# INTRODUCTION

## LETTER TO DANIEL HALEVY

My dear Halevy—I should doubtless have left these studies buried in the bound volumes of a review if some friends, whose judgment I value, had not thought that it would be a good thing to bring them before the notice of a wider public, as they serve to make better known one of the most singular social phenomena that history records. But it seemed to me that it would be necessary to give this public some additional explanations, since I cannot often expect to find judges as indulgent as you have been.

When I published, in the *Mouvement Socialiste*, the articles which are now collected in this volume, I did not write with the intention of composing a book: I simply wrote down my reflections as they came into my mind. I knew that the subscribers to that review would have no difficulty in following me, since they were already familiar with the theories, which for some years my friends and I had developed in its pages. But I am convinced that the readers of this book, on the contrary, will be very bewildered if I do not submit a kind of defence which will enable them to consider things from my own habitual point of view. In the course of our conversations, you have sometimes made remarks which fitted so well into the system of my own ideas that

they often led me to investigate certain questions more thoroughly. I am sure that the reflections which I here submit to you, and which you have provoked, will be very useful to those who wish to read this book with profit.

There are perhaps few studies in which the defects of my method of writing are more evident ; I have been frequently reproached for not respecting the rules of the art of writing, to which all our contemporaries submit, and for thus inconveniencing my readers by the disorder of my explanations. I have tried to render the text clearer by numerous corrections of detail, but I have not been able to make the disorder disappear. I do not wish to defend myself by pleading the example of great writers who have been blamed for not knowing how to compose. Arthur Chuquet, speaking of J. J. Rousseau, said : " His writings lack harmony, order, and that connection of the parts which constitutes a unity." [1] The defects of illustrious men do not justify the faults of the obscure, and I think that it is better to explain frankly the origin of this incorrigible vice in my writings.

It is only recently that the rules of the art of writing have imposed themselves in a really imperative way ; contemporary authors appear to have accepted them readily, because they wished to please a hurried and often very inattentive public, and one which is desirous above all of avoiding any personal investigation. These rules were first applied by the people who manufacture scholastic books. Since the aim of education has been to make the pupils absorb an enormous amount of information, it has been necessary to put into their hands manuals suitable to this extra rapid instruction ; everything has had to be presented in a form so clear, so logically arranged, and so calculated to dispel doubt, that in the end the beginner comes to believe that science is much simpler than our fathers supposed. In this

[1] A. Chuquet, *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, p. 179.

way the mind is very richly furnished in a very little time, but it is not furnished with implements which facilitate individual effort. These methods have been imitated by political publicists and by the people who attempt to popularise knowledge.[1] Seeing these rules of the art of writing so widely adopted, people who reflect little have ended by believing that they were based on the nature of things themselves.

I am neither a professor, a populariser of knowledge, nor a candidate for party leadership. I am a self-taught man exhibiting to other people the notebooks which have served for my own instruction. That is why the rules of the art of writing have never interested me very much.

During twenty years I worked to deliver myself from what I retained of my education ; I read books, not so much to learn as to efface from my memory the ideas which had been thrust upon it. It is only during the last fifteen years that I have really worked for the purpose of learning ; but I have never found any one to teach me what I wanted to know. I have had to be my own master, and in a way to educate myself. I make notes in which I formulate my thoughts as they arise ; I return three or four times to the same question, adding corrections which amplify the original, and sometimes even transform it from top to bottom ; I only stop when I have exhausted the reserve of ideas stirred up by recent reading. This work is very difficult for me ; that is why I like to take as my subject the discussion of a book by a good author : I can then arrange my thoughts more easily than when I am left to my own unaided efforts.

You will remember what Bergson has written about the impersonal, the socialised, the *ready-made*, all of which contains a lesson for students who need knowledge

[1] I recall here a phrase of Renan : " Reading, in order to be of any use, must be an exercise involving some effort " (*Feuilles détachées*, p. 231).

for practical life. A student has more confidence in the formulas which he is taught, and consequently retains them more easily, when he believes that they are accepted by the great majority ; in this way all metaphysical preoccupations are removed from his mind and he is to feel no need for a personal conception of things ; he often comes to look on the absence of any inventive spirit as a superiority.

My own method of work is entirely opposed to this ; for I put before my readers the working of a mental effort which is continually endeavouring to break through the bonds of what has been previously constructed for common use, in order to discover that which is truly personal and individual. The only things I find it worth while entering in my notebooks are those which I have not met elsewhere ; I readily skip the transitions between these things, because they nearly always come under the heading of commonplaces.

The communication of thought is always very difficult for any one who has strong metaphysical preoccupations ; he thinks that speech will spoil the most fundamental parts of his thought, those which are very near to the motive power of the mind, those which appear so natural to him that he never seeks to express them. A reader has great difficulty in grasping the thought of an inventor, because he can only attain it by finding again the path traversed by the latter. Verbal communication is much easier than written communication, because words act on the feelings in a mysterious way and easily establish a current of sympathy between people ; it is for this reason that an orator is able to produce conviction by arguments which do not seem very comprehensible to any one reading the speech later. You know how useful it is to have heard Bergson if one wants to recognise clearly the tendencies of his doctrine and to understand his books rightly. When one has followed his courses

of lectures for some time one becomes familiar with the order of his ideas and gets one's bearings more easily amidst the novelties of his philosophy.

The defects of my manner of writing prevent me getting access to a wide public; but I think that we ought to be content with the place that nature and circumstances have assigned to each of us, without desiring to force our natural talent. There is a necessary division of functions in the world; it is a good thing that some are content to work, simply that they may submit their reflections to a few studious people, whilst others love to address the great mass of busy humanity. All things considered, I do not think that mine is the worst lot, for I am not exposed to the danger of becoming my own disciple, as has happened to the greatest philosophers when they have endeavoured to give a perfectly symmetrical form to the intuitions they brought into the world. You will certainly not have forgotten the smiling disdain with which Bergson has spoken of this infirmity of genius. So little am I capable of becoming my own disciple that I am unable to take up an old work of mine again with the idea of stating it better, or even of completing it; it is easy enough for me to add corrections and to annotate it, but I have many times vainly tried to think the past over again.

Much more, then, am I prevented from ever becoming the founder of a school;[1] but is that really a great

[1] I think it may be interesting to quote here some reflections borrowed from an admirable book of Newman's: "It will be our wisdom to avail ourselves of language, as far as it will go, but to aim mainly, by means of it, to stimulate in those to whom we address ourselves, a mode of thinking and trains of thought similar to our own, leading them on by their own independent action, not by any syllogistic compulsion. Hence it is that an intellectual school will always have something of an esoteric character; for it is an assemblage of minds that think, their bond is unity of thought, and their words become a sort of *tessera*, not expressing thought but symbolising it" (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 309). As a matter of fact, the schools have hardly ever resembled this ideal sketched out by Newman.

misfortune ? Disciples have nearly always exercised a pernicious influence on the thought of him they called their master, and who has often believed himself obliged to follow them. There is no doubt that his transformation by young enthusiasts into the leader of a party was a real disaster for Marx; he would have done much more useful work if he had not been the slave of the Marxists.

People have often laughed at Hegel's belief—that humanity, since its origins, had worked to give birth to the Hegelian philosophy, and that with that philosophy Spirit had at last completed its development. Similar illusions are found to a certain extent in all founders of schools ; disciples expect their master to close the era of doubt by giving final solutions to all problems. I have no aptitude for a task of that kind. Every time that I have approached a question, I have found that my enquiries ended by giving rise to new problems, and the farther I pushed my investigations the more disquieting these new problems became. But philosophy is after all perhaps only the recognition of the abysses which lie on each side of the footpath that the vulgar follow with the serenity of somnambulists.

