with itself Freed from its obligations toward practical knowledge, and unburdened of any care for things to come, it creates forms as pure as crystal But the demands, the tension, the haste of modern existence disturb or destroy this precious repose Look within and about you! The progress of insomnia is remarkable, and keeps pace with all other progress How many people in the world now sleep a synthetic sleep only, and get their supply of oblivion from the skilled industry of organic chemistry! It may be that some new combination of more or less barbituric molecules will bring us meditation too, which life more and more deprives us of in its natural forms Some day the pharmacopoeia will provide us with profundity as well But, meanwhile, mental confusion and fatigue are sometimes so great that we take to sighing naively for the Tahitis, the paradises of simplicity and idleness and the slow, vague lives we have never known Primitive men do not know the necessity of fine divisions of time

There were no minutes or seconds for the ancients Artists like Stevenson or Gauguin fled from Europe and reached the islands where there were no clocks Neither the postman nor the telephone harassed Plato Virgil never hurried to catch a train Descartes lost himself in thought on the quays of Amsterdam But our movements today are regulated by exact fractions of time Even the twentieth part of a second is beginning to be no longer negligible in certain technical fields

Doubtless our organism is wonderfully resilient It has so far stood up under this more and more inhuman treatment but, after all, will it forever tolerate such constraint, such excesses? That is not all God knows how much we endure, how much our unhappy sensibility must compensate for as best it can!

Faced with all these facts, I am not far from concluding that sensibility in modern man is being debased A stronger *stimulus, a greater expense of energy are needed for us to feel* anything, which means that the delicacy of our senses, after a period of refinement, is diminishing I am sure that a precise measurement of the energy required today by the senses of civilized men would show that the thresholds of our sensibility are getting higher—that is, sensibility itself is becoming more obtuse

This dulling of sensibility is strongly indicated by our growing general indifference to ugliness and brutal sights

We have developed our museums with a view to cultivation in art. We have introduced a kind of aesthetic education into our schools But these are specious measures that can only end in spreading an abstract erudition having no real effect It is simply a matter of distributing a kind of learning with no

living depth we go on allowing our highways streets and squares to be disgraced by monuments that are an offense to the eye and the mind our cities to grow in disorder, our State or private buildings to be built without the slightest regard for the simplest requirements of a feeling for form

But I am here bordering on the realm of ethics Our decadence as regards the disposition of buildings and perspectives comes in great part from the exaggerated mania for regulations which is itself a symptom of degeneration in our *sense of responsibility*

All city planning and construction should proceed from definite voluntary action These are matters of art They should therefore not result from the deliberations of a council a committee a commission or any constituted body whatever however well composed To build is to give reality to a certain desire of the eye a desire that must gradually be *defined and analyzed by the mind and so brought closer to* its realization in action and material But one of the signs of the failure of character in our time is the subordination of action to regulation and the general prevalence of distrust and group discussion

I shall come back to this presently

But let us now consider one of the chief objects of our *inquiry perhaps the most important*

The whole future of intelligence depends on education or rather on the training of every kind received by the mind The terms education and training must not here be taken in a restricted sense When we hear them used we generally think of the systematic instruction of children and adolescents by parents or teachers But let us not forget that our entire life may be considered as *an education no longer organized* or even organizable but on the contrary, essentially disorderly

consisting of the whole lot of impressions and acquisitions, good or bad, that come to us from life itself School is not the only instructor of youth Their surroundings and the age itself have as much influence on them as their teachers, and more The streets, the shows, what they hear, the company they keep, the general climate of the times, changing fashions (and by fashions I mean not only those in dress and manners but those to be observed also in language), have a powerful and constant influence on their minds

But let us first turn our attention to organized education, the kind dogmatically dispensed in schools I shall make a preliminary remark which I believe is called for by the most obvious characteristic of our time I presume that we can no longer deal with any question regarding human life without taking into account the different forms it assumes throughout the civilized world In all matters, our age requires of us, or imposes on us, a wider view than ever before The study of a human problem can no longer be limited to what goes on in one particular nation Our investigation must be extended to neighboring or sometimes very distant peoples Human relations have become so immediate and so numerous, and repercussions so rapid and often so surprising, that an inquiry into every order of phenomena found within a limited area is not enough to inform us of the conditions and possibilities of life, even the local conditions and possibilities in that one locality All knowledge today is necessarily comparative knowledge

Now the men of tomorrow in Europe, that is, the children and young people of today, are divided into very different groups And tomorrow these groups will find themselves face to face—in competition or collaboration or antagonism We would do well, therefore, to compare what we are doing for our children with what other nations are doing for theirs, and

we must think of the possible consequences of such dissimilar types of education I shall not stress this But I cannot help reminding you that, in three or four great countries, the whole of their youth have for some years been subjected to a process of education essentially political in character *Politics first* is the rule in the school programs and disciplines of those nations Their programs and disciplines are calculated to produce uniformity in young minds and to that end certain remarkably precise political and social aims outweigh all considerations of culture The smallest details of school life the inculcation of manners the games the books available to young people, everything must work together to turn them into men who will fit into a social structure and adapt themselves to perfectly definite social or national goals Freedom of the mind is strictly subordinated to State doctrine whose principles, of course, vary from one nation to another, but whose goal of uniformity is everywhere the same *The State shapes men to its own ends*

Our own young people, then, will soon find themselves confronted with several groups of homogeneous youth who have been molded, trained, and, so to speak, *nationalized* A modern State of this type tolerates no nonconformity in education, and education, beginning at the tenderest age, will not let its victim go, but prolongs and perfects his training in postgraduate programs of a military type

I cannot, nor would, carry these observations further, I shall rather confine myself to putting the question that seems important at this point, a question that only the future can answer

"What will be the result for the value of culture? What will become of independence of mind, independence in the pursuit of knowledge, and above all, independence of feeling? What will become of intellectual freedom?"

Let us leave that and come back to France, and consider our own system of education and instruction

I am obliged to remark that our system, or rather what passes for it (for, after all, I do not know whether we have, or whether what we have can be called, a *system*) I am obliged to remark that our schools share in the general uncertainty and disorder of our time And, indeed, they so exactly reflect that chaotic state, a state of such remarkable confusion and incoherence, that we have only to look at our programs and objectives of study to understand the mental condition of our time, and discover every aspect of our doubt and our fluctuations with regard to values of every kind Our school program is not, as in the countries I have mentioned, clearly dominated by a policy It is mixed with politics, which is quite a different matter, and mixed in an irregular and inconsistent way We may say that it is free, but as we ourselves are free, with a freedom restrained at one moment for fear of too much, and revived the next for fear of too little Hardly have we taken courage from a surge of strength when we bristle against any manifestation of it

Our education, then, shows its uncertainty and does so in its own way Its aims are divided between tradition and progress At times, it advances resolutely, sketching out programs that make a clean sweep of many literary or scientific traditions, at other times, a respectable solicitude for what is called the *humanities* lays hold of it, and once again we see the revival of that unending and familiar dispute between the dead and the living, in which the living do not always have the advantage I cannot fail to observe that in our debates and our vacillation, the fundamental questions are never stated I know that the problem is terribly difficult The steady increase in kinds of knowledge is not easily reconciled with the

desire to preserve certain qualities which rightly or wrongly, we consider not only superior in themselves but characteristic of our nation. But if we considered the *subject* of all education—the *child* who is to be made into a man—and if we asked what precisely we want that child to become, it seems to me that the problem would be remarkably and happily transformed, and that every program, every method of instruction could be compared point by point with the desired change in the child and the direction that change is to take, and could be judged in that light. Suppose, for example, that we should say:

This child (taken at random) is to be given the notions he will need in order eventually to add to the nation a man capable of earning his living, of living in the modern world in which he will have to live, of adding a useful ingredient to it, one that will not be dangerous but capable of working toward the general prosperity. Capable, moreover, of enjoying all the different achievements of civilization, and of adding to them; capable, in short, of costing others as little as possible and of bringing them as much as possible. . . .

I do not say that this formula is definitive or complete, or even at all satisfactory. I say that we must fix our minds upon this order of questions before all else, if we wish to determine the principles of education. It is clear that first of all we must inculcate in young people the fundamental conventions that will enable them to carry on relations with their fellows, and the notions that eventually will give them the means of developing their powers or of guarding against their weaknesses in the social milieu. But when we examine the present state of affairs, we are astonished to see how obviously the methods in use—if methods they are (and if they are not merely a combination of routine, on the one hand, and exper-

imentation or rash anticipation, on the other)—show the lack of prior reflection, which I consider essential The dominant preoccupation seems to be to give children a culture that is split between the so-called *classical* tradition and the natural desire to initiate them into the vast modern developments in knowledge and activity Sometimes one tendency is uppermost, sometimes the other, but never, in all the discussion, does the essential question come up

'*What do we and should we want?*'"

The fact is that the question implies a decision, a side to be taken What we have to do is imagine the *man of our time*, and situate this *idea of man* in the probable surroundings in which he will live The idea must result from precise observation and not from the feelings and preferences of this person or that—and particularly not from their political hopes Nothing is more reprehensible, more pernicious, and more misguided than party politics in matters of education. Yet there is one point on which everyone is agreed and deplorably at one Let us confess the *real* object of education is the *diploma*

I never hesitate to declare that the diploma is the deadly enemy of culture As diplomas have become more important in our lives (and their importance has done nothing but grow as a result of economic conditions), the less has education had *any real effect. As regulations have multiplied, the results* have grown worse

Worse in their effect on the public mind and on the mind generally Worse because a diploma creates hopes and the illusion that certain rights have been acquired. Worse because of the stratagems and subterfuges it gives rise to· the recommendations, the strategic "cramming," and, indeed, the use of every expedient for crossing the redoubtable threshold

That we must admit is a strange and detestable preparation for intellectual and civic life

Furthermore if I take my stand on experience alone and look at the effects of regulation in general I note that regulation will in all matters finally vitiate action and pervert it I have already said so once an action is put under regulations, the ulterior aim of the one who acts is no longer the action itself He anticipates the regulations and thinks how to circumvent them Examinations are merely a particular case and a striking proof of this very general observation

With us the basic diploma is the *baccalaureat* It has led to adapting the various studies to a strictly defined program with a view to the examinations which, for the examiners the professors and the victims, represent, more than anything else, a total, radical and uncompensated loss of time and labor The day you create a well-defined regulator like the diploma, you are bound at once to see a whole organization, no less well defined than your program, lining up against it with the sole aim of capturing that diploma by every means The aim of education being no longer the development of the mind but the acquisition of the diploma, the required minimum becomes the goal of study It is no longer a matter of learning Latin, Greek, or geometry It is a matter of *borrowing*—not of *acquiring*—of borrowing what is needed to get the *baccalaureat*

That is not all The diploma grants to society a phantom guarantee, and to the diploma-holders, phantom rights The diploma-holder is officially considered to *know*, all his life he keeps that certificate of some momentary and purely expedient knowledge Moreover, the holder of a diploma is led in the name of the law to believe that something is owed to

him No practice ever instituted was more fatal for everyone, the State and the individual (and, in particular, for culture) It is with a view to the diploma, for example, that the reading of authors has been replaced by the use of summaries, manuals, absurd digests of knowledge, ready-made collections of questions and answers, extracts, and other abominations The result is that nothing in this adulterated form of culture can be helpful or suitable to the life of a developing mind

I do not wish to examine in detail the various subjects taught in our regrettable system of education I shall confine myself to showing you to what extent the mind is shocked and wounded in its most sensitive part by such a system

Let us not go into the question of Greek and Latin, the vicissitudes in the history of these studies is a mockery By ebb and flow, a little Greek, a little Latin, is added to or withdrawn from the program But what Greek and what Latin! The quarrel about the so-called "humanities" is merely a fight over the semblances of culture When we see the use to which those unhappy, twice-dead languages are put, we have the impression of some strange fraud They are no longer dealt with as real languages or literatures, these tongues seem never to have been spoken but by ghosts For the immense majority of those who make a pretense of studying them, they are bizarre conventions that have no function but to make up the difficult part of an examination No doubt Latin and Greek have greatly changed within the past century Antiquity, nowadays, is no longer at all what it was for Rollin, any more than the "Apollo Belvedere" and the "Laocoon" have been considered, for the past hundred years, the masterpieces of ancient sculpture; nor is there any doubt that no one now knows the Latin of the Jesuits or that of the doctors of philology Some know a sort of Latin, or rather make a pretense

of knowing a sort of Latin whose final and only use is in the translation required for the *baccalauréat* For my part, I believe it would be better to make the teaching of dead languages entirely optional with no examination required, and to give only a few students a solid knowledge of them rather than force all of them to swallow indigestible scraps of languages that never existed I shall believe in the teaching of ancient languages when in a railway carriage I see one passenger out of a thousand take a small Thucydides or a charming Virgil from his pocket and become absorbed in it, trampling under foot the newspapers and the more or less *pulp* stories

But let us go on to French On this head it will suffice to point out an enormity France is the one country in the world where it is absolutely impossible to learn to speak French Go to Tokyo, to Hamburg, to Melbourne and there it is not unlikely that you will be taught to pronounce your language correctly But make a tour of France, that is to say, a tour of its accents, and you will discover Babel Nothing is less surprising true French is spontaneously spoken only in those regions where French arose What, on the contrary, may astonish the observer, but seems not to astonish educators, is that the various pronunciations of French—the accents of Marseilles, Picardy, Lyons, Limoges, Corsica, or Alsace—in a country whose keen interest in unification is well known, have not been reformed and corrected so that all Frenchmen may recognize their tongue throughout the land

Here we encounter the misdeeds of spelling Let us run over the provinces of our country We shall find in the various types of local speech that French vowels are generally altered from one province to another On the other hand, we shall observe that the structure of words, the articulated form that

is in some way held in shape by the *consonants*, is rigorously, much too rigorously, sounded by all those mouths in conformity with our criminal spelling We find, for example, that all consonants which are doubled in writing, and which should not be heard in French, are terribly emphasized in speaking Everything is pronounced For example, people say *somptueux* and *dompter* instead of *sontueux* and *donter* .. And, in my part of the country, the South, we say *La valeur n'attend pas le nombre des an-nées*

This is not the place to bring the whole of our orthography to trial The absurdity of our spelling, which is indeed one of the most grotesque fabrications in the world, is well known It is an imperious or imperative collection of a great many errors in etymology, artificially fixed by decisions that are inexplicable Let us end this trial, but not without observing how the complicated spelling of our language puts it in an inferior position with regard to certain others Italian is perfectly phonetic, whereas French, in its wealth, has two ways of writing *f*, four ways of writing *k*, two of writing *z*, etc

I now come back to the spoken language Do you think that our literature, and in particular our poetry, does not suffer from our negligent training in speech? What do you expect a poet to do, a true poet, a man for whom the *sounds* of a language have an equal importance (equal, I say) to that of the *sense*, when he has carefully formulated his rhythmic structures on the values of voice and tone, and then he hears that special music which is poetry, being read, or rather massacred, in one of the various accents I have mentioned? But even if the accent is that of true French, the way of speaking taught in school is quite simply criminal Go and hear La

Fontaine or Racine recited in any school you like Children are instructed literally to drone and more than that not the least notion of rhythm or of the assonances and alliterations that form the sonorous substance of poetry is ever given and demonstrated to them No doubt these things are considered a waste of time and yet they are the very substance of poetry But contrariwise candidates for examinations will be required to have a certain knowledge of poetry and poets What a strange kind of knowledge! Is it not astonishing to substitute a purely abstract knowledge (which in any case has only the remotest connection with poetry) for the sensation itself of hearing the poem While we are required to respect the absurd part of our language the spelling we tolerate the most barbarous misrepresentation of the phonetic part, that is to say the living language The basic idea seems to be, here as in other matters to set up an *easy* means of checking, for nothing is easier than to check the conformity or nonconformity of a written text with the legal spelling, at the expense of real knowledge, which is the experience of poetry Spelling has become the criterion of good education while a feeling for the music, for the rhythm and form of phrases, plays no part whatever in classes or examinations

Education is not confined to childhood and adolescence Learning is not limited to the schools Throughout life our *milieu* is our teacher, at once stern and dangerous Stern because mistakes here are more costly than in school and dangerous because we are hardly aware of the educational influence good or bad, of our milieu and our fellows We learn something at every moment, but such direct lessons are usually unnoticed We are made up, to a large extent, of all the events that have affected us but we are not aware of their

effects accumulating and combining within us Let us look a little more closely at the way in which this chance education transforms us

I shall distinguish two kinds of accidental learning that go on constantly one, the good kind, or at least it could be, is *learning from experience*, these are the lessons learned from what happens to us, the facts we directly observe or experience The more direct the observation—that is to say, the more directly we perceive things or events or people, without immediately translating our impressions into clichés and ready-made expressions—the more valuable are the perceptions I add (and this is not a paradox) that a direct perception is all the more precious as we are the less able to express it. The more it defies the resources of our language, the more it forces us to develop them

We have within us a whole reserve of phrases, epithets, and ready locutions which are made by pure imitation, they rid us of the trouble of thinking, because we tend to take them for valid and appropriate solutions

For the most part, we react to what strikes us by using words that are not ours, we are not their true authors. Our thought—or what we take to be our thought—is, at such times, merely a simple, automatic response That is why we must not too readily believe *our own words* I mean that a word that comes into our head is generally not ours

But where does it come from? Here we see the second type of learning I mentioned This is the learning that comes, not from our direct personal experience, but from our reading or from what we are told.

You know, though perhaps you have not thought much about it, how *talkative* the modern age is Our cities are

plastered with gigantic letters The night itself is peopled with words of fire In the morning numberless printed sheets are in the hands of passers-by of travelers in trains and lazy people in their beds We have only to turn a knob in our room to hear the voices of the world and sometimes our masters voice As for books never have so many been published Never has so much been read or rather skimmed over!

What will be the result of this great debauch?

The same as I was describing just now but this time it is our verbal sensibility that is being brutalized dulled degraded Our inner language is wearing out

Adjectives are devaluated The inflation of publicity has depleted the power of the strongest epithets Praise and even abuse are in bad straits we have to cudgel our brains to find the means of praising or insulting anyone!

Furthermore the daily output of vast quantities of published matter the flood of printing and broadcasting wash over our judgments and impressions from morning to night mangling and mixing them making of our brains truly a gray matter in which nothing stands out nothing can last and we have an odd sense of the monotony of novelty we are bored with wonders and extremes

What must we conclude from such observations?

For all their incompleteness I think they are enough to give us grave anxieties about the future of intelligence—I mean intelligence as we have known it We have in our minds a notion of the mind and various standards of intellectual value which though very ancient—not to say immemorial—are perhaps not eternal

For example we can still hardly imagine that the labor of the mind could be collective The individual seems indispensable to any advance in the highest forms of knowledge and

to all production in the arts For myself, I hold fast to this opinion, though I recognize that it is based on personal feeling and that feeling is suspect the stronger it is, the more personal, and I tell myself that we must not try to read the lines of the future in one person So I refrain from pronouncing on the great enigmas posed by the modern era I see that it is putting our minds through unimagined trials

All the notions by which we have lived are tottering The sciences are calling the tune Time, space, and matter are as though in the furnace, and our categories are in fusion

As for political principles and economic laws, you know well enough that, today, Mephistopheles in person seems to have enrolled them in his hellish crew

Lastly, we are faced with the difficult and controversial question of the relations between the individual and the State the State, which is to say, an organization that is growing tighter, more demanding, more efficient every day, taking whatever portion it wants of the individual's freedom, his work, his time, his strength, and, in short, his life, giving him in return What? The means to enjoy what is left, develop what is left? The shares are difficult to determine It would seem that at present the State has the upper hand, that its power tends to absorb almost the entire individual

But the individual stands for the mind's freedom Now we have seen that freedom (in the highest sense) is becoming, under the conditions of modern life, an illusion We are hypnotized, harassed, stupefied, a victim of all the contradictions, the dissonances that rend the air of modern civilization The individual is already compromised, even before the State has entirely assimilated him

I have said that I shall not draw conclusions, but I will end with something in the way of advice

Among the features of our epoch, there is one I shall speak no ill of I am no enemy of sports I mean those sports that do not depend on mere imitation and fashion on whatever makes a great noise in the newspapers But it is the *idea* of sports that I like And I like to transpose it into the realm of the mind It is an idea that leads us to cultivate one of our native qualities to its highest point while keeping them all in balance for a sport that deforms its subject is a bad sport Well any sport seriously practiced is a test requiring privations (sometimes severe ones) hygiene concentration and regularity, all measured by the results—in short a true morality of action that tends to develop the human type through a training based on the analysis and systematic stimulation of one's abilities It might be characterized in a phrase a seeming paradox, by saying that it consists in the training of our reflexes by reflection

But the mind though a mind, can deal with itself by similar methods The functioning of our mind may be considered as a flow of unconscious production irregularly interrupted by consciousness Mentally we are a succession of transformations, some of which—the conscious ones—are more complex than the other, the unconscious ones At one moment we dream, at another we wake that roughly expresses the matter Well, every positive, unquestionable increase in human potentiality is due to the functioning of these two modes of psychic life, with a resulting increase of consciousness—that is to say, an increase of willed inner action If civilized man thinks in quite a different way from primitive man, it is due to the predominance in him of conscious reactions over unconscious products Of course the latter are the indispensable, and sometimes most valuable, substance of our thoughts, but their lasting value depends in the end on consciousness

Intellectual sport, then, consists in the development and control of our inner acts Just as the virtuoso of the piano or the violin manages artificially, by studying himself, to increase his consciousness of his own impulses and finally to possess *them distinctly, thus attaining a higher order of freedom,* so must we, in the order of intellect, acquire an art of thinking, fashion for ourselves a kind of controlled psychology Such is the blessing I wish for you

Remarks on Progress

[1929]

ARTISTS used not to like what was called Progress They found no more of it in works of art than philosophers did in manners They condemned the barbarous behavior of science, the engineer s brutal operations on the landscape, the tyranny of machines the simplification of human types as a result of the growing complexity of collective organization Around 1840 they were already indignant about the effects of a transformation that had hardly begun Though they were contemporaries of Ampère and Faraday, the Romantics readily ignored the sciences, or despised them, or fastened only on the fantastic in them Their minds sought refuge in a version of the Middle Ages they had fashioned for themselves, they shunned the chemist for the alchemist They were happy only with legend or history—that is, with the exact opposite of physics They escaped from organized life into passion and emotion and on these they founded a culture (and even a type of drama)

Here however, is a rather striking contradiction in the intellectual behavior of a great man of that period The same Edgar Poe who was one of the first to denounce the new barbarism and the cult of the modern, was also the first writer who thought of bringing to the production of literature, to

the art of writing fiction, and even to poetry, the very spirit of analysis and calculation whose exploits and transgressions he elsewhere deplored

In short, the idol of Progress was countered by the idol of damning Progress, which made *two commonplaces*

As for us, we hardly know what to think of the prodigious changes that are taking place around us and even within us New powers, new constraints, and the world has never been less sure where it was going

As I was thinking of the artist's antipathy for progress, a few related ideas came to mind, I offer them for what they are worth—as idle as you please

In the first half of the nineteenth century the artist discovered and defined his opposite—the *bourgeois.* The bourgeois is the Romantic's other face Moreover, he is saddled with contradictory qualities, for he is made out to be at one and the same time the slave of routine and an absurd partisan of progress The bourgeois loves stability, yet believes in improvement. He is the incarnation of common sense and devotion to palpable reality, but he trusts in a kind of increasing and almost inevitable betterment of living standards The artist claims the world of "dreams"

Now the passage of time—or, if you like, the demon of unexpected combinations (a demon who derives the most surprising consequences from the present, and out of these composes the future)—amused itself by making a quite admirable muddle out of two exactly opposite notions What happened was that the miraculous and the scientific contracted an astonishing alliance, these two old enemies conspired to involve our lives in an endless career of transformations and

surprises Men are doubtless developing the habit of considering all knowledge as transitional and every stage of their industry and their relations as provisional This is new The rules of collective life must more and more take account of the unexpected The real is no longer neatly delimited Place time and matter admit of liberties that not long ago, no one had an inkling of Logic begets dreams Dreams take on flesh Common sense a hundred times confounded, baffled by the success of the most extraordinary experiments, is now appealed to only by the ignorant The value of ordinary evidence has gone down to zero The fact of being commonly accepted which once made judgments and opinions invincible today depreciates them *What was once believed by all always and everywhere, seems no longer to carry much weight* The kind of certainty that used to emanate from the unanimity of minds or from the testimony of a large number of people is now contested by the objectivity of records, kept and interpreted by a small number of specialists Perhaps the value that used to be attached to general consent (on which our manners and civil laws are based) resulted merely from the pleasure the majority always feel at finding themselves in accord and so much like their fellows

In short, nearly all the dreams of humanity, as found in fables of various types—flying deep-sea diving apparitions, speech caught and transmitted, detached from its time and source, and many strange things that no one ever dreamed of —have now emerged from the impossible, from the mind The fabulous is an article of trade The manufacture of machines to work miracles provides a living for thousands of people But the artist has had no share in producing these wonders They are the work of science and capital The bourgeois has invested his money in phantoms and is speculating on the downfall of common sense

Louis XIV, at the height of his power, hadn't the hundredth part of the authority over Nature, the means of amusement, of cultivating his mind, or of providing it with sensations, which are today at the disposal of so many men of moderate station True, I am not taking into account the pleasure of commanding, subjugating, intimidating, dazzling, punishing, or absolving, which is a godlike and theatrical pleasure But rather the time, the distance, the speed, the freedom, the view of the whole earth

A young man today, healthy and in easy circumstances, can fly where he will, quickly circling the earth, sleeping every night in a palace. He can share a hundred ways of life, a taste of love, a taste of security, almost anywhere If he is not without intelligence (but no more intelligent than need be), he can pick and choose the best of everything, making himself time and again a happy man The greatest monarch is less to be envied The body of the great Louis was much less at ease than his, whether a matter of cold or heat, skin or muscles For when the king was ill, he was poorly doctored He had to writhe and groan on his feather bed amid all his pomp, with no hope of the quick relief or the unconsciousness that chemistry brings to the least afflicted of moderns

So, for ills and boredom, and for the satisfaction of curiosities of all kinds, a great many men are now better off than the most powerful man in Europe two hundred and fifty years ago

Suppose that the enormous transformation which we are living through and which is changing us, continues to develop, finally altering whatever customs are left and making a very different adaptation of our needs to our means, the new era will soon produce men who are no longer attached to the past by any habit of mind For them history will be nothing but strange, almost incomprehensible tales, there will be nothing in their time that was ever seen before—nothing from the

past will survive into their present Everything in man that is not purely physiological will be altered, for our ambitions, our politics our wars our manners our arts are now in a phase of quick change they depend more and more on the positive sciences and hence less and less on what used to be. *New facts* tend to take on the importance that once belonged to tradition and *historical facts*

Even now a native of some new country, visiting Versailles, may and should look upon those personages laden with their vast wigs, dressed in embroidery, and nobly fixed in stately attitudes, with the same eye as when, at the Ethnographical Museum, we look at the figures clothed in feathers or hides, representing the priests and chiefs of extinct tribes

One of the surest and cruelest effects of progress, then, is to add a further pain to death, a pain increasing of itself as the revolution in customs and ideas becomes more marked and rapid It is not enough to perish, one has to become unintelligible, almost ridiculous, and even a Racine or a Bossuet must take his place alongside those bizarre figures, striped and tattooed, exposed to passing smiles, and somewhat frightening, standing in rows in the galleries and gradually blending with the stuffed specimens of the animal kingdom . .

I tried years ago to form a positive idea of what is called *progress* Eliminating all considerations of a moral, political, or aesthetic character, I found that progress came down to the rapid and obvious growth of the (mechanical) *power* at man's disposal, and of the *accuracy* he can attain in his predictions Horsepower and the number of verifiable decimals· these are indexes that, beyond any doubt, have greatly risen in the last hundred years Think of what is consumed every day by all

the motors of every kind, think of the squandering of resources going on in the world A Paris street teems and quivers like a factory In the evening, an orgy of lights, whole treasuries of brilliance pour out before our half-dazzled eyes their extraordinary power of dissipation, their almost criminal largesse Perhaps waste itself has become a public and permanent necessity Who knows what might be revealed by a prolonged analysis of such excesses, now becoming so familiar? Perhaps some fairly remote observer, considering the state of our civilization, might conclude that the Great War was but a terrible yet direct and inevitable consequence of the development of our capacities The scope, duration, intensity, even the atrocity of that war were on the same grand scale as our power. The war itself was of the same magnitude as our peacetime resources and industries, as different in its proportions from previous wars as our weapons, our material resources, and our superabundance *required* But the difference was not only one of proportion In the world of physics a thing cannot be made larger without being partially transformed in its *quality*, it is only in pure geometry that figures can be similar Similitude is almost nowhere but in the heart's desire. The last war cannot be considered a mere enlargement on former conflicts Wars of the past used to end long before the nations engaged in them were really exhausted—just as, for a single "man" lost, a good chess player will give up the game It was therefore by a sort of *convention* that the "show" used to end, and the event that revealed the inequality of forces was more symbolic than actual We, on the other hand, only a few years back, saw a quite modern war continue inevitably to the final exhaustion of the adversaries, all of whose resources, even to the farthest, were brought one after the other to be consumed on the line of fire Joseph de Maistre's

celebrated saying that a battle is lost because it is thought to be lost has itself lost some of its ancient truth. Henceforth the battle is *really* lost because of the shortage of men, gold, bread, coal, and oil, not only in the armies but in the whole country.

Among the many advances made, none is more astonishing than the progress of light. A few years ago light was an event only for the eyes. There was either light or no light. It spread through space, encountering matter, which more or less modified it but remained foreign to it. Now it has become the world's prime enigma. Its speed expresses and limits something essential to the universe. It is thought to have weight. The study of its radiation is destroying our previous ideas of empty space and pure time. It resembles and is yet different from matter in a mysterious mixture of ways. Finally, this same light that once was the common symbol of full, distinct, and perfect knowledge is now involved in a sort of intellectual scandal. It is compromised, together with its accomplice matter, in the suit brought by discontinuity against continuity, probability against images, integers against complex numbers, analysis against synthesis, hidden reality against the mind that would track it down—and, in a word, by the unintelligible against the intelligible. Science seems to be facing its crucial trial. But the case will be settled out of court.

Our Destiny and Literature

[1937]

THE MIND has transformed the world, and the world is repaying it in kind The mind has led man where he had no notion of going. It has given us a taste for life and the means of living, it has conferred on us a power of action enormously surpassing the individual's powers of adaptation and even his capacity for understanding, it has aroused desires and produced results from them greatly exceeding what is useful to life. Hence we have moved farther and farther away from the primitive conditions of all life, borne along as we are at a speed now growing so great as to be terrifying, toward a state of things whose complexity, instability, and inherent disorder bewilder us, allowing us not the least foresight, taking away our ability to reason about the future or to make out any of the lessons we used to expect of the past, and dissolving in their violence and fluctuation all effort at founding and building, whether intellectually or socially, just as quicksands absorb the strength of an animal that ventures upon them.

All this necessarily reacts on the mind itself. A world transformed by the mind no longer presents to the mind the same perspectives and directions as before, it poses entirely new problems and countless enigmas

The spectacle of the world of man, as man used to see it and as history represented it, partook of both comedy and

tragedy; it was easy, comparing one century to another, to find analogous situations, comparable public figures, well-divided periods, long-pursued policies, clearly defined events with fully realized consequences. In those days administrations could live on precedents.

But how strangely is this classic spectacle transformed! To the human comedy and tragedy has been added an element of the fairy-play. On the stage of the modern world, as on that of the Chatelet Theater, every scene is a transformation scene: nothing but apparitions, quick changes, and surprises not always pleasant ones. And sometimes the very author of all this, man—at least the man who still has leisure for the lamentable habit of reflection—is astonished at being able to live in the present atmosphere of enchantment and transformation, where contradictions come true, where reverses and catastrophes dispute the stage, one replacing the other as by magic; where, in a mere few years, some invention in the laboratory can be developed and exploited to the point of changing our manners and our minds. And the man who thinks (or can still think) sometimes feels an extraordinary sort of weariness. He feels that the most surprising discovery could no longer surprise him.

I have a granddaughter who is two years and two months old. She uses the telephone nearly every day, she turns the knobs of the radio set, somewhat at random, and, for her, all this is just as natural as playing with her blocks and dolls. I would not for anything lag behind my grandchild, so I am doing my best to give up seeing any distinction between what used to be called natural and what used to be called artificial.

Just now I uttered the term "fairy-play." I was thinking of an

old play of this type which I cannot remember whether I read or saw many years ago A wicked magician was inflicting strange tribulations on an unhappy youth whose love affairs he wished to thwart At one moment he would surround him with flames and devils, at the next he would change his bed into a pitching and rolling ship in a room inundated by a make-believe sea, and the sheet would swell like a homemade spanker-sail filled with an off-stage wind But the young man's astonishment finally turned into resigned indifference, and at the wonder-working magician's tenth trick, being bored with all the hocus-pocus, all those tiresome miracles, he shrugged his shoulders and cried

"Here we go again with that stupid nonsense!"

This, perhaps, is how we shall one day greet the "miracles of science"

But mankind seems never to get enough of them Besides, I am not sure whether man is aware that he is himself changing He still believes that "human nature never changes" We *believe* it!. which is to say that we know nothing about it! And yet there are reasons for believing that man *is* changing Just imagine (since we are in the realm of magic) . imagine the remarks that might be made by an observer, some Mephistopheles standing a little above mankind, a spectator of the destinies of our race, meditating on our condition, the life of our species as a whole, what is happening, how our life is being transformed, how it has been spent for the past century He would have plenty of opportunity for amusement at our expense as he noted how curiously our efforts at invention turn against us. While we imagine that we are subjecting forces and matter to our own ends, there is not one of our scientific raids on Nature that does not, on the contrary,

directly or indirectly subject us a little more to herself, making us slaves of our own power creatures all the more incomplete as we are better equipped making our desires needs, and very existence the playthings of our own genius

Can you not see that clear-eyed devil would say, that you are merely the subjects of an outrageous experiment—that thousands of reactions and thousands of unknown substances are being tried out on you Someone wants to know how your organs will react at very high speeds and very low pressures whether your blood can adapt itself to highly carburized air whether your retina can stand stronger and stronger light and radiation Not to mention the smells and noises you endure the vibrations and currents of all frequencies the synthetic foods and goodness knows what else! And as for your intellects, my friends and your sensibilities—since these are what I am most interested in—your mind is being subjected to an incredible amount of incoherent news every twenty-four hours your senses have to absorb, without a day's respite, as much music, painting drugs, and bizarre drinks spectacles, journeys, sudden changes in altitude, in temperature, or in political and economic anxiety as once upon a time, the whole of humanity was able to absorb in three centuries!

"You are guinea pigs, my dear men, and very ill-used guinea pigs, since the ordeals inflicted on you are repeated and varied merely at random There is no scientist, no laboratory assistant to regulate, measure, check, and interpret the experiments, the artificial changes whose more or less profound effect on your precious persons no one can foresee Fashion and industry, the combined forces of invention and advertising possess you, lay you out on the beaches, send you up to the snows tan your thighs and bleach your hair, while

politics lines up your multitudes, makes them raise their hands or brandish their fists, march in step, vote, hate or love or die in cadence, indistinguishably, like mere statistics!"

But I must silence my Mephistopheles He was about to give the whole show away! But, devil though he is, he would certainly not have been able to tell you the future The future is like everything else, no longer what it used to be By that I mean that we cannot now think of it with any degree of confidence in our inductions We have lost our traditional means of thinking about and predicting it this is the pathos of our plight

Though we are more and more anxious to know where we are going and never tired of wondering about the possibilities of the morrow, yet we live a terribly everyday life We live from day to day—as people lived in those ages that were most harried by immediate needs, the most precarious periods of humanity But still, and as though to deepen our sense of uncertainty, we are not yet accustomed to doing without predictions, we are not yet prepared to live simply in the present, in spurts and snatches Our deeply ingrained habits, our laws, our language, our feelings, our ambitions were formed at a time and attuned to a time that allowed long duration, basing itself and its reasoning on an immense past, and having in view a future measured by generations

Moreover, the same is true of our relation to space Our customs, ambitions, politics are all inspired by notions that are strongly, powerfully local, they are suited to men bound to the soil, settled Whether in reference to individuals or nations, our ideas, laws, conflicts, and contracts imply stability, recognition of property rights, and control of territory In short, duration and continuity of nations and individuals

After dinner, in one and the same instant of time or perception, you can be in New York by car (soon it will be by eye) while your cigarette sends up its smoke in Paris This is in the *true sense of the word a dislocation, which will not be without* its consequences In short, if we bring together and try to set in order all the observations we can make regarding the changes in the world today, we find ourselves at grips with a paradoxical idea *trying to take shape in our minds, where it* clashes with ancient knowledge and immemorial habits

We *are unable (up to now, absolutely unable) to admit* that a kind of ignorance, a helplessness of the mind, can equal a positive knowledge We are unable to consider as a real gain the well-established conviction that a conscious refusal to exercise our intellect may be an act of intelligence, and still less are we able to regard as characteristic of a thing, and as one of the essential points of its definition, the fact that that thing is indeterminate You would think it ridiculous if someone should answer you, on being asked his name

"My name? Whatever you like!"

You would find the answer absurd And if he should add, "My name is whatever you like, and that is actually my name," you would think him mad And yet, that is perhaps what we shall have to get accustomed to indeterminateness as a positive fact, a positive element of knowledge

. . .

People used to say, quite commonly (it is proverbial) "You never know what's coming " But no one saw the true profundity of this banal remark The man who *first uttered it, and* those who repeated it after him, doubtless meant simply to express the experience of their past lives They had observed that something unexpected was constantly happening and

that the slightest glance at anyone's history shows a sequence of unforeseen events, and predictions proved wrong. But I find a more interesting meaning in the rather trite wisdom of this old proposition. I interpret it this way: the living organs, their functions, and those of the mind, all the properties and faculties of the living man are what enables us to adapt, in some degree, to what will happen. My eye is unaware that I am nearing a certain object, or that the light will change in intensity, and yet, as soon as the object comes nearer, as soon as the light gets stronger or weaker, my eye is at once modified in order to preserve its clear vision. Therefore it was capable of being modified—which could be translated into rather unphilosophic language by saying that it was made to be modified, that it was made for this unexpected event, that it foresaw something unforeseen, that certain previous incidents had perhaps shaped and adapted it to this end, and that its ability to accommodate was as though made for surprises, and that the eye is not only an organ of sight but an instrument endowed with foresight . . .

If, now, you generalize from this simple example . . . if you observe that the whole man (and not only the whole man, but the whole complex web of his life) hangs, as it were, on the possibility of being modified in face of an event, so that the man and his complexity may preserve what is required to keep on living, for the self to maintain its continuity, recognize itself and go on being itself, you will easily understand how essential is the role of a certain "free play" in the very structure of our organism, our mind, and our society. All three admit of a certain free play, a capacity for adapting to a certain amount of the unexpected. Besides, such ideas as forethought, precaution, prudence, our civil laws, marriage,

credit, debt, and the investment of money all presuppose that the morrow—unknowable though it may be in detail—cannot be entirely different from today In a word, it used to be that all the events of life which the mind might be uncertain about were somehow set out before it, they were imaginable, they belonged to recognized species which man had known and described from remotest antiquity There were limits to the unforeseen, and this conferred great value on history, which taught us that one might, by and large, expect what had already been Of course our fathers used to say that chance played a great part, they knew that no one could be sure of the outcome of any affair, but on the whole, this imaginable kind of contingency allowed them to decree lasting laws, to sign stable agreements, to lay up savings for their children, to know, when buying, exactly what they would have to pay and, when selling, what they would receive Do we still know?

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I was saying that the unexpected itself has been in process of transformation and that today its scope is almost boundless Imagination faints before it It used to be that in foresight our vision (and, consequently, the unforeseen at that time) was limited on the one hand by our knowledge and on the other by our means of action, and these two factors were somehow in balance We regarded the unknown future simply as a combination of things already known, the new could be broken down into elements that were not new But this is no longer so Here is an image of things as they now are, or so it seems to me.

Instead of playing a straightforward card game with destiny, as we used to do, knowing the rules, knowing the

number of cards and face cards we are now in the position of a player who discovers with amazement that his partner s hand contains face cards he has never seen before and that the rules of the game change with every deal No calculation of probability is possible and he cannot even throw the cards in his opponent s face Why Because the more he looks at him the more he recognizes himself! The modern world is being remade in the image of man s mind Man has sought in Nature the means and power to make things around him as restless as unstable as mobile as himself as admirable absurd disconcerting and wonderful as his own mind Now the mind is unpredictable nor can it predict itself We can predict neither our dreams nor our plans we can predict little but our reactions If then we impose on the human world the ways of the mind the world becomes just as unpredictable, it takes on the mind s disorder

However we must consider as best we can (and naturally without any pretension to prophecy) the question of the future—the destiny, if you like—of literature It already bears certain mysterious signs on its forehead

Literature may be affected first of all in the person of the one who practices it and next, in the matter it is made of, language, and in the ways in which language changes Finally, apart from the author and the work, literature necessarily involves a third condition which can itself vary, and which is none other than the reader

Considered in the person of the author, literature is a curious profession Its tools are merely a pen and a few sheets of paper the apprenticeship, the learning of the craft, is whatever you please it may last for a moment or forever The raw material is also whatever you wish It is everywhere—in

the street, in the heart, in good and evil And as for the labor involved, it is indefinable, anyone can say that he belongs to this profession and means to master it

But let us now consider with an unindulgent eye the writer's odd social situation Strip him of the luster he still traditionally wears and look at him in his real life as an artisan of ideas, a practitioner of written language What or whom does he remind us of, busy beneath his lamp, shut in by his books and his walls, strangely absorbed or agitated, in the grip of some curious discussion, the subject of which is invisible, now animated, then suddenly stopping short, but finally and always coming back to his work table and scribbling, or rattling his typewriter? Set aside the romantic image of the disheveled poet, with fateful brow, feeling as though he were a harp or a lyre in the midst of a tempest, or at night under the moon, beside a lake Nothing good is ever done in such extraordinary circumstances Beautiful verse matures on the day after the inspiration

Now look at the author of a work What are this worker's circumstances?

In truth, literature, as it really is, is curiously akin to one of those little homecrafts, of which so many are still to be found in Paris, and in many ways it *is* one The poet reminds us of those ingenious craftsmen who, for Christmas or the New Year, make those toys so remarkable for inventiveness and calculated surprises, out of whatever comes to hand The poet gets his materials from ordinary language Though he may invoke heaven and earth, raise up tempests, stir our emotions, or elicit what is most delightful or tragic in the depths of our being, though he may have at his disposal all Nature, death, the infinite, the gods and all beauty, he is none-

theless in the eyes of anyone observing his deeds and gestures, a citizen a taxpayer, who shuts himself up at a certain hour in front of a blank note book and covers it with black scribbles, sometimes in silence, sometimes shouting and pacing back and forth between door and window About 1840 Victor Hugo was a model author, living like any bourgeois in a flat in the Marais district He paid his rent and his taxes, he was a regular producer But what did he do? What did he produce? And what type of industry was it? The same observer, drily accurate would note that the products of that little industry had a fluctuating value, as precarious as that of a toymaker's products or those of any fancy-goods maker working in his room, a few steps away, in the Rue des Archives or the Rue Vieille-du-Temple

But that value the value produced by the poet's hands, is complex, ambivalent, and, in both cases, essentially unstable It is composed of one part reality (that is, it can sometimes be exchanged for money) and one part smoke—a strange smoke indeed, that may one day solidify into some monumental work of bronze or marble, casting round about it a powerful and enduring aura of fame But again, whether real or ideal, that value is incommensurable, it cannot be measured in society's terms A work of art is worth a diamond to some, a pebble to others It cannot be assessed in man-hours, it cannot, therefore, figure as a universally negotiable currency for every kind of exchange The useful is that which satisfies men's physiological needs, whose possession frees man from some sensation of pain or deficiency, some physically defined depreciation

Man acts to appease any such sensation, and the development, organization, and co-ordination of his action, radiating outward to thousands of other beings over the surface of the

globe, has given rise to the whole economic machinery But there is no place in it for the useless Basically the economic machine is an enlargement, a colossal amplification of the human organism, and such an apparatus, founded strictly on the equal usefulness of all objects and services exchanged by men, cannot accommodate objects and services that satisfy only desires, not absolute needs, and cater only to individual dispositions, not to vital functions For these reasons any society that is systematically and completely organized cannot, without altering its rigid economy, permit any luxury, any exchange of things having *value for all*, in return for things having *value for some but not for others*

How, then, have our poets, philosophers, and artists, all our small craftsmen who produce things that are the pride of the human race how have they managed to live, hitherto? They have lived as best they could Thanks to a loose connection in the economic machine, they have lived—some very badly, some fairly well Verlaine from hand to mouth and on charity, whereas Victor Hugo left millions Among my little attic craftsmen, some make a fortune, others a failure, most of them get by with odd jobs on the side they have to have several strings to their lyre

But, lucky or not, the general run of human affairs promises them nothing brilliant Everywhere they are threatened by the rigidity of planned economy The machine is beginning to function much too mechanically for them, and more than that, the heavy hand of authority, though it occasionally refrains from crushing some thought in embryo, allows only those works to hatch out which sing or proclaim or show that everything is better and better under the best of all possible regimes

A further consideration literature in essence no more than an exploitation of the resources of language, depends on the various changing conditions a language may undergo and on the modes of transmission provided by the material means at the disposal of the age

I have no time to develop the many observations that this aspect of the subject calls for I shall confine myself to a few remarks on radio broadcasting on the one hand and disc recording on the other

We may already wonder whether a purely spoken and heard literature will not very shortly replace written literature This would be a return to primitive times, and the technical consequences would be enormous If writing were dispensed with what would be the result? First—and this would be to the good—the part played by the voice and the demands of the ear would in matters of form, resume the capital importance they once had, and still had a few centuries ago The structure of literary works, their dimensions, would at once be strongly affected, but on the other hand, it would be much more difficult to go back over an author's text Certain poets would not be able to make themselves as complicated as they are said to be, and readers, transformed into listeners, could no longer look back over a passage, reread it, go into it more deeply, for pleasure, or to criticize it, as they can do with a text held in their hands

Another thing Suppose long-distance vision develops (and I must confess that I scarcely hope it will), then the descriptive passages in books could at once be replaced by visual representation landscapes and portraits would no longer fall within the province of Letters they would have done with the medium of language One may go still further The sentimental passages could likewise be reduced, if not entirely

done away with, by introducing amorous pictures and well-chosen music at the tender moments

And here at last is a possible and perhaps the most serious consequence of setting all this progress in motion What would become of abstract literature? As long as it is merely a question of amusing, moving, or delighting the mind, we may in a pinch agree that broadcasting is sufficient But science and philosophy require a quite different rhythm of thought, which reading used to make possible Or, rather, they require an absence of rhythm Reflection frequently halts or breaks the movement, introduces unequal pauses, backward glances, and detours, which require the presence of the text and the possibility of handling it at leisure All this is impossible in listening.

The ear alone is not adequate for the transmission of abstract works

But I will not dwell on all these very interesting problems, the nature and scope of which we can already see, I shall limit myself, in concluding this point (though not yet in closing), to pushing on toward certain particular points on the literary horizon.

Fantasy is one of the provinces of literature, and I have sometimes asked myself in what new developments it might, today or tomorrow, be put to use Let me be more specific What would or could such a maker of imaginary worlds as Jules Verne or H G Wells do today? Note that although they invented imaginary worlds, neither of them attempted anything on the intellectual side For example, they made no effort to imagine the arts of the future The celebrated Captain Nemo, as everyone knows, plays the organ in his *Nautilus* at the bottom of the ocean, and what he plays is the music of

Bach or Handel. Jules Verne did not foresee our electronic music, nor did he think up new combinations or compositions, nor some yet unknown kind of aesthetics. Remember that it was easy for him to imagine certain inventions that have been made since his time: the submarine, the airplane, etc. These required no more than the elaboration of already existing resources combined with the naive fantasies of primitive man, fantasies he has had from the beginning—for instance flying through the air, traveling undersea, striking someone dead from at a distance, creating riches without the corresponding toil. All this required no more imagination than what may be termed elementary. Even Wells in his famous book *The Time Machine* used and explored time as it used to be, old fashioned time, the kind of time that had been real down to his day.

But anyone today who wanted to be the successor of these famous storytellers would have to borrow from recent science its paradoxical views and strange predictions. True, he would disconcert his reader and doubtless require of him some rather abstruse knowledge. After all, it would not be impossible to bring into modern literature a truly modern version of the fantastic: for example, having prepared the way with a semblance of scientific explanation, one could introduce a character who with a gesture or a mere glance at an instrument produces tremendous effects at a distance—very much like magic. Such magic already exists! We can open a safe by merely speaking a phrase, an "Open Sesame!" More than that, and with no trick, we know very well (sometimes too well) that a gesture or a glance directed at a human being can often bring about astonishing consequences. For the future it will be enough to substitute imaginary mechanisms for living persons, making them sensitive to a glance—

an invention requiring little of the writer—and we shall have yet unexploited means of combining the elements of fiction

But all this is merely derived, roughly, from our present possibilities in physics We must go a bit further To think of the destiny of literature is also, and above all, to think of the future of the mind On this point, everyone is perplexed Since we are entirely free to conceive the mind's future as we wish, we may arbitrarily suppose either that things will continue to be very like what we know, or that in the coming age there will be a decline in intellectual values, a deterioration and decadence comparable to what happened at the close of antiquity, when culture was abandoned, when works of literature and art were either no longer comprehensible or were destroyed, and the production of such works forbidden All these things are unhappily quite possible, and possible in two well-known ways either the tremendous power of our instruments of destruction may be brought into play, decimating the populations of the most cultivated regions of the globe, wrecking the monuments, libraries, laboratories, archives, reducing the survivors to a poverty that would overwhelm their intelligence and suppress all that elevates the mind of man, or else, not the means of destruction, but the very means of possession and enjoyment, with all the incoherence resulting from too frequent and too facile sense impressions, with the rapid and widespread application of industrial methods to the production, evaluation, and consumption of the fruits of the mind, may in the end corrupt the highest and most important intellectual virtues—the powers of attention, meditation, and critical analysis, and what may be called thought in the grand style, or prolonged

and profound research carried through to the most precise and forceful expression of its object.

Let me take a more reassuring view for a moment. I warn you that I am here dealing with the *intellectually fantastic*, with possibilities which, as I told you just now, neither Verne, nor Wells nor Poe himself, the greatest and most profound author in this genre, dared to imagine. Let us first recall that we know nothing about the mind itself and almost nothing about the senses. I have sometimes remarked to physicists, when the conversation had turned to the many unforeseen innovations that bewilder science today, that, after all, the retina must have its own ideas about light, about the wave phenomena that confound the terms we have taken from traditional language—matter, energy, continuity and discontinuity . . .

"It is to be predicted," I would say to them, "that, one day or another, you will be forced to concentrate your research on the sensibility and its organs. These are your basic mechanisms. Every measurement you physicists make brings into play: touch, sight, and the muscular sense. With the help of your numerous relays and other instruments, you have gone far beyond the little radius within which all these senses have a hold on something. You began by using the images they perceive, to imagine what you thought existed below the level of the senses, but now you have reached the limit, beyond which those images and analogies are useless. You must come back to the source, back to our little-known senses which bring us what we know."

We know still less, perhaps, about memory and the other faculties, or properties, of what we call the mind. And yet (and perhaps without knowing more) it is not absurd to

imagine that in the not too distant future all our ideas about the mind and its faculties may be shaken up, transformed, as our ideas about the physical world are at present, compared with what they were forty years ago What we still call intelligence, memory, imagination, genius, talent, etc are notions and categories that will perhaps seem as crude, primitive, and outdated as the idea of "matter" opposed to "mind" does today You know, of course, that in the last few years matter has vanished, and with it many a dispute Spiritualism and materialism now have only historical significance—that of a rather outworn antithesis

What can happen, then, in this field?

A great scientist of my acquaintance, who still has full confidence in the somewhat shaken theory of evolution, firmly believes that man will finally acquire what he now lacks to resolve the contradictions that today impede him in many fields, that we shall eventually become familiar (in the *course of a few hundred centuries*) with an entirely new world, characterized by the pre-existence and actual occurrence of vastly different magnitudes, widely separated dimensions and speeds, and that the most abstract notions, those which today are only mathematical symbols without images, will become intuitive in the minds of men in those times

I confess I am less certain than he that the resources of our nature will bestow such favors on our intelligence, but you have every right to dream of them, and I should not like to detain you any longer from yourselves and your hopes

Freedom of the Mind

[1939]

It is a sign of the times and not a very good sign that today it is not only necessary but imperative to interest people's minds in the fate of the Mind—that is in their own fate

This necessity is obvious at any rate to men of a certain age (which means unfortunately an age that is only too certain) men who have known quite another time lived quite another life accepted suffered and observed the good and evil things of life in quite other surroundings in a very different world

They have admired things that are hardly ever admired now, have seen truths living that are now nearly dead have in fact speculated on values whose decline or collapse is as clear as manifest and as ruinous to their hopes and beliefs as the decline or collapse of the securities and currencies which they, and everyone else, once thought were unshakable values

They have witnessed the ruin of their former faith in the mind a faith that was the foundation and, in a way the postulate of their life

They had faith in the mind but what mind? what did they mean by this word?

The word is indecipherable, since it refers to the source and value of all other words But the men I am thinking of gave it a special meaning Perhaps they meant by mind that

personal yet universal activity, internal and external, which confers on life, on the raw energies of life, on the world, and the reactions provoked in us by the world, a direction and use, a concentration and cumulative effort, or effect, all quite different from those having to do with the normal functioning of ordinary life, the mere preservation of the person

To comprehend this point correctly we must understand by the word *mind* the ability, the need, and the energy to separate and to develop thoughts and acts which are not necessary to the functioning of our organism, or do not improve its economy

For the living creature in us, like all living creatures, has to have a certain power, *a power of transformation* that can exert itself on all the things around us, to make us aware of them

This power of transformation is spent in solving the vital problems imposed on us by our organism and our surroundings

We are, above all, a system of transformation, more or less complex (according to the species of animal) Since everything that lives must both expend and receive life, the living creature and his surroundings mutually modify each other.

However, once the vital needs are satisfied, there is one species, our own, an *actively* strange species, which thinks it must create other needs and other tasks for itself than that of preserving life It is concerned with other exchanges, and tempted to other transformations

Whatever may be the origin, the cause of its curious divergence, the human species has set out on an enormous adventure whose aim and end it does not know, and whose limits it imagines it can ignore

Man has set out on an adventure and what I call *the mind* has furnished him with the immediate direction, the spur, the stimulus the impetus the drive just as it furnished the pretexts and all the illusions required for action These pretexts and illusions by the way have varied from age to age The perspective of the intellectual adventure is a shifting one

This more or less is what I meant by my opening remarks

I want to dwell on this point for a moment so as to show more precisely how our *human* power differs (though not entirely) from our *animal* power—the latter being spent in preserving our life specializing in the performance of the habitual cycle of our physiological functions

Our human power is different but resembles the other and is very closely connected with it The similarity between them is an important fact and on reflection, teems with consequences It may be quite easily shown we must not forget that whatever we do, whatever the object of our action, whatever the order of impressions we receive from the world around us and whatever our reactions to them, one and the same organism is entrusted with the whole business, the same apparatus of relations is used for the two activities I have indicated the useful and the useless, the indispensable and the arbitrary

The same senses, the same muscles, the same limbs, more than that, the same types of signs, the same tokens of exchange, the same languages, the same modes of logic that function in the most indispensable actions of our life, all likewise figure in our most gratuitous, conventional and extravagant actions

In short, man does not have two sets of equipment, he has only one, and sometimes it functions to maintain his life his physiological rhythm and sometimes it furnishes the illusions and labors of our *great adventure*

On one subject in particular I have often made a compari-

son between our two forms of action, saying that the same organs, muscles, nerves, produce both walking and dancing, exactly as our faculty of language serves, on one hand, to express our needs and ideas, while on the other, the same words and forms can combine to produce poetry In both cases a single mechanism is used for two completely different ends

It is therefore natural, in speaking of both practical and spiritual matters (meaning by *spiritual* all science, art, philosophy, etc), that we should note a remarkable parallel between them, and be able sometimes to draw a lesson from it

Certain rather difficult questions can thus be simplified, by showing the similarity—based on our organs of action and relation—between the activities that may be called *superior* and those that may be called practical or *pragmatic*

Between the two, since the same organs are involved, there is an analogy of functions, a correspondence of dynamic phases and conditions All this has a profound substantive origin, since the organism itself governs it

I was saying just now how sadly affected men of my years are by the times so rapidly and crudely replacing those they once knew, and in this connection I mentioned the word *value*

I spoke, I believe, of the decline and collapse, before our very eyes, of the values of our life, and with the word *value* I brought together under one term, one sign, values of the material and the spiritual order.

Value is precisely what I wish to talk about, the important point to which I should like to draw your attention

We are today witnessing a true and gigantic transmutation of values (to use Nietzsche's excellent phrase), and in giving to this lecture the title "Freedom of the Mind" I am simply

alluding to one of those essential values which nowadays seem to be suffering the same fate as material values

So in saying *value* I mean that *mind* is a value just as *oil wheat* and *gold* are values

I said *value* because an appraisal an assessment of importance is involved and also because there is a price to be discussed—the price we are willing to pay for the value we call *the mind*

We may have made an investment in this value we can follow it as they say on the stock exchange we can watch its ups and downs in the quotations to be found in the world s general estimate of it

These quotations inscribed on every page of the newspapers show us how it comes into competition here and there with other values

For there are competing values for example, *political power* (not always in accord with *mind*), *social security*, or the *State*

All these values, rising and falling, constitute the great stock market of human affairs On that market, *mind* is " weak" —it is nearly always falling

Considering the mind as a value allows us, as with all values, to divide men according to the confidence they have in it

Certain men stake everything on it, all their hopes, all their savings—all the vitality, courage, and faith they have managed to garner

Others take only a moderate interest For them, it is not a very exciting investment, its fluctuations concern them little

There are still others who are almost completely indifferent to it, they have not put their vital money into the business

And finally, it must be admitted, there are those who do their best to depreciate it

You see that I am borrowing the language of the stock exchange It may seem strange, adapted to spiritual matters, but to my mind there is none better, and perhaps no other, to express relations of this kind, for when you think of it, both the spiritual and the material economy can be quite well summed up as a simple conflict of *evaluations*

I have often been struck by the analogies that arise, in the most natural way in the world, between the life of the mind in all its manifestations and the various aspects of economic life

Once we have perceived the likeness, we are almost bound to follow it out to its very limits

In both enterprises, in the economic as in the spiritual life, you will find the same basic notions of *production* and *consumption.*

In the spiritual life, the producer is a writer, an artist, a philosopher, a scientist, the consumer is a reader, a listener, a spectator

You will also find the notion of *value* which I have just been using, and which is essential in both realms, likewise the notion of exchange, and that of supply and demand

All this is simple, easily explained These terms have just as much meaning on the internal market (where every mind argues, negotiates, or compromises with other minds) as in the world of material interests

Moreover, in either case we may equally well speak of capital and labor *Civilization is a kind of capital* that may go on accumulating for centuries, as certain other kinds of capital do, and absorbing its compound interest.

This parallel seems striking when we think about it. The

analogy is quite natural I would go so far as to see an actual identity and for this reason First as I said the same organism is involved, whether in production or consumption—these terms always imply exchange but more than that all society is a result of the relations between a great number of individuals everything that goes on in the vast system of living and (more or less) thinking persons, each of whom sees himself as both ally and enemy of all the others—unique as far as he himself is concerned but indistinguishable and as though nonexistent amongst the many

That is the point, and it may be observed and verified in the practical as well as the spiritual realm On one hand, the individual on the other indistinct quantity, and things So the general form of these relations cannot be very different, whether it be a matter of production, exchange, or consumption of articles for the mind, or of articles for material life

How could it be otherwise? It is the same problem in both cases it is always a matter of an *individual* and an *indistinct mass of individuals*, in either direct or indirect relation, the latter above all, since in the majority of cases it is only *indirectly* that we feel external pressure in economic as in spiritual matters, or, in turn, exert our own influence externally on an indefinite number of listeners or spectators

The result is a twofold relationship Seeing that, on the one hand, exchange must take place, while on the other, men and their needs are diverse, what happens is that when these unique individuals, with their irreconcilable tastes or their abilities, industry, talents, and personal ideologies, come face to face on a market, whether of doctrines or ideas, of raw materials or finished articles, then the competition waged between their individual values forms, for a moment only, a dynamic equilibrium based on the *values* of the moment

Just as certain merchandise is worth so much for a few hours today, just as it is subject to sudden fluctuations or to very slow but continuous variations, so with the values of taste, doctrine, style, ideals, etc

Yet the mind's economy contains phenomena much more difficult to define, since most of them are not measurable, nor recorded by organs or institutions that specialize in doing so

Since we are considering the individual in contrast with his fellows, we may be permitted to recall a saying of the ancients, that about tastes and colors there is no disputing But in fact, the opposite is the case we do nothing else

We spend our time disputing tastes and colors—on the stock exchange, on innumerable boards and committees, in the Academies, and it could not be otherwise Wherever the individual and the group, the singular and the plural, must come face to face and try either to agree or to silence each other, there is nothing but bargaining

Here the analogy we are tracing is so striking that it borders on identity

So, when I speak of the mind, I now mean an aspect and property of collective life, as real as material wealth and sometimes as precarious

I mean to designate a kind of production and evaluation, an entire economy which either prospers or not, which is more or less stable like the material economy, which either develops or declines, which has its general powers, its institutions, its own laws, and is not without its secrets

Do not think I am here playing with a mere simile, a more or less poetic device, I am not trying to proceed by mere rhetorical artifice from the idea of a material economy to that of a spiritual or intellectual economy

In fact if we look closely at the matter we find that the opposite is true. *The mind came first*, and it could not have been otherwise.

It is the commerce of minds that was necessarily the first commerce in the world, the very first, the one that started it all, necessarily the original; for before swapping goods, it was necessary to swap signs, and consequently a set of signs had to be agreed on.

There is no market, no exchange without language; the first instrument of all trade is language. We may here repeat (giving it a suitably altered meaning) the famous saying: *In the beginning was the Word*. It was essential that the Word should precede the *act* of trading.

But the Word is no less than one of the most accurate names for what I have called *the mind*. The mind and the Word in many of their uses are almost synonymous. The term that in the Vulgate means *word* is translated from the Greek "logos," which means at once *calculation, reason, speech, discourse, and knowledge*, as well as expression.

Consequently, in saying that the *word* is identical with the mind, I think I am not uttering a heresy, even in linguistics.

Besides, the least reflection will show that in all commerce the first thing required is something to start the conversation, to designate the article to be exchanged, and to show a need. Consequently, it must be something that strikes the senses but is also intelligible, and that something is what, in a general sense, I call the *word*.

The commerce of minds, therefore, precedes the commerce of things. I shall show that the former also accompanies the latter, and very closely.

