# CHAPTER VI

## ATTACK ON DECADENCE

All three writers were concerned about the decadence of France, the weaknesses in the system, and the decline of what they considered to be the appropriate traditional values. The manifestations of decadence they saw prevented France from maintaining her historic status as a first-class power and from being the political and cultural leader in the hierarchy of nations. It was this concern about the declining place of their country among the powers of the world and the awareness of France's internal weakness that made the writers prophetic of those in other countries whose reaction to a similar problem was to be a violent one, dangerous to the peace of the world.

Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras were all aware of the diminished glory of the country, and in this each paid almost as much attention to the literary as to the physical attributes of France. "We must serve France and defend a Latin culture of which we are the extreme bastions,"[1] said Barrès. From the European point of view, argued Maurras, "every Frenchman is a politician."

All three writers were disappointed with the existing political institutions and with the politicians running them, whom they considered to be betrayers of the best interests of France. The three condemned the overcentralization of the country, which had had unfortunate effects. But each of the writers stressed a different aspect of the problem of France's decadence. Barrès and Sorel emphasized the negative characteristics of the Republic, its lack of doctrine, energy, and heroic qualities. Maurras and Barrès emphasized the foreign elements, personal and ideological, which in the cultural, economic, political, and financial worlds, were rotting the very fiber of France.

Sorel was a moralist who emphasized the need for *élan* and denounced the dullness, lack of heroism, pacific nature, and

[1] *Mes Cahiers*, III:145.

unity of the country. He was also a technician who criticized the Republic's fatal tendency to consume rather than produce. The moralist and the technician were interconnected because the laxity of morals was harmful to the activities of production. Sorel crossed the normally accepted barriers between Left and Right. He was representative of the Left in regarding decadence as an outcome of rigid stability, denying the desirability of a state of equilibrium, and arguing that the proletariat had a unique mission to perform in the regeneration of society. He was representative of the Right in his belief that energetic action as such would create a more desirable moral state, in his attacks on rationalism and intellectualism, on individualism and on bourgeois plutocracy, and in his partly paradoxical belief in rural values.

Barrès disagreed with Sorel over the desirability of an unstable society. With his acute sensitivity to human failings and desires, he was the first person in modern literature to stress the elements of decadence resulting from the instability of society and the psychological problems of modern citizenship. Change, centralization, and abstract ideology had resulted not only in stifling the life of the provinces, but in an uprootedness of individuals which had left them shiftless, helpless, and rudderless. The result had been, as Simone Weil at a later date was to express it, "a lack of participation in the life of a community which preserves . . . certain particular treasures of the past, and certain particular expectations for the future."[2] Decadence, for Barrès, was the result of this alienation of man from the traditions of his society and his culture.

But if the conservative Barrès urged stability, Maurras, the counter-revolutionary, desired not stability—despite his avowal of this aim—but radicalism in reverse, with the restoration of the past, a past which he idealized to the point of incomprehensibility. To the fact that revolution too can have its traditions, as France had had since 1789, he was completely opposed. For Maurras, the Revolution and the Third Republic

[2] Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, Boston, 1955, p. 43.

neglected true values, attacked the natural authorities of society, and overthrew tradition. In the ceaseless war he waged on the Third Republic, there were a bitterness and antagonism which prevented any kind of compromise. Indeed, there was in Maurras more hate for the present than love for the past. The writer who stressed so incessantly the need for unity was himself a prime divisive force in France, an irreconcilable opponent of those who exercised power.

The response of the three writers to the decadence that they observed was to look for elements of certainty with which to erect barriers against universal chaos. The antidemocrat can never tolerate the conditional or the tentative and is always interested in definitive solutions, in certainty, in the finite. The antidemocrat will always mistake flexibility for anarchy. Sorel spoke for the other two when he talked of a democratic parliamentary regime as a regime "where everything is provisional . . . where the revision of laws is perpetually on the order of the day."[3] For all three writers, a desirable moral state of society could never be attained through expediency instead of assured principles or through stratagems rather than integrity.

Sorel, Maurras, and Barrès were all agreed on the necessity of accepting traditions, on the danger of squandering of resources through consumption, and on the need for vigorous action, but each emphasized his own starting premise for the attack on decadence. With Sorel, who had criticized the Socratic philosophy for its absence of moral certitude[4] and indicated the Marxian fear of a completely rigid and closed system,[5] it was the desirability of recognized moral rules. With Barrès, it was the search for a discipline of tradition which the individual would willingly embrace, and which would provide the necessary foundation for the exercise of individual sensibility. With Maurras, it was the return to the spirit and ideal of classicism, the static and perfect order, hierarchical, authoritarian, untainted by any foreign element.

[3] Georges Sorel, "De l'Eglise et de l'état," *Cahiers de la quinzaine* (October 1901), 3rd Series, No. 3.

[4] *Le Procès de Socrate*, p. 92.

[5] Sorel, preface to Arturo Labriola, *Karl Marx, l'économiste, le socialiste*, Paris, 1910.

## *ABSENCE OF TRADITIONS*

Between the years 1910 and 1912, the three writers were associated together in a demand for a revival of traditions that were lacking under the Republic. To uphold traditions is to approve certain institutions, certain sentiments and ideas of value which have been the result of the historical experience of a community and which that community wishes to maintain. However, a believer in tradition is not necessarily a supporter of traditionalism, which is partly a psychological characteristic of human behavior and partly a political phenomenon. As a psychological characteristic, traditionalism means a clinging to the old ways of life and an acceptance of the value of the past simply because it is the past.[6] As a political phenomenon, traditionalism in France implies a return to the political past, a reaction favorable to the values and often the institutions of the *ancien régime*, and therefore desirous of destroying the ideology, heritage, and institutions of the Revolution. Not all traditions will thus become part of a traditionalist attitude. Since the 19th century there have been the two traditions of the *ancien régime* and of the Revolution, and acceptance of the latter does not denote traditionalism. It was in this sense that Sorel denied being a traditionalist if this meant supporting monarchical or Catholic institutions and marching beside Maurras to achieve these institutions.[7] And it is in this sense also that Maurras and Barrès were traditionalists in their desire to reconstruct political and social institutions, in their stress on the absolute dependence of the individual on society, in their use of the symbols of the earth, the dead, the glory of France, and in their denunciation of innovation. But all three writers were aware of the absence of desirable traditions, those traditions which might act as a substitute for or an appendage to religion in the attempt to give meaning to human existence. Unfortunately, all three writers were apt to forget that tradi-

[6] Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, London, 1953, p. 95.