It is my ambition to be able occasionally to stir up personal research. There is probably in the mind of every man, hidden under the ashes, a quickening fire, and the greater the number of ready-made doctrines the mind has received blindly the more is this fire threatened with extinction ; the awakener is the man who stirs the ashes and thus makes the flames leap up. I do not think that I am praising myself without cause when I say that I have sometimes succeeded in liberating the spirit of invention in my readers ; and it is the spirit of invention which it is above all necessary to stir up in the world. It is better to have obtained this result than to have gained the banal approbation of people who

repeat formulas and enslave their own thought in the disputes of the schools.

## I

My *Reflections on Violence* have irritated many people on account of the pessimistic conception on which the whole of the study rests ; but I know that you do not share this impression ; you have brilliantly shown in your *Histoire de quatre ans* that you despise the deceptive hopes with which the weak solace themselves. We can then talk pessimism freely to each other, and I am happy to have a correspondent who does not revolt against a doctrine without which nothing very great has been accomplished in this world. I have felt for some time that Greek philosophy did not produce any great moral result, simply because it was, as a rule, very optimistic. Socrates was at times optimistic to an almost unbearable degree.

The aversion of most of our contemporaries from every pessimistic conception is doubtless derived, to a great extent, from our system of education. The Jesuits, who created nearly everything that the University still continues to teach, were optimists because they had to combat the pessimism which dominated Protestant theories, and because they popularised the ideas of the Renaissance ; the Renaissance interpreted antiquity by means of the philosophers, and consequently misunderstood the masterpieces of tragic art so completely that our contemporaries have had considerable difficulty in rediscovering their pessimistic significance.[1]

[1] " The significant melancholy found in the masterpieces of Hellenic art prove that, even at that time, gifted individuals were able to peer through the illusions of life to which the spirit of their own surrendered itself without the slightest critical reflection " (Hartmann, *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*, Eng. trans., vol. iii. p. 78 ; ii. p. 436).

I call attention to this view, which sees in the genius of the great Greeks a historical anticipation ; few doctrines are more important for an understanding of history than that of anticipations, which Newman used in his researches on the history of dogmas.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was such a concert of groaning that pessimism became odious. Poets, who were not, as a matter of fact, much to be pitied, professed to be victims of fate, of human wickedness, and still more of the stupidity of a world which had not been able to distract them; they eagerly assumed the attitudes of a Prometheus called upon to dethrone jealous gods, and with a pride equal to that of the fierce Nimrod of Victor Hugo (whose arrows, hurled at the sky, fell back stained with blood), they imagined that their verses inflicted deadly wounds on the established powers who dared to refuse to bow down before them. The prophets of the Jews never dreamed of so much destruction to avenge their Jehovah as these literary people dreamed of to satisfy their vanity. When this fashion for imprecations had passed, sensible men began to ask themselves if all this display of pretended pessimism had not been the result of a certain want of mental balance.

The immense successes obtained by industrial civilisation has created the belief that, in the near future, happiness will be produced automatically for everybody. "The present century," writes Hartmann, "has for the last forty years only entered the third period of illusion. In the enthusiasm and enchantment of its hopes, it rushes towards the realisation of the promise of a new age of gold. Providence takes care that the anticipations of the isolated thinker do not disarrange the course of history by prematurely gaining too many adherents." He thinks that for this reason his readers will have some difficulty in accepting his criticism of the illusion of future happiness. The leaders of the contemporary world are pushed towards optimism by economic forces.[1]

So little are we prepared to understand pessimism, that we generally employ the word quite incorrectly:

[1] Hartmann, *loc. cit.* vol. iii. p. 102.

we call pessimists people who are in reality only disillusioned optimists. When we meet a man who, having been unfortunate in his enterprises, deceived in his most legitimate ambitions, humiliated in his affections, expresses his griefs in the form of a violent revolt against the duplicity of his associates, the stupidity of society, or the blindness of destiny, we are disposed to look upon him as a pessimist ; whereas we ought nearly always to regard him as a disheartened optimist who has not had the courage to start afresh, and who is unable to understand why so many misfortunes have befallen him, contrary to what he supposes to be the general law governing the production of happiness.

The optimist in politics is an inconstant and even dangerous man, because he takes no account of the great difficulties presented by his projects ; these projects seem to him to possess a force of their own, which tends to bring about their realisation all the more easily as they are, in his opinion, destined to produce the happiest results. He frequently thinks that small reforms in the political constitution, and, above all, in the personnel of the government, will be sufficient to direct social development in such a way as to mitigate those evils of the contemporary world which seem so harsh to the sensitive mind. As soon as his friends come into power, he declares that it is necessary to let things alone for a little, not to hurry too much, and to learn how to be content with whatever their own benevolent intentions prompt them to do. It is not always self-interest that suggests these expressions of satisfaction, as people have often believed ; self-interest is strongly aided by vanity and by the illusions of philosophy. The optimist passes with remarkable facility from revolutionary anger to the most ridiculous social pacificism.

If he possesses an exalted temperament, and if unhappily he finds himself armed with great power, permitting him

Your Anger is a gift

to realise the ideal he has fashioned, the optimist may lead his country into the worst disasters. He is not long in finding out that social transformations are not brought about with the ease that he had counted on ; he then supposes that this is the fault of his contemporaries, instead of explaining what actually happens by historical necessities ; he is tempted to get rid of people whose obstinacy seems to him to be so dangerous to the happiness of all. During the Terror, the men who spilt most blood were precisely those who had the greatest desire to let their equals enjoy the golden age they had dreamt of, and who had the most sympathy with human wretchedness : optimists, idealists, and sensitive men, the greater desire they had for universal happiness the more inexorable they showed themselves.

Pessimism is quite a different thing from the caricatures of it which are usually presented to us ; it is a philosophy of conduct rather than a theory of the world ; it considers the *march towards deliverance* as narrowly conditioned, on the one hand, by the experimental knowledge that we have acquired from the obstacles which oppose themselves to the satisfaction of our imaginations (or, if we like, by the feeling of social determinism), and, on the other, by a profound conviction of our natural weakness. These two aspects of pessimism should never be separated, although, as a rule, scarcely any attention is paid to their close connection.

1. The conception of pessimism springs from the fact that literary historians have been very much struck with the complaints made by the great poets of antiquity on the subject of the griefs which constantly threaten mankind. There are few people who have not, at one time or another, experienced a piece of good fortune ; but we are surrounded by malevolent forces always ready to spring out on us from some ambuscade and overwhelm us. Hence the very real sufferings which arouse the

sympathy of nearly all men, even of those who have been more favourably treated by fortune ; so that the literature of grief has always had a certain success throughout the whole course of history.[1] But a study of this kind of literature would give us a very imperfect idea of pessimism. It may be laid down as a general rule, that in order to understand a doctrine it is not sufficient to study it in an abstract manner, nor even as it occurs in isolated people : it is necessary to find out how it has been manifested in historical groups ; it is for this reason that I am here led to add the two elements that were mentioned earlier.

2. The pessimist regards social conditions as forming a system bound together by an iron law which cannot be evaded, so that the system is given, as it were, in one block, and cannot disappear except in a catastrophe which involves the whole. If this theory is admitted, it then becomes absurd to make certain wicked men responsible for the evils from which society suffers ; the pessimist is not subject to the sanguinary follies of the optimist, infatuated by the unexpected obstacles that his projects meet with ; he does not dream of bringing about the happiness of future generations by slaughtering existing egoists.