Not only is it logically necessary that this should be so, but it can also be demonstrated historically. You will find the

proof in this remarkable fact, that those regions of the globe where the most extensive, the most active, and the oldest traffic in material goods has flourished are precisely those regions where the production of intellectual values, the production of ideas, works of the mind, and works of art started earliest and has been most prolific and various

I would mention further that it is in these same regions that what is called *freedom of the mind* has been most widely granted, and would add that it could not have been otherwise

When relations between men become most frequent, active, and numerous, it is impossible to preserve great differences of understanding between them, though differences of caste or status may persist

Conversation, even between superiors and inferiors, takes on an ease and familiarity not to be found in places where relations are less frequent For example, it is known that in ancient times, particularly in Rome, the slave and his master had a quite familiar relationship, in spite of the harshness, the discipline, and the atrocities that were legally permitted

I was saying, then, that freedom of the mind and the mind itself developed most fully where trade developed at the same time In every age, without exception, any intense production of art, of ideas, of spiritual values, has flourished in places that are also remarkable for their economic activity As you know, the Mediterranean basin offers the most striking and conclusive example in this connection

This basin is, in fact, a kind of privileged place, predestined, providentially marked out for the vigorous trade that grew up around its shores and moved back and forth between its ports

It stands like a deep bowl in the most temperate region of the globe, it is especially favorable to navigation, it washes

the coasts of three very different parts of the world, and as a result it attracts many and very diverse races, it brings them into contact into competition, concord or conflict, it also stirs them to exchanges of every kind This basin (which has the remarkable characteristic that a traveler can go from one point to any other point around it either by land, following the littoral or by sea) has for centuries been the scene of both mixture and differentiation among various families of the human race each enriching the other with every kind of experience

There was found the impulse to exchange and keen competition competition in trade in ability, in influence, in religion in propaganda competition in material products and spiritual values at once—there was no distinction

The same ship or row boat brought merchandise and gods ideas and methods

How many things have begun along the shores of the Mediterranean, by contagion or dissemination! That is how all that wealth came into being, to which our culture owes practically everything, at least in its origins, I may say that the Mediterranean has been a veritable *machine for making civilization*

And in creating trade, it necessarily created *freedom of the mind*

On the shores of the Mediterranean, then, *intellect, culture, and trade* are found together

But here is another example less commonplace than the one I have just given Consider the Rhine basin, from Basel to the sea, and think of the life that has developed along the banks of that great waterway, from the first centuries of our era to the Thirty Years' War A whole system of cities, all very much alike, was established along that river, which played

the part both of a conductor, like the Mediterranean, and a *collector* Whether Strasbourg, or Cologne, or towns nearer the sea, these *great centers were built up under analogous* conditions and showed a remarkable similarity in spirit, in institutions and functions, and in material and intellectual activity

These are towns to which prosperity came early towns for tradesmen and bankers The network they form, broadening out toward the sea, is linked to the industrial cities of *Flanders on the West and to the Hanseatic ports on the* Northeast

There, material wealth, spiritual or intellectual wealth, and freedom in the form of free cities were established and consolidated, and grew from century to century Those cities were both strongholds of finance and strategic positions for the mind They were the site of industries requiring technicians, of banks requiring accountants and commercial envoys, men specially trained and devoted to exchange, at a time when the means of exchange and communication were not very practical, but there, also, were to be found an artistic vitality, a thirst for learning, an outpouring of painting, music, and literature—in fine, the creation and communication of values fully parallel to the economic activity in the same cities

It was there that printing was invented, whence it spread throughout the world But it was along the banks of the river itself, and as one component of the trade generated by the river, that the book industry grew up and spread over the whole of the civilized world

I have said that all those towns showed remarkable similarities in spirit, customs, and inner organization, they won or purchased a kind of autonomy

There, wealth and the amateur met, the connoisseur was

not lacking The mind as represented by artists writers or printers could flourish there in the most favorable soil

It was an excellent soil for culture which requires freedom and resources

So that group of cities along the river gave rise to a narrow strip of provinces stretching toward the sea quite different from the regions of the interior to East and West which were agricultural lands that remained for a long time feudal

You must understand that I am giving a very summary account and that to fill in the details of my sketch you would need to consult a good many books and rearrange my whole scheme of periods and places But what I have said will perhaps be enough to justify my notion of the parallel between the intellectual development and the commercial, industrial and banking development of the Mediterranean and Rhine basins

What we call the Middle Ages was transformed into the modern world by acts of exchange—a kind of action that raises the temperature of the mind to its highest point Not that the Middle Ages were, as they have been said to be a period of darkness They have their witnesses standing in stone But those feats of construction, their cathedrals, those incomparable works by medieval architects—and above all the French—are for us real enigmas if we inquire into the conditions of their conception and execution

In fact, we have no document telling of the real education of those *master craftsmen*, who nevertheless must have had highly technical knowledge to construct works of such scale and such extreme boldness They have left us no treatises on geometry, mechanics architecture, perspective or the resistance of materials, no plans, no drawings nothing that, for us, throws any light on what they knew

One thing we know, however those architects were nomads They went building from town to town It seems they must have transmitted their theoretical procedures and building techniques from person to person The workmen and their bosses or foremen formed trade guilds, which exchanged methods of stonecutting and dressing, carpentry or ironwork But no written document has come down to us on all those techniques The famous notebook of Villard de Honnecourt is, as a document, completely inadequate

All those itinerant builders, then, those carriers of the methods and formulas of art, were also instruments of exchange . . but primitive, personal and, moreover, jealous of their secrets and the tricks of their trade. They guarded, as arcane, what any age of intense culture tends to disseminate as widely as possible and perhaps too widely

There was also a certain intellectual life in the monasteries. It was in the shade of the cloisters that the study of antiquity was born, that the literature, the languages, the civilization of the ancients were studied, preserved, and practiced for several bleak centuries

In the whole of the West, the life of the mind was terribly starved between the fifth and the eleventh centuries Even at the time of the first Crusades it was not to be compared with that found in Byzantium and Islam, from Baghdad to Granada, in the realm of the arts, the sciences, and modes of life Saladin must have been, in taste and culture, greatly superior to Richard Cœur de Lion

Must not this glance at the high Middle Ages show us something about our own time? Culture, cultural changes, the value put on matters of the mind, the appraisal of its products, and the place we give to these in the hierarchy of man's needs—we know now that, on the one hand, all

this is related to the ease and the variety of exchanges of all sorts on the other hand it is strangely precarious Everything that happens today must be related to these two points Let us look within and around us What we may observe I have already summed up for you in my opening words

I said that to invite minds to be concerned about the Mind and its fate was a sign of the times, a symptom Could I have had such an idea if a whole mass of impressions had not been significant and powerful enough to make me reflect, and to turn my reflections into the act of expressing them for you? And should I have done so if I had not been aware that my impressions were those of many other people, that my own sense of a decline of intellect a threat to culture, a twilight of the purer divinities, was growing stronger and stronger in all those who can sense anything in the order of those higher values of which we are speaking?

Culture, civilization are rather vague terms which it may be amusing to distinguish, contrast, or combine I shall not dwell on them For myself, as I have told you, they are a kind of capital that grows and can be used and accumulated, can increase and diminish like all the imaginable kinds of capital—the best known of which is, of course, what we call *our body*

Of what is the capital we call Culture or Civilization composed? In the first place, it is composed of *things*, material objects—books pictures, instruments, etc —having the probable life-span, the fragility, and the precariousness of *things* But this is not enough—any more than an ingot of gold, an acre of good land, or a machine can be capital unless there are men *who need them* and *know how to use them* Note these two conditions If the material of culture is to become capital, there must also be men who need and know how to use it—

that is, men who have a thirst for knowledge and for the power of inner transformation, for the creations of their sensibility, and who, moreover, know how to acquire or exercise the habits, the intellectual discipline, the conventions and methods needed to exploit the arsenal of documents and instruments accumulated over the centuries

I say that our cultural capital is in peril It is so from several quarters It is so in several ways It is brutally so It is insidiously so. It is under attack from many of us It is being wasted, neglected, and debased by us all The progress of disintegration is obvious

I have already given several examples of this I have shown as best I could to what extent the whole of modern life, often in very brilliant and alluring forms, constitutes a real malady of culture by allowing that wealth which should accumulate like natural riches, that capital which must be deposited in successive strata in our minds, to be subjected to the general state of agitation in the world, a state both propagated and intensified by our abuse of all the means of communication At such a pitch of activity, exchanges amount to a *fever*, and life devours life

Perpetual shock, novelty, news, instability itself has become a real need, nervous tension is communicated by all the devices the mind itself has created It could be said that there is an element of suicide in the feverish and superficial life of the civilized world.

How can anyone conceive of the future of culture—I mean anyone now old enough to compare what it used to be with what it is coming to be? I propose a simple fact for your reflection, just as it imposed itself on mine

I have witnessed the gradual dying out of men of the greatest value for their contribution to our ideal capital, men

as valuable as those who created it one by one I have seen our connoisseurs vanish those matchless amateurs who if they did not themselves create works yet created the true value of works they were the impassioned but incorruptible judges for whom or against whom it was a joy to work They knew how to read a virtue now lost They knew how to see how to hear and even how to listen Which means that whatever they wished to read hear or see *again* was, by recapitulation turned into a *solid value* And the world's wealth was thus increased

I do not say that they are all dead and that no more will ever be born But I note with regret their growing rarity It was their profession *to be themselves* and in all independence to enjoy the exercise of their judgment, which neither publicity nor criticism could affect

Intellectual and artistic life at its most passionate and disinterested was their *raison d'être*

There was no theater, exhibition, or book to which they would not devote scrupulous attention They were sometimes spoken of—with a touch of irony—as men of taste, but the species has become so rare that the phrase itself is no longer felt as a gibe They are a heavy loss, for nothing is more precious to the creator than those who can appraise his work and who, above all, can appreciate the care he has put into it, the *work value* of his work, as I was saying just now—that appraisal which, with no regard to fashion or momentary effect, fixes the authority of a work and a name

Today, matters go very quickly, reputations are quickly made, and vanish in the same way Nothing lasting is done for nothing is done with a view to lasting

How do you expect the writer not to sense, beneath the appearances of widespread appreciation and attention to his

art, all the futility of the age, the confusion of values and all the superficiality it encourages?

If he brings to his labor all the time and care he can, he does so with the feeling that something of this will take effect in the mind of the man who reads it. He hopes to be repaid by a certain quality and span of attention, for a little of the trouble he took in writing his page.

Let us confess that we pay him very badly. It is not our fault; we are swamped with books. Above all, we are harassed with reading about things of immediate and violent interest. In the public press the news is of such diversity, incoherence, and intensity (on certain days particularly) that the little time we are able to give to reading, out of twenty-four hours, is entirely taken up with that, and our minds are left troubled, agitated, overwrought.

If a man is employed, earns his living, and can devote but an hour a day to reading, at home or in the bus or the subway, his hour is taken up with crime stories, nonsense, tittle-tattle, and invariably the same "news," in a confusion and abundance that seem calculated to bewilder and stultify people's minds.

Such a man is lost to books. This is inevitable, and we can do nothing about it.

The consequence of it all is, first, a real debasement of culture, and, second, a real debasement of true freedom of the mind, for such freedom requires detachment, a rejection of all the incoherent or violent sensations we get so constantly from modern life.

I have just mentioned freedom. There is ordinary freedom, and there is freedom of the mind.

All this is a little outside my subject, but I must dwell on it for a moment. Freedom, that tremendous word widely

used in politics (though forbidden here and there in the last few years) freedom has been an ideal a myth, a word full of promise for some threatening for others a word that has stirred men and moved paving stones the rallying cry of those who looked weak but felt strong, against those who looked strong and were unaware that they were weak

Political freedom is almost inseparable from notions of equality and sovereignty, but it is seldom compatible with the idea of order, and scarcely more with the idea of justice

But this is not my subject

I come back to the mind When we examine somewhat more closely all the kinds of political freedom, we think at once of *freedom of thought*

Freedom of thought is confused in people's minds with the freedom to publish, which is not the same thing

No one has ever been kept from thinking as he wishes That would be difficult, unless there were machines for tracing thoughts in people's brains It will certainly come to that, but not just yet, and it is one discovery we are not looking forward to Meanwhile, then, we have freedom of thought—insofar as such freedom is not limited by thought itself

It is all very nice to have freedom of thought, but that means we have to think about something!

Yet, in common usage, when we say *freedom of thought* we mean *freedom to publish*, or else *freedom to teach*

This sort of freedom creates serious problems it is always raising some difficulty At times the Nation, at other times the State, and again the Church, School, or Family has found reasons for opposing the freedom to think in published form, to think in public or to teach

Such authorities are all more or less jealous of any outward signs of a man thinking

I do not wish to deal here with the root of the problem, which is a matter of particular cases It is obvious that in certain cases the freedom to publish should be supervised and restricted.

But the problem becomes very difficult when it is a question of general measures For example, it is clear that during a war it is impossible to allow everything to be published It is not simply that it is unwise to let out news about the conduct of operations—everyone understands that—but there are also certain things that public order itself cannot allow to be published

That is not all Freedom to publish, an essential part of the freedom of trade between minds, is also, in certain cases and certain places today, severely restricted and even, in fact, suppressed.

You see what a burning question this is, and how it crops up nearly everywhere I mean, everywhere that questions can still be asked at all. I am not personally very much inclined to publish my thought Anyone can quite easily not publish Who forces you to publish? What demon? And why do so, after all? Ideas can very well be kept to oneself Why externalize them? They are so brilliant hidden in a drawer or in one's head. . . .

But, in fact, there are people who like to publish, to press their ideas on others, who think only to write, and who write only to publish Such people usually venture onto the ground of politics And that is where the trouble begins

Politics, being obliged to falsify all the values which it is the mind's business to verify, excuses every kind of misrepresentation or omission that suits its purposes, and rejects, even violently, or forbids, those that do not

What, in short, is politics? . Politics consists in the will

to gain and keep power so it must exert either constraint or illusion over minds which are the source of all power

All power necessarily wants to prevent the publication of those things not consonant with its exercise It tries its best to do so The political mind is always in the end forced to misrepresent It puts into circulation into exchange false intellectual coinage it introduces falsified historical notions constructs specious rationalizations in short it allows itself everything needed to preserve its authority which—I know not why—is called *moral*

It must be admitted that in all possible cases *politics and freedom of the mind are mutually exclusive* The latter is the *true enemy of parties* just as it is of every doctrine that comes into power

That is why I wanted to stress the different shades of meaning these expressions can take on in French

Freedom is a notion that figures in contradictory expressions, since we sometimes use it to mean that we can do whatever we wish, and at other times that we can do what we do not wish—which is, according to some, the maximum of freedom

This amounts to saying there are several persons in each of us, but since these several persons have only one and the same language, it sometimes happens that the same word (like freedom) is used to express very different meanings It is a "word of all trades"

Sometimes we are free because there is nothing against what we are tempted to do, at other times we may feel more truly *free* because we have overcome an inducement or a temptation, we are able to act against our own inclination that is a maximum of freedom

Let us look for a moment at this notion, so fleeting in its

spontaneous uses It occurs to me at once that the idea of freedom is not *instinctive* in us, it never comes unless it is called I mean it is always *a response*

It never occurs to us that we are free until something shows us that we are not, or might not be The idea of freedom is a response to some sensation or suggestion of constraint, prevention, or resistance, something opposed either to an impulse of our being, to a desire of our senses, to a need, or to the exercise of our deliberate will

I am free only when I feel that I am free, but I feel that I am free only when I imagine some restraint, when I begin to think of some state in contrast to my present state

Freedom therefore cannot be felt, imagined, or wished for, except as the effect of a *contrast*

If my body finds obstacles to its natural movements, its reflexes; if my thought is hampered in its operations either by some physical pain or some obsession or by the action of the external world, by noise, excessive heat or cold, some jarring vibration, or music made by the neighbors, I aspire to a changed state, to some deliverance, to freedom I move to regain the use of my faculties to the full I move to reject the condition that refuses me this.

You see, then, that there is some negation in this term *freedom*, when we go back to the origins of its use.

And here is the conclusion I draw Since the need for freedom and the idea of freedom do not arise in those not subject to hindrances and *constraints*, the less sensitive we are to restrictions the less often will the word and the reaction called *freedom* occur

A man who is not very sensitive to obstacles put in the way of his mind's freedom, to those constraints imposed on him by the public authorities, for example, or by external cir-

cumstances of whatever nature will react only slightly against such constraints He will feel no impulse to revolt, no reaction, no rebellion against the authority that hampers him On the contrary in many cases he will feel relieved of some vague responsibility His deliverance his freedom will consist in the sense of being unburdened of the bother of thinking, deciding and willing

You can guess the enormous consequences in men so insensitive to things of the mind that they are unaware of the pressures hindering the production of works of the mind, there is no reaction at all at least externally

As you know a case is to be found not far away, you can see on the horizon the visible effects of such pressure on the mind and at the same time you can see how little reaction it provokes This is a fact

It is only too evident But I do not wish to judge, for it is not my place Who can judge of men? To do that is surely to be more than a man?

I mention this because there is no subject that touches us more closely, for we do not know what the future holds for those of us whom, if you will allow me, I shall call *men of mind*

So I find it both necessary and disquieting today, to have to invoke not what are called the *rights of the mind*—these are but words, there are no rights if there is no force—but rather the benefit to everyone in preserving and sustaining the values of the mind

Why?

Because the creation and organized existence of intellectual life have, at present the most complex and yet the clearest and closest relation to life itself, to the whole of human life No one has ever explained the real point about us men, and our peculiarity which is mind Mind is a certain power in us that

has involved us in an extraordinary adventure, our species has diverged from all the original and normal conditions of life. We have made the world like the mind—and we want to live in this mind's world The mind wants to live in what it has made.

It was a matter of remaking what Nature had made, or of correcting her mistakes and so, in the end, of remaking man himself, as it were

It was a matter of remaking everything insofar as man's means would allow, and they are already considerable, of refashioning his mode of living, equipping the portion of the planet he inhabits, of traveling over it in every direction, from top to bottom, of exploiting it, extracting its whole content of usable material for his purposes All this is very fine, and we do not see what else man could do but this, unless he returned to a completely animal state.

But we must not forget to point out that a wholly spiritual activity goes along with this material equipping of the globe, and is linked with it I mean the equipping of the mind itself, which has consisted in creating speculative knowledge and the values of art, and in producing a large body of works, a whole capital of *immaterial* riches But, whether material or spiritual, our treasures are not imperishable. I wrote a long time ago, in 1919, that civilizations are as mortal as any living creature, that it is no longer strange to think that our own civilization can vanish, with its methods, its works of art, its philosophy, and its monuments, as so many other civilizations have vanished since the beginning—like a great ship going down.

In vain is it armed with all the modern means and methods of holding its course, of defending itself against the sea, in vain does it boast of its powerful engines, they propel it to

destruction as easily as to harbor and it goes down with all it carries goods and men

All this struck me at the time Today I feel no surer than then That is why I do not think it useless to recall the perishability of all our goods whether culture itself or freedom of expression

For where the mind has no freedom culture sickens Beyond our frontiers we can see important publications reviews once very much alive now filled with the most unbearable pedantry it is obvious that all life has gone out of them yet they must keep up the pretense of intellectual activity

That pretense reminds us of what went on in the days when Stendhal made fun of certain learned men he had met despotism had driven them to take refuge in discussing the commas in a text of Ovid

We thought such wretchedness was gone forever Such absurdity seemed banished beyond recall But there it is back again in all its force, in certain places

On all hands we find obstacles and threats to the mind, its freedom and its cultivation are contested both by our inventions and our ways of life, both by politics in general and by various policies in particular, so that it is perhaps neither useless nor unwarranted to sound the alarm, and to point out the perils that surround what men of my years have considered the sovereign good

I have tried to say these things elsewhere I spoke of them recently in England, and I noticed that I was heard with great interest that my words expressed feelings and thoughts immediately grasped by my audience And now listen to what I still have to tell you

I wish, if you will allow me to express a wish, that France,

although burdened with many other cares, would make herself the repository, the temple where the traditions of the highest and finest culture may be kept alive, the tradition of truly great art, marked by purity of form and rigor of thought, and that she would also welcome and preserve everything that is highest and freest in the commerce of ideas, that is what I wish for my country!

Perhaps the circumstances, economic political, and material, are too difficult the situation among nations and competing interests, our state of nerves, and the stormy atmosphere that makes us draw our breath in anxiety

But, after all, I shall have done my duty in saying so!

II

Reflections on Politics

The Persian Letters

A Preface

[1926]

To Henri de Régnier

These delightful "Persian Letters" set one not so much dreaming as thinking Reflections that take Montesquieu as their starting point may perhaps be allowed to go too far, and probe the depths of his fancy. I shall commit some serious digressions

* * *

A society rises from brutality to order As barbarism is the era of *fact*, so the era of order must necessarily be the reign of *fiction*—for there is no power capable of founding order on the mere coercion of bodies by bodies Fictional powers are needed for that.

* * *

Order, then, requires *the active presence of absent things*, and results from ideals counterbalancing instincts.

A fiduciary or conventional system develops, setting up between men imaginary links and obstacles whose effects are very real. They are essential to society.

Little by little the *sacred*, the *just*, the *legal*, the *decent*, the *praiseworthy* and their opposites take form and crystallize in the mind The Temple, the Throne, the Tribunal, the Tribune, the Theater—monuments of co-ordination and, as it were,

geodetic markers of order—arise one after the other Time itself is ornately marked with sacrifices, audiences, and spectacles to fix collective hours and dates Rites, forms, and customs complete the training of the human animals, repressing or moderating their immediate impulses Any reversion to untamed or unconquerable instincts gradually becomes rare and negligible But the whole system depends on the power of images and words It is indispensable to order that a man should feel on the very point of being hanged when he is on the point of deserving to be If he does not feel great conviction in this image, everything soon crumbles

* * *

The reign of order, which is that of symbols and signs, always results in fairly general disarmament, beginning with visible arms and gradually spreading to the will Swords get thinner and vanish, characters get rounder The age when fact was dominant fades imperceptibly away Under the names *foresight* and *tradition*, the future and the past, which are imaginary perspectives, dominate and restrain the present

Society then seems as natural to us as Nature, though it holds together only by magic Is such a system not, in fact, a conjured edifice being founded on writing, on obedience to words, the keeping of promises, the power of images, the observance of habits and conventions—all of them pure fictions?

* * *

This world of relationships, because we are used to it, seems as stable and spontaneous as the physical world; and though created by men, being their joint work from time immemorial, it seems no less complex and mysterious than the

It dares to speculate without regard to the infinitely complex system that makes it so independent of things and so detached from the primitive necessities The depths are hidden by appearances Thus reasoning is let loose man believes he is mind On every hand, questions, mockery, and theories spring up all the uses of the possible the unlimited exercise of speech unrelated to action The criticism of ideals is everywhere brilliant and effective—those very ideals that gave intelligence the leisure and occasion to criticize them

Meanwhile the instincts of preservation and perpetuation become exhausted or perverted

Thus, by the roundabout way of ideas and the turmoil of their activity, disorder and the *world of fact* are bound to return and reassert themselves at the expense of order

This return to the state of fact can sometimes come about in unforeseen ways, man can become a new species of barbarian, as an unexpected consequence of his boldest thought

Some people today believe that the scientific conquest of things is leading us on, or back, to barbarism, though in a laborious and rigorous form, yet more to be dreaded than the older kinds of barbarism, being more exact, more uniform, and infinitely more powerful We are returning, they say, to the era of fact—but of *scientific fact*

Now, societies on the contrary are based on *Vagueness*, at least, hitherto they have been based on notions and entities sufficiently mysterious to keep the rebellious mind from ever being quite sure that it was rid of them, or from daring to dread nothing but what it could see A certain tyrant of Athens, a man of insight, said that the gods were invented to punish hidden crimes

Could any society endure if it eliminated all that is vague and irrational, relying only on what is measurable and verifiable? The problem is ours and urgent The whole modern era shows a continual increase in precision Anything not tangible is incapable of precision and, as it were, lags behind the rest It will more and more, and of necessity, be considered useless and insignificant, by contrast

* * *

Order is always a burden to the individual Disorder makes him wish for the police or death Such are the two extreme conditions in which human nature is not at ease The individual's wish is for a perfectly enjoyable era, in which he is completely free, yet completely cared for He finds it toward the beginning of the end of a social system

That moment between order and disorder is the reign of delight Every possible advantage to be had from the regulation of powers and duties has been acquired, and now the first relaxations of the system are to be enjoyed. The institutions still stand They are great and imposing But, without showing any visible alteration, their splendid presence is now nearly all they are, their virtues have all been demonstrated, their future is secretly at an end, their character is no longer sacred, or rather it is now merely sacred, criticism and contempt weaken and empty them of all subsequent value The body politic quietly loses its futurity *It is the hour of general* enjoyment and consummation

* * *

The nearly always spectacular and voluptuous doom of a political structure is celebrated by a bonfire on which everything is heaped which fear had kept from being consumed before

State secrets private shames unspoken thoughts long-repressed dreams everything from the depths of those over-excited and joyously despairing hearts is brought out and thrown on the public mind

A fairylike flame soon to develop into a conflagration rises and runs over the face of things It throws a weird light on the dance of ends and means Manners and patrimonies dissolve Mysteries and treasures go up in smoke Respect evaporates and chains melt away in the incandescent consummation of life and death growing to the pitch of frenzy

If the Fates had ever given to any free man to choose, from all the known centuries the one in which he would have preferred to spend his life that happy man would have named I am sure, no other than the age of Montesquieu I am not without my weaknesses, I should do the same Europe at that time was the best of all possible worlds, law and license worked together truth was moderate, matter and energy did not govern directly—they were not yet in power Science was already flourishing and the arts highly refined, there was still a certain amount of religion There was caprice enough, and no excess of discipline The Tartuffes, the stupid Orgons, the sinister "Messieurs" and the absurd Alcestes were fortunately dead and buried, the Emiles, Renes, and sordid Rollas were yet to be born There were manners even in the street The shopkeepers knew how to turn a phrase Even tax collectors, prostitutes, spies and informers expressed themselves as no one today can The Treasury made its demands with elegant restraint

The earth was not yet entirely explored, the various peoples had plenty of room in the world, the map was not without large blanks and in Africa, America and Oceania

it showed empty spaces that made men dream. Even the days were not filled and frantic, but slow and free, schedules did not cut across men's thought and make individuals the slaves of regular hours and of each other

There were complaints against the government—it was still thought that improvement was possible But such worries were not excessive

There were many lively, sensual men whose intelligence shook Europe, as they rashly belabored everything, sacred and otherwise Ladies concerned themselves with the new-born differentials or with those animalcules that wriggle before the eyes under a microscope, and are almost a prerequisite to love Ladies hovered like fairies over the glass-and-copper cradle of the infant Electricity

Poetry itself tried to be clear and free from nonsense, which is impossible all it did was to get thinner

* * *

At that time, so supple and pure an intelligence prevailed that licentious manners of every kind seemed but the innocent exercise of a subtle creature to be caught by nothing, not even the worst Even the obscene could not snare it People were so witty, so skeptical, so in love with enlightenment that they felt they could not be soiled, degraded, or undone either by ideas, the most daring remarks, or the hottest encounter They even employed the supreme artifice, which is to invent nature and to mime simplicity This kind of fantasy is always a sign of the end of the show, a final moment of taste

* * *

That society knew its real self, as well or perhaps better than any society has ever done

There was no lack of mirrors It looked at itself as often,

as tenderly and as cruelly as any mortal person. Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire, and a multitude of lesser witnesses showed it its own face and its poses. In such men it saw itself as freer, bolder, more restless, more sensual than it doubtless was, and sometimes far more unhappy.

But even unhappy and even moribund, a society cannot look at itself without laughing. How can we bear to see ourselves?

• • •

How can one be a Persian?

The answer is a further question: *How can anyone be what one is?*

No sooner does the question occur to us than it takes us out of ourselves, and at once we see how impossible we are. Immediately we are astonished at being someone, at the absurdity of every individual face or existence, at the curious effect of seeing our acts, beliefs, and persons duplicated; everything social becomes a carnival, everything human is too human—an oddity, a delusion, a reflex, or nonsense.

The system of conventions I was speaking of just now becomes comic, sinister, unbearable to think of, almost unbelievable! Laws, religion, customs, clothes, wigs, swords, beliefs—all seem curiosities, a masquerade, things for the fairground or the museum.

But to get this distance and the full force of wonder, the laughter and then the smile coming to the lips of the model facing his image, there is one very simple device; it nearly always works and wonderfully. Most authors who have mirrored their epoch, for itself and for us, have used it. Nothing could be more ingenious, or easier to conceive, though difficult of execution.

elegant was ever written. The change in taste, the introduction of sensational devices, cannot touch this perfect book. Yet it has everything to fear from a return to the state of barbarism of which there are many warnings, even in literature. The *world of film*—we can feel it coming—is quietly bringing men back to the condition of not knowing even how to read—I mean to read in depth. There begin to be many people who are offended if asked to make the very slightest effort of mind. Such is the fruit, in the realm of Letters, of that progress of facility in everything which has for a long time now been the world's chief business. The quality of intelligence we put into a work is inevitably, almost automatically, related to the notion of the reader we have in mind. Montesquieu had no notion of such readers as ourselves. He did not write for us, not foreseeing that we should be so primitive. He has a taste for ellipsis, and in many of his maxims he calculates the form of his sentences, giving them a subtle kind of internal linking. He aims at minds rather more supple than ours, offering them the pleasures of intellectual elegance, along with everything required for such enjoyment.

* * *

This book is incredibly daring. We are amazed that the only trouble it brought upon its author was a passing worry that he might miss his seat in the Academy, and that was only a small cloud. What he got was fame, his seat, and a prodigious sale. Freedom of the mind was so great in those days that these frivolous and famous letters were not the slightest obstacle to their author's career as judge and philosopher. Hypocrisy is a necessity in an era that demands simplicity in appearances, when human complexity is not tolerated, when jealous authority or stupid opinion imposes a model on people. The model is promptly taken as a mask.

Hypocrisy flourishes only at times when the situation imperiously requires all citizens to conform to a simple type, easy to define and, consequently, to handle

Around 1720 this necessity was somewhat relaxed, between two great eras

* * *

To set up an exchange of letters between an imaginary Orient and a superficial Paris, an exchange in which the seraglio, the *salon*, the intrigues of sultanas and the whims of dancing girls, Parsees, the Pope, muftis, cafe gossip, dreams of the harem, imaginary constitutions, and political observations are all woven together—this was to provide the spectacle of a mind at the top of its vivacity, whose only law was to sparkle, to break with what it had just been, to display for its own pleasure its precision, swiftness, and buoyancy This is a tale, a comedy, almost a drama, and blood flows But it flows at a good distance, and even the passions and secret executions are here as literary as they should be

* * *

I must end by noting something remarkable In almost every work written in this lively and slightly diabolical style during the eighteenth century, we regularly find, by a kind of law of the genre, representatives of two human types actually very dissimilar Jesuits and eunuchs The Jesuits can be explained It was they who had educated, and very thoroughly, most of the good authors, who repaid their masters in jibes and caricature for what they had received in canings and exercises both spiritual and rhetorical

But who can explain all those eunuchs? I have no doubt that there is some secret and profound reason for the almost obligatory presence of these persons, so cruelly cut off from many things and, in a way, from themselves

Notes on the Greatness and Decline of Europe

[1927]

IN MODERN times, not one Power, not one Empire in Europe has been able to remain at the summit to exercise wide command, or even to hold on to its conquests for more than fifty years The greatest men have failed in this, even the most fortunate have led their nations to ruin Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Metternich, Bismarck—average span, forty years Not a single exception

Europe had it within her to conquer, rule, and organize the rest of the world to European ends She had invincible means and the men who had created them But far inferior to these men were those who controlled her destiny They had fed on the past, they could do nothing but imitate the past Opportunity, too, is past Her history and political traditions, her village feuds, her parish and shopkeepers' quarrels, her neighborhood jealousies and grudges, and, in short, the want of vision, the small-mindedness inherited from the time when she was as ignorant as, and no more powerful than, the other regions of the globe, all these things have caused Europe to lose her tremendous opportunity, the existence of which she did not even suspect at the right time Napoleon seems to be the only one who had any presentiment of what was bound to happen and what might be done He thought on the scale

to support her primitive political practices and to furnish them with more redoubtable and barbarous weapons

Thus a contrast a difference an astonishing discrepancy became apparent between two states of one and the same mind according as it devoted itself to disinterested labors to rigorous and critical awareness to the methodical exploration of its own depths or on the other hand applied itself to political interests It seemed to set aside for political use its shoddiest its most negligible its basest products instincts fetishes relics and vestiges of the past greed sounds without meaning and meanings that set the mind whirling—everything that science and the arts did not want or would no longer tolerate

All politics imply (and generally are unaware that they imply) a certain idea of man and even some notion of the destiny of the species a whole system of metaphysics ranging from sensualism of the crudest kind to the most daring mysticism

Suppose, for instance, that you are given unlimited power You are an honest man and your firm intention is to do your best You are levelheaded, your mind can consider things distinctly and grasp their relations, and lastly you are detached you are placed in a position of eminence, so powerfully absorbing that your own personal interests are as nothing are insipid compared to the value of what lies before you the possibilities that are yours You are not even troubled by what would trouble anyone else—that is, by your awareness of everyone's expectations, you are neither intimidated nor troubled by the hopes you inspire

Well! What are you going to do? What are you going to do *now*?

There are victories *per se* and victories *per accidens*

Peace is a virtual victory, a silent and continual victory of possible strength over probable greed

There is no true peace except when everyone is satisfied That is to say that most often there is no true peace There is only actual peace which, like war, is no more than an expedient.

The only treaties that count are those that reconcile ulterior motives

Everything that is open and avowed is, as it were, stripped of any future

We boast that we can impose our will on an adversary It sometimes happens that we can, but such an imposition may be disastrous Nothing seems to me more difficult than to determine a nation's true interests They must not be confused with its wishes To accomplish what we desire does not always keep us from ruin

A war that ends only because of an inequality in the total strength of the adversaries is a suspended war

The actions of a few men have consequences for millions of men, just as all living things are affected by the changes and disturbances in their surroundings As natural causes produce hail, typhoons, and epidemics, so intelligent causes affect millions of men, the great majority of whom submit to them as to the vagaries of the sky, the sea, the earth's crust When intelligence and will act upon the masses in the manner of blind, physical causes *we have what is called politics*

On Nations

It is never easy to picture clearly for oneself what is called a nation. Its plainest and strongest features go unnoticed by its

own people who are unaffected by what they have always seen The foreigner is aware of those features but too vividly and without sensing the vast number of internal relations and unseen exchanges by which the mystery of profound union works among millions of men

There are two great ways then, of being mistaken about any given nation

Moreover the very idea of a nation is generally not easy to grasp The mind loses its way among the diverse aspects of the idea, finding it difficult to choose between very different modes of definition Hardly does it think it has found a satisfactory formula when the formula itself suggests some special case it has failed to include

"Nation" as an idea is as familiar to us in use, and as actual in feeling, as it is complex or vague on reflection But it is the same with all words of great importance We talk glibly of law, race, and property But what is law, race, property? We know, and do not know!

And so it is with all those powerful notions, at once abstract and vital, living sometimes so intensely and imperiously within us, all those terms which, in the minds of statesmen and even whole populations, determine the thoughts, projects, arguments, and decisions on which destinies hang—prosperity or ruin, the life and death of human beings All these, on reflection, are but vague and impure symbols . . . And yet, when men use these indefinable terms among themselves they understand one another very well So these notions are clear and adequate, from one man to another, but obscure and, as it were, infinitely misleading in a single mind

Nations appear as strange to each other as people of different characters, ages, beliefs, manners, and needs They watch

each other with curiosity and anxiety, they smile, or pout, admire some detail, and imitate it, despising the whole, they are seized with jealousy or swollen with contempt However sincere, at times, their desire to converse, to understand each other, the conversation always clouds over and comes to an end at a certain point There is some kind of impassable barrier against depth and duration

More than one nation is deeply convinced that, in and of itself, it is pre-eminent, the elect of the endless future, the only nation capable of aspiring—whatever its present condition, its poverty or weakness—to the supreme development of whatever potentialities it arrogates to itself Each finds an argument in the past or in the possible None likes to regard its troubles as its legitimate offspring

When they compare themselves to other nations, whether with respect to area, population, material progress, customs, liberties, or public order, or even culture and works of the mind, or indeed even memories and hopes, nations necessarily find motives for preferring themselves In this perpetual game, each has her own cards But some are real, others imaginary There are nations that hold only trumps of the Middle Ages, or of antiquity, dead and venerable values, others count their fine arts, their scenery, their folk music, their refined manners, or their noble history, throwing these on to the table among the real clubs and real spades

All nations have present, past, or future reasons for believing themselves incomparable And, of course, they are The impossibility of comparing these great entities, since they touch and affect each other only by their obvious characteristics and external factors, is not one of the smallest difficulties in political speculation For the essential fact that makes them nations, the principle of their existence, the inner bond that

rivets together the individuals that compose a people, and the generations to each other, is not of the same kind in different nations With one it is race, with another language, or territory, or memories, or interests, all these, in turn, give national unity to any organized collection of human beings The deep, formative cause of one group may be of a kind totally different from that of any other

Rising nations must be reminded that there is no tree in nature which, though placed in the best conditions of light, soil, and terrain, can grow and spread indefinitely

The Idea of Dictatorship

A Preface

[1934]

I KNOW almost nothing about practical politics, though I am *convinced that it involves everything I abhor* Nothing, surely, could be more impure, more a mixture of things I dislike to see together, such as bestiality and metaphysics, might and right, religion and selfishness, science and histrionics, instincts and ideas

But this, no doubt, is to indict human nature . So I am without the slightest qualification to introduce a work such as this, in which, in the form of interviews, a statesman now in power reveals his ideas and plans, and explains his actions.

Perhaps Mr Antonio Ferro, who asked me to write a few lines of preamble here, was looking for contrast and wanted to preface these considerations, authorized and inspired by experience, with a few speculative views—a naive statement of the effect produced on a layman by the spectacle of a one-man government of the modern type

I must say that the ideas of Mr Salazar as set down in this book, or those attributed to him, seem to me perfectly sound They give evidence of deep reflection, by a mind aware of the greatness of the task it has undertaken It is this sense of greatness that distinguishes the man who pursues a noble policy from the one who, in the highest position, stoops to think principally of himself

But I could not without impertinence offer an opinion on the subject of Mr Salazar s actions being ignorant of them for I have never been to Portugal and even if I had visited that country I should take care not to pass judgment on its internal politics—for I am enough at sea in the problems of French politics and am often shocked by what foreigners write about them

I shall limit myself therefore to trying to conceive for the reader how a *dictatorship* is born

Every social system is more or less contrary to nature and nature is constantly striving to recover its rights Every human being, every individual every turn of events tends to disrupt or to undo the powerful apparatus of abstractions, the network of laws and rituals, the edifice of conventions and agreements which define an organized society Persons, group interests, sects, and parties, each according to its needs and means undermine and sap the order and substance of the State

So long as the abuses, errors and weaknesses that exist and cannot but exist under all possible regimes, do not alter the very life principle of the State (which is confidence in its prestige and belief in the superiority of its strength), public opinion is not excessively moved by the troublesome incidents that occur, which, when promptly resolved, tend more to demonstrate the profound stability of institutions than to compromise them But a moment may come when the threshold of the general conscience is reached and when it becomes impossible for most people to think about their own affairs without finding some trouble that can be imputed to the vices of the State Thus when the general situation is disturbing enough to have a noticeable effect on private lives, and the common weal appears to be the plaything of events,

when trust in men and institutions is gone, and the functions of government, the operation of services, the enforcement of law seem entirely a matter of caprice, favoritism, or routine, when parties fight merely to enjoy the baser advantages of power rather than for the means of regulating a nation according to some idea . then the sense of disorder and trouble never fails to produce, in those who have it and yet have nothing to gain from a dissolution, the image of an entirely different State, and soon of what must be done to secure it

At such times, the regime is held together by only three things the strong private interests that depend on its existence, uncertainty and fear of the unknown, and lastly, the absence of any single precise idea of the future, or of the right man to personify such an idea

The image of *dictatorship* is the inevitable (and, as it were, instinctive) response of the mind when it no longer finds in the conduct of affairs the authority, continuity, and unity that indicate reflective will and the rule of organized knowledge

Such a response is an incontestable fact Which is not to say that it does not bring with it great illusions about the extent and depth of what political power can do, but it is the only possible response when reflective thought encounters confusion in public affairs Consciously or not, everyone then thinks *dictatorship* Everyone then feels in his heart that he is a budding dictator This is a first impulsive response, a kind of reflex by which the opposite of what then prevails makes itself felt as an indisputable, unique, and inevitable need The vital thing is public order and safety, this goal must be reached by the quickest and shortest way, and at all costs The only *one* who can do this is *myself*

The same idea (without being expressly formulated) is at

least latent in all who think of reforming or remaking society according to some theoretical plan an undertaking that would involve deep and instant changes in laws manners and even hearts

In either case a definite aim is attributed to society a more or less legitimate and yet inevitable analogy is drawn between a group of human beings and a structure or mechanism which must satisfy certain definable conditions and in every circumstance manifest the order and willed continuity of an idea

In short once the mind no longer recognizes itself—its own essential features its mode of rational activity its horror of disorderly or wasted energies—in the fluctuations and failures of a political system it necessarily imagines and instinctively desires the promptest intervention of the authority of a single head for it is only in a single head that a clear correspondence between perceptions notions reactions, and decisions is conceivable, or may be arrived at with a view to imposing on external circumstances its own intelligible conditions and arrangements

Every regime, every government, is exposed to being so judged by the mind, the idea of dictatorship takes shape as soon as the actions or inactions of power seem to the mind inconceivable and incompatible with the exercise of reason

Furthermore, when a dictatorship is set up, and if the dictator's intellectual power is equal to his political power, his mind, doubly sovereign, will strive to raise to its highest level the *intelligibility* of the social system which it is now in a position to modify

Bonaparte, as First Consul, entered the hall where his Council of State was discussing rather confusedly, the administrative organization of France He took off his saber, sat on the corner of the table, and listened for a moment Then,

suddenly imposing silence with a glance, and animated by a kind of inspiration, he improvised (or so it appeared) a whole plan that left his hearers, less accustomed to creating than to quibbling, half delighted, half shocked. The imperious enchanter unfolded in their presence a simple and extraordinary *idea, apparently revealed to him step by step as he drew it* from his expectant mind and urged it on with his strange, nervous speech. He told them he would take, as a model for the organic institutions to be created, the forms and functions he observed in his own faculties of thought and will—that he would set up the administration in such a way that the State would possess distinct means and organs for perception, interpretation, and execution, such as control the life of a human being whose lucid and positive mind is served by constantly exercised senses and muscles.

But all politics tend to treat men as *things*, since it is always a matter of dealing with them according to ideas sufficiently abstract to be, on the one hand, translated into action—which requires extremely simplified formulas—and, on the other hand, *applied to an indefinite variety of unknown individuals*. The politician thinks of these "units" as figures in arithmetic, since he proposes to manipulate them. Even the sincere intention of leaving to individuals as much freedom as possible and of offering to each some share of power, leads in one way or another to imposing advantages on them which may sometimes be scarcely wanted, or may even amount indirectly to a disadvantage. Nations have been known to complain of being liberated.

In any case the mind, when dealing with "men," cannot help reducing them to creatures capable of figuring in its operations. Of their real characteristics, it retains only what is

necessary and sufficient to the pursuit of a certain ideal (of order justice power or prosperity) making of human society a kind of *product* in which the mind recognizes its own There is something of the artist in the dictator and a certain amount of aesthetics in his conceptions He must therefore fashion and mold his human material to make it adaptable to his plans People s ideas must be pruned or developed or unified their impulses guilefully seduced and fitted out with strong simple formulas answering everything and foreseeing all their objections their feelings must be corrected and educated and even their manners transformed etc (They must be left however with enough undestroyed initiative so that the plans pursued by the mind will not suffer from an excess of submission or inertia in its agents)

Hence the (political) mind which under all circumstances is the opponent of man—contesting his liberty his complexity and his versatility—attains, in a dictatorial regime, to the fullness of its development

Under such a regime—which, as I have said is nothing less than the complete realization of the aim implied in all political thought—the mind is possessed to a supreme degree by the desire to give itself with all its will to its proper work, and to perform with all possible force the act of *one* against *all*, by *all*, and ideally, for *all*, which is characteristic of its nature and is required of it by the spectacle of human disorder It therefore sets itself up as a superior consciousness and brings to the exercise of power that counterbalance and that hierarchy of relations which exist in every individual between the reflective will sustained and directed to an end and the whole group of reflexes of every kind The mind will then deal with other minds by training and bringing into play those baser

powers that penetrate and undo them fear, hunger, myth, oratory, the rhythms and imagery of speech—and sometimes even a show of reasoning All the devices for exploiting the sensibility will be seized upon by the mind and put to use

In modern types of dictatorship, the youth and even children are the objects of very special attention and training

Order will then reign, and certain very palpable benefits —some real, others imaginary—will result for the mass of the population

Acts of power will appear coherent and rational, even if so energetic sometimes as to be harsh

The instincts of collective preservation and growth, which usually remain latent in a people, will be aroused, clarified, and defined as ideas and projects in that single head, where contempt for the visible, maneuvered crowd may be found curiously combined with the cult of the *nation* as an historical form, of which that crowd is the momentary substance

It is clear, then, that the mere notion that the collective life of men could be organized on an intelligible plan is enough to give birth to the idea of dictatorship It dawns as soon as public opinion is surprised or bewildered by the action or inaction of public authority So a dictator may well be (and often is) a man inwardly driven to seize that authority—just as a spectator at an ill-played game feels a furious desire to push aside the incompetent player and take his place He sets himself up and proceeds to become the concentration point *for all those elements or seeds of dictatorship that were latent* or budding in many minds He eliminates or isolates all those who will not give up their dictatorial element to him He remains the sole free will, the only whole intelligence, the sole

possessor of the fullness of action the sole being to enjoy all the properties and prerogatives of the mind in face of an immense number of people reduced to an indistinct quantity (whatever their personal value) to the condition of means or material—there is no other name for anything the intelligence can take as its object

Concerning Dictatorship

A Preface

[1934]

ALL POLITICS, even the crudest, imply some theory of man and of society We cannot conceive a society—its duration, *its cohesion, its defenses against whatever external or internal* causes tend to corrupt it—except by means of imagery borrowed from our knowledge of mechanisms or living beings, and their functioning We make more or less conscious images out of our more or less scientific notion of machines or organisms, those complex assemblages which we endow with an aim, or assume they have one We used to speak of the ship of state, we now speak of controls, forces, wheels within wheels, or else of action, co-ordination, dangers, remedies, growth or decay . in order to describe certain connections and events involving a vast number of men

Such images are of indifferent value in themselves (yet how could we think without their help?) They all bring in ideas of order and disorder, of good or bad functioning, and so allow us to judge and criticize either the structure of the supposed mechanism or the person (or group) that appears to *supervise or run it (Here great illusions may creep in,* about the scope and reality of political power—about the power of Power, which always seems the greater and more stable the farther away it is)

Now it happens from time to time, everywhere, that circumstances make us fear for the life of the machine or the organism in question Faults of construction, errors in operation accidents it was not made to withstand, may disturb its running order and endanger the property or lives of the men who are its parts They realize that something is wrong and that nothing is being done that the danger is increasing, that a sense of helplessness and imminent ruin is in the air and getting stronger Finally, everyone feels that he is on a sinking ship

Then it is that the idea of the opposite situation inevitably takes shape in people's minds—the contrary of disruption, confusion, and indecision This reversal necessarily implies some person—one who is latent in all of us

Just as hunger gives rise to a vision of succulent dishes, and thirst to a vision of delicious drinks, so in the anxious waiting for a crisis, the sense of danger excites the need to see and understand the workings of power, and produces in most people the image of strong, prompt, and resolute action, free of every obstacle of convention and all passive resistance Such action can only belong to one person It is only in a single head that the end and the means can be clearly seen, that notions can be transformed into decisions, all resulting in complete co-ordination There is a kind of simultaneity and reciprocity among the factors of judgment, and a kind of positive force, in making decisions, which are never found in a deliberative majority If, then, a dictatorship is set up, if the One takes power, the conduct of public affairs will bear all the marks of concentrated and deliberate will, and all the acts of government will carry the imprint of a personal *style*, whereas the State with no face and no voice is manifest only as a nonhuman entity, an abstract emanation whose origin is in

statistics or tradition and which proceeds either by routine or endless groping

In truth, it must be an extraordinary joy (just as, for an observer, it is a prodigiously captivating spectacle) to harness power to thought, to make a whole people carry out what One alone has conceived, and on occasion to modify single-handedly and for a long time the character of a nation, as once was done by that profoundest of dictators, Cromwell—a monster and a marvel in the eyes of Pascal and Bossuet—who transformed the vigorous spirit of England

It is in the dictator alone, finally, that the fullness of action resides He absorbs all values into his own, subordinates all views to his own He makes of other individuals the instruments of his thought, with the idea that *all shall* accept it as the most just and perspicacious, since it proved itself the boldest and most effective at the time of trouble and public bewilderment He has overthrown the impotent or rotten regime, thrown out the undeserving or incompetent men, and with them the laws or customs that produced incoherence, delay, and useless problems, weakening the springs of the State Among the things done away with is freedom Many people easily resign themselves to the loss We must admit that freedom is the most difficult test a people can undergo Knowing how to be free is not given to all men and all nations, and it should not be impossible to classify them as knowing or not knowing Moreover, freedom in our time is not, and cannot be, for the majority of men, more than apparent Never has the State—even the most liberal, both in essence and affirmation—*more closely grasped, defined,* restricted, scrutinized, molded, and recorded men's lives Likewise, the general scheme of life has never weighed so heavily

on men reducing them by means of schedules the sheer force of mechanical devices working on their senses the haste, the imitative behavior required the excessive standardization," etc to the condition of machine-made products as alike as possible even in their tastes and amusements We are slaves of an apparatus in which functional difficulties are constantly increasing because we keep on inventing ways of transforming the ordinary conditions of life Speed enthusiasts get in each other s way one radio fan interferes with another and the same is true of the lovers of seaside or mountains If, to the constraints arising from our interference in one another's pleasures, we add those imposed on most men by modern methods of work control, we shall find that dictatorship merely completes the system of pressures and obligations of which modern man is the more or less conscious victim, even in the politically freest countries

However that may be, dictatorship, once established, amounts to the simple division of an organized people into two parts. On the one hand, one man assumes all the higher functions of the mind he takes responsibility for the "happiness," the "order," the 'future," the "strength ' and the "prestige" of the national body—all those things for which unity, authority, and continuity of power are doubtless necessary He reserves the right of direct action in all fields and of final decision in all matters On the other hand, the rest of the people are reduced to the condition of tools or raw material for his use, whatever their worth and personal ability This human material, suitably differentiated, will be entrusted with all the "automatic functions"

A division of this nature is all the more unstable as the people

so divided have more dictatorial *minds among them (that is,* men who insist on understanding, and are capable of action) The maintenance of a dictatorship requires constant vigilance, since dictatorship—which is the quickest and most energetic response to any critical situation felt by all—is always in danger of becoming unnecessary and, in effect, dissolved by the very success of its self-appointed mission Certain dictators have had the sense to retire at the right moment Others have tried to loosen the grip of their power and to return by degrees to a more moderate kind of regime This is a most delicate operation Still others try every means to consolidate their power Apart from direct coercive measures and constant surveillance, they find valuable resources in the training of young people and in proclaiming the successes and obvious advantages of the system They devote to this task all the intelligence and energy that brought them to power But such a policy may not be enough, or its promised results may lie too far in the future The next move may be to consider returning in artificial ways to the original situation, organizing the same distress and danger that first led to creating the dictatorship Images of war may then be a temptation

In the past few years we have seen, I think, seven monarchies vanish and an almost equal number of dictatorships arise, and in several nations whose regimes have not changed, the gov*ernment has been harassed, as much by "incidents" as by the* reflections and comparisons provoked in people's minds by the changes in neighboring states The remarkable fact is that dictatorship is at present contagious, just as, in the past, freedom was

The modern world, having so far been unable to adapt its

nature memory social habits and political and legal traditions to its new body and newly formed organs is hampered by the conflicts and contradictions that incessantly arise between on the one hand the concepts and ideals historical in origin which form its intellectual capital and its capacity for feeling and on the other those needs connections conditions and rapid changes which are scientific and technical in origin and which on every hand surprise and baffle its long experience

It is seeking a system of economics politics morals aesthetics even religion—and perhaps even logic No wonder that among the experiments only just beginning and whose outcome and end cannot be predicted the idea of dictatorship that famous image of the intelligent tyrant should here and there have been invoked and even imposed

On Political Parties

[1931]

THERE IS no party that has not raved against its own country

The things no party ever talks about Every party has its dark side—its reserves—its cellars of corpses and unmentionable dreams—its hoard of ill-considered acts and blunders Its views—those it has forgotten and those it wants forgotten

They deny, in order to survive, what they promised in order to get a start

When in power, one is no better than another, when not in power, one is no better than another

Never hesitate to do what alienates half your followers and triples the fidelity of the rest

What pleases a member of one political party is the vagueness of its ideals What pleases another about his party is that its immediate goals are so definite

Since anarchists are commonly found in the parties of order, and organizers in the anarchist party, I suggest a realignment Every man should be enrolled in the party of his natural gifts

There are creators, preservers, and destroyers by temperament Each individual would be put in his true party, not that

of his words or wishes but that of his nature and ways of acting and reacting

All politics are founded on the indifference of the majority of those involved otherwise no politics would be possible

Politics was at first the art of preventing people from minding their own business

A later age added the art of forcing people to decide things they did not understand

This second principle combines with the first

Among the possible combinations is this there are *State secrets* even in countries with universal suffrage This is a necessary and in fact, viable combination but it sometimes provokes great storms and keeps governments constantly maneuvering Power is always forced to navigate against its source It governs *close to the wind* in the direction of absolute power

Every society requires fictions

Some decide that citizens are equal Others stipulate and organize inequality

These are conventions needed to start the game Once either one of them is laid down, the game begins, consisting necessarily of *counteraction* on the part of individuals

In a society of equals, the individual acts against equality In a society of unequals, the majority work against inequality

The result of political battles is to disturb people's minds and to falsify their notion of the order of importance, and the order of urgency, of *questions*

What is vital is masked by what is simply a convenience,

the future by the immediate, the really necessary by the apparent, what is deep and slow by what is sensational

Everything pertaining to *practical politics* is necessarily *superficial*

The historian does for the past what the fortune teller does for the future But the fortune teller takes the risk of being proved wrong, the historian does not

One cannot "go into politics" without pronouncing on matters that no sensible man can say he knows anything about One must be extraordinarily stupid or extraordinarily ignorant to dare have an opinion on most of the problems discussed in politics

Opposite opinions about war stem simply from the uncertainty of an era—our own—about the following question *what kinds of human groups should make war on each other?*

Should it be races, classes, nations, or other groupings as *yet to be discovered?*

For actually, class, nation, and race were discovered, just as the nebulae were

Just as it was discovered that the Earth is part of a certain system and this system part of the Milky Way, so it was discovered that a person is *this* by birth and *that* by his livelihood, and it is for him to choose, or to be undecided, whether to follow his nation, his class, his sect—or his nature

Violence and war try to settle in a short time, and by a sudden dissipation of energy, difficulties that ought to be dealt with by the subtlest analysis and the most delicate tests—for the object is to reach a state of unforced equilibrium

When the adversary overestimates our strength our plans our astuteness when to stir people up against us he paints us in terrifying colors—he is working for us

Its neighbors are a nation's sole defense against perpetual civil war

The wolf lives on the lamb which lives on grass Relatively the grass is defended by the wolf The carnivore protects the grass (which feeds him indirectly)

Between old wolves the battle is fiercer more skillful but there is a certain mutual respect

In everything what is essential is always done by people who are obscure indistinguishable, without individual value If they did not exist if they were not as they are, nothing would be done If nothing were done, they would have the least to lose They are essential and of no importance

Great events are perhaps so only for small minds

For more attentive minds, it is the unnoticed, continual events that count

Events are born of an unknown father Necessity is only their mother

Law is the *interlude between acts* of force

The most *pessimistic* view of man and things of life and its value, goes wonderfully well with *action* and the *optimism* it requires This is the essence of Europe

Fluctuations on Freedom

[1938]

I

FREEDOM this is one of those detestable words that have more force than sense, they sing rather than speak, ask rather than answer, it is one of those words that have been put to every sort of use, and leave the memory smeared with Theology, Metaphysics, Morals, and Politics, a word that is handy in controversy, dialectics, and oratory, as good for specious *reasoning and endless hairsplitting as for thunderous climaxes*

I find no precise meaning in the word "freedom" except in dynamics and mechanical theory, where it indicates by how much the number that defines a mechanism is greater than the number representing the constraints that prevent its breaking down, or prohibit certain of its movements

This definition, the result of reflection on a perfectly simple observation, was worth recalling, in view of the remarkable incapacity of moral thought to encompass in a formula what is meant by the "freedom" of a living being endowed with consciousness of itself and its actions.

But nothing is more fruitful than what allows minds to differ and to exploit their differences, when there is no common point of reference compelling them to agree

Since some have dreamt that man was free, though unable to say exactly what they meant by the word, others immediately imagined and maintained that he was not They

spoke of fate, of necessity, and, much later, of determinism; but these terms have precisely the same degree of accuracy as the term they contradict. They bring nothing to the subject that can clear up its vagueness, where everything is true.

The determinist swears that if we knew everything, we would also know how to deduce and predict the conduct of everyone in every circumstance—which is perfectly obvious. Unfortunately, to know everything makes no sense.

Everything turns to absurdity in this argument, as in so many others, once we squeeze the terms; they were swollen with vagueness. We soon discover that nobody has ever managed to state the problem correctly; that this fact has never stopped anyone from solving it; and even confers on it a kind of immortality: it goads the mind in a circle. The famous geometrician Abel, speaking of something quite different, said: "The problem must be given a form that will always make it possible to solve it."

This form is what should have been sought. For if it cannot be found, the problem does not exist.

Without this basic research, the mind grows excited by the word "freedom" and loses its way in a mass of particular expressions—sometimes adopting a more or less composite meaning, a kind of average of the various uses, at other times a purely conventional meaning that is soon blurred by usage. And added to all this is the infinite number of mistakes and variations introduced by the thinker himself.

It is a natural error, and so common that it might be called constant, to make of a problem of statistics and accidentally gathered notations a problem of existence and substance. There is nothing more, there cannot be more in the *meaning of a word* than what one mind has received from other minds on a thousand different and unrelated occasions, plus the uses

this one mind has made of it—all those tentative gestures of a thought trying to be born to expression All questions, then, whose terms are debatable can properly be addressed to philology alone, their natural judge Only philology can reconstruct the origins and vicissitudes of the meaning and use of words, for it does not assume that they have a "real meaning" that resides and subsists in the isolated term, or any depth, any value other than that of position and circumstance

* * *

How is it, then, that the matter of freedom and of free will should have aroused so much passion and started so many arguments with no conceivable issue? It is no doubt because a quite different sort of interest was brought to bear than that of acquiring knowledge Both sides were looking to the consequences They *willed* that one thing rather than another should be so, they were seeking nothing they had not already found In my eyes, this is the worst use we can make of whatever mind we have

It is always a matter of astonishment to me that thought should go to war with all its might at the summons of some term which, though simple, inoffensive, and even clear in ordinary circumstances, becomes a monster of difficulty once it is taken out of its natural element—which is the normal course of exchange and personal communication—and turned into a "resistance coil" Of course, the most ordinary phenomenon, an apple falling, the lid of a pot rising, can, for a mind disposed to go deeply into its own observations, provide a source of meditation and analysis, but such mental work constantly goes back to take hold of the phenomenon itself and, in order to deal with it by intellectual means, seeks to give it that form which Abel spoke of in the remark I quoted, that

form which makes of problems true problems, *not requiring an "eternal return" to their data*

Therefore, I see no "problem of freedom", but I do see a problem of human action, which seems to me not to have been scrupulously and strictly posed and studied, so far, even in the simplest cases. An act, originating in the psychic and physiological condition of some individual, is certainly a series of very complex transformations of which we have as yet no idea, no model. It is possible that the study of *an act*, and the knowledge that could be gained from it, might throw some light on the whole obscure matter, the origin of which may be seen in two propositions here given together: "How is it that we are able to do what repels us, and not to do what tempts us?"

* * *

A man asking himself if he were free got lost in his thoughts. He could not see the absurdity of his predicament. After several *inner* centuries of distinctions and imaginary experiences, spent in changing his mind and placing himself by turns in fictitious situations of the most critical, or again, the most trivial kind, he had to admit that he was getting nowhere.

He could not manage to compare quite different states of mind, and recognize what carries over from one to the other. Suppose a moment contains a certain amount of fear, or some terrible sorrow, or some imperious desire?

"Ah!" says he, "*we can do whatever we wish whenever we wish nothing.*"

* * *

Another man, who was also worrying about his freedom, finally thought he had arrived at a fairly exact idea of it by means of a quite artless invention.

He said to me "I have in mind two characters, perfectly identical, situated in two universes no less so They are, if you like, the same man and the same world twice over Nothing physical or mental distinguishes the two systems, they are as equal as two good triangles in Euclid But now, two events no less similar than the rest take place, one in each of these *wholes*, and one of my twins acts in one way, while the other makes up his mind and acts in another, perhaps exactly the opposite The event has therefore provoked in *each a reaction that is true 'freedom' with regard to what was* around them and what they were until it happened a result that is hardly intelligible But what else can you expect? This is a matter of nothing less than changing equality into inequality *without external intervention*, of causing a perfectly balanced scale to tip to one side, *or the other*, without touching it Could it be that one must become *someone else*, who then reacts on what one was before? Can freedom be an interlude between two determinisms? A condition in a man who, in a particular case, can create an *ad hoc* determinism for his own use?"

* * *

I gave him a hit-or-miss answer, since I had to answer somehow. I pointed out first of all that I could hardly imagine *equality* between two systems, for I cannot even conceive the equality of those figures they talk about in geometry—and that is simply a physical matter But in the strict purity of abstract thought there are no doubles There, each object is but an essence, that is, a model, and no substance is present to permit of plurality There are no equal triangles there, but simply a single triangle of each species, that is, as many as there are possible definitions And I added, for my own pleasure, that what I said about triangles was taught by

St Thomas Aquinas concerning angels, for being quite immaterial and of separate essences, each is necessarily the only one of its species Strictly speaking, then, one should never say two triangles or two angels but a triangle and a triangle, an angel and an angel

* * *

Then I came back to ' freedom Have you noticed," I said to the fellow,' that the performance of an external act does not fully suppress within us the thought that the act remains to be done? What is more common than to find ourselves reliving that state of oscillation, of balanced possibilities, which we were in before acting, as though it were someone else who had given way to the act, and as though it were impossible for the same Self, under pain of no longer being the same Self, to admit *that the deed should count*? It would seem that our Self dislikes the idea of becoming that Other who has committed the irrevocable In truth, it is strange that an 'accomplished fact' should sometimes seem to us only a dream, from which we must awake in order to recover our full imaginary life, all our contradictory resources and solutions We recognize ourselves only in the provisional, in pure possibility that is what is really ours "

"Yes," he replied "I have heard that criminals are sometimes astonished at having committed a crime They say that something terrible happened to them "

"But after that, what is to be said to the victim? "

"You know, I think I have never committed any other crimes but those we all commit in the ordinary run of life, yet I must confess that I *have* experienced that inner return to a state of uncertain innocence in which it is so difficult to be convinced that what is done is done

"Yes A man necessarily loses himself in any reflection in which he figures in person All thinking about freedom requires that the thinker implicate himself He tries to observe himself in some action He goes over situations he has lived through But have you ever gone over, in the ways of the mind, one of your own actions? I mean one of those we commonly call 'free,' without probing any further into the word than is usual in conversation, or in law 'If I had it to do again!' we often say Can you really imagine this sort of *corrected copy* of a life?"