[7] Edouard Dolléans, "Le Visage de Georges Sorel," *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* (1940-1947), 26:107.

tion, as Raymond Aron once wrote, is a fact of which one must take account, not a value before which one must incline.

Sorel saw the absence or neglect of traditions as a threat to French society, and drew historical parallels to show the danger. The lack of a conservative spirit had led to a rapid decadence in Hellenic culture.[8] The philosophers of that culture, foreign to Attica, had had no fatherland, and so they had declared that their fatherland was the world. Just like the heterae, they had no hearth, no national culture, no tombs of ancient ancestors to guard, no relics to protect against the barbarians. In opposition to the Socratics and the Stoics, it was Aristophanes who, by singing the glory of ancestors and recalling the heroism of the past, was accomplishing a great and holy mission. Rome, too, had shown that only a people with profound respect for traditions could have a great legal system.

It was the absence of this profound respect for traditions that was disturbing to Sorel in the contemporary scene. The Republic, with its vices of envy, greed, ignorance, skepticism, and license, was leading to the destruction of the family, the marriage sacrament, and religious sanctity. The French bourgeoisie was producing this destruction because it attached no importance to the things that could neither amuse it nor serve it for exercising its command. It was to the masses, who were conservative by nature, that Sorel looked for defense of the traditional concepts of morality and law against the relativism of the bourgeoisie.[9]

For Sorel there was no question more interesting than that of the transmission of a heritage from one era to another, and he agreed with Marx that socialism must be careful not to compromise the acquisitions of the capitalist era. All revolutions conserved many things of the past: a heritage, a body of writings and sacred histories, a severe discipline of manners and a way of utilizing books, traditions, and practical ethics.[10]

[8] Sorel, "Les Intellectuels à Athènes," *Le Mouvement socialiste* (September 15, 1908), 24:234-235.

[9] *D'Aristote à Marx*, p. 100.

[10] Sorel, *Le Système historique de Renan*, Paris, 1906, pp. 467-468.

France was living on what remained of the *ancien régime* in democratic France; a century of revolutions and of the representative system had not succeeded in breaking down all that the old royalty had created. French democracy had not abandoned itself to instincts of spoliation because it found the invocation of the glory of ancestors too useful.

"We live on the resources accumulated by our fathers," Sorel had said in a speech in 1899,[11] and in 1910 he was again urging the value of traditions. Sorel helped draft the declaration of the new journal, *l'Indépendance*, addressed to men who "disgusted by the silly pride of democracy, by humanitarian nonsense, by foreign fashions, wanted to make the French spirit independent." *L'Indépendance* resolved to attain this end by following the noble routes opened by the masters of national thought, declaring that tradition was a springboard rather than a fetter.

Much of this decadence and neglect of traditions was due to intellectuals, whose chief role was to destroy the authority which was the basis of the *ancien régime*. An intellectual like Condorcet, in his educational reforms, did not propose to produce agriculturists, industrialists, engineers, geometricians, or wise men, but wanted to produce "enlightened men," men free of all chains, all authority, all old habits.[12] Intellectuals destroyed tradition, and thus singularly favored the triumph of the bourgeoisie.

Maurras made many of the same criticisms of the neglect of traditions as Sorel, and agreed that the democratic Republic had profited from the start given it by eternal France; it profited from the genius of military men, whom it had not honored.[13] But democracy and the Republic were detrimental to tradition and to all the desirable, time-hallowed values: hierarchy, authority, discipline, order, peace, family, property. Democracy, venerating anarchy as its true mode of expression, excluded both the idea of time and that of public spirit. To Maurras, who was Burkean in his view that although the

[11] Sorel, "L'Ethique du socialisme," in Georges Sorel et al., *Morale sociale*, Paris, 1909.

[12] *Les Illusions du progrès*, p. 55.

[13] *Enquête sur la monarchie*, p. *l.*

individual passes the nation endures, this was disastrous. Whereas the wisdom of the community was concerned with the public good—collective unity, family, state, race, and nation—the democrat and the revolutionary thought of private happiness and satisfaction—in other words, insurrection.

Maurras regarded the Republic as inimical to the natural authorities of the nation, and the Revolution as a break with national traditions. The Republic, by the spirit of its founders and its logicians, admitted neither army, nor family, nor classes, nor savings, nor property, nor order, nor fatherland—nothing which was national or social.[14] The Revolution had proclaimed the reign of popular assemblies; France now regarded them with limitless contempt. The Revolution had established the departments; France now spoke only in terms of provinces. The Revolution had abolished the guilds; France now was syndicalist.

In their solicitude for desirable traditions, Sorel was primarily concerned with the search for and the maintenance of an appropriate code of ethics and juridical sentiments and Maurras with the revival of the classical spirit founded, as he saw it, on authority, hierarchy, and inequality. But it was Barrès, with his desire for a firm foundation on which an individual could develop his sensibility, who stressed most strongly the idea of dependence on traditions.

## *BARRÈS: ABSENCE OF EXALTATION*

In his articles on Baudelaire in his early journal, *Les Taches d'encre*, Barrès had recognized the existence of a specifically Baudelairean psychology and language concerned solely with the search for sensations and with their analysis.[15] Barrès himself began his literary career and quickly achieved fame by advocating the desirability of such a search and analysis through the *culte-du-moi*, the method by which each individual developed himself.

Barrès had declared that "our malaise comes from the fact

[14] *L'Allée des Philosophes*, p. 28.

[15] R. Nugent, "Baudelaire and the Criticism of Decadence," *Philological Quarterly* (April 1957), 36:234-243.

that we live in a social order imposed by the dead, not chosen for us. The dead poison us."[16] In his first trilogy, *Sous l'oeil des barbares, Un Homme libre,* and *Le Jardin de Bérénice,* Barrès heralded a restless, experimental individualism. "I wish that each morning life would appear new to me and all things start afresh," he wrote.[17] Since life had no sense, and the universe and existence were senseless tumults, since all certainty had vanished and religion and national sentiment were fragile things from which to derive rules of behavior, since he encountered philosophic skepticism and cynicism everywhere, the ego became the only tangible reality and manifested itself through the cultivation of the largest number of exalted, rare, complicated, subtle emotions. From Loyola he took the idea of subjecting himself to a train of images. Reflection was unimportant compared with the omniscience and the omnipotence produced by the subconscious.