3. The most fundamental element of pessimism is its method of conceiving the path towards deliverance. A man would not go very far in the examination either of the laws of his own wretchedness or of fate, which so much shock the ingenuousness of our pride, if he were not borne up by the hope of putting an end to these tyrannies by an effort, to be attempted with the help of a whole band of companions. The Christians would not have discussed original sin so much if they had not felt

[1] The sham cries of despair which were heard at the beginning of the nineteenth century owed part of their success to the analogies of form which they presented to the real literature of pessimism.

the necessity of justifying the deliverance (which was to result from the death of Jesus) by supposing that this sacrifice had been rendered necessary by a frightful crime, which could be imputed to humanity. If the people of the West were much more occupied with original sin than those of the East, it was not solely, as Taine thought, owing to the influence of Roman law,[1] but also because the Latins, having a more elevated conception of the imperial majesty than the Greeks, regarded the sacrifice of the Son of God as having realised an extraordinarily marvellous deliverance; from this proceeded the necessity of intensifying human wretchedness and of destiny.

It seems to me that the optimism of the Greek philosophers depended to a great extent on economic reasons; it probably arose in the rich and commercial urban populations who were able to regard the universe as an immense shop full of excellent things with which they could satisfy their greed.[2] I imagine that Greek pessimism sprang from poor warlike tribes living in the mountains, who were filled with an enormous aristocratic pride, but whose material conditions were correspondingly poor; their poets charmed them by praising their ancestors and made them look forward to triumphal expeditions conducted by superhuman heroes; they explained their present wretchedness to them by relating catastrophes in which semi-divine former chiefs had succumbed to fate or the jealousy of the gods; the courage of the warriors might for the moment be unable to accomplish anything, but it would not always be so; the tribe must remain faithful to the old customs in order to be ready for great and victorious expeditions, which might very well take place in the near future.

[1] Taine, *Le Régime Moderne*, vol. ii. pp. 121-122.

[2] The Athenian comic poets have several times depicted a land of Cokaigne, where there was no need to work (A. and M. Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature Grecque*, vol. iii. pp. 472-474).

Oriental asceticism has often been considered the most remarkable manifestation of pessimism; Hartmann is certainly right when he regards it as having only the value of an anticipation, which was useful since it reminded men how much there is that is illusory in vulgar riches; he was wrong, however, in saying that asceticism taught men that the "destined end to all their efforts" was the annihilation of will,[1] for in the course of history deliverance has taken quite other forms than this.

In primitive Christianity we find a fully developed and completely armed pessimism: man is condemned to slavery from his birth—Satan is the prince of the world—the Christian, already regenerate by baptism, can render himself capable of obtaining the resurrection of the body by means of the Eucharist;[2] he awaits the glorious second coming of Christ, who will destroy the rule of Satan and call his comrades in the fight to the heavenly Jerusalem. The Christian life of that time was dominated by the necessity of membership in the holy army which was constantly exposed to the ambuscades set by the accomplices of Satan; this conception produced many heroic acts, engendered a courageous propaganda, and was the cause of considerable moral progress. The deliverance did not take place, but we know by innumerable testimonies from that time what great things the march towards deliverance can bring about.

Sixteenth-century Calvinism presents a spectacle which is perhaps even more instructive; but we must be careful not to confuse it, as many authors have done, with contemporary Protestantism; these two doctrines

[1] Hartmann, *loc cit.* p. 130. "Contempt for the world, combined with a transcendent life of the spirit, had, indeed, in India, already found a place in the esoteric doctrine of Buddhism. But this teaching was only within the reach of a narrow circle of celibate adepts; the outside world had only taken the 'letter which kills,' so that the thought only attained realisation in the eccentric phenomena of hermits and penitents" (p. 81).

[2] Batiffol, *Etudes d'histoire et de théologie positive*, 2nd series, p. 162.

are the antipodes of each other. I cannot understand how Hartmann came to say that Protestantism "is a halting place in the journey of true Christianity," and that it "allied itself with the renaissance of ancient paganism."[1] These judgments only apply to recent Protestantism, which has abandoned its own principles in order to adopt those of the Renaissance. Pessimism, which formed no part of the current of ideas which characterised the Renaissance,[2] has never been so strongly affirmed as it was by the Reformers. The dogmas of sin and predestination which correspond to the two first aspects of pessimism, the wretchedness of the human species, and social determinism, were pushed to their most extreme consequences. Deliverance was conceived under a very different form to that which had been given it by primitive Christianity; Protestants organised themselves into a military force wherever possible; they made expeditions into Catholic countries, expelled the priests, introduced the reformed cult, and promulgated laws of proscription against papists. They no longer borrowed from the apocalypses the idea of a great final catastrophe, of which the brothers-in-arms who had for so long defended themselves against the attacks of Satan would only be spectators; the Protestants, nourished on the reading of the Old Testament, wished to imitate the exploits of the conquerors of the Holy Land; they took the offensive, and wished to establish the kingdom of God by force. In each locality they conquered the Calvinists brought about a real catastrophic revolution, which changed everything from top to bottom.

[1] Hartmann, *The Religion of the Future*, Eng. trans., p. 23.

[2] "At this epoch commenced the struggle between the Pagan love of life and the Christian hatred of this world and avoidance of it" (Hartmann, *op. cit.* p. 88). This pagan conception is to be found in liberal protestantism, and this is why Hartmann rightly considers it to be irreligious; but the men of the sixteenth century took a very different view of the matter.

Calvinism was finally conquered by the Renaissance ; it was full of theological prejudices derived from medieval traditions, and there came a time when it feared to be thought too far behind the times ; it wished to be on the level of modern culture, and it finished by becoming simply a lax Christianity.[1] To-day very few people suspect what the reformers of the sixteenth century meant by "free examination" ; the Protestants of to-day apply the same method to the Bible that philologists apply to any profane text ; Calvin's exegesis has been replaced by the criticisms of the humanists.

The annalist who contents himself with recording facts is tempted to regard the conception of deliverance as a dream or an error, but the true historian considers things from a different point of view ; whenever he endeavours to find out what has been the influence of the Calvinist spirit on morals, law, or literature, he is always driven back to a consideration of the way in which former Protestant thought was dominated by the conception of the path to deliverance. The experience of this great epoch shows quite clearly that in this warlike excitement which accompanies this *will-to-deliverance* the courageous man finds a satisfaction which is sufficient to keep up his ardour. I am convinced that in the history of that time you might find excellent illustrations of the idea that you once expressed to me—that the Wandering Jew may be taken as a symbol of the highest aspirations of mankind, condemned as it is to march for ever without knowing rest.

## II

My theses have shocked many people who are, to a certain extent, under the influence of the ideas of natural

[1] If Socialism comes to grief it will evidently be in the same way, because it will have been alarmed at its own barbarity.

justice implanted in us by our education; very few educated men have been able to free themselves from these ideas. While the philosophy of natural justice is in perfect agreement with that of force (understanding this word in the special meaning that I have given it in Chapters IV. and V.), it cannot be reconciled with my conception of the historical function of violence. The scholastic doctrines of natural right contain nothing but this simple tautology—what is just is good, and what is unjust is bad; as if in enunciating such a doctrine we did not implicitly admit that the just must adapt itself to the natural order of events. It was for a reason of this kind that the economists for a long time asserted that the conditions created under the capitalist regime of competition are perfectly just, because they result from the *natural course* of things; and inversely the makers of Utopias have always claimed that the actual state of the world was *not natural enough*; they have wished, consequently, to paint a picture of a society naturally better regulated and therefore juster.