"Hardly It is inconceivable to me that I have been 'free' . But I think, nonetheless, that I could have managed my affairs quite differently."

"Yet you say, like everyone else 'If only I had known ' But in most cases 'you knew very well' and everything happened as if you had not known "

"This is diabolical! How can you expect to reconstruct the accidental and its immediate effects?"

"And yet, what else has a more determining influence on action?"

"Beware. We are about to fall into the most classical of dilemmas Hardly have we looked into action (or rather the thought of action) than we find what is found in the world an appalling mixture of determinism and chance ."

* * *

"But where do we get this idea that man is free, or indeed the other idea, that he is not?

"I am not sure who started it philosophy or the police. After all, it is a question either of absolving man of his actions completely, whatever they may be, of turning him into a mechanism, or else of making him, as they say, *responsible*—

that is conferring on him the dignity of being a first cause Logic sentiment and all the natural sciences have been employed to these ends and immense resources of knowledge ingenuity and eloquence have been expended in proving both Note that these great proceedings if they have the slightest importance if they were worth starting at all do not involve the moralist or the metaphysician only all the pride of the artist all the well known vanity of the poet are at stake A work of art is an act

But then a man who says he is inspired a lyricist who boasts of being one is boasting of not being free he follows a course not his own

The height of this sort of pretension—claiming to be and yet not to be a cause, taking pride in one s work and yet attributing it to some source quite distinct from oneself—is to be found in those fabricators of novels who claim that they merely submit to the lives of their characters, that the author is inhabited by persons who impose their own passions on him drag him into their adventures Such writers confer on their fabrications a curious kind of *necessity*, one that is quite *arbitrary* You will notice that I can express this only by a contradiction They would be much annoyed if anyone replied that they therefore have no merit of any kind—no more than the table to which spirits come and rap out their famous messages

* * *

" We can say anything starting from the word 'freedom' it arouses in the mind images and ideas determined entirely by the particular moment, the circumstances, or some interlocutor Sometimes 'freedom' may be considered a property of those organisms whose life depends on a kind of adaptation that cannot be achieved by the functioning of the elementary reflexes Any action that requires the co-ordination of a

system of normally independent functions, and must meet and satisfy something unforeseen, needs a certain element of *play*, so that the organism's mechanical possibilities may be adapted to its perceptions"

"But there are quite other points of view For example, we may consider 'freedom' a mere sensation, indeed a secondary sensation, which we never feel so long as we can do what we wish or follow the promptings of our body What probably happens, in reality, is that our sensibility produces a *contrast* whose first term is a sensation (or an idea) of constraint, itself awakened, in our thought or our feelings, by the notion of some act Consequently, the *sense of freedom* can come to us only as a reaction against some felt or imagined hindrance. If a prisoner, when set free, immediately forgot his chains, his altered condition would give him no sense of freedom at all That is why, when we have won freedom and become accustomed to it, it ceases to be felt, it has lost its value and is sometimes held of little account"

"All speculation on 'freedom,' therefore, must lead to the study of impulses and constraints The well-known practice of cheating or suppressing needs or desires in order to feel free, would result, if it worked, in suppressing the sense of freedom, since the feeling of constraint would itself be abolished Actually, such a practice sometimes leads to this paradoxical result that one gains the sense of 'freedom' by imposing constraints on oneself with other advantages in view."

Here we see the very crux of the matter It resides in that little word "oneself" *To constrain oneself* How can one constrain *oneself*?

My inclination, if I were to push the analysis of this matter to the extreme, would be to try to eliminate the notion,

or rather the oversimplified notation "myself." 'My' is relatively precise only insofar as it is a notation for external use only. I can say equally well: my ideas, my 'hat,' my doctor, my hand.

But let us change the focus and come back inside 'ourselves.' We then find that *my* ideas come to *me*. *I* know not how and *I* know not whence. It is the same with *my impulses and my energies*. *My ideas may torment me* or war with each other. *I* struggle against *myself*. But to say *my* when this participant or presence behaves like an external phenomenon, shows the purely negative nature of the notation. I can renounce *my* opinion in favor of yours. *My* pain (*my* keenest and most intimate sensation) can cease, and when it is gone I shall still speak of it as *mine*. Yet it has become a memory, functionally identical with the memory of any other perception.

So, the notation *myself* describes nothing definite except in, and by means of, the circumstances, and if there is something left over, it is only the abstract notion of *presence*, of a *capacity* for an endless sequence of transformations. In the end *ego* means simply *whatever it may be*.

This remark will doubtless appear less extraordinary if you will observe that what we call our person and our personality is only a network of recollections and habits that may be effaced from our memory, as can be seen in certain cases of insanity: the patient forgets what he is, and can no longer even recognize his own body. But he has not lost the notation *myself*: he will say *I*, and he will distinguish this *I* and this *me* from everything else. In other words, this notation has retained its function in the subject's thought.

In short, whatever the sensation, or idea, or relation, whatever the *object or act that I refer to as "mine,"* I thus distinguish them all, without exception, from the inex-

haustible ability to "refer"—an ability which, in action, is independent of what it does That is why I have sometimes made so bold as to compare the *self* (without attribute) to the *zero* of mathematics, an important and fairly recent invention, making it possible to express any quantitative relation in the formula $a = o$ *Zero* is in itself synonymous with *nothing*, but the act of writing *zero* is a positive act signifying that, in every case, any relation of equality between numbers completes an operation that cancels them simultaneously and is the same operation for all Remember, *we are writing* while we think *nothing* is the same as a quantity called *zero*

So, in the "reflexive" forms (*I* say to *myself, I* feel *myself*) the two pronouns have very different meanings, the first term is that momentary, hence functional *self* which I have just likened to zero The other is qualified it is body, memory, person, or thing in relation to the person, and all this is variable, *modifiable, forgettable That makes two selves, or rather,* a *self* and a *self*

* * *

To liberate oneself?

Freedom is a feeling that every man seeks in his own way One in wine, another in rebellion, one in a "philosophy," another in an amputation—like Origen Asceticism, opium, the desert, a sea voyage (alone, with but a sail), divorce, a monastery, suicide, the Foreign Legion, disguise, deception

Whether we increase our power or reduce our will, both come to mind as measures of evasion, one by acting upon things and people, the other by acting upon oneself

And when we are really freest, that is, when our needs and desires are in equilibrium with our powers, the sense of freedom is nil

It is extraordinary that a man walking toward extreme

danger, toward pain, death, or shame, can physically walk, that his bones and muscles carry him toward it

Suppose it were impossible what strange consequences

How many things are based on a kind of simulation, with real and effective results—the ability to make the muscles perform the contrary of what our inmost being is wishing and performing "Against the grain" Sometimes an unwilling act requires great mechanical effort, at other times no more than an effortless motion, like nodding "yes" or signing your name But then again, such a slight movement may take on so much "extraneous" weight that the "yes" comes out a sigh and the signature a scrawl

II

Politics, too, speaks of *freedom* It seemed, at first, to give only a juridical meaning to the term For centuries nearly every organized society comprised two categories of individuals, of unequal status some were slaves, others were called "free" In Rome, free men, if they were born of free parents, were called *ingenui*, if they or their parents had been freed, they were known as *libertines* Much later, those were called *libertines* who were alleged to have liberated their thoughts, but soon this fine word was used only for those who knew no restrictions as regards morals

* * *

Later still, freedom became an ideal, a myth, a yeast, a word filled with promise, or threat, a word that set man against man—generally those who seemed the weakest and felt the strongest, against those who seemed the strongest and did not feel the weakest

Political freedom seems hardly separable from notions of

equality and "sovereignty", hardly compatible with the idea of "order," or at times the idea of "justice"

The knots and entanglements among these abstractions are more clearly seen if we break up the so-called idea of "freedom" into its different kinds Freedom of "thought" (that is of "publication") is not always consonant with order Freedom of trade, freedom to work, may offend justice and equality The Nation, the Law, the State, the School, the Family, each in its own way, are so many powers restricting the impulses of the individual

In short, the following would be an interesting piece of research, and perhaps a fruitful one to determine what is possible for an individual in a "free" country—how much "play" is still left him after he has complied with all the constraints imposed on him for the common good

Politics and intellectual freedom are mutually exclusive, for *politics means idols*

I find that intellectual freedom consists in a particular "automatism" that rapidly reduces ideas to their character as ideas, not allowing them to be confused with what they represent, separating them from their affective and impulsive values, which diminish or falsify their ability to combine The said values are connected only by accident A gloomy idea can be broken down into an *idea* that cannot be gloomy and a *gloom* containing no ideas

This kind of "freedom" must not be confused with what is commonly called "freedom of thought," or with "freedom of conscience" These are entirely external, a matter of demonstration or action, which, as a rule—for those concerned with such things—have little to do with "intellectual freedom" as defined above

A truly free spirit sets little store by his opinions Though he cannot help having them nor help feeling the emotions and affections that at first seem inseparable from them yet he reacts against these inner phenomena trying to reduce them to their undeniably personal and unstable nature We cannot indeed take sides except by yielding to what is most personal in ourselves and most accidental in the present

The free mind feels that it is inalienable

* * *

I find that I am hard put to it to form a clear and precise idea of political freedom It means I suppose that I owe obedience only to the law law being assumed to emanate from all and to be made in the interests of all If it hampers or hurts me I have no right to accuse or to hate anyone I submit to it as I do to the laws of Nature

When I cannot at all accept civil law as if it were natural law either because I see a *man* behind it and it appears to be the expression of a particular will superior to mine only in force or because that law although emanating from all seems to me absurd or cruel then I hold that my political freedom is infringed

But this means that I have learned to conceive of political freedom The notion is inculcated Slaves have been known to suffer from emancipation We have seen that nations perplexed at being handed over to themselves will turn to new masters as soon as possible It sometimes happens that such nations are among the most cultivated and intelligent of their time

Another remark where freedom is concerned a distinction must be made between notion and sensation Even under despotic authority institutions and government administra-

tion may relax and allow more "play" to the individual, and even more of a hand in public affairs, than he would find in a rigorously free State In this case, he feels all the more liberated as appearances are less liberal

* * *

A country is called a free country in which the constraints of the law are alleged to be the work of the majority

The strictness of such constraints has no place in the definition However harsh they may be, so long as they emanate from the majority, or so long as the majority thinks they do, that is enough that country is *free*

It is remarkable that this kind of political freedom should *have come from the desire to set up freedom of the individual* as the natural right of every man born into the world

It was meant to shield him from the caprices of one man, or a few, and there was no other solution than to subject him to the caprices of the many

But since this must not be said, for neither the caprice nor the wisdom of the majority is to be mentioned, decorum has *sometimes bestowed on the vague sentiment of the many* the beautiful name of Reason

* * *

It is generally agreed that when we supposedly deny ourselves certain rights we do so by virtue of a higher freedom than that of exercising them This simple remark is enough to show in what complications of expression and thought we are involved by the term freedom

* * *

Here in our country, *which is free, it is strictly forbidden to*

take a glass of water from the sea or to cultivate ten stalks of tobacco and it would be well-nigh dangerous to light a cigar with a magnifying glass in the sun All this is doubtless very wise and must be somehow justified But the pressure exists nonetheless and here is the remark I have been coming to the number of legal constraints and their binding force are perhaps greater than they have ever been The law seizes man in his cradle settles a name on him he cannot change sends him to school and then makes him a soldier for life subject to every call It lays numberless ritual acts confessions and oaths upon him and where his property and his labor are concerned it puts him under decrees so numerous and complex that no one can know them all and scarcely anyone can interpret them

I am almost persuaded that political freedom is the surest way of making men slaves for its constraints—believed to emanate from the will of all—are hardly to be disputed and its controls and demands stemming from an anonymous, an entirely abstract and impersonal authority operate with the imperturbable indifference, the cold and irresistible force of a machine, transforming every individual life from birth to death into some unidentifiable element in some unbelievably monstrous existence

* * *

The great things are done by men who have no sense of man's impotence Such ignorance is a precious gift

But we must admit that, in this respect criminals are not without some resemblance to our heroes

* * *

The victims of freedom

More than one thing of price, and several of the *greatest* price, are the cost of freedom

Just as freedom of movement is not immediately felt, but comes as a sensation after the lifting of some restraint, or is imagined under pressure of some handicap, so political freedom and freedom of manners or of thought are not natural but are conceived, take shape and strength in the mind, and prevail only after long periods of constraint, discipline, formalism, and submission. During such rigorous times, man acquires the kinds of virtue that on the whole are favorable to the life of society, to the regular functioning of its mechanisms, to a mutual understanding among individuals, and to ways of predicting the individual's reactions or those of various kinds of groups. But it may come about that the principles, rules, practices, or habits so inculcated cannot be deduced from the observation of things themselves at a given time. They may begin to appear strange, absurd, tyrannical, arbitrary, and people may be unable to imagine how they have for so long submitted to forms or formulas that are either troublesome or unjust or ridiculous or cruel or merely useless. The result is an impulse to overthrow these obstacles, and a vision of joy and relief at being rid of them. Immediately the idea dawns of what delight it would be to attack and destroy them at once. Taking the name of freedom, Violence herself in her vivid colors, with her singing and her mockery, her struggles and her dramatic scenes, becomes an irresistible temptress. In most cases, when a lion, weary of obeying his master, rips and devours him, his nerves are appeased and he finds himself another—and cringes before him . . .

Revolt destroys indiscriminately. Violence is to be known by this characteristic, that it cannot choose. Anger is rightly called blind, an explosion or a conflagration affects a certain area and everything in it. Those who imagine that a revolution or a war can be a solution to a definite problem are under the illusion that only evil would be abolished.

Among the victims of freedom are all the forms and in every sense of the word style Everything that requires training constant practice or certain observances that may at first seem inexplicable everything that by means of constraint leads from the freedom to avoid an obstacle toward the higher freedom of overcoming it—all this is undermined and *facility* covers the world with its works A true history of the arts would show that most of our novelties alleged discoveries and audacities are only the disguises of the demon of *least action*

* * *

The idea the sensation the thirst for liberty have been all the stronger and more pronounced as authority became more personal in its source and more administrative and impersonal in its means and forms of action When it has become concentrated all in one individual it has had, in consequence, to provide itself with a mechanism that would be more and more narrowly confined to transmitting and automatically executing the orders coming from the center the One

This happened in France in the seventeenth century, making a revolution not only desirable but conceivable and possible All our revolutions of the last century had as their necessary and sufficient condition the centralization of power by virtue of which a minimum of imagination and a minimum of force and sustained effort could suddenly turn a whole nation over to anyone who undertook the venture The day it became evident that the seizure of two or three buildings and a few leaders was enough to control the whole country the era of political change by means of sudden, brief violence began The system devised by Richelieu and Louis XIV authorized and favored such wild dreams as those of Blanqui

But this is not my subject at the moment I was thinking

of what is called the State, for which I have never found any explanation that satisfies my mind

Jurists say that it is a "body politic," which means that it is a word and a convention which evoke and bring together a certain number of capacities or powers, but such powers themselves stem necessarily from the law Now there is no law without a State to make it and to see that it is obeyed And here, we are in that remarkable world of myth that rules all collective life, and inflicts on every individual the real and precise effects of imaginary or nominal entities impossible to describe, circumscribe, or define

One day when a young man had asked me for some clarification of this notion, I found myself embarrassed for a reply, since for one thing he was pressing in his demand, and for another I felt my habitual reluctance to make statements that did not satisfy me and to use terms in which I could not see bottom All I could think of finally was to offer him—for what it might be worth—a *recipe-for-conceiving-the-State*, which came to me on the spot

"You can of course imagine a monarch," I said to him "A *man* yet one who can do many things and has many things *He owns the whole country, in the sense that all* other owners own by virtue of the protection he affords them, and must pay him tribute He can enrich or impoverish, *elevate or demean anyone*, *he can exile* or put to death whom he pleases, build and destroy, make war and peace, organize, regulate, permit, or forbid He is not accountable to anyone . . In fact he is the only complete man in his kingdom, and if he announces '*L'État c'est Moi*,' nothing is clearer, and you readily understand what is meant by the State in his remark, since you can see the man and observe his action Let us proceed from this image Let us now base our operation on

this idea of an all-powerful man Take away every part of his humanity but leave him all his power, suppose him exempt from old age and death—time has no hold on him

Vainement pour les dieux il fuit d un pas léger

So far so good Now take away all his sensibility an immortal needs no heart Neither senses nor heart As for a mind Well, I hardly know what a State s mind could be '

Your State is a monster, replied the young man All we have is simply what it is willing to give up Our goods, our lives, our destinies are but the precarious concessions it makes to us I can understand why a struggle for deliverance should from time to time counter the growing inhumanity of such a system Man is appalled and trembles before it, just as he is wonder-struck and troubled when he sees the enormous machines he has built "

"And there is also this,' I said *if the State is strong, it crushes us, if it is weak, we perish* "

* * *

Certain sensitive individuals are shocked by the idea of themselves implied in the harangues and political arguments they listen to Some of them cannot bear a heated tone or the utterance of certain words so noble that it seems indecent to use them They withdraw from the parties that tolerate, practice, and live by such things in other words, from all parties

* * *

All politics, even the crudest, presuppose an idea of man, for he must be dealt with, used, and even served

Whether of parties or governments or statesmen, it would

perhaps be instructive to try to extract from their tactics or actions the various ideas of man they have held, or hold

I wonder if a single one of them has ever taken the time and trouble to think deeply on this matter—I am convinced of the contrary

* * *

I propose another piece of research a study of the fluctuations of individual freedom during the last *x* number of years

It would mean examining the succession of laws, some of which enlarge while others restrict the range of a man's possibilities After a certain date, it was no longer possible to be a dentist without an examination and a diploma At a certain time, everyone became subject to military service At another, divorce was made permissible Thirty years later, we were obliged to confess to the tax authorities everything we earned Around 1820, a different order of confession was required

It is clear that the boundaries of our field of freedom are quite variable I am greatly afraid that its area has done nothing but shrink during the last fifty years—*like* Balzac's wild ass's skin

But it would be entirely unjust and superficial to consider no other restraints than legal ones *Modern man is the slave* of modernity, at every step of progress he sinks deeper into slavery Comfort shackles us Freedom of the press and its *all-too-powerful resources torment us with printed clamor,* stab us with sensational news Advertising, one of the worst evils of our time, insults our eyes, degrades every adjective, defaces the countryside, corrupts all quality and all criticism, abuses every tree, rock, or monument, and the pages of it vomited up by machines make no distinction between the murderer, the victim, the hero, the centenarian of the day, and the brutalized child

There is also the tyranny of schedules

All this is aimed at our brain We shall soon have to build heavily insulated cloisters where neither radio waves nor newspapers can come, in which ignorance of all politics will be guarded and cultivated Speed, numbers, effects of surprise contrast, repetition, size novelty, and credulity will be despised there And thither, on certain days, visitors will come, to look through the iron bars at a few specimens of *free men*

Literature and Politics

Answer to an Inquiry

[1933]

ANY ANSWER to your questions must depend on one's ideas about politics and literature

Every man has his own ideas, and their power to incite action or to give pleasure differs greatly from one man to another, and in the same man from one age to another.

Finally, certain circumstances—public or private events, new aims, disappointments or losses, temptations of pride, etc —can more or less suddenly alter the status of the "Ivory Tower"

"Definitions" of politics and literature may always be selected in such a way that they are either mutually exclusive or compatible

If, for example, we see in *literature* an opportunity to explore something in ourselves that is entirely our own and can be dealt with by no one else, a peculiar need to develop in oneself the relations of thought and sensibility with language, a "sport" (sometimes strenuous) that requires the exercise of almost all the powers of the mind, and if, on the other hand, *politics* seems to us a practice amounting necessarily and wretchedly to nothing but expedients, obliging us to say emphatically what we could not possibly think, to promise the impossible, to speculate on credulity, enthusiasms, instincts, and all the human weaknesses or illusions, constraining

us to reckon with fools, to flatter people who repel us to depreciate the man we esteem, and to be party to a "party," which means consummating every day the *sacrifice of the intellect* — and all this for the sake of winning or keeping "power" whose possession in every imaginable case will be but the *experience of helplessness* — then we shall find that a man caring for true value will have nothing to do with events, and must shut himself up in his Ivory Tower.

But if we consider literature to be a means of influencing great numbers of unknown people, an enterprise aiming at advantages that depend entirely on public opinion at the moment, then it is very close to politics as represented below.

On the other hand, a certain way of considering the latter so as to embellish and ennoble it would be sufficient to lift it above pure literature. One would invoke the public weal, justice, the good order of the city, etc., and one's duty not to lose interest in these great things.

In short, there is no solution applying to everyone, but rather individual decisions that depend on one's character and circumstances, for here reason can decide nothing.

Besides, there are many degrees between a purely literary occupation and political activity. Let us say of the former that it consists *in writing to make people think or imagine*, and of the latter that it comes down to *writing (or speaking) to make people act*, and we shall then observe that the two motives cannot be clearly distinguished nor their results clearly separated.

The effect of ideas in the political world, the simplifications they must undergo and their unexpected and contradictory consequences, show that quite often *the man who thinks he is having an influence is not* (or is having one contrary to his intentions) and that the man who had no thought of influenc-

ing may unintentionally bring about profound changes It sometimes happens that the Ivory Tower unknowingly sends out powerful waves Nothing is more remarkable than to see that ideas, separated from the intellect that conceived them, isolated from the complex conditions of their birth, from the *delicate analyses and the hundreds of tests* and comparisons that preceded them, can become *political agents signals weapons stimulants*—that products of reflection may be used purely for their value as provocation How many examples there have been in the past hundred and fifty years! Fichte, Hegel, Marx, Gobineau, Nietzsche, even Darwin, have been put to use, turned into crude slogans

One word more It seems that France today has no sense of "mission." Our general attitude is expectant Nothing could be wiser, doubtless, at a time when world-wide confusion *makes one think that anything is possible at any moment,* when stability anywhere seems to be an outdated inheritance from a prewar world Nothing could be wiser, but perhaps nothing is more dangerous than such a reasonable state of mind I think it is not without peril for our young people Who is going to find them a new ideal to aspire toward with all their might? It is to such a purpose as this that, without taking part in public life, without respect to political parties, without giving up anything of himself, a *writer* could dedicate the height and solitude of his Tower

Constitutional Reform

Answer to an Inquiry

[1934]

1 *Are you in favor of restricting the powers of Parliament?*
2 *Are you in favor of permanently reserving certain ministerial posts for persons not in Parliament?*

IT MAY be that a reform of constitutional law is called for However no one may flatter himself that he can foresee the results The more I observe what goes on, the more certain I am that habits of mind, public sensibility, customs, aptitudes, and resistances are of much greater importance than laws It is both erroneous and dangerous to believe that laws are enough It is (for example) the English nature alone that constitutes the whole value of the English system

Besides, anyone who sets himself to imagine a political regime must not forget that there is no system so perfect that it does not presuppose quality in the men in power, and general good will in the rest The best conceived and designed machine in the world, if the material it is made of is bad or the operator clumsy, will not be long in running into trouble

However, I pass over this objection in order to reply to the second point

It seems to me that one of the vices of our present system is the absence of any organ of reflective thought there is no

provision for the free mind to participate in the government Everything is left to the course of events These are of two kinds· *on the* one *hand the* ballot, either in parliamentary elections or in Parliament itself, on the other, the more or less obvious incidents which, at home or from abroad, affect the national life Authority necessarily turns to whatever is most urgent Expediency, in oratory or action, is its one resource (We often see a highly important law made or modified entirely by a sort of *reflex* action) It must not be thought that the permanent staffs of the ministries, the technical committees, or the various "high councils" can suffice to fill the gap that, to me, seems to exist in the brain of the State Those *organs are overburdened with special, local, and nearly al*ways "urgent" business, and are composed, moreover, of specialists whose training in "general" ideas and views dates either from their youth or, worse still, from their recent accession to higher office Let me add (to avoid any confusion) that what I have just called "general ideas" are not acquired in school and do not necessarily result from any particular amount of reading

One can, indeed, approve in principle the idea of changing the composition of the government in the way you suggest But I *must confess that* I cannot conceive a suitable method of recruitment Our governmental and administrative personnel is at present recruited by election or by competitive examination, and, in addition (for certain posts) "special" appointment, which by no means brings in the worst candidates Competitive examination is a method that cannot be considered in the present case Besides, it is deplorable, however inevitable it *may* be, *since it consists in testing an in*dividual's *relative* worth *at a given moment* As for election and special appointment, chance plays a great part in both, and

superficial or simulated qualities are not without their effect

Perhaps the personalities whose participation in public affairs is the subject of your inquiry should be sought among those men whose works and acts entitle them to be considered But even then *who* would choose them?

State Reform

An Interview

[1934]

We were received by the author of Eupalinos *in a drawing room furnished in the most perfect taste. The bright glance of his gray eyes, the fine tones of his voice, the natural elegance of his bearing, his affable and simple greeting were all full of charm. His clear-cut face has remained very young in spite of his white hair, neatly parted, and his gray mustache. He grows animated as he talks, and talking, he makes little gestures as though caressing the delicate and subtle forms created by his thought in the course of conversation.*

Our questions were not unfamiliar to him. After all, he is the author of a "note" on the idea of dictatorship, which he wrote for Antonio Ferro's Salazar.

I am embarrassed by your word "State." I would remind you of what I have often written—namely that the whole arsenal of terms, in this order of ideas, is quite an ancient one, that, on the one hand, these words have undergone very different uses (does not Littré give the word *State* four distinct definitions?) and that, on the other hand, they cannot satisfy any mind that has contracted the habit—good or bad—of a certain precision.

As for reforming the State—assuming that I do understand the word—I can imagine such a thing being done only on a plane above all politics, that is, all preconceived ideas. So, if

I had to think about it with a view to a practical solution I should try to think of it as of a machine to be built That is to say, the specialization of organs their mutual dependence or independence and the conditions of their proper functioning would be my chief concern That is to say too that the present system seems to me hardly to answer to these conditions It must not be forgotten that a good machine is silent

To my mind there is at present in the term *Laws* a confusion among entirely different orders of prescription Parliament is required to pronounce on questions of quite different kinds and on quite different scales For example it may turn from a penal law to a law permitting the commune of X to borrow 500 000 francs although rationally it would not wish to waste its time in voting measures of local interest The study and drafting of a penal law should be the task of a committee or a commission specializing in work of this kind

In politics all measures carry an electoral exponent That is what vitiates the functioning of national life I confess that I hate political parties

I do not believe it is indispensable to set up the kind of government you speak of First because nothing is indispensable and second because a Committee of Public Safety—for that is what it is—*takes over*, it is not set up However, I think the revival in the Senate of the bygone type of Senator elected for life would not be without its advantages True enough, the young would not be happy about it

III

Women and Politics

The Intellectual Destiny of Woman

[1928]

THERE HAS been no lack of women painters and writers, but none have excelled in the more abstract arts

I call an art *more abstract* when it requires more imperiously than another the invention of entirely ideal forms, that is, forms not taken from the tangible world

Painting and Letters afford, for the productive instinct, an infinite number of models and concrete opportunities that not only directly stimulate and feed the artist but can also serve him as an end or object to be attained by imitation But the composer, on the contrary, pursues a model that exists only in himself Nothing in the universe resembles a sonata, unless by analogy

Once this is agreed, we immediately find that *the more abstract an art is, the fewer are the women who have made an illustrious name in it*

There are no women among the masters of music. Their absence is a surprise and a puzzle Woman has always taken an interest in this art, she has devoted herself to it with considerable freedom, whereas she has sometimes found difficulties in the way of writing or painting

It is easy to see why the feminine temperament could not have given to the world a Johann Sebastian Bach, a Beethoven, a Richard Wagner What these men undertook required

long-sustained acts of intellectual will Their works are monuments of continuous strength whose complex and organized immensity could not have been built up by feeling or even by passion Feeling can provide only their substance What they demand in addition are organizing powers and the deepest concentration And most fundamentally there must be as it were a *transcendent* intuition embracing the whole and the parts of the immense whole, a kind of vision that brings together emotion and order the spontaneous and the meditated the human and the inhuman into a sort of calculation that is wholly personal and incommunicable The performance of the highest genius presupposes the discovery and possession of a universe of secret forms representing the laws a mind evolves from itself and imposes on its own works

But in music there are other works of the highest merit which require no such powerful effort of construction, which can ravish us to tears or hold us enchanted by exquisite expressions of voluptuous tenderness or melancholy

It might have been expected that woman's nature should give us such delicate and touching creations, and that Mozart or Chopin, Schumann or Debussy should have sisters or rivals *among women*

But it must be agreed that so far, our expectation has been in vain and that what seems most feminine in music has been written by men

These few remarks lead at once to a more general question is woman forever condemned to such marked mediocrity in the freest and most original uses of the mind? Or is her unquestionable disability but the sad *fruit of an age-long* state of subordination and passivity? I should like to think so In the former case, she would be burdened with a physiological

fatality. In the latter, her inferiority would be due to custom But we do not know what effect customs that have been long practiced, or laws obeyed for centuries, may have on an organism and a nervous system The most remarkable result, from the biological point of view, of the immense transformations just beginning in the life of individuals and societies, and destined to have a profound effect on woman's social capacity, will doubtless be the gradual change in her intellectual capacities and hence in her ambitions

It is not impossible that the domain of the arts may one day fall completely under the power of women, and that personalities may appear in music and philosophy as great as Semiramis or Catherine in politics

The Passion for Intelligence

[1930]

LADIES, and even Gentlemen, you are about to hear two voices Not discordant, but harmoniously attuned, though successive and contrasting They will talk to you about what might be called 'The Intellectual Destiny of Woman "

I am here only to furnish the prologue, as it were, to their eloquence I have come simply to set the stage and arrange the scenery for the ideas that Mlle Hélène Vacaresco and Mme la Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld are to expound for you As we are all aware, they have every right to speak of woman's intelligence Their arguments owe their persuasiveness as much to the living examples which these ladies are as to the reasons and facts they will set before you But I must above all be tender of their modesty

So I am to arrange the scenery Please conjure it up in your minds as a scene in Shakespeare's theater Let the stage where we are now standing be the *present* The backdrop is the *future* a veil, a mist, through which a distant view may be seen or glimpsed As for the props and furniture that encumber and decorate the *present*—the books, the family portraits, the coats of arms—these stand for the *past*

So much for the setting

But what is the subject of the play?

I shall say first of all what it is not

We shall not deal here, ladies, with *feminism* in the political sense of the word

The basis of political feminism is an opinion about the *average* value of woman, her *average* aptitude for taking part in public life, for taking part in that necessarily very *average* activity which consists in electing and being elected Incidentally, I do not understand how women can be denied a right that so many men exercise almost mechanically Those who deny it to women honor them without knowing it

No It is not a question here of *averages*, of an abstract woman multiplied by a whole number, on the contrary, it is a question of exceptional values The average is not our concern And we have no intention today of making trouble for the public authorities, who in any case are absent

We are thinking of the place woman may aspire to fill, not in the State, not in the political system and the councils of government, but in the world of the Mind, I mean in the great enterprise of increasing our capital of knowledge and of beautiful things, a capital which humanity—but a humanity composed of exceptional beings only, the great humanity of the few—builds and hands on from century to century

Hitherto, woman's part in generating this light and beauty has been curiously small Certainly there have been remarkable women in painting and Letters But in music, in philosophy, in the highest realms of science, there is a total, or almost total, absence of feminine names of the first magnitude

. . .

This remark brings me to a reflection which you must forgive me for setting before you It is very closely connected with our subject

Is sensibility in woman really more delicate, more lively,

more dominant than in man And must we divide the Nervous Kingdom roughly between the two sexes giving more intellect to the one and to the other more feeling and affective life? I cannot omit the fact that various experiments made by the physiologists seem to teach us that *man* is the more sensitive of the two But that is not all

There is a certain event—perhaps the most important of all events since it changed the whole destiny of the human race for the worse—which at the beginning of the world or almost fixed and showed us the true nature of woman

In Eden there were two marvelous trees The apples on the first would give eternal life to whoever ate them But the fruits of the second were fruits of knowledge Their flesh was full of intellect They promised their takers the immediate and miraculous possession of all the sciences and in particular the moral and political sciences

It was between life and science that Eve made her choice Her lovely hand seized that sapient apple so worthy to be bitten by members of the Academy

Eve made her choice Eve, being intellectual, chose knowledge And of course, she handed that fatal and precious apple to us She loved, therefore she gave Is there any wonder, then that after a mere few thousand years, she now wishes in her turn to eat her slice of apple, to know all the savor of that fruit she had recognized and preferred from the very earliest days?

Man of course, would unhesitatingly have chosen the plump fruit of life That eminently sensitive and sensual creature would have been seduced by eternal youth Is he, perhaps, inconsolable for his companion s choice? Does he, perhaps, still bear her a grudge? Notice that ever since that immemorial day he has accused her of curiosity But what is

curiosity if not a keen desire to know, a kind of itch for knowledge? Is it not that very restlessness of the mind which leads it in endless pursuit? So, little by little, without in the least urging well-established facts, we may see Eve the Fair, Eve the First, Eve the inquisitive, the temptress, gradually, ever since Eden, taking on the imposing features, the thoughtful, pure countenance of a statue of Knowledge

That primeval affair, whose consequences were the Earthly Paradise and all humanity, has left man with a strange terror of women's thoughts He sometimes accuses them of frivolity, or again he distrusts their dissimulation and treacherous profundity What man has not, like the Moor of Venice, anxiously wondered "What can be going on in this little head I hold in my hands? What would I not give to know what it is thinking, what it wants, what it hides?"

But is not that the very question we are putting today? Are we not saying, as we face the future What will happen in this feminine head? What will issue from this brow, hitherto destined to no pursuit beyond the variations on love?

Sometimes the unknown mind of woman has given man such anxiety that he has undervalued it, decrying it as an almost instinctive activity Worse! He has even denied its existence

You are aware, ladies—and you, young ladies, are too well educated to be unaware—that until the year 835 of the Christian era you had no soul, for certain Some of the Church Fathers held you to be charming animals

Not until the year 835 did the sacred Council of Agde—unless it were another Council at another time—not until 835 did that Council of Agde or elsewhere, after long, subtle, and rigorous dispute, officially recognize that women have souls

Until then it could be doubted whether they were able to sin. This was not a very honorable condition, but it was not without its advantages.

That Council, dear ladies, is perhaps mythical. But it is far from being impossible—so far, indeed, that it is in session here and now; at this moment I have the floor in it. We are the ecumenical and literary Council of the *Annales*; we are an assembly of scrupulous theologians who, in the Year of Our Lord 1930, or rather (as cloudy old History will say, tottering among its doubtful documents, drunk on wrong dates) [illegible] *in* the Year of Our Lord 1930 — we are inquiring whether woman has within her not only a soul but also the seed of the highest works of the mind. Will woman give to humanity spiritual fruits of the same value, the same savor, the same intellectual virtue as those produced by men? Why do we doubt it?

There are people, a good many of them, and even some very worthy people, who share this doubt and quite readily incline to the negative.

Not all of their reasons are trifling. Some are powerful. But these powerful reasons are necessarily drawn from the past.

Shall I tell you what I think? The past can no longer prove very much. In our time, the past deceives us about the future. In our time, each day not only *replaces* the previous day, it turns it into something almost inconceivable and sometimes quite ridiculous. Well then, tomorrow it may be inconceivable that we should for so long have doubted the wisdom and intellect of half the human race.

Let us suppose that the event will prove the doubters wrong, assume that women will finally come into all the power of their minds. *At this very moment then*, we are, on the one hand, between two ages of intellectual history, and on

the other, between two eras in the history of woman. And what do we see?

We are witnessing, my dear listeners, an extraordinary phenomenon. Future poets—if there are any—will sing of it as the poets of the past sang of the death of the gods.

We are witnessing *The Twilight of the Ladies.*

The Lady is not a very ancient phenomenon, she is the prodigious invention of the Middle Ages. Woman, as I have said, has always been strange to us. Woman, the object of desire and lust, woman, both instrument and ornament—instrument of pleasure and paternity, ornament of leisure—the perfume and poison of life, a being at once intimate and inexplicable, at once a peril, a help, and an enigma, often an enemy of the mind, in the eyes of philosophers, feared by the doctors of the Church, quite often anathematized in beautiful verse, a slave, an idol, laden with chains but chains of gold, this same woman, as a result of a change in manners and a poetic renaissance, was, in the thirteenth century, transfigured into a *Lady.*

This *Lady* was a weird creature, resplendently artificial, a perfumed monster, armored in whalebone, tight-laced, harnessed in high boots of soft leather, gloved to the shoulder, her head decked with feathers or spikes of wheat, roses, grapes, parakeets ... anything under the sun, even frigates in Louis XVI's day ...

I remember that in my childhood, ladies seemed to me enormous and marvelous insects, or hussars of operetta, or heroes of adventure and combat—but of what combat I had as yet no idea ... They were also tyrants who obliged little boys to be polite, and in whose presence even men had to talk as they did not talk among themselves.

All this is greatly changed. The only thing now left to

woman, as a vestige of the sacred fear inspired by the Lady are those terrible blood-red fingernails she keeps as a cruel and disgusting ornament. I shudder when I am faced with those hands to be kissed and I think of the entrails of chickens or haruspices, and the cook.

But the end is here. The Twilight of the Ladies has come. The Lady with her feathers and her pearls, the rituals surrounding her in society, the attentions, the refinements she inspired in others, seems to be giving way to a quite different and new figure of woman, but one still impossible to foresee.

What will that new woman be like? And what will be her place in the life of man when the political distance, the difference in culture and occupation, between the two sexes has more or less disappeared? That is what I shall not attempt to conjecture. You will listen more profitably to the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld, to whom I now yield the floor, and who will tell you of the role of women in the sciences.

Woman Suffrage

[1931]

Ladies and Gentlemen

MME JEAN-BRUNHES DELAMARRE, daughter of the great scientist whose recent and sudden death has saddened all of us, is to speak to you of the present state of what is called "Feminism"

I believe this question has ceased to raise a smile Even in France, people have made up their minds to accept its existence, and have begun to agree that, after all, men have not created a system of politics so successful, so rich in benefits, so free from crime, and so reasonable that one may not wonder whether women would have done worse We now recognize that in many cases the advice of a mother or a housewife might well have made even great statesmen reflect, and perhaps have led to some savings in blood or money

Mme Delamarre will confine herself to comparing for you woman's political situation in the various nations that make up the civilized world Their different constitutions do not treat woman in the same way In each of them, she has gained a certain position, she has won certain rights, and the degree of political existence accorded her in this country or in that certainly measures something I should like—and yet am ashamed—to say that it measures the degree of intellectual freedom the mind's freedom from prejudice and ridicule

The subject she will bring before you is closely related, therefore to Human Geography,' the precise definition, program and methods of which we owe to our lamented colleague of the Institute Jean Brunhes

But what could be more remarkable in the way of human geography than to see that among so many nations granting women more or less extensive rights France—liberal France, France free and just, France well known for the regard and affection women have always met with here—is distinguished at present by her absolute refusal to allow women to take part in public affairs?

France's refusal, her resistance and delay doubtless have causes and a meaning which, if known and analyzed, would add piquancy to the notion which some observer of the modern world like the *Ingenu* or Micromegas might get of our country

The French are perhaps unwittingly insular They cannot believe they are peculiar They feel that they are universal and they tend irresistibly to think in general terms They incline to consider strange what is merely foreign, they are surprised that others are not, and do not act, like themselves, when they ought sometimes to be surprised at not being or reacting like others Montesquieu saw this very plainly

"How can anyone be a Persian?" he makes us say—a very French remark

"How can anyone be a woman?" is what men, particularly serious-minded men, seem to say when they try to imagine women acting in complete independence, having a direct influence on public affairs, perhaps changing the habitual tone, upsetting the routine and tacit conventions of all factions, and bringing into debates and laws more sensibility perhaps, or more humanity

In short, we have a certain idea of woman which we think is *exact* and hope is immutable, in our minds we have an eternal woman—eternally under age This idea asserts itself at the first sign or the slightest move that threatens our monopolies, we smile, shrug our shoulders, or respond with banter, not only to the most solid arguments but to facts themselves, that is, the political concessions that women have gained in many countries of the world over the last few years

It must be admitted that, with us, evolution in all things is acceptable, if at all, only as the execution of some rational program completely and clearly set forth—the development *of a pre-established plan proceeding from idea to action and* following a calculated line entirely laid out in accordance with lucid and well-ordered principles

We like to create facts, or fit them into our structure, we do not like to yield to them, or give up our habits or our taste for system, and we recognize ourselves only in our ideal, which after all is but a fixed image

Let us not forget that it is in France that *clarity* has been taken to be the mark and basis of truth It is in France that abstractions and telling phrases have been endowed with *political power, a kind of sovereignty* due perhaps more to their striking and simple form than to their content Even those of us who are most attached to the national traditions of Right and Left cannot see them as local manifestations, we see in them general truths, valid for all men We are also the only people, perhaps, who put obstacles in the way of the evolution of language, just as we do in the way of the unfettered caprice of poetry *I do not say that all this is blameworthy* I say we must look around us There we see a very different spirit prevailing Among the Anglo-Saxons, for example, we see facts, the question of fact, dominating all

other considerations. They have introduced this outlook even into metaphysics, under the name of religious experience. They regard their traditions as valid in themselves, by the sole fact of their existence. Existence seems to them a stronger argument than any explanation or rational justification. If any one of them takes some initiative, founds a religion, expounds and wishes to propagate some idea, even an outlandish one, he is not mocked or molested in any way; they wait for the outcome—that will be the judge.

Viewed in this spirit, women's participation in public life has nothing shocking or alarming about it. Only experience can settle the question; no discussion, no appeal to logic can decide it. Besides, logic is never more than a recourse to the past. And our era is one in which the past is *pluperfect*—an era that is producing many things for which there is no concept yet crystallized.

In our time, so prodigiously rich in sudden changes, so fertile in events of the first magnitude in every field, we see nothing but improvised and makeshift attempts to accommodate our laws and constitutions, the whole social, economic, and political machinery, to the new facts, the new necessities of life, the dawning reality. Administrations and even forms of government are compelled to change.

In particular, the juridical and political status of women is tending everywhere to be altered. Written law will eventually have to come into harmony with the facts.

The legal inequality of man and woman is in fact based—habit and mental inertia aside—and can only be based on the difference in their roles in society and in their modes of life. We can no longer invoke intellectual inequality. It was always, and could only be, presumed. On this point, experience has spoken. I concede that the greatest women are not

superior to the greatest men, but in matters of politics, of elections, we do not have to compare Archimedes with Hypatia We are concerned only with *average* persons No one would dare assert that the average woman is inferior to the average man We can no longer invoke inequality of physical strength That is daily losing its importance, as technical progress makes it possible for a mere gesture to replace physical effort and a child s finger to control the movement of enormous masses

The result is an increasing assimilation of the two sexes, with regard to their way of life and of earning their living

What else remains? What final obstacle is in the way of putting the two sexes on a completely equal footing in the social order, where the average must be the only consideration?

Maternity remains Here inequality is imposed by Nature Here the law owes woman preferential treatment Its indifference would be fatal to mother and child, and disastrous for the race

But who better than woman herself can claim, demand, and define what is needed for the mother and the child?

So, on the one hand, there is no valid reason for denying to woman, who from the professional point of view is on the same footing as man, the civil rights that man possesses, on the other hand, there are strong reasons for granting her these in their fullness so that she may, in person, enforce the claims of those sacred interests given her by maternity to defend

Nearly everywhere, moreover, woman as a political personality is to be seen forcing or finding her way into lawmaking Women can vote and, in various countries, sit in the local councils, in Parliament, or even in the Cabinet

But in the very country where woman has played the

greatest social role, where her influence on manners, on arts and letters, has been deepest and most beneficial, where she has so often influenced politics, woman is legally ignored In public law the Frenchwoman does not exist

It is remarkable that the reasons for her exclusion are never openly and precisely stated There is a kind of vague hostility *easily* expressed in jokes but only with *difficulty* in serious form

Perhaps in the banal psychological make-up that goes with such instinctive resistance—in our consciousness, as it were, of our inertia—there are traces of the old respect and the old frivolity that formerly combined rather oddly in the minds of Frenchmen and inspired their attitude toward women Our literature bears witness to this curious mixture of devotion and cynicism There, woman appears either as ideal or inferior, but always essentially different from man, and perpetually requiring of him an attitude either too submissive or too free Equality in relations with women, without ulterior motive or embarrassment, is for us almost unthinkable

In particular, we dislike the idea of seeing woman mixed up in our political fights Perhaps we are afraid that her presence would oblige us to temper our language to more decent terms And we dread the comic effects that can easily be imagined a household politically divided, a member of the Cabinet having her hair waved, a candidate making use of her personal attractions

About thirty years ago, in an electoral district in central France, a young mother, wife of a parliamentary candidate, traveled through the countryside and here and there gave suck to some baby, whose fond parents were quite won over by this electoral gift of herself Was that corruption?

But it is too easy to play upon our sensitivity to ridicule Let us not forget that ridicule is only the exploitation of a

detail or a moment If the accession of women to public life can bring about a diminution of our appalling infant mortality and the final conversion of France to hygiene, if the direct action of women can abolish this danger, wipe out this shame from our country, then we must face up to such ridicule, or else admit that this time ridicule literally kills

However that may be, the present formula in France with regard to the rights of women can be explicitly stated thus

In the eyes of our constitutional law, the greatest woman is inferior to the lowest of men

And again

All Frenchwomen are inferior to any woman whatever in those countries where women have the vote

That is how things are

You may be an illustrious poet, a doctor of science, a medical doctor, a professor of philosophy, you may be a creator in the arts or in the refined luxury trades, you may give proof of your intelligence, your gifts of organization, you may during the war have managed a farm or a business, more simply, you may bring up your children, having learned by humble experience everything that has to be foreseen or provided for in order to preserve or strengthen those young lives, for all that, you are creatures incapable of handling and weighing the smallest grain of public and political power, which the least of men, though illiterate, or alcoholic, or corrupt to the core, fully possesses in the name of the law

Law, on the purely civil side, is in fact full of astonishing things It institutes and protects marriage, but immediately informs us that woman thereby becomes a minor In marriage a minor, in free love an adult[1] .

Many other things to be found in our laws are beginning to look astonishing

That is because our civil as well as our penal laws and our political laws and ideas are, on the whole, out of date. Like our administrative practices and our educational system and our farming methods and our town planning, our legislation is out of date.

I do not like the new because it is new, nor the old because it is old. I consider it neither difficult nor interesting to want to create an artificial future simply by reversing the present or to want *what has been* to outlive its reasons for having been. The difficult thing is to link memory with fact, fact with trend, to understand what will be irresistible, and to give it, by foresight and intelligence, the aspect of a desirable change wisely achieved.

The Question of Universal Suffrage

A Preface

[1934]

THERE ARE problems whose obvious data and abstract structure remain what they always were, while their scope and chances of solution change and are one day discovered to have been profoundly altered by more or less extraneous and accidental circumstances

In the same way, a piece of land that had no value is worth a fortune because a railway line or a road has been built nearby

And in this way certain ideas that have been lying fallow among a people suddenly take on unexpected vigor as a result of changes taking place in a neighboring country

The participation of women in public life is one of those questions that also change, as a face changes with the position and quality of the source of light that strikes and molds it

Of course, ladies, you are still, and for some time yet (at least in the mind of the legislator—if he has one) will remain inferior beings, suspect in the eyes of the law You are still, from the point of view of our Constitution, lower than all other women in the world And the best-educated, the most distinguished among you, for talent, learning, or character, is still decreed incapable of exercising those political rights so

generously accorded to the most ignorant or stupid of men

But when I say that the legislator is still prepared to refuse you what reason grants, I mean that he thinks he is prepared to refuse you as he has done hitherto He thinks he is still the same, and that he can still maintain *his own notion* of universal suffrage, against what would and should be the real thing

That is because the legislator of course is blind He can not, or will not, see the state of the world, the new state of mind developing around him He can not see that his refusal his will to deny, his sarcasm, and his shrugging of shoulders now bear witness against himself, and argue against the system of universal (but restricted) suffrage from which he derives his power and which he still alleges to be based solely on the legal right of all to take part in the affairs of the City

That system as you know, is going through a difficult time almost everywhere In some places it has gone out of fashion Nothing is less surprising the same thing is happening that happens one day or another to every system and every form of government For each of them there are critical periods when the vices of the system are more strongly felt than the advantages This is a fairly regular phenomenon, almost as predictable as events in astronomy The events and circumstances of an era throw light on the worst side of an institution, and its advantages turn pale There is also, alas, the matter of age

This is now becoming apparent as regards universal suffrage It is no longer considered, as formerly, the unique modern solution to the political problem, an inevitable solution to which all peoples, as they become more educated and more aware of their strength, must gradually and ineluctably come. Many objections are raised against it People observe

that the approval of the majority is not always a *guarantee* of competence, and that the functioning of the political and administrative machine dependent on the majority is not of the most satisfactory, the reproach is heard that it breeds *inefficiency, discontinuity, and instability of power—at a time* when fluctuations of will and the relaxing of energy are far from opportune

It is also held responsible for all the defects of everything *in existence—for you know, ladies, that nothing is more* beautiful than what does not exist

So the question of universal suffrage (whether we will or not) now faces the test of public opinion, and no longer merely *theoretically* It is posed by the facts, by the state of things in France and abroad, by the amazing changes in forms of government in Europe and, finally, by the doubt and anxiety of us all.

Let us make no mistake in everyone's mind at this moment, circumstances have set up a kind of *competition* between the various political systems of the world In all countries the difficulties are enormous and, in fact, similar The links and connections between countries in the modern world are such that this could not be otherwise Money troubles know no frontiers The worries of a finance minister must be very much alike from one capital to another Every nation tries to solve its problems, some by political innovation, others by trying to preserve their institutions But nations watch each other They draw comparisons they compare systems and the fruits of those systems There is indeed, as I have just told you, a *competition between political mechanisms* It has to be determined which of them is best suited, in the present state of the world, to function most economically and with most benefit to the life of a people

Is this the moment then, by the refusal I have mentioned,

to show our curious fear of extending the system of universal suffrage which we claim to uphold, of giving it the full scope that justice demands it should be given.

We want universal suffrage, yet do not want it to be universal. *[illegible]* It is agreed, ladies, that in equity and reason you have every right to take part in political action. But there are those who fear the unknown that would follow upon your casting a vote, who are afraid that some very convenient arrangements would be disturbed, some well tried teams disbanded, some well-established local or parliamentary positions upset.

Such arguments are, in the most literal sense, *[illegible]*. They are based on the wish to be re-elected.

But there could be no graver injury to the prestige of universal suffrage—which, as I reminded you just now, is passing through a most critical time—than to show clearly, by this denial of justice and equality with which you are now faced, that the very principle of universal suffrage is a victim of selfish interests.

IV

The Idea of Europe

The European*

[1922]

Ladies and Gentlemen

THE STORM is over, and yet we are still uneasy anxious as though it were just now going to break Nearly all human affairs are still in a state of terrible uncertainty We ponder on what is gone, we are almost ruined by what has been ruined; we do not know what is to come, and have some reason to fear it We hope vaguely, but dread precisely, our fears are *infinitely clearer than our hopes, we recognize that pleasur*able living and abundance are behind us, but confusion and doubt are in us and with us There is no thinking person, however shrewd and experienced we imagine him to be, who can flatter himself that he is above this malaise, that he has escaped this sense of gloom, and can gauge the probable duration of this period of disturbance in the vital exchanges of humanity

We are an unfortunate generation, it has befallen us to witness during our brief passage through life these great and terrifying events whose reverberations will fill the whole of our lives

It can be said that everything essential in the world has been affected by the war, or more exactly by the circumstances of the war Attrition has undermined something deeper than

*The excisions in this essay were made by Valéry —J M

the renewable parts of man You know of the great upset in the general economy in the policies of States and the very lives of individuals distress uncertainty and apprehension are everywhere *The Mind itself has not been exempt from all this damage* The Mind is in fact cruelly stricken it grieves in men of intellect and looks sadly upon itself It distrusts itself profoundly

What, then is the Mind? In what way can it be struck stunned, reduced, humiliated by the present state of the world? Whence comes this deep concern for things of the Mind, this distress, this anguish among men of intellect? This is what we must now speak of

Man is that different animal, that bizarre living creature who has set himself off from all others, who stands above them by virtue of his *daydreams* the intensity, continuity, and diversity of his *daydreams*! And by their extraordinary *consequences*, which go even so far as to modify not only his own nature but also the very Nature around him, which he strives indefatigably to dominate with his daydreams

I mean that man stands constantly and of necessity apart from *what is* by being concerned with *what is not*! And that, either laboriously or with genius, he creates out of himself the means of endowing his dreams with the very power and precision of reality and, furthermore, of imposing on that reality ever-increasing changes, bringing it nearer to his dreams

Other living creatures are driven and transformed by external changes only They adapt themselves, that is, they change in order to preserve the essential character of their existence, thus bringing themselves into a state of equilibrium with their surroundings

They are not, that I know of, in the habit of spontaneously upsetting that equilibrium of quitting, for instance—for no reason, from no external pressure or necessity—the climate to which they are already adapted They blindly seek their own good, but they do not feel the spur of that *better* which is the enemy of the good, and which can prompt us to face the worst

Man, on the other hand, has it in him to interrupt the equilibrium with his surroundings He has it in him to become dissatisfied with what used to satisfy him At every moment he is something besides what he is He does not form a *closed system* of needs and their satisfaction He gains from satisfaction some strange excess of power that ends his contentment No sooner are his body and his appetite appeased than something stirs in his depths, torments him, enlightens him, commands him, spurs him on, secretly maneuvers him This is the Mind, armed with its inexhaustible *questions*

It is eternally probing us with who, what, where, at what time, why, how, by what means? It divides the past from the present, the future from the past, the possible from the real, the image from the fact It is both what goes ahead and what lags behind, what builds and what destroys, it is both chance and calculation, it is, therefore, both what is not and the instrument of what is not It is finally it is above all, the mysterious author of those dreams I spoke of . .

What are the dreams man has dreamed? And which of them have entered reality, and by what means?

Let us look within us and about us—consider the city at random, turn the pages of a few books, or, better still, observe the simplest impulses of our hearts

We wish for, or take pleasure in imagining, many strange things, such wishes are very ancient, and it seems that man

will never make up his mind to stop having them Reread Genesis On the very threshold of the sacred book at our first step into the first garden we come upon the dream of Knowledge and the dream of Immortality those beautiful fruits of the tree of life and the tree of science still entice us A few pages further on you will find in the same Bible the dream of a completely united humanity collaborating in the building of a prodigious tower And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech We still dream of it

You will also find the strange story of that prophet who swallowed by a fish could move through the depths of the sea

Among the Greeks there were heroes who built themselves flying machines Others knew how to tame wild beasts and their miraculous words moved mountains caused blocks of stone to rise and take their places in the building of temples by a kind of marvelous telemechanics

Acting at a distance making gold transmuting metals conquering death predicting the future, traveling through mediums unnatural to our species speaking or seeing or hearing from one end of the world to the other, visiting the stars inventing perpetual motion, and so on and on—we have dreamed of so many things that the list would be endless But all these dreams together form a strange *program*, the pursuit of which is somehow inseparable from the very history of humanity

Every project of world conquest and domination, whether material or spiritual, figures in it Everything we call *civiliza-tion progress, science, art, culture* goes back to that extraordinary activity and is directly dependent on it It may be said that all our dreams are directed against all the given conditions of our finite existence *We are a zoological species*

that tends of itself to transform its mode of existence, and we could draw up a table, a systematic classification of our dreams, by considering each of them as attacking one of the original conditions of our life There are dreams that defy gravity, and others the laws of movement Some defy space and others time Ubiquity, prophecy, the Fountain of Youth, all have been dreamed of, and still are, under scientific names

There are dreams defying Mayer's principle and others defying Carnot's Some defy physiological laws and others ethnic data and destinies the equality of races, eternal and universal peace are among the latter Suppose we had drawn up this table and were looking at it We should very soon be tempted to complete it by adding a table of dreams realized Opposite each we should set down what had been done to realize it If, for example, we had inscribed in one column the desire to fly through the air, and beside it the name of Icarus, then in the column of achievements we should write the famous names of Leonardo da Vinci, Ader, the Wright brothers, and their successors I could multiply these examples, it would be a kind of game that we have no time now to play Besides, we should also have to draw up a table of *failures*, unrealized dreams. Certain dreams are definitely doomed—the squaring of the circle, the free creation of energy, etc Others are still among our not unreasonable hopes

But we must return to our table of *dreams realized*, it was to this I meant to draw your attention

If, then, we consider this list, a very honorable list, we can make this observation

Out of all these achievements, most, and the most astonishing and fruitful, have been the work of a tiny portion of humanity, living in a very small area compared to the whole of the habitable lands

This privileged place was Europe, and the European man, the European mind, was the author of these wonders

What, then, is Europe? It is a kind of cape of the old continent, a western appendix to Asia It looks naturally toward the west On the south it is bordered by a famous sea whose role, or I should say function, has been wonderfully effective in the development of that European mind with which we are concerned All the races who came to its shores mingled with each other, they exchanged merchandise and blows, they founded ports and colonies where not only articles of trade but beliefs, languages, customs, and technical achievements were the objects of traffic Even before present-day Europe took on the appearance familiar to us, the Mediterranean had witnessed the establishment, in its eastern basin, of a sort of pre-Europe Egypt and Phoenicia somehow prefigured the civilization we founded, then came the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Iberian peoples Around that sparkling and uncommonly salty water, a host of the most impressive gods and men in the world are said to have been seen Horus, Isis and Osiris, Astarte and the Cabiri; Athene, Poseidon, Minerva, Neptune and their like, all reigned concurrently over that sea, which once tossed the strange thoughts of St Paul, just as it cradled the dreams and calculations of Bonaparte .

But to these shores, where so many peoples had already mingled and clashed and instructed each other, yet other peoples came in the course of the ages, drawn by the splendor of the sky, the beauty and special intensity of life in the sun The Celts, the Slavs, the Germanic peoples all have felt the enchantment of that noblest of seas; a kind of irresistible *tropism* acting through the centuries has made of this admirably shaped basin the object of the world's desire and the site

of the greatest human activity. Economic, intellectual, political, religious, artistic activity—everything has happened, or seems at least to have begun, around this inner sea. There we can look back on the events that foreshadowed the formation of Europe, and can see, at a certain point, the beginnings of the division of humanity into two ever more dissimilar groups. One, occupying the greater part of the globe, remained as though immobile in its customs, its knowledge, its practical power, making only imperceptible progress, or none.

The other was a prey to perpetual restlessness and search. Every kind of exchange, every variety of problem multiplied and fermented in its midst; the means of life, knowledge, and growth accumulated from century to century with extraordinary rapidity. Soon the difference between this portion of humanity and the rest of the world, as regards positive knowledge and power, became so great that it upset the equilibrium. Europe burst out of its borders, went out to conquer other lands. Civilization renewed the early invasions, but this time in the opposite direction. At home, Europe reached the maximum of vitality, intellectual fruitfulness, riches, and ambition.

Triumphant Europe, born of the exchange of all things spiritual and material, born of the voluntary and involuntary co-operation of many races, of the competition between different religions, political systems, and business interests, *all within a very limited territory*. Europe was a lively market where all good and precious things were brought, compared, and discussed — and changed hands. It was an Exchange where the greatest variety of doctrines, ideas, discoveries, and dogmas were *floated*, and *quoted*, and rose or fell, and were the object of the most pitiless criticism and the blindest infatuation. Products from the most distant lands soon came into

this market in abundance On the one hand the new lands of America, Oceania Africa and the ancient empires of the Far East sent their raw materials to Europe to be put through those astonishing transformations that Europe alone knew how to achieve On the other the learning the philosophies the religions of ancient Asia came to nourish the ever alert minds that Europe produced in every generation and this powerful machine transformed the more or less strange conceptions of the Orient—sounded their depths and extracted from them their usable elements

This Europe of ours which began as a Mediterranean market has thus become a vast factory a factory in the literal sense—that is machinery for transforming but an incomparable intellectual factory as well This intellectual factory takes in all things of the mind from everywhere and distributes them to its numerous parts Certain parts seize every novelty with hope or hunger exaggerating its value, others resist, preferring to the influx of novelties the brilliance and solidity of the riches already amassed A dynamic equilibrium has to be constantly maintained between acquiring and preserving but a more and more active critical sense attacks one of these tendencies or the other, pitilessly belaboring all favorite and established ideas, mercilessly testing and protesting both tendencies of that precariously kept balance

Thought has to develop, and it has to be preserved It can advance only by *extremes* but it can endure only by *means* Extreme order, which is automatism, would be its ruin, extreme disorder would bring it even more quickly to the abyss

In short, Europe has been built up gradually like a gigantic city It has its museums, parks, workshops, its laboratories and salons It has Venice, Oxford, Seville, Rome, Paris

There are cities of Art, other cities of Science, and still others that join ornament and instrument in one It is small enough to be traveled over in a very short time—which may soon be too short to count It is large enough to contain all climates, diverse enough to afford the most varied crops and terrain From the physical point of view, it is a masterpiece of temperament, combining all the conditions favorable to man And here man has become the European You will forgive my using the words "Europe" and "European" in a somewhat more than geographical and historical rather in a *functional* sense I would almost say (allowing my thought to abuse my language) that a *Europe* is a kind of system composed of human variety and a particularly favorable locality, and, lastly, fashioned by a singularly vivid and eventful history The product of this conjunction of circumstances is a European

If we examine this personality in relation to the simpler types of humanity, he is a kind of monster His memory is too full and too continuous He has extravagant ambitions, an unlimited greed for knowledge and wealth As he usually belongs to some nation that in its time has more or less dominated the world and still dreams of its Caesar, its Charles V, or its Napoleon, his pride, hope, and regret are always on the alert As he belongs to an age and a continent which have seen so many prodigious inventions and so many daring and successful experiments of every kind, there is no scientific conquest or enterprise he may not dream of He is caught between marvelous memories and immoderate hopes, and if sometimes he tends to pessimism, he cannot help noting that pessimism has produced certain works of art of the highest order Instead of sinking into a mental void, he wrenches a song from his despair Or sometimes he may wrench from it

a tough and formidable will a paradoxical incentive to action based on contempt for man, for life itself

But who after all, is European?