Cultivation of the ego, the heightening of sensibility, meant feeling differently from others. The *barbare* was not the barbarian, or the philistine of Matthew Arnold, but simply the "non-ego." The first concern of the individual, therefore, was to be surrounded by high walls, and to seek his own development. "What I have followed everywhere, in my enthusiasm for Lorraine and France together, in traveling, in seeking power, is an immense increase of my personality."[18] Everything became a method by which his soul could be nourished —parliament, electoral activities, politics in general, Spain, religion, all played their part in this. His voyages—in later life he or his memory was honored by Metz, Sainte-Odile, Pau, Toledo, Marseilles, Beirut, Alexandria—were made primarily, not to understand, but to enlarge, his ego. Toledo was less a town than a significant site for the development of the soul. Spain and Italy were places of savagery and passion.

This undisciplined exaltation was the key to the individualism of Barrès. "I am a garden where emotions flourish. I am

16 Maurice Barrès, *Sous l'oeil des barbares,* Paris, 1892, p. 141.
17 Barrès, *Un Homme libre,* Paris, 1905, p. 237.
18 *Mes Cahiers,* v:77.

lost in vagabondage, not knowing by what principle to direct my life."[19] He confessed that he would not have spent the nights of his 20th year reading poetry if it had not been capable of stirring him emotionally. He approved of the fact that a Renan, a Stendhal, was concerned only with his internal development. They were voluptuaries in the noble sense of the word. "For Barrès," said Bourget in his preface to *The Disciple*, "nothing is true, nothing is false, nothing is moral, nothing is immoral." Even a friendly critic like Pierre Lasserre recognized that the *culte-du-moi*, "this formula of disinterestedness and idealism, this repudiation of the utilitarian spirit . . . contains a certain perfume of anarchy."[20] Maurras too admitted that "he was the hero of the most beautiful adventures of the soul."[21]

But the ironist and dilettante pupil of Renan became the nationalist, traditionalist, antidemocratic pupil of Taine, with his ideas of uprootedness, decentralization, respect for national traditions, passion for energy, and acceptance of discipline. The place where he was most likely to realize himself changed from Venice to France, and in particular, to Lorraine. Tradition became the certitude with which to escape from nihilism, death, destruction, and decomposition.

Yet there was no real change in the basic attitude of Barrès. In his early book, *Un Homme libre*, which remained "my central expression," the individual ego was completely fed and supported by society. Individuals were only fragments of a more complete system that was the race, itself a fragment of God. Barrès admired Tiepolo as the conscious center of his race, for he found the Venetian painter typical, as was Barrès' own fictional hero, of his whole race. In the third book of Barrès' first trilogy, *Le Jardin de Bérénice*, he had said, "Our meditations, like our sufferings, are the result of our desire for something that can complete us."[22] His heroine,

[19] Barrès, *Le Jardin de Bérénice* (Definitive Edition), Paris, 1921, p. 76.

[20] Pierre Lasserre, *Faust en France*, Paris, 1929, p. 117.

[21] *Enquête sur la monarchie*, p. 490.

[22] *Le Jardin de Bérénice*, p. 65.

Bérénice herself, was symbolic of Barrès' belief that the self can be enriched by communion with the unconscious primitive soul of the people because it is in the people that the human substance and the creative energy, the sap of the world, the unconscious, are revealed.

Barrès changed his front, but never his ground. To seek his own good, to nourish his imagination, his sensibility, his soul, he imposed a discipline on himself, a discipline of tradition and of the dead, a Tainean acceptance of the necessities of life. But, commented M. Parodi, "under the appearance of a nationalist terminology, it is always, in truth, pure anarchic individualism and moral nihilism that are expressed in his work."[23] The soul of France was the soul of Barrès externalized. His nationalism was only the expression, the clamor, of ideas held from his birth.

Barrès argued that tradition allowed the extension and development of individuality and also admitted the individual into something larger than himself. "There is at the bottom of ourselves a constant neurotic point . . . it does not simply provoke the sensations of an ephemeral individual but also stirs the whole race."[24] The tradition of a country did not consist of a series of fleshless affirmations that could be catalogued, but was a way of feeling life rather than judging it. There were no personal ideas; ideas, even the most rare, judgments, even the most abstract, metaphysical sophisms, even the most infatuating, were ways of feeling in a general way. Reason, that enchanted queen, obliged men to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors.[25] "There are no personal ideas . . . we are the prolongation and the continuation of our fathers and mothers," wrote Barrès. Individuals were not masters of the thoughts born in them. Thoughts were reactions, movements of the organism in a given milieu. They were not born of intelligence, but were ways of reacting that were common to all those in the same milieu.

[23] D. Parodi, "La Doctrine politique et sociale de M. Maurice Barrès," p. 24.

[24] *Scènes*, p. 10.

[25] Barrès, *Amori et dolori sacrum*, Paris, 1903, p. 277.

In a revealing passage, Barrès attempted to link his conception of individuality with that of tradition:

> "I am not a social utilitarian . . . what is useful for the life of the individual is to increase the number of his dreams. . . . I am not preoccupied above all to save society . . . or to trace a rule of moral conduct for men. That would be good, but it is not my message. I am preoccupied with understanding, with feeling the world, with making it understood and felt, acting on the thought of man, and do this by defending the Church."[26]

It was tradition that gave Sturel, the character who most closely resembled Barrès himself, a motive for acting and provided direction to his internal drives. Individuals, moreover, were glad to accept the fact of this determinism, the yoke of necessity, the yoke of the past. The word "discipline" was one of the favorite words of Barrès, important for the individual, for Lorraine, for France. Everyone felt the necessity of discipline whether he was attached to syndicalism, nationalism, Catholicism, or monarchy because, he argued, acceptance of a discipline was less difficult than complete liberty. Barrès was remarkably prophetic in his awareness of the willingness of men to merge their individuality in the whole society. Between the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevsky and totalitarian movements, Barrès stands equidistant in time, and provides the link between thought and action. In 1889 Barrès had felt it was important that each individual choose his own discipline, and that it would be abominable if he submitted to a discipline he had not chosen. At the end of his life, in 1922, he was writing that a discipline was necessary for man; it did not suffice to know the laws that ruled things and the material universe, it was also necessary to know the law that ruled the individual, the moral law. Though Barrès spoke of the *Social Contract* as "imbecilic because it is a dialectical construction about an abstract man," at times he approached Rousseauistic ideas, in talking of "being a slave

[26] *Mes Cahiers*, IX:24.

of my earthly and family formation," and of "the slavery I have slowly learned to love."[27]

An essential part of Barrès' deterministic pattern of tradition and discipline was acceptance and individual self-limitation. In his *Du Sang, de la volupté, et de la mort*, he had seen in the Christ of Leonardo's *Last Supper* in Milan, the supreme word of a complete knowledge and meditation on reality, which was acceptance. In *Les Déracinés*, it was the powerful speech of Taine about his plane tree that emphasized the most sublime philosophy, the acceptance of necessities. The tree was a repeated symbol for tradition and continuity in the works of Barrès. Just as the tree without denying itself, without abandoning itself, had drawn the most from the conditions furnished by reality, so man, by accepting inherited philosophies, gave substance to the works of ancestors.