I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting some of Pascal's *Pensées* which terribly embarrassed his contemporaries, and which have only been understood in our day. Pascal had considerable difficulty in freeing himself from the ideas of natural justice which he found in the philosophers; he abandoned them because he did not think them sufficiently imbued with Christianity. "I have passed a great part of my life believing that there was justice, and in this I was not mistaken, for there is justice *according as God has willed to reveal it to us*. But I did not take it so, and this is where I made a mistake, for I believed that our justice was essentially just, and that I possessed means by which I could know this and judge of it" (fragment 375 of the Braunschvieg edition). "Doubtless there are natural laws; but this good reason once corrupted,

has corrupted all"[1] (fragment 294); "*Veri juris.* We have it no longer" (fragment 297).

Moreover, mere observation showed Pascal the absurdity of the theory of natural right; if this theory was correct, we ought to find laws which are universally admitted; but actions which we regard as criminal have at other times been regarded as virtuous. "Three degrees of latitude nearer the Pole reverse all jurisprudence, a meridian decides what is truth; fundamental laws change after a few years of possession, right has its epochs, the entry of Saturn into the constellation of the Lion marks to us the origin of such and such a crime. A strange justice that is bounded by a river! Truth on this side of the Pyrenees becomes error on the other. . . . We must, it is said, get back to the natural and fundamental laws of the State, which an unjust custom has abolished. This is a game certain to result in the loss of all; nothing will be just on the balance" (fragment 294; cf. fragment 379).

As it is thus impossible for us to reason about justice, we ought to appeal to custom; and Pascal often falls back on this precept (fragments 294, 297, 299, 309, 312). He goes still further and shows how justice is practically dependent on force: "Justice is subject to dispute; might is easily recognised and is not disputed. Thus it is not possible to attribute might to justice, because might has often contradicted justice, and said that it itself was just. And thus not being able to make what was just strong, what was strong has been made just" (fragment 298; cf. fragments 302, 303, 306, 307, 311).

This criticism of natural right has not the perfect clearness that we could give it at the present day, because we know now that it is in economics we must seek for a

[1] It seems to me that Pascal's editors in 1670 must have been alarmed at his Calvinism. I am astonished that Sainte-Beuve should have said nothing more than that there "was in Pascal's Christianity something which they could not understand, that Pascal had a greater need than they had of Christian faith (Port Royal, vol. iii. p. 383).

type of force that has attained absolutely uncontrolled development, and can thus be identified naturally with right, whilst Pascal under the one heading confuses together all the manifestations of force.[1]

Pascal was vividly impressed by the changes that the conception of justice has experienced in the course of time, and these changes still continue to embarrass philosophers exceedingly. A well-organised social system is destroyed by a revolution and is replaced by another system, which in its turn is considered to be perfectly just; so that what was just before now becomes unjust. Any amount of sophisms have been produced to show that force has been placed at the service of justice during revolutions; these arguments have been many times shown to be absurd. But the public is so accustomed to believe in natural rights that it cannot make up its mind to abandon them.

There is hardly anything, not excepting even war, that people have not tried to bring inside the scope of natural right: they compare war to a process in which one nation reclaims a right which a malevolent neighbour refuses to recognise. Our fathers readily acknowledged that God decided battles in favour of those who had justice on their side; the vanquished were to be treated as an unsuccessful litigant: they must pay the costs of the war and give guarantees to the victor in order that the latter might enjoy their restored rights in peace. At the present time there are plenty of people who propose that international conflicts should be submitted to arbitration; this would only be a secularisation of the ancient mythology.[2]

[1] Cf. what I say about force in Chapter V.

[2] I cannot succeed in finding the idea of international arbitration in fragment 296 of Pascal, where several people claim to have discovered it; in this paragraph Pascal simply points out the ridiculous aspect of the claim made in his time by every belligerent—to condemn the conduct of his adversary in the name of justice.

The people who believe in natural right are not always implacable enemies of civil struggles, and certainly not of tumultuous rioting ; that has been sufficiently shown in the course of the Dreyfus question. When the force of the State was in the hands of their adversaries, they acknowledged, naturally enough, that it was being employed to violate justice, and they then proved that one might with a good conscience "step out of the region of legality in order to enter that of justice" (to borrow a phrase of the Bonapartists) ; when they could not overthrow the government, they tried at least to intimidate it. But when they attacked the people who for the time being controlled the force of the State, they did not at all desire to suppress that force, for they wished to utilise it some day for their own profit ; all the revolutionary disturbances of the nineteenth century have ended in reinforcing the power of the State.

Proletarian violence entirely changes the aspect of all the conflicts in which it intervenes, since it disowns the force organised by the middle class, and claims to suppress the State which serves as its central nucleus. Under such conditions, it is no longer possible to argue about the primordial rights of man. That is why our parliamentary socialists, who spring from the middle classes and who know nothing outside the ideology of the State, are so bewildered when they are confronted with working-class violence. They cannot apply to it the commonplaces which generally serve them when they speak about force, and they look with terror on movements which may result in the ruin of the institutions by which they live. If revolutionary syndicalism triumphs, there will be no more brilliant speeches on immanent Justice, and the parliamentary regime, so dear to the intellectuals, will be finished with—it is the abomination of desolation ! We must not be astonished, then, that they speak about violence with so much anger.

Giving evidence on June 5, 1907, before the Cours d'Assises de la Seine, in the Bousquet-Levy case, Jaurès said, "I have no superstitious belief in legality, it has already received too many blows; but I always advise workmen to have recourse to legal means, *for violence is the sign of temporary weakness.*" This is clearly a reminiscence of the Dreyfus question. Jaurès remembered that his friends were obliged to have recourse to revolutionary manifestations, and it is easy to understand that, as a result of this affair, he had not retained very great respect for legality. He probably likened the present position of the syndicalists to the former position of the Dreyfusards; for the moment they are weak, but they are destined ultimately to have the force of the State at their own disposal; they would then be very imprudent to destroy by violence a force which is destined to become theirs. He may even regret at times that the State has been so severely shaken by the Dreyfus agitation, just as Gambetta regretted that the administration had lost its former prestige and discipline.

One of the most elegant of Republican ministers [1] has made a speciality of high-sounding phrases directed against the upholders of violence. Viviani charms deputies, senators, and the employés assembled to admire his excellency on his official tours, by telling them that violence is the caricature, or rather "the fallen and degenerate daughter," of force. After boasting that he has, by a magnificent gesture, extinguished the lamps of

[1] The *Petit Parisien*, that one always quotes with pleasure as the barometer of democratic stupidity, tells us that "this scornful definition of the elegant and *immoral* M. de Morny—*Republicans are people who dress badly*—seems to-day altogether without any foundation." I borrow this philosophical observation from an enthusiastic description of the marriage of the charming minister Clémentel (October 22, 1905). This well-informed newspaper has accused me of giving the workers hooligan advice (April 7, 1907).

Heaven, he assumes the attitudes of a matador, at whose feet a furious bull has fallen.[1]

If I were more vain about my literary efforts than I am, I should like to imagine that he was thinking of me when he said in the Senate, on November 16, 1906, that "one must not mistake a fanatic for a party, nor rash statements for a system of doctrine." There is only one pleasure greater than that of being appreciated by intelligent people, and that is the pleasure of not being understood by blunderheads, who are only capable of expressing in a kind of jargon what serves them in the place of thought. But I have every reason to suppose that, in the brilliant set which surrounds this *charlatan*,[2] there is not one who has ever heard of the *Mouvement Socialiste*. It is quite within the comprehension of Viviani and his companions in the Cabinet that people may attempt an insurrection when they feel themselves solidly organised enough to take over the State; but

[1] "I have seen violence myself," he told the Senate on November 16, 1906, "face to face. I have been, day after day, in the midst of thousands of men who bore on their faces the marks of a terrifying exaltation. I have remained in the midst of them, face to face and shoulder to shoulder." He boasted that in the end he had triumphed over the strikers in the Creusot workshops.