I shall now risk—with many reservations and the infinite scruples we must have when we wish to make a provisional statement of something not susceptible of true accuracy—I shall risk proposing a tentative definition It is not a logical definition I am about to work out for you It is a way of seeing a point of view which recognizes that there are many others neither more nor less legitimate

Well then, I shall consider as European all those peoples who in the course of history have undergone the three influences I shall name

The first is that of Rome Wherever the Roman Empire has ruled and its power has asserted itself and further, wherever the Empire has been the object of fear, admiration, and envy, wherever the weight of the Roman sword has been felt, wherever the majesty of Roman institutions and laws, or the apparatus and dignity of its magistrature have been recognized or copied, and sometimes even incongruously aped—there is something European Rome is the eternal model of organized and stable power

I do not know the reasons for this great achievement; it is useless to seek them now, as it is idle to wonder what would have become of Europe if it had not become Roman

The fact alone matters to us, the fact of the astonishingly durable imprint that was left on so many races and generations by this superstitious and systematic power, oddly permeated by the spirit of law, of military discipline, religion, and formalism the first power to impose on conquered peoples the benefits of tolerance and good administration

Then came Christianity. You know how it gradually spread throughout the area of the Roman conquest. If we discount the New World (which was not so much Christianized as peopled by Christians) and Russia (which for the greater part was unaware of Roman law and the empire of Caesar) we see that the area covered by the religion of Christ still coincides almost exactly with the domain of the Empire's authority. These two *very different conquests yet have a kind* of resemblance, and that resemblance is important to us. The policy of the Romans, growing ever more supple and ingenious with the increasing weakness of the central power, that is to say, with the extent and heterogeneity of the Empire, brought about a remarkable innovation in the practice of one people dominating many.

Just as the *City par excellence* in the end took to its bosom practically all beliefs, naturalizing the most distant and incongruous gods and the most diverse cults, so the imperial government, conscious of the prestige attaching to the Roman name, did not hesitate to confer the title and privileges of *civis romanus* on men of all races and all tongues. So, by the deeds of that same Rome, the gods ceased to be associated with one tribe, one locality, one mountain, temple, or town, and became universal and to some extent common. And moreover, race, language, and the fact of being victor or victim, conqueror or conquered, gave way to a uniform juridical and political status inaccessible to no one. The emperor himself *could be a Gaul, a Sarmatian, a Syrian, and* could sacrifice to very strange gods. This was a great political innovation.

But Christianity, as St Peter testifies, although it was one of the very few religions to be looked on with disfavor in Rome. Christianity, born of the Jewish people, itself spread

to the gentiles of every race through baptism it conferred on them the new dignity of Christians as Rome conferred its citizenship on its former enemies It gradually spread throughout the area of Roman power adapting itself to the forms of the Empire even adopting its administrative divisions (in the fifth century *civitas* meant the episcopal city) It took all it could from Rome and fixed its capital there rather than in Jerusalem It borrowed Rome s language A man born in Bordeaux could be a Roman citizen and even a magistrate and at the same time a bishop of the new religion The same *Gaul* could be imperial prefect and in pure *Latin* write beautiful hymns to the glory of the Son of God born a *Jew* and a subject of Herod There already we have almost a complete European A common law a common God one and the same temporal judge and one and the same Judge in eternity

But while the Roman conquest had affected only political man and ruled the mind only in its external habits the Christian conquest aimed at and gradually reached the depths of consciousness

I do not wish even to attempt to measure the extraordinary changes which the religion of Christ brought into that consciousness *with the aim of making it universal* I do not wish even to attempt to show how singularly that religion influenced the formation of the European I must here touch merely upon the surface of things and in any case the effects of Christianity are well known

I shall do no more than remind you of some of the features of its influence In the first place it introduced *subjective* morality, and above all it brought about the consolidation of moral thought This new unity took its place alongside the juridical

unity contributed by Roman law, in both cases, abstract analysis tended to make regulations uniform

Let us go beyond that

The new religion imposed self-examination It may be said that it introduced Western man to that inner life which the Hindus had cultivated in their own way for centuries, and which the mystics of Alexandria in their way had also felt, recognized, and studied

Christianity proposed to the mind the most subtle, the greatest, and indeed the most fruitful problems Whether it were a question of the value of testimony, the criticism of texts, or the sources and guarantees of knowledge, of the distinction between faith and reason, and the opposition that arises between them, or the antagonism between faith, deeds, and works, a question of freedom, servitude, or grace, of spiritual and material power and their mutual conflict, the equality of men, the status of women—and how much else?—Christianity educated and stimulated millions of minds, making them act and react, century after century

However, this is not yet a finished portrait of us Europeans Something is still missing from our make-up What is missing is that marvelous transformation to which we owe, not the sense of public order, the cult of the city and of temporal justice, nor even the depth of our consciousness, our capacity for absolute ideality, and our sense of an eternal justice what is missing is rather that subtle yet powerful influence to which we owe the best of our intelligence, the acuteness and solidity of our knowledge, as also the clarity, purity, and *elegance* of our arts and literature it is from Greece that these *virtues* came to us

In this case too we must admire the role of the Roman Empire It conquered only to be conquered Permeated by Greece and Christianity the Empire offered to both an immense field, pacified and organized it prepared the site and fashioned the mold into which Greek thought and the Christian idea were to pour and combine so curiously

What we owe to Greece is perhaps what has most profoundly distinguished us from the rest of humanity To her we owe the discipline of the Mind the extraordinary example of perfection in everything To her we owe the method of thought that tends to relate all things to man the complete man Man became for himself *the system of reference* to which all things must in the end relate He must therefore develop all the parts of his being and maintain them in a harmony as clear and even as evident as possible He must develop both body and mind As for the mind, he must learn to defend himself against its excesses and its reveries, those of its products which are vague and purely imaginary, by means of scrupulous criticism and minute analysis of its judgments, the rational separation of its functions, and the regulation of its forms

From this discipline, science was to emerge—*our* science, that is to say, the most characteristic product and the surest and most personal triumph of our intellect Europe is above all the creator of science There have been arts in all countries, there have been true sciences only in Europe

Of course, before the age of Greece a kind of science had existed in Egypt and Chaldea, some of whose results may still seem noteworthy, but it was *impure*, being in no way different, at times, from the technique of some trade, or, again, including extremely unscientific considerations There has always been such a thing as observation Man has always practiced reasoning But these essential activities have no value and cannot regularly succeed unless other factors are prevented from

vitiating their use To develop science as we have it, a relatively *perfect model had to be established, a first work had* to be set up as an Ideal, representing every form of precision, every proof, every beauty, every solidity, and which should *once for all define the very concept of science* as a pure construct, free of every consideration but the edifice itself

Greek geometry was that incorruptible model, not only for every kind of knowledge that aims at the state of perfection, but also and above all for those virtues most typical of the *European intellect I never think of classical art without seeing* as its ineluctable example the monument of Greek geometry The construction of that monument required the rarest gifts *and those ordinarily most incompatible The men who built* it were hard and astute workmen, profound thinkers, but also artists of great subtlety and an exquisite sense of perfection

Think of the cunning and the persistence required for them to accomplish such a delicate, such an *improbable* adaptation as that of common speech to precise reasoning, think of *all their analyses of the most complex motor and visual* operations, and how they succeeded in clearly matching those operations with linguistic and grammatical properties They *trusted words and their combinations to lead them safely* through space Of course their space has now become a plurality of spaces, it has been singularly enriched, and their *geometry, which formerly seemed so rigorous, has been* shown to have many flaws in its crystal We have examined it so closely that where the Greeks saw one axiom we now *count a dozen*

For each of the postulates they introduced, we know that several others may be substituted, and the result is a coherent *geometry that sometimes can be physically applied*

But think what an innovation was that almost ceremonial

form which in its general outline is so beautiful and pure. Think of that magnificent division of the Mind into separate moments, that marvelous order in which each act of reason is clearly placed, clearly distinct from the others. It reminds us of the structure of a temple, a static assemblage whose elements are all visible and all declare their function.

The eye considers the load, its support and distribution, the bulk and its system of balance: the eye effortlessly distinguishes and orders those well-aligned masses whose very shape and vigor are appropriate to their role and volume. Those columns, capitals, architraves, those entablatures and their subdivisions, and the ornaments that derive from them, never protruding beyond their proper place and fitness, all make me think of those elements of pure science as the Greeks first conceived them: *definitions, axioms, lemmas, theorems, corollaries, porisms, problems* ... that is to say, the mechanism of the mind made visible, the very architecture of intelligence drawn to a plan—the temple erected to Space by the Word, yet a temple that can rise to infinity.

These, it seems to me, are the three essential conditions that define a true European, a man in whom the European mind can come to its full realization. Wherever the names of Caesar, Caius, Trajan, and Virgil, of Moses and St. Paul, and of Aristotle, Plato, and Euclid have had simultaneous meaning and authority, there is Europe. Every race and land that has been successively Romanized, Christianized, and, as regards the mind, disciplined by the Greeks, is absolutely European.

Some have undergone only one or two of these influences.

There is a certain trait, then, quite distinct from race, nationality, and even language which unites the countries of the

West and Central Europe, making them alike The number of notions and ways of thought they have in common is much greater than the number of notions we have in common with an Arab or a Chinese

In short, there is a region of the globe that is profoundly distinct from all others, from the human point of view In power and precise knowledge, Europe still, even today, *greatly outweighs the rest of the world Or rather, it is not* so much Europe that excels, but the European Mind, and America is its formidable creation

Wherever that Mind prevails, there we witness the maximum of *needs*, the maximum of *labor, capital*, and *production*, the maximum of *ambition* and *power*, the maximum *transformation of external Nature*, the maximum of *relations* and *exchanges*

All these taken together are Europe, or the image of Europe

Moreover, the source of this development, this astonishing superiority, is obviously the quality of the individual man, the average quality of *Homo europaeus* It is remarkable that the European is defined not by race, or language, or customs, but by his aims and the amplitude of his will And so forth .

Europe's Power to Choose

Answer to an Inquiry

[1925]

I LACK time and some other things needed to answer your questions, which I find very difficult The Orient is not simple A glance at it shows many diverse races What is there in common between a Mongol, a Hindu, and a Chinese?

What I make out or think I make out, very clearly is a contrast between Europe—since the fifteenth century—and the rest of the world, from which she differs by her will to precise and objective knowledge and by the power that has been the result But since this kind of power is essentially *transmissible*, Europe now has to reckon (1) with America, which is an emanation of Europe and represents a kind of exaggeration of her characteristics, and (2) with the older continents which she has gone out and disturbed, aroused, educated, armed, and angered

We must think of what will become of Europe once Asia is industrially organized and equipped

From the point of view of culture, I do not believe we have much to fear *at present* from Oriental influence We know something about it To it, we owe the beginnings of all our arts and learning We could easily welcome whatever might come to us from the East, if anything new should come

from there—which I doubt This doubt is precisely Europe's protection and her weapon

Besides, in these matters, the only question is one of *assimilation* But that has been precisely the main business and indeed the specialty of the European mind through the ages Our role is to maintain this power to choose, to take in everything and transform it into our own substance, for this has made us what we are The Greeks and Romans showed us how to deal with the monsters of Asia, how to treat them by analysis, what to extract from them For me, the Mediterranean basin is like a retort in which the essences of the vast Orient have, from the beginning of time, come to be condensed

There is perhaps still much more to say on all these questions, but one would have to go right back to their beginning and know an endless number of things You will therefore forgive me for sending you only these few insignificant words

The European Spirit

[1935]

With this article by Paul Valéry we open a vast inquiry on the European Spirit. We have put the following questions to the most eminent personalities in the world of thought and letters:

Is there such a thing as the European spirit? Is that spirit more than a name—is it a living reality?

Has the intellectual a part to play in shaping the European spirit, and must he consequently abandon his traditional stance as one of the intelligentsia?

Will the European be the new man we see arising at various points on the continent? Will Europe be fashioned by intellectuals or will it be born from certain economic necessities?

About the European spirit, I think the notion itself may be considered first of all as a sort of myth in our own minds. But it may be useful to define this myth. If we look for the feeling

the sensation of being a European, we discover in ourselves such a complex and intimate combination of elements deriving from all the cultures of Europe that we are forced to recognize, side by side with our national feelings, the existence of a broader sensibility and capacity for understanding and—above all—*a desire for understanding and exchange* which we cannot imagine our minds doing without.

For example, the idea of *Shakespeare* is an integral part of French, or Italian, or German culture .

In various degrees we all inherit an intellectual tendency or an intellectual mode of life which has been known by very different names—"Christianity," "humanism"—and which nowadays we call "the European Spirit " This tendency early assumed the character of a belief, and an invincible hope, in the future of *knowledge*, in its eventual absolute reign But for some years now, events of every kind, some political, some economic, and some even intellectual, have created an anxiety in people's minds, and today our most precious intellectual acquisitions are exposed to three or four kinds of danger.

The European spirit, formed by the many exchanges between the peoples of Europe, is perhaps on the eve of a disturbance comparable to that in the world of politics and economics Today every nation tends to isolate itself, to become an island or a closed territory, self-sufficient and living on its own resources This cannot fail to affect and endanger the intellectual unity of Europe

At the present time, on the intellectual as well as the moral plane, a kind of reaction is taking place against communicating or bringing together works and ideas What we once tried to unite, what seemed to be tending to unification by force of circumstance, seems today to be splitting up, and if this movement becomes more pronounced it may well make the men of this continent less and less intelligible to each other

I have no faith in *direct* political action by *men of intellect* They thereby lose their own virtues without acquiring the powers of professional politicians Politics, political action, and political forms are necessarily inferior values and inferior activities of the mind For politics can exist only by working upon the automatisms, the myths, all the demons of the mind, which on the contrary we ought to try rather to dominate and

exercise I find in politics an irresponsible, complex, and contradictory interpretation of history, which is one of the most powerful instruments of political illusion (This is not history's fault Arsenic is not responsible for poisonings!) Politics involves kinds of reasoning that are always deceptive, based as they are on low-grade abstraction and *unconscious* conventions In fact, in the field of political discussion and political action I find all the elements that I reject, that anyone rejects, at those moments when each of us is at last *himself—that is, able to devote himself to the pure, direct action of* his mind

I believe that perfectly free thought, entirely disengaged from any desire for power and any intention of making propaganda, as detached and as disciplined as possible, *can still* play a part—but

In short, all European intellectuals are, in differing degrees and proportions, educated in traditions, works, and methods *to whose preservation the different peoples of Europe have* brought the fruits of their own experience This *de facto* collaboration, carried on over the centuries, has produced certain results Among these are the greatest material power and the *greatest knowledge of the world ever attained, one must* also add, of course, the greatest civil and spiritual freedom If by "the European Spirit" we mean all of those intellectual and moral conditions to which such results may be attributed, then *the effort to preserve and develop that spirit must inspire* all who set a high price on those results

America: A Projection of the European Mind

[1938]

I HAVE been asked to comment, for the readers of *Síntesis*, on a phrase concerning America that occurs in my book *Variété*. I think it would be more interesting and meaningful to present a more general idea, whose application to America will be self-evident.

If the modern world is not to end in the universal and irreparable ruin of every value created by centuries of effort and experiment of every kind, and if (after all its troubles and vicissitudes) our world is to reach a certain political, cultural, and economic equilibrium, we must look to the possibility that the various regions of the globe might one day use their differences of all sorts to complement rather than to oppose each other. They would all the more fulfill themselves, the more freely and rationally they shared in the common work of life. For example, we should no longer have nations creating and maintaining completely artificial industries that must live entirely on subsidies and the protective system. Besides, the division of habitable territory into politically defined nations is purely empirical. It can be explained historically but not organically, for the line traced on a map and on the ground, constituting a frontier, is the result of a series of accidents sanctioned by treaties. In many cases the boundary line is oddly drawn. It separates countries that are alike, and

joins others that differ greatly and it introduces into human relations those difficulties and complications that lead to war *which is never a solution but on the contrary sows the seeds* of further trouble

The curious point in our historical and traditional way of defining nations is this the present conception of grouping men into nations is quite anthropomorphic A nation is characterized by rights of sovereignty and property It owns buys sells fights tries to live and prosper at the expense of others it is jealous proud rich or poor it criticizes others has friends and enemies and sympathies is artistic or not etc In short nations are persons and by an immemorial habit of oversimplifying we attribute to them feelings rights and duties virtues and faults will and responsibility

There is no need for me to show the consequences of identifying human groups with something as sharply defined as a person

But the modern transformation of the earth continues and the new mode of life that should correspond to this enormous change clashes with the political structure I have just outlined

Now for America Whenever my thoughts turn too black and I despair of Europe, I can find some hope only in thinking *of the New Continent To the two Americas Europe has* sent her message the communicable creations of her mind the most positive things she has discovered and in short whatever was least likely to deteriorate from conveyance and separation from its normal circumstances A veritable natural selection' has taken place extracting from the European mind those of its products having universal value while

whatever was too conventional or too historical in content was left behind in the Old World

I do not say that all the best has crossed the ocean, nor that all that is less good has not That would not be natural selection I say that those things most capable of living in a climate remote from their home have crossed the ocean and taken root in a soil that was to a large extent virgin

Let us consider, in conclusion, two ideas that may be derived from the preceding rather summary observations

First, the American soil bore various sorts of races and remains of antecedent life It is not impossible that important reactions may one day show themselves as a result of the contact with, and penetration by, European factors I should not be surprised, for instance, if happy combinations should result from the effect of our aesthetic ideas upon the powerful nature of aboriginal Mexican art Grafting is one of the most fruitful methods of developing the arts. The whole of classical art, we must admit, is the product of grafting.

The second idea is of a quite different order If Europe is to see her culture perish or wither away, if our cities, museums, monuments, and universities are to be destroyed in the fury of a scientifically waged war, if the life of creators and men of thought is to be made wretched or impossible by brutal circumstances, either political or economic, then a certain consolation and hope are to be found in the idea that our works, the memory of our labors, the names of our greatest men will not be as though they had never been, and that here and there in the New World there will be minds to give a second life to some of the marvelous creations of unhappy Europe

Switzerland Is an Island

[1943]

WE THINK of Switzerland as a happy island At present in the minds of millions of people she is a blessed land where all that is lacking to most men is to be found where things we dream of really exist real bread milk that is milk meat that was recently alive quietness and those working conditions that make possible the works of the mind

But we need not imagine that all the attractions of that fortunate isle come from Nature alone or from some special favor of the gods Peace, liberty prosperity are there the fruits of a will to social perfection sustained for centuries The Swiss is a *citizen* This word applied to him is not an empty epithet he feels its total meaning in all its force Switzerland is the work of her citizens who fully deserve the material and spiritual benefits they enjoy in the very midst of an area of unexampled distress If we envy that country the most casual observation will give positive value and substance to the feeling Everyone must agree that Switzerland is a model state it has patiently and successfully managed to solve nearly all the problems that for centuries have been a curse on the rest of Europe and today torment the whole world We must admit that the most difficult and painful of these problems are in the nature of feelings which means that they can be revived indefinitely with the help of history, whereas problems

of an economic order can always be solved by transaction, so long as sensitivity does not interfere to embitter them

But in Switzerland we find diversity and peaceful contact among populations that agree in preserving their differences of language, character, beliefs, customs, and civil laws The Swiss have long understood that diversity is a rich resource, which must not be allowed to decay into antagonism or dissolve into systematic unity That country is wise Some people have reproached her for being too wise For myself, I see in her only an excess of what I prefer courtesy in manners, conscientiousness in work, an absence of boasting, pedantry, and envy I have the impression that her public services do not think that they are an end in themselves and that her Administration considers that it is for the administered, that her system of education holds itself to be perfectible and does not wait half a century before modifying its methods and its programs, that justice is simple there, and as humane as justice can be

Finally, from Geneva to Zurich and Basel, I have always had a wonderful sense, as a guest, of being accepted, indulged, understood, and sometimes, perhaps, loved And is that not everything?

If I am told that I am deceiving myself and trusting to appearances, I reply that, for me, appearances that satisfy are enough The devil take realities!

The Polish Nation and Its Place in Europe

A Preface

[1934]

Is IT quite certain that I am particularly qualified to preface this work in which Mr Edward Krakowski gives us a brilliant summary of the whole history of Poland from its origins showing us its civilizing mission its greatness its past decline and present renaissance It seems to me that I am singularly without authority to present properly to the public an historian of quality It is well known that history is not my forte and certain words on the subject have escaped me which are considered unfortunate But Mr Krakowski is precisely one of those historians who are not the object of my criticism He is one of those who do not limit their curiosity and research to the study of political and social phenomena For him there are many other events in no way inferior in importance to these I mean the events of the intellectual world ideas and the great men who father great ideas

This book on *The Polish Nation and Its Place in Europe* is in fact a happy synthesis of all those aspects of the total history of a people which are too easily broken up I have noticed that the study of documents has never turned its author away from the comprehensive consideration of those sequences of facts which reveal their true meaning only when seen in movement rather than as a collection This understanding of history upsets the traditional values put upon

purely scenic events, and instead emphasizes certain more obscure events, far more important in reality, though their importance appears only long afterwards, proved by the sequence of events they caused

The collective life of men, which is the material of history, resembles our individual lives particularly in this, that a new fact or a privileged moment can produce effects a thousand times more considerable than the whole sum of monotonous facts or insignificant moments that preceded it And indeed Mr Krakowski has endeavored in his recital to discern the privileged action—whether good or bad—of certain great men Mieczyslaw, Casimir, Ladislas Jagello, Catherine II, or Napoleon, or the enormous potential future inherent in certain events, for example the union of Poland and Lithuania, or the advent of the Vasa dynasty in Poland, events that when they occurred left Europe almost indifferent And Mr Krakowski also has the merit of substituting for the rigorous sequence of causes and effects, which so many historians overdo, a more discreet and profound historical continuity He defines the spirit, the culture, the soul, if you like, of Poland, he shows us how early this was formed, in a way forcing Poland to assume the role of a western march on the eastern limits of Europe Then he shows us how Poland has remained faithful to this early vocation, this essential aptitude, in spite of all the fluctuations in her form of government or her power It is a question of living history, directed like life itself to an end Mr Krakowski aims to prove that there is more between Poland and Western civilization, and consequently more between Poland and France, than an accidental meeting of interests, a diplomatic alliance, or a marriage of convenience

He shows us the profound Latinity of this nation of Slavic origin how she was from her beginnings drawn by Catholicism into the orbit of the Western Empire And the principal originality of this book is its success in proving that these Franco-Polish affinities have endured through the worst calamities in history The author is not afraid to deal with the delicate question of the relations between Poland and France during the French Revolution It would seem that France had abandoned Poland or at times that Poland had repudiated France Mr Krakowski shows that nothing of the kind happened, he discerns under the official and unofficial diplomacy the great collective impulses of peoples, he reveals—and this is what particularly touches me—the leading role of men of genius in expressing and shaping national sentiment, whether their names be Kosciuszko, Sulkowski, Dombrowski, or Bonaparte

The Revolution is an enormous event But any history of France or Poland, the history of any country, is strewn with great events Why should those great events always be institutions, battles, treaties, alliances, or Diets? The Caesars and Napoleons are enormous figures But the *Timaeus*, the *Enneads*, the treatise on *Matter and Memory* are also enormous events These must be considered facts of the first order, with at least as much value for man as many of those catastrophes and political acts that history talks so much about May I add that the fate of mankind as a species depends profoundly on holding to our conviction of the pre-eminent value of spiritual events

The Polish epic retraced by Mr Krakowski is a spiritual event The order of facts, as he conceives it, serves only to illustrate and punctuate the hidden development of a vast collective idea And that is why this historical work, touching

upon so many present considerations as well, is of such an urgent and potent actuality Poland today, considered in all her heroic past and ancestral culture, seems destined to continue her great civilizing and mediating role in modern Europe Mr Edward Krakowski is right to speak of a spiritual affinity between Poland and France both are conscious that in serving their national cause they serve the cause of humanity

Introduction to a Dialogue on Art

[1938]

SEEING that the author of the little work that follows has for nearly half a century been one of my dearest friends, and that the work itself refers quite often to a few ideas on the Dance which I once presented in this review, the *Revue Musicale* has seen fit to ask me to introduce the author and his work to the public. But those same reasons and, in addition, the small faith I have in the virtue of such preludes, which have so little effect on the reader's disposition, would have made me refrain had not a quite different consideration come into my mind. The fact is that the interest of the present dialogue happens not to reside entirely in the text. We must see in it also a kind of *act*, one part of a certain undertaking that may have some importance, and that is why I have thought it useful and perhaps more than useful to explain in a few words what might be called the *function of this text*, a function that is not apparent to the uninstructed reader.

It is remarkable—and doubtless quite characteristic of our age, filled as it is with unexpected echoes and comparisons—that when dealing with a dialogue on art we are reminded of the most difficult political problem in the world today, a problem that tomorrow will be one of the gravest. I refer to the relationship of Europeans (native and "assimilated") with the other inhabitants of the globe, and in particular with those

who, being subjects of, or protected by, some European power, nevertheless have their own culture and traditions, artistic or intellectual, as well as an elite of creators, amateurs, and connoisseurs

Hitherto, the European attitude has consisted either in neglecting these living indigenous values, or (at best) in trying to transmit our learning and a little of our outlook to our subjects and "protégés" But if we have tried, and sometimes with great success, to teach them something, the idea has never occurred to us—and could hardly do so—that we might learn something from them There has been no exchange It seems to us impossible, and even absurd, that we might receive the slightest spiritual benefit from the populations we have subjected It is indeed unquestionable that, in matters that can be taught, European culture is, in the strict sense, infinitely superior

But everything cannot be taught There are products of the mind more subtle than those that can be reduced to neat formulas of expression or systematic methods and practices As regards these imponderable riches, I am not at all convinced of our superiority

Our progress has to be paid for, and we can measure what it is costing us in refined leisure, in profound enjoyment, in the true, intimate, and contemplative understanding of works of art we have only to go and spend a while watching the lives of people in any of our possessions or protectorates

No, I am not convinced that the general run of our citizens have a more marked taste for beauty than the clientele of Moorish cafés, or that even our decorators have a more exquisite sense of ornamentation than that of native craftsmen

We must admit that with us the need and the instinct for delighting the eye are now extremely rare

And as for rhythm Here there can be no doubt The mere fact of its complete absence from our training, the strange use made of poetry in our schools accuses and condemns us

Add to this a rapid degeneration in manners in the forms of language in the kinds of deference that keep a society from being reduced to a statistical balance of obvious forces but I will not dwell on this I merely wish to suggest that on more than one point the races we have in our charge can set us some example Their life is wiser than ours and on the whole it is nobler Though they may have certain marks of coarseness you will find in them no other vulgarity than what we have taught them

If we wish really to bring these peoples into association with us—and everyone feels the growing importance of doing so—it is our responsibility to establish reciprocal relations between us and them, a real exchange, which I have tried to show is not impossible, by briefly explaining that we are wrong to think they can only receive and have nothing to give us Every day the dogma of the inequality of races becomes more and more dangerous in politics It will be fatal to Europe Technology is spreading like the plague

This, no doubt, is what Pierre Feline must have suspected on his first contact with Morocco during the campaign of 1908 He fell in love with that country, he went back after the 1914 war, and finally settled there Fez charmed him his aim is now to charm Fez Being a born mathematician and musician, he could teach his Moroccan friends the differential calculus or the art of the fugue But that would not be making an ex-

change with them It would only be giving without receiving —an imperfect solution and, as I have said, more dangerous than useful He has therefore sought passionately to set up an active commerce of ideas, forms, and aesthetic values with the native artists and art lovers He has studied in detail the composition of the very complex rhythms that predominate in their music and are strangely and mysteriously akin to the arabesque, that astonishing product of the Islamic genius, which learned so much from Greek geometry and its polygonal constructions

This dialogue on art should therefore be appreciated not only in its substance as a charming work in itself but also as a document and an act in a one-man enterprise, of which I shall praise neither the boldness nor the importance nor the timeliness nor the qualities of intellect it implies—for, as I have said, the author is a great friend of mine and quotes me a good deal

V

The League of Nations

Also see Appendix III, "Valery's Role in the League of Nations" pp. 529 ff.

League of Nations: League of Minds

[1930]

THE UNDERLYING aim of the League of Nations appears to be the creation of a state of mutual understanding between peoples that may succeed in eliminating from their relationships the brutal expedients, the violent and transitory solutions which humanity has so far had to tolerate The League of Nations, then, is founded on a belief in man, on a certain conception of man that implies faith in his intelligence. That belief and faith are of the kind that are essential to all scientific *research and, indeed, to every effort of the disinterested mind*

If this is so, if we agree that increasing awareness and knowledge are the necessary conditions for accomplishing the aims of the League of Nations, then the co-operation of *minds especially dedicated to the mind* (thus to describe intellectuals) is of all forms of international co-operation the most important to encourage, and the special instruments of this kind of co-operation must be particularly studied, strengthened, and improved in the light of experience

Experience has led to the formation of an Institute That Institute, the agent of the committees, is already functioning and we cannot fail to recognize the positive results of its labors, their variety and value The problem was absolutely new, and action had to be initiated in an atmosphere of uncertainty The only way to begin was to do something

But today after ten years of experience, it ought to be possible to appraise and if necessary rectify the functioning of our instruments of co-operation

Now if we compare the work done and its results with the essential aim I have just recalled—the aim to create a state of mind that can beget and support a *League of Mind*—if we agree that a *League of Minds* is essential to a *League of Nations* both resting on one and the same basis of public opinion and that they can exist only through a widespread sense of their usefulness and if finally we are agreed that the whole problem of their existence consists in making them the need and desire of every thinking person—by creating sensitivity and adaptation to them—then it is clear that the labors of our Committee on Intellectual Co-operation and of the Institute labors that *are in themselves remarkable and may* be very useful are nevertheless so far answers to questions that have not been put food for an appetite that does not yet exist

It is all too clear that so far, the whole world of intellectuals is unaware of our effort for intellectual co-operation The intellectual neither thinks about it nor joins in it Even if he has learned of its existence he never thinks of it as a reality of any importance to him an organization that may serve and sustain him, an institution of which he necessarily forms a part to which he may have recourse, and which he cannot do without once he has seen its results

In other words during these ten years the intellectual has acquired neither an approximate idea nor any usable knowledge of intellectual co-operation Neither the need nor the habit has been created And that should be the main part of our task

Our Committee does not yet exist except on paper and will continue to exist only administratively—in the perishable

form of paper—so long as the interested parties are not interested, so long as minds have not been induced to *conceive* of organized co-operation as the answer to their essential desire to understand and to be understood—that fundamental need of the intelligence, which is to be fulfilled in what it lacks and confirmed in what it possesses

In a word, if care for the highest things of the intellect does not dominate and direct the activity of the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, that Committee *will never be understood* by those for whom it has been created, and will never have the slightest influence on education, on literary production, on public opinion, and hence on the function of ideas in modern man

Toward a Correspondence*

[1933]

By inviting men of thought to consult together and exchange their views on the great problems of the life of the mind, on the present and future of intellectual activity, the League of Nations is pursuing one of its essential aims Not only is it difficult for the League to act effectively as the organ and principle of union among peoples without the help of such leaders but every attempt in the political field to substitute the rules of reason for selfish scheming and disorderly passions is doomed to vacillation and helplessness if it is not based on a fundamental accord among minds The League of Nations hopes to be able to group around itself those men most capable of enlightening world consciousness and each other, at a particularly critical time in the life of the world It has never wished to establish among minds the harmony of uniformity That would doubtless be monotonous, and certainly undesirable It is right that ideas should differ according to men, their ages, conditions, and surroundings, and there is more than one art of thinking This very variety is a natural and necessary condition of vitality But it is extremely important that such valuable nuances should not turn into obstacles, should not harden in isolation and become inaccessible to exchange 'The League of Nations presupposes a league of minds"

*Written in collaboration with Henri Focillon —J M

This league of minds is not a fiction It has always existed, its vitality varying with the times The essential aim of even the most solitary thought, developed in the most secret and jealous independence, is to communicate—to waken distant responses, affinities, and even opposed reactions that attest its quality The history of civilization as well as the life of peoples is made up, not only of public acts and literary monuments, but of an enormous number of mute dialogues and wordless conversations between those who think And superimposed on this network of relations is another—interchanges of conscious, accidental or arranged encounters, colloquies, and exchanges of correspondence In our own day, the needs of scientific research have defined and given birth to institutions that form a sort of intellectual "city" covering the whole world The interests of science, the intellectual interests of men of science—that diffuse nation, which is yet more solid and compact than many political entities—are felt, conceived, organized, and defended with remarkable vigor and lucidity The League of Nations has done much in this field Wherever an organ of liaison seemed to be needed, it has set one up and supported it In this task it has been aided by the strong connections that hold researchers together as a group, though they may be scattered over the whole planet connections constituted by shared disciplines, specific techniques, and clearly defined needs Laboratory research, just as much as the milling of metals, implies division of labor and standardization of instruments—both being expressions of deliberate agreements and a common order

But there are problems for which there are as yet no defined techniques and which are not treated in the laboratories They are at once general and very urgent, they involve *the whole* of man and, if one may say so, the risk of his higher

destiny Every period of crisis insistently poses these problems, and in an almost inevitable manner It is around them that the league of minds has always crystallized Neither politicians nor scientists are capable of solving them with their own resources Recourse must be had to those who have created the idea of man, his condition and his future, in the past as in the present, in the life of poetry and fiction as in the life of history and philosophic meditation What do we wish to make of man, and what kind of man do we wish to make? Doctrine and method will not spring from parliamentary debate, and yet parliaments need doctrine and method, if it is true that the art of governing presupposes not only knowledge of the secret motives of the human soul but at least a vague idea of the aims of life in society It was to no other end that the masters of the Renaissance, the founders of classical thought, or the philosophers of the eighteenth century—representatives of the league of minds in the periods of its greatest vigor—interrogated each other, corresponded, and argued The notion of "a republic of letters" does not apply to a professional group, but to men variously imbued with an equal sense of the great urgencies of the mind, devoted in their very essence to intellectual activity, and organized to insure its efficacy

In the past, the best instrument for the exchange of views, which such an organization constantly requires, was *correspondence* Nominally this was an exchange between two men, and, as such, in its abundance, its regularity, and above all its tone, it was admirable In fact, however, it was addressed to a wider audience It was circulated and commented on—a semi-public form for the mind's confidential thoughts It went from one person to another person, but it echoed beyond them If the history of the intellect were known to us solely

from such letters, I am convinced that we could still grasp, *with little loss, all* its essential features In any case, we have them in a fresher, more living form than in works concerted and planned to resist time Letters can more easily preserve what true painters are proudest and most jealous of, the quality of a sketch This is not simply a case of the connoisseur's fancy but a sign of authenticity, a record of high passions strongly lived

We are attempting to revive that ancient mode of exchange—not for the pleasure of resuscitating a genre, but to make possible a debate A newspaper "inquiry" results in a collection of opinions The reader is free to see how they compare and clash, but the authors talk to themselves or to their public It is the same with reviews and the various periodicals offered as provisional compilations or digests of information The press has by no means replaced everything else Polemics are not correspondence We need the written equivalent of secret meetings A letter is not only the work of the man who writes it, but also of the one who receives it Even before there is any reply, it is already a dialogue And even when made public, even if written with that in view, it remains a dialogue Only bad actors turn away from their partner and, for an effect, play to the gallery That fault and that danger do not, in the present case, threaten either the correspondents or the readers

In the first phase of its undertaking, the League of Nations had the duty of setting up organizations to co-ordinate efforts and practical methods for the promotion of research These organizations are already functioning Now, therefore, it is possible for the League to undertake another essential task, the problems dealing with man In creating the League of Minds and the new Republic of Letters, it signifies its respect

for the unique, by asking a few thinkers to agree to exchange letters, each choosing his own correspondent, either known or unknown, either by affinity or by attraction of opposites, it hopes for variety. An idea is not merely of value in itself. How it is received by men capable of entertaining it and for whom it has been specially formulated also counts. So a kind of counterpoint comes to replace mere response or theoretical objection.

The first problem we submit to the authors of this correspondence is the most general of all. In the present state of the world, what is and what should be the role of the intellect? Every modern activity, in particular politics and economics, is dominated and governed by *myths* in the form of *ideologies*. On the other hand, there are men whose function is to produce and organize ideas, and, by expressing them, to make them live. Could they not agree that, at least among themselves, they will replace those inferior forms and terms by firmer and higher views, so as to create an *intellectual order*? Such an order is not to be entirely defined by the notion of class, its interests are more general and more urgent than *those corporate interests studied and defended on the international plane* by the League of Nations. What will become of thinking man if that intellectual order is not strongly defined—if it is not laid down that beyond the animal instincts, beyond the interests of class, party, and nation, there are higher interests for which the intellectual order is responsible?

If these questions should remain unanswered, or if the discussions arising from them should be considered purely an intellectual pastime, it would prove (as many people tend to believe) that thought is not the principle of civilization but an ornament, and we should see a growing and hardening antagonism between two kinds of humanity—one living ac-

cording to the mind, keeping aloof, or taking part in affairs only to lose face, the other living according to instinct, and under the sway of selfish interests crudely formulated as doctrines, tolerating the mind only as an added luxury

Toward a League of Minds

A Letter to Salvador de Madariaga

[1933]

My dear friend

You have sent me a meditation on intelligence that is all intellect and wit.* To have written it presupposes all that you are and all that makes you a specifically European personality. This you are to an exceptional degree, uniting in the liveliest and most felicitous fashion the savor of the land of Cervantes, the intellectual precision of the École Polytechnique, the manner acquired at Oxford, and that indefinable air of the familiarly universal that is breathed only in Geneva. If one were to set, for a maker of brains, the problem of fashioning a mind having all the elements I find in yours, he might be as perplexed as a great chemist to whom I said one day: when you come really to know chemistry, we shall be able to ask you for the formula of a substance at once as transparent as glass, as supple as silk, as elastic as rubber, and as tough as steel.

But now the problem is solved, and I can cite your own existence to illustrate the questions that beset us and are the subject of your letter to me. Perhaps all that was needed in your case was to consult what you are and to recognize in yourself the resolution of a given dissonance, in order to prove that it is not at all impossible to discover unity in diversity, and to find the principle by which the different

*Madariaga's letter will be found in the Appendix, pp. 555 ff.—J. M.

sensibilities, cultures, and ideals whose variety defines Europe and whose antagonisms rend her could be brought into accord That principle is belief and confidence in the mind

If we were more intelligent and gave the mind more place and real power in the things of this world, this world would have a better chance to right itself, and that more quickly I am certain that lack of intelligence and the limitations we put on its authority are the most real and menacing *vices* of our plight In a famous poem, George Meredith asked for a little more brain in woman "More brain, O Lord," he said. That is what we must pray for Europeans to have They have thrown themselves into a prodigious adventure, which consists in transforming the original, "natural" conditions of life, not (as a few centuries ago) in order to meet life's regular needs and limited necessities, but as though inspired to create a completely artificial form of life, a type of men whose constantly increasing means of knowledge and action commit them *deliberately and systematically to use all they know and all they can do, to change what they are*

Here we are, then, in an era of rapid transformation and *profound instability* *All we need, to give a precise meaning* to the word "rapid," is to consider the number of ideas adopted and abandoned in turn, over the past forty years, in art, science, and politics, and the frequency of technical innovations of the first importance

A very simple kind of image represents for me this phase of acceleration the Mind, in the course of *several thousands* of years, managed to light fires at a few focal points here and there over the globe, these were difficult to keep going, were frequently smothered out, were widely separated from each

other and gave off less flame than smoke or less useful heat *than fitful light But at last when the mass of humanity had* gradually become heated the fire broke out everywhere everything burst into crackling flame and began to fuse things that once seemed solid eternal and quite distinct be gan miraculously changing shape It seemed that nothing could hold nothing could last and keep its identity caught up in that excited energy where at every moment in a whirl of *dissociations* we could see the elements and systems of the old world the contradictory principles and opposed activi ties uniting and dividing combining and falling apart The change from *dream to reality* and from *reality to dream* was so to speak furiously accelerated

And still today see how everything instantly creates its opposite and how nothing distinct can survive in this fan tastic temperature War continues in the midst of peace Want is born from abundance The astonishing advance in communications has the immediate effect of heightening and tightening Customs barriers In one and the same laboratory the same men search for what will kill and what will cure cultivating good and evil In the domain of intelligence itself we observe that logic when applied to the nature of things leads to a principle of indetermination We must admit, too that the overproduction of books and instruments of thought produces forms of ignorance hitherto unknown Modern man has little more than the newspapers to feed his intelligence and he finds in them nothing but what ought to be shunned by any self-respecting mind

What an age is this, when the serpents of the world are all swallowing their own tails! Is there now anything on earth—any way of life thought, or work, any leisure any situation—that is not at the mercy of some discovery, inven tion, telegram reflex, or vote?

But to complete this view of our utter disruption, it must be added that our madness for uncontrolled transformation does not take effect *equally* in all human affairs

Whereas the material side of life (and life itself insofar as it depends directly on material things) is an immediate prey to the prompt and profound transformations we have spoken of, on the other hand the fundamental conventions of society —our manners, civil laws, constitutional rights, all the notions, entities, and essential myths comprised under such terms as Morals, Politics, and History—remain to all appearance practically intact They are all more or less ruined in our minds, their metaphysical substance being destroyed, but they retain their practical and even their emotional force We might say that they have lost their meaning and kept their influence

In particular, the whole political structure and the kind of political action it requires are as little adapted as can be to the present state of civilized man, to his conception of himself and to the full employment of his means of action The gap is immense between, on the one hand, our habits, our institutions, our legislation, even our sensibility, and on the other, what we know and are capable of knowing, what we will and are capable of willing

On the one hand, technique, preparation, accuracy, control, order, and precision, on the other, expedients, verbal trickery, illusions, various superstitions of a philosophical or historical kind, party prophecies, *naive symbols playing upon* impulse or innuendo, more or less disguised appeals to cupidity and bestiality—in short, a deployment and imposition of the baser type of psychological products . such is the table of comparison showing the elements of the contrast

I have in mind, which can be set out in the following form while the relations between man and his physical environment have become more and more precise and advantageous the relations between man and man are still dominated by a detestable empiricism and at several points indeed, show a marked regression I do not want to deal here with customs manners language, our style of living our hierarchy of values, or to linger over what a modern brain puts up with in the way of amusements reading matter incoherence, and absurdity But I must make one point practical life is more and more shot through with habits and considerations imposed upon it by the application of scientific methods (the use of machines, measurements etc) our minds are becoming rapidly, though insensibly, accustomed to a mode of life that presupposes a certain scientific conception of the physical universe

But this same practical life, insofar as it requires relations between men (economic, political, juridical), is entirely ruled by notions, entities, and associations from every quarter, every period of history, most of which would be very difficult to justify They would be found to imply several mutually contradictory *ideas of Man*, all of them quite different from the *idea of Man* that could be formulated on the basis of our verifiable knowledge at the present time

Everyone tacitly agrees that the *man* in question in our constitutional or civil laws, the man who is the pawn in political speculations and maneuvers—*the citizen, the voter, the candidate, the taxpayer, the ordinary man*—is perhaps not quite the same *man* as the one who might be defined by recent ideas in biology or psychology Certain strange contradictions, making a curious split in our judgments, are the result We look on the same individuals as capable or incapable,

responsible or irresponsible, according to the fiction we adopt at the moment, depending on whether we are in a juridical or an objective state of mind

And yet all politics, even the simplest, amount to a speculation on man, a kind of reasoning and action applied to men and groups of men The grounds for such action are fictitious, whereas its effects are real enough—only too real in some circumstances Powerful are the fictions that rule the world, but however powerful they are, a close inspection of them shows only an incoherently formed mythology in which popular, metaphysical, administrative, legendary, theoretical, and pragmatic elements are mixed—a confusion of sentimental motives, appetites, ideals, mistaken memories All this was admissible, bearable (and, in fact, indispensable) in an *age of vagueness and delay*, those happy days when it was possible to believe in the teachings of history (that is, in simple causality) and to derive from them the means of thinking about the events of the day or making plans for the future All this has now become, for more than one observer, almost impossible to think of without a kind of nausea .

I confess the spectacle of the world of politics makes me sick I was doubtless not meant to contemplate it I would willingly refrain if the state of things, the machinery of the world, did not put us all in the sorry plight of *resonators*. We have to submit to all the cruelties that can be inflicted on the mind by intensively organized disorder The newspapers and the radio bring the street and its events, with all their clamor and incoherence, right into our rooms The very walls shriek, and at night, letters of fire on what is left of the darkness, would inform Belshazzar that *Mene* is a tavern, *Tekel* a cinema, and *Upharsin* a motorcar

In the same way, we have to submit to "politics" It is

impossible for a man accustomed to some precision of mind not to observe that the great malaise the world complains of today the general anguish the unreal balance between war and peace that troubles us so deeply are caused in the main by conceptions or fictions formed centuries ago which resist any shift toward a true balance a state of human affairs in keeping with the new conditions of life

What we ought to do is learn to distill the real in a pure state All of politics would be changed as a result at least in a few minds Those men who still have the leisure to think closely about things (if any such men are left) and who can afford to think about them without concern for the pressure of events or their own situation or function should perhaps devote some part of their precious time and their most precise attention to doing what statesmen or those who pass for them cannot do for lack of freedom and because they lack the habit of considering problems without remembering that their own power reputation opinions or vested interests are involved *I regard the political necessity of exploiting all that is lowest in man's psyche as the greatest danger of the present time* Hostilities between nations depend necessarily on a very limited number of persons for nations themselves are political notions or entities that can be clearly conceived only by men of sufficient culture and imagination to comprehend and symbolize groups of millions of human beings often extremely unlike (if not antagonistic) in type and interests and who live within boundaries fixed at a given period by events and conventions that vary from century to century What we call 'foreign policy is in fact the play of relations between those few involving their personal feelings memories aims or ambitions

and it is fairly easy to discover that this traditional interplay, being more and more set against dealing with the consequences of the modern transformation of the world, more and more requires that both civilization and the individual be divided against themselves We cannot escape the impression that some *artificial fate* has set humanity on the way to wars without issue and without any possible result except the total destruction they promise However cruel they may be, their stupidity will outweigh their cruelty, for the nullity of their results (other than suffering) could have been foreseen, and it will be further apparent that such mad outbreaks imply a total and despairing renunciation of the resources of the mind The transformation of the human world makes any solution by violence unpredictable and therefore stupid It would be as well, perhaps, to make this clear, without the least appeal to sentimental considerations So I come back to my beginning, which was an invocation to the intelligence of men, and I repeat "More brain, O Lord"

When I said one day at Geneva, at one of the meetings of our Committee, that the League of Nations presupposed a League of Minds, I meant simply that No one understood it better than you

The Struggle for Peace

A Preface

[1933]

This little book you have written sums up the state of a world that cannot manage to find its point of balance *its peace*—that is the kind of peace suitable to the present era for what we have enjoyed since 1919 (if enjoyment it is) is at bottom only a kind of indefinite truce

But we may wonder whether in the present circumstances it is even possible to conceive an ideal of stability, since the obvious character of the age in which we live is instability in everything—a continual and as it were compulsive production of sudden novelties and disturbances in every field in science as in manners in theories as in materials in taste as in politics and economics

The political world, in particular, offers us the most shifting and troubled spectacle, the most palpable contradictions the most surprising and ephemeral combinations

Everyone knows perfectly well for example, that war can no longer be considered even by the coolest calculator or the most powerful nation as a means of attaining with sufficient probability a definite end It has become impossible to foresee not only the final outcome but even the immediate effects of war or rather it is to be expected that these effects whatever the outcome will be equally disastrous first for the

belligerents on both sides, and a little later for all the nations on earth

War of the traditional type no longer has any meaning, as you so well explain in Chapter V of your book

Meanwhile, what do we see?

We see that, in spite of the evidence, the world is arming or planning to arm, and we are far from certain that these arms will not one day find a use The tradition of violence, which reason and recent experience should compel us to renounce, is still with us, and moreover receives its more and more powerful weapons from science, which in turn owes its own progress to the systematic abandonment of all tradition

In a word, statesmen, theorists, and nations still hold to the *idea of war*, and to everything that will give it the appearance of being useful

That is why, however obscure and complex the situation as a whole, however numerous the inequalities involved and the incompatibilities of interest, it is still not impossible to believe that by an effort of mind we may succeed in circumscribing, if not in abolishing, that aspect of our confusion which is but *confusion of mind*

The most just and serious criticism which, in my opinion, can be leveled at the League of Nations is that it was not constituted, first of all, as a League of Minds The League brings together individuals who represent an historical system of rivalry and discord They bring to Geneva the best will in the world, but, along with it, a burden of mental reservations and the invincible habit of wanting to gain an advantage at someone else's expense *This simple idea no longer fits the conditions of the modern world*

Independent minds must therefore labor to develop and clarify a conception of politics from which everything that

has become absurd and yet is still practiced will be eliminated The rotten part, the *adhesions* of the intellect, must be cut away

Such are the reflections and the hope suggested by your *Struggle for Peace* Your work illustrates very clearly the present state of our almost desperate search, of which, as the representative of a South American nation, you are a witness and a most objective critic In particular, your analysis and judgment of the policy of Washington in relation to European policy have an interest and value that I particularly recommend to the reader

Is the Mind a Luxury?

or

The Necessity of the Useless

[1937]

THE COMMITTEE on Arts and Letters is an offspring of the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, itself created at a moment that now seems almost effaced from the memory of men, when man tried the great innovation of introducing, not *into* but *alongside* politics, a little *pure intellect* Not much — for too much of that powerful essence would soon have destroyed everything in the world, but merely a little more than human affairs can ordinarily tolerate—and let us own that they get on none the better for doing without it.

Yes, a few people actually believed that the labors of disinterested thought, the pursuit of the arts, the creations of organized sensibility, all those activities and productions that are properly and essentially useless—but without which life is reduced to a cycle of uniform and terribly secret functions, a wretched sequence of elemental sensations and passions shot through with fears and nightmares—might be elevated to the same rank in the preoccupations of peoples and their leaders as the materially defined values, and might claim some attention that would not be pure, meaningless pretense It was hoped that there would be some benefit from this irruption of ideals into the circle of appetites and demands, but it seems

to me slow in coming It is only too plain that the hour has not yet come when vested interests and governments must recognize as a real power that power which can only inspire men to be men

I do not wish to linger over this point for there is no end to what I find in me to say on the subject Nothing strikes me with more force than the following proposition most of the evils from which we suffer today the continual anxiety the general cry of blame and even the disastrous economic conditions are the demonstrable results of human stupidity and credulity These are the enemy

However one must always act as though there were hope and we have tried to act as though by some unimaginable miracle it would one day be possible (politically) to see the individual no longer as a producer a consumer, a taxpayer, an instrument or a voter but as *a man* We have tried to act as though, by a miracle of similar magnitude, ideas would one day cease to be considered as creations that have force only if they can be used for particular ends, or if they are, or seem to be, dangerous It is easy to arouse them, or even inflame them when they are thought of as instruments of government, or they can be stifled for fear of the havoc they may do

But that labor of the mind which develops the mind itself, which tends to increase this strange power of transformation which is in man, showing itself in the noblest branches of science, or embodied in works of art and giving order to the compositions of poets, although it is often and nearly everywhere honored, celebrated, and even "encouraged" rewarded, indeed subsidized, is nonetheless held to be a *luxury* and is kept in that condition with a care and strictness manifested precisely in the very honors and advantages accorded

to it This is the way *ladies* used to be treated They were showered with attention, they governed manners, but their gallant privileges stopped there, and their authority vanished at the smallest piece of serious business—their opinions and their signature suddenly worth nothing

But this luxury, which philosophers, writers, and artists *of every kind devote their lives to producing*, is not at all what it is thought to be, it plays a serious and active role which I can explain in a few words it proceeds directly from the inmost being of one man to the inmost being of another, and *it seeks out and develops that capacity for mutual understanding* which is after all the necessary foundation of any society We have only to consider for a moment what is implied by the existence of languages, to realize the need that one thinking man has for another thinking man, for it takes two to think

But without going further in this analysis, consider for a moment those supposedly serious matters from which the free inventive mind is so carefully excluded, observe the principles, the kind of reasoning, the expressions, aims, statements, and arguments which figure in debates, discern the motives behind the deals, decisions, arguments, speeches which are the life-principle and stock-in-trade of all politics what do we find? We find—and generally in what a state!—mere vestiges, faint echoes, caricatures and parodies of those intellectual products, ideas, or figures which were developed in minds dedicated to the proper work of the mind, accustomed to maturing and pondering their thoughts, to giving them the force and precision of form . So, in the last analysis, it is reflective thought that endows action with the means of self-control, of being understood, believed, and obeyed—in a word, of becoming real

I am not exaggerating I should need only to mention the names of two books, works by two very different theorists of the nineteenth century and you would at once get the direct force of my thought Two States two very great and powerful States, owe their guiding ideals to these two books

But is it not amazing that in spite of such telling facts, the most original minds are still considered merely ornaments of their time?

These remarks and certain others which I spare you, have led several members of the Committee on Arts and Letters to seek to institute regular discussions with a view to enlarging the Committee's objective, in order to bring more minds to take part in our very small League of Minds and, by an annual association of thinking heads annually invited to examine a problem as precise as possible, to anticipate a time that will never come—when the most disinterested intellectual labor will be recognized as a public good

VI

The Far East

The Yalu*

[1895]

Civilization, according to the interpretation of the Occident, serves only to satisfy men of large desires
VISCOUNT TORIO

IN SEPTEMBER 1895, in China, one blue and white day the scholar led me to a lighthouse of black wood on the sands of the shore. We emerged from the last thickets, and walked half-asleep, drowsy from the sloth of the ground—a spongy powder that soaked up our efforts and yielded under our feet. At last we quit the sand. Looking back, I could see as a whole the vague traces of our path winding and fading along the beach. Between the underpinnings of the lighthouse I saw the water sparkling. At each step of the stair we became lighter, we breathed more and saw more. About halfway up we became heavier. A full, stiff wind sprang happily to life, it was feeling for the warm wooden rails through the billowing silk of the scholar's robe. The sea rose with us. The whole view came upon us like some cool refreshment. It was so pleasant up there that we soon felt a need to pee. After no matter how long, the gentle balance between movement and

* This essay was written during the first Sino-Japanese war. [P. V.] For the French text of this piece of youthful, finely imagined, and difficult prose, see Appendix I, pp. 502, ff.—J. M.

calm took hold of us The sea rocking me tenderly made me easy *It filled all the rest of my life with a great patience that* pleased me it was wearing me away and I felt myself becoming smooth The waves effortlessly revolving gave me the sense of smoking after long smoking and having to go on smoking forever It was then that the etherealized recollection of many important things slipped easily into my mind I felt a fundamental delight in thinking of them with indifference with a smile I welcomed the idea that such well-being might eliminate certain errors and enlighten me So And I lowered my eyelids seeing no more of the brilliant sea than a small glass of golden liqueur held close to the eyes Then I closed my eyes The sounds of the pacing water filled me to the full

I know not how there came to my companion a desire to speak and overcome the delicious air the oblivion At the first obscure words I wondered What is he going to say?

Nippon he said is making war on us Her great white ships steam through our nightmares They will trouble our estuaries They will set fires in the peaceful night"

They are very strong," I sighed "They are imitating us"

You are children" said the Chinese "I know that Europe of yours"

You have paid it your visits with a smile"

I may have smiled Certainly, when hidden from other eyes, I laughed The *face of mine that I alone see*, laughed abundantly, whereas the merry mockers who followed and pointed at me could not have borne my echo of their laughter But I saw and touched the crazy disorder of Europe I cannot understand how such confusion has endured even for so short a time You have neither the patience that weaves long lives nor a feeling for the irregular, nor a sense of the fittest place

for a thing, nor a knowledge of government You exhaust yourselves by endlessly re-beginning the work of the first day So your ancestors are twice dead, and you are afraid of death

"In your land, power can do nothing Your politics consists in changes of heart, it leads to general revolution, and then to reaction against revolution, which is another revolution Your leaders do not lead, your free men are forced to labor, you are afraid of your slaves, your great men kiss the feet of the crowd, worship children, and depend on everybody You are at the mercy of *all* the ferocities of wealth and public opinion But now glance with your mind at the subtlest of your errors

"For you, intelligence is not one thing among many You neither prepare nor provide for it, nor protect nor repress nor direct it, you worship it as if it were an omnipotent beast Every day it devours everything It would like to put an end to a new state of society every evening A man intoxicated on it believes his own thoughts are legal decisions, or facts themselves born of the crowd and time He confuses his quick changes of heart with the imperceptible variation of real forms and enduring Beings (Within the duration of a flower, a thousand desires have come and gone, a thousand times you may have rejoiced at finding a flaw in the corolla a thousand corollas you thought more beautiful have colored the mind, then vanished) This is the law by which the intelligence despises law and you encourage its violence! You are in love with intelligence, until it frightens you For your ideas are terrifying and your hearts are faint Your acts of pity and cruelty are absurd, committed with no calm, as if they were irresistible Finally, you fear blood more and more Blood and time

"My dear barbarian and imperfect friend, I am a scholar

from the land of Tsin, near the Blue Sea I am learned in writing, in war command, and in the management of agriculture I prefer to be ignorant of your disease of invention and your debauchery of confused ideas I know something more powerful Yes, we men of these parts feed by continual millions in the most favorable valleys of the earth, and the depth of this immense sea of individuals has kept the form of a family, in an unbroken line from the earliest days Every man here feels that he is both son and father, among thousands and tens of thousands, and is aware of being held fast by the people around him and the dead below him and the people to come, like a brick in a brick wall He holds Every man here knows that he is nothing apart from this composite earth, and outside the miraculous structure of his ancestors At the point where our forefathers fade, begin the crowds of Gods He who meditates can measure in his thought the beautiful form and solidity of our eternal tower

'Think of the web of our race, and tell me, you who cut your roots and dry your flowers, how is it you still exist? Will it be for long?

'Our empire is woven of the living, the dead, and Nature It exists because it sets all things in order Here everything is a part of history a certain flower, the sweetness of a turning moment, the delicate flesh of lakes laid bare by a sunbeam, a stirring eclipse In these things the spirits of our fathers meet our own Things reproduce themselves, and as we repeat the sounds they gave them for names, we are joined by memory to our fathers and made eternal

'Being so, we seem asleep and are despised Yet all things dissolve in our magnificent mass Conquerors lose their way in our yellow water Foreign armies are drowned in the flood of our descendants or crushed under the weight of our an-

cestors The majestic cascades of our rivers of lives and the swelling succession from our fathers sweep them away

"Our politics, therefore, must be infinite, reaching to both ends of time and leading a thousand million men from their fathers to their sons, *in lines neither broken nor tangled* There lies endless direction without desire You consider us inert We simply preserve wisdom enough to grow beyond measure, beyond all human power, and to look on while you, in spite of your raging science, dissolve in the deep and fruitful waters of the land of Tsin You who know so many things, do not know the most ancient and powerful, and you rage with desire for what is immediate and you destroy your fathers and your sons together

"Gentle, cruel, subtle, or barbarous, we have been what was needed at the time We do not wish to know too much Men's knowledge must not increase endlessly If it continues to expand, it causes endless trouble, and despairs of itself If it halts, decadence sets in But we, who think that time is stronger than the strength of the Occident, shun the intoxication that destroys wisdom We keep our old answers, our Gods, our hierarchy of powers If we had not reserved for *the superior among us the mind's inexhaustible resources of* doubt, if, by destroying the simplicity of men, we had excited desire in them and changed their notion of themselves, if our superior men had been isolated in the midst of Nature turned evil, faced with a horrifying number of subjects and their violent desires, they would have succumbed, and with them the whole strength of the whole country But our form of writing is too difficult for that *It is politic It conceals ideas* Here, in order to think, we must know numerous signs, and only scholars can manage—at the cost of immense labor Others cannot reflect deeply nor combine their shapeless

notions They feel, but their feelings remain shut within All the powers of the intelligence therefore are left to the educated, and an unshakable order is founded on difficulty, and on the mind

'And now remember that your great inventions had their origin with us Do you understand now why we did not develop them further? To have singled them out for development would have spoiled the slow grandeur of our existence by disturbing the simple regularity of its course You can see that we are not to be despised we invented gunpowder—but for shooting off fireworks in the evening '

I gaze The Chinese scholar is already a small shape on the sand going back into the inland thickets I let a few waves pass I hear a confusion of all the birds gently bubbling in the breeze or in a haze of bushes behind me, far off The sea looks after me

What shall I think of? Was I thinking? What is left to be understood? How am I to reject what is now so soothing, satisfying, clever, easy? Shall I move, and savor certain difficulties up there in the air? Restful the naive idea of being transported so high and, on the least impulse, so near to every crest of crumbling wave, or of approaching each thing with infinitely little desire, and no effort—an imperceptible time for immense journeys, amusing in themselves and so easy —then to return I am drawn onward, in all this calm, my least idea is right, finding its satisfaction in the whole of space, improvising at once its perfect execution and the pleasure of fulfillment that ends it It dies each time, having in itself recovered all that went before But each idea does the same, and fades the same way, voluptuously, for the combination of light and thought which at this moment constitutes myself,

remain unstable. So, change is annulled. Time no longer moves. My life is at rest.

Almost nothing makes me feel this, since each minute lets me recapture the preceding one, and my mind flits to every point around me. Every possibility has been pecked. . . . If all points in the expanse around me come together one by one—if I can so quickly have done with what is continuous—if this sparkling water that turns and sinks like a sparkling screw into the distance on my left—if that shower of thin, golden snow, alighting on the open sea before me . . . .

And now, open like an oyster, the sea cools me in the sun with the shine of its fat, humid flesh. I can also hear the water, nearby, take a prolonged gulp, or skip rope among the wooden supports of the lighthouse, or make a noise like hens.

The better to listen to it, I stop looking. I close my eyelids, and soon see two or three little luminous, jeweled windows moving. little orange-colored moons contracting and sensitive, a darkness in which they blink and blind me. I then want to reconstruct the whole view I have just shut out. I summon the numerous blues and the folded lines of a plain cloth spread over something trembling. I make a wave that swells and lifts me.

But I cannot make many. Why? And the sea I was making vanishes. Already I am reasoning, and concluding.

I must open up, come back to the steady day. Now I must let go.

There they all are—rolling. I am rolling too. They murmur, I speak. They break into fragments, lick each other, withdraw, float out again, foaming, and leave me dying on the kissed sand. I revive far out, at the first sound of the least resuscitation, on the threshold of the open sea. My strength comes back to me. Swim against them—no, swim on them—

it is the same thing upright in water foothold gone, heart thrust forward eyes dissolved weightless bodiless

Now a man feels a profound identity with what goes on under his eyes—water

Orientem Versus

[1938]

I do not care for phantom ideas, thoughts that are merely perspectives, terms whose meaning avoids the mind's eye. I cannot tolerate vagueness. This is a kind of malady, a special sort of rage that in the end is against life, for life would be impossible without approximations. The extreme and accidental variety of circumstances defies all precision; the unexpectedness of events, which is the most obvious and constant law of the world, is therefore compensated by a certain *play* in our make-up that allows living to go on in the midst of hazards, and thinking to cancel or contradict itself.

And yet my somewhat rigorous turn of mind can relax and allow me to fall under the spell of various words, no matter how imprecise and inexhaustible, which delight me with the illusion of a richness and profundity so precious that I will *not allow myself to reject their enchantment*. So I relieve them of all importance, exclude them from any use in sustained thought, and set them aside for my carefree moments.