But it was also necessary to concentrate on a limited end. The master rule was to limit desires, as Renan had done, and to turn activity towards a precise and single end. It is curious to find Barrès, the individual so complex and of such diverse emotions, at the end of his life arguing that the great thing in life was to unify oneself, to be entirely employed in the same way, not to be dispersed in efforts that contradicted, annulled themselves, and were troublesome.[28] For the duality always remained in Barrès between his need for tradition in a French setting and his love for Asia, "le vaste flot de l'Asie," and its divinities of a brutal, animal nature.

For Barrès the best example of the danger caused by the lack of tradition and discipline was the *déraciné*, or uprooted individual. The tragedy of the *déraciné* was that he had lost all the traditions in which the experience of the race was conserved. From both an individual and a national point of view, a young person isolated from his nation was hardly worth more than a word isolated from the text; he was a young beast without a lair. *La patrie* was always stronger in the soul of an *enraciné* than in that of a *déraciné*. The *déraciné*, once

[27] *Mes Cahiers*, XIV:52; IX:319; VI:266.

[28] Barrès, "La Vie Exemplaire de Paul Bourget," *Revue hebdomadaire* (December 15, 1923), 32.12:266-271.

he left his homeland, was no more than an individual, for to be uprooted is to have no place in the world. Barrès was one of the first to introduce the theme of individual loneliness which Durkheim was later to call *anomie*.

This *déracinement*, moreover, was dangerous for France. Barrès had noticed, and was distressed at the fact, that in the suburbs of Paris, the population was anarchic and their names indicated they came from all the provinces of France. Anyone who had lived there for twenty years was regarded as belonging to an old family.

Organic metaphors are always treacherous, and Barrès' analogy between the *déraciné* who has left his homeland and a plant that has been uprooted is, as André Gide has shown,[29] both imprecise and false. The human being who "cuts off roots" can survive in a way that might be impossible horticulturally. Also, the view that the animal or plant prospers only in its place of origin denies the possibility of transplantation, which has proved to be successful organically. Moreover, the tendency to equate a healthy growth with a natural one may be restrictive in obliging adherence to one given pattern. It is not easy to know exactly who is a *raciné* for Barrès. He himself was content to study the soul of Lorraine either in Paris, on his constant travels, or on his annual but brief pilgrimage to his birthplace. The concept of *raciné* in fact seems at times to mean little more than one who agrees with the Barresian political views. Lemaître was one of those whom he had called "petits français," but when the literary critic took the antirevisionist side in the Dreyfus Affair, "I felt he was a *raciné*."[30]

Tradition was doubly desirable. It was a means of protection against the brutal pressures of life, a means of individual exaltation, and also a basis for organizing French energy in order to accomplish French destiny.

The necessity of exaltation within a traditional framework was a national as well as an individual phenomenon. Like other Nationalists, one of the primary aims of Barrès was to

[29] André Gide, *Incidences*, Paris, 1924, p. 56. Also, *Prétextes*, Paris, 1913.

[30] *Mes Cahiers*, II:145.

reassert the position of France in world politics. Barrès, like his character Sturel, had felt that French nationality, the substance supporting him and without which he was nothing, was in the process of diminishing and disappearing. The fact that French energy was at a low point in an epoch of deep depression determined his role. It was necessary for France to recapture, protect, augment the energy inherited from its ancestors. France would save itself only by a fever; "our whole national history says it."[31] The patriot must be prepared to defend those hereditary reserves that everyone falls back on in order to find his direction. In all this, the old enemy was not forgotten. Part of the hereditary reserves was the fund of subconscious sentiment which provided the resistance to Germany.

One of the essential characteristics of conservative thinking is the manner in which it clings to the immediate, the actual, the concrete.[32] Reacting against the abstract ideology of democracy, Barrès attempted to found his traditionalism on concrete places and people, though his "points of spirituality and of fixity" changed from time to time. It was on seeing *la colline inspirée* that Barrès understood "my country and my race, and saw my true post, the end of my efforts, my predestination."[33] Included in his summits of the embodiment of the French spirit were the mountain of Sion-Vaudémont, the ruined stones from the Chateau of Vaudémont, Sainte-Odile and the Puy de Dôme. What Barrès, the advocate of energy, action, and sensations, liked in the past was, he said, "its sadness, its silence, and above all, its fixity."[34]

It was in Lorraine, and especially in its dead, that he found his tradition. "My ideas are not mine; I found them, breathed them from birth in the ideas of Lorraine."[35] At the end of his life he wrote that of all the ideas to which he had devoted himself none was more deeply rooted than the sense of his dependence on his family and Lorraine.[36] In *Mes Cahiers,*

[31] *Scènes,* p. 274.
[32] Mannheim, *op.cit.,* p. 102.
[33] *Amori et dolori sacrum,* p. 281.
[34] *Mes Cahiers,* III:287.
[35] *Mes Cahiers,* XI:395.
[36] Barrès, preface to J-B.A. Barrès, *Souvenirs d'un Officier de la Grande Armée,* Paris, 1923, p. iv.

in the *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*, and particularly in the chapter, "Le 2 Novembre en Lorraine," in *Amori et dolori sacrum*, and in his long description of the journey along the valley of the Moselle in *L'Appel au soldat*, Barrès was continuously searching for the heritage of Lorraine. At Metz, he admired the old names on the shops, the simple polite manners, and the virtues of humility and dignity which were in accordance with the heritage of the inhabitants.

Lorraine patriotism was manifested for both emotional and material reasons. Barrès said that Lorraine was not essentially "our countryside, works of art, customs, resources, dishes, not even our history . . . but it was a special way of feeling."[37] But it was also true that Lorraine adhered to France solely to obtain order and peace. "Our patriotism has nothing idealistic, philosophic about it; our fathers were very realistic."[38] Moreover, the idea of Lorraine was useful to Barrès himself. Lorraine, from which something mystical arose to guide and rule, from which Barrès sought "the law of my development," was also a mirror in which he contemplated himself, a concept which accorded with his nature, his habits, and his works. As more than one critic has suggested, if Lorraine did not create Barrès, he created it.

