

THE CRISIS OF THE MODERN WORLD



RENE GUENON

BERSERKER

BOOKS



THE CRISIS
OF
THE MODERN WORLD

By
RENÉ GUÉNON

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	FOREWORD - - - - -	I
I	THE DARK AGE - - - - -	10
II	THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST -	31
III	KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION - - - - -	48
IV	SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE - - - - -	61
V	INDIVIDUALISM - - - - -	80
VI	THE SOCIAL CHAOS - - - - -	100
VII	A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION - - - - -	117
VIII	WESTERN ENCROACHMENT - - - - -	141
IX	SOME CONCLUSIONS - - - - -	155

FOREWORD

WHEN writing *East and West* a few years ago, we thought we had said all that was required, at least for the time being, concerning the questions dealt with in that book. Since then, however, events have followed one upon another with ever increasing speed, and while this has not made it necessary to alter a single word of what we have written, it provides an opportunity for certain additional explanations and for the development of lines of thought which we did not feel called upon to stress in the first instance. These explanations have become the more imperative since we have recently seen reaffirmed in a distinctly aggressive manner some of those very confusions we had already tried to dispel. For this reason, while carefully holding aloof from all controversies, it has seemed to us advisable to present matters once more in their true perspective. In this connection there are certain considerations, often of a quite elementary nature, which appear so alien to the vast majority of our contemporaries, that in order to make them generally understood it is necessary to return to them again and again, presenting them in their various aspects and explaining more fully, as circumstances permit, any points likely to give rise to difficulties which could not always be foreseen from the outset.

The very title of the present volume calls for some initial explanation if what it means is to be clearly

FOREWORD

understood and all misrepresentation thus prevented. Many no longer doubt the possibility of a world crisis, using the latter word in its most usual acceptance,¹ and this in itself marks a very noticeable change of outlook : by sheer force of circumstance certain illusions are beginning to vanish, and for our part we cannot but rejoice that this is so, for it is at any rate a favourable symptom and a sign that a readjustment of the contemporary mentality is still possible, a glimmer of light, as it were, in the midst of the present chaos. In keeping with this, the belief in an endless "progress," which was held until recently as a sort of intangible, indisputable dogma, is no longer so general, there are those who perceive, though in a vague and confused manner, that the civilization of the West may not always go on developing in the same direction, but may some day reach a point where it will stop, or even be plunged in its entirety into some cataclysm. It is possible that such persons do not see clearly where the danger lies ; the fantastic or puerile fears they sometimes express are proof enough that their minds still harbour many errors, but it is at any rate something that they realize there is a danger, even if it is felt rather than really understood, it is something too that they can conceive that this civilization with which the moderns are so infatuated holds no privileged position in the history of the world, and that it may

¹ As people to-day are continually talking of "crises" of one sort or another, it is perhaps worthwhile pointing out that this sentence was written in 1926, that is just before the financial difficulties of the late 'twenties. The West has subsequently had many occasions for still further doubting its own self-assurance — *Translator*

FOREWORD

meet the same fate which has befallen so many others that have already disappeared at more or less distant epochs, and some of which have left traces so slight as to be hardly noticeable, let alone recognizable.

Consequently, when it is said that the modern world is in the throes of a crisis, this is usually taken to mean that it has just reached a critical phase, or, in other words, that a more or less complete transformation is imminent, which implies that sooner or later a change of trend must inevitably ensue : whether voluntarily or no, whether suddenly or more gradually and whether attended or not by catastrophe remains to be seen. This acceptance of the word crisis is perfectly legitimate and corresponds in part to what we ourselves think, but in part only, for the point of view we hold is a more general one, and for us it is the modern epoch as a whole which is a period of crisis ; that is why we entitle this book *The Crisis of the Modern World*. It seems, however, that the crisis is nearing its solution, and this has the effect of emphasizing still further the abnormality of the state of affairs which has already existed for some centuries, though the consequences were never before so apparent as they are now. This is also the reason for the increasing speed with which events are now unfolding themselves : such a state of affairs may doubtless continue for some time longer, but not indefinitely, and even without being able to assign a definite time-limit, one has the impression that it cannot last very much longer.