The very name of *Nature*, for example, intoxicates me, and I do not know what it means. Dare I admit that the word *philosophy* seems to me magical if I hear it innocently, far from any thought of schools? I find a charm in the word itself—the charm of some very beautiful, calm Being who can transform love into wisdom or wisdom into love.

But among all those themes of language whose indefinable

echoes and quality of pure wonder I reserve for my pleasure, the name *Orient* is one that for me is beyond price

And here I must put in an essential proviso If this name is to have its full and entire effect on the mind one must above all *never have been* in the ill defined region it designates

It must be known only from pictures from stories one has heard or read and from a few objects and then only in the least erudite most inexact and even muddled fashion This is the way we amass good material for reverie It needs a mixture of space and time of the half-true and the certainly false of tiny details and vast indefinite views

This is the *Orient* of the mind

The word *Orient* can no longer reasonably signify anything more than a point on the *local horizon* But in the days when cosmography was more human, when the earth was whatever could be seen of it, and when every day the sun really came up out of the sea, people in our part of the world thought that the domain of everything prodigious or strange or original lay in the direction whence that powerfully visible god and generator of vision arose A mirage is an optical phenomenon that, for eyes stretched wide with desire, makes more things manifest than can actually be perceived But as for the Orient, no conjuring is needed the imagination, far from being driven to inventing what it wants for its excitement, on the contrary faints, unable to bear all that even the most careless memory offers for picturing Whoever orients himself toward the *Orient* feels incapable of formulating from the bewilderment of names and images that come to him a clear figure and a definite thought

For us, let it suffice to trace on a globe a curvilinear polygon

bounded by the 20th and 55th degrees of longitude East and the 40th and 20th degrees of latitude North This marks off for us quite a sizeable *Orient* I know very well that recent developments have brought into use the definition of a much vaster *East*, in three stages Near, Middle, and Far But why, now, stop at Japan? There is something absurd in the expression the *Far East* The relative has no extreme I therefore hold to my spherical polygon and admire its astonishing characteristics

All science, nearly all of the world's art, the most delicate pleasures, the most abstract forms of knowledge are as it were the natural products of that quarter of the globe—just as grain and the vine, the rose and the jasmine, the terebinth, the gum-distilling shrubs, and myrrh and incense are Here originated the most powerfully organized beliefs, the best-reasoned philosophies Here idolatry created monsters of magnificence and beauty, and intellectual rigor, masterpieces of solid purity Many notable cities flourished here, from Nineveh to Venice, from Athens to Isfahan

This *Orient of the Mind* intoxicates with the most delightful disorder, the richest mixture of names, of imaginable things, events, and times—fabulous or almost real—doctrines, works and acts, persons and peoples I put myself in that state between dreaming and waking where there is neither logic nor chronology to keep the elements of our memory from attracting each other into their natural combinations, simply for the pleasure of the moment and then—when the baroque, bizarre, or charming effect has momentarily occurred—at once dissolving, vanishing, long before any objection, any sense of absurdity or of the arbitrary can arise

Genghis Khan's cavalry tramples the fatal territory of

Eden The two baneful trees of that orchard remind us of all sinister and remarkable trees the one that held the fugitive rebellious Absalom by the hair, and that other to which the most famous traitor of the innumerable traitors of history came and hanged himself And passing from trees to plants the Lotus of the Egyptians appears, and their papyrus closely related to the calamus, both being detestable abettors of facility in writing

The Fauna of my *Orient* is no less rich than the Flora in admirable species, some of which are reduced to a single specimen in the vague annals of time Here are the ibis, the lynx, the cat, the grinning crocodile, the purebred horse and the falcon of Araby, and the desert greyhound, outstripping even that tortoise Achilles himself could not overtake

What a multitude of animals—fearful, learned, or charged with important missions The simurgh, the piercing unicorn both happily adapted to the decorative arts, the Babylonian fish whose gall "cured the blind eyes of old Tobias," in Victor Hugo's words, the enormous cetacean that transports terrified passengers in its belly, hardly caring whether it is Jonah the prophet or Sinbad the Sailor, Arion's dolphin and Athene's owl, not to mention the Serpent that argues suggestively, the other that coils about the Pythian priestess, the Sphinx that asks questions, the Bull that imposes his love, the Roc, the Eagle of Olympus, the Raven that brings food to the prophets, the Locust on which they are nourished, the various Dragons that watch over Andromeda or cause the death of Hippolytus, or are exterminated by Perseus, Bellerophon, St George, or Dieudonné de Gozon I nearly forgot the terrible lions of Assyria and the one of Nemea, and the octopuses of Crete, the Hydra, and the filthy Stymphalian birds Should I, finally, in this age of iron and fire, omit, on

the one hand, that foul herd of swine swollen with devils and driven to be drowned, and on the other, that dove the color of dawn, bearing an olive branch in its beak, flying out of the Ark and spreading over the reconciled earth the hope of fair days and the blessed enjoyment of kindness everywhere and universal calm?

The number of all these beasts, peculiar or not, must be multiplied by their uses, since poetry, the plastic arts, philology, exegesis, archeology, the science of religion, and even natural history, paleontology, or zoology deal with them, each in its own way

I have recalled them only to evoke, in one particular aspect and by means of a disorderly display of an improvised mental *menagerie, a sense of the incredible richness of life in my* polygon of the *Orient* I say expressly *of life*, although more than one of the animals mentioned above belong to the category of myth But if Fable is not Life, the creation of Fables is one of those acts of Life which most forcefully demonstrate its powers It shows that in the very midst of an abundantly productive Nature, man cannot help adding his own creations to the number of already existing creatures he takes the eagle's wings and the lion's body, he fits a fish's tail to a woman's torso, he endows the ass and the reptile with speech, he combines the mechanisms, the weapons, and the organs of perception or defense found in animals, in such a way that one might distinguish and define the art of composing that fabulous bestiary—the art of constructing a centaur, a cherub, a gryphon, and a hircocervus, as these are to be found through the centuries in every part of our *Orient*

But cutting across this rich flow of creativity, and among so many aberrant species, two privileged families appeared

they were distinguished by the logic and lucidity of their productions I am thinking of Greek art and that of the Arabs The Arabs carried to an extreme their rage for clarity in the construction of figures by accumulated operations the principles of which they had received from the Hellenic school of geometry Their deductive imagination subtle above all others wonderfully harmonizing mathematical rigor with the strict precepts of Islam which for religious reasons forbade the representation of living things in plastic form invented the *arabesque* I like that prohibition It eliminated from art all idolatry the trompe-l'œil the anecdote credulity the imitation of Nature and of life—everything that is not pure that is not the creative act itself developing its intrinsic resources discovering its own limits aiming to erect a system of forms deduced solely from the real necessity and the real freedom of those functions it *sets in operation* Is not imitative harmony in music considered a second-rate and crude artifice? To imitate or describe or represent man or other things *is not to imitate Nature in operation but to imitate its products, which is quite different* If we wish to resemble that which produces (*Natura* means *producer*) we must, on the contrary, exploit the whole domain of our sensibility and our action, seeking to combine their elements, for the objects and living things known to us are only single instances, very special cases set apart from all we might see and conceive

The artist of the arabesque, placed in front of a blank wall or a bare panel, summoned to create, and forbidden any recourse to memory, covers that free space, that desert, with a formal vegetation resembling no other taking root at a few points and adapting itself to a few numbers fertilizing itself by acts of intersection and projection, proliferating dividing and rejoining itself indefinitely Our artist is the unique source

He can count on no image pre-existing in the minds of others
He cannot plan to *recall* anything whatever, on the contrary,
it is for him to *call up something*

I envy him

Orient and Occident

A Preface

[1928]

A DELIGHTFUL book is rare, as rare as a book of true importance. So we hardly ever find these two virtues combined. And yet the improbable is not the impossible; it may one day happen that some charming book will mark an epoch in the world.

In this one, under its soft colors and a most gracious exterior, I think I can detect the first signs of great and admirable beginnings. It reminds me of the dawn, a rosy phenomenon that, with its tender colors, hints at and announces that tremendous event, the birth of day.

What could be newer and more capable of profound consequences than to undertake a direct interchange between the minds and even the hearts of Europe and Eastern Asia? Such a commerce in feelings and thoughts has hitherto been nonexistent. There is no one among us yet who believes in it.

China was for a long time a separate planet for us. We peopled it with a fantastic people, since nothing is more natural than to reduce others to whatever seems odd about them. A bewigged and powdered head, or one wearing a top hat, cannot understand heads with pigtails.

We attributed wholesale to this extravagant people both wisdom and foolishness, weakness and endurance, prodigious inertia and prodigious industry, ignorance and cunning,

naiveté yet incomparable subtlety, sobriety yet incredibly refined excesses endless absurdities We considered China immense and impotent, inventive and backward, superstitious and atheistic, cruel and philosophical, paternal and corrupt, and, being disconcerted by the disorderly notion we had of her, not knowing where to place her in our scheme of civilization—which we inevitably trace back to the Egyptians, *the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans—unable either to* relegate her to the rank of barbarian, as she does with us, or to elevate her to our own level of pride, we shut her off in another sphere and another scale of time, in the category of what is at once real and incomprehensible, coexistent but infinitely far away

Nothing, for example, is harder for us to imagine than putting a limit on the mind's will and using material power with moderation How is it possible to invent the compass—the European asks—without pushing curiosity and thought until they find the science of magnetism, and, once the compass was invented, how was it possible not to think of sending a fleet to discover and conquer the lands beyond the seas? The same people who invented gunpowder made no progress in chemistry, and manufactured no cannons for themselves *they wasted it in fireworks and vain amusements* of the night

The compass, gunpowder, and printing have changed the course of the world Yet it never occurred to the Chinese, who discovered them, *that they had in their hands the means* of endlessly disturbing the earth's repose

To us this is scandalous It was left to us, who have to the highest degree the instinct for exploitation, who cannot imagine not having it and not wringing the utmost possibilities and excesses from every advantage and every opportunity

it was for us to develop these inventions to their extreme Is it not our vocation to make the universe too small to move about in and to overload our minds not so much with the vague infinitude of what is unknown as with the actual quantity of everything we might but never will know

Caesar who thought nothing had been done so long as anything remained to be done and Napoleon who wrote I always live two years ahead seem to have communicated their restlessness their intolerance of *all that is* to almost the whole of the white race Like them we are driven to do nothing but what destroys its precedents and awaits its own destruction in turn

It should be remarked that this tendency which might be thought creative is in reality no less automatic than its opposite It quite often happens that the systematic pursuit of the new is a form of *least action*—merely the easy way

Between a society in which acceleration has become an obvious law and another in which the most evident characteristic is inertia, there can hardly be equal relations and that reciprocity which is the condition of equilibrium and defines the regime of true peace could only with difficulty exist at all

This is not the worst of it

Unfortunately for the human race, it is in the nature of things that relations between peoples always *begin* with contact between those individuals least fitted to seek common roots and to discover, first of all, an accord of sensibilities

Peoples meet first through their toughest and greediest representatives, or those most determined to impose their beliefs and to give without receiving—which distinguishes them from the first category Neither kind have equality of

exchange as their object, and their role is by no means to respect the repose, liberty, beliefs, or property of others Their energy, talents, intelligence, and devotion are employed in creating or exploiting inequality They spend, and sometimes sacrifice, themselves in the enterprise of doing unto others as they would not be done by One must necessarily feel contempt for people—often unwittingly, and even in all good faith—in order to set about reducing or seducing them In the beginning is contempt no other form of reciprocity is easier or more readily established

Misunderstanding, mutual disdain, even a fundamental *antipathy*, a kind of double-entry negation, a few lurking thoughts of violence or trickery—such, so far, has been the psychological substance of the relations maintained between the *Chinks* and the *foreign devils*

But the time came when the foreign devils were excited by the extraordinary effects of their activating powers Being odd demons, intoxicated with ideas, thirsting for power and knowledge, arousing and heedlessly wasting latent natural energies, turning loose greater forces than they could cope with, erecting structures of thought inconceivably complex and far-reaching they took it into their heads, also, to wake from stupor or torpor the primitive races or those peoples overcome with antiquity

In this state of affairs, a war of unheard-of extent and fury broke out, creating a universal state of panic and stirring the human race to its depths Men of every color, every custom, every culture, were summoned to a kind of next-to-the-Last Judgment All those ideas and opinions, prejudices and evaluations, on which past political stability rested were put to a formidable test For war is a collision between event and expectation, the physical in all its power holds the spiritual

in its grip—a long general war upsets everyone's idea of the world and the future

The reason is that peace is only a system of conventions, an equipoise of symbols, a structure whose essence is confidence Threat takes the place of action, paper takes the place of gold, gold takes the place of everything Credit, probabilities, habits, memories, and words are at such times the basic elements in the political game—for all politics is speculation, a more or less real transaction in fictitious values *All politics come down either to discounting or postponing power* War finally liquidates these *positions*, requires that real strength be present and expended, tries all hearts, opens coffers, prefers facts to ideas, results to reputations, accident to foresight, and death to fine phrases It tends to make the ultimate fate of things depend on the raw reality of the moment

The last war, therefore, was fruitful in revelations We saw the haughtiest and richest nations of the globe reduced to a kind of beggary—calling on the weakest for help, begging for men, bread, aid of every kind, incapable by themselves of playing the dominant role their very power had forced upon them. Many eyes were opened, many reflections and comparisons were made

But it is not among ourselves that the most important consequences of those great events are developing It is not at all those peoples who were most directly involved or opposed in the conflict who are today most disturbed and transformed by it The effects of the war are spreading beyond Europe, and there is not the slightest doubt that we shall receive in return from the antipodes the consequences of that shock imparted to the enormous mass of the Orient

The *Chinks* have finally realized the disadvantages of their too obstinate and too prolonged passivity For a long time

they held to the principle that all change is bad, while the *foreign devils* held to the contrary Now that we, the heirs of Greek dialectics, Roman wisdom, and the evangelical doctrine, have gone out and broken the slumber of the one people on earth who, for so many centuries, have been used to being governed by refined litterateurs, nobody knows what will happen, what general disturbances, what internal transformations will come about in Europe, nor toward what new form of equilibrium the world of men will gravitate in the coming era

But taking a human view of these human problems, I shall confine my consideration simply to the inevitable *rapprochement* between these very different peoples There are men now face to face who had never looked on each other as anything but radically foreign, which was quite true, since they had no need of each other Strictly speaking, we were to each other merely *curious animals*, and if we were each forced to concede certain virtues in the other, or some superiority at certain points, it was hardly more than we do when we recognize in some animal a strength, agility, or industry we do not have

This is because our only knowledge of each other came, and still comes, from commerce, war, politics, or religious doctrine, and in all these relations the notion of an adversary, and contempt for an adversary, are essential

This kind of relationship is necessarily superficial Not only is it compatible with complete ignorance of the inner being of others, but indeed demands it It would be painful and almost impossible to dupe, vex, or kill someone whose inner life you were aware of, and whose sensibility was measurable by your own

But everything now is bringing the peoples of the world *into a state of such close interdependence and such rapid*

communication that in a short time they will be unable to misunderstand one another sufficiently to limit their relations to the simple maneuvers of self-interest There will be room for something else besides acts of exploitation, coercion, and competition

For a long time now the Far East has offered incomparable works of art for our consideration The West, which prides itself on understanding everything and absorbing everything into its devouring substance, gives first place in its collections to many such marvels that have found their way here, *per fas et nefas*

Perhaps this is the place to remark that the Greeks, so clever in giving proportion and composition to forms, seem to have neglected the refinement of matter They contented themselves with the materials they found about them and did not seek anything more delicate, anything that holds the senses indefinitely, postponing the onset of ideas But we owe to the Celestial Empire such exquisite inventions as silk, porcelain, enamels, paper, and many other articles that have become familiar to us, so perfectly are they suited to the tastes of all civilization

But it is not nearly enough to admire and use the talents of a foreign race, if one goes on despising its feelings and its spirit, merely fondling the vases, the lacquers, the works in ivory, bronze, and jade which it has produced There is something more precious still, of which such masterpieces are only the proof, the recreation, and the relics—I mean life

Mr Cheng, whose book I wish to present and recommend to the public, has set out to make us love what we have for so long ignored, despised, and mocked with so much naive assurance

This scholar and son of scholars, the descendant of an

ancient family that counts among its ancestors the venerable and illustrious Lao-tse, came among us to study the natural sciences He has written his book in French

He aims at nothing less than to take us into the living depths of that abyss of numberless men, of whom we know, so far, only what is told us by observers too much like ourselves

Our author's one particular ambition is to touch our hearts He would illuminate China from within by placing a soft light there to let us glimpse in *transparency the whole* organism of the Chinese family, showing us its customs, its virtues, its greatness and its misery, its inner structure, its unending vegetal strength

He has set about this in the most original, delicate and skillful way he has chosen his own mother as the central character This great-hearted lady is a charming figure *Whether she is telling the painful story of the torture inflicted* on her feet, or the incidents of her life at home, or again, telling her children those delightful tales, as pure and mystical as certain fables of the ancients, or finally, giving us her impressions of political events, the war with the Japanese or the Boxer Rebellion, I find enchantment in listening to her

To take a tender and kindly mother as the interpreter of her race to all mankind is *an idea so surprising and yet appropriate* that one cannot but be charmed and, as it were, taken unawares by it

Shall I say what I think? If the author had known us better, would he ever have dreamed of invoking the name and spirit of his mother, would he ever have imagined converting us to universal love by way of maternal love? I can hardly conceive of any Occidental who would *think of addressing* the people of China through this noblest of senti-

ments And that is something to think over The whole of this book for that matter turns our thoughts back to Europe its customs beliefs laws and above all its politics Here as there every moment suffers from the past and the future Clearly tradition and progress are the two great enemies of the human race

VII

France

The Function of Paris

[1927]

A GREAT city needs the rest of the world, it feeds like a flame on territory and people, consuming their dormant energies and inner resources, transforming these into thoughts, words, novelties, acts and works It seizes on whatever was slumbering, smoldering, accumulating, ripening, or quietly wasting away in the vague and self-contained expanse of a vast region, and quickens it, makes it burn brightly, briefly, actively In this way, inhabited lands develop, as it were, their own glands—organs that produce what men require in the way of the most refined, most violent, vain, abstract, and exciting qualities, and the least necessary to elementary life, though indispensable to the development of superior, powerful, and complex human beings and to the elevation of their values

Every great city in Europe or America is cosmopolitan, which means the vaster and more diverse it is, the greater will be the number of races found, tongues spoken, and gods worshipped in it at one time

Every one of these cities of excessive size and vitality, being the product of anxiety, will, and greed, combined with the local terrain and the geographical location, lives and grows by attracting all that is most ambitious, restless, liberal-minded, refined in taste, conceited, lustful, and loose in morals People come to the great centers in order to get on, to triumph, to rise, to enjoy, burn themselves out, to be submerged and

transformed, in short, to gamble, to put themselves within range of the greatest possible number of chances and choices of quarry—women, jobs, enlightenment, connections, facilities of all kinds—to await, or provoke, some lucky accident in a dense milieu thronging with pretexts and opportunities, rich in the unexpected, and breeding in the imagination all the promise of uncertainty Every great city is an immense gaminghouse

But in each, some particular game predominates One city is proud of being the diamond market of the world, another controls all the cotton One reigns over coffee, or furs, or silks, another sets the price for freight, wild beasts, or metals One whole city smells of leather, another of scented powder

Paris does a little of everything Not that it lacks its specialty, its particular quality, but this is of a more subtle order, and the function that belongs to Paris alone is more difficult to define than that of other cities

The adornment of women, with the constant changes it implies, the production of novels and plays, the various arts that aim to refine the fundamental pleasures of the species—all this is commonly and glibly attributed to Paris

But we must consider the matter more attentively and delve a little more deeply into the essential character of our famous city.

First of all, it is in my eyes the most complete city in the world, for I can see no other in which the diversity of occupations, industries, functions, products, and ideas is richer and more diversified than it is here

To be in itself the political, literary, scientific, financial, commercial, voluptuary, and sumptuary capital of a great country, to embody its whole history, to absorb and concentrate its whole thinking substance as well as all its credit

and nearly all its monetary resources and assets, *all* this being both good and bad for the nation which this city crowns—that is what distinguishes Paris from all other giant cities The consequences, the immense advantages, the inconveniences, *the* grave dangers of such a concentration are easy to imagine

This remarkable meeting of such variously restless beings, their totally different interests crisscrossing, all carrying on their inquiries and pursuits in the same place, each ignoring yet inevitably influencing the other, the precocious mingling of young men in their cafés, the accidental meeting and tardy recognition of older men who have finally reached the *salons*, the interplay of individuals in the social structure, so much easier and faster than elsewhere—all suggest a purely psychological image of Paris

Paris makes one think of some strangely magnified organ of the mind The prevailing rhythm is entirely cerebral Generalizations, dissociations, renewals of consciousness, and forgetting are more sudden and frequent here than in any other place on earth With a single word, a man can make his name or instantly destroy himself Bores are not looked on as kindly here as in other cities of Europe, and this to the detriment, sometimes, of profound ideas Charlatanism exists here, but it is almost immediately recognized and put in its place It is not a bad thing in Paris to disguise one's solid accomplishments under a certain levity or some graceful turn, to protect the secret powers of careful and concentrated thought This kind of modesty or prudence is so common in Paris that to foreign eyes she bears the appearance of a city of pure luxury and easy morals Pleasure is well in evidence Many come here on purpose to indulge in it, to divert themselves They easily get many false impressions of this most enigmatic and yet most candid people in the world

A few words more on a great subject which there is no question of exhausting here.

This Paris whose character is the result of long experience and an endless number of historical vicissitudes, Paris which in the space of three hundred years has twice or three times been the capital of Europe, three times conquered by the enemy, the theater of half a dozen political revolutions, the creator of an amazing number of reputations, the destroyer of countless stupidities, constantly summoning to herself both the flower and the dregs of the race, has made herself the metropolis of various liberties and the capital of human sociability.

The mounting credulity in the world, due to boredom with entertaining clear ideas and the rise of exotic peoples to civilized life, threatens what used to distinguish the spirit of Paris. We have known it as the capital of quality and the capital of criticism. We have every reason to fear for these glories, wrought by centuries of delicate experiment, enlightenment, and choice.

Views of France

[1927]

No NATION is more candid, yet none is more enigmatic than the French; no nation is easier to observe and to think one understands at a glance. Later one realizes that there is none whose impulses are more difficult to predict, none more capable of unexpected changes of mind and direction. Her history presents a picture of extremes, a chain of peaks and abysses more numerous and closer together in time than any other nation's history can show. In the very light of her many storms, a little reflection will gradually reveal an idea that expresses quite exactly what had already been suggested by observation: this country seems fated by her nature and her structure to act in the dimensions of space and history as a kind of balance, endowed with a peculiar stability; the events, the inevitable vicissitudes that are part of life itself, the internal explosions, the political upheavals and storms coming from outside, have tipped and shaken her several times in each century, for centuries. France rises, staggers, falls, rises again, retrenches, recaptures her greatness, is rent in two, reunited — displaying by turns the qualities of pride, resignation, unconcern, and ardor, and standing out from other nations by a curiously personal character.

This high-strung nation finds in her many contradictions quite unexpected resources. The secret of her prodigious resistance lies, perhaps, in the great and numerous differences

that combine in herself. With the French, an apparent frivolity of character is accompanied by a singular endurance and flexibility. A general ease and charm in personal relations is joined to a formidable and ever alert critical sense. France is perhaps the only country where ridicule has played a part in history: it has undermined and destroyed several governments, in France, a witty remark, a well-aimed gibe (sometimes too well-aimed) can in a few seconds ruin great authority and position in the public mind. On the other hand, a certain natural discipline is to be observed in the French, which always comes to the fore when a need for it is evident. Sometimes the nation is suddenly united when one would expect to find it divided.

As you see, the French nation is particularly hard to define in any simple way, and this very characteristic of being hard to define is a most important element in its definition. It cannot be characterized by any collection of noncontradictory attributes. I shall try in a moment to make clear the reason for this. But whether it be France or any other political body of the same order, it is never easy to picture clearly to oneself what is called a nation. The simplest and broadest features of any nation are unnoticed by the inhabitants themselves, since they are oblivious of what they have always seen. The foreigner who notices those features makes too much of them, not sensing the many intimate characteristics and invisible realities that compose the mysterious and profound community of millions of men.

There are two main ways, therefore, of being mistaken about any given nation.

Between a land and the people who inhabit it, between man

and the extent and nature of the terrain, the water resources, the climate, the fauna and flora, the substance of the soil, *certain reciprocal relations are gradually established and become* all the more numerous and intermingled the longer the people have been settled in the country

If the population is composite, if it has been formed by successive additions throughout the ages, the possible combinations are greatly increased

In the eyes of the observer, these reciprocal relations between the earth, as mother or nurse, and the organized life it supports and nourishes are not all equally apparent Some consist in the various modifications which human life imposes on the *land*, the others in those modifications made in human beings themselves by their habitat And whereas man's effect on his surroundings is generally visible and legible in the *earth, the inverse effect is almost always impossible to isolate* and define exactly Man clears, sows, exploits the land, builds, deforests, digs in the earth, tunnels mountains, harnesses the waters, imports various species The labors of construction and cultivation, the alterations in Nature can be observed or imagined from the evidence But the modifications in man himself brought about by his place of residence are as obscure as they are certain The effects of the sky, the water, the air he breathes, the prevailing winds, what he eats, etc , on a living man are physiological phenomena, whereas the results of his own acts are, *for the most part, of a physical or mechanical* kind Most of our operations on Nature remain recognizable, since the artificial generally stands out from the natural, but the action of ambient Nature upon us is an action on itself It fuses and combines with us Everything that acts on a living being and does not kill it produces a form of life, or a more or less stable variation on life

It may be seen from these very simple remarks that knowledge of a country requires two kinds of research of unequal difficulty Here as with many other things what would be the most important for us to know is also the most difficult Manners ideals politics and products of the mind are all incalculable effects of infinitely involved causes where intelligence loses its way among so many independent factors and their combinations and where even statistics are grossly inadequate to help This great incapacity is the bane of the human species it is this rather than opposed interests that sets nations against each other and prevents any organization of all mankind—an undertaking attempted in vain so far, by the spirit of conquest the religious spirit, the revolutionary spirit each in its own way

Man knows too little about man not to resort to expedients Crude, vain or desperate solutions are indispensable to mankind just as they are to individuals *because they do not know*

These are rather abstract remarks some of them very gloomy to introduce a collection of photographs But then the pictures of a country—visions of a land that nourishes a people and is the theater and object of its actions—inevitably arouse in us, like a continuous and stirring accompaniment we cannot escape, all the voices of a drama and a dream of unlimited complexity and depth in which we are all personally involved

The land of France is remarkable for the sharpness of its whole outline, the contrasts between its several regions, and the general balance among its various parts forming convenient and fairly complementary groups

In this country there is a kind of happy proportion between the extent of the plains and that of the mountains

between the total area and the length of the coastline, and, on the coasts themselves, between cliffs, rocks, and beaches whose chalk, granite, or sand line the shores of France on three seas. France is the only country in Europe possessing three distinct sea fronts. As for her resources on or beneath the surface, it may be said that she lacks few things essential to life. There is a great deal of grain-bearing land and many hills famous for their vineyards; iron and excellent building stone abound. There is less coal than we need in our time. In addition, the modern era has created new and intense, though accidental and perhaps ephemeral, needs which this country cannot by itself suplpy or satisfy.

On her land lives a people whose history has mainly consisted of the incessant labor of making themselves what they are. Whether it be a question of ethnic composition or of psychological constitution, more than any other people they are the product of their location, the age-old creation of a given geography. No people in the world could have closer *relations with the place they inhabit. One cannot imagine* them moving away en masse, emigrating in a body to another region, cutting themselves off from the body of France. The French people cannot be conceived apart from the place, to which they owe not only the ordinary marks of adaptation that are stamped on all peoples in the long run by the regions they inhabit, but also what might be called the formula of their composition and their own law of preservation as a national entity.

The British Isles, France, and Spain form the western terminus of the vast Eurasian land-mass, but whereas Britain is separated from the rest of this enormous continent by the sea, and Spain by the huge bulk of the Pyrenees, France is wide open and

accessible from the northeast She also affords numerous landing points along her extensive seacoasts

These natural circumstances added to the general quality of the soil and the temperateness of the climate have had the greatest influence on the peopling of her territory Whatever the primitive inhabitants of the country may have been—I mean the people who lived on this land at the time when the country s present physiognomy was being settled in its main outlines—that population has been many times modified enriched, impoverished reconstituted, or recast, in every age by astonishingly varied additions and accidents It has undergone invasion, occupation infiltration extinction—incessant losses and gains

The living winds of population, blowing from north and east at intermittent intervals and with varying intensity, have borne westward across the ages very diverse ethnic elements *which driven one after another to discover the regions of the* extreme west of Europe finally came up against indigenous populations or those who had settled there, halted by the ocean and the mountains They found before them human obstacles or natural barriers, around them a fertile and temperate land These newcomers settled beside or among the groups already there, coming to rest, gradually combining one with another, slowly mingling their languages, their characteristics, their arts, and their customs The immigrants came not only from the north and east, the southeast and south provided their contingents A few Greeks came along the shores of the Mediterranean, Roman troops, few at a time but again and again over the centuries, and later, swarms of Moors and Saracens Greeks or Phoenicians, Latins and Saracens from the south, as well as Norsemen from the shores of the Channel and the Atlantic, penetrated into the territory

in not very considerable quantities The largest masses were most likely those brought by currents from the east

However that may be, a map showing population movements, like air currents on a meteorological map, would make it apparent that the territory of France is an area where human currents have swept in and been mixed, neutralized, and subdued by the progressive fusion and mingling of their swirling eddies

The basic fact, then, for the formation of France was the remarkable number of different ethnic elements that came to be mixed within her territory All the nations of Europe are composite, and there is perhaps not one of them in which a single tongue is spoken But there is none, I think, whose ethnic and linguistic mixture is so rich as that of France She has found her singular individuality in the complex phenomena of internal exchanges, the marriages between individuals of so many different races and physical types The combinations of so many independent factors, the infusion in differing proportions of so many heredities, explain many contradictions in the behavior and feelings of the French, as well as the remarkable average worth of individuals Because of the quite disparate races she has taken in and from which, *in a few centuries, she has fashioned a European personality* so clear and so complete, with a characteristic culture and mentality, the French nation resembles a tree several times grafted, the quality and flavor of whose fruit are the result of a happy wedding of very different saps and humors combining in a single and indivisible life

The same circumstance makes it possible to understand most of the specifically French institutions and organizations, in general they are the creations, or the often very energetic

reactions, of the national body in behalf of its own unity. The sense of this vital unity is acute in France.

If I dared let myself be lured into those reveries to which we give the handsome name of "philosophy of history," I should perhaps take pleasure in fancying that all the truly great events in the history of France have been: on the one hand, actions that threatened, or tended to upset, a certain balance between races, attained within certain territorial bounds; and on the other hand, the sometimes quite vigorous reactions answering those threats and tending to restore the balance.

Sometimes the nation seems to be trying to reach or regain its optimum variety, the condition most favorable to internal exchanges and a full and complete life; at other times it strives to return to the unity made necessary by its very variety. In the case of sharp inner dissensions, the political party that seems most capable of re-establishing the threatened unity soonest, and at any price, always has the best chances of winning. That is why the dramatic history of France can be summed up better than any other in a few great names, names of persons, families, or assemblies that have particularly and energetically personified this essential tendency at critical moments or in periods of crisis and reorganization. Whether we speak of the Capetians, of Joan of Arc, Louis XI, Henri IV, Richelieu, the Convention, or Napoleon, we are referring to one and the same thing, an active symbol of our national identity and unity.

But another name comes to mind as I think of all these representative names. It is the name of a city. What phenomenon is more significant or can better illustrate what I have just said than the enormous development, throughout the

centuries, of the pre-eminence of Paris? What is more typical than the powerful attraction and the continual stimulation it exerts as a vital center, whose role is far more than that of a political capital or a city of great size?

The sure, visible, and constant function of Paris is to counterbalance by means of her jealous and intense concentration, the great regional and individual differences in France The increasing number of functions performed by Paris in the life of France during the past two centuries is a response to the growing need for total co-ordination and to the fairly recent annexation of certain remote provinces with more heterogeneous traditions The Revolution found France already centralized from the governmental point of view, and polarized toward the Court as regards taste and manners This centralization scarcely affected, in a direct way, any but the ruling and the leisure classes But after the meeting of the *Revolutionary Assemblies, and during the critical years,* an intense traffic in men and ideas was set up between Paris and the rest of France Local incidents, schemes, denunciations, all the most active or ambitious individuals, everything came to Paris and fermented there, and in its turn Paris flooded the country with delegates, decrees, newspapers, the results of all the meetings, all the events, passions, and arguments which *so many differences—attracted to this one place and there* clashing together—engendered within her walls

I do not know why historians in general fail to stress the great *fact* represented, for me, by the transformation of Paris into a central organ of confrontation and combination not only a political and administrative organ but an organ of judgment, elaboration, and transmission and a control point for the country's general *sensibility Perhaps historians* dislike to classify as an event such a relatively slow phenomenon that

cannot be precisely dated. But our way of looking at history must sometimes be granted the same liberties in regard to time and space as those we have learned from our optical instruments and motion pictures. Imagine perceiving in a few seconds what has happened over several hundred years—Paris taking shape, growing, developing its connections with the rest of the country in number and quality, Paris becoming the indispensable apparatus of all traffic for the whole country, its necessity and its functioning capacity asserting themselves more and more, increasing with the Revolution, with the Empire, with the development of railways, the telegraph, the press, and with what one might call intensive literature.

You would then conceive Paris as an event, an event entirely comparable to the creation of an institution of the first importance, and to all the other significant events that history describes and ponders.

There is no event more significant than this. I have spoken of the need it answers. It is a typical product of France, of the extraordinary diversity of France: this great city, to which a whole great nation delegates all its spiritual powers, through which it works out its fundamental conventions of taste and manners, and which serves the nation as intermediary, interpreter, and representative to the rest of the world, just as it serves to give the rest of the world a rapid, inaccurate, and delightful acquaintance with the whole of France.

The ideas on France which I have just presented, or rather offered to the reader as pure approximations, occurred to me as a remote consequence of some remarks I made a very long time ago on a particular subject.

Poetry has from time to time occupied my mind; not only have I spent several years of my life composing various poems

but I have also taken frequent pleasure in examining, in quite general terms, the nature and means of that art

Well, in meditating on the physical characteristics of poetry—that is, on its relations with music—and in pushing that study even to the point of comparing systems of metrics and prosody among various peoples, one cannot but notice a fact which, though it is well known and quite palpable, has not, I think, been sufficiently considered and questioned

French poetry differs musically from all others—so far indeed that at times it has been regarded as almost devoid of many of the charms and resources that poets have at their disposal in other tongues I believe this is an error, but, as often happens, the error is a spurious and subjective deduction from an accurate observation It is the French language itself that ought to have been considered, with a view to defining its phonetic peculiarity, once the latter were nicely defined, one could then try to explain it

Three characteristics clearly distinguish French from other Western languages French, well spoken, hardly sings at all It is a discourse in a narrow register, a more level speech than others Next, the consonants in French are remarkably soft—no harsh or guttural forms. There is no French consonant that any European cannot pronounce Finally, French vowels are numerous and very finely shaded, forming a rare and precious collection of delicate tones, offering to poets worthy of the name values they can play upon to compensate for the temperate register and the generally moderate accentuation in their language. The variety of the *e* and *è*, the rich diphthongs, such as *feuille, paille, pleure, toise, tien,* etc , the mute *e* which is sometimes sounded, or again hardly heard at all, before fading altogether, allowing many subtle effects of perceptible silence, and either ending or prolonging many

words in a kind of shadow left behind by an accented syllable these are the *means*, whose efficacy could be shown by endless examples

But I have mentioned this only to establish what I was earlier claiming, that the French language must be set apart, from the phonetic point of view, it is equidistant between the so-called Latin or Romance and the Germanic languages

It is remarkable in particular that the tongue spoken in a region midway between Italy and Spain should be set in a much narrower register than that enjoyed by Italian and Spanish voices Its vowels are more numerous and more delicately shaded, its consonants never have so much force nor require so much effort as in the other Latin languages

On this subject, the history of French teaches us some curious things, which I think significant It teaches us, for example, that the letter *r*, though not very rough in French, where it is never rolled or aspirated, nearly disappeared from the language on several occasions, to be replaced, through progressive softening, by some more easily uttered sound (The word *chaire* became *chaise*, etc)

In short, even a superficial phonetic inquiry (such as a mere amateur could make) into the poetics and language of France has shown me features and peculiarities that I can explain only by the very characteristics of the nation, which I described just now.

If the French language is, as it were, tempered in its general tonality, if to speak French well is to speak it without accentuation, if rough or strongly pronounced phonemes are forbidden or have been gradually eliminated, if, on the other hand, the tones are numerous and complex, and the mutes so pervasive and palpable, I can see no other cause than the complexity of the nation's alloy, and the way it was formed

In a land where Celts, Latins, and Germans have come into intimate fusion, where, side by side with the dominant speech, many diverse languages are still spoken and written (several Romance tongues, the French dialects, two Breton dialects, Basque, Catalan, and Corsican), a linguistic unity has necessarily taken shape alongside the political unity and that of sentiment Linguistic unity could not have been attained without statistical compromises, mutual concessions, some people giving up what was too difficult for others to pronounce—a composite change Perhaps our analysis could be pushed a little further, to find out whether the specific forms of French do not themselves stem from the same necessities?

The clarity of structure in the French language, if it could be defined simply, would no doubt be seen as the fruit of the same needs and the same conditions, and it is not to be doubted, moreover, that this country's literature, at its most characteristic, proceeds in the same way from a mixture of very different qualities of very diverse origins, in a form all the more precise and imperative as the substances which that form must accommodate are more heterogeneous One and the same country produced Pascal and Voltaire, Lamartine and Victor Hugo, Musset and Mallarmé A few years ago one could meet Émile Zola and Théodore de Banville in the same *salon* in Paris, or in fifteen minutes go from Anatole France's study to J K Huysmans' office This was to visit the extremes

At this point we might very naturally consider what France has contributed to literature that is properly and especially French For example, we should have to point to the remarkable development of the critical spirit in matters of form, which became pronounced as early as the sixteenth century. This spirit dominated literature during the period

known as classical and has never since ceased to exert a direct or indirect influence on literary production

France is perhaps the only country where considerations of pure form—a preoccupation with form in itself—have persisted and dominated in the modern era The sense and cult of form seem to me to be passions of the intellect most frequently found joined to the critical spirit and a skeptical turn of mind they are accompanied indeed by a particular freedom regarding content and often coexist with a kind of generalized sense of irony These vices or virtues exquisite in either case are normally cultivated in social milieus rich in experience and contrasts where the interplay of ideas and the activity of minds meeting and clashing in their diversity are overstimulated and take on the intensity the brilliance and sometimes the aridity of a flame The parts played by the Court and by Paris in French literature were, or are essential The literary masterpiece of France is perhaps her abstract prose, whose equal is nowhere to be found But I cannot develop these views here It would take a whole book

I shall add only one remark to this quite inadequate survey institutions like the French Academy, the Comedie Française, and a few others are indeed, each according to its nature and function, specific national products whose essence is to strengthen and symbolize and in a word, to represent in the eyes of France herself her willed and powerful unity

As for the fine arts I shall say only a few words about French architecture, pointing to its originality during the great periods of its flowering To understand French architecture from 1100 to 1800—seven centuries each of which has left us its masterpieces, its cathedrals and palaces in admirable succession—we must go back to the subtlest and yet the most solid principle of all the arts which is an inner harmony, as

profound as the nature of things will allow, between the matter and the form of a work

The indissolubility of these two elements is the incontestable aim of all great art The simplest example is that offered by poetry, whose life depends on the close union or mysterious symbiosis of sound and sense

The search for this unity, felt and achieved in the artist's vibrating depths and somehow in his whole body, is the only *means by which a work can acquire some resemblance* to the living products of Nature, in which it is impossible to dissociate forces and forms

As for architecture, if we are to have an exact opinion of it and to get a superior enjoyment from it, we must develop the habit of distinguishing between structures whose shape and materials have remained independent of each other and those in which the two factors have been made, as it were, inseparable *Too often the public confuses truly architectonic* qualities with purely external decoration, content to be moved, or astonished, or amused by theatrical effects, and doubtless very beautiful monuments do exist and fill the eye with wonder although they are made from coarse materials —a core of aggregate covered with a deceptive coating, marble veneer, or applied ornaments But, on the other hand, it is enough for a connoisseur to look at a simple village church, thousands of which still exist in France, to receive the shock of total Beauty and to experience somehow a feeling of synthesis

In the great periods, our architects always conceived their buildings at a single stroke, and not in two movements of the mind or in two series of operations, one relating to form, the other to matter If I may be allowed the expression, they thought in materials Besides, the magnificent quality of the stone in those regions where the purest medieval

architecture developed was infinitely favorable to this method of conception If we consider the series of discoveries and achievements in this order of things from the twelfth to the fourteenth century we witness a remarkable evolution, which may be interpreted as a struggle between, on the one hand imagination ever bolder designs a growing desire for lightness fantasy and richness and on the other, a feeling for matter and its properties which was obscured and lost only toward the end of that great period This development was marked by an improvement in the combined knowledge of structure and stonecutting and ended in wonderful freaks and the inevitable abuses of excessive virtuosity But before reaching that decadence what masterpieces! What extraordinarily true harmony between the parts of the building! Art has never come so near to the logic and grace of living creatures —I mean, of course, Nature's happier inventions—as in those admirable works (so different from those whose value is no more than that of a stage-set) which can bear and actually do suggest and require that we should move about them, examine and reflect on them By a curious circumstance, we know nothing at all of the methods, the technical and theoretical training, the mathematical and mechanical knowledge of their great creators

I shall mention in passing two very important characteristics of their works, which will clearly illustrate what I have just said about their methods of invention Walk into Notre Dame in Paris and look at a section of the building comprised between any two pillars in the nave Such a section constitutes a whole It is comparable to a segment of backbone From the point of view of structure, as from that of decoration, it is a complete constituent part—visibly complete On the other hand, if you transfer your attention to the shapes of the linking forms, moldings, ribs, stringcourses, groins, which lead the

eye along, you will gain from the understanding of these auxiliary means, so simple in themselves, an impression like that produced in music by the art of modulation, of transporting *the listener's mind by degrees from one state to* another. But there is no need of large buildings to show these high qualities. A chapel or a very simple house in any of ten thousand villages is enough to provide age-old testimony to this sense of the intimacy of form and matter, by which even a humble structure may have the character of a spontaneous product of the soil from which it springs.

After what I have said, no one will be surprised that I consider France herself to be a form, and that I see her as a created work. She may be said, as a nation, to have been made by man's hand—as it were, designed and constructed like a figure whose various parts come together to form a person. It might also be said that she is a kind of law, imposed by a certain territory and a certain ethnic composition upon a group of human beings which through the ages has never stopped organizing and reorganizing itself according to that law. The most visible effect of the law controlling the existence of France is, as I said earlier, the function of Paris and its peculiar role. This phenomenon of prime importance was a necessity in a land defined, not by a dominant race nor traditions and beliefs nor economic circumstances, but by a very complex *balance, an extremely rich diversity, a combination of differ-*ences between peoples and between climates, all of which required a powerful organ of co-ordination. As for the nation's character, it is well enough known. She is quick-witted, generally prudent in her actions, changeable on the surface but fundamentally constant and faithful. She easily neglects her traditions, but keeps her habits indefinitely. She is wise and frivolous, perceptive and absent-minded, temperate to

excess, and indeed much too moderate in her true desires, for an age in which enormous ambitions and monstrous appetites are almost normal The Frenchman is content with little He has no great material needs and his instincts are moderate Indeed, he looks with a certain skepticism on the rise of mechanization and similar kinds of progress, to which he often contributes by inventing something and then letting it lie, leaving to others the care and profit of using it Perhaps the French have a sense of all that the mind and its general values stand to lose from the endless development of organization and specialization

This latter trait fits well with the general thesis of my little study It is clear that an essentially heterogeneous people living in the communion of its internal differences could not, without a profound change, adopt the entirely disciplined and uniform way of life suitable to those nations for whom industrial yield and standardized contentment are conditions or ideals in keeping with their nature Contrasts and even contradictions are almost essential to France This country where indifference to religious matters is so common, is also where the most recent miracles have taken place. During the years when Renan was developing his criticism, when positivism and agnosticism were spreading, a vision lit up the grotto at Lourdes It is in the country of Voltaire and several others that faith is perhaps most serious and most solid, and in which the religious orders most easily find recruits; it is to this country that the Church has granted most canonizations in recent years But there is little superstition—I mean, less than elsewhere In France there is less telepathy, psychic research, conjuring, and fewer magical cures than in certain less superficial lands I do not mean to say that there are none

France at Work

[1932]

Work is any expenditure of action that tends to make things or creatures or circumstances profitable or pleasant to man, and man surer and prouder of himself

Moreover, all life endures by means of continual acts, of every scale, taking place within the organism and completed, or initiated, sustained, and modified by external acts. So every life necessarily alters the milieu in which it is spent On the one hand, it depletes its surroundings from favorable, it makes them more and more unfit for its existence, it consumes as it proliferates On the other hand, it can modify its habitat so as to make it more favorable, richer, more convenient, more regular in production, more bearable in climate, being careful also to give back in some form what it takes for its own needs Hence, every settled region is gradually transfigured The primeval flora and fauna disappear Fields drive back forests, moors and sand wastes are taken over by pines, marshes dry up and are turned into vineyards Beds of rock and limestone hills vanish, their substance absorbed into buildings and other works A land that has been worked for centuries, then, is a product of acts on the part of life such land bears the marks of human economy and will, but, in return, both land and labor have reacted upon the owner and the laborer

Some people assert that there is a direct and, as it were, like-to-like relation between man's hand and his brain. The complex articulations, quick movement, and well-distributed sensibility of the hand, its many uses, the universal instrument it is for us, and even the many metaphors we derive from its action to indicate actions of the mind, give weight to this unprovable opinion. For myself, even if it be false, I find it worth pondering. I feel sure that the intelligence must constantly refer to the system of acts we know or can perform, that its aim is some activity, and that the practice of some trade can form its habits or inspire it with priceless analogies. So I say the French mind owes much to all those farmers, winegrowers, artisans, workers in metal or wood, creatures and creators of their homeland. Consider the number of local masterpieces to be seen in France. Think of all the architecture, the finest bridges, viaducts, and tunnels in the world, the furniture, the precious stuffs, the pottery and the ironwork; count the famous vineyards—the list of their names is a kind of armorial—they owe as much to care and experience as to Nature; visit the centers where flowers are expertly cultivated for perfumes, where fruits are carefully watched and protected: roses and jasmine at Grasse and Vence, delicately thinned and pruned Chasselas grapes at Thomery; let us not forget even the difficulties and wonders of the art of writing in our tongue, the only language left with some care for weighing words, ordering thoughts, and displaying the forms of discourse, as though we were still in that fabulous age when minds knew how to feel, and time did not count.

If we wish to form a more precise idea of what we owe to *work*, we must return to the great example of building. There is hardly a village in France whose church does not offer the connoisseur some delightful feature, some elegant solution to

remember, few towns where a house, a hospital, a door, or a fountain fails to reveal a knowledge and feeling that make one stop and sigh

Other modes than building have required and developed other qualities that have been gradually incorporated into the national mind sensory acuteness and refinement have been creative necessities in the fashion industry, as in that of fine wines A taster of Bordeaux who says of a wine that *it spreads like a peacock's tail in your mouth* is the equal of many a poet—just as Baucher, the famous horseman, is nearly a great writer when he speaks of *the velvet suppleness of the mouth of a horse*

What patience, too, what care, trouble, and pains are implied in bringing under cultivation certain kinds of terrain, at once very rich and very rough The winegrowers of the Côtes du Rhône sometimes cultivate vines scattered among the hollows in high rocks These must be tended one by one, and a man has to carry up baskets of earth and fertilizer on his back

Yet work itself is changing in character Time was when time did not count, it was energy, mechanical energy, that counted Methods were traditional Many secrets and tricks were passed on from master to helper, from father to son, from lessor to lessee There was no organized and general technology, no mass production One may wonder whether the machine will not debase those human powers that were kept alive by the obligation to use one's strength, skill, concentration, and persistence I merely put the question Perhaps, just as athletics today serve to develop the muscular system for its own sake—thus compensating for those opportunities to use it which the machine deprives us of—we shall have

to find new aims for our effort new difficulties It is at this point that we begin to see the capital problem the *quality of the man of tomorrow*

On the worth of this heir to our knowledge and works will depend among other things what might be called *the Future of the Past* that is the coming evaluation of all that art and intelligence have so far created What will be the value tomorrow of what we still admire or appreciate today?

The question is posed by the number and magnitude of those transformations of life itself which make our own time so new

What will our children be like? What will they do? What labors, resources, relations with matter and energy will be theirs?

No reply We live under a regime of surprise But there is no doubt of it arts and techniques may change, speed power, precision, and the use of relays these may increase beyond all present conjecture, but in the final analysis the value of the individual will always be the foundation of value in everything created or constructed out of matter Work will perhaps be more "intellectual," but perhaps we shall see certain *gifts* coming magnificently to the fore, gifts that are precisely those of our most excellent artisans and experts past and present

It is important, then, to recognize and make known the specific virtues of such artisans of quality, for it is important that the material progress of the future, far from reducing or depreciating the individual, should serve, on the contrary, to exalt him It is important in a world superlatively exploited equipped, and organized, in a civilization relieved of me-

chanical tasks, that some transfigured form of personal labor should arise and be developed—of which the past labors of our most skilled and conscientious experts and workmen will have been the simple and venerable source

French Thought and Art

[1939]

THE CIRCUMSTANCES in which we are now involved the pressure of events the corresponding tension of our minds have among many other effects that of making us more and more strongly aware of our intimate participation in a life greater than our own which is the life of France In calm and peaceful times to be French in France is taken for granted an almost unnoticed condition in short one is in a neutral equilibrium with one s native and natal surroundings Being French is as natural as breathing One comes to believe it impossible to be anything but French—Montesquieu remarked on it

Of course, there have been Frenchmen who went abroad and soon felt their national difference But in comparison to our total population the number of those who have crossed the frontier—and coming into contact with foreigners discovered France—has been almost negligible

But now our principal frontier is called the Maginot Line and our contacts with foreigners—whether friend enemy, or neutral—tend to make us more aware of our French personality We are more and more sensitive to what we are What is happening to us is what happens to any living thing compelled by circumstances to get ready to act or react His thought can no longer ignore his body, he co-ordinates all his faculties, he turns the whole of himself into a single system

of forces, and is finally aware of himself in his deep unity and essential individuality

Can this feeling of nationality be clarified by a definition of ourselves simple enough, in the end, to be contained in a few ideas?

I shall attempt one, with little hope of succeeding, limiting myself to the intellectual part of the question

I shall assume, then, that we wish to form an idea of what France has created in the realm of the mind since France first came into being, that we must try to sum up the volume, the value, the particular nature, and the universality of her production, must melt down centuries, genres, schools, modes and persons, making a sort of compound so concentrated that it can be contained in a few pages I wonder how to set about this task and what can be hoped from it In short, it is a question of defining or creating a *Being*, an *Author*, to be called *France*, who, in the course of a career of a thousand years, could have turned out so many monuments, priceless works of all kinds, expressions of intelligence or knowledge, which we look on as our capital of pride and tradition

This is the problem as I see it I know it is insoluble, if not absurd But on either hypothesis it can at least be attempted The mind can work, even with profit, on the insoluble and the absurd, these are the subjects of most of our thoughts

Here, then, is how one could perhaps begin It would be vain, and moreover endless, to treat this problem by enumeration, by a chronological table of works and persons whose names form the catalogue of the works of France I think that a list of names and titles, even when accompanied by dates, references, and a few notes, can teach us nothing substantial

Besides, such a list would alone fill my few pages And, if I were to make a selection, I should have either to question or to justify my own preferences

My plan is to imagine our total intellectual and artistic treasure *at such a great remove* that the *whole composition* of so many accumulated beauties and values is alone to be perceived, without separating them into distinct works, famous persons, and unusual events that may be isolated from the system of which they are parts in short, to envisage France the role or function of France in building up the capital of the human mind, but to include only what belongs to France alone, leaving aside both what is so plain as to be obvious and what is apparent only on close inspection

The first intellectual product of a people is its language, which is therefore the first thing to examine if we wish to appreciate the life of the mind among that people and the evolution of that life in connection with the dramatic development of its history Language is formed statistically, and would be quite variable—very rapidly so, at times—if its instability and anonymous local differences could develop in unhindered anarchy, altering the sound and sense of words as well as their syntax But this constant process is more or less hampered by certain wills or sensibilities above the average and dominating the many, whether such influence be that of individuals or institutions or even cities in which the exchange of ideas is particularly intense Here, as in economic matters, the more active the exchanges, the more important it is that the conventions—the weights, measures, and currencies—should be stable and well defined

Our syntax is one of the most rigid In the strictness of its conventions it equals our classic prosody It is remarkable that a people whose mind is considered extremely liberal and logical should have conformed in speech to all sorts of constraints, many of which are inexplicable Perhaps the French have felt that there is a freedom of a higher order, which is both revealed and attained by constraints, even useless ones.

However that may be, our language, not being given to forming compound words, nor to easy syntactical agreement, nor to the arbitrary disposition of words in a sentence, and *being content with a somewhat limited vocabulary, is justly* famous for the clarity of its structure which, together with a frequent taste for abstract definitions and distinctions, has made possible the conception and realization of so many masterpieces of verbal construction—pages of such architectural perfection that they seem to exist and to have their effect independently of their meaning, of the images or ideas they embody, and even of their qualities of sound In this respect, they are comparable to those pieces of cerebral music whose theme is slight and the immediate pleasure they give to the ear almost negligible, compared to the intellectual sensation we get from them and the superior enjoyment of understanding that sensation

Since I have mentioned the name of architecture, I shall here introduce a reflection directly related to it. I have just been considering the specifically French qualities in our literature *as if they formed* a single work derived from that great collective work which is our language In fact, any literature (and I do not except what is called philosophy) is and can be no more than the exploitation of some of the properties of a language A Frenchman who is a writer will find in our

language both resources and gaps facilities and restrictions (the latter especially) which will be more or less clearly perceived in his work Our language very often hinders an immediate expression of thought and compels us to a doubtless more difficult and more inward elaboration of our intentions or impulses than is necessary with other peoples But the resulting constructions which have been successfully carried out only through a conjunction of warring conditions and which require as much skill lucidity and sustained will as invention *very often give the impression of a wonderful* agreement between life and time light and matter form and content

Is it not true that very similar qualities place French architecture of the great epochs together with the Greek of the best period in the front rank of all the art of building has produced?

Whether it be a question of architecture or literature, it must be noted that in France there is a tradition a need for fine work. We must admit that the conditions of modern life the change from handicraft to manufacture, from individual workmanship to the mechanical mass production of objects on the assembly line, time saving, competition to give us bargains' fashion and advertising giving rise to imitation at the expense of personal taste—these and other circumstances are not the most favorable for creating precious objects Neither the inimitable nor the lasting is suited to our time

I said one day to an architect who wanted to convince me of the superior beauty of very modern buildings rearing prodigious beehives of cement a thousand feet in the air, that these concrete masses certainly astonished the eye presenting

it with a marvelous setting of geometrical cliffs, exposed to all the higher variations of light throughout the day, and that I admired these superhuman structures But, although I could not help admiring them, that was not the same as loving them A drawing, I continued, a blueprint tells all that can be known about them, but I do not see anyone looking at them with growing tenderness, lingering over a point, taking a notebook from his pocket to sketch some detail, some unusual *solution of a problem that had arisen unexpectedly* and forced the builder to combine function, material, and his own genius in an invention that would answer the purpose, with an effect of inspired discovery—the work of a living mind And yet that is what is often suggested by an old house or a little church in France Some cottage, some fragment of a ruin have their own flavor, which is theirs alone

There are still to be seen in the old quarters of Paris hundreds of little wrought-iron balconies, not one of which resembles any other, and each of which is a charming invention, a kind of idea, as simple as a theme of but a few notes It was made by putting together a few pieces of iron with a great deal of taste Nothing sums up for me more clearly what is most French in France

Here I shall insert an observation that applies to a whole class of our works of art in every genre, but especially to writing

From the sixteenth century onward, we developed a certain critical spirit in matters of form, which kept a strict "watch" over our literature during the so-called "classical" period, and has never ceased to exert a direct or indirect influence on judgments of value and, hence, on production France is the country where considerations of pure form—care for form in itself—have dominated and persisted up to

our own time A "writer" in France is something more than a man who writes and publishes An author, even one of very great talent who achieves very great success, is not necessarily a "writer" All the intellect, all the culture in the world cannot give him a "style"

Style is the result of a special sensitivity to language This cannot be acquired, but it can be developed With us this development has come not only from the artist's communion with his own thought, his solitary ambitions, and his own verbal resources but also from the stimulus of competition and example in those restricted circles formed at different periods by the Court, the *salons*, the cafes, the cliques, or by the habitues of certain theaters These were so many courts of jurisdiction, hotbeds of the critical spirit The demands they made, with their conservative or revolutionary traditions, have had the greatest possible effect on our literature and, indeed, on all our arts All this would require prolonged demonstration and detailed examples, which I have no time to give in these few pages I shall confine myself to stressing the importance of this entirely French manner of organizing literary activity, by the following remark with us, the intellectual personality can scarcely develop in isolation, as a phenomenon unrelated to prevailing opinion, fashion, and taste It must side *with* these or *against* them For four centuries the evolution of our arts has proceeded through successive schools, actions and reactions, manifestoes and pamphlets We like innovations to explain themselves and traditions to defend themselves, a whole library of prefaces, proclamations, and theories, with their various arguments have accompanied the successive re-creations of value In this way our literature resembles our politics Finally, in the last half century or more, the former has become, oddly enough, a

kind of experimental field in which all the possibilities (and consequently all the impossibilities) of language and prosody have been tried—highly daring experiments, with varying success, some proceeding from a profound analysis of thought and its means of expression, others purely adventurous and inspired merely by a burning desire to do something different from what had already been done. The present state of our literary production is remarkable for the coexistence of completely different ways of writing. All the gods are honored at once, without any great dispute among their worshippers. The age of battles, anathemas, and mutual contempt is past.

My present attempt to perceive, isolate, and expound in a few words what is most purely French in the immense production of France becomes, by the very nature of things, more difficult and uncertain (if not entirely illusory) when we turn to the speculative and the scientific. It is clear that philosophic meditation, as well as scientific research, seeks universal results, results essentially transmissible to all men—an effort that tends to free the products of the mind from the hidden influences of race, local habits, and milieu. Abstract or "pure" thought, like scientific thought, endeavors to obliterate what comes to the thinker from his race or his nation, its aim being to create values independent of place and person. It is doubtless not impossible to discern, or think we discern, in a system of metaphysics or morals, the part that properly belongs to one race or nation—sometimes, indeed, nothing seems to define a certain race or nation better than the philosophy it has produced. It is claimed that certain ideas, though expressed in all universality, are almost unthinkable outside the climate of their origin. In a foreign

land they wither away like uprooted plants or else they look preposterous This may well be

In order to isolate what is specifically French in the abstract work of our philosophers taking care (as far as possible in such matters) to avoid the vague and the arbitrary we must rely on the simplest observations but in addition we must allow ourselves a certain postulate which is not an obvious one and which few will allow

In my view (and I apologize for it) philosophy is a matter of form It is not in the least a science and it should free itself from any unconditional link with science To be *ancilla scientiae* is no better for philosophy than to be *ancilla theologiae* In saying that it is a matter of form I mean that if I seek an order and an expression that will sum up and compose for *me the whole of my personal experience, the inner and the* outer then that is my philosophy and to do that is to seek a form I do not say that I am right which in any case would be meaningless I say that in my present undertaking this formula however rash enables me to consider that the form under discussion is one of those which a certain language is capable of, and that anyone who speaks this language, to others and to himself can neither go beyond its means nor escape the suggestions and associations which the said language has insidiously implanted in him

If I am French there at the very point of my thought where thought takes shape and talks to itself, it takes shape in French according to the possibilities and within the framework of French This language has its (relative) virtues and vices it has no license to compound words, it abounds in restrictions it has a rather limited psychological vocabulary Now, whoever thinks in a certain language pursues from phrase to phrase, a kind of perfection, an inner satisfaction

that he expects to find in one of those phrases But the one he chooses, be what it may, will conform with the requirements of the language, will be modified by its peculiarities, suborned by its attractions The thinker will be satisfied or his thought fix itself at such and such a critical point in such and such a language, and in this state it will become for him his definitive *thought, to be written* and exteriorized Language, the common and undifferentiated work of a whole people, will thus finally have imposed conditions of expression and of meaning on a particular thought—conditions of which that thought is unaware Suppose that our language did not allow us French to accept from ourselves any but finished and clearly articulated expressions, to tolerate any but those constructions whose framework can be seen—then our metaphysics would be completely governed by this The passage from obscurity to clarity, which, for metaphysics, is the great hidden task, would be more laborious for us, our conceptions would be more restrained, and doubt would here play the greatest part metaphysics can allow without perishing What we call profundity (without exactly knowing the abysses that lurk beneath this imposing word) would not be held, in France, to be a positive virtue

Here arises a great debate that can never be settled Profundity and clarity, consciousness and the unconscious, introspection and objectivity, logic and whatever it is that defies it, these are classic antitheses in all philosophies, yet with us they have been developed to the point of becoming national characteristics

I shall sum up in a few words my general impression of this part of my subject It seems to me that the French mind tends to mistrust and to shun every conception that does not allow the hope that it may in the end be reduced to a clear and

ceramics to typography, and this simple enumeration shows a variety of talents, throughout the ages, as rich as the variety we observed just now in terrain, climates, and the human constituents of France To grasp this richness we must picture it as made up of a considerable number of inventions, models, combinations, and procedures, to which we must add all the talent and skill required to imagine and bring into being so many possible forms

The French hand has done wonders, whether in shaping stone or illuminating parchment

Of this abundance of research and discovery in the pursuit and practice of art I find a recent and shining example in the body of French painting from 1800 to the present day I shall *not mention any names, and confine myself to this remark* Names are made only to send us back to things, yet they too often save us the journey

What I should like to do here would be to show the astonishing diversity of solutions to the problem of painting which were proposed during these one hundred and thirty years form, light, color, liveliness, or restraint, or urgency, or pure harmony, all, in turn, were taken as the aim of the artist's effort and a stimulus to his powers All this is closely linked with the many literary experiments made during the same period, particularly in poetry

How much I must pass over in silence! Our sculpture, for the past two centuries, has been the finest in the world Our music, the most subtle of all, seems to me (if I may allow my incompetence to speak) to have sought by way of intelligence to outflank the formidably fortified positions of a great symphonic power which until recently dominated the world of music .