Barrès was also extraordinarily preoccupied with the idea of death and decomposition, both physical and national. It is with the idea of the "earth and the dead" that his traditionalism is most closely associated, although possibly it was not an original idea. Henri Peyre has suggested that in this, as in some other matters, he may have been influenced by Louis Ménard, since Barrès republished Ménard's article, "Le Jour des morts," originally written in 1889 for *La Critique philosophique*, in his own journal, *La Cocarde*, on the 2nd and 3rd November 1894.[39] Lorraine, in fact, became a matter of sentiment to him only after his parents died: "I created Lorraine on the tomb of my father." His mother, too, was an important influence in the formation of Barrès' cult of the

[37] *Mes Cahiers*, IX:121.
[38] *Scènes*, p. 84; *Un Homme libre*, p. 133.
[39] Henri Peyre, *Louis Ménard*, New Haven, 1932, p. 522.

earth and the dead. She had gone to the cemetery and his father's tomb to re-read an article on Picquart that Barrès had written during the Rennes trial of Dreyfus. He confided that when he walked behind the bodies of his parents to the cemetery, the bells of his parish suddenly began to speak to him publicly of his dependence on his native soil of Lorraine.

From the dead he gained discipline, genius, courage, and knowledge. He made one of his characters, Saint-Phlin, explain that in cemeteries he saw the tree of life and its roots stir up the soul. The earth gave him the *racinement* which was essential to preserve tradition and encourage development. Each act which "denies our earth and our dead means a lie which sterilizes us."[40] A race which thought of itself, affirmed its existence in honoring its dead, for great works had been accomplished by generations of unknowns, the labor of ancestors. Many generations rested in the Lorraine cemetery, but the results of their activity persisted.[41]

Barrès called himself "an advocate of the dead" who had loved cemeteries in Venice, in Toledo, in Sparta, in Persia, but above all in Lorraine. He took refuge in them, defended them, and allowed himself to be governed by them. The heritage from the past had to be preserved and passed on to others. "The soul which today lives in me is made of thousands of dead, and that sum, increased by the best of myself, will survive me when I am dead and forgotten." An individual was a moment in the development of his race, an instant in a long culture, "one movement in a thousand of a force which preceded me and will survive me." The essential part of an individual was that part of eternity deposited in him. An individual found his true essence in the family, the race, the nation, in the thousands of years nullified by the tomb. Barrès said he defended "not the past, but what is eternal."[42]

Maurras said of Barrès that "he was a decisive return to the old taste, to the natural and traditional taste, to the

[40] *Amori et dolori sacrum*, p. 279.
[41] Barrès, *Colette Baudoche*, Paris, 1923, p. 150.
[42] *Mes Cahiers*, XIII:25.

eternal taste of France . . . [against] impressionism, naturalism, and all the other forms of degenerate romanticism."[43] But in January 1899, at a meeting at which Barrès and others argued for "the respect for traditions," when Lavisse asked, "What traditions?" no one would answer.[44] Certainly Barrès' conception was less rigid than that of Maurras, for "there are many reasons and many traditions in France, because France comes from Pascal and Rousseau."[45] The contradiction between Barrès' alternative proposals of austerity and exaltation, the love for Sparta but also for the Orient, remained. His love for the austere was shown by Lorraine. He recognized that neither the land, nor the physiognomy of the people, nor the young girls were attractive; the land was never vibrant, the nights rarely sentimental. Barrès preached the doctrine of discipline, sacrifice, and austerity, but not for himself. In his voyages, his romantic adventures, his cult of egoism, his constant interest in action and combat, he was the eager seeker after sensation who would not submit to the self-limitation he advocated elsewhere.

It is surprising that one who wrote so continuously and so emotionally of tradition should know so little of it. He read little—his books, said the Tharauds,[46] formed a company of the dumb which he left in silence—and of 17th century literature, knew only Pascal well. In related cultural fields of music and architecture, he had little knowledge. Strongly influenced by Pascal in his ideas on nationalism and obedience to laws, Barrès adopted Pascal's analysis of custom as second nature as a justification for traditions as such, oversimplifying Pascal in the process.[47]

Barrès' curious mixture of the ideas of individualism and tradition, of aloofness and participation—a product both of

[43] Charles Maurras, *Gazette de France*, April 1905, as cited in R. Gillouin, *M. Barrès*, Paris, 1907, p. 58.

[44] Pierre Moreau, *Maurice Barrès*, Paris, 1946, p. 109.

[45] *Mes Cahiers*, II:157.

[46] Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, *Mes Années chez Barrès*, Paris, 1926, p. 98.

[47] R. Virtanen, "Barrès and Pascal," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (September 1947), 62:823.

his own personality and of the state of the country—was an influential one. With its concentration on traditional modes of behavior, on the heroic figure, the need for energy, the spirit of *élan*, it provided a remarkable parallel to Sorel's ideas for ending the spirit of decadence.

## *SOREL: ABSENCE OF ETHICS AND LAW*

On May 6, 1907, Sorel wrote to Croce that "the genesis of moral ideas is the passion of my life."[48] Since a religious belief was not acceptable to Sorel, and since he believed it was a law of human nature to want something indemonstrable in which to believe, he was concerned with the search for fundamental principles. His life therefore was spent in the search for and the preservation of a social ethic—those ethical ideas and juridical principles which would express the sentiments and the ideals of the community, and to which its members would subscribe. "Our business," he said, "is not to know which morality is better, but to determine whether there exists a mechanism capable of guaranteeing the development of morals."[49] He found this mechanism in the working-class movement, which could ensure that the essential values of individual and social vitality, devotion to labor, and therefore personal freedom and creativity, were maintained.

From his early book, *Le Procès de Socrate*, on, Sorel warned of the dangers that would confront civilization if it were indifferent to law and ethics, for the result would be decadence. Law and ethics were of the greatest importance both for social reforms, which would be based on them, and, more particularly, for individual conduct. Law was concerned with external relations, ethics with the internal development of the individual. Law always related to economic facts and to the existing social structure. That explained why all modern legislation was founded on the presupposition that it was necessary, by all means, to accelerate production.[50] Sorel thought

[48] *La Critica* (March 1928), 26:100.