But the word " crisis " contains other implications

FOREWORD

confronted with things of this kind is simply to dismiss them without further enquiry as errors or fantasies of no importance ; we consider, however, that even if they are in fact errors, it is better, while denouncing them as such, to probe for the reasons which have given rise to them and to seek the modicum of truth, deformed though it may be, which they may nevertheless contain, for, since error has after all a purely negative manner of existence, absolute error cannot exist anywhere and is merely a meaningless expression. If the matter is viewed in this way it becomes easy to see that the preoccupation with the "end of the world" is closely connected with the state of general mental unrest in which we are at present living : the vague foreboding of an end, which is in fact near, works uncontrollably on the imaginations of some people and quite naturally gives rise to wild and, for the most part, grossly materialized mental images which in their turn assume external form in the extravagances to which we have alluded. This explanation is, however, no excuse for such extravagances, or at least, even if the persons who fall involuntarily into error, being predisposed to it by a mental state for which they are not responsible, are to be excused, it can never be a reason for excusing the error itself. For our part, we certainly cannot be accused of undue indulgence towards the "pseudo-religious" manifestations of the contemporary world, any more than towards modern errors in general. Indeed, we know that there are those who would be inclined rather to reproach us with the opposite of tolerance, and it may be that what is said here

FOREWORD

will enable them to understand better our attitude in these matters, an attitude which consists in abiding always by the only standpoint that concerns us, that of impartial and disinterested truth.

But this is not the whole question at issue : a purely psychological explanation of this idea of the "end of the world" and of its current manifestations, accurate though it might be in its own order, could never be fully adequate ; to accept it as such would be to yield to one of those modern illusions which we take every opportunity of condemning. As we have said, there are people who have a vague feeling that something is approaching its end, without being able to define exactly the nature or extent of the change which they foresee , it is impossible to deny that this feeling is based on reality, even though it be vague and subject to false interpretations or imaginative deformations, for whatever may be the nature of the end that is approaching, the crisis which must necessarily lead up to it is apparent enough, and there is no lack of unequivocal and easily perceptible signs all pointing with one accord to the same conclusion. This end is doubtless not the " end of the world " in the complete sense in which some persons seek to interpret it, but it is at least the end of a world . and if it is Western civilization in its present form which is to end, it is understandable that those who are accustomed to see nothing beyond it, for whom this is " Civilization " unqualified, should incline to the belief that everything will end with it and that its disappearance will in fact be " the end of the world."

FOREWORD

It may be said, then, to bring the question down to its true proportions, that we really seem to be approaching the end of a world, that is to say the end of an epoch or of an historical cycle, which may also correspond to the end of a cosmic cycle, in accordance with the teaching of all the traditional doctrines on the subject. There have already been many occurrences of the same sort in the past, and there will doubtless be others in the future ; these occurrences are of varying importance according to whether they terminate longer or shorter periods and whether they affect the whole of mankind or merely one or another of its component parts, some definite race or people. It is to be expected that in the present state of the world the change which is to ensue will be very general in extent, and that whatever form it may assume—and this is a point we shall not attempt to determine—it will affect more or less the whole world. In any case, the laws governing such occurrences apply analogously at different levels, so that what is true of the “end of the world” in the most complete sense in which this can be conceived—it is usually taken to refer only to the terrestrial world—is true also on a proportionately lesser scale of some particular world in a much more restricted sense of the word.

These preliminary remarks should make it easier to understand the questions that we are about to consider. We have already had occasion to refer fairly frequently in other works to the “cyclic laws” ; it would be difficult, perhaps, to give a complete exposition of them in a form easily compre-

FOREWORD

hensible to Western minds, but one must at least have a certain amount of data on this subject to appreciate the true character of the present epoch and to see its exact place in world history. We shall therefore begin by showing that the characteristic features of this epoch are in actual fact those which the traditional doctrines have from all time indicated for the cyclic period to which it corresponds ; and in so doing we shall make clear that what is anomaly and disorder from a certain point of view is nevertheless a necessary element of a vaster order and an inevitable consequence of the laws which govern the development of all manifestation. However, let it be said at once, this is no reason for consenting to submit passively to the disorder and obscurity which seem momentarily to triumph, for, were it so, we should have nothing better to do than to keep silence , on the contrary, it is a reason for striving to the utmost to prepare the way out of this "dark age," for there are many signs that its end is already near, if not imminent. This also is a part of the appointed order of things, for equilibrium is the result of the simultaneous action of two contrary tendencies ; if one or the other could cease to act entirely, equilibrium would never be restored and the world itself would disappear ; but this supposition has no possibility of realization, for the two terms of an opposition have no meaning apart from one another, and whatever the appearances, one may be sure that all partial and transitory disequilibriums contribute in the end towards realizing the total equilibrium.