But the subject is vast and the conditions of the problem far too rigorous You have no doubt noticed—with some surprise—that I have spoken no name, quoted no title, mentioned no date If I had not kept to this rule, I should have had to offer you a huge book, a catalogue of persons and works That would have been to show you multiplicity and individual differences instead of composite unity and national harmony

I will end by summarizing for you in two words my personal impression of France our special quality (sometimes our foible, but often our finest claim) is to believe and to feel that we are universal—by which I mean, *men of universality*

Notice the paradox to *specialize* in the sense of the *universal*

Subject of a Conversation with Conrad

[1924]

I HAVE the most delightful memories of poor Conrad But they can be contained in a few lines I met him only twice, once in London two years ago, and again in his cottage near Canterbury a few months ago Both meetings were arranged and planned by our friend G Jean-Aubry, to whom I am infinitely grateful.

Conrad spoke French with a good Provençal accent, but English with a horrible accent that amused me very much It is a rare mark of individuality to be a great writer in a language one speaks so badly

He was also the most affable and agreeable man in the world. We quickly found a very fruitful subject of conversation He had started as a sailor along the coasts of Provence and Languedoc under the skipper of a coasting vessel who came from my native port He had a wonderful knowledge of that coast perpetually fed with sand by the Rhône as it washes the Alps into the sea The sand is swept westward by the currents, the depths are extremely variable, the channels fill up very quickly, and have to be dredged at great expense Conrad loved that land of vines and lagoons bordering the Gulf of Lions He had spoken Provençal and Languedocian early in his career, and the singular collection of maritime terms he had in his head had accumulated around the vocabulary of our men of the sea.

He ranked French sailors above all others

Hardly had he said so when I felt the most annoying question I know coming to my lips

It is a problem easy to state, and very difficult to solve why and how has France never been able to hold supremacy of the sea?

The mind immediately finds a host of answers But a large number of answers is always a bad sign—equivalent to another question more awkward than the first, since it no longer offers the imaginary resources that have just been recognized as vain, nullified by their abundance

In the case of the problem I have stated, a thousand reasons one after another come to mind We think of the geographical shape of France, the powerful ambitions of some of her greatest heads of state, the negligence of several others, our natural resources which unfortunately give most Frenchmen the impression that France can do without the sea, England's constant effort on the Continent to make us turn our eyes and our strength toward the land, etc An infinite number of etceteras

On this question Conrad had a curious view He remarked that in a great number of *individual* fights—that is, between one isolated ship and another—toward the end of the old regime and under the Empire, whenever the strength of the two ships engaged was comparable, the Frenchman generally had the upper hand

He observed the contrary in encounters between squadrons From this he deduced that *something* in these collective engagements handicapped the individual qualities of our men and kept them from developing their superiority He blamed the instructions from Versailles According to him, our admirals received from the central authority express recom-

mendations to spare the quickworks of the enemy, and to capture his vessels rather than aim at destroying them. In consequence, we directed our fire at the rigging and batteries. But the English fired to sink.

I do not know where Conrad got this information. I have no idea how reliable it is.

I said to him—recalling something I had read—that at the end of the Revolution when Bonaparte, having given up his scheme of invading England with a flotilla after the defeat of his squadrons, had decided to create floating stock superior to that of his enemies, he called on that staff of incomparable scientists he had kept around him ever since the expedition to Egypt. He put to work such men as Monge, Borda, etc.

And so a whole group of mathematicians, rivals or pupils of *Lagrange and Laplace, having an admirable confidence in* the resources of analysis, tackled the theoretical and practical problems of shipbuilding.

The results of their efforts were such that in the latter days of the Empire the English, who were experts, were apparently using as models any of our ships they captured.

Napoleon fell before he had the powerful naval force he had dreamed of. Besides, his attention had turned elsewhere long before his fall. But as a result of the impetus he had given, and thanks to the long life of ships in those days, France in the last years of the Restoration and during the reign of Louis Philippe found herself in possession of the most imposing and best-built navy she has ever had. It is not unreasonable to think that the conquest of Algiers and our settlement in North Africa were made possible by the existence and obvious strength of a great fleet, more important in giving us freedom of initiative than in action itself.

I pointed out to Conrad that Germany likewise, by scien-

tific means and without recourse or respect to tradition had in less than thirty years built up a redoubtable navy

Someone came to tell us that tea was served An hour later we parted forever

A Reflection

[1927]

A NATION IS a living substance Neither race, territory, beliefs, customs, nor interests, nor even language are enough to define it These are merely characteristics that have no necessity The essence of a nation consists in the feeling of a common and indivisible destiny. Hearts secretly attuned to this feeling are ready for that sudden accord, that immediate common understanding, that identical resonance in their depths which at historic moments wonderfully transforms a whole people into a single being

It is at school that this miracle is gradually and unconsciously prepared for. The child brings to school his own instincts and the particular manners and traditions of his home But in class he is confronted by a variety of other natures to which he gradually becomes accustomed He find himself caught up *in a tiny organization* where a kind of public spirit reigns, where public opinion and points of honor exist Whether he imitates and conforms, or reacts, he is changed day by day under the influence of his various teachers, and he feels, even more insistently and clearly still, the effect on him of his fellow pupils He both exerts and undergoes this kind of impact. He creates and is created Moreover, as an indirect result *of such contacts, by an exchange of personal differences,* families themselves without knowing it influence each other

So each generation of pupils, moving from class to class toward manhood and combining various temperaments, gradually forms a common sensibility Each generation fashions its own pride, its own ambitions, hopes, and fears, and by this indefinable process, it renews and perpetuates the deeper life of its country In school, where youth is thought to do nothing but learn, it is secretly and continually at work creating the nation

Such are the thoughts that came to me as I looked at this list of the dead and glorious our teachers and our schoolmates, the representatives of our Lycée who fell in the Great War The roll of their names piously gathered by our Association stirs us first of all to a special affection and a backward glance, filled with emotion, to the years of our youth Memory does not separate those who perished from those who are still living It revives all of us together Teachers and pupils, we see ourselves once more moving about and talking in our classrooms, in the courtyards of the old building, in those vast corridors where the silence used to be suddenly broken by a drum roll that quickly filled their echoing solitude with our chatter and footsteps

We cannot look at this long list of dead without reliving those days

But all our memories of far-off school days, of faces, of moments relived, such fragments of the broken mirror of our youth as sometimes reflect back to us, taking on color to waken our dreams for a moment may not all these assume henceforth a more moving power in our minds and a wonderful significance?

We were well aware that in the few years we spent on these Lycée benches, our bodies were developing, and our

minds gradually taking shape and growing richer But we were unaware of the most precious thing that happened to us here In the light shed on us by the sacrifice of our dead, in the presence of all their names united in the bonds of a common schooling and a common destiny, our childhood and adolescence are illuminated, and we are moved by the thought that our school days are also the days when the life of our nation takes hold of us, and in us finds new life

Quality

[1944]

The best of France is now possessed by a dream. The dream of a new France more truly France than ever. Which means capable of things of every kind as beautiful as the most beautiful things France has ever produced.

This dream like many another is born of regret and hope. It takes the form of an ideal, at its command are all the perfections the past has to show; it finds in these the substance and promise of a future of noble creations, it throws an arch of desires and designs over the present.

But the present exists—such as it is. And as it is, it is not unusable. No matter how bitter, miserable, and hateful it may be, our task is to extract from it all the truth and strength of will that can be found in misfortune deeply felt but coolly and lucidly pondered. It must compel us to the most rigorous scrutiny of conscience, the most exact analysis of our situation; it must finally result in ideas and these must mark out or illuminate for us the range of action to be prepared for, or undertaken at once.

All this requires a survey both of the world and of ourselves. The time is no more when it was enough to study and reflect on ourselves in order to have self-knowledge. We are today what others make of us. We cannot understand our situation or define our present condition except by means of a

general review that will reveal the complete relativity of the economic and social life of a nation within a system of world-wide exchanges.

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An unprecedented collapse has plunged us into an abyss of impotence, where we who once were envied are now pitied—with a pity as wounding and unbearable to us as our own painful awareness of our condition. Let us, however, fortify ourselves with the memory of our country's incredible recovery after the many reverses and other abasements she has undergone. But we must realize that a turn of fortune is not to be expected from the mere passing of time and the shifts of chance. The greatest of the dangers that we may yet have to fear would be the hope of recovery without effort and, as it were, without thought. . . . It is imperative, therefore, *if we are to affirm our own being, that we should understand* and elucidate the circumstances in which we now find ourselves. We have some pretensions to clear and distinct understanding; we regard the perfection of intellectual vision as the highest of our gifts. It will never have a more urgent call for use than in one of the most troubled periods of human history, on the threshold of a future where we find only an inextricable confusion of the ordinary means of prediction.

Europe created *science*. This word *science* has two meanings: one is *pure knowledge*—ideas, analyses, theses and hypotheses, an unlimited capital, yet a kind of wealth that is of no importance to life, although of immense interest to those who live by the mind. The other meaning is *power of action*. If we look to nothing but observable results, the first of these meanings must be

considered a *fiduciary value* which depends entirely on public opinion many see no worth in it On the other hand every one has to acknowledge the second it compels respect for *it consists exclusively of recipes for action that always succeed Do this and you will get that* This kind of knowledge since it can always be converted into predictable phenomena is a *gilt-edged value*

Having created science and in particular gilt-edged science Europe has for three hundred years possessed a power of action that has made itself felt the world over and has set up for its own benefit a domination of the West that reached its zenith toward the end of the last century It is here that the combination—which may be called *fatal*—of the two factors I have just mentioned comes in On the one hand the predominant power of the West was divided or disputed among several heads set against each other in the bitterest of all *competition* On the other hand, as we have shown Western superiority resided in its power of action But this "gilt-edged" knowledge is reducible to precise recipes or formulas for action which any man should be able to use It is eminently adapted to dissemination Anywhere on earth, a man can build and run a machine, manufacture a product copy a given object, make use of all those means and instruments of power and precision which, formerly being confined to the West gave it in peace as in war a crushing supremacy But far from jealously guarding the secrets of their ascendancy, the rival Europeans vied with each other in giving them away, selling them, forcing them on all the nations of the earth

The result was that the concentration of power, which was intellectual in origin and which had made *the smallest part of the habitable earth sovereign over the whole*, was rapidly to

disappear and, consequently, *the hierarchy of political and economic power tended to be based on a classification of regions according to statistical elements alone area, population, value of soil and substrata*

This is what, in 1919, I called my "basic theorem"

The above preamble, a little too long but much too brief, was needed to introduce the reflections I should now like to deduce from my observations of the present state of affairs as they affect the life of France, or more precisely, her vitality, her prospects, and the dangers that threaten her

Among these dangers must be counted that of the mistaken use of our resources I mention (as a reminder) what the investment of enormous capital in foreign loans has cost the nation The two most perfidious demons in the psychological Hell—Credit and Security—tempted millions of savings to their doom, and this time it was the ant who found herself "greatly depleted" As a result, the habit of saving —a form of wisdom which, since Guizot's day, has constantly been recommended to our prudent people—brought on a large-scale and ruinous reduction of the birth rate, and rigid economizing was carried to the point of sordid neglect and the shabbiest mediocrity in the material maintenance of life

It is only too clear that in the hierarchy of power, for which I just stated the rule, our country is far from the front rank Considering simply the economic aspects of her situation, we find her in *a helpless state of inferiority* as a producer of things essential to life or of primary use in living Even our agriculture, which is the livelihood of the majority of our population, can scarcely survive but by the artifice of the Customs barrier Our wheat costs us much more than it is

worth In other lands there are immense plains and deep black soil which are overwhelming advantages when coupled with the use of machinery to exploit them on an industrial scale.

Similar observations in almost every type of mass production are equally unfavorable to us It is inevitable that the developments both extensive and intensive to be seen in every part of the world must make our basic economic life more and more precarious We can of course live or vegetate under the protection of tariffs but this is a life of expedients always more or less at the mercy of the political situation at home or abroad To sum up *quantity* is against us

There remains *quality* But there is quality and quality and here a delicate analysis is called for

For man, the act of production, if it amounts to any more than tending, promoting or (from our point of view) improving some product of nature, requires an *aim*, an *idea*, a *material* and an *act of execution*

I am oversimplifying It is not enough, for example, to indicate by the single word *idea* the complex intervention of the mind in the series of transformations that end in a manufactured article The mind sets itself an *aim* for example to get rich, and by such and such means, for example the production of such and such article, defined by its intended use, and more or less determined by technical economic, and psychological considerations Among these are the questions of material and of execution, and all this is generally combined with the estimated cost of production and all the commercial aspects

Every manufactured article is in short, the result of a certain number of decisions fixing a corresponding number of *variables* more or less clearly related to each other We

shall see that an article's *quality* or *class* depends on two factors in the making of it first, the freedom of conception allowed by the purpose it is meant to serve, second, the quality of the execution

Of all the articles fashioned by man, the greater number are as though entirely designed or dictated by man's nature, by the tendencies of his organism, his desire to spare his strength and increase his power of action They are suggested by some particular usefulness so obvious that, having found the right material for them, man sets to work, makes them, and develops a need for them which becomes, almost necessarily, more and more refined in its demands and more and more clearly suggestive of something else which might satisfy him in the highest degree

Articles of this useful kind are better made, of course, with experience and improved techniques But their evolution remains subject to a law of increasing adaptation to their purpose. They fulfill more and more exactly the need that created them, but this need does not change Invention is, of course, possible in this order of production, but invention is here limited by the idea of use, and use is itself defined and regulated by our vital functions To say that an article is *practical* is to place it in a category of articles where it is seen to fulfill the same function as the others but with a smaller expense of energy, or time, or trouble, or attention

If I conceive the idea of drinking from a vessel instead of lapping like an animal or using my cupped hand or a shell, my idea can be carried out in wood, clay, horn, or metal and the receptacle can take whatever shape I wish, but that shape and the dimensions of the object are not entirely arbitrary Imagination can take liberties in regard to the convenience,

the solidity and even the grace of form desirable in such a vessel In this the creative act avoids the suggestion of crude direct utility the mind takes pleasure in the thought of the article s resistance and probable duration eye and hand alight on it with interest and linger But all this is within the limits of the conditions of its use

Let us look at the matter a little more closely

The development of a civilization as seen in the articles it makes—I mean those not entirely defined by needs of primary urgency or by practical advantages—shows that such articles fall into two classes that cannot always be clearly distinguished Of these products of work one kind aims only at increasing our *well-being* at sparing us delay fatigue or frustration at making agreeable what is necessary, easy what might be difficult, and interesting or automatic what might in itself be tiresome They bring comfort, propriety, facility and they tend to adapt themselves as closely as possible to the sensibility of our bodies and the requirements of our activities

But *all this is good for everyone is desired and understood by everyone*, being as it were, called for by universal instincts capable of creating habits in everyone

As a result, an article in this category can be fully defined by a precise program of *improvement* it must be better and better executed, in unlimited quantities and with an always surer guarantee of its *consistent* quality This kind of production then is, by nature, progressive Real and positive progress, which is merely a matter of increase in precision and mechanical power, here reaches the maximum employment of its resources This is characteristic The fact is however that there are other objects in relation to which *the word progress has no meaning* they imply no goal of perfect usefulness at which productive effort can aim whereas the first-

mentioned take advantage of all the resources of method, measurement, and the systematic division of labor By these means, manufacture can achieve the remarkable success of producing an article progressively more perfect, at an ever lower price, and in larger and larger quantities *The excellence of such products is not impaired by increased output on the contrary, their perfection rather depends on mass production*

But this kind of success and perfection is based on an increasingly "scientific" analysis of needs, means, and probable consumption "Scientific" that is to say, "which can be formulated in rules and numbers," formulas for action that everyone can learn and adopt Positive science, "gilt-edged" science, has for its proof and guarantee the fact that its processes can be universally copied, from which it results—in the category of things we are discussing—that any article reducible to a clear and perfectible formula of manufacture can be produced in any quarter of the globe and by men of all races, once they are suitably trained *Just as the article is essentially imitable, so the maker is interchangeable*

Now comes a most important observation, which must take its place here For a long time, industrial production as I have just described it was confined to making articles with no aesthetic pretensions or (on the other hand) things sufficiently resembling luxury articles to give, at little expense, an illusion of quality But the inevitable result was that, in time, industry decided to try for the authentic "luxury article" and, in keeping with its methods, undertook to subject this article to its own processes, which are *essentially imitative*

But the expression "luxury article" is far from being clear

and precise There are numberless gradations between the necessary and the useless Besides life s innumerable variations sometimes alter all values in the eyes of an individual. However, there are particular characteristics which distinguish certain creations and which must be defined as precisely as possible

Why? Because the creations I am thinking of are those which could constitute for France an incomparable medium of exchange, an effective means of fighting the endlessly increasing impoverishment with which she is seriously threatened as a result of competition from the tremendous productivity all over the world

We have just seen that imitable articles, even of excellent quality, will henceforth be manufactured everywhere, and in quantities dependent only on industrial capacity We have observed that the forces of quantity were not on our side and, what is more, that even the quality of imitable articles, as a result of very definite technical factors, can hardly assure us a lead "defying all competition"

Fortunately there is a category of articles that do, and doubtless always will, defy systematic production, and it happens that France, historically and psychologically, is a creator of these superior objects, which we must now examine in their essence

We know already that their utility is nil, at least for man considered indiscriminately—as nothing more than a living machine The absence or deprivation or total ignorance of them in no way hinders or troubles the working of his machine So they are of a rather mysterious nature As for their value, it exists only in relation to some *personality* One might say that each of these articles is a response of the personal taste that creates it to the personal taste that desires

it or at least can be provoked to desire it The relation between producer and consumer is here entirely accidental It is really a matter of two people or rather two sensibilities in accord on the same subject, like two voices at the same pitch Nothing could be more different from mere definable "quality", nothing can better resist analysis, there is nothing whose success and commercial future are more difficult to predict Calculations are here based on intuition, not on mathematics, here, large outlays of capital do not ensure triumph, and triumph consists less in impressing a great number of people than in captivating the few who make the laws for a little world whose curious and secret principle is to exclude or reject what suits or pleases the majority Here sensual pleasure, vanity, the desire for singularity, sometimes the very flaws in a body, and all the passions of the soul serve as inspiration Satiety exacts and procures creations of an extreme delicacy What is called taste is made up of a thousand distastes, but what happens is that, at the thousand-and-first time, the taste so developed demands or chooses infallibly

Here is another remarkable characteristic of the particular species of article I am speaking of it elevates the one who makes it, as it does the one who desires it, provided that the first makes it and the other desires it with a kind of love. Note that its *uselessness consecrates it*, "sublimes" it somehow, for to say that it is essentially useless is to say *that it interests only* our most subtle senses—sight, touch, and smell, it was conceived simply to gratify them Is it not true that to consecrate a thing means to withdraw it from every use except the ideal? That is not all This particular article, among all articles made, is the one least subject to a consideration of the price it may cost. It is a paradox, it seems to counter the evidence that declares *what serves no purpose is worth nothing* with a peremp-

tory declaration to the contrary *I serve no purpose and I am worth most of all*

This is a suitable place to introduce some very necessary examples What I have just been saying about a certain article applies exactly to works of art properly so called A picture, a statue, a piece of enamel, a sonata, a book of poetry are just as much pure objects without the slightest necessity for their existence, just as freely created, as suffused with personality, as the luxury articles of which I have been speaking There is, however, a certain difference which I have often stopped to consider A moment's reflection makes it clear

A picture, a statue, an engraving are indeed ornaments of our leisure they compel us, now and then, to live moments of contemplation as it were in the margin of our life We enjoy them as if in the absence of our body and all its habits While we give ourselves up to them, they banish all things near and real That is what gives them their worth, in that they fulfill their office

But an article of exquisite luxury mingles with our very existence, diverting or charming its particular circumstances and ennobling its immediate surroundings It can be handled, carried, breathed, caressed, it is familiar to us, however precious. Our steps fall on a dreamlike fabric, a composition of strong, sweet tones, our limbs settle and relax on well-designed shapes bearing embroidered pillows and cushions, and our eyes and fingers play with a chain, a case, or a precious box as if they were the natural accessories to our careless gestures These things, then, set up a kind of intimacy between a life and the choicest creations of a civilization, whereas works of art are reserved to the realm of contemplation and the delights that take us out of ourselves

An article of supreme quality can be born only of a threefold meeting an *idea* that is neither derived from nor directed to anything, but comes as a more or less happy accident, a *material* marked and chosen (rather than excluded) for its rarity, its price, the difficulty in handling it, and, finally, *an execution as immutable as possible*, giving no impression of the machine-made

We recognize such a work as we recognize a person, and connoisseurs can put a name to it, for there are connoisseurs of such things who do not confuse what is merely well made with what is exquisitely so Anyone can appreciate what is made for everyone, but what is so made can be made by so many people that the product does not *name* the producer, whose very signature is merely a trademark, a piece of information.

All this brings us back to France

Her nature is creative The arms that have vanquished her have sprung, for the most part, from the brow of our own Minerva All the poetry of our time has taken its inspiration from a few of our own poets, and for the last two centuries *all* the great painters have been French

As for objects of exquisite quality who, thinking of them, does not think of Paris? When Paris is what it should be, it is—in the guise of an elegant and intoxicating city—a laboratory of ideas where the fermenting desire to create, captivate, and dazzle, where countless analyses, assays, and experiments constantly supply the finest and most exciting products to the display windows and galleries opening, like illustrations in a storybook, on the noblest streets of the city

Any passer-by sensitive enough to linger *in spite of himself*, fascinated for a moment by those choice objects, will find

that such delights for the eye will waken in him a sense of perfect workmanship and the value of fantasy, when these two are found together The same passer-by, if he looked at those luxuries from a slightly different angle, might reflect that he is watching a marvelous transmutation taste turned into riches and sometimes riches eliciting taste, invention and meditation striving to provoke caprice and the desire for luxury the creation of useless things regularly promoting the livelihood and prosperity of an ingenious people

All this vitality would not exist moreover, but for an elite that deserves a special study, at once historical psychological and social It is not for me to make such a study, but the present essay would not be complete without a few remarks on the role played by personality in a nation's real worth in the values of conservation, production, and orientation

All these vital values and particularly the one that shows itself in a nation's recovery, a national renaissance, are never and can never be, due either to any political system or to isolated individuals, even the most energetic and gifted, or to any administration, however excellent, for these various participants in the national life either have no certainty of remaining in power, or no proper continuity and length of service, or again are lacking in initiative, or prudence, or a sense of reality, or the courage to take risks and to welcome ideas Rather, it is nearly always those naturally formed groups of men united by certain affinities, certain traditions or a certain desire for excellence, rather than by a concern for their own interests pure and simple

The true elite emerge of themselves

Neither the public authorities, nor the majority vote nor selection by examination or other specific competition, nor even the success of an enterprise can create creators

Yet certain men, who recognize each other, whatever their respective spheres of activity, being animated by the same ideal of sustained perfection in their different fields and having the same productive drive — such men, if circumstances bring them together, constitute a power of the first importance, the authenticity of which is shown by the *creative atmosphere*, the inventive vitality that emanates from their combined efforts.

What happens under these conditions is something I should like to call the *spontaneous production of aristocracy*. This is what occurred, for example, toward the end of the Middle Ages in the cities of Italy or Flanders, which, as we know, were such magic crucibles where the concern for art, the thirst for gold, the boldest speculations, the passion to create, the mastery of execution, all at one time reaching I know not what extreme temperatures, resulted in that profusion of masterpieces of every kind which are the pride of European civilization. But perhaps it has been less carefully noted that this prodigious thrust was a demonstration of the power of individual values coupled and concentrated in a narrow space, complementing each other, often perpetuating themselves hereditarily, founding both the fortune and the fame of one family, and in their way, which is the best, strengthening the common weal as much by the universal renown they won for their country as by the riches they created around them.

I shall summarize these few pages in *three points*, which seem to call for meditation by those who have the courage to think about the revival of a gravely wounded country *as a creative undertaking*. If we look within ourselves and around us, we shall discover:

That which we may rightly envy,

That which we can only envy

That for which and by means of which we can make others envy us

Reflection on these points and a glance such as we have just taken at the world of today and have just risked taking at what may be conjectured of the world now beginning to emerge will convince us that if we do not want to be reduced to a wholly mediocre existence and a completely second rate economy the problem of the right use of our resources must be clearly solved and the solution vigorously applied

In the field of production the foregoing considerations seem to show definitely that the way indicated for France lies in the search for the *highest quality* For the reasons we have given *her future lies with the immutable* and this means that a constant effort of invention and a tireless refinement of workmanship are required to enable her to outstrip, or to outmode all rival production and to guarantee, so to speak, that we shall have unquestioned pre-eminence in making luxury articles of superior elegance and style

This most desirable result (which would also have great value as an example) depends on that few who, knowing the resources of ingenuity and skill in the handiwork of our artisans and steeped in our best traditions but sensitive to inevitable changes in taste, will join together, combine their aims constitute a directorate of the highest order of production and bring to the wide range of creative fancy the constant, unobtrusive support of a single, self-confident mind

The Diversity of France

[1948]*

THE ESSENCE of France is variety.

A foreigner said to me one day: "You French . . ."

Excuse me, I said. I am sorry to interrupt you, but what do you mean? Let's clear the way before we go ahead. I don't quite understand the phrase, "You French." If you are about to deal with those abstract Frenchmen defined by civil law, all right. Go ahead. But if you intend to talk to me about Frenchmen of flesh and blood, and you lump them together under one heading for the sake of making generalizations about them, let me warn you. Frenchmen are not much alike, by which I mean that the chances of two Frenchmen taken at random resembling each other are fewer than with any such random choice among any other people in the world. I have only to look around me, at the theater, the Academy, or any gathering whatever, to observe a great number of types, accents, and ways of reacting, all remarkably different. This is because no nation is more composite. I shall not say that we comprise Celt, Iberian, Teuton, Ligurian, Saracen, and Norseman and some elements of Tartar, for I should be hard put to it to persuade you that I understood the exact meaning of these words. I am not the only one to be baffled by the obscure question of racial origins. But I can

*Published three years after Valéry's death.—J. M.

certainly see that the Lorrainer is not the Basque and that the Provençal, the Picard, the Breton and the Catalan, the Fleming and the Limousin the Corsican and the Angevin are profoundly dissimilar The result is a strange unity that to a foreigner seems rather mysterious Sometimes this unity is said to be the fruit of a long-pursued policy, but the policy would not have succeeded had it not been suggested or imposed by the shape and structure of the country It is France that makes the French

Obviously "racialism" is an expression of weakness and fear, a theory that suits a people afraid of being absorbed, assimilated, or dissolved, because it feels profoundly incapable of digesting or assimilating the foreign elements with which it comes into contact It can imagine only two ways to get rid of them and save itself destroy or subdue them.

France, on the contrary, has made something French out of Celt, Iberian, Ligurian, Teuton, Sarmatian, and Saracen Neither Corsican nor Fleming, Catalan nor Basque is missing in her complex molecule; she has great poets who have come to her from Malines or Athens, and Paris has turned many singularly exotic beings into Parisians Moreover, her colonies and protectorates are witnessing a development of literary vitality in which her culture is blended with utterly different traditions and sensibilities

This power of transformation enables a people to be unafraid of losing their essential characteristics and peculiar qualities by mixture and exchange with other kinds of men. On the contrary, they consider as one of their primary qualities this ability to absorb into the subtle substances of their nature all that, in humanity, is truly human

Let me end with this observation: if races exist, and if one can speak of racial purity, it is clear that the purer the race,

the more will the individuals who compose it resemble each other. But similarity of individuals brings on passivity, mass submission, the impossibility of an entirely personal reaction and, as the fatal consequence of all this, that credulity which, in my opinion, is the necessary foundation for the most hateful schemes and undertakings

VIII

The Second World War

Against the Horrible Ease of Destruction

[1936]

EVERY civilization creates its own spiritual capital and its own material capital, these are essentially inseparable, and they rise and fall with the civilization itself The more aware a *civilization is of its own worth and the greater the value it* puts on what it has produced, the more it strives to preserve, collect, amass, and arrange that production, which is at once the substance and proof of its existence. The conservation, restoration, study, and interpretation of monuments of every nature become affairs of State

But men are not "civilized" only It may happen that certain necessities or certain circumstances awaken their instinct for destruction and move them to demolish, coldly or furiously, what has been created by the best among them and accumulated through the centuries Modern means make it possible to do away in a few hours with what is most beautiful and precious in Europe Nothing is more feasible The probability even of such an event is not small If some insurance *company were asked to assume the risks of our museums,* our libraries, our buildings, in the present state of men's minds and machines, what, I wonder, would be the result of its calculations?

That is what we are now facing No one would have

A Radio Address

[September 1939]

NOTHING today must be overlooked that can define and clarify in all minds—friend's or enemy's—the true nature of the war that has begun

It is important to France and her cause, which is the cause of all men worthy of the name, that for the eyes of the world the strongest light should be thrown on the conditions that made this war at first possible and then inevitable These conditions can be summed up in a few words this is a war between certain free countries and one that is not

What is a free country? It is a country in which there is reciprocity of service and obligation between the State and the individual In a free country the State is not an island, it is a necessary organization that must constantly justify its necessity, and must ask of each citizen only what is explicitly required for the good of all

Those countries where the public's freedom counterbalances the power of the State have often been disparaged, ridiculed, or vigorously criticized But all the ill that can be thought of our liberties, or attributed to their excess, vanishes in the light of the present explosion—whose flame tragically illuminates a very simple truth, that *a free country is a country where it is impossible for peace or war to be the act of a single human being*

Consider this on the one hand a man who is simply a man for whatever he is worth on the other, a whole people dependent on that man s slightest gesture All it takes is an insignificant act, as simple as pressing a button or turning a switch for that man to set fire to Europe and to let loose on millions of men incalculable evils and the most extreme calamities

This is what we cannot imagine we French or English. We are fighting absurdity It is inconceivable to us that a people—among the most educated and reflective peoples in the world—should submit to the monstrous authority of a single man and silently follow him beyond all reason Yet such a people exists and its existence shows us that what makes the difference between a free country and one that is not, is not a difference in political regime so much as an irreducible difference in character In our time, a country that is not free is a country in which men have no heart to be free, nor even the desire or need to be, nor even the idea that they could be They would scarcely wish to be free That is the mainspring of the present war

It must be admitted we do not understand the Germans. What a strange people is that great people! They have produced admirable and universal works of the mind, and yet they deliver themselves up to a persecutor of the mind They delight in painstaking research, in works methodically pursued and scrupulously executed, they excel in foresight and thoroughly rational preparations, and yet they entrust their destiny to the fatal impulses of a gambler who, in the delirium of a run of luck, is bound to be swept to his ruin

But how was that man able to impose his inordinate power on a people of advanced and very wide culture? He could never have robbed them of their free self-determination without

first having subjugated or degraded their minds He did so Literature, philosophy, religious belief, and even the plastic arts, everything that elevates life and sets it free from abjection, has there been reduced to a miserably timid existence and controlled activity Goethe himself is barely tolerated If he were alive, he would be either in prison or with us

The churches, the universities, the press, the public platform, every voice has been silenced by one dominating, raucous, and violent voice, whose invectives, orders, and threats echo throughout Europe Even those who do not understand the language it speaks understand the meaning of that voice, whose effect is to terrify some, to charm or perfidiously reassure others, and to swell beyond all limit the pride, the egotism, and the material ambitions of one nation

So far, this mad gambler has consistently won Having beaten down all his adversaries at home—Jews, Catholics, Protestants, intellectuals, Communists, and even the very heads of the great General Staff—and with everything giving way to him in his own country, how could he not yield to the temptations of chance? He proceeded at once against the weakest States on his frontiers He absorbed them without striking a blow

But these quick successes, at so little cost and so astonishingly fulfilling the predictions he had himself made and published, have made him drunk He has gambled on dissension and the peace-loving spirit of free peoples He has dropped even the outward show of sincerity His word no longer binds him He has denied his signature and come to terms with a doctrine and a nation he had furiously denounced . And now he listens to nothing, completely possessed by the poisonous will to conquer So there is war A curious war, like no other. a war of reason against madness, a war of respect for

commitments against contempt for the sworn oath, a war of mind against suppression of all thought, but a war with no hatred for the mass of docile German souls who cannot find it in themselves to resist the delirium that leads them on, a strange war aimed at liberating the enemy people and forcing us to fight men we cannot help but pity

Yet all the same we must see it through to the end

War Economy for the Mind

[1939]

Everything that man has made, and that has made him man, had as its first principle and primary aim the idea and the act of accumulating reserves — reserves that came from leisure. Leisure can make us dream, think, invent, work out our inspirations, combine our observations; from this have come many consequences, which have transformed the conditions of human life and our relations with all things, external or otherwise.

Stored grain, fish or meat (dried or smoked): material reserves produce free time, reduce the element of accident in subsistence, and stimulate forethought. They have made it possible to build up and store reserves of knowledge, and we live on these. It takes more and more of them for us to live. What is modern man? He is a man whose every means of subsistence is strictly dependent on his preserving, revitalizing, and renewing an incredible and constantly increasing amount of *knowledge*.

But, as regards knowledge, it is not enough to accumulate the materials that contain it and allow it to function, or even to maintain the personnel for dispensing or applying it: these do not create it. Knowledge is preserved in its full value only if the conditions vital to its increase are present. It decays

in the absence of individuals capable of expanding and transforming it—and even of contesting or legitimately destroying those parts which seem most firmly established It must grow or perish and it can grow only in free minds—a free mind being one strong enough to create first of all its own controls Under penalty of degenerating into more and more misguided and less and less intelligible practices, knowledge cannot be divorced from the kind of passion that puts the mind above everything else nor from that general freedom of the mind which requires freedom of the individual

Now let us look about us We are at war A modern war demands first priority on all of a nation s resources, and it consists in competitively exhausting all the material reserves of the enemy nations From this point of view the progress of a conflict can be described in terms of the successive balance-points on a set of scales where the shifting of weights is timed by a clock There are other factors, but, supposing them to be equal on both sides, it is fairly clear that the comparison is already in our favor and that this happy inequality can only become more marked

I come to my object, which is to consider the intellectual reserves on either side of the front line

We know (as the whole world knows) with regard to our enemies, that their whole policy toward the intellect has been reduced or devoted, *during the past ten years*, to suppressing intellectual development, depreciating the values of pure speculation, taking measures (often cruel) against anyone dedicated to it, promoting even in university chairs and laboratories the idol-worshippers at the expense of the independent creators of intellectual wealth, and imposing on both the arts and the sciences the utilitarian ends pursued by power

based on harangue and terror The universities, once rightly the greatest glory of their country, have been deprived of their best teachers, subjected to the control of a party that is a police force, their students transformed into followers of the regime or else regimented laborers, finally, the doctrine of the State, in that country, has come out clearly and brutally against the integrity and the dignity of thought—which must be employed only in its service

This picture cannot be denied In a few years, Germany has seen nearly all her "potential" for intellectual creation and renewal destroyed by her own government Some of them, drunk on pride and the will to power, others, degraded by collective submission, or bound and gagged by fear her people have tolerated all this

But we in the West can tolerate neither the suppression of thinking individuals—to be replaced by automatons— nor an unreasoning and unlimited obedience to some precise and necessary aim requiring that We believe that every system of government produces the men it deserves, and we are not envious of the type which the Prussian system has imposed on Germany, which in turn is trying to impose it on the whole of Europe. Against that fatal excess of discipline whose ideal goal is general passivity, our feelings and strength have revolted Among our many resources, we must include and take care not to neglect those intellectual reserves I spoke of just now. They must count for a great deal from now on, and they will prove far more precious still when the hostilities are over To that other half of Europe, desperately impoverished in culture, starving for spiritual food, long deprived of free philosophy, pure science, disinterested literature and art, and even of untrammeled religious activity think what

it will mean to discover a Western Europe where France and England intimately united in their resolve to guarantee the independence of the mind will have fought hard to preserve it They are both well aware that every value of humanity all that man has made and that has made him man can endure —that is grow—only in those living and universal conditions afforded by the free mind

Breathing Again

[September 1944]

FREEDOM is a kind of sensation It can be breathed The notion that we are free expands every moment's future The very idea gives us strange inner wings that stretch their widest in our breast, lifting us in their intoxicating rise One full, fresh, deep draught of breath at the universal source whence we draw the means of living a moment longer and the whole liberated human being is invaded by a delicious revival of his authentic will He is in possession of himself He sets going within him all the springs of his hopes and plans He recovers the integrity of his speech He can now speak to all as he has been speaking to himself He feels the full meaning of walking, as he encounters no further barriers or sentries in his path, and he smiles as he watches a few workingwomen with little saws hurrying to turn a hideous thicket of chevaux-de-frise into plain firewood All those defense installations now broken, crushed, and vacant, the wreckage of empty casemates, the disabled tanks riddled with holes and being taken to pieces, buildings spattered with bullets, scarred by explosions, and gnawed by fire, all give force to the impression of some extraordinary power surging up out of life itself—a power against which the most shrewdly planned obstacles, the most painstaking preparations, the most redoubtable armaments in the hands of the most determined men, all the concrete, the

automatic weapons the underground passages, all that the toughest will can imagine and create to master a revolt, cannot prevail We have seen and lived through what can be done by an immense and illustrious city with the will to breathe again And here that vague word *soul* takes on a wonderful meaning

But the mind by the very fact of its recovery, regains all its rights and exerts them against the very moment that restores them It is not to be fettered by the pleasure of being alive, or revived Its highest inner law must be recovered—which is not to yield to the moment not to surrender entirely to its joy It must also be on guard against shock or bedazzlement, the effect of tremendous events on the intelligence Events are only the froth on things Reflections based on them are fallacious, and the so-called lessons we draw from startling facts are arbitrary and not without danger We know what the "lessons" of previous wars have cost us—in 1940 as much as in 1914 Besides, it is enough to think of the countless coincidences that make up every "event," to be convinced that there is no reasoning about them, anyone who does so is merely applying crude simplifications and the superficial verbal analogies they allow But, today, the mind must keep all its lucidity If French intelligence has the virtues of clarity it is said to have, a more urgent occasion for exercising them has never been offered The task is to conceive a completely new era We are now faced with a universal confusion of questions and conjectures Scores of unprecedented situations and problems will arise, before which nearly everything the past has taught us is more to be shunned than studied. It is from a profound analysis of the present that we must start, not in order to predict events—about which, or their consequences, one is always mistaken—but in order to prepare,

arrange, or create what is necessary to ward off events, to resist and use them Organisms, with their resources against surprise and sudden changes in their surroundings, are a great example to us here

I cannot at present develop these considerations, which I have barely sketched, and shall confine myself to repeating what I have often said Let us beware of backing into the future That is why I do not much care to hear about reconstructing France it is *constructing* France that I should wish to be our aim

Our Cousins in Quebec

A Prefatory Letter

[May 1945]

Madam,

I HAVE READ your Canadian notes and impressions with all the interest that such a subject of observation and meditation cannot fail to arouse in us I am not a great traveler, but reading is some compensation, carrying me here or there in its lazy fashion, as it has just now done into that vast country of which the little I knew was only superficial

But when it is a matter of Canada, a French mind cannot but be stirred by the descriptions and sensations communicated by an author

A Frenchman cannot think of Canada without feeling in his heart the contending forces of an immense bitterness and a deep pride

He experiences, in fact, the feelings of a father who had once abandoned a very young child on a distant shore, and now finds her again after many years, a splendid girl, grown up in another family, happy and with the promise of the finest future But this accomplished young lady shows a singular wisdom She does not repudiate the father who abandoned her, he has his place in her heart Yet she is profoundly attached and devoted to the powerful family in whose bosom she grew up

And now, when the most crushing misfortune has befallen

her father, the noble child brings to the service of his seemingly hopeless cause all her resources—her strength, her goods, her blood

This politico-psychological situation seems to me unique in history It also appears capable of developments of the highest importance The conditions that will make for stability in the world of tomorrow are, for the moment, impossible to imagine The gigantic problem of coexistence that must arise among powers of all ranks will certainly entail combinations of which we can have no idea Now, more than ever, it is important not to trust in history The force of entirely new circumstances will abolish many traditional antagonisms, and the future will see, as we see already, ideals and monsters emerging from oblivion, which for us have existed only in fable.

But, as matters now stand, we can only hope for the preservation of the best we think we have created or discovered. We French do not want all that to perish which has taken so many centuries of searching, suffering, and greatness to build, and which is in such serious danger today—an age dominated by the law of great numbers and the greater number In this very grave situation, the thought that French Canada exists is a comfort to us, an invaluable element of hope French Canada affirms our presence on the American continent It shows what our vitality, our endurance, our will to work might yet become We should send over to Canada all our most precious possessions, all our intellectual wealth, for (if I may be allowed the expression) these need to be *protected against Europe*

Unhappily, far too many Frenchmen (including myself) have only vague and summary ideas about Canada (and here it would be too tempting to criticize our schools)

Your book, Madam, plain and unpretentious though it be, is one that can bring home to us here in France, what I have just been trying to say in a somewhat abstract form

Something of an Event

[1945]

History prefers to recount what nobody has ever seen, hardly balking even at what nobody ever could have seen There would be no history if we were to limit the past to the products of actual memory, to what the eyes have seen and the ears heard In historical matters, it is almost impossible to avoid inventing Nevertheless, that is what I should like to do with regard to the liberation of Paris—give my impressions just as they are

I live in a neighborhood whose location and the size, modernity, and comfort of its buildings were the cause of its being largely "occupied" Nothing was to be seen but army services, sign panels and direction arrows, men in green, girls in gray Two doors away from mine, every day at about noon, an enormous Black Maria used to wait, to pick up and carry off human beings who looked without seeing and whom we dared not look at The street that runs from Avenue Foch up the hill to the Rue Lauriston and down again, ending at Avenue Kléber between the house where Briand died and the site of a formidable barricade of chevaux-de-frise this street from end to end was in a state of defense, blocked by stacks of paving stones ready to accommodate who knows what traps or stakes This street passes alongside a tall city reservoir, which was guarded by a small garrison I used to visualize an

attack on this detachment The days went by I felt that Paris was becoming different and everywhere people s eyes were lighting up from face to face Nothing was changed in appearance As for me I went on with my task which is to weave endlessly like Penelope a fabric of the mind But *this eternal task more and more day by day showed signs of* the approach of some considerable event Something like the imminence of a great thaw or what the awakening of the migratory instinct in birds must be like something began to stir in my soul astonished to feel within her again the powers projects and perspectives of *a free being* One morning the whole neighborhood was filled with transport vehicles The most diverse objects were being piled into them furniture cases of champagne or biscuits suitcases cardboard boxes even chipped washbasins And there was a sound of cannon in the air Came the evening of August 24 I extract from a chaos of impressions this one typical of that period in which nothing stands out from the whole While the local sky was all brief flashes dull thuds bursts of machine-gun fire and in the direction of Neuilly a vast display of fiery red from burning houses and while I was trying to get some news on the radio all at once a heavenly voice rose up singing from the Berlin Opera House some melody of Italian music whose pure line stood out like a clear idea against the background of warring noises and explosions thrown up in every direction by the violent engagement that gripped all the immense city

But what a strange and wonderful disorder took hold of everyone s mind it seems the next day All the joy of deliverance mixed with all the emotions of a struggle not yet ended Flags at windows exchanges of gunfire between roof and street the crowds laughing people smiling at one another walking briskly and suddenly running for cover in

the doorways It was an extraordinary confusion of contradictory feelings, all equally intense and equally destructive of any reflection, any resumption of organized thought I could observe the disorder in myself *the seen* mixed with *the imagined*, what had just happened with what was predicted, the anxious heart suddenly set free, swelling, recovering, the *moment* accelerating, simplifying, exaggerating, and exchanging all the living values whose possibilities make us what we are—*the moment was our master*

There was also that parade I went to see in the Champs Elysées Between the strong green masses of the trees were the multicolored spots that formed the substance of the crowd life seen as an impressionist mass

I noticed all around me, and in me, how strong emotions equalize people, level the differences in age, culture, and situation Everyone was relieved, lifted by the same impulse, and the word *unanimous* took on a positive meaning I saw a young mother brandish her child toward the passing troops, as though either to give him his share of the general lightness and lift, or to offer him to the nation We breathed deeply of an air utterly different from that of the days past There is a physiology of circumstances just as there is a meteorology of events, and a little research and a comparison of memorable dates could demonstrate it

I shall not describe what went on before my eyes the electrifying effect of the first tricolor flag hung out at a window, the arrival of the tanks, warriors coming home in triumph, the capture of the neighboring reservoir, and the little knot of prisoners coming down two by two into the crowd, their hands behind their heads There are and will be a thousand stories of scenes of this kind, and others more dramatic and decisive But with my own eyes I saw only my

corner of Paris and I leave to the historian who has generally seen nothing the job of imagining the picture as a whole In any case I am told that apart from the setting and action—the local aspects of those critical moments in our self-recovery—the same energetic revival the same overflow of emotion the same stormy gaiety stirred every living thing in every quarter of the capital

I went back to work and as I sat looking at a half written page without seeing it all at once I was shaken with laughter that came from the hidden parts of the mind through the unguarded ways of distraction Gone the laughter said they are gone Four years of their silent work their iron will their calculated pressure four years of secure and meticulous organization of incredible preparations and de fense constructions the trenches the roadblocks and God knows how many papers dossiers reports graphs lists Gone gone all that labor gone to nothing in a matter of hours And the free man s laughter turned into meditation

Ultima Verba

[May 1945]

STOP, CONQUEROR   PAUSE AT THIS LOFTY MOMENT OF VICTORY   BE SILENT FOR A TIME AND REFLECT ON *WHAT TO* THINK AT THIS PINNACLE   WHAT TO THINK THAT WILL NOT BE MEANINGLESS

A VOW, AN OATH, AN IRREVOCABLE ACT, A MONUMENT IN THE SOUL, AND, AS IT WERE, A SOLEMN PRAYER   THIS IS WHAT YOU MUST UTTER AND ESTABLISH OVER THE DEAD AND OVER THE LIVING, SO THAT THIS SPLENDID MOMENT OF SILENCE SHALL NOT PERISH LIKE ANY OTHER

DECLARE WITHIN YOU, AND ENGRAVE ON YOUR HEART

MAY THE DAY NEVER DAWN
WHEN THE MEMORY OF THIS DAY
OF VICTORY SHALL BRING
BITTERNESS AND HATEFUL RECOLLECTION
OF THE PRESENT JOY,
WHENEVER YOU RELIVE THIS DAY,
MAY THERE NEVER COME INTO YOUR MIND
THESE CRUEL WORDS

WHAT WAS THE USE?

APPENDIX I

Early Texts

Education et Instruction des Troupes

Critique

[1897]

Une troupe se forme, s'oriente, se meut comme certaines images dans son chef. Une troupe se hasarde, donne, et se perd conformément à certaines images communes à toute la masse.

Enfin, tout l'art du commandement est d'avoir organisé l'inégalité fatale qu'il faut que quelqu'un s'attribue. Elle est une composition du temps, des nombres, du terrain, des armes, des sentiments. Les deux membres de la lutte sont faits de ces termes, et, s'il y en a dont les valeurs sont égales ceux-là se détruisent.

Vues d'un certain point, deux armées, nouées par le but, constituent une seule chose, qui se déforme, et va d'un être initial à un final, par une suite de mouvements intérieurs. De ce point, la victoire, la défaite ont perdu leur signification.

A l'origine de ce système, tous les individus qui en sont présentent une hésitation générale, et, quel que soit l'espoir, deux idées contraires partagent le fond de chacun. A la fin, *ce mélange ou ce doute*, d'abord *uniformément* distribué sur le champ, devient deux certitudes, chacune colorant un parti tout entier.

Je dirai ici que je ne vois du sujet que les idées, les figures les raisonnements, ou les constructions qu'on y emploie

Instruction and Training of Troops

A Review

[1897]

A REGIMENT is formed, given a purpose, and set in motion according to certain images in the mind of its commander A regiment moves up, charges, and is dispersed according to certain images common to the whole group

Thus, the entire art of command depends on someone's taking it upon himself to formulate this inevitable inequality The difference is a combination of time, numbers, terrain, weapons, and feelings The two sides in a battle are composed of these terms, and, if there are any whose values are equal, they cancel each other

Seen from a certain point of view, two armies linked by their objective constitute a single thing, changing shape from an initial entity to a final one through a series of internal movements From this viewpoint, victory and defeat lose their significance

At the beginning of such an operation, all the individuals taking part add up to a general uncertainty, and whatever their hopes, there are two contradictory ideas in each man's mind. This conflict or doubt, which at first is distributed uniformly over the field, in the end becomes two certainties, each coloring one entire side

Let me say here that in any subject I see only the ideas, figures, principles, or structures used in it That granted, there

Cela admis, on n'y trouve plus d'autres difficultés que celles qui sont partout et partout les memes

A la guerre faute de symboles, on serait obligé, pour etre clair de tuer jusqu'au dernier des autres Toute bataille est donc pleine de conventions

L'ensemble des idees militaires est commandé par une d'entre elles qui est *fixe* et qui est l'idee de l'*Ennemi* C'est le Non-Moi d une armée Un homme en guerre, cette idee lui vient constamment, et critique toutes ses minutes simplement parce qu'elle revient Je laisse au lecteur le probleme tres général de rechercher ce que devient le penser continuel de l'individu, lorsque quelque condition invariable s'y impose et par un retour incessant se retrouve dans toutes les associations possibles, les altérant une à une, elle, ne s'altérant pas.

Si la pensée modifiée de la sorte est celle d'un homme de guerre, cela veut dire que l'oubli de la condition imposée sera tres rudement puni

Dans les têtes où cet Ennemi imaginaire existe, il est plus ou moins défini Une armée en campagne, dans un pays dur, isolée, a un horizon ennemi On connaît plus ou moins l'adversaire, sa force, sa position, sa vitesse, son projet, et l'idée que lui-même se fait de vous L'image en est d'autant moins dangereuse qu'elle est plus déterminée, et qu'elle peut moins gâter, avec son vague, la logique ou les rêveries de ses sujets

Je m'aperçois à l'instant qu'il serait possible—entre autres essais—d'*exprimer* la suite des événements d'une guerre, *par* les changements de l'unique idée de l'ennemi dans un des témoins, le long de la durée des opérations En construisant chacun des termes de cette suite, on aurait une représentation incomplète, mais excessivement simple de la série des faits, et on se figurerait, par la variation d'une sorte de quantité

are no other difficulties than those to be found everywhere, and everywhere the same

In war, if there were no symbols it would be necessary, in order to clarify the situation, to kill the other side to the last man Every battle is therefore full of conventions

The whole body of military ideas is controlled by one idea, which is fixed, and that is the idea of the Enemy This is the Non-Self of any army When a man is in war, this idea is constantly coming to him and criticizes his every moment, simply by recurrence I leave to the reader the very general problem of finding out what happens to the individual's thinking when some invariable condition is thus imposed on it and, by constant repetition, becomes a part of all its possible associations, changing them one by one, while the condition itself does not change . If the thinking thus modified is that of a man in war, this means that when he forgets the condition imposed he will be summarily punished

In those minds where the Enemy exists, he is more or less clearly defined For an army in the field, isolated in rough country, the whole horizon is hostile The adversary is more or less known his strength, position, rate of movement, plans, and his notion of you The clearer this image, the less dangerous it is, being thus less likely to obscure the logic or the meditation of the mind where it is present

It has just at this moment occurred to me that it would be possible—among other things—to *express* the series of events in a war in terms of the changes in a single witness's idea of the enemy throughout the course of operations By construing each of the terms in the series, one would have an incomplete but extremely simple representation of the sequence of events, and could conceive, as variations in a kind of homogeneous quantity, the states of mind of a human being involved in the

homogène, les états d'un être lié à l'entier des événements. Je ne dis pas qu'il faille le faire; je dis qu'il peut être intéressant de le concevoir.

Il sort de tout ceci que la grosse difficulté, dans la préparation à la guerre, est justement de s'imaginer l'Ennemi dès le temps de paix. Il faut remonter sans cesse à cette idée qui fixe et dirige tout acte militaire, et qui pâlit dans les garnisons. Il s'agit, alors, de jouer une partie sans partenaire, ce qui est extrêmement difficile : de se chercher une faute, qu'on vient de chercher à ne pas commettre, de se mettre méthodiquement au pire. Il faut aussi craindre de ne pas suffisamment craindre; enfin, c'est une objection continue qui force l'esprit à se prévoir, à se répondre, et,—le plus ardu,—à renverser brusquement le sens de tout son travail, car il doit sauter d'un côté, avec son entière application, dans l'autre.

Il faut apprendre à redouter assez les salves à blanc et les charges devant être arrêtées court.

Une telle nécessité est au fond le principe de l'éducation des troupes. Dans ces "règlements" spéciaux, petits livres bleus qu'on jette au sortir des casernes pour oublier qu'on les sait par cœur, est ramassée plus de vraie mécanique psychologique que dans les romans les meilleurs. Car les romans se donnent tout; et les livres soi-disant théoriques se tiennent dans le vague, ou dans l'exception, qui est du vague. Je citerai, entre tous ces règlements, l'étonnante "Instruction sur le tir" faite pour conduire toutes les classes d'individus jusqu'à la discipline particulière qui est son but. Seulement, il la faut lire en reconstituant tout ce qu'elle suppose, et sans songer qu'elle ennuie quelque part des jeunes gens fort instruits.

J'ajoute, à ce propos, que la difficulté de connaître et de remuer le "troupier" a été ridiculement exagérée. Rien n'est

whole sum of events. I do not say it should be done, I say it is interesting to conceive it.

From all this it emerges that the great difficulty in preparing for war is precisely that of imagining the Enemy in peacetime. This is the idea one must constantly come back to, for it determines and motivates every military act, and in garrisons it tends to grow dim. The problem is that of playing a game without a partner, which is extremely difficult, of catching oneself in the error one has just tried not to commit, of putting oneself methodically in the wrong. One must also be afraid of not being afraid enough. In short, one must exercise a kind of continuous objectivity that forces the mind to anticipate itself, respond to itself, and—most difficult of all—suddenly to reverse the direction of its whole effort, for it must leap with all its attention from one side to the other.

One must learn to be actually afraid of *blank* fire and *sham* attacks.

Such a necessity is at bottom the principle of troop instruction. In those special "regulations," those little blue books you throw away on leaving the barracks so as to forget that you know them by heart, there is more true psychological mechanics than in the best novels. For novels allow themselves anything, and theoretical works, so-called, confine themselves to the vague, or to the exception, which is always vague. Among all the regulations, I must single out the astonishing "Instructions on Firing," drafted so as to initiate all sorts of individuals into this particular discipline. Only, they must be read with all that they imply in mind, and never a thought that, somewhere or other, certain highly educated young men are finding them a bore.

In this connection, I must add that the difficulty of understanding and "inspiring" troops has been ridiculously exag-

plus élémentaire, ni mieux connu que la psychologie *intime* du soldat, quel qu'il soit. Il n'y a peut-être pas une seule bataille depuis l'histoire où cet élément — le moral du soldat — ait joué *en tant qu'inconnu* un rôle quelconque.

Ici commence le livre dont j'aurais dû parler. Au delà des spécialistes, il pourra faire réfléchir ceux que laisse indifférents le sujet de leurs réflexions.

gerated. Nothing is more elementary, or better known, than the *practical* psychology of the soldier, of whatever sort he may be. There is perhaps not one battle since history began in which this element—the soldier's morale—has played, *as an unknown*, any part whatever.

And here begins the book about which I should have been writing. In addition to specialists, it will interest all those given to reflection, whatever the subject.

Éléments d'Économie Politique Pure

Critique

[1896]

LA TROISIÈME édition du livre de M. Walras présente sous une forme complète les théories de l'auteur. M. Walras est de ceux qui pensent que le domaine de l'analyse mathématique ne saurait être trop étendu et que l'étude des phénomènes de la vie et de la société n'a rien d'incompatible a priori avec les méthodes purement quantitatives. Les adversaires de cette tendance sont généralement peu familiers avec les théories physico-mathématiques ou celles de la mécanique rationnelle. Ils pourraient y voir que l'application de l'analyse aux phénomènes dépend surtout de l'ingéniosité mise en œuvre par les fondateurs des sciences exactes. Quelle que soit donc la valeur intrinsèque des résultats de M. Walras, nous ne pouvons qu'approuver la direction de ses travaux et apprécier hautement l'effort qu'il a fait, à la suite de Cournot, de Gossen et de Jevons, pour constituer une Économie mathématique.

Nous ne saurions donner ici un exposé de cet ouvrage. Par cela même qu'il est de nature mathématique, il ne pourrait être *raconté* ni *résumé*. On peut dire des bons ouvrages mathématiques, que le rapport de leur forme à leur fond est constant.

M. Walras commence par dégager, dans le fouillis des phénomènes sociaux, ceux qui pourront lui servir à créer un "espace économique," c'est-à-dire un ensemble de variables liées par des relations purement quantitatives et sur lesquelles

Elements of Pure Political Economy

A Review

[1896]

THE THIRD edition of M Walras' book presents the author's theories in complete form M Walras is one of those who think that the field of mathematical analysis cannot be too widely extended and that the study of the phenomena of life and society is not, a priori, incompatible with purely quantitative methods The opponents of this tendency are generally unfamiliar with physicomathematical theories or with theoretical mechanics Such theory could show them that it was largely the ingenuity exercised by the founders of the exact sciences that made possible the application of analysis to phenomena. Whatever may be the intrinsic value of M Walras' results, therefore, we cannot but approve the direction of his labors and highly appreciate the effort he has made, following Cournot, Gossen, and Jevons, to found mathematical economics

We cannot here give a full account of his book The very fact that it is of a mathematical nature means that it can be neither paraphrased nor summarized Of good mathematical works it may be said that there is a constant relation between their form and their content

M Walras begins by extricating from the welter of social phenomena those that may be used to create "economic space," that is to say, a group of variables linked by purely

on n a it plus qu a operer mathematiquement pour connaitre les proprietes de leurs combinaisons et de leurs variations C est sur ce debut indispensable que la critique devra s acharner N us regrett ns d y tr uver maint paragraphe depourvu de rigueur et de criticisme et tout un chapitre (2ᵉ leçon) sur la distinction entre la science l art et la morale qui nous m ntre que l esprit analytique de M Walras ne s est pas souvent ecarte du domaine de l economie pure * Nous regrettons egalement de ne pas rencontrer en tete du volume —au lieu d une esquisse de la the rie des fonctions qui est insuffisante à la fois pour le mathematicien et pour le non-mathematicien —une idee generale de la methode physico-mathematique et surtout un bref expose de la theorie des *unites* Toute explication est soumise a la necessite d exprimer tout un ordre de phenomenes par les combinaisons d un nombre limite et generalement petit de quantites variables soigneusement determinees Ainsi la mecanique rationnelle a pour unique but de ramener tout probleme qu elle se pose à une equation entre le temps l espace et la masse et cette restriction est evidemment fondee sur la nature philosophique et logique d une explication M Walras pour avoir neglige l expose dont nous parlons pour avoir passe à peu pres sous silence les idees si importantes de *continuité* et la generalisation de l idee de *mesure* a ete contraint de poser d une façon assez embarrassee sa definition de la valeur et du prix Il n est pas jusqu a la remarquable equation du numero 117

$$x_1 + y_1 p_b + z_1 p_c + w_1 p_d = 0$$

* M Walras cite à la page 69 de son ouvrage u s M *de Quincey* *Thomas de Quincey* probablement inf rieur comme économiste n en est pas moins un des meilleurs prosateurs de l Angleterre tr s con u en France par la tra l ict on de Ch Baudelaire C'était l n d é comme le croit M Walras un q *dam*

quantitative relations, on which one has only to perform certain mathematical operations to learn the properties of their combinations and variations It is to this indispensable beginning that the critic should pay particular attention We regret to find here many a paragraph lacking rigor and critical method, and a whole chapter (the second lecture) on the distinction between science, art, and moral thought which shows that M Walras' analytical mind has not often looked beyond the field of pure economics * We also regret not finding as an introduction to the volume (instead of an outline of the theory of functions, inadequate alike for the mathematician and the nonmathematician) a general exposition of the physicomathematical method and, in particular, a brief account of the theory of *units* Any explication must necessarily express a whole order of phenomena as combinations of a limited number, generally small, of carefully determined variable quantities Thus, the sole aim of theoretical mechanics is to reduce every problem it undertakes to an equation between time, space, and mass, and this restriction is plainly based on the philosophical and logical nature of an explication. Having neglected to give the account as indicated, and having almost entirely passed over in silence the important idea of *continuity* and the general theory of *measurement*, M Walras has been obliged to set out his definition of value and price in a somewhat cramped fashion Even the remarkable equation number 117

$$x_1 + y_1 p_b + z_1 p_c + w_1 p_d \quad = 0$$

*On p 69, M Walras mentions 'a certain Mr de Quincey " Thomas De Quincey, probably a poor economist, is nevertheless one of England's finest prose writers, well known in France through Charles Baudelaire's translation He was far from being, as M Walras thinks, a nonentity [P V]

qui exprime que la somme des quantites offertes et demandees a divers prix est nulle qui ne se presente assez desavantageusement a cause de l insuffisance du contexte

Mais tout ceci n est qu une querelle de forme Le malheur est qu elle nous parait porter sur la portion importante du travail de M Walras sur l analyse primitive des faits qui doit preceder l analyse mathematique Des que le calcul peut intervenir on peut dire que les difficultes sont terminees et il ne reste plus enfin que la lecture des resultats ou leur controle c est-a-dire la comparaison des nouveaux rapports que les operations d algebre degagent avec la realite

Rappelons *enfin* que des speculations comme celles de M Walras meritent plus que toutes autres d etre encouragees En dehors de l attrait special qu elles presentent et du document qu elles offrent a l histoire si passionnante de l expansion mathematique elles impliquent un veritable courage et un beau dedain pour le succes immediat n oublions pas que les economistes mathematiciens sont aussi rares que les mathematiciens economistes et que personne n est tendre pour les fondateurs de quelque chose

which says that the sum of the quantities of supply and demand *at various prices is zero, is presented somewhat disadvantageously* for lack of context

But all this is only a quarrel about form The unfortunate thing is that, to us, it seems to have a bearing on the important part of M Walras' work—I mean the primary analysis of facts, which should precede mathematical analysis Once computation has begun, it may be said that the difficulties are over and all that remains is to read off the results, or to verify them —that is, to check the new relations brought out by the operations of algebra against the facts

Let us emphasize, in concluding, that speculations such as those of M Walras deserve above all others to be encouraged Apart from their special attraction and the documentary evidence they add to the fascinating history of the development of mathematics, they imply real courage and a fine disdain for immediate success We must remember that economists who know mathematics are as rare as mathematicians who know economics, and that no one feels kindly toward pioneers in any field.