[49] Sorel, *L'Avenir socialiste des syndicats*, Paris, 1898, p. 127.

[50] Sorel, "Les Aspects juridiques du socialisme," *La Revue socialiste* (October 1900), 32:414.

that the influence of Italy on all phases of law—the Roman code of law, canon law, criminal practice, and now revolutionary syndicalism—was beneficial because of its relation to reality.[51]

Ethics was concerned with individual conduct, and therefore could remain more independent of the economic environment than could law. Ethics required something mysterious, or at least foreign to social institutions, something in fact analogous to religion.[52] In a manner similar to that of Barrès, Sorel suggested that, in true ethics, it was a question not of concepts, but of profound states of the soul. The ethics of the Greeks was deficient in that it refused to take account of the reality and importance of consciousness.[53] What was important was not merely to search for and find precepts and examples, but to animate conduct conforming to the precepts and examples. The important thing in life was to know how to take account of one's own conduct. The final end of a social movement existed only in terms of one's internal life. Socialism would be realized only to the extent that socialist conduct was followed; in the last analysis, socialism was a metaphysics of manners.[54]

In order to determine what were beneficial standards of morality and juridical principles, it was necessary to define "law" exactly. The bourgeoisie was incapable both of providing a satisfactory definition and of ending the degeneration of the existing social system because its members flitted with great facility from one political or social conception to another. They were victims in law, as in literature and music, of the inconstancy of fashion. Contributing to this inconstancy was the democratic electoral system, and Sorel attributed the principal cause of the juridical decay of modern nations to the activities of legislative bodies. These bodies acted in un-

[51] Sorel, "Pro e contro il socialismo," *Le Devenir social* (October 1897), 3:880.

[52] Sorel, "La Crise morale et religieuse," *Le Mouvement socialiste* (July 15, 1907), 22:27.

[53] *Le Procès de Socrate*, p. 299.

[54] Sorel, "Pour Proudhon," "*Pages libres*" (June 8, 1901), 23:503-505.

systematic fashion, and there could not be a science of law where everything depended on chance.[55]

The bourgeoisie could not provide the necessary code of law and ethics not only because of this inconstancy, but also because of its essential superficiality and its concern with immediate problems. Among these problems was that of the influence of commercial ideas on law: the complicity of the courts in misdeeds committed by adventurers rich enough to buy statesmen produced a real decomposition of law and a consequent skepticism toward it.[56]

In general, the elaboration of juridical conceptions would include three considerations: the desire to assure more just laws to the largest number of people, the protest of the oppressed invoking his title of man against political authority, and the hope of rendering future generations more happy and, from the moral point of view, more enlightened. But the juridical ideas of the bourgeoisie had to be discarded. Ideas like natural justice and natural rights were meaningless. Ideas like the right to existence or the right to work treated the worker as an absolutely passive being, but the cooperative relations of production had to be taken into account. In particular, the idea of work must have as important a place in the proletarian code as property had in the bourgeois. Above all, the juridical system must express the manifestation of the proletariat to revolt.

There was in Sorel's idea of juridical sentiments a degree of similarity to Mosca's idea of juridical defense, those social mechanisms which regulate moral behavior. Since man was not good, social organization provided for the reciprocal restraint of people by one another. Rule by law was established, restrictions put on those exercising power, and individuals obtained protection against the exercise of that power. But whereas Mosca argued for a balance of social groups to attain the equilibrium of power which would provide a frame-

[55] Sorel, "La Crise de la pensée catholique," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1902), 10:530.

[56] Sorel, "Le Prétendu socialisme juridique," *Le Mouvement socialiste* (April 1907), 21:328.

work for the rule of law, Sorel tipped the scales to one side, in favor of the proletariat.

Only the proletariat could produce the necessary code, because only in the proletariat did one find the necessary qualities: sentiment for law, dignity, frugality, and honesty, and respect for work, love, and the family. The task of Marxism, Sorel urged, was to regenerate the juridical studies that were in the process of decomposition, and to formulate a socialist ethics. In 1898, he was lamenting the absence of directions in morals and religion which was one of the weaknesses of modern socialism. In 1909, one of the criticisms he made of Marxism was that it provided no juridical criticism of private property.[57] Above all, the historical mission of socialism was to produce juridical and ethical conceptions properly belonging to it.

The way in which the necessary sentiments that would form the basis for this new morality would be developed was through the struggle for liberation. In this struggle man was free, heroic, and dignified. An epic state of mind would be produced. Man was free in the sense that he acted without reflection; the moral decision was instantaneous, coming out of the depths of man like an instinct.[58] During the struggle, the maximum tension existed in society, and therefore also the noblest and most dignified feelings.

This plea for free autonomous development of man and the maximization of heroic feeling was coupled with a rigid code of personal conduct, in which the chief emphasis was on the family and on marriage. In an obviously autobiographical passage, Sorel spoke of the happy man who has met the devoted woman, energetic and proud.[59] Woman in modern society he regarded as the great educator, not only of children, but of man himself.[60] Sorel attacked the quality of homosexuality in Greek thought, the poetic theory of Socrates on unisexual love, and the communism of Plato which was fatally pederastic. One of his major charges against the Socratics was the

[57] Sorel, *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, 3rd edn., Paris, 1925, p. 37.
[58] *Reflections on Violence*, p. 242.
[59] Sorel, "J-J. Rousseau," *Le Mouvement socialiste* (June 1907), 21:513.
[60] Sorel, "Morale et socialisme," *Le Mouvement socialiste* (March 1, 1899), 1:210-211.

contempt with which they treated women. It was necessary that man respect woman, if he wanted to acquire the necessary qualities to participate in the mission of the proletariat. Sorel regretted the decisions of the German Social Democratic party regarding women. In wishing them to be in the workshop, the Social Democrats, under the specious pretext of preparing a superior future relationship between the sexes, was leading to the ruin of the family.[61]

Unlike the bourgeois family, which was formed by the union of a profession and a dowry, the proletarian family was a moral union, and therefore free. The family was founded on a religious principle and was the chief source of French moral ideas; the home was the symbol of tradition, unity, and society. Sorel thought that the aberrations of neo-Malthusians deserved the severest condemnations, while divorce added to the ruin of the dignity of the family. He applauded the way in which conjugal fidelity had been celebrated by Homer and Aeschylus. The true values of virtue were to be found in the family: the respect for the human being, sexual fidelity, devotion to the feeble. Love meant devotion and chastity. The juridical conscience could not be purified in a country where the respect for chastity had not become an important part of manners. The world would become more just only to the degree that it became more chaste.