[2] In the course of the same speech, Viviani strongly insisted on his own Socialism, and declared that he intended "to remain faithful to the ideal of his first years of public life." If we are to judge by a brochure in 1897 by the *Allemanistes*, under the title *La Vérité sur l'union socialiste*, this ideal was opportunism; when he left Algeria for Paris, Viviani was transformed into a Socialist, and the brochure then asserts that his new attitude is a lie. Evidently this work was edited by fanatics with no understanding of the manners of polite society.

[*Allemanistes*: this was the name given to the members of the "Revolutionary Socialist Workmen's Party" because Allemane was the best-known member of the group. They did not wish (in principle at any rate) to admit any but workmen into the party; they were for a long time very hostile to the parliamentary Socialists. During the Dreyfus affair they went with the rest and demanded a retrial; to-day they have disappeared, but they had some influence in the formation of the Syndicalist idea.—*Trans. Note.*]

working-class violence which has no such aim, seems to them only folly and an odious caricature of revolution. Do what you like, but don't kill the goose.

## III

In the course of this study one thing has always been present in my mind, which seemed to me so evident that I did not think it worth while to lay much stress on it—that men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph. These constructions, knowledge of which is so important for historians, I propose to call myths ;[1] the syndicalist " general strike " and Marx's catastrophic revolution are such myths. As remarkable examples of such myths, I have given those which were constructed by primitive Christianity, by the Reformation, by the Revolution and by the followers of Mazzini. I now wish to show that we should not attempt to analyse such groups of images in the way that we analyse a thing into its elements, but that they must be taken as a whole, as historical forces, and that we should be especially careful not to make any comparison between accomplished fact and the picture people had formed for themselves before action.

I could have given one more example which is perhaps still more striking : Catholics have never been discouraged even in the hardest trials, because they have always pictured the history of the Church as a series of battles between Satan and the hierarchy supported by Christ ; every new difficulty which arises is only an episode in a war which must finally end in the victory of Catholicism.

[1] In the *Introduction à l'économie moderne*, I have given the word *myth* a more general sense, which closely corresponds to the narrower meaning given to it here.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the revolutionary persecutions revived this myth of the struggle with Satan, which inspired so many of the eloquent pages in Joseph de Maistre ; this rejuvenation explains to a large extent the religious renascence which took place at that epoch. If Catholicism is in danger at the present time, it is to a great extent owing to the fact that the myth of the Church militant tends to disappear. Ecclesiastical literature has greatly contributed to rendering it ridiculous ; thus in 1872, a Belgian writer recommended a revival of exorcisms, as they seemed to him an efficacious means of combating the revolutionaries.[1] Many educated Catholics are horrified when they discover that the ideas of Joseph de Maistre have helped to encourage the ignorance of the clergy, which did not attempt to acquire an adequate knowledge of a science which it held to be accursed ; to these educated Catholics the myth of the struggle with Satan then appears dangerous, and they point out its ridiculous aspects ; but they do not in the least understand its historical bearing. The gentle, sceptical, and, above all, pacific, habits of the present generation are, moreover, unfavourable to its continued existence ; and the enemies of the Church loudly proclaim that they do not wish to return to a regime of persecution which might restore their former power to warlike images.

In employing the term myth I believed that I had made a happy choice, because I thus put myself in a position to refuse any discussion whatever with the people who wish to submit the idea of a general strike to a detailed criticism, and who accumulate objections

[1] P. Bureau, *La Crise morale des temps nouveaux*, p. 213. The author, a professor of the Institut Catholique de Paris, adds: " This recommendation can only excite hilarity nowadays. We are compelled to believe that the author's curious proposition was then accepted by a large number of his correligionists, when we remember the astonishing success of the writings of Léo Taxil after his pretended conversion."

against its practical possibility. It appears, on the contrary, that I had made a most unfortunate choice, for while some told me that myths were only suitable to a primitive state of society, others imagined that I thought the modern world might be moved by illusions analogous in nature to those which Renan thought might usefully replace religion.[1] But there has been a worse misunderstanding than this even, for it has been asserted that my theory of myths was only a kind of lawyer's plea, a falsification of the real opinions of the revolutionaries, the *sophistry of an intellectualist.*

If this were true, I should not have been exactly fortunate, for I have always tried to escape the influence of that intellectualist philosophy, which seems to me a great hindrance to the historian who allows himself to be dominated by it. The contradiction that exists between this philosophy and the true understanding of events has often struck the readers of Renan. Renan is continually wavering between his own intuition, which was nearly always admirable, and a philosophy which cannot touch history without falling into platitudes ; but, alas, he too often believed himself bound to think in accordance with the *scientific opinions* of his day.

The intellectualist philosophy finds itself unable to explain phenomena like the following—the sacrifice of his life which the soldier of Napoleon made in order to have had the honour of taking part in " immortal deeds " and of living in the glory of France, knowing all the time that " he would always be a poor man " ; then, again, the extraordinary virtues shown by the Romans who resigned themselves to a frightful inequality and who suffered so much to conquer the world ; [2] " the belief in

[1] The principal object of these illusions seems to me to have been the calming of the anxieties that Renan had retained on the subject of the *beyond* (cf. an article by Mgr. d'Hulst in the *Correspondant* on October 25, 1892, pp. 210, 224-225).

[2] Renan, *Histoire du peuple d'Israël*, vol. iv. p. 191.

glory (which was) a value without equal," created by Greece, and as a result of which " a selection was made from the swarming masses of humanity, life acquired an incentive and there was a recompense here for those who had pursued the good and the beautiful." [1] The intellectualist philosophy, far from being able to explain these things, leads, on the contrary, to an admiration for the fifty-first chapter of Jeremiah, " the lofty though profoundly sad feeling with which the peaceful man contemplates these falls of empires, and the pity excited in the heart of the wise man by the spectacle of the nations *labouring for vanity*, victims of the arrogance of the few." Greece, according to Renan, did not experience anything of that-kind, and I do not think that we need complain about that.[2] Moreover, he himself praises the Romans for not having acted in accordance with the conceptions of the Jewish thinker. " They laboured, they wore themselves out for nothing, said the Jewish thinker—yes, doubtless, but those are the virtues that history rewards." [3]

Religions constitute a very troublesome problem for the intellectualists, for they can neither regard them as being without historical importance nor can they explain them. Renan, for example, has written some very strange sentences on this subject. " Religion is a necessary imposture. Even the most obvious ways of throwing dust in people's eyes cannot be neglected when you are dealing with a race as stupid as the human species, a race created for error, which, when it does admit the truth, never does so for the right reasons. It is necessary then to give it the wrong ones." [4]

Comparing Giordano Bruno, who " allowed himself to be burnt at Champ-de-Flore " with Galileo, who

[1] Renan, *loc. cit.* p. 267. [2] Renan, *loc. cit.* pp. 199-200.
[3] Renan, *op. cit.* vol. iii. pp. 458-459.
[4] Renan, *op. cit.* vol. v. pp. 105-106.

submitted to the Holy See, Renan sides with the second, because, according to him, the scientist need not bring anything to support his discoveries beyond good arguments. He considered that the Italian philosopher wished to supplement his inadequate proofs by his sacrifice, and he puts forward this scornful maxim : " A man suffers martyrdom only for the sake of things about which he is not certain." [1] Renan here confuses *conviction*, which must have been very powerful in Bruno's case, with that particular kind of *certitude* about the accepted theories of science, which instruction ultimately produces ; it would be difficult to give a more misleading idea of the forces which really move men.