Le Yalou*

Civilization, according to the interpretation of the Occident serves only to satisfy men of large desires.
VICOMTE TORIO

EN SEPTEMBRE mil huit cent quatre-vingt-quinze, et en Chine, un jour bleu et blanc, le lettré me conduisit à un phare de bois noir, sur le sable du rivage. Nous quittâmes les derniers bosquets. Nous marchâmes, dormants, assoupis par la paresse du sol en poudre fondante, par qui étaient bus nos efforts, et qui descendait sous nos pas. Nous quittâmes le sable, enfin. Je regardai, en résumé, la vague trace de notre chemin se tordre et fuser sur la plage. Je vis dans les jambes du phare cligner la lumière de l'eau. A chaque marche, nous devenions plus légers, et nous respirions et nous voyions davantage. Vers la mi-hauteur, nous devînmes plus lourds. Un vent plein et bien tendu se mit heureusement à exister: il a tâtonné les barres de bois tièdes à travers la soie se gonflant de la robe du Chinois. La mer monte avec nous. Toute la vue nous vint comme un frais aliment. Là-haut, il faisait si bon que nous sentîmes bientôt un petit besoin à satisfaire. Au bout d'un temps indifférent, la douce égalité du mouvement, du calme nous saisit. La mer, qui me remuait tendrement, me rendait facile. Elle emplissait tout le reste de ma vie, avec une grande patience qui me faisait plaisir: elle m'usait, je me sentais de-

* Cet essai a été écrit en 1895 pendant la première guerre sino-japonaise [P. V.] For translation see pp. 371 ff.—J. M.

venir régulier Les ondes, tournant sans peine, me donnaient la sensation de fumer, après avoir beaucoup fumé, et de devoir fumer infiniment encore C'est alors que le souvenir édulcoré de maintes choses importantes passa aisément dans mon esprit je sentis une volupté principale à y penser avec indifférence, je souris à l'idée que ce bien-être pouvait éliminer certaines erreurs, et m'éclairer Donc Et je baissai mes paupières, ne voyant plus de la brillante mer que ce qu'on voit d'un petit verre de liqueur dorée, portée aux yeux Et je fermai les yeux Les sons de la promenade de l'eau me comblaient

J'ignore comment vint à mon compagnon un desir de parler et de vaincre l'air délicieux, l'oubli Je me disais Que va-t-il dire? aux premiers mots obscurs

—Nippon, dit-il, nous fait la guerre Ses grands bateaux blancs fument dans nos mauvais rêves Ils vont troubler nos golfes Ils feront des feux dans la nuit paisible

—Ils sont très forts, soupirai-je, ils nous imitent

—Vous êtes des enfants, dit le Chinois, je connais ton Europe.

—En souriant tu l'as visitée

—J'ai peut-être souri Sûrement, à l'ombre des autres regards, j'ai ri La figure que je me vois seul, riait abondamment, tandis que les joyeux moqueurs qui me suivaient et me montraient du doigt n'auraient pu supporter la réflexion de leur propre rire Mais je voyais et je touchais le désordre insensé de l'Europe Je ne puis même pas comprendre la durée, pourtant bien courte, d'une telle confusion Vous n'avez ni la patience qui tisse les longues vies, ni le sentiment de l'irrégularité, ni le sens de la place la plus exquise d'une chose, ni la connaissance du gouvernement Vous vous épuisez à recommencer sans cesse l'œuvre du premier jour Vos pères

ainsi sont deux fois morts, et vous, vous avez peur de la mort.

Chez vous, le pouvoir ne peut rien. Votre politique est faite de repentirs, elle conduit à des révolutions générales, et ensuite aux regrets des révolutions, qui sont aussi des révolutions. Vos chefs ne commandent pas, vos hommes libres travaillent, vos esclaves vous font peur, vos grands hommes baisent les pieds des foules, adorent les petits, ont besoin de tout le monde. Vous êtes livrés à la richesse et à l'opinion féroces. Mais touche de ton esprit la plus exquise de vos erreurs.

L'intelligence, pour vous, n'est pas une chose comme les autres. Elle n'est ni prévue, ni amortie, ni protégée, ni réprimée, ni dirigée, vous l'adorez comme une bête prépondérante. Chaque jour elle dévore ce qui existe. Elle aimerait à terminer chaque soir un nouvel état de société. Un particulier qu'elle enivre, compare sa pensée aux décisions des lois, aux faits eux-mêmes, nés de la foule et de la durée : il confond le rapide changement de son cœur avec la variation imperceptible des formes réelles et des Êtres durables. (Durant une fleur, mille désirs ont existé, mille fois, on a pu jouir d'avoir trouvé le défaut de la corolle . . . mille corolles qu'on a crues plus belles ont été coloriées dans l'esprit, mais ont disparu . . .) C'est par cette loi que l'intelligence méprise les lois . . . et vous encouragez sa violence ! Vous en êtes fous jusqu'au moment de la peur. Car vos idées sont terribles et vos cœurs faibles. Vos pitiés, vos cruautés sont absurdes, sans calme, comme irrésistibles. Enfin, vous craignez le sang, de plus en plus. Vous craignez le sang et le temps.

Cher barbare, ami imparfait, je suis un lettré du pays de Thsin, près de la mer Bleue. Je connais l'écriture, le commandement à la guerre, et la direction de l'agriculture. Je veux ignorer votre maladie d'inventions et votre débauche

de mélange d'idées. Je sais quelque chose de plus puissant. Oui, nous, hommes d'ici, nous mangeons par millions continuels, les plus favorables vallées de la terre, et la profondeur de ce *golfe* immense d'individus garde la forme d'une famille ininterrompue depuis les premiers temps Chaque homme d'ici se sent fils et père, entre le mille et le dix mille, et se voit saisi dans le peuple autour de lui, et dans le peuple mort au-dessous de lui, et dans le peuple a venir, comme la brique dans le mur de briques Il tient Chaque homme d'ici sait qu'il n'est rien sans cette terre pleine, et hors de la merveilleuse construction d'ancêtres Au point ou les aieux pâlissent, commencent les foules des Dieux Celui qui médite peut mesurer dans sa *pensée* la belle *forme* et la solidité de notre tour éternelle.

Songe à la trame de notre race, et, dis-moi, vous qui coupez vos racines et qui desséchez vos fleurs, comment existez-vous encore? Sera-ce longtemps?

Notre empire est tissu de vivants et de morts et de la nature. Il existe parce qu'il arrange toutes les choses Ici, tout est historique une certaine fleur, la douceur d'une heure qui tourne, la chair délicate des lacs entr'ouverts par le rayon, une éclipse émouvante Sur ces choses, se rencontrent les esprits de nos pères avec les nôtres Elles se reproduisent et, tandis que nous répétons les sons qu'ils leur ont donnés pour noms, le souvenir nous joint à eux et nous éternise

Tels, nous semblons dormir et nous sommes méprisés *Pourtant, tout se dissout dans notre* magnifique quantité Les conquérants se perdent dans notre eau jaune Les armées étrangères se noient dans le flux de notre génération, ou s'écrasent contre nos ancêtres Les chutes majestueuses de nos fleuves d'existences et la descente grossissante de nos pères les emportent.

Il nous faut donc une politique infinie, atteignant les deux fonds du temps qui conduisent mille millions d'hommes, de leurs pères à leurs fils sans que les liens se brisent ou se brouillent. Là est l'immense direction sans désir. Vous nous jugez inertes. Nous conservons simplement la sagesse suffisante pour croître démesurément, au delà de toute puissance humaine et pour vous voir, malgré votre science furieuse, vous fondre dans les eaux pleines du pays de Thsin. Vous qui savez tant de choses, vous ignorez les plus antiques et les plus fortes, et vous désirez avec fureur ce qui est immédiat, et vous détruisez en même temps vos pères et vos fils.

Doux, cruels, subtils ou barbares, nous étions ce qu'il faut à son heure. Nous ne voulons pas savoir trop. La science des hommes ne doit pas s'augmenter indéfiniment. Si elle s'étend toujours, elle cause un trouble incessant et elle se désespère elle-même. Si elle s'arrête, la décadence paraît. Mais, nous qui pensons à une durée plus forte que la force de l'Occident, nous évitons l'ivresse dévorante de sagesse. Nous gardons nos anciennes réponses, nos Dieux, nos étages de puissance. Si l'on n'avait conservé aux supérieurs, l'aide inépuisable des incertitudes de l'esprit, si, en détruisant la simplicité des hommes, on avait excité le désir en eux, et changé la notion qu'ils ont d'eux-mêmes,—si les supérieurs étaient restés seuls dans une nature devenue mauvaise, vis-à-vis du nombre effrayant des sujets et de la violence des désirs,—ils auraient succombé, et avec eux, toute la force de tout le pays. Mais notre écriture est trop difficile. Elle est politique. Elle renferme les idées. Ici, pour pouvoir penser, il faut connaître des signes nombreux, seuls y parviennent les lettrés, au prix d'un labeur immense. Les autres ne peuvent réfléchir profondément, ni combiner leurs informes desseins. Ils sentent, mais le sentiment est toujours une chose enfermée. Tous les pouvoirs contenus dans

l'intelligence restent donc aux lettrés, et un ordre inébranlable se fonde sur la difficulté et l'esprit

Rappelle-toi maintenant que vos grandes inventions eurent chez nous leur germe Comprends-tu désormais pourquoi elles n'ont pas été poursuivies? Leur perfection spéciale eût gâté notre lente et grande existence en troublant le régime simple de son cours Tu vois qu'il ne faut pas nous mépriser, car, nous avons inventé la poudre pour brandir, le soir, des fusées

Je regarde Le Chinois était déjà très petit sur le sable, regagnant les bosquets de l'intérieur Je laisse passer quelques vagues J'entends un mélange de tous les oiseaux légèrement bouillir dans la brise ou dans une vapeur d'arbustes, derrière moi et loin La mer me soigne

A quoi penser? Pensai-je? Que reste-t-il à saisir? Ou repousser ce qui maintenant me caresse, satisfaisant, habile, aisé? Se mouvoir, en goûtant certaines difficultés, là-dedans, dans l'air? Tu me reposes, simple idée de me transporter si haut, et, au moindre élan, si près de toute pointe de vague qui crève, ou d'arriver vers chaque chose infiniment peu désirée, avec nul effort, un temps imperceptible selon d'immenses trajets, amusants par eux-mêmes, si faciles, et revenir Je suis attiré, dans ce calme, ma plus petite idée se corrige, en se laissant, dans tout l'espace, se satisfaire, en improvisant tout de suite son exécution parfaite et le plaisir de se contenter qui la termine Elle meurt chaque fois, ayant d'elle-même rétabli l'ensemble antérieur Mais toute autre l'imite, et s'épuise pareille, voluptueusement, car le groupe de lumière et pensée qui dans ce moment me constitue, demeure encore identique Alors, le changement est nul Le temps ne marche plus Ma vie se pose

Presque rien ne me le fait sentir, puisque je reconquiers

a chaque minute la précédente, et mon esprit voltige à tous les points d'ici Tout ce qui est possible est becqueté Si tous les points de l'étendue d'ici se confondent successivement —si je puis en finir si vite avec ce qui continue,—si cette eau brillante qui tourne et s'enfonce comme une vis brillante dans le lointain de ma gauche —si cette chute de neige dorée, mince posée au large, en face

Désormais, ouverte comme une huître, la mer me rafraîchit au soleil par l'éclat de sa chair grasse et humide j'entends aussi l'eau, tout près, boire longuement, ou, dans les bois du phare, sauter à la corde, ou faire un bruit de poules

Pour mieux l'écouter, je coupe le regard Je baisse les paupières, et vois bouger bientôt deux ou trois petites fenêtres lumineuses, précieuses des lunules orangées qui se contractent et sont sensibles, une ombre où elles battent et m'aveuglent moi-même Je veux reconstruire alors toute la vue que je viens de clore, j'appelle les bleus nombreux, et les lignes fermées du tissu simple étendu sur une chose tremblante, je fais une vague qui bouffe et qui m'élève .

Je n'en puis faire mille Pourquoi? Et la mer que je formais, disparaît Déjà, je raisonne, et je trouve

Rouvrons Revenons au jour fixe Ici il faut se laisser faire

Les voilà toutes Elles se roulent je me roule Elles murmurent je parle Elles se brisent en fragments, elles se lèchent, elles retournent, elles flottent encore, elles moussent et me laissent mourant sur un sable baisé Je revis au lointain dans le premier bruit du moindre qui ressuscite, au seuil du large La force me revient Nager contre elles,—non, nager sur elles,—c'est la même chose, debout dans l'eau où les pieds se perdent le cœur en avant, les yeux fondus sans poids, sans corps

L'individu, alors, sent profondément sa liaison avec ce qui se passe sous ses yeux, l'eau

APPENDIX II

On History

Extracts from Two Letters to Andre Gide

I

March 15, 1897

I DISCOVER tonight that I am unconsciously writing history, in my own way I am reading some de Maistre—with a good bit of *pleasure To read that and Stendhal, so different, is exciting* The fumes of bygone politics go to my head It so happens that for the period 179– to 184– I have read five or six highly toxic books In history, I have absolutely no respect for facts, and this will continue until someone shows me that it is impossible to replace one event by any other, with no trouble at all. Except for the stories, *what proof have we today that N B did not win at Waterloo?* No necessity whatever For all the facts are, perforce, entirely *imagined*—that is, they are not *hard* facts

Reading de Maistre (such a great writer and to my mind juicier than any Chateaubriand), I am polishing up my own ideas (sometimes *a contrario*, sometimes in accord) on a certain subject . Governing is as much a lost art as stained glass or building. The present situation and those asinine pro-Greeks make no sense France is no longer of any interest The whole of contemporary history is dominated by fear—which plays into the hands of the fakers in Athens and the Paris pinks It would be interesting to show, step by step, how rare a thing

clear ideas are how little thinking goes into the very simplest matters You are probably fed up with my rage on that score It is crystal clear that for the past X years we haven't had a single statesman a single diplomat (nor a single literary statesman in literature) And I m not playing any favorites

II

July 15, 1908

By chance, have been reading some Michelet, *La Revolution* It gave me a fit of *literary* indignation That stuff is made to be preached in some popular university, there's not a word in it worth *reflection*, not one sentence that could undress and take to the mental bed of an honest man All that claptrap has never been *put through* the intellect (it would have come to pieces and dissolved) but merely blurted out to the superficial public

Extracts from Two Letters to André Lebey

I

August 30, 1906

WHY OF COURSE, obviously I have dug into history at a few points So have you!—so has everybody! But which points, and when, and how?

That's easy what happened to me yesterday, some incident in my life, a certain phase, seeing a friend on a certain day, meeting and judging some man, etc These are facts just as historical as the treaty of Westphalia

Now, by means of these immediate facts, about these facts, around them and because of them, I have been obliged to question myself, clarify my mind—look for motives, connections, suppositions, ways of simplifying, etc

In particular, I have been forced to *dissociate* the facts—that is, to pound days and years into separate strands, otherwise we would have to concede that seeing M X in the morning is the *cause* of making love to Mme Y in the evening

To write general history is to transfer into a broader and much less definite area the procedures and kinds of observation learned from . anecdotes.

Such procedures are, some of them more, others less legitimate, effective, or susceptible of proof It will depend on the *art* with which I untie the tangled sequences and establish firm connections, how strong, more or less, is the impression of arbitrariness.

But it is precisely from my daily experience that I know how difficult it is to *analyze* in any satisfactory degree at all this *bouillabaisse*—life!

When it comes to my own history, I stammer and can find a certain solace only in using the instruments which I have carefully devised ahead of time in solitude—and which I am *confident will give fairly reliable results. I try not to shape* them to fit some particular circumstance. I simply try to conduct my experiment under predetermined conditions, not haphazardly. Facts have absolutely nothing to do with this entirely independent act of preparation, just as the most elementary experiment—measuring a given length—could not take place without a previously agreed system of measurement.

And to object to this means falling back on all the old instruments, which have never been checked or fitted up together. A fact picked at random can be used only by some literary writer (and even so, he tampers with it!). A scientific fact is a fact chosen so that it can be transformed step by step into systematic data, as generalized and constant as possible.

What interests me in everything is the transformation by which *chaos* is turned into something that can be handled by man. But I find that all too often the historian dispenses with this part of his job and—without realizing his mistake—adopts the kind of firsthand observation that everybody uses, and which, I repeat, contains no fewer postulates than the scientific kind, but without knowing it, and with no precautions.

In all this, you must not think I am attacking your point of view or your work. But knowing that you are about to pass judgment on an era and the men who made it—about to put a great deal of time and labor into an account of them, I say: Beware! You must do better than the ordinary historian—

the Vandal method, the Houssaye method Having already plunged into the documents, you must make them serve you Remember that *you* are the principal document

Certainly, Tacitus rather than Plutarch! But because Tacitus is a really great writer, it is not a matter of history but of art, style, staging, etc As a historian, I think he must have lied with tremendous gusto, must have exaggerated and heightened everything, to suit his antipathies and his prose style

II

September 1906

Another imposing dame—History! You ask the most terrible questions! Of all historians, which do I rate the highest? But to answer that would be to say History = Literature

If there is now such a thing as physics, it is because *today* physics is no longer dependent on Mr So-and-So

And you remind me that in fact there was a time when a whole science could hang by the thread of one man's life—that's true

Therefore, since neither you nor I want to see history absorbed into pure literature, I don't know how to answer you directly All I can tell you (and this again is fantasy) is the difference in the pleasure derived from reading de Maistre, Gobineau, and Tacitus I haven't read Mommsen, though I wanted to.

But on the other hand, and this fits into the ideas I mentioned to you about comprehensible series, I have derived something now and then from reading specialized histories—of architecture, geometry, navigation, political economy, tactics

In each of these fields every event is clearly the child of another event. You really possess History—that is, over a longer span than can be experienced by *one mortal*. Just as you can understand developments in nature only by first of all distinguishing the different species, so too you can span or unravel the centuries only by following a few sure and consistent guiding threads. In all *general* history, every child seems to have a thousand fathers and vice versa. It's the devil!

And this brings us straight to Darwin. I don't like that fellow—he leaves me cold, I can't get inside him. But no historian can pass him over. Just think, if he is right, the whole of history is changed. I mean all thinking about history. And there is no doubt that he has contributed something.

The end of the page stops me here, but not before I can protest against your notion of Salamis. The Greeks did not defeat Semites there, but rather (in part at least) the purest of Aryans, the Persians! under the command of Khschearscha, or Xerxes, and this name is respectably Indo-European. The great-grandfather of Xerxes had crushed the Babylonian Semites—that was Cyrus, and *his* empire, in the person of Darius III, was destroyed by Alexander. Good night, old man!

A Few Words

[July 1917]

OF ALL THOSE things the mind feeds on, history is the one my own finds least to its taste I could never manage on a diet of Bollandists and newspapers I have the vague idea that events are only the froth on things But things themselves are elusive and the froth on them ephemeral To call history a science is contradictory, if what we call science is a system of verifiable knowledge that remains verifiable If history is a literary genre it should be put with tales and legends, from which it can be distinguished only as prose is from verse I see no difference between reading a novel and reading a volume of history, except in terms of boredom, intelligence, experience —in short, in terms of the reader

And yet, history does exist It does have a role, a role that has nothing to do with verification And the function I assign to it will explain why I am talking about it here This is not a digression

The *true character* of history is to play a part in history itself The past as a precise idea has meaning and value only for the man who is aware that he has a passion for the future The future by definition has no image History furnishes us the means of thinking about it History constitutes an indispensable vocabulary of situations, a list of catastrophes, a gallery

of ancestors a formulary of actions expressions and decisions holding them up before our mutability and uncertainty to help us *form* what tends to come into being

Just as the theater and novels furnish for millions of men and women their models lovers and heroes their ideas of greatness and notions of crime just as they show us all the kinds of fortune good and bad all the types of situations tragic or ridiculous—with the corresponding phraseology—so does history nourish history Livy produces Romans Machiavelli's strange *prince* A king of France on the scaffold is the response to a king of England on the scaffold Our Revolution which was haunted by the Museum of Antiquities is now in turn haunting the first impulses of the revolution in Russia Bonaparte sought himself in Caesar and Frederick the Great confided in no one but them and held his critics up before them to be judged And how many men how many peoples even have tried to be Napoleon!

History is a magic book in which we read nothing but what we think we ought to be We leaf through centuries that strike us as dim and past but suddenly a page stops us a figure looks our way without knowing it we communicate to him a secret thought an absurd inadmissible invincible thought and he *never fails* to answer us with a fleeting sign of complicity full of promise and sadness

In this way we shorten our fumbling search for ourselves! A man says That is the day I would like to have seen! And there he has discovered what he will later call his political opinion

For history finally leads to politics just as Bacchus used to lead to Venus History in relation to politics can act as an appetizer It predisposes us just as a menu can provoke a succulent foretaste of a dinner

But by a negative consequence of this premise, anyone who is cool or skeptical toward history, will also be resistant to politics I confess that here I am summing up the deplorable part I played a thousand times, in those days, in conversations with André Lebey

. .

Politics! At that word, I am overcome with silence I am aware that I have nothing more to say No! I will not follow my friend through that inextricable complex of corridors, chambers, and dens, I shall not go into that restricted area, whose secrets I should be quite incapable of explaining to you It is said to be a place of prodigies and wonders, where miracles really happen, where, by an effect of the most deceptive catoptrics, reflections and flickering lights and echoes abound and reverberate On plazas decorated with urns and rostrums, all of Bacon's idols—and a few he had not foreseen —are set up There, vibrant and buzzing, are the emissaries, the meddlers, the bores, the buffoons And don't imagine that their words are winged! Some roar, others whisper in your ear Some know everything and are silent. Those who talk know nothing By a trick of inverted lights, friends see each other as enemies, fools look impressive to the intelligent, who in turn see themselves as tiny indeed Here we watch fuming retorts in endless operation, where the most astonishing mixtures and the subtlest analyses are being made power distilled from impotence, law from doubt, and, everlastingly, doubt from law And circulating through the crowd—being forbidden to tarry—are a number of handsome girls belonging strictly to no one, but greeted by all, with a smile so intimate they cannot understand it, someone is always pointing to legitimate Reason as she passes in her majesty, inconsolable

sions, to enrich it with one's own riches, and yet, in the midst of it, to maintain one's own intellectual and inner preoccupations so that the management of public affairs may be ennobled by them, the second is the exact opposite it consists in taking from politics all one's ideas, along with power and many other resources This is living off politics instead of giving it life. These two ways are sometimes mixed

Conversation on History*

[1938]

ALPHA All history is false and more than that useless It has no attraction for my mind

OMEGA But don t you think that a civilization is shaky if it is based on an artificial language? Why couldn t history be made into a science or a philosophy?

A Science is necessarily transmissible Philosophy is a strictly personal matter But history can neither be transmitted nor become personal Anyway, what does history matter?

My friends cannot understand my indifference to the past What is history, as we have it? It is made up of accounts given by witnesses, generally in writing, and these undergo a double selection one by the witness, which is partial if not tendentious, and the other by the historian The first is a source of incoherence, a collection of lifeless things The second is always arbitrary

We put into history our *present* energy and our whole stock of images, necessarily drawn from the present We fit it out in our sympathies and antipathies, we construct systems of events and give a kind of arbitrary life and substance to characters institutions, or incidents gotten from documents in the form of verbal arguments, often extremely sketchy if not fragmentary

It may be that all we know of history is a series of abso-

* Between Valéry (Alpha) and Lo Duca (Omega) —J M

lutely unimportant events, those we do not know may be infinitely more important All because we were not there For instance, what is the value of those ancient peace treaties like the Treaty of Utrecht, when compared to that reality they never mentioned but which was passed down to us—probably as a gift from the New World—syphilis?

O Details aside, wouldn't it be possible simply to look for a guiding thread to follow events by?

A. Now we're getting to the point

For some, history comes down to a photograph album, scenes, a show For others, it is a record of human experience to be consulted—as we do meteorological data, and for the same purpose—to find in the past some clue to the future I don't believe we can find or even look for a guiding thread What thread could have led us to predict a Hitler? or a Mussolini? Nonsense!

I remember a quip of Henri Poincaré's on Carlyle The Scottish historian was walking past the bridge at Montereau

"To think," he said with deep feeling, 'that John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, once crossed this very bridge, just before he was murdered"

And Poincaré added, as a physicist "Cheer up! He won't do it again"

O But to get back to the matter of fabrications To what do you attribute their flourishing, for example, in French history—that is to say, the best known history in the world

A To violent partisanship, no doubt, which has always held the country in its grip No historian has managed to be impartial, and the partisan violence of half the people has always done its best to banish the other half—from past and future alike

The notion of photography—could a certain narrated

event have been photographed?—ought to be used as a test of historical knowledge which would break it down into eyewitness accounts candid camera shots But alas! photography brings in further reasons for caution

O Your remark is very much to my point It seems to me that the unquestioning acceptance of almost entirely fabricated history has helped to increase the violence I have quoted Malet s story about the nobleman of Perigord ' who cut off his serfs feet, while his wife tore off the peasant women s breasts (sic) After such fabrications, how could man not be born hating?

A I didn t know that one But why try to probe further? It would only reveal a hideous confusion, an awful chaos I don't care for those among my contemporaries whose skulls are seething with a mixture of togas and airplanes

O Isn t that the fate sir, of those who can only think in scraps of thought?

A History is dangerous mainly because of its invitation to plagiarism A fatal invitation

If I were asked to say a few words about Louis XIV, what would I say? Judged by his own time, he was a disagreeable tyrant who built a mediocre palace and some fine gardens Anyhow, figures of this kind land up at some "Madame Tussaud's' of the imagination You can see those imposing dummies wigs and gold braid—glittering but mute All that is left of Napoleon is his forelock, of Louis Philippe, his gout That's what history comes down to

O Is nothing left but to give it up?

A One the other hand, there are some very lively things in that country Its vague boundaries sometimes wander over into the organized territory of science, or into the forests of legend

I saw recently, in a handsome catalogue of autographs, a letter by General Sir Henry Shrapnel, written four or five days after Waterloo, in which he said something like this: "The battle was won by my new shells."

Shrapnel? So all we have been told is untrue! That battle, depicted as so confused—the Emperor feverish, Grouchy late—all that is false? Was Waterloo in fact nothing more than the triumph of a new kind of equipment, General Shrapnel's "excellent shell"?

Q. We would seem to be in agreement. All we can ask of history is to show us letters like General Shrapnel's, which excited your curiosity, your "search for what is real"—for the "concrete evidence."

A. *Are you any better off? I know of nothing madder than wanting to be right.*

tinction between a *true* document and a *false* one believed to be true, etc

I haven't the time or the energy to go on But don't imagine that I have said the essential thing

My plan of operation consists in attempting to expose *all the implicit conventions* which the idea of History cannot do without, and which it projects into the minds of those interested in it

APPENDIX III

Valéry's Role in the League of Nations

FORENOTE

IT SEEMS worth while to supplement the essays in Part V of the main text by a few of the speeches, impromptu or written, which Valéry made as a member of the League's Permanent Committee on Arts and Letters

The Council of the League of Nations in 1922 created the *Committee on Intellectual Co-operation* Three years later this Committee created the Sub-Committee on Arts and Letters, with Valéry as one of its members This Sub-Committee in its early years was occupied for the most part with practical questions, among them the promotion of translation It was in this connection that Valéry in 1926 made the proposals to be found in "An Exchange for Literary Values," p 535

His presence in Geneva, his electrifying intelligence and wit soon made him a leading figure, and by 1930 his own intellectual interests had become the dominant influence in the committee On his recommendation the Sub-Committee was transformed in 1931 into the *Permanent Committee on Arts and Letters*, with a program strongly reflecting his own turn of mind Its members were Béla Bartók (Hungary), Karel Čapek (Czechoslovakia), Costa du Rels (Bolivia), Henri Focillon (France), Julien Luchaire (France), Salvador de Madariaga (Spain), Thomas Mann (Germany), John Masefield (England), Ugo Ojetti (Italy), Gheorghe Oprescu (Romania), Ragnar Ostberg (Sweden), Roberto Paribeni (Italy),

Nini Roll-Anker (Norway), Josef Strzygowski (Austria), Helene Vacaresco (Romania), Paul Valéry (France), Wilhelm Waetzold (Germany).

This Committee now planned to engage in "intellectual co-operation at the highest level," which meant that it was to conduct exchanges between minds occupied with the "creation of ideas, the invention of forms and combinations of thought, and the discovery and interpretation of facts." The means of such exchange were to be of two kinds: *Conversations* and *Correspondence*—i.e., debates and exchanges of letters. The results were to be published in two series of volumes under those titles by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation in Paris.

One of the first volumes of *Correspondence* to be published was an exchange of letters between Einstein and Freud on the subject *Why War?* (1933). Number One in the series, however, was *Toward a League of Minds* (1933), containing two contributions by Valéry: the "Introduction," written in collaboration with Henri Focillon and here given the title "Toward a Correspondence" (p. 348), and a letter to Salvador de Madariaga, later given the title here translated as "Toward a League of Minds" (p. 354; for Madariaga's reply, see p. 555).

The series of debates, or *Conversations*—in French, *Entretiens*—became one of Valéry's principal activities during the 1930's.

The FIRST SESSION was held at Frankfurt-am-Main, May 12–14, 1932, in commemoration of the centenary of Goethe's death. There were lectures on Goethe by Thomas Mann, Salvador de Madariaga, Gilbert Murray, Henri Focillon, and Valéry—among others. Valéry's lecture, "Comment je vois Goethe," was a partial version of one he had delivered two

weeks earlier (April 30) at the Sorbonne This lecture and two of his interventions in the discussion on Goethe will be found in Vol 9 of the Collected Works

SECOND SESSION Madrid, May 3–7, 1933 Subject *The Future of Culture* Madame Curie presided Valéry spoke little His reply, at the request of Madame Curie, to a speech of welcome by the Minister of Education will be found on page 537.

THIRD SESSION Paris, October 16–18, 1933, under the auspices of the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation. Subject *The Future of the European Mind* Valéry presided His speeches opening and adjourning the conference are given here (pp 541 ff) In the course of this meeting, a new organization, La Société d'Études Européennes, was created—a society of two hundred members devoted to the study of intellectual questions affecting the future of European civilization Its aim was to make Europeans aware of the unity of their culture Valéry was elected President of the Society

FOURTH SESSION Venice, July 25–28, 1934. Two subjects I *The Contemporary Arts and Reality*, II *Art and the State.* Valéry did not attend.

FIFTH SESSION Nice, April 1–3, 1935, held at the new Mediterranean University, of which Valéry was the newly appointed Administrator Subject *The Education of Modern Man* In his double role as host and participant, Valéry gave the address of welcome (See Vol 11 of the Collected Works)

SIXTH SESSION Budapest, June 8–11, 1936 Subject *Toward a New Humanism the Role of the Humanities in the Education of Modern Man* Valéry presided, having succeeded Jules Destrée as Chairman of the Permanent Committee on Arts and Letters See his Address of Thanks, pp 547 ff

SEVENTH SESSION Buenos Aires, September 14–16, 1936, held in conjunction with the international congress of PEN

Clubs Subject *Relations between European and Latin-American Cultures* Valery did not attend

EIGHTH SESSION Paris, July 20–24, 1937, held at the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, in connection with the opening of the International Exposition of Arts and Sciences Subject *Literature in the Near Future* Valery presided His opening remarks as chairman are to be found, in a revised and somewhat reduced version, in the article "Is the Mind a Luxury?", p 365 Some preliminary considerations which he wrote in preparation for the congress are included here (p 550)

NINTH AND LAST SESSION Nice, October 27–29, 1938, held again at the Mediterranean University Purpose to discuss changes that should be made in the conduct of future *Conversations* Valery proposed that the subject of the next meeting (1939) should be *Quality and Life* The subject was adopted, but the meeting was never held

J M

An Exchange for Literary Values*

[Geneva, 1926]

THE ESSENTIAL requirement for any intellectual co-operation between nations that speak different languages is that the principal works of *each of the various nations* should be known in a certain measure to the other (It goes without saying that certain works of no less importance—particularly those whose principal value is in their form—can never be appreciated save in the original text What I am about to say, then, applies especially to books that are interesting for the facts or ideas they contain) I have therefore proposed that this subcommittee should submit to the League of Nations a scheme for instituting prizes to reward translators, or more precisely, translation

I had in mind the formation of a special international committee, meeting once a year, whose task would be to express the wishes of the various nations (once they were ascertained) and then to discuss the contents of a list of works to be recommended to translators It would, in short, be a real "exchange for transmissible literary values" (For there are nontransmissible ones—as poets well know!)

Such an Exchange would make it possible for supply and demand to have free play

In effect, one people would be saying to another "You ought to know something about my finest products!"

*Written

It might happen—rarely but such a paradox has sometimes occurred—that a nation would become aware of the value of a book it had itself produced but disregarded to the point of complete ignorance or contempt It would find this book translated and honored in some foreign literature Such was the remarkable case of the works of Edgar Poe Baudelaire s translations and praise made them famous throughout the world not excepting the country of their origin Such also was Gobineau s case the attention his work aroused in Germany led to its being re-read (or read) in France and ranked somewhat higher here

In short the aim of the committee would be by resorting to artificial means (subsidies for translation) to distribute the wealth of reading matter in the various languages and to fill some astonishing gaps

Other prizes, not administered by this organization, would be instituted for translators in general

Furthermore, measures to encourage translation should include editors of reviews and publishers For, in practice, translation and publication are inseparable

Finally, I should be glad to see such measures supplemented by rewards to those writers who by commentary and criticism help to make foreign literatures known, and who create the demand which translations can then satisfy

The Future of Culture*

[Madrid, 1933]

YOUR Excellency, you have come into the midst of a critical discussion, which yet, in spite of the differences that may have arisen, is precisely one of those debates for which we were constituted I shall make so bold as to say, although I am in Spain and although I see Señor de Unamuno here, that you have before you an assemblage of Don Quixotes—Don Quixotes of the mind, fighting their windmills I must confess how very glad I am that this meeting—which, as our distinguished chairman Madame Curie has told you, I am somewhat responsible for initiating—has taken place, and has done so in Madrid

It is particularly fortunate that this first meeting, this first trial, should be held in Spain, a nation both illustrious and ancient, yet which itself at this moment is making a most remarkable experiment In particular, one of the aspects of the present Spanish experiment that strikes us, and must especially do so, is the fact that you have summoned intellectuals to the highest posts in the State Spain has ministers and ambassadors, some of them present here, who are our intellectual brothers It may be said that, hitherto, a politician rose either

*Impromptu

by his own energy or by his oratorical sway over the masses but you are now drawing your highest political personnel or so I believe from the top rank of Spanish intellectuals I assure you that I am following with the keenest interest the progress of your present institutions and the great and admirable effort you are making for the development of culture You have around you a staff who go into the villages of Spain disseminating knowledge books and in fact every possible document to give the people the means of culture It is a magnificent undertaking

Many years ago now struck by the general state of the world and in particular by that aspect of things that for me is of the highest interest—I mean the world of the mind—it occurred to me that a moment would come when either individuals or nations or *still more inclusive groups like those* in Geneva would have to undertake to establish or at least to conceive a *policy for the mind* just as there is an oil policy and a grain policy It seemed to me that we could not remain indefinitely in the state of profound incoherence and perpetual threat of which the mind is now a victim in every possible way first in the persons of intellectuals themselves whose material situation is often so hard nowadays—we see examples of this daily—then in the ever deeper division between the different conceptions of life that are becoming ever more apparent around us and finally in the very interesting and for the mind extremely dangerous consequences arising from the fact that the modern world has rather suddenly found itself facing a large number of vital problems so new and of such scope complexity and urgency that neither a knowledge of the past nor the vastest intelligence nor even deliberate human action of any kind seems able to solve them In more than one country the result has been a kind of repudiation of

culture Some would blame mechanization, others skepticism, others freedom, but all would blame *the mind*

The League of Nations, which initiated our intellectual co-operation, perhaps did not at the start see the direction which modern circumstances would require such co-operation to take

Overstepping my rights perhaps, or my authority, I happened to say a few years ago in Geneva—and this was to some extent the origin of our Committee—that a *league of nations* presupposes a *league of minds*, and that it was useless to go on making more or less fragile or ephemeral pacts, conventions, and agreements, if the men who in fact had either to carry out those pacts or endure their consequences, were not themselves animated by a sincere and profound *spirit of agreement*—not written agreement but an agreement of minds on certain fundamental points of human thought That is what made me propose some years ago that the Committee's largely administrative work, which was respectable enough and obviously necessary when the task of intellectual co-operation first began, should be replaced by a more effective kind of work, dealing with ideas themselves and not solely with procedures I thought it would be an altogether interesting task, even an essential one for the intellectuals who composed the Committee, to try facing, together, the various problems constantly posed by the intellect and the needs of the intellect I do not know how this venture will end, nor what the result will be I believe that the experiment had to be made, that an intellectual policy had to be given a trial, a first formulation, and that its aim should be not only to protect the livelihood of intellectuals but also to establish the importance of their function in the life of society All politics imply an idea of man and of man's duty Working out these ideas is an es-

sential task It is therefore natural to think that those who are dedicated to clarifying, criticizing, and formulating ideas as such must not be ignored by the public authorities and deprived of all but the scattered, unorganized, and indirect results of their writings and influence

The Future of the European Mind*

[Paris, 1933]

I

Opening Address

We are faced with a situation which has forced even those unaccustomed to reflecting on the destiny of the mind, or indifferent to it, to look back from time to time on the splendid past of our culture and to wonder what is to be the future of this considerable capital, composed not only of knowledge—all that enormous store of documents, techniques, and special skills—but above all of something we call "mind," that is to say, a certain way of transforming whatever occurs to us, either adapting it to our vital functions or using it against them

Many centuries ago, a certain tendency became manifest, a certain intellectual way of being, which in our time has been called "the European mind," but which in past centuries had *many different names*, "Christianity," "humanism," etc This tendency long since took on for us the character of a conviction, an invincible hope in the future of knowledge and its eventual absolute reign Only a few years ago we still thought that in the world of the mind there were definite values, solutions found once for all, that a certain way of thinking, a certain general freedom of thought, a will to in-

*Impromptu

tellectual sincerity, intellectual precision, had somehow gained, once for all the confidence of all humanity, and that the great game played by the will to know and the will to create, against the nature of things and particularly against human nature would continue henceforth without any great difficulty *the gaming table would never again be upset*, as it had been, for example, at the close of ancient civilization But events of every nature, some in the political, others in the economic, and even certain events in the intellectual order, have created an anxiety in our minds which is the image of our confused situation, and makes for a general decline and depreciation of hope

Here we are, then, faced with this problem which is *our* problem, gentlemen—the one we have come together to examine what can we foresee, what can we make of the probable future evolution of the European mind?

This question is of great consequence, since every work that has been recognized to be of the first order, in every domain of the mind, his contained elements foreign to its author's nation The greater a work is, the richer it is in borrowings from abroad—and this in no way corrupts its national savor

So, here we are, faced with this problem what effect will the future have, dreadful or otherwise, on the sort of instilled faith we have in what we call the European mind, a faith that has been, as I have said, built up little by little out of more and more frequent, more and more necessary—indeed indispensable—exchanges between us? For instance, in the domain of literature you will find an endless number of specifically national ideas, yet the greater the idea, the more foreign in-

fluences you will find in it What could be more English than Shakespeare? And yet, this poet is penetrated with antiquity, with French influence, with Montaigne, and the same is true for all the great writers in European history At the present time, there seems to be a defensive reaction against communicaiton, against works composed by a sort of infusion of foreign elements or borrowings from abroad This is a sufficiently enigmatic phenomenon—it exists and yet we do not see it clearly We are about to take a direction that may lead to a profusion of intellectual industries and intellectual products We ought perhaps to expect first an increasing difference between the various literatures, then the various philosophies, I shall not say the sciences, for they are always unified on the plane of objectivity In short, every effort to unify, or at least whatever seemed in the natural course of things to tend toward unification, seems today trying to divide And if you would make this singular situation vivid and alive to yourselves, gentlemen, you have only to look into your own hearts, and what do you find there two persons One of them is precisely the European, a man of general European culture, with a sense of universality, of all that is most beautiful, all that is most actual or true in human knowledge But by his side there is another man who speaks his own language, is shut up in his own national traditions At the present time, then, we resemble—if the mathematicians will allow me to borrow a figure from their domain—we resemble complex numbers, and we never know, for circumstances alone can determine, what is *imaginary* and what is *real* within us Sometimes we feel more universal or more European than national, and again, at the slightest incident affecting our sensibility, we are much more national than European

I do not wish to linger on these considerations, that is not

my role I am here to knock three times for a play which is to begin this afternoon But I did wish quite simply to present one view of these questions a view chosen at random from the many in this assembly and which happens to be my own We shall try during the coming three days of deliberations to determine precisely what can now be discerned in the way of changes to be expected in the resources and the general awareness which have been my subject

II

Adjournment

LADIES and Gentlemen Before declaring our Congress adjourned I have a few more words to say

The first is to thank M Henri Bonnet and the Institute of Intellectual Co-operation which has offered us such splendid hospitality And since I am on the subject of intellectual co-operation please allow me to recall that if I have taken some small part personally in these debates it is because I have been for some years a member of the Committee on Arts and Letters a subcommittee of the Geneva Committee on Intellectual Co-operation and it was there speaking at one of our meetings that I made so bold as to imagine a League of Minds This term was adopted and ever since as often happens we have been trying to give it a meaning It does not necessarily have a single meaning And a League of Minds may be conceived in several different ways according to the view taken of the mind

Also in continuing the search for a meaning that might be given to the notion of mind a notion that would apply to our life, the life of intellectuals I have tried in a brief essay to de-

fine what I called "politics of the mind," *to define also the* fortuitous circumstances that have now brought me to attend and take a fairly active part, though speaking little, in the founding of the Society which we worked out this morning

Now, my own conviction is not entirely in accord with that of my friend Romains I have such confidence in the mind itself, in the mind's own work, that I cannot imagine that any powerfully concentrated thought applied continuously to the same problem, even if it is the thought of a hermit, a man shut up in a cell, can be in vain and without effect.

As for the European mind, which is our subject at the moment, I think this notion must, on first approach, be considered a myth, it actually is a myth in our minds But that myth can be given a less hermetic kind of existence, less deprived of the values of action, if we undertake to define it, if we seek to discover what gives us the sense, the sensation even, of being Europeans, if we trace in ourselves all the successive roots of our intellectual development I do not include our moral development, since we have decided to limit ourselves to matters of the intellect. Now, when we try to discover what is European in us, we find such a deep and complex combination of elements drawn from every nation in Europe, from all the European races, that we are obliged to recognize in ourselves, whatever our personal feelings—for example, our national feelings—a certain sensibility, certain resonances, *certain intellectual reactions* which cannot be explained or described in any but *European* terms We have two persons in us, and, according to the circumstances, sometimes it is the national man, sometimes the European man, who stands up and responds

If, therefore, as I have just said, you feel this quality in yourself, you will understand that all European intellectuals

have that same sensibility, and that our true task is to awaken this sense in each of us, these deep common roots to be found in every thinker, writer, scholar, and philosopher in Europe That will be the object of our Society to seek the European element in each national compound

I do not wish to keep you long on this subject We have spent our days discussing it I should like, in conclusion, merely to emphasize the importance of this deep search for the real elements that constitute us

A few minutes ago, Romains spoke to us with great eloquence about politics On this point, I am now going to speak my whole mind I shall give you my true and complete opinion on politics and its relation to intelligence I consider politics, political action, all forms of politics, as inferior values and inferior activities of the mind For politics can exist only by working on the automatisms, the myths, all those psychological demons which we try personally, on the contrary, to dominate, to exorcise, to clear out of our minds We find in politics an irresponsible, complicated, and contradictory interpretation of history, which is one of the most powerful instruments for the political practice of illusionism We find reasoning which is merely apparent, since reasoning in politics is founded on low-grade abstractions and unconscious conventions We find in the arguments and practices of politics all the things that we deny and reject *at those moments when we are ourselves*—that is to say, when we devote ourselves to the pure and direct action of our minds

Toward a New Humanism

*Address of Thanks**

[Budapest, 1936]

OUR Committee on Arts and Letters which today, in an age sadly divided against itself, represents and is trying to preserve the mind's principle of unity and the eternal hope for a community of human minds, greets you and through me invites you to accept all the gratitude that is your due From the moment of our arrival in beautiful Budapest, we have met with the most cordial welcome and the kindest faces Everyone, according to his function and his office, has wished to help us and has shown the greatest sympathy with our work and for our persons

I must express first of all to His Excellency, the Minister of Education, our thanks for the invaluable part so kindly taken by the Royal Government in receiving us, and I assure him that we are profoundly touched by His Excellency's personal benevolence in our regard We were already aware that Hungarian soil is singularly fertile in intellect, and that its illustrious sons have added to the world's culture their precious gifts and the fruits of a genius like no other What could be more original than this spirit that lives between East and West, doubly victorious over those contradictory influences, and finding in itself all that is needed to constitute a perfectly distinct art, so rich that others come to borrow?

*Impromptu

I shall not explain (since nothing is more widely known) all that modern music owes to your great Liszt—whose ideas inventions and technical discoveries from the moment they were made received the homage of imitation and the peculiar honor of being used and developed by a creator The combination of inventive power and a kind of absolute virtuosity is an event in art But I cannot at present say all that is suggested to me by that admirable phenomenon Besides in this country music and poetry are such natural products that it is useless to say more But how can I not observe that Hungary so rich in the rhythms and spontaneous productions of sensibility is also the begetter of marvelously abstract minds? I cannot fail to mention the capital work of Janos Bolyai who almost at the same time as Lobachevski untied the knot that since Euclid s time had bound geometry and tied it to a certain postulate All critical analysis of the principles of that science, as well as the generalizations that have followed are indebted to those immortal pages

But there is one absolutely remarkable trait of your culture which most clearly designated Hungary as the place for our debates this year I speak of the penetration by Latin culture that goes so deep into your own Our duty this year is to try to define the idea of *humanism* There is no country in the world where ancient civilization has played a more real and important role than in yours—and even a more surprising role, since, of all the languages in Western and Central Europe, yours is, I believe the only one that has no connection with the language of Rome, and yet your literature has always and passionately fed on Latin letters It seems even that the language of Cicero and Virgil has been more alive with you, more a part of the ordinary life of the mind, and of more familiar use in thought than anywhere else

Now our plan for this year, the aim of the present session of the Committee, is to try to define the idea of humanism, and we must question ourselves about the immediate future of what we call "the humanities," or classical studies.

The very question that our program poses for those who will take part in our labors has been solved *in practice* by Hungary. *All* that we *shall* proceed to do, then, is find and formulate the reasons that may persuade all nations to do (or to do better) what you Hungarians have been so happily and continuously doing for centuries.

Literature in the Near Future

[Paris 1937]

*Preliminary Considerations**

WE ARE justified in feeling some anxiety about the preservation of the delicate or complex forms of language which make it possible to express nuances of meaning and combinations of ideas more or less remote from everyday usage The situation today as regards the creation of literature and the education of readers is threatening the quality of literary works There is rivalry between the functions of discourse, according as it requires of the reader less or more active collaboration, a smaller or greater capacity for attention, and less or more education

Certain works are created by their public, other works create their own And if at present we are witnessing the corruption of language, with the accepted, everyday use of shortened or debased forms that is doubtless and above all because the education of the public today is made up of hasty and incoherent reading, crude effects, and violent imagery

People who used to know how to read verse and appreciate its resonance, who used to note and savor a word the poet may have spent days in search of are becoming very scarce Slow, meditative reading is doomed to disappear, the automobile, the cinema, the welter of news in the newspapers

*Written

keep people's minds in a disorder equally fatal to composition or criticism The habit of never going deeply into anything is becoming general, overtaking those whose profession and privilege it once was to weigh and clarify their ideas We cannot fail to notice that certain books have exercised an extraordinary collective influence, it is enough to mention *Das Kapital* or Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races*

But the question here must be confined to literature as such Literature may, of course, be used as a mere diversion, an amusement allowing the reader to live an artificial life, another life than his own, but there is no certainty that literature as we have loved and practiced it will last

The conditions for the existence of literature presuppose first of all its material existence, including the material circumstances of the men who write, the production of the book, its price, etc *Literature, after all, depends on the life of the writer* who makes it and on the means by which he makes his work public

Next comes the cardinal question of the education of those to whom literature is addressed, the level of their culture, and this is perhaps the most serious point we shall have to examine Let us emphasize this general culture is certainly declining, not that the number of readers has declined—there have never been so many people who could read—but they are educated in the most negligent way, in general they read only newspapers Now, from the point of view of literary forms, as well as that of ideas, a culture based solely on the reading of newspapers is a dead culture From the day when a short story or a tale was first seen in a newspaper, it could be said that the newspaper was killing literature, many writers make their living in this way, but it means that form, so essential to the expression of ideas, is degenerating.

So, we have on one hand the question of the producer and his material circumstances, on the other the question of the reader and his education How can we try to develop again what we used to have, which was in fact the basis, the compost of literature—I mean a few educated people, people of taste, with time and leisure to read, and to read deeply? That, in my opinion, is a question of prime importance

It would be interesting to ascertain, for each nation, the present stage of its evolution as regards the forms of literary language This question is fundamental because, in every country where literature has been deeply cultivated for a long time, *a sort of separation occurs, and a literary language develops* which is more refined, more exclusive, its forms more rigorously observed, its vocabulary more select In every *country that has a literature with several centuries of activity* behind it, this tendency is to be found Today such specialization, which I greatly approve, is tending to disappear, and in spite of individual efforts, some of them remarkable, others less so, the common speech is gradually prevailing, with uniform values or absence of values Result debasement of words, debasement of forms, bombast, etc —all of which might furnish the subject for an important debate Writers should be shown that they are heading for the ruin of their language

Here is a quite recent example, which I have taken from one of the last work sessions of the French Academy. A host of French words have disappeared in the course of about one generation . precise words, of popular origin, generally very attractive, they have given way before the empty abstractions and clumsy technical terms that are invading our

speech At that particular session of the Academy we were reviewing the dictionary from the beginning, the dictionary we just finished three months ago, and in discussing a word which applies to a bird feeding its young (*donner la becquée*), everyone agreed that it should be *abecquer* This word, which we left in the dictionary, and which had been given in the old edition as a familiar one, had never been heard by any of us Never in the memory of an Academician ! There, then, is a dead word, finished, no longer French And this is true of many other words Often charming and to my mind most valuable terms are disappearing because language, instead of binding the individual directly to his own experience, is becoming a thing fabricated in an anonymous way by the Press and the crudities of common usage, here, then, is an impoverishment The same is true of linguistic "forms", the verbal moods are disappearing, there are no more subjunctives, etc Sentences of any length at all are difficult for people to understand today In this, we can see modern technology reacting on the language of certain nations It would be interesting to know whether the same thing is happening in all nations or in only a few

A further point remains in my opinion, the faculty of abstraction and meditation, or reflection, is declining The novels now in fashion tend merely to recount adventures, an indefinite number of stories dealing with the hazards of human life, more or less well put together, incidentally, but having the common characteristic of discouraging the reader from any prolonged study of the text—from doing his part of the work And yet this is the important thing in literature, if it is to be worth anything, the consumer must produce If he does not and is content to be passive, to take whatever nourishment is offered, then literature dies, even imaginative

literature of high quality If the reader does not produce if he cannot add to what is given provide his share of the labor in mental exercise of a certain quality then the quality of literature is inevitably debased

We must not forget spoken literature *Radio broadcasting* is still in embryo But what will happen if literature becomes entirely spoken? I once said that the day might come when no one would know how to read and write—there would be no need to that the day might come when a professor at the College de France would announce on the radio I have deciphered an old inscription in which I can make out *Le Petit Parisien!* ' It is possible in fact that writing and reading are changing more and more perhaps altogether, direct disc-recording may become a habit We may conjecture what will happen to literature, and indeed there will be a return to some eminent virtues of the past, in particular to euphony, which is now lost to fine speaking, beautiful form, etc Such form will be different from what we have now, for it is quite certain that the act of writing has brought into literary work the possibility of retouching, revising, cutting and correcting, a whole mass of improvements which would never exist if literature were only spoken, in short, what would disappear would be the habit of working over a text, refining or enriching it, which is made possible by having before our eyes what we have written and going over it again at leisure, once, ten, a hundred times if possible

Besides, if henceforth nothing but spoken literature is to be practiced other good qualities will surely develop All this is hypothetical, but deserves full consideration On the other hand, I am not so sure that the film will have any profound and lasting influence on literature

A Letter to Paul Valéry
by Salvador de Madariaga

Madrid, 1933

My dear friend,

During the Easter holidays, I have devoted myself to a meditation on the role of the mind in the modern world It has naturally taken the form of a letter to you For I was thinking not so much of the Holy Spirit as of the Whole Spirit, the *Healthy Mind*, which I like to visualize as that magnetic fluid which emanates from your keen eyes and from the electric bristles of your pepper-and-salt mustache

Besides, you and I were among the first to think that the question of the mind's role in the modern world was the very foundation of what, in Geneva jargon, is called "Intellectual Co-operation" From the earliest days of the League of Nations, when I was a mere choirboy in that assembly, I conceived intellectual co-operation in this way, and that is why, unlike the professional politicians who smile at the notion, I saw in it the very soul of the Covenant—the one idea which, two or three centuries hence, will perhaps seem to historians the most fertile of all the ideas elevated into general law by the *first World Charter*

Professional politicians, involved in the demands of their utilitarian tasks, have neither the time nor the turn of mind to attack the deeper causes of the evils they wish to cure Would

you think of asking a doctor who is fighting an acute disease at the bedside of a patient to attack the ancestral and municipal causes that have brought his patient to a hospital bed? But those "whose work is joy"—the bees of the mind—have other leisures and other duties, and when they turn their attention to the modern world, they come from far enough away and see clearly enough to conclude that your prophecy has come true—as true as even the Serpent could wish

Il en chetra des fruits de mort,
De désespoir et de désordre!

Especially *désordre* The human mind is the organizer of Nature It brings order into the tumultuous testimony of the senses Therefore a man dedicated to the work of the mind suffers constantly in his inner being from the contrast between the intuitive order which he carries in his heart as an archetype and the external disorder which is like a cruel parody of it I mean no reference here to the magnificent advance of the forces of Nature, but to that tangle of international, national, and personal forms of anarchy—anarchy of ideas, customs, beliefs, and doctrines—a monster of a thousand heads and a thousand bodies, closing in from every direction, strangling the individual, paralyzing his intelligence and his will with a multiplicity of appearances and possibilities

How far off is that happy time when Europe was a Christian society, ruled by an infallible Trinity and governed by a code of Ten Articles—a short and perfect code, but *practicable* thanks to the loophole of forgiveness Of course, there were matters that we should today call "grave problems," but they scarcely worried the Christians, since it was understood that this world is a Vale of Tears, and that suffering is an indis-

pensable element in the subtle alchemy of eternal salvation Overriding the differences in language and climate—for there was as yet no question of different nations—the Christian world was as translucent, free, and homogeneous as the air of spring over the mountains and valleys The Western World in those days revolved about two unshakable poles Christendom, a secure and universal faith, and the individual Christian, ever the same and secure in his faith

Going and coming in that free and translucent milieu were the *clerks,* since we must call them by their true name They went from Paris to Bologna and from Oxford to Salamanca, hardly feeling that they were in a foreign country, at least no more than in going from Aragon to Castile, from Provence to Picardy, or from Milan to Venice Above the popular languages, the same Latin was spoken everywhere, expressing the same established truths And everywhere, justice, law, morality, politics, and economics drew their inspiration from the springs of a uniform and definite theology

Two currents of history finally broke up this fine unity The spirit of observation, latent throughout the Middle Ages and probably more alive at that time than would appear at a first glance, resulted, *on the one hand, in Bacon and experimental* science, and, on the other, in Luther and religious individualism, and secondly, three localities in the West, each endowed with a special power of attraction—the Thames, the Île de France, and the plateau of Castile—became three powerful nations Nations those new entities, those powerful forms of humanity, those positive spirits that take hold of an individual and dominate him nations were destined to transform every aspect of life in the West and, in the process, to destroy organized Christendom

With historical intuition of rare depth, George Bernard

Shaw presented this double evolution in his *Saint Joan* For him Joan of Arc was the first Protestant and the first nationalist that is to say—I should add—the first individual to rebel against the Church and the inspired leader of the first nation to rebel against Christianity

Imperial Spain on the contrary was the last defender of the Old Order Charles V still dreamed of Christian unity Vitoria at Salamanca delivered his unforgettable lecture in which he severely limited the right of the Prince (the Nation) to make war basing himself on Christian principles which for him were true and therefore universal But to be right is not enough—one must be right at the right time The wind of history was against Vitoria, and Europe heard only the voice of Machiavelli The will of the Prince, and therefore of the State and therefore of the Nation became the supreme law The world that had been an organic unity was broken up into independent units Those enormous and powerful entities called nations stood between Christendom and the Christian, they shattered the first by setting up their own sovereignty against it, they crushed the second with absolutism

Christendom as an organic unity was dead forever The Christian as a uniform type vanished when Luther and Calvin —actually without meaning to—opened the door to free thought But the Christian vanished in a deeper sense also Rule at the king's pleasure, a corruption of Machiavelli's doctrine, in turn corrupted individual morality and, along with it, science and philosophy—multiplying *ad infinitum* the possible points of view, already augmented by Protestantism, and plunging the simple-minded into confusion while setting the elite at liberty among the caprices of individual intelligence

Nevertheless, that was an age that could accommodate a certain anarchy Its task was to discover the earth, explore the

sciences, master technology, and develop industry The boldness of the sixteenth- and *seventeenth-century navigators, the* eighteenth-century philosophers, the nineteenth-century scientists and industrialists that whole phase of expansion presupposed individual and national freedom of movement, a fluidity of principles without which that groundswell of history could never have made its way We can now see how it rose majestically from the wonderful sixteenth century, when Europe seethed with a life of splendor, through the seventeenth, sweeping over the earth and plunging, in the eighteenth, into the depths of the mind, to arise in the nineteenth in torrents of invention, discovery, colonization, new nations, distant expeditions, bold building, extravagant waste, prosperity, grandeur, and wars

Wars What a tremendous wave of mud, heroism, science, and blood was the last war—the last monstrous surge of that groundswell of three centuries of history And the crisis in *which we are now floundering, the sense of being swallowed* up, as if drawn down by nameless forces into a yawning gulf, could this be the fearful ebb of the waters of history which, after hurling themselves in threat toward the pitiless sky, after breaking in fury over our homes and our hearts, are now irresistibly withdrawing toward some mindless abyss?.

Adrift! Are we merely adrift? In any case, we give the incoherent impression of drifting wreckage What a vast insane asylum is our world! What discordant gestures! What cacophony of opinions! What inconsequence! Confusion! Hubbub! In politics, democracy is discredited and—after a century of fairly honorable effort—very nearly abandoned in favor of systems combining the unknown with the forgotten Liberalism, at the very moment when certain of its extreme consequences—such as feminism—are triumphant, has taken

refuge with the elite while the masses seek liberation in the negation of liberty The pressures of technology and economic pressures in particular have forced all faith doctrine and general ideas out of political programs Political parties are formed and split grouped and regrouped under the influence of a short-sighted empiricism that is only irritated by principles The very notion of progress that naive forward march is blurred in modern eyes and seems to be dissolving in the sands of the desert A destructive psychology is ruining all behavior and paralyzing literature Art without discipline is moping inconsolably around the lost paradise of rules Science is reaching the limits of the knowable and declaring itself helpless to explain the caprice in the soul of atoms, while an illustrious scientist enjoys the popularity of a movie star, for having expressed certain abstract truths that are barely accessible to a few hundred mathematicians Science, moreover, is being split into isolated lesser sciences, each taking its own direction in search of partial truths, while the philosophers, unable to encompass all the kinds of positive knowledge, are building systems to suit their own taste, based on the particular kinds of knowledge at hand Nations continue to dream of sovereignty, though bound together in economic bonds, and at the very moment when increasing travel and exchange are turning our bodies into passive cogs in a world machine, our minds are giving way to an unbridled individualism that knows no other law than its own caprice

A glimmer of hope What neither ideas nor faith could do the natural course of things will perhaps at least make possible The world is somehow overtaken by solidarity, even if it is not yet aware of it The furnace of the Great War has melted nations into a single bloc Debts reparations, credits, trade, and trends of public opinion are all so many bonds, so many

forms of vital circulation gradually drawing together into a single living organism all those organisms that not long ago were proudly independent nations And like living nerves galvanizing the whole, the cables and the ether are continually transmitting waves of news, sentiment, hopes, and fears, more and more common to all humanity

Thus under our very eyes a new society is taking shape, a wider Christendom, a *civitas mundi* less theological than medieval Christendom, less sentimental and abstract than the "Humanity" of our ancestors It is not based on the beyond but on the here and now, it draws its strength not from sentiment and opinion but from facts and necessities Its domain is "nothing but the earth", its constituents are men, races, and nations, its creative moral force is culture, its creative natural forces are place and climate, its guide is reason, its faith is the intuition of order—which is to say, the relatively modest dogma that God is not crazy

Henceforth, then, the role of the mind in the modern world is clear

The mind, as we have said, is the organizer of Nature Its task therefore is to discover and define the order sensed by our faith and felt as a necessity by the mind itself So long as our point of view remained partial, the notion of order was partial also and, consequently, precarious order this side the Pyrenees, disorder beyond But from the moment when we can define our domain as the whole earth, and our group as all men, the problem is posed with enough probability of success to persuade us to try to solve it.

We shall draw inspiration, no doubt, from the past, though conscious of the differences that separate us from it We shall find in the bipolar structure of the older society—Christendom and the Christian—the surest model for World

Society, the building of which is the true task of our time Humanity and the individual man Yes I know my dear Valery that the word humanity is a beautiful abstraction saturated with sentiment and when it is handled it drops tears Find me another O magician of language! Meanwhile I shall use it without emotion to mean all men taken as an organic whole and as they are—that is to say in intelligent consideration (always subject to debate) of their present condition and their probable evolution

I mean by that—and here I leave off stating the problem and go on if merely for example to debate the possible solutions—I mean that World Society must be based on the individual and the human race conceived as the two ends, not I dare say ultimate ends but the highest that we know the individual containing in himself all intelligible forms and without whom no idea nor feeling could exist, the human race being the endless fabric of history, woven of the innumerable threads of individual lives

In this fabric, the shapes to be seen in splendid colors and bold contours are nations and empires They come into view, take firm outline, run together, ravel out, and disappear But the fabric endures Other individual threads replace those whose skein has given out, other shapes, other nations other empires come to give new variety that will fade in turn into the gray of time The fabric endures, the endless dream of the Master of time, space, and life

The mind s task in the modern world will be to create a hierarchy in which the values called nations and empires will each find the place that corresponds to its dignity and creative power, yet without endangering the two bases of the structure the individual and humanity For nations are excellent and useful, and, however paradoxical it may seem, they are

noble avenues to one world It is the mind's work to purify them of their fierce gregarious instinct, which has nevertheless enabled them to survive the period of cannibalism from which they are just now emerging—for we must not forget that, though individual human beings shudder at the idea of cannibalism, those collective human beings we call nations have practiced it until recently, and may even, alas, practice it tomorrow, devouring each other without hesitation Here then as everywhere, it is a question of man, when the mind's effort must favor the evolution that lifts the human mind from the beast toward the angel

Order Hierarchy Can we hope to attain these without a heroic effort to synthesize our most fundamental ideas about life and its ultimate ends? Do not be alarmed I am not hiding a new gospel under my Voltaire, and I am not confusing the Salève with Sinai Moreover, it seems to me obvious that in a new world, religion cannot be understood otherwise than as that partial image of universal truth which—with certain prudent distortions in each case—happens to be available to every race, epoch, or nation But over and above all such partial views, and without laying claim to any absolute synthesis, should not our aim be to establish a brief and simple code of universal principles for man, which would be explicitly recognized as binding on all and everywhere, and, being taught in the schools, would become the basis of a new spirit? To my mind, the first task to be undertaken toward a *World Society would be to formulate those extremely simple* principles as a framework for the conduct of the individual, the nation, and trade Such a code would give humanity a common law, a solidarity and, as it were, a moral kinship making the human race one vast family

That is a definite task, relatively simple in theory but very

complex in practice For it is not a matter of formulating and promulgating a synthetic Decalogue The effort must be to arrive first at all that is most general and most essential so that by digging downward we may reach those layers of humanity where all races meet And next something much more difficult the method itself must be a process of promulgation also the search must also be the goal the world in short must go along with us in our effort to convert it

I like to think of the organization for Intellectual Co-operation as the mother cell of a whole field of fermenting minds drawn toward unity order and hierarchy In my opinion that is its fundamental task—I was about to say simply its task Under its continuous and methodical influence we should witness the gradual growth of a powerful structure of ideas a solid framework of freely accepted duties and undeniable obligations which would bind individuals to nations and nations to organized humanity Likewise the effort toward a synthesis would take effect also in the world of positive knowledge and speculation leading to closer organization of the sciences and technology and to closer collaboration among philosophies The problem of man and history that daily drama that dialogue in action endlessly played by character and destiny would have as a background a precise and vigorous scene drawn in clear lines instead of the anarchy against which it stands out today In a word we should live in the bosom of a world culture

Do I need to tell you—you with your free creative mind—that it is no part of my idea that this supreme gift of Nature the creative mind should be made in any way whatsoever subservient even to the highest and most necessary duties? Would that be possible in any case? No creation will always remain a free act in its essence free even of the creator But if

the day comes when, by the double effort toward a synthesis which I have just described for you, we shall succeed in drafting at least the main outlines of a world culture, or a hierarchy of values founded on reason and history, and valid everywhere, if the day comes when we shall again establish on a world-wide base a framework of order and clarity as precise as that which our ancestors enjoyed in the great period of European culture, on that day, so it seems to me, the artists—now in retreat from the void they sense at the center of things, seeking originality on the periphery, in bizarre and irresponsible gestures—would feel drawn by a more austere knowledge of things toward the source of all originality, that is to say, toward the true Origin. Art would lose its tinsel, and gain in dignity. The artist would more resemble that great figure who is present these days in all our minds, that great creator who was also not only the first great European but the first man fully to attain the stature, the consciousness, and the sense of responsibility required for so great a destiny: Goethe.