It was with this new code, a combination of morality, desirable juridical sentiments, emphasis on labor and the *élan* and heroism that could be based on it, that Sorel believed an end would be put to decadence. And it was the workers' groups which, for moral and industrial reasons, and by reason of their opposition to the bourgeois and intellectual environment, would be the instruments to this end. By remaining loyal to their proletarian character, the workers would create a more desirable society.

In this plea for a moral revolution, Sorel traveled much of the same ground that one of his contemporaries did. "The social revolution is moral or it is nothing," Péguy had printed

[61] Sorel, "Les Polémiques pour l'interprétation du Marxisme," *Revue internationale de sociologie* (May 1900), 8:355.

on the flyleaf of his *Cahiers*, and Sorel, a close friend at the time, had agreed. Like Péguy, Sorel talked of the value of the family, the workshop, the local community, and shared Péguy's dislike of intellectualism, the party system, and the process by which religion had become mechanical, political, and devoid of emotional life. If Sorel refused to share Péguy's dislike of modern industry and its techniques, it was a measure of his greater appreciation of industrial and social life.

It must be admitted that there is both obscurity and some contradiction in Sorel's writings on ethics and law, yet the general tenor is clear and the inherent logic consistent. Man must live by certain values. For Sorel these values could not be established by religion, in spite of its useful mystical elements, nor could they, in contemporary France, be embodied or protected by any other class but the proletariat. The proletariat, by its *élan*, its energy, its heroism, must be the instrument through which the traditions and values of society could be upheld. This combination of the revolutionary and the conservative, the combination of Marx and La Tour du Pin, made him the most perplexing French writer since Proudhon. But his stress on the need to expend energy to obtain the correct values was an improvement on both Marx and La Tour du Pin. It was an improvement on the naïve socialist belief that goodness would automatically be the outcome of a change in economic conditions. And also it was more realistic to deny that the old privileged group would be the means of preservation. Sorel's idea of the purity of morals as an aspect of the sublime in life, and his ultimate belief in goodness is a refreshing and more attractive alternative both to the exhilaration of Barrès, and the order of Maurras.

## *MAURRAS: ABSENCE OF CLASSICISM*

To Maurras the indication that the system was decadent was that civilization was being threatened. He regarded civilization as transmitted capital, the result of the transmission of material and spiritual reserves, memory, and tradition. Tradition was what had endured, and must always be greater and

more important than the individual. There could be no society without tradition, or men without society. To support Dreyfus and the individual against society was to imperil the ethics and politics of former centuries and to destroy peace, the defense and security of the nation.[62] Tradition was what had endured, but it did not mean the transmission of everything. It could not include revolutionary, humanitarian, or romantic ideas. Distinction must be drawn between those ideas of an inferior nature, of animal instinct, and those which were produced by intelligence. Tradition was the transmission only of the beautiful and the true.[63]

At this point Maurras linked together his ideas of aesthetics and politics. Order in the state was akin to beauty in the arts. The laws of beauty were like the laws of life, inspiring him with a horror of all disorder and anarchy. The good lay not in things but in the relation of things, not in the number but in the composition, not in quantity but in quality; it lay in the holy notion of limits. It was in Greece that Maurras found his model of the well-ordered system. For a Greek, beauty was identical with the idea of order; it was composition, hierarchy, gradation. Form was more important than emotion. The nationalist Maurras explained that his love was not for the Greeks, but for the works of the Greeks. "It is not because it is Greek that we go to beauty, but because it is beautiful that we run to Greece." What Maurras took from Greece were the ideas of a rule, of perfection, of heroic activity.

But this analysis is open to objection on two counts. The first is that the Maurrasian view of Greek history was limited to the Periclean century. When he talked of the Athenian heritage, "this priceless good,"[64] and of Attica, the model for the world, he referred to only a short period in history. Moreover, it was a period which, in its democratic and libertarian behavior and ideas, was the exact antithesis of everything that Maurras was advocating for France. The second objection is that even in the most static of societies, political laws can

[62] Charles Maurras and Lucien Moreau, "L'Action française," p. 967.
[63] Maurras, *L'Ordre et le désordre*, Paris, 1948, p. 14.
[64] *Anthinéa*, p. 86.

have little reference to those of aesthetics. To equate political order with beauty, the institution of monarchy with quality, and nationalism with the real is to raise prejudice to the level of a science.

France, claimed Maurras, had become the legitimate inheritor of the Greek and Roman worlds—the inheritance that had been laid aside since the Revolution. The whole of Europe was barbarous by comparison, and when French influence diminished, universal barbarism increased. French literature, like France, was a work of art, and an aristocratic art in that it emanated from the noblest traditions of the human race and from the continued efforts of a long historic elite. It was necessary to preserve these traditions and the world's high regard for France. Maurras warned that it was when Rome ceased to believe itself absolutely superior to the barbarians that it began to yield to their invasion and that it became barbaric itself.[65]

Classicism was the essence of France's inheritance of the best of civilization, and the classical spirit to Maurras was the essence of the best of humanity. A spirit of authority and tradition, it was both "the tradition of the human species and that of our particular ethnic group."[66] To call classical the spirit of the Revolution was to strip a word of its natural sense and to substitute ambiguities, since democrats by conviction detested history, tradition, the past.

France was in peril because classicism was being replaced by romanticism. Even for people to whose political opinions Maurras was not totally opposed, romanticism was unwise. Commenting on Barrès' *L'Appel au soldat*, Maurras wrote that he could observe that Boulanger was sacrificing his glory, his party, his country, his fortune, and even his life, to the will of love. Romanticism in politics for Maurras meant liberalism and anarchy, stemming partly from the influence of English and German literature. Democracy and Protestantism were both barbarisms connected with other barbarisms like roman-

[65] Maurras, "Pour les Langues Romanes," *Soleil* (August 23, 1895). As cited in L.S. Roudiez, *Maurras jusqu'à l'action française*, Paris, 1957.

[66] Maurras, *Prologue d'un essai sur la critique*, Paris, 1932, p. 92.

ticism and "Hugocracy" in the 19th century.[67] French literary history closely resembled its political history. The defects of romanticism, present in so much French literature, were similar to those of democracy—egotism, foreign origin and perversions, independence and anarchy, a fundamental lack of reality. Sensibility inspired the direction of romanticism and led to anarchy, for the ego was made the center of the world, and the ego meant individualism, tumult, and the constraint of reason. Moreover, it was a feminine, not a masculine, quality.