CHAPTER I

THE DARK AGE

THE Hindu doctrine teaches that a human cycle, to which it gives the name of *Manvantara*, is divided into four periods marking so many stages during which the primordial spirituality becomes gradually more and more obscured, these are the same periods that the ancient traditions of the West called the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages. We are now in the fourth age, the *Kali-Yuga* or "dark age," and have been so already, it is said, for more than six thousand years, that is to say since an epoch far earlier than any known to "classical" history. Since that time, the truths which were formerly within reach of all men have become more and more hidden and inaccessible; those who possess them grow gradually less and less numerous, and although the treasure of "non-human" wisdom that was before the ages can never be lost, it becomes enveloped in ever more impenetrable veils, which hide it from men's sight and make it extremely difficult to discover. This is why we meet everywhere, under various symbols, with the same theme of something which has been lost, at least to all appearances and so far as the outer world is concerned, and which those who aspire to true knowledge must

THE DARK AGE

find again ; but it is also stated that what is thus hidden will become visible once more at the end of the cycle, which, because of the continuity that binds all things together, will at the same time be the beginning of a new cycle.

It will doubtless be asked why cyclic development must proceed in this manner, in a downward direction, from higher to lower, a course which will at once be perceived to be a complete negation of the idea of progress as the moderns understand it. The reason is that the development of any manifestation necessarily implies a gradually increasing movement away from the principle from which it proceeds , starting from the highest point, it tends necessarily downwards, and, as with heavy bodies, the speed of its motion increases continuously until finally it reaches a point at which it is stopped. This fall could be described as a progressive materialization, for the expression of the principle is pure spirituality ; we say the expression and not the principle itself, for the latter, being beyond all oppositions, cannot be described by any term appearing to suggest an opposite. Moreover, words such as “spirit” and “matter,” which we borrow here from Western terminology for the sake of convenience, have little more than a symbolical value for us , in any case, they can be made to fit the question in hand only on condition that we exclude the special interpretations given to them by modern philosophy, whose “spiritualism” and “materialism” are, in our eyes, only two complementary forms which imply each other and are alike

THE DARK AGE

negligible for anyone who wishes to go beyond these contingent points of view. However, since it is not of pure metaphysic that we propose to treat here, if all due precautions are taken to avoid ambiguity and if the essential principles are never lost sight of, we may admit the use of terms which, although inadequate, nevertheless serve to make things more easily understandable, so long, of course, as this can be done without distorting what is to be understood.

What has been said of the development of manifestation gives a picture which is accurate when viewed as a whole, but which is none the less too simplified and rigid in that it may give the idea of development along a straight line, in only one direction and without oscillations of any sort ; the truth is actually far more complex. In point of fact, as we have already indicated, two contrary tendencies are to be traced in everything, the one descending and the other ascending, or, to express it differently, the one centrifugal and the other centripetal, and from the predominance of one or the other tendency result two complementary phases of manifestation, the one a departure from the principle and the other a return towards the principle, two phases often compared symbolically to the movements of the heart or to the two phases of breathing. Although these two phases are usually described as successive, the two tendencies to which they correspond must, in reality, be conceived as always acting simultaneously, although in different proportions, and it sometimes happens, at moments when the downward tendency seems on the point of prevailing definitely

THE DARK AGE

in the course of world development, that some special action intervenes to strengthen the contrary tendency, so as to restore a certain equilibrium, at least relative, such as the conditions of the moment allow ; and this causes a partial readjustment through which the fall may seem to be checked or even temporarily neutralized ¹

It is quite obvious that these traditional data, of which we can give only a very bare outline here, open the way to conceptions quite different from and far more vast and profound than all those essays in "historical philosophy" in which the moderns delight. But we have no intention, for the moment, of going back to the origin of the present cycle, or even to the beginning of the *Kali-Yuga*, we shall only be concerned, directly at least, with a far more limited field, namely with the last phases of the *Kali-Yuga*. Actually, within each of the great periods of which we have spoken it is possible to go further and distinguish secondary phases which constitute so many sub-divisions of it ; and since each part is after its own fashion analogous to the whole, these subdivisions reproduce, so to speak, on a much smaller scale, the general course of the great cycle in which they are contained ; but here also a complete investigation of the ways in which this law applies to various particular cases would carry us far beyond the limits laid down

¹ This is connected with the function of "divine preservation" which is represented in the Hindu tradition by *Vishnu*, and more particularly with the doctrine of the *Avatâras* or "descents" of the Divine Principle into the manifested world, a doctrine which we naturally cannot undertake to develop here

THE DARK AGE

for the present study. We shall conclude these preliminary remarks by mentioning only one or two particularly critical epochs among those through which mankind has more recently passed, that is to say among those which fall within the period usually called "historical," as it is in fact the only one which is really accessible to ordinary or "profane" history ; and this will lead on naturally to what is to be the real object of this study, since the last of these critical epochs is none other than that which constitutes what is termed modern times.