These, dear and great friend, are the reflections suggested to me by a subject that I know interests you in the highest degree. If I have managed to precipitate in the rich solution of your mind a mist of sparkling crystals of thought, I shall not have wasted these few hours stolen from my official duties for what we call, I forget why, the Easter vacation.

SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA

NOTES

NOTES

I FEEL sure that Valéry would have approved of the title of this volume The initials HP which head so many entries in his Notebooks are the best evidence that for him history and politics were one subject and one of the subjects his mind turned to most often in his daily sessions with himself It pleases me to recall, however, that I found the title not in his Notebooks but—by one of those curious anticipations that come from long intimacy with a writer's work—in my own mind, before I knew the *Cahiers*

Like the other volumes of the Collected Works, this one is modeled in its general conception on certain collections made by Valéry himself—specifically, two in the series of *Œuvres* published during his lifetime *Variété, premier volume* (Vol. D) and *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Vol J) But there is no single volume among the existing editions in French which corresponds to *History and Politics* Here all of Valéry's published writings on this subject—except those few which I think he would not have wished to see collected—have been brought together for the first time A number of these pieces have not appeared before in any collection of his works Together they bring to light certain of Valéry's interests and activities that have remained little known—his support of woman suffrage, his role in the League of Nations, his fascination with the Far East, his reactions to the second World War, and together, as in no other way, they clarify the aim of those outspoken speculations which made him for more

than a decade a sort of public seer in France and an enlightening presence all over Europe.

The fact of bringing into one volume a large number of essays written over a period of fifty years and for many different kinds of occasions has made a few excisions desirable, to avoid the effect of repetition from one essay to another. These are indicated throughout by a line of dots.

In the edition of *Variété* mentioned above, there is a preliminary note which I take as justification for the present arrangement of these pieces:

> The volumes that have appeared, or will appear, under the title *Variété* are collections of essays or occasional writings brought together from time to time, and therefore presented to the public in a vaguely chronological order. But, rigorous as it may be, chronological order is merely a kind of systematic disorder, actually quite useful once it is adopted as one adopts the alphabetical order.
>
> Nevertheless, it seemed possible to try, in this new edition, to arrange these essays on a more reasonable plan. In spite of the great and accidental diversity of the subjects treated in them, they may be grouped according to the affinities of subject matter. Literature has been put with literature, and politics with myths and dreams.

Don Salvador de Madariaga and Monsieur François Valéry wrote their introductory essays especially for this volume, and I am grateful to them.

Professor Madariaga, the distinguished historian and essayist, formerly a Spanish representative to the League of Nations, Ambassador of the Spanish Republic, and Professor of Spanish literature at Oxford, now lives at Oxford.

M. François Valéry is the younger son of Paul Valéry. Although not a diplomat by profession, he is an official of the Quai d'Orsay and head of the French delegation to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

He has studied mathematics and English literature and has a keen interest in music and painting M Valéry studied music for some time with Nadia Boulanger and, at her request, became Chairman of the Fontainebleau Schools of Music and Fine Arts

I am happily indebted to Miss Denise Folliot for her fine work and her sturdy tolerance as a collaborating translator, to Mr David Paul for his brilliant touch in revising the translation and for suggesting a few excisions to Mr Bart Winer for excellent criticism and advice, to Mr Richard G Anderson for his help with economic terms, to Professor Jean Hytier, editor of the Pléiade edition of Valéry, whose "Notes" I have freely drawn upon, and to Madame Catherine David for her canny insights into the allusive and idiomatic turns in Valéry's prose, her indispensable contribution to the Notes, and for courage and wit in the face of deadlines

The notes which follow are bibliographical and explanatory, by turns The explanatory notes are not meant to supply general information They are limited, with a few exceptions, to clarifying those allusions and other references which, though a French reader might be expected to catch them, an American or English reader might not The bibliographical notes indicate for each work the occasion of its composition (when that is known), its first publication, and, if republished, one later collection where it may be readily found The French title of each work is given after the English title Except where otherwise noted, the place of publication is Paris and the publisher is Gallimard

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like a sounding echo . " From Victor Hugo's *Feuilles d'automne*, the opening poem, dated June, 1830

xxvi. *Lucien Fabre* (1889–1952), engineer, scientist, poet, and novelist, a man Valéry greatly admired and for whom he wrote two prefaces "A Foreword" and "Notes on Tragedy and a Tragedy" (Collected Works, Vol 7, pp 39 ff and 231 ff, on Fabre, see especially ibid, pp 47–51 & nn)

The passages cited from Valéry throughout the "Introduction" (listed in order of occurrence) are to be found as follows

xxii (1, 2) "The Crisis of the Mind," herein, pp 30–31 (3) "Note and Digression," Collected Works, Vol 8

xxiii (1, 2) Ibid (3) "On Poe's *Eureka*," Collected Works, Vol. 8. (4) "Last Visit to Mallarmé," ibid

xxiv (All) "Note and Digression," as above

xxv (1) "Views of France," herein, p 414 (2) "A Foreword" Collected Works, Vol 7, p 48 (3) *Cahiers*, I, p 225.

xxvi (1) "French Thought and Art," herein, p 432 (2, 3) "A Foreword," as above, p 44

xxvii "Note and Digression," as above

xxviii "Stéphane Mallarmé," Collected Works, Vol 8

xxix *Cahiers*, II, p 880, I, p 193

xxx Ibid, II, p 865

xxxi Ibid, I, p 216

xxxii "The Persian Letters," herein, p 215

History and Politics

3 FOREWORD "Avant-propos," written for the first edition of *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931, see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), tr by Francis Scarfe in *Reflections on the World*

Today (New York, Pantheon Books, 1948), hereafter cited as Scarfe, *Reflections*

5 *Horrible confusion* In French the phrase "*horrible mélange*" echoes a passage from Racine's *Athalie* (II, 5) which most French children learn at school

> *Mais je n'ai plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange*
> *D'os et de chair meurtris*
> (But I found only a hideous mass
> Of mangled flesh and bones)

8 *Law of least action* The principle of the economy of physical behavior, observed by Heron of Alexandria and others, but first formulated by the French mathematician and astronomer Pierre de Maupertuis (1698–1759) "The principle is displayed where the amount of energy expended in performing a given action is the least required for its execution" (J R Newman, *The World of Mathematics*, New York, 1956, II, p 882)

It may be as well to make the general point here that Valéry's habitual use of mathematical and scientific terms had nothing vague about it. It was based on a clear understanding of their meaning, including a knowledge of their history. This point is nicely made in an article by Judith Robinson on Valéry's notebooks, from which I cite the opening passage

> The recent publication of Valéry's personal notebooks calls for a major change of emphasis in many of the generally accepted critical attitudes towards this most complex of all modern French thinkers In particular, the *Cahiers* make it abundantly clear that nothing was more central or fundamental in Valéry's thought than his preoccupation with the methods and achievements of science, and especially of physics and mathematics. Throughout the whole of his adult life, the *Cahiers* show him reading widely and intensively in the field of classi-

cal physics, from Newton to Boltzmann and Maxwell, and studying with the greatest interest the development of mathematics from Euclid to Riemann, from Descartes to Gauss They show him as well following in detail, and with tremendous intellectual excitement, the remarkable advances which were taking place in scientific thought during his own lifetime, the gradual emergence of relativity theory, quantum theory, atomic physics and wave mechanics, and the elaboration of abstract mathematical concepts of the kind embodied in group theory, set theory topology and *n*-dimensional geometry.*

9 *Champ de Mars* Valéry here uses the phrase in its general (Latin) as well as its specific (French) sense The Campus Martius in Rome and certain Roman towns was an open level place where civic, military, religious, or recreational assemblies of the people were held In Paris the Champ de Mars is the large esplanade between the École Militaire and the Eiffel Tower, where in 1790 a great gathering of the people of Paris celebrated the first anniversary of the capture of the Bastille.

18 *Temuchin* the given name of the man whose title was Genghis Khan

23. THE CRISIS OF THE MIND "La Crise de l'esprit," written at the request of John Middleton Murry for the *Athenaeum* (London), and published first in English, in two parts I "The Spiritual Crisis," II "The Intellectual Crisis," Apr 11 and May 2, 1919, in *The Living Age* (Boston), May 10, 1919, in French, *N R F*, Aug 1, 1919, in *Variété* (1924), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957), tr by Malcolm Cowley, *Variety* (New York Harcourt, Brace, 1927, hereafter cited as Cowley, *Variety*

On its first publication in French (in the *N R F*), the

*Judith Robinson, "Language Physics and Mathematics in Valéry's *Cahiers*," *The Modern Language Review* Oct 1960 p 519

essay was accompanied by this note: *The Athenaeum*, the famous old London review, presently edited by one of the most acute and distinguished men in England, John Middleton Murry, published in its numbers for April 11 and May 2, 1919, two letters by M. Paul Valery. Although these were written especially to be translated into English and for an English audience, we believe our readers will be interested in the French text, hitherto unpublished.

Hel... l... Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles. This is the most famous and influential of all Valery's pronouncements, one of the great instances of modern rhetoric—comparable in power and superior in insight to Churchill's "blood, sweat, and tears." It has been endlessly cited and used; it served, for example, as the topic of one of the summer conferences at Pontigny, Aug. 1934 (See François Valery's Preface, p. xvi above.)

6 *Et ... d...* When it has conquered devouring appetite / Spirit will rule in triumph everywhere.

9 *L... r...* When Valery as a young man was studying the Leonardo manuscripts in the archives of the Institut de France in preparation for his first essay, *L'Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci*, he found in one of the margins of the manuscripts this note by an unknown hand:

L... r... o L... nardo che tanto penate

(My Lionardo, O Lionardo who hast labored so much.)

He was moved by the intimate sympathy expressed by some unknown reader, whose hand left one in doubt whether he had written *penate* (labored) or *pensate* (thought). Or perhaps the doubt was an invention of Valery's own mind—he used both versions. And he liked this strange old spelling of Leonardo's name. (See herein, p. 9; also Collected Works, Vol.

12, p 222 & *n*; and Vol 8, "Note and Digression," final page)

Il grande uccello "the big bird mounted on the back of his great swan"

31. *For me, everything relates to the intellect* "tout par rapport à l'intellect" This is a deceptively *weighted* remark, modeled on one that Valéry attributes to Pascal in an early letter to André Gide (May 24, 1897) "Comme dit Pascal 'Tout par rapport à Jésus Christ'" Valéry means to say, in short, that the intellect is as much the center of his own world as Christ was of Pascal's (See Gide and Valéry, *Correspondance*, p 298)

36. *Deminutio capitis* 'loss of prestige (or leadership)" The Latin phrase in its various meanings expresses one of Valéry's fundamental criticisms of the modern world For another use of it, see Collected Works, *Vol 12*, p *76 & n*

37 A FOND NOTE ON MYTH "Petite Lettre sur les mythes," first published as a preface to Maurice de Guérin, *Poèmes en prose* (Blaizot, 1928), in *Variété II* (1929), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957)

I cannot forgo the remark that this little essay has long seemed to me one of the wittiest and most intelligent pieces in all of Valéry's work

43 "*In the beginning was the Fable*" Valéry's essay "On Poe's *Eureka*" ends with this variation on John 1 1 (See Collected Works, Vol 8, also Vol 4, p 169 & *n*)

46. A CONQUEST BY METHOD "Une Conquête méthodique," first published as "La Conquête allemande," *The New Review* (London), Jan, 1897 (in French), first published in France, *Mercure de France*, Sept. 1, 1915, see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade

(1957), extract tr by Anthony Bower as "Methodical Conquest" in *Selected Writings* (New York New Directions 1950) hereafter cited as Bower *Selected Writings*

This essay appeared in France for the first time during the first World War with this footnote

It was about 1895—twenty years ago—that English public opinion became clearly aware that the growth of the German Navy and the development of German industry and trade were threatening Britain's vital monopolies or quasi-monopolies Mr Balfour and Lord Rosebery were the first to alert the British people The principal text on the subject was written by Mr Ernest E Williams under the famous title *Made in Germany* This was a striking array of facts, and had a considerable influence On the other hand *Le Danger allemand* by M Maurice Schwob (editor of the *Phare de la Loire*) a similar book raising the same question and looking at it from the French point of view went unnoticed and had no influence in France

Toward the end of 1896 Mr William E Henley, a poet and editor of *The New Review* (in which Williams's articles had appeared) asked M Paul Valery to write an essay in more general terms on the developments in Germany This study appeared—in French—in No 92 of the London *New Review*, January 1, 1897, that essay is the one republished here Though it is not our practice to include articles already published in French, even abroad, we do so in this case because it is interesting to show that twenty years before the events taking place today, there were a few Frenchmen who appreciated the "great soul" which the Germans have now displayed before an amazed world Also, because the author's seemingly paradoxical thesis has now proved beyond all doubt, true

M Henry D Davray, in his "Lettres anglaises" (*Mercure de France*, Feb , 1897), commented as follows on this article "M Paul Valery, in conclusion and with hair-raising objectivity, gives us a glimpse of the charming future in store for the human race as a result of the strict application of *method* in organization "*

*See *Œuvres I* Pleiade p 1765

The republication in 1915 of this early essay brought Valéry a number of letters. One was from the economist Victor Cambon, to whom he wrote in reply:

> That essay of 1897 was written, quite by chance, by an inquisitive young man who knew neither German nor Germany, and whose friends, wanting to help him to get published, suggested the subject.
>
> It is true that the idea of method dominated his thinking. I have always resisted every kind of specialization—a fact I regret—but necessity drove me to organize my highly varied interests as best I could. Yet, once I had agreed to write a conclusion in French to Williams's series of articles *Made in Germany*, my difficulties had only begun. The subject was dangerously new to me. And I was in the hateful position of having to improvise, in order to carry out an *assignment* which at the time was very important to me.
>
> The idea finally occurred to me to draw an analogy between military and economic organization. *In those days*, that was an arbitary point of view, a purely rhetorical approach. I meant to "fix" the truth, or make it fit, and perhaps at the time I did just that. In short, certain considerations of symmetry gave me the next *term* in the series called Germany.
>
> This procedure made it possible for me to come to the point that really interested me. I did no more than touch on it in that article. I mean: method in the intellectual industry. Is such a thing possible? What would it consist of? Is it desirable? These are the questions I still spend my spare time trying to clarify.
>
> It happens on occasion that I invade someone else's territory.
>
> A few years ago, I drew up a plan for a thoroughgoing reorganization of our army. I saw in my mind's eye an organization with all its parts functioning so precisely that my imaginary army would have made our actual army look like a herd of sheep.
>
> I spoke of it to a few officers; they were astonished, but nothing more. Since the Taylor system has come out, I realize that my army plan was vaguely like it. If I had been a German, I would no doubt

have worked out my original idea and published it It might even have been adopted and had some future *

In his interviews with Frédéric Lefèvre, Valéry gave this account of his meeting with Henley and his collaboration on *The New Review*

I was very fond of London, which Mallarmé quite rightly called 'a very engaging city "

I met the poet William Henley Henley looked like a lion—tawny, gray mustaches, and an enormous face with a terrifying glare that from time to time was jovously transformed into immense bursts of laughter In the years 1871–73 he had known many of the French refugees from the Commune, particularly Verlaine, with whom he had something in common, having spent long periods in the hospital His French acquaintances had left him with a knowledge and love of uncommonly obscene language He took delight in using with me, in French, the most outrageous expressions—of a kind he used far more sparingly in English For the publisher Heinemann, Henley had founded a review which has since disappeared, but which had a good deal of political importance in its time In this *New Review*, in 1895, Williams published a series of articles that aroused suspicion against Germany in English public opinion It was as a result of those articles that England first became aware of the German pressure on the critical points of her economic life and her empire The title Williams gave to his series was a great success the three words *Made in Germany* were incorporated into law in a famous bill At the same time they became fixed in the English mind, where they continued to be effective until Nov. 11, 1918 Henley had the odd notion of asking me to write for his *New Review* a sort of philosophical conclusion to Williams's work of observation and pure fact I was baffled by such a task, which for several good reasons I was tempted to accept, but which *Reason* alone would have obliged me to refuse

The "good reasons" had a numerical advantage, so I improvised

*See *Œuvres I*, Pléiade pp 1766 f

what I could and gave *The New Review* an article that appeared in French. I called it "Une Victoire méthodique," but Henley preferred to give it the title "La Conquête allemande " The *Mercure* republished it in 1915 during the war This essay, along with "La Crise de l esprit" which I wrote for the *Athenaeum* in 1919, were my only efforts at a kind of political philosophy This is a subject which, in the truest sense, is indefinite I have happened at times to give some thought to it, always *in an effort to find the characteristics and the simplest basic* premises of the problem of politics in its *most general form*

In this field there is a certain range of conditions and quantitative data which I believe are of decisive importance, but they are somehow too simple not to be quite often impossible to observe *

Tarde venientibus ossa "the latecomers get the bones "

47 *Mr. Williams* Ernest E G Williams (1866–1935), English barrister and fellow of the Royal Statistical Society *Made in Germany* (1897) was his first book Other works *Marching Backward*, *Plain Truths about British Trade* (also 1897); *The Imperial Heritage* (1898), *The Case for Protection* (1899); *Free Trade or Protectionism* (1907), etc

48 *M Maurice Schwob* See note for p 46, above Not to be confused with Marcel Schwob, note for p xii, above

52. "*Enumerations so complete and reviews so general*" the essential phrase of the fourth and last precept in Descartes' method (*Discourse on Method*, Part II, tr by John Veitch).

54 *Landwehr* German organized militia, equivalent to the United States National Guard or the British Special Reserve

Landsturm German home reserves, draft forces made up

*F Lefèvre, *Entretiens avec Paul Valéry* pp 14–17 For a further account of the origins of this article see Current Recollection ' Collected Works, Vol 15

of all those capable of bearing arms and not already in some other kind of military service

58 *He threw his phlegmatic wig in the air on receiving a telegram* presumably one announcing the Emperor's decision to mobilize the German army, which he was to lead in the coming war against France, July, 1870

62 *Omni re scibili* Pico della Mirandola, at Rome in 1486, called for public disputation of nine hundred questions and conclusions of his own devising in all branches of philosophy and theology—*de omni re scibili* ('about every known thing")

67 UNPREDICTABILITY 'L Imprevisible," first published in *La Revue de l'economie contemporaine*, March, 1944, in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948)

70 "*History is experimental politics*" the French text here is "l'histoire est la politique expérimentale " Jacques Barzun suggests that this "slightly unidiomatic" phrase might be a French adaptation of E A Freeman's "History is past politics "

72 REMARKS ON INTELLIGENCE "Propos sur l'intelligence," first published under the title "Sur la crise de l'intelligence," *Revue de France*, June 15, 1925, under its present title, as a *plaquette* (A l'Enseigne de la Porte étroite, 1926), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957)

This essay was written in response to a survey conducted by the *Revue de France* on the question "Is there a crisis in the liberal professions?" The inquiry was addressed to the clergy, the army, the universities, the press, and to artists and men of letters When Valéry's response appeared, it was headed by this note, written by Marcel Prévost

M Paul Valery has sent us a particularly important contribution The author of "The Crisis of the Mind," departing from the particular subject of the inquiry and taking a larger and more general view, has chosen to deal with what he calls "The Crisis in Intelligence" It seemed appropriate that these pages should be published apart from the main body of the survey In them, an important mind comes to grips with a problem of considerable interest today *

87. *Sono lavoratore* "I am a worker"

89 POLITICS OF THE MIND "La Politique de l'esprit, notre souverain bien," a lecture given at the Université des Annales, Nov. 16, 1932, first published in *Conferencia*, Feb 15, 1933, in *Variété III* (1936), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957), tr as "Spiritual Polity" by Wm A Bradley, in *Variety, Second Series* (New York Harcourt, Brace, 1938), hereafter cited as Bradley, *Variety II*

During the 1930's Valéry lectured frequently at the Université des Annales (see note for p 290) There, to the disapproval of a number of his friends, he reached a large popular audience A note on this lecture in *Conferencia* indicates his hearers' response to "Politics of the Mind" "This lecture, with its admirable insight into our age and the chaos that characterizes it, created a sensation The audience listened fervently, and time and again applauded the poet, the philosopher, the prophet—the revelations of the man whom André Maurois has called our modern Descartes"

103 *A recent piece of legislation* there is little doubt that Valéry is referring to the application of "rational measures" by the rising Nazi Party in Germany, prescribing the elimination of the unfit and genetic selection toward the creation of a super-race (See herein, note for p 368)

*See *Œuvres I*, Pléiade p 1771

105—106 *Exchanging a bird in the hand for a bird in the bush* The French text here is "echange du *tiens* contre le *tu l'auras*," meaning literally "exchanging 'here it is' for 'you'll get it later.'" Valéry's phrase is a variation on the proverb "un bon tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras." La Fontaine uses it in *Le Petit Poisson et le pêcheur* (Book V, Fable III).

110 *Happy peoples have no mind* a variation on the French maxim "les peuples heureux n'ont pas d'histoire" (happy peoples have no history). For another version with specific reference to America, see herein, p. 227.

112 *Regulations to control copying* copyright laws to prevent the pirating of "models", enforced by the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, representing the principal Paris fashion houses.

114 ON HISTORY "De l'Histoire," first published as part of "Grandeur et Décadence de l'Europe" in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931, as a separate article, dated 1928, in *Œuvres*, Vol. J (1938); see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

118 HISTORICAL FACT "Discours de l'histoire," a speech given at commencement exercises at the Lycée Janson-de-Sailly in Paris, July 13, 1932, and published by Les Presses Modernes, Aug., 1932. Valéry changed the title to "Le Fait historique" (used for the present translation) in *Œuvres*, Vol. D (1934), but reverted to the title above in *Variété IV* (1938) and elsewhere. See *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957).

His sensational attack on history is one of Valéry's most famous speeches. He had already expressed similar views, however, as in the previous short essay "On History." (See also Appendix II herein.)

The remarkable and thoughtful address we have just heard Valéry was preceded on the program by Gustave Lanson (1857–1934), one of the great teachers of the century, Professor at the École Normale Supérieure and the Sorbonne His *Histoire de la littérature française* has for several generations been the standard reference book on French literature in schools and universities everywhere

121 *Your classmates in Philosophy* "Philosophy" is the final year in the French *lycée*, leading to the second part of the *baccalauréat*, the diploma awarded on passing the oral and written examinations at the end of the secondary school program

122 *Micromégas* the hero of Voltaire's satirical, philosophical novel of that title (1752), he is a giant visiting the Earth from the star Sirius (See pp 223, 294, & nn)

125. *Rhetoric Class* a course in the humanities, originally including recitation and *explication de texte* of French, Latin, and Greek authors, with exercises in writing Latin and Greek prose and Latin verse Before 1925, it led to the first part of the *baccalauréat* (see note for p 121)

130 THE OUTLOOK FOR INTELLIGENCE "Le Bilan de l'intelligence," a lecture given twice at the Université des Annales (see note for p. 290), Jan 16 and Mar 29, 1935, in *Variété III* (1936), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957), tr as "The Balance Sheet of the Intelligence," by Bradley, *Variety II*

Valéry wrote an earlier version of some of the ideas in this essay as a radio talk, given over Radio-Paris on June 12, 1934, and published under the title "Indication d'une politique de l'esprit" in *Les Cahiers de Radio-Paris*, Aug 15, 1934, republished in *Vues* (1948) This early text has not been included in the present collection.

In this same place: at the Université des Annales. (See note for p. 290.)

150. *Baccalauréat*: the diploma awarded upon successful completion of the secondary school program. (See notes for pp. 121 and 125.)

151. *Rollin*: Charles Rollin (1661–1741), French educator. His fanciful compilations of Latin authors, *Histoire ancienne* and *Histoire romaine*, were among the first textbooks written in French. Voltaire and Anatole France both expressed a debt to Rollin.

153. *La valeur n'attend pas...*: "Courage does not depend on the number of one's years"; from Corneille's *Le Cid* (II, 2).

156. *And sometimes our masters' voice*: The French text here, "et parfois la voix de nos maîtres," is a complex pun on the Victrola trademark, "His Master's Voice," *La Voix de son Maître*, which is as well known in France as elsewhere. In French, Valéry's remark refers both to lectures broadcast by professors (*nos maîtres*), and to the speeches of political "masters"—a jibe at the broadcast harangues of Hitler.

160. REMARKS ON PROGRESS: "Propos sur le progrès," first published in *Lumière et Radio*, Dec. 10, 1929; tr. (anon.) as "Art and Progress," *Yale Review*, Summer, 1930; tr. (anon.) in *The Studio* (London), Sept., 1930; in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Bradley, *Variety II*, and Scarfe, *Reflections*.

The review *Les Marges*, in its issue of June 10, 1932, published an "Inquiry on 1900." Valéry's reply included, among other comments on the period, these on Progress:

In philosophy, minds were divided between two widely divergent schools: Poincaré with his Kantian ideas opposed to those of Bergson which were highly ideological and biological.

As for science in 1900, it would take too long to tell you what I think, though I was profoundly interested in all its aspects—without much time to devote to it. I would put first, above any other progress, the discovery of X rays and the work of Marconi.*

164 *The Ethnographical Museum* in Paris, founded in 1880, its principal collection at first was the *cabinet de curiosités* of François I, exotic objects brought to France in the sixteenth century by foreign ambassadors and missionaries. Since 1938, this museum has been part of the Musée de l'Homme.

165–166 *Joseph de Maistre's celebrated saying* "*Dites-moi, M. le Général, qu'est ce qu'une bataille perdue? Je n'ai jamais bien compris cela.* Il me répondit après un moment de silence: *Je n'en sais rien.* Et après un second silence il ajouta: *C'est une bataille qu'on croit avoir perdue.*"

("Tell me, General, when is a battle lost? I have never understood that." He answered me, after a moment of silence: "I don't know." And after another silence, he added: "It is lost when it is thought to be lost.") (From *Les Soirées de St Pétersbourg*, 7th "Entretien.")

167 OUR DESTINY AND LITERATURE: "Notre Destin et les lettres," a lecture given at the Université des Annales (see note for p. 290), Feb. 17, 1937, first published in *Conferencia*, Sept 15, 1937, in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

168. *The Châtelet Theater*: the largest theater in Paris, seating 3,000, built in 1862; its machinery for quick scene changes and its elaborate sets and stage effects made the Châtelet famous for its fairy-plays and other dramatic spectacles.

168–169 *I was thinking of an old play of this type*: The whole passage that follows had been in Valéry's mind at least

*See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade, pp. 1552 f.

since 1895 In a letter to Andre Gide, Aug 18, 1895, he wrote in great amusement

Such idiotic, fiendish tricks remind me of that wonderful curtain line in *Rotomago* (a fairy-play by Messrs Clairville and Siraudin I think) There's a fellow in it completely fed up with the magic tricks some sorcerer is practicing on his furniture Just when one more inevitable trap is sprung and the sofa fills up with water—no wait the room—the sofa turns into a boat a sail shoots up etc the fellow shouts, Here we go again with that stupid nonsense! This line is irresistible believe me! And it stays with me, I say it over and over to myself!—my sole verbal charm against the prodigies of print and bad luck—or luck—that keep cropping up You can see how it applies to self important people books sales

Here we go again with that stupid nonsense!" (Curtain)

173 *You never know what's coming* the French, "la vie est faite d'imprevu, " is doubtless a better proverb than our English translation

178 *The Marais district* that section of Paris around the Place des Vosges and near the Place de la Bastille Many of its handsome seventeenth-century town houses are still standing, in various states of repair

The Rue des Archives or the Rue Vieille-du-Temple both are in the Quartier du Temple, once the property of the Knights Templars, and not far from the Marais district The narrow, winding streets have kept something of their medieval air In the crowded houses, independent craftsmen live and work, turning out *l'article de Paris*—the small, fanciful, often elegant objects in leather, beads, or feathers

182. *Even Wells, in his famous book "The Time Machine"* Wells's book (1895) had been the occasion for Valéry, as a young man, to publish some of his reflections on *time*, as a review of *La Machine a explorer le Temps* (*Mercure de France*,

May 1899.) See Collected Works, Vol. 13.

186. FREEDOM OF THE MIND: "La Liberté de l'esprit," a lecture given at the Université des Annales (see note for p. 290), Mar. 24, 1939; first published in *Conferencia*, Nov. 1, 1939; in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

199. *The famous notebook of Villard de Honnecourt*: a thirteenth-century French architect whose sketchbook, preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale, shows plans and details of Gothic cathedrals, landscapes, human and animal figures, and problems in geometry and mechanics. (See Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral*, Bollingen Series XLVIII, 1956, index, s.v.)

215. THE PERSIAN LETTERS: "Préface aux *Lettres Persanes*," first published under the title "Au sujet des *Lettres Persanes*" as preface to Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (Terquem, 1926); in *Variété II* (1929); see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957); extract tr. by Bower, *Selected Writings*.

Henri de Régnier (1864–1936): a leading Symbolist poet, one of Mallarmé's circle, who later turned to writing novels and tales. He was the son-in-law of the poet José María de Heredia, and a friend and fellow Academician of Valéry.

220. *The Tartuffes, the stupid Orgons, the sinister "Messieurs" and the absurd Alcestes*: Tartuffe, Orgon, and Alceste are familiar comic characters of Molière. The sinister "Messieurs" are, no doubt, the black-cloaked religious zealots, the Jansenist *Solitaires* who lived in retreat and taught at Port-Royal.

The Emiles, Renés, and sordid Rollas: the sentimental Romantic heroes of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, and Musset. Va-

lery's distaste for them may be seen in a characterization of himself which he wrote at the age of nineteen "He [Paul Valery] detests what is called sentiment and finds Rolla repugnant Not that he doesn't have his own tears and anguish, but to him it seems base to turn them into a way of life or a theory of art He understands all the degrees of tenderness but for him it must be substantial He abhors the ready tear, the sobbing over a contemptible love affair with no glory in it no abandon" (*Œuvres II* Pleiade pp 1430–32 Collected Works Vol 15)

221 *Ladies concerned themselves with the retort and [illegible]* In eighteenth-century France "there was enthusiasm amounting to infatuation for the natural sciences, for physics. Kings dukes magistrates abbes doctors, bankers, ladies, all had their *cabinets de physique* Scientists were the object of ardent veneration" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1959], "France," IX p 612)

223 *Usually a Turk or a Persian* French writers of the eighteenth century liked to use this imaginary or exotic voyage as a weapon of satire Montesquieu drew on such books as Tavernier's *Voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes* (1682) and Chardin's *Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient* (1771) Voltaire imagined an interplanetary voyage in his philosophical tale *Micromegas* (1752), in which a giant from Sirius visits the Earth accompanied by an inhabitant of Saturn (See herein, pp 122, 294, & n)

226 NOTES ON THE GREATNESS AND DECLINE OF EUROPE "Notes sur la grandeur et décadence de l Europe," *La Revue des Vivants*, Mar , 1927, as a separate *plaquette* (E. Champion, 1927), in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931, see *Œuvres II*, Pleiade (1960), tr by Scarfe, *Reflections*

233 THE IDEA OF DICTATORSHIP "L'idée de dictature," *first* published under the title "*Note en guise de préambule sur l'idée de dictature*," as a foreword to Antonio Ferro's *Salazar Le Portugal et son Chef*, tr from the Portuguese by Fernando de Castro, with a preface by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar (Grasset, 1934), as "L'Idée de dictature," in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945, see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), tr by Scarfe, *Reflections*

Antonio Ferro (1895–1956) Portuguese writer, lecturer, and journalist In 1932, as President of the Fédération Internationale de la Critique, *he met Valéry who, with Colette*, Pirandello, and Durtain, was invited to lecture at the Casa de Portugal in Paris Ferro's book, with Salazar's preface, appeared in English as *Salazar Portugal and Her Leader* (London Faber and Faber, 1939), with a foreword by Sir Austen Chamberlain

241 CONCERNING DICTATORSHIP "Au sujet de la dictature," preface to a collection of photographs and documents "Dictatures et dictateurs," published as a special number of the quarterly *Témoignages de notre temps*, No 7 (Les Illustrés français, June, 1934), in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945, see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), tr as "On the Subject of Dictatorship" by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

245 *Dictatorship is at present contagious, just as, in the past, freedom was* It is tempting to imagine that Valéry had in mind Jefferson's famous remark in a letter to Lafayette (1820) "the disease of liberty is catching"

247 ON POLITICAL PARTIES "*Des Partis*," *first* published together with "Réflexions Mêlées" and "Hypothèse" under the general title "Réflexions," in *La Revue des Vivants*, Mar,

1929, in *Remarques extérieures* (Éditions des Cahiers Libres, 1929), as a separate article in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931 not included in later editions of *Regards* see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960) tr by L Titus in *This Quarter* (Paris), June, 1932

251 FLUCTUATIONS ON FREEDOM Fluctuations sur la liberte appeared first in a volume of essays by several writers, *La France veut la liberte* in the series Presences (Plon, 1938), in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945 see *Œuvres II*, Pleiade (1960) tr as Fluctuations on Liberty by Scarfe, *Reflections*

252 *Abel* Niels Henrik Abel (1802–1829), a Norwegian mathematician who made important contributions to the study of elliptical functions

254 *Eternal return* the notion of cyclical repetition in history life processes, the mind, etc —for example, the myth of the cyclical death and rebirth of the universe Valery associates the idea most often with Nietzsche (See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, tr by W R Trask, Bollingen Series XLVI, 1954)

The whole obscure matter the French phrase is "cette ténébreuse affaire," an allusion to Balzac's novel, *Une Ténébreuse Affaire* (1841)

265–266 *It is strictly forbidden to take a glass of water from the sea* This passage pokes fun at the French government's monopoly on salt, tobacco, and matches

268 *The demon of "least action"* see p 8 & n

Blanqui Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–1881), a left-wing agitator who initiated or participated in most of the French political revolutions between 1830 and 1870 Repeatedly imprisoned, twice sentenced to death, he took a leading part in the fall of the Second Empire and briefly headed the Paris

Commune in 1870. He died quietly in 1881 A Paris boulevard now bears his name

270 *Vainement pour les dieux* . "No matter to the gods that it [time] flies with a light step", from La Fontaine's *Adonis* (See Collected Works, Vol 7, p 23 & n)

271 *Around 1820, a different order of confession was required.* Under the reactionary clerical government of the Restoration a *billet de confession*, as proof of one's good standing in the church, was required for marriage, baptism, and burial Such *billets* naturally had their political uses

Balzac's wild ass's skin In his novel, *La Peau de chagrin* (1831), a magic skin grants the hero all his wishes, but shrinks in size with each wish

273. LITERATURE AND POLITICS "Réponse à une enquête (sur la chose littéraire et la chose pratique)," dated 1933 in *Œuvres*, Vol D, 1934, see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957)

276 CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM "Réponse à une enquête sur la réforme des lois constitutionnelles," *Le Figaro*, Nov 10, 1934, not republished

279 STATE REFORM "La Réforme de l'État," an interview in *Candide*, Oct 4, 1934, not republished

280 *Committee of Public Safety* the committee with dictatorial powers set up by the hard-pressed French Revolutionary government of 1792, it led to the Reign of Terror

283 THE INTELLECTUAL DESTINY OF WOMAN "Destin intellectuel de la femme," in the review *L'Union nationale des femmes*, Aug 10, 1928, in *Remarques extérieures* (Éditions des Cahiers Libres, 1929)

286. THE PASSION FOR INTELLIGENCE "La Passion de l'in-

telligence," the introductory address at a forum on "Woman" (*O Femme, qui donc es-tu?*) at the Université des Annales (see note for p. 290), Nov. 28, 1931; the other speakers were the Duchesse de La Rochefoucauld and Hélène Vacaresco; published in *Conferencia*, Jan. 20, 1931; not republished.

A footnote to this "debate," in *Conferencia*, commented: "This conference in three voices was a sensation. With the hall filled to capacity and overflowing onto the stage, people standing in the corridors or sitting on the steps, the whole responsive and delighted audience gave a brilliant ovation to these three exceptional opponents. On popular demand, the conference was repeated, Dec. 8, 1930."

288. *The moral and political sciences*: an amusing jibe at the venerable *Institut*, or rather at one of its five Académies: L'Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques.

289. *The sacred Council of Agde*: Valéry was playfully aware of the improbability of date or place or both, but liked the notion of situating the event in this old Mediterranean town so near his birthplace at Sète. A sacred Council was indeed held at Agde early in the sixth century (506), but it is not certain that the status of women was debated there. Nevertheless, it is true that this obscure point of canon law became, in Catholic countries, a telling argument in favor of the feminist movements of our time.

290. *The Annales*: The Université des Annales was an agency for arranging and producing lectures and recitals; it was founded (1907) and directed by Yvonne Sarcey. The programs under its auspices were published in the society's journal, *Conferencia*. When the second World War put a stop to its activity of thirty-three years, Valéry had appeared at least twenty-one times and given fifteen lectures on its programs (1927–1939).

Souvenirs littéraires (Nov 18, 1927)
Propos sur la poésie (Dec 2, 1927)
La Passion de l'intelligence (Nov 28 and Dec 8 1930)
Histoire d'Amphion (with performance of *Amphion*,
Jan 14, 1932—twice)
La Politique de l'esprit (Nov 16, 1932)
Goethe (Dec 15, 1932—twice)
Stéphane Mallarmé (Jan 17, 1933)
Inspirations méditerranéennes (Nov 24 1933—twice)
Le Bilan de l'intelligence (*Jan 16 and Mar 29, 1935*)
Philosophie de la danse (Mar 5, 1936—twice)
Villon et Verlaine (Jan 12, 1937)
Notre Destin et les lettres (Feb 17, 1937)
Nécessité de la poésie (Nov 19, 1937)
La Liberté de l'esprit (Mar 24, 1939)
Pensée et art français (Nov 30, 1939)

293. WOMAN SUFFRAGE "Le Suffrage des femmes," a lecture given at the Cercle Interallié in Paris, published in the *Revue de Paris*, Feb 15, 1931, not republished

Jean Brunhes (1869–1930), French geographer, Professor at the Universities of Fribourg and Lausanne and later at the Collège de France (1912), elected to the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques (1927) Brunhes was one of the first to study the influence of the natural environment on man, in *La Géographie humaine* (1910)

294 *The Ingénu* the hero of Voltaire's satirical story by that title (1767), in the vein of *Micromégas*, *Candide*, *Zadig*, etc A native Huron named Hercule de Korkabon, just arrived in France, he naively says what he thinks and does what he wishes, and is soon in difficulties with the prejudices and customs of the country (See pp 122, 223, & nn)

299 *Ridicule literally kills* "Le ridicule tue" (ridicule kills) is proverbial in France

301 THE QUESTION OF UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE a lecture given at the third congress of the Union Nationale pour le Vote des Femmes Feb 3, 1934 published as a preface to *Problèmes nationaux vus par des françaises* (Éditions du Sagittaire 1934) not republished

307 THE EUROPEAN L Européen extract from Valéry's first public lecture given at the University of Zurich, Nov 15 1922 first published in *La Revue universelle* July 15, 1924, under the title Caractères de l'esprit européen , it appeared as a Note to La Crise de l'esprit in *Variété* (1924), republished as L Européen ' in *Œuvres*, Vol D (1934), see *Œuvres I* Pléiade (1957) tr by Cowley, *Variety*

309 *That better which is the enemy of the good* "Le mieux est l ennemi du bien is a French proverb

311 *Ader* Clément Ader (1841–1925), a French aeronautical engineer, credited with the first heavier-than-air flight (1897)

317 *Civis romanus* "Roman citizen "

324 EUROPE'S POWER TO CHOOSE "Puissance de choix de l'Europe," published with other answers to an inquiry, in a special number of *Les Cahiers du Mois*, Feb –Mar , 1925, under the title *Les Appels de l'Orient* See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), pp 1555 ff The inquiry was formulated in these terms

1 Do you think that West and East are *completely impervious* to each other, or at least that, as Maeterlinck said, in the human brain there is a Western lobe and an Eastern lobe, and each has always paralyzed the other?

2 If we are not impervious to Eastern influence, by what indirect ways—German, Slav, or Asiatic—does it seem to exercise its profoundest effect on France?

3. Do you agree with Henri Massis that Eastern influence may constitute a grave danger to French thought and art, and that it must be urgently resisted? Or do you think that the end of Mediterranean influence is already in sight, and that, like Germany, we may look to a "knowledge of the East" for the enrichment of our culture and a renewal of our sensibility?

4. In what field—art, letters, philosophy—does it seem to you that the Eastern influence can produce particularly fruitful results?

5. What, in your opinion, are the Western values that constitute the superiority of the West over the East? Or what are the false values which, to your mind, cheapen Western civilization?

326. THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT. "L'Esprit européen," an interview published in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, Nov. 16, 1935; not republished.

329. AMERICA, A PROJECTION OF THE EUROPEAN MIND. "L'Amérique, projection de l'esprit européen," written at the request of the literary monthly *Síntesis* (Mexico City), and published there, May, 1938; in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945; published, minus the first paragraph, in French and English (tr. by C. A. Hackett) under the title "L'Amérique, projection de l'Europe," in the first number of the review *Variété*, Oct.–Nov.–Dec., 1945; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

A phrase concerning America that occurs in my book "Variété". The reference is evidently to the words "the European Mind, and America is its formidable creation," in the closing passage of "The European." (See herein, p. 323.)

332. SWITZERLAND IS AN ISLAND. "La Suisse est une île . . . ," the leading article in *Images de la Suisse* (Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1943); not republished.

334 THE POLISH NATION AND ITS PLACE IN EUROPE Preface to Edward Krakowski's *Histoire de la Pologne* (Denoël et Steele 1934) not republished

History is not my forte Valery had a habit of saying this or that is not my forte always in irony as here The habit probably came with the early success of An Evening with M Teste (1896) which opens with Stupidity is not my forte (See Collected Works Vol 6 also Vol 12 p 112 & n)

336 *The treatise on Matter and Memory Matière et mémoire essai sur les rapports du corps à l'esprit* (1897) by Henri Bergson Valery seems to have felt more true deference for Bergson than for any other of his contemporaries

338 INTRODUCTION TO A DIALOGUE ON ART Introduction à un dialogue sur l'art preface to Pierre Féline's Dialogue sur l'art entre un Français et un Marocain de Fez," *La Revue Musicale* June 1938 in *Œuvres* Vol J (1938), see *Œuvres II* Pléiade (1960)

Pierre Féline a boyhood friend of Valery's The two boys lived in the same house in Montpellier, and held weekly rendezvous at which one would give a prepared talk to the other Féline was a talented mathematician, it was from him —and not at school—that Valery got his first real interest in mathematics Valery encouraged Féline in his attempt later on (1936–38) to establish an intellectual exchange between French and Moslem writers and artists (See Féline's "Souvenirs sur Paul Valery," *Mercure de France* July 1, 1954)

345 LEAGUE OF NATIONS LEAGUE OF MINDS "Société des Nations et Société des Esprits" in *L'Europe nouvelle*, Sept 20 1930, in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948)

348 TOWARD A CORRESPONDENCE "Introduction" to the volume *Correspondance I Pour une société des esprits*, published in French and English by the Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle (Paris, 1933), in English only, under the title *A League of Minds* (London Allen and Unwin, 1933)

This "Introduction" was written in collaboration with Henri Focillon Its first publication was headed by this note

> The League of Nations has decided to initiate a *Correspondence* between qualified representatives of the highest activities of the intellect, and has entrusted its publication to the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation
>
> The first *subject* suggested may be summarized in this way Would it not be possible for those whose function it is to produce ideas and bring them to life in expression, to agree to form an "order" of intellectuals? What form would it take? What place could it find in our contemporary world, above and beyond the self-interest of class, party, and nation?
>
> At the first meeting of the Permanent Committee on Arts and Letters of the League of Nations, Messrs Paul Valéry and Henri Focillon, both members of the Committee, expressed certain ideas which, at the Committee's request, they have embodied in the following text.

354. TOWARD A LEAGUE OF MINDS "Pour une société des esprits," in *Correspondance I Pour une société des esprits* (see note for p 348), under the title "Lettre sur la société des esprits" in *Œuvres*, Vol. D (1934), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957).

362 THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE "Préface," a letter dated Oct, 1933, published as the preface to Mariano H Cornejo, *La Lutte pour la paix*, in the series "Les Questions du temps présent" (Alcan, 1934), see *Œuvres I*, Pléiade (1957)

365 IS THE MIND A LUXURY? "L'Esprit est-il un luxe? ou la necessite de l'inutile," first published in *Le Figaro* July 24, 1937; in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948). This article is a revised version of Valery's impromptu opening remarks at the Conversation on *Literature in the Near Future* held in Paris in July 1937. (See Appendix III, p. 550 & n.)

368 *I should need only to mention the names of two books*: the books Valery has in mind are *Das Kapital*, of course, and Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1854). He was keenly aware of Gobineau's influence on the rise of National Socialism in Germany. (See Appendix III, pp. 536 and 551 & n.)

Regular discussions: a reference to the series of Conversations which had then (1937) been in progress for five years.

371 THE YALU "Le Yalou," written in 1895, but unpublished until a single facsimile copy of the original manuscript was made for Julien P. Monod, 1928; published in *Œuvres*, Vol. J (1938) and in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. as "The Yellow River" by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

Valery seems to have thought of "Le Yalou" at first as a part of the Teste cycle. He was evidently referring to this piece in a letter to Andre Gide (July 12, 1899): "I am rotting away over a fragment—a piece of old Roquefort—of Monsieur Teste, long overdue, and as flabby as possible. You know my fate: invariably, everything that amuses me bores the public, and no one can bungle things as I can when I'm bored." Gide replied (July 24): "Where will the *Teste* piece you mention be published? Is it the *Teste in China*?" Then Valery (August 3): "I brought with me, without much hope, some manuscripts to work on, Teste and the Chinese, and I

am letting them lie I would like to be done with these two monsters, so as to take up something else, but here we are, just boring each other."

Viscount Torio Koyata Torio (1847–1905), of the powerful Choshu (Army) Clan, as a member of the Japanese Privy Council and House of Peers, he was active in negotiations for the revision of the treaties with Western powers, completed in 1899

379 ORIENTEM VERSUS "Orientem Versus," first published in *Verve III*, Oct -Dec , 1938, in *Œuvres*, Vol J (1938), see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960)

382 *Cured the blind eyes of old Tobias* "Le poisson qui rouvrit l'œil mort de Tobie ," from Hugo's *Les Orientales* (1829).

Dieudonné de Gozon 27th Grand Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (1346–53), descendant of an ancient family of Provence and Languedoc, who, according to local tradition, slew a monster on the island of Rhodes

383 *That foul herd of swine swollen with devils and driven to be drowned* the "Gadarene swine," Luke 8 32 f (See Collected Works, Vol 3, p 167)

386 ORIENT AND OCCIDENT "Orient et Occident," preface to Cheng Tcheng, *Ma Mère* (Paris and Neuchâtel Éditions Victor Attinger, 1928), under the title "Préface au livre d'un chinois" in *Commerce*, No 15, Spring, 1928, in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931, but not in *Regards* , 1945, see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960) Tr by Marvin McCord Lowes, *A Son of China* (New York Norton, 1930)

Valéry wrote, in a letter to Jean Herbert (Sept 18, 1941, *Lettres à quelques-uns*, pp. 232 ff)

First, concerning spiritual relations between East and West. I have given my views on several occasions and more particularly in my preface to the book *Ma Mère* by Cheng Tcheng. I have always believed that the people of the Middle and Far East could teach us a great deal if we would only allow ourselves to learn from them, not in the sciences, where they are obviously our inferiors, but in the fundamental knowledge of life, and particularly as regards relations between men. Let me put it quite colloquially: I have the impression—perhaps a wrong one—that cads are found only in Europe.

388 *I always live two years ahead*: "Je ne vis jamais que dans deux ans." Valéry admired this remark of Napoleon's, all the more a pity that it is not easy to put into English. (See Collected Works Vol. 7, p. 36 & n.)

Least action: see note for p. 8.

392 *Per fas et nefas*: "by fair means or foul."

397 THE FUNCTION OF PARIS: "Fonction de Paris," first published as "Paris" in *Tableaux de Paris* (Émile-Paul, 1927), in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

401 VIEWS OF FRANCE: "Images de la France," first published as the preface to a collection of photographs by Martin Hürlimann, *La France, Architecture et Paysages* (Librairie des Arts Décoratifs, 1927), in *Regards sur le monde actuel* (Stock), 1931; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

419 FRANCE AT WORK: "La France travaille," first published as the preface to *La France travaille* (Horizons de France, 1932), in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960); tr. by Scarfe, *Reflections*.

421. *It spreads like a peacock's tail in your mouth* "il fait la queue de paon dans la bouche", *the velvet suppleness of the mouth of a horse.* "la mobilité moelleuse de la bouche du cheval"

Baucher, the famous horseman (1805–73), he described his method, *bauchérisme*, in his *Méthode d'equitation basée sur de nouveaux principes* (1842) (See Collected Works, Vol 12, p 65 & *n*)

424 FRENCH THOUGHT AND ART "Pensée et art français," a lecture given at a public session of the Institut de France, Oct 25, 1939, and published in its bulletin, *Institut de France Séance publique annuelle des Cinq Academies* (Firmin-Didot, 1939); repeated at the Université des Annales (see note for p 290), Nov. 30, 1939, published in *Conferencia*, Dec 15, 1939, in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945, see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960)

437 SUBJECT OF A CONVERSATION WITH CONRAD: "Sujet d'une conversation avec Conrad," published in a special number of the *N. R. F* "*Hommage à Joseph Conrad 1857–1924*," Dec 1, 1924, not republished

Once in London two years ago On Oct 30, 1922, at the invitation of Georges Jean-Aubry, Valéry spoke at the unveiling of the plaque on the house at 44 Howland Street, London, where Paul Verlaine had spent the winter of 1872–73. During his short stay, Valéry met Conrad at the house of Lady Colefax The following year he returned to give two lectures, on Hugo and Baudelaire (Oct 16 and 17, 1923) It was on this occasion that he made his visit to Conrad at Bishopsbourne

Georges Jean-Aubry (1882–1950), French writer who lived for ten years in England, and translated several of Conrad's books into French

439 *Monge* Gaspard Monge, Comte de Péluse (1746–1818), French mathematician, professor of mathematics and hydraulics He directed scientific research for Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, was afterwards made President of the Cairo Institute, Senator, and Count, and was decorated with the *grand cordon* of the Legion of Honor He is credited with several discoveries in mathematics

Borda Jean-Charles de Borda (1733–99), French mathematician naval officer, and engineer The ship formerly used as the French Naval Academy (L'École Navale) bore his name

441 A REFLECTION "Reflexion," published in *Le Livre d or du Lycee de Montpellier* (1927), not republished

444 QUALITY "La Qualité," first published by the Comité du Luxe (1944), in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948)

447 *This time it was the ant who found herself "greatly depleted"* in La Fontaine's *La Cigale et la fourmi* (The Cicada and the Ant) (Book I, Fable I), it was the cicada who was "fort dépourvue"

453 *Calculations are here based on intuition, not on mathematics* "Ici les calculs sont de finesse et non de géométrie", the French text makes an obvious allusion to Pascal's distinction between the "mathematical" and the "intuitive" mind ("l'esprit de géométrie et l'esprit de finesse") In English the allusion is not so readily caught (See Collected Works, Vol 7, p 122 & *n*)

459 THE DIVERSITY OF FRANCE "Diversité de la France," first published after Valéry's death, in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948), not republished

465. AGAINST THE HORRIBLE EASE OF DESTRUCTION "Contre l'horrible facilité de détruire," first published in *Vu*, Oct 28, 1936, not republished

467. A RADIO ADDRESS "Allocution sur la guerre," first published in *Le Temps*, Sept 12, 1939, not republished

471. WAR ECONOMY FOR THE MIND "Economie de guerre de l'esprit," first published in the supplement to *Le Temps*, Dec 30, 1939, in *Regards sur le monde actuel*, 1945 see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), tr by Scarfe, *Reflections*

475 BREATHING AGAIN "Respirer," first published in *Le Figaro*, Sept 2, 1944, in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948), see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960)

478 OUR COUSINS IN QUEBEC "Préface," a letter dated May, 1945, published as the preface to M M Charpentier, *Nos Cousins de Québec* (Colbert, 1945), not republished

481. SOMETHING OF AN EVENT "Un rien d'événement," first published in *Le Figaro*, 1944, in *Jours de gloire, histoire de la libération de Paris* (1945), under the patronage of the Minister of National Education, sold for the benefit of the French Red Cross and war prisoners, in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948)

485 ULTIMA VERBA "Ultima Verba," first published in *Carrefour*, May 12, 1945, in *Vues* (La Table Ronde, 1948), see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960)

Valéry died July 10, 1945 These were then almost literally his "last words"

Appendix I

489 INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING OF TROOPS review of the book *Éducation et instruction des troupes* in the *Mercure de France*, Oct 1897 see *Œuvres II* Pleiade (1960) pp 1446 ff

This is one of three articles by Valery published under the heading *Méthodes* in the *Mercure de France* from 1897 to 1899 For the other two see Collected Works Vol 13

After a 28-day period of military service in Lorraine during Aug-Sept 1895 Valery wrote to Andre Gide in Oct (Gide and Valery *Correspondance* p 249)

The little I have thought since I left was along military lines Rather curious—probably a result of my 28 days A tough corporal is what they put on my record, and in fact I had to put one man in the jug and discipline another (for which I was really sorry, moreover)

However look at this

[Here Valery drew a graph]

Just to follow this line across this plain is enough to drive you wild on the subject of strategy and tactics This is the most exciting chessboard in the world, and with the incompetence of a Bouvard I couldn t see anything but "fortified ridges enveloping movements danger zones" Imagine that the towns in this country are called Lonato, Verona, Peschiera, Castiglione, etc Now, with that slight whiff of history which we inhaled long ago, and a few memories of having fired some blank cartridges I fabricated for myself a *mechanical* or *psychomechanical* view, attempting to make the (always so interesting) *terrain*, each man and the *complex of men*, all taken together = the army as an organized whole Imagine what the algebraic or pseudo-algebraic expression of such a group would be, with the values to be assigned to accidents of terrain geological laws productive land, even the movement of peoples over the given topographical model of Lombardo-Venetia

You get the aesthetics of it at once

This letter gives an excellent sense of the kind of interest which led to Valéry's curious early article on troop training

497 ELEMENTS OF PURE POLITICAL ECONOMY review of Léon Walras' book *Éléments d'économie politique pure* in *Revue générale du droit*, Nov–Dec, 1896, see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), pp 1442 ff

M Walras Léon Walras (1834–1910), a French economist, professor at the University of Lausanne The first edition of his book had appeared in 1874 Walras was one of the first men in Europe to attempt to reduce the prevailing empirical notions of political economy to an exact science His effort to find mathematical expression for the conditions of general economic equilibrium corresponded closely with young Valéry's preoccupations

502. LE YALOU for bibliographical details, see note for p 371

Appendix II

511. EXTRACTS FROM TWO LETTERS TO ANDRÉ GIDE see Gide and Valéry, *Correspondance*, pp 287 f and 417, also *Œuvres II*, Pléiade, p 1544

Those asinine pro-Greeks This was the moment of excitement over the Greco-Turkish War of 1896, which in 1897 gained for Crete a measure of independence from Turkey

513 EXTRACTS FROM TWO LETTERS TO ANDRÉ LEBEY see *Lettres à quelques-uns*, pp 76–80, also *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), pp 1541 f. and 1543

André Lebey (1877–1938), poet and historian, an early and lasting friend to whom Valéry dedicated his poem "Le Rameur." He was a nephew of Édouard Lebey, the wealthy re-

tired director of the Havas News Agency to whom Valery acted as private secretary for twenty-two years. André Lebey was in fact responsible for Valery's being offered the post. His volume of poems *Coffrets étoilés* was prefaced by Valery (see note for p. 517 below). Lebey became a historian and politician, and later refuted Valery's opinions on history and politics in a small volume *Nécessité de l'histoire* (Firmin-Didot 1933).

After Lebey's death, when his library was to be sold, Valery wrote a preface for the sale catalogue in which he said: "He dreamed of great things; the bitterness of being kept from accomplishing them was not without its part in his death." (See *Œuvres II*, Pléiade [1960], p. 1543 f.)

517 A FEW WORDS: extracts from "Quelques Mots," Valery's preface to the poems of André Lebey, *Coffrets étoilés* (La Renaissance du Livre, 1918); not republished. (It is to be found in full in Vol. 11, Collected Works.)

One of the first times Valery ever spoke before an audience was to read his "Quelques Mots" as the prelude to a recitation of poems by André Lebey, in the drawing room of Mme Aurel in Paris, July 5, 1917.

520 *S'io sto, chi va*: "If I do not go, who will?"

522 CONVERSATION ON HISTORY: "Conversation sur l'histoire avec Paul Valéry," by Lo Duca, in *Le Monde illustré*, Christmas, 1946; see *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), pp. 1544 ff.

Lo Duca, who was the partner in this conversation and wrote it down, added the following note on its first publication: "This conversation with Paul Valéry (*Alpha* in the text) took place during a stroll from the Faubourg St. Honoré to the Rue de Villejust. Valery at moments expressed himself in

less decent and more passionate terms—it was in August, 1938, but the written text could hardly be other than it is Besides, the poet himself revised it—in July, 1939 and added a few disabused and pertinent comments"

526. EXTRACT FROM A LETTER TO ANATOLE DE MONZIE first published in Louis Planté, *Un Grand Seigneur de la Politique, Anatole de Monzie* (Raymond Clavreuil, 1955), pp 322–23; see also *Œuvres II*, Pléiade (1960), pp 1547 f

Anatole de Monzie (1876–1947), French Radical Socialist Deputy, Senator, and Minister, later founder and guiding spirit of *L'Encyclopédie française*, author of a number of books, among them his *Pétition pour l'histoire* (1942), which contained a chapter entitled "Épître tardive à Paul Valéry" ("A Belated Letter to Paul Valéry") This is the book to which Valéry's letter, cited herein, is a reply

Appendix III

535 AN EXCHANGE FOR LITERARY VALUES "Il faut créer une bourse des valeurs littéraires," in *L'Europe nouvelle*, Jan 16, 1926, not republished

537 THE FUTURE OF CULTURE An impromptu speech made at the close of the second session of Conversations, held in Madrid, May 3–7, 1933, Valéry spoke at the request of the chairman, Mme Curie, in reply to a brief address by the Spanish Minister of Education, Sr de los Rios, published in *Entretiens II L'Avenir de la culture* (Paris Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1933)

Valéry had spoken only once before during the several days of discussion On that first occasion, he made this remark

about Unamuno, who was present I see before me in this meeting two great physicists an eminent doctor, one of the most distinguished of biologists and a mathematician of the rank of M Severi I see also what I shall call an Unamuno—I shall not try to define him he is a special category in himself, a unit that will not break down into multiples

541 THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN MIND two speeches with which Valery, as chairman opened and closed the third session of Conversations held in Paris October 16–18, 1933, published in *Entretiens III L Avenir de l esprit européen* (Paris Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1934)

At this meeting, Valery also participated frequently in the discussions that founded the Societe d Etudes Européennes, of which he was elected President

544 *To knock three times for a play* in the French theater the traditional signal for curtain rise is to knock three times on the stage floor with a wooden staff The origins of the tradition seem to be unknown

547 TOWARD A NEW HUMANISM extract from the chairman s ' Address of Thanks" at the opening of the sixth session of Conversations, Budapest, June 8–11, 1936, published in *Entretiens VI Vers un nouvel humanisme* (Paris Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1937)

550 LITERATURE IN THE NEAR FUTURE These "Preliminary Considerations' were written in preparation for the eighth session of Conversations, held in Paris, July 20–24, 1937, published in *Entretiens VIII Le Destin prochain des lettres* (Paris Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1938)

The subject was proposed by Valery, to be discussed under

three topics (1) the writer—his economic and intellectual situation, his influence in the modern world, (2) the reader—his new needs and tastes, (3) language—its new forms, its new methods and means of expression Valéry presided A revised version of his remarks opening the session was published under the title "L'Esprit, est il un luxe? ou la nécessité de l'inutile," in *Le Figaro*, July 24, 1937, the day the meeting ended (See herein, p 365)

554 *Le Petit Parisien* a daily tabloid newspaper published in Paris before 1940, it was mainly interested in local gossip, read by the concierges

555. A LETTER TO PAUL VALÉRY by Salvador de Madariaga, published in *Correspondance I Pour une societe des esprits* (Paris Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1933), in English, under the title *A League of Minds* (London Allen and Unwin as n 348, 1933) The present translation is our own

556 *Il en cherra des fruits de mort* "From it will fall fruits of death, despair, and disorder" *The two lines are from Valéry's* poem "Ébauche d'un serpent"

558 *Vitoria at Salamanca* Francisco de Vitoria (1486?–1546), a Dominican friar, professor of theology and head of the University of Salamanca, in his lectures *De Indis* (1539) and *De jure belli* (1539), he laid down the basic argument for civil rights, in other lectures he argued that the New World was not under the personal sovereignty of Charles V but under that of the Spanish nation, thus laying the foundations of national sovereignty He is known in Spain as the father of international law

563 *The Salève* a mountain ridge overlooking Geneva

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