The whole of this philosophy can be summed up in the following phrase of Renan's: " Human affairs are always an approximation lacking gravity and precision " ; and as a matter of fact, for an intellectualist, what lacks precision must also lack gravity. But in Renan the conscientious historian was never entirely asleep, and he at once adds as a corrective : " To have realised this truth is a great result obtained by philosophy ; but it is an abdication of any active rôle. The future lies in the hands of those who are not disillusioned." [2] From this we may conclude that the intellectualist philosophy is entirely unable to explain the great movements of history.

The intellectualist philosophy would have vainly endeavoured to convince the ardent Catholics, who for

[1] Renan, *Nouvelles Études d'histoire religieuse*, p. vii. Previously he had said, speaking of the persecutions: " People die for *opinions*, and not for *certitudes*, because they believe and not because they know . . . whenever beliefs are in question the greatest testimony and the most efficacious demonstration is to die for them " (*L'Église chrétienne*, p. 317). This thesis presupposes that martyrdom is a kind of ordeal, which was partly true in the Roman epoch, by reason of certain special circumstances (G. Sorel, *Le Système historique de Renan*, p. 335).

[2] Renan, *Histoire du peuple d'Israël*, vol. iii. p. 497.

so long struggled successfully against the revolutionary traditions, that the myth of the Church militant was not in harmony with the scientific theories formulated by the most learned authors according to the best rules of criticism ; it would never have succeeded in persuading them. It would not have been possible to shake the faith that these men had in the promises made to the Church by any argument ; and so long as this faith remained, the myth was, in their eyes, incontestable. Similarly, the objections urged by philosophy against the revolutionary myths would have made an impression only on those men who were anxious to find a pretext for abandoning any active rôle, for remaining revolutionary in words only.

I can understand the fear that this myth of the general strike inspires in many *worthy progressives*,[1] on account of its character of *infinity* ;[2] the world of to-day is very much inclined to return to the opinions of the ancients and to subordinate ethics to the smooth working of public affairs, which results in a definition of virtue as the golden mean ; as long as socialism remains a *doctrine expressed only in words*, it is very easy to deflect it towards this doctrine of the golden mean ; but this transformation is manifestly impossible when the myth of the "general strike" is introduced, as this implies an absolute revolution. You know as well as I do that all that is best in the modern mind is derived from this "torment of the infinite" ;

[1] Translator's Note.—In French, "*braves gens*." Sorel is using the words ironically to indicate those naïve, philanthropically disposed people who believe that they have discovered the solution to the problem of social reform—whose attitude, however, is often complicated by a good deal of hypocrisy, they being frequently rapacious when their own personal interests are at stake.

[2] Parties, as a rule, *define* the reforms that they wish to bring about ; but the general strike has a character of *infinity*, because it puts on one side all discussion of definite reforms and confronts men with a catastrophe. People who pride themselves on their practical wisdom are very much upset by such a conception, which puts forward no definite project of future social organisation.

you are not one of those people who look upon the tricks by means of which readers can be deceived by words, as happy discoveries. That is why you will not condemn me for having attached great worth to a myth which gives to socialism such high moral value and such great sincerity. It is because the theory of myths tends to produce such fine results that so many seek to dispute it.

## IV

The mind of man is so constituted that it cannot remain content with the mere observation of facts, but always attempts to penetrate into the inner reason of things. I therefore ask myself whether it might not be desirable to study this theory of myths more thoroughly, utilising the enlightenment we owe to the Bergsonian philosophy. The attempt I am about to submit to you is doubtless very imperfect, but I think that it has been planned in accordance with the only method which can possibly throw light on the problem. In the first place, we should notice that the discussions of the moralists hardly ever come into contact with what is truly fundamental in our individuality. As a rule, they simply try to appraise our already completed acts with the help of the moral valuations formulated in advance by society, for the different types of action commonest in contemporary life. They say that in this way they are determining motives ; but these motives are of the same nature as those which jurists take account of in criminal justice ; they are merely social valuations of facts known to everybody. Many philosophers, especially the ancients, have believed that all values could be deduced from utility, and if any social valuation does exist, it is surely this latter,—theologians estimate transgressions by the place they occupy on the road which, according to average human experience, leads to mortal sin ; they are thus

able to ascertain the degree of viciousness of any given sin,—while the moderns usually teach that we act after having established a particular maxim (which is, as it were, an abstraction or generalisation of our projected conduct), and justify this maxim by deducing it (more or less sophistically) from general principles which are, to a certain extent, analogous to the Declaration of the Rights of Man ; and, as a matter of fact, this theory was probably inspired by the admiration excited by the Bill of Rights placed at the head of each American constitution.[1]

We are all so extremely concerned in knowing what the world thinks of us that, sooner or later, considerations analogous to those the moralists speak of do pass through our mind ; as a result of this the moralists have been able to imagine that they have really made an appeal to experience for the purpose of finding out what exists at the bottom of the creative conscience, when, as a matter of fact, all they have done is to consider already accomplished acts from the point of view of its social effects.

Bergson asks us, on the contrary, to consider the inner depths of the mind and what happens there during a creative moment. " There are," he says, " two different selves, one of which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation. We reach the former by deep introspection, which leads us to grasp our inner states as living things, constantly *becoming*, as states not amenable to measure. . . . But the moments at which we thus grasp ourselves are

[1] The Constitution of Virginia dates from June 1776. The American constitutions were known in Europe by two French translations, in 1778 and 1789. Kant had published the *Foundations of the Metaphysic of Custom* in 1785 and the *Critique of Practical Reason* in 1788. One might say that the utilitarian system of the ancients has certain analogies with economics, that of the theologians with law, and that of Kant with the political theory of growing democracy (cf. Jellinck, *La Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, trad. franc., pp. 18-25 ; pp. 49-50 ; p. 89).

rare, and that is just why we are rarely free. The greater part of our time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow. . . . Hence we live for the external world rather than for ourselves ; we speak rather than think ; we are acted rather than act ourselves. To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back into pure duration." [1]

In order to acquire a real understanding of this psychology we must " carry ourselves back in thought to those moments of our life, when we made some serious decision, moments unique of their kind, which will never be repeated—any more than the past phases in the history of a nation will ever come back again." [2] It is very evident that we enjoy this liberty pre-eminently when we are making an effort to create a new individuality in ourselves, thus endeavouring to break the bonds of habit which enclose us. It might at first be supposed that it would be sufficient to say that, at such moments, we are dominated by an overwhelming emotion ; but everybody now recognises that movement is the essence of emotional life, and it is, then, in terms of movement that we must speak of creative consciousness.

It seems to me that this psychology of the deeper life must be represented in the following way. We must abandon the idea that the soul can be compared to something moving, which, obeying a more or less mechanical law, is impelled in the direction of certain given motive forces. To say that we are acting, implies that we are creating an imaginary world placed ahead of the present world and composed of movements which depend entirely on us. In this way our freedom becomes perfectly

[1] Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, Eng. trans., pp. 231-232. In this philosophy a distinction is made between duration which flows, in which our personality manifests itself, and mathematical time, which science uses to measure and space out accomplished facts.

[2] Bergson, *op. cit.*, Eng. trans., pp. 238-239.

intelligible. Starting from a study of these artificial constructions which embrace everything that interests us, several philosophers, inspired by Bergsonian doctrines, have been led to formulate a rather startling theory. Edouard Le Roy, for example, says: "Our real body is the entire universe in as far as it is experienced by us. And what common sense more strictly calls our body is only the region of least unconsciousness and greatest liberty in this greater body, the part which we most directly control and by means of which we are able to act on the rest."[1] But we must not, as this subtle philosopher constantly does, confuse a passing state of our willing activity with the stable affirmations of science.[2]

These artificial worlds generally disappear from our minds without leaving any trace in our memory; but when the masses are deeply moved it then becomes possible to trace the outlines of the kind of representation which constitutes a social myth.