Romanticism meant an end of French traditions, and a taste for what was foreign, as was shown by the books that it produced. *La Nouvelle Héloïse* was written by a Swiss, *De l'Allemagne* by a Swiss woman of Prussian origin, *Lélia* by a descendant of de Saxe. Written by foreigners, romantic works showed traces of the strange, the novel. Traditional values were being threatened by this barbarian invasion in literature, in political ideas, and in personnel. While Le Play and Spencer had used the idea of the barbarian to signify the savage or the infantile, Maurras used it to denote all to which he was opposed. The family was being menaced by class struggles and parliamentary intrigues, traditional culture was being menaced by the Protestant and Jewish spirit. To the Oriental, German-Judaic dream, individual, liberal, and mystical, "we oppose Western thought, traditional, classic, scientific, and social thought; to subversive Nuées are opposed Hellenic-Latin civilization, French order."[68]

But Maurras, as Basil de Selincourt said,[69] was a restrictionist whose love of the classical was the love of an achievement, not of the achieving power. He inverted the maxim of Hobbes: for him, happiness came from having prospered, not in prospering. He limited civilization to a small minority of races and to a small minority within each of these races. It is indeed putting a high price on one's opinions to relegate

[67] Maurras, *La Critique des lettres*, Paris, n.d., p. 69.
[68] *La Démocratie religieuse*, p. 320.
[69] Basil de Selincourt, "A French Romantic," *The English Secret and Other Essays*, London, 1923, p. 26.

the vast majority of the world to an inferior status of barbarism. Moreover, even his criticisms of romanticism were unjustified. Romanticism at its height was both monarchist and antirevolutionary. It is difficult to see, as Lucas suggested, what was anarchistic about Alfred de Vigny, Sir Walter Scott, Rossetti, Disraeli, or Walter Pater.[70] Even Barrès would not agree that romanticism was either un-French or unhealthy, and he counted both "classical and romantic fathers" in his inheritance. "Romanticism does not come from Germany. It is French . . . Saint-Just and Chateaubriand, two illustrations of romanticism of action and dreams, are sons of Rousseau."[71]

Barrès, always loving and admiring the great romantic books, was even willing to believe that a sentiment called romantic, if it led to a superior degree of culture, took on a classical character.[72] It is noticeable that in contrast to Maurras, what Barrès admired in Greece was not Athens, but Sparta. For Barrès, Athens compared very unfavorably with Provence. The Acropolis was a "deserted house," and the Athens of the fifth century an open-air museum, a cold tomb.[73] But he realized in 1901 that for Maurras, Athens was less a divine ruin, less one of the three great historical periods of the world than a source of energy and a useful symbol. Yet Maurras himself was not always the classicist he claimed to be. In Florence, he had moments of nihilism, in Paris in his early years he had been attracted to and influenced by the symbolists, in his homeland of Provence, he wrote with deep feeling of the Swamp of Marthe, and even in Greece, his enthusiasm for the country was disproportionate.

"Classicism" and "romanticism" are terms which have slain their tens of thousand critics. Neither term can be properly defined, for, as Anatole France said of the latter, the ideas they represent are multifarious and contradictory. But the interrelationship between literary classicism and political reaction has been of some significance in recent thought, and it

[70] F. L. Lucas, *The Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, Cambridge, 1936, p. 6.

[71] *Mes Cahiers*, XII:187.

[72] Barrès, *Adieu à Moréas*, Paris, 1910, p. 11.

[73] Maurice Barrès, *En Provence*, Paris, 1930, p. 106.

is no coincidence that in Pierre Lasserre's influential book, *Le Romantisme français*, the contemporary reference is to counter-revolution rather than to classicism. Henri Peyre has pointed out that whereas the classicism of the 17th century implied acceptance of its time and its milieu, the late 19th and early 20th century neo-classicism refused to do so, and in fact used the 17th century to attack contemporary life.[74]

Maurras was the dominant figure in this neo-classicism, and could claim T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot among his intellectual disciples. His attitude was largely an expression of bewilderment before the problems of modern life, in which traditional authority had lost its effect, whether the authority was political groups, symbols or ideas, or canons of form and stylistic rules. It was an affirmation of the desirability of order, universality, permanence, and the static in both politics and art.

From the counter-revolutionary point of view all these necessary values were being overthrown or discarded through the influence of Rousseau. Through him came the belief in natural goodness, in humanism, in optimism, in progress, the belief in the value of internal authority, and the challenge to external authority. Against these, Maurras urged the necessity for known and accepted rules, for form in literature and for authority in politics.

The vehemence of Maurras' struggle for his traditional classical values led him to prison on three occasions, to violence of word and of deed, and to political isolation. Tolerance, warmth, humanity were qualities absent in him. If, as de Tocqueville said, in politics a community of hatred is almost always the foundation of friendships, Maurras in his relation to the Action Française movement was no exception.

A society is regarded as decadent by those who believe both that its heritage is not being preserved, and that nothing of value is being substituted. The attitude of the critics is one of repugnance, antipathy, and rejection. Such an attitude was a common experience in the Third Republic, especially

[74] Henri Peyre, *Le Classicisme français*, p. 216.

between the years of 1885 and 1899, which nationalists called the "gelatinous" period of the Republic. Literature aptly commented on the lack of prestige of the regime. Proust's Swann would turn down an invitation from the President of the Republic to dine at a fashionable house. His Mme de Villeparisis declined in the kaleidoscopic social hierarchy because of her love affair with a Republican minister. The fashionableness of anarchy in the 1890's was another indication of the belief in the degeneration of the country. Barrès' own book, *L'Ennemi des lois*, followed closely the trend which included Paul Adam's eulogy of the anarchist-terrorist Ravachol, Jean Grave's *La Revolte*, and a number of reviews dedicated to praising the "brave gestures" of the anarchists.

Barrès, Maurras, and Sorel made devastating attacks on what they considered to be a stultifying regime. But the attacks were being made in an era which can justly lay claim to being one of the greatest in French history, and a rival to the great 17th century of which all three writers were so proud. One can understand their attacks on political ineptitude (discussed in Chapter IX), but it is remarkable that they could dismiss with scorn a period in which Gide and Proust, Ravel and Debussy, Van Gogh and Picasso, Stravinsky and Diaghilev were only the most notable of a great cultural ferment. The cultural conservatism and the distaste for innovation of the three writers made them insensitive to the glories of their own era.