This belief in "glory" which Renan praised so much quickly fades away into rhapsodies when it is not supported by myths; these myths have varied greatly in different epochs: the citizen of the Greek republics, the Roman legionary, the soldier of the wars of Liberty, and the artist of the Renaissance did not picture their conception of glory by the help of the same set of images. Renan complained that "the faith in glory" is compromised by the *limited historical outlook* more or less prevalent at the present day. "Very few," he said, "act with a view to immortal fame. . . . Every one wants to enjoy his own glory; they eat it in the green blade, and do not gather the sheaves after death."[3] In my opinion, this limited historical outlook is, on the contrary,

[1] E. Le Roy, *Dogme et critique*, p. 239.

[2] It is easy to see here how the sophism creeps in; the *universe experienced by us* may be either the real world in which we live or the world invented by us for action.

[3] Renan, *op. cit.* vol. iv. p. 329.

not a cause but a consequence ; it results from the weakening of the heroic myths which had such great popularity at the beginning of the nineteenth century ; the belief in "glory" perished and a limited historic outlook became predominant at the time when these myths vanished.[1]

As long as there are no myths accepted by the masses, one may go on talking of revolts indefinitely, without ever provoking any revolutionary movement ; this is what gives such importance to the general strike and renders it so odious to socialists who are afraid of a revolution ; they do all they can to shake the confidence felt by the workers in the preparations they are making for the revolution ; and in order to succeed in this they cast ridicule on the idea of the general strike—the only idea that could have any value as a motive force. One of the chief means employed by them is to represent it as a Utopia ; this is easy enough, because there are very few myths which are perfectly free from any Utopian element.

The revolutionary myths which exist at the present time are almost free from any such mixture ; by means of them it is possible to understand the activity, the feelings and the ideas of the masses preparing themselves to enter on a decisive struggle ; the myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act. A Utopia is, on the contrary, an intellectual product ;

[1] "Assent," said Newman, "however strong, and accorded to images however vivid, is not therefore necessarily practical. Strictly speaking, it is not imagination that causes action ; but hope and fear, likes and dislikes, appetite, passion, affection, the stirrings of selfishness and self-love. What imagination does for us is to find a means of stimulating those motive powers ; and it does so by providing a supply of objects strong enough to stimulate them" (*op. cit.* p. 82). It may be seen from this that the illustrious thinker adopts an attitude which strongly resembles that of the theory of myths. It is impossible to read Newman without being struck by the analogies between his thought and that of Bergson : people who like to make the history of ideas depend on ethnical traditions will observe that Newman was descended from Israelites.

it is the work of theorists who, after observing and discussing the known facts, seek to establish a model to which they can compare existing society in order to estimate the amount of good and evil it contains.[1] It is a combination of imaginary institutions having sufficient analogies to real institutions for the jurist to be able to reason about them; it is a construction which can be taken to pieces, and certain parts of it have been shaped in such a way that they can (with a few alterations by way of adjustment) be fitted into approaching legislation. Whilst contemporary myths lead men to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things, the effect of Utopias has always been to direct men's minds towards reforms which can be brought about by patching up the existing system; it is not surprising, then, that so many makers of Utopias were able to develop into able statesmen when they had acquired a greater experience of political life. A myth cannot be refuted, since it is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group, being the expression of these convictions in the language of movement; and it is, in consequence, unanalysable into parts which could be placed on the plane of historical descriptions. A Utopia, on the contrary, can be discussed like any other social constitution; the spontaneous movements it presupposes can be compared with the movements actually observed in the course of history, and we can in this way evaluate its verisimilitude; it is possible to refute Utopias by showing that the economic system on which they have been made to rest is incompatible with the necessary conditions of modern production.

Liberal political economy is one of the best examples of a Utopia that could be given. A state of society

[1] It was evidently a method of this kind that was adopted by those Greek philosophers who wished to be able to argue about ethics without being obliged to accept the customs which historical necessity had imposed at Athens.

was imagined which could contain only the types produced by commerce, and which would exist under the law of the fullest competition; it is recognised to-day that this kind of ideal society would be as difficult to realise as that of Plato; but several great statesmen of modern times have owed their fame to the efforts they made to introduce something of this ideal of commercial liberty into industrial legislation.

We have here a Utopia free from any mixture of myth; the history of French democracy, however, presents a very remarkable combination of Utopias and myths. The theories that inspired the authors of our first constitutions are regarded to-day as extremely chimerical; indeed, people are often loth to concede them the value which they have been so long recognised to possess—that of an ideal on which legislators, magistrates, and administrators should constantly fix their eyes, in order to secure for men a little more justice. With these Utopias were mixed up the myths which represented the struggle against the ancient regime; so long as the myths survived, all the refutations of liberal Utopias could produce no result; the myth safeguarded the Utopia with which it was mixed.

For a long time Socialism was scarcely anything but a Utopia; the Marxists were right in claiming for their master the honour of bringing about a change in this state of things; Socialism has now become the preparation of the masses employed in great industries for the suppression of the State and property; and it is no longer necessary, therefore, to discuss how men must organise themselves in order to enjoy future happiness; everything is reduced to the *revolutionary apprenticeship* of the proletariat. Unfortunately Marx was not acquainted with facts which have now become familiar to us; we know better than he did what strikes are, because we have been able to observe economic conflicts

of considerable extent and duration; the myth of the "general strike" has become popular, and is now firmly established in the minds of the workers; we possess ideas about violence that it would have been difficult for him to have formed; we can then complete his doctrine, instead of making commentaries on his text, as his unfortunate disciples have done for so long.

In this way Utopias tend to disappear completely from Socialism; Socialism has no longer any need to concern itself with the organisation of industry since capitalism does that. I think, moreover, that I have shown that the general strike corresponds to a kind of feeling which is so closely related to those which are necessary to promote production in any very progressive state of industry, that a revolutionary apprenticeship may at the same time be considered as an apprenticeship which will enable the workmen to occupy a high rank among the best workmen of his own trade.

People who are living in this world of "myths," are secure from all refutation; this has led many to assert that Socialism is a kind of religion. For a long time people have been struck by the fact that religious convictions are unaffected by criticism, and from that they have concluded that everything which claims to be beyond science must be a religion. It has been observed also that Christianity tends at the present day to be less a system of dogmas than a Christian life, *i.e.* a moral reform penetrating to the roots of one's being; consequently, a new analogy has been discovered between religion and the revolutionary Socialism which aims at the apprenticeship, preparation, and even reconstruction of the individual,—a gigantic task. But Bergson has taught us that it is not only religion which occupies the profounder region of our mental life; revolutionary myths have their place there equally with religion. The arguments which Yves Guyot urges against Socialism on

the ground that it is a religion, seem to me, then, to be founded on an imperfect acquaintance with the new psychology.

Renan was very surprised to discover that Socialists are beyond discouragement. "After each abortive experiment they recommence their work: the solution is not yet found, but it will be. The idea that no solution exists never occurs to them, and in this lies their strength."[1] The explanation given by Renan is superficial; it regards Socialism as a Utopia, that is, as a thing which can be compared to observed realities; if this were true, it would be scarcely possible to understand how confidence can survive so many failures. But by the side of the Utopias there have always been myths capable of urging on the workers to revolt. For a long time these myths were founded on the legends of the Revolution, and they preserved all their value as long as these legends remained unshaken. To-day the confidence of the Socialists is greater than ever since the myth of the general strike dominates all the truly working-class movement. No failure proves anything against Socialism since the latter has become a work of preparation (for revolution); if they are checked, it merely proves that the apprenticeship has been insufficient; they must set to work again with more courage, persistence, and confidence than before; their experience of labour has taught workmen that it is by means of patient apprenticeship that a man may become a true comrade, and it is also the only way of becoming a true revolutionary.[2]

[1] Renan, *op. cit.* vol. iii. p. 497.

[2] It is extremely important to notice the analogy between the revolutionary state of mind and that which corresponds to the *morale* of the producers. I have indicated some remarkable resemblances at the end of these reflections, but there are many more analogies to be pointed out.

## V

The works of my friends have been treated with great contempt by the Socialists who mix in politics, but at the same time with much sympathy by people who do not concern themselves with parliamentary affairs. We cannot be suspected of seeking to carry on a kind of *intellectual industry*, and we protest every time people profess to confuse us with the intellectuals, who do, as a matter of fact, make the exploitation of thought their profession. The old stagers of democracy cannot understand why people should take so much trouble unless they secretly aim at the leadership of the working classes. However, we could not act in any other way.

The man who has constructed a Utopia designed to make mankind happy is inclined to look upon the invention as his own personal property; he believes that no one is in a better position than he is to apply his system. He thinks it very unreasonable that his writings do not procure him some post in the government. But we, on the contrary, have invented nothing at all, and even assert that nothing can be invented; we have limited ourselves to defining the historical bearing of the notion of a general strike. We have tried to show that a new culture might spring from the struggle of the revolutionary trades unions against the employers and the State; our greatest claim to originality consists in our having maintained that the proletariat can emancipate itself without being compelled to seek the guidance of that section of the middle classes which concerns itself professionally with matters of the intellect. We have thus been led to regard as essential in contemporary phenomena what was before regarded as accessory, and what is indeed really educative for a revolutionary

proletariat that is serving its apprenticeship in struggle. It would be impossible for us to exercise any direct influence on such a work of formation.

We may play a useful part if we limit ourselves to attacking middle-class thought in such a way as to put the proletariat on its guard against an invasion of ideas and customs from the hostile class.

Men who have received an elementary education are generally imbued with a certain reverence for print as such, and they readily attribute genius to the people who attract the attention of the literary world to any great extent ; they imagine that they must have a great deal to learn from authors whose names are so often mentioned with praise in the newspapers ; they listen with singular respect to the commentaries that these literary prize-winners present to them. It is not easy to fight against these prejudices, but it is a very useful work ; we regard this task as being absolutely of the first importance, and we can carry it to a profitable conclusion without ever attempting to direct the working-class movement. The proletariat must be preserved from the experience of the Germans who conquered the Roman Empire ; the latter were ashamed of being barbarians, and put themselves to school with the rhetoricians of the Latin decadence ; they had no reason to congratulate themselves for having wished to be civilised.

In the course of my career I have touched on many subjects which might be considered to be outside the proper range of a Socialist writer. I have endeavoured to show that the science whose marvellous results the middle class constantly boasts of is not as infallible as those who live by its exploitation would have us believe ; and that a study of the phenomena of the Socialist world would often furnish philosophers with an enlightenment which they do not find in the works of the learned. I do not believe, then, that I am labouring in vain, for in this

way I help to ruin the prestige of middle-class culture, a prestige which up to now has been opposed to the complete development of the principle of the "class war."

In the last chapter of my book, I have said that art is an anticipation of the kind of work that ought to be carried on in a highly productive state of society. It seems that this observation has been very much misunderstood by some of my critics, who have been under the impression that I wished to propose as the socialist solution — an aesthetic education of the proletariat under the tutelage of modern artists. This would have been a singular paradox on my part, for the art that we possess to-day is a *residue* left to us by an aristocratic society, a residue which has, moreover, been greatly corrupted by the middle class. According to the most enlightened minds, it is greatly to be desired that contemporary art could renew itself by a more intimate contact with craftsmen; academic art has used up the greatest geniuses without succeeding in producing anything which equals what has been given us by generations of craftsmen. I had in view something altogether different from such an imitation when I spoke of an anticipation. I wished to show how one found in art (practised by its best representatives, and, above all, in its best periods) analogies which make it easier for us to understand what the qualities of the workers of the future would be. Moreover, so little did I think of asking the *École des Beaux-Arts* to provide a teaching suitable to the proletariat, that I based the *morale* of the producers not on an aesthetic education transmitted by the middle class, but on the feelings developed by the struggles of the workers against their masters.

These observations lead us to recognise the enormous difference which exists between the *new school* and the anarchism which flourished twenty years ago in Paris. The middle class itself had much less admiration for its

literary men and its artists than the anarchists of that time felt for them; their enthusiasm for the celebrities of a day often surpassed that felt by disciples for the greatest masters of the past. We need not then be astonished that by a kind of compensation the novelists and the poets thus adulated have shown a sympathy for the anarchists which has often astonished people who do not know what a force vanity is in the artistic world.

Intellectually, then, this kind of anarchism was *entirely middle class*, and the Guesdistes attacked it for this reason. They said that their adversaries, while proclaiming themselves the irreconcilable enemies of the past, were themselves the servile pupils of this cursed past; they observed, moreover, that the most eloquent dissertations on revolt could produce nothing, and that literature cannot change the course of history. The anarchists replied by showing that their adversaries had entered on a road which could not lead to the revolution they announced; by taking part in political debates, Socialists, they said, will become merely reformers of a more or less radical type, and will lose the sense of their revolutionary formulas. Experience has quickly shown that the anarchists were right in this view, and that in entering into middle-class institutions, revolutionaries have been transformed by adopting the spirit of these institutions. All the deputies agree that there is very little difference between a middle-class representative and a representative of the proletariat.

Many anarchists, tired at last of continually reading the same grandiloquent maledictions hurled at the capitalist system, set themselves to find a way which would lead them to acts which were really revolutionary. They became members of syndicates which, thanks to violent strikes, realised, to a certain extent, the social war they had so often heard spoken of. Historians will one

day see in this entry of the anarchists into the syndicates one of the greatest events that has been produced in our time, and then the name of my poor friend Fernand Pelloutier will be as well known as it deserves to be.[1]

The anarchist writers who remained faithful to their former revolutionary literature do not seem to have looked with much favour upon the passage of their friends into the syndicates ; their attitude proves that the anarchists who became syndicalists showed real originality, and had not merely applied theories which had been fabricated in philosophical coteries.

Above all, they taught the workers that they need not be ashamed of acts of violence. Till that time it had been usual in the Socialist world to attenuate or to excuse the violence of the strikers ; the new members of the syndicates regarded these acts of violence as normal manifestations of the struggle, and as a result of this, the tendencies at work in the syndicates, pushing them towards trades unionism, were abandoned. It was their revolutionary temperament which led them to this conception of violence, for it would be a gross error to suppose that these former anarchists carried over into the workers' associations any of their ideas about propaganda by deed.

Revolutionary syndicalism is not then, as many believe, the first confused form of the working-class movement, which is bound, in the end, to free itself from this youthful error ; it has been, on the contrary, the produce of an improvement brought about by men who had just arrested a threatened deviation towards middle-class ideas. It might be compared to the Reformation, which wished to prevent Christianity submitting to the influence

[1] I believe that Léon de Seilhac was the first to render justice to the high qualities of Fernand Pelloutier (*Les Congres ouvriers en France*, p. 272).

of the humanists; like the Reformation, revolutionary syndicalism may prove abortive, if it loses, as did the latter, the sense of its own originality; it is this which gives such great interest to inquiries on proletarian violence.

*July 15th*, 1907.