It is a strange fact, and one which appears never to have been given the attention it deserves, that the strictly "historical" period, in the sense that we have just indicated, stretches back exactly to the sixth century before the Christian era, as though there were at that point a barrier in time impossible to surmount by the methods of investigation at the disposal of ordinary research. Indeed, from this time onwards there is everywhere a fairly precise and well-established chronology, whereas for all that occurs prior to it only very vague approximations are as a rule obtained, and the dates suggested for the same events often vary by several centuries. This is very noticeable even in the case of countries of whose history we possess more than a few scattered vestiges, such as Egypt, for example , but what is perhaps even more astonishing is that in an exceptional and privileged case such as that of China, which possesses, for far more distant epochs, annals dated by means of astronomical observations which should leave no room for doubt, the

THE DARK AGE

moderns none the less class these epochs as "legendary," as though they recognized in them a domain in which they have no right to any certainty and in which they do not allow themselves to obtain any. So-called "classical" antiquity is therefore a very relative antiquity and far nearer to modern times than to real antiquity, since it does not even go back to the middle of the *Kali-Yuga*, whose length is itself, according to the Hindu doctrine, only a tenth part of the whole *Manvantara* ; and this is sufficient indication of how far the moderns are justified in priding themselves on the extent of their historical knowledge.

They will doubtless seek to justify themselves by replying that all this refers only to "legendary" periods, which they therefore deem unworthy of consideration ; but this reply is a mere admission of ignorance and of an incomprehension that can be explained only by their contempt for tradition ; the specifically modern outlook is in fact, as we shall show farther on, identical with the anti-traditional outlook.

In the sixth century before the Christian era, considerable changes took place, for one reason or another, amongst almost all peoples, changes which, however, varied in character from country to country. In some cases it was a readaptation of the tradition to conditions other than those that had previously existed, a readaptation which was accomplished in a rigorously orthodox sense. This is what occurred, for example, in China, where the doctrine, primitively established as a single whole, was then divided into two clearly

THE DARK AGE

distinct parts. Taoism, reserved for an elect and comprising pure metaphysic and the traditional sciences of a properly speculative nature, and Confucianism, which was common to all without distinction and whose domain was that of practical and mainly social applications. Among the Persians there seems also to have been a readaptation of Mazdeism, for this epoch was that of the last Zoroaster.¹ In India, on the other hand, this period saw the rise of Buddhism,² that is to say of a revolt against the traditional spirit, amounting to a denial of all authority and resulting in a veritable anarchy, in the etymological sense of "absence of principle," both in the intellectual and social realms. It is a curious fact that there are no monuments in India dating from before this period, and the orientalisks have tried to make this fact tell in favour of their tendency to find the origins of everything in Buddhism, the importance of which they strangely

¹ It should be noted that the name of Zoroaster does not really designate any particular person, but a function at once prophetic and legislative, there were several Zoroasters who lived at very different epochs, it is probable that it was a function of a collective nature, as was that of Vyâsa in India, likewise in ancient Egypt, what was attributed to Thoth or Hermes represented the work of the whole sacerdotal caste

² The question of Buddhism is by no means so simple as this brief account of it might suggest, and it is interesting to note that if, as far as their own tradition is concerned, the Hindus have always condemned the Buddhists, this is not the case with the Buddha himself for whom many of them have a great reverence, some going so far as to see in him the 9th Avatâra. As for Buddhism such as it is known to-day, one should be careful, in dealing with it, to distinguish between its *Mahâyâna* and its *Hinayâna* forms, that is between the "Greater" and the "Lesser" Vehicles, in general one may say that Buddhism outside India differs markedly from the original Indian form, which began to lose ground rapidly after the death of Ashoka and eventually disappeared

THE DARK AGE

exaggerate. The explanation of the fact is nevertheless quite simple, it is that all earlier constructions were of wood and have therefore naturally disappeared, leaving no trace.¹ Such a change in the mode of construction must have corresponded, however, to a profound modification of the general conditions governing the existence of the people concerned

Moving westwards, we see that for the Jews the same period was that of the Babylonian captivity, and it is perhaps one of the most astonishing facts we have to record that a short period of seventy years sufficed for them to forget even their alphabet, so that afterwards they had to reconstruct the Sacred Books in characters quite different from those which had been in use till then. It would be possible to cite many other events more or less of the same date. we will only remark that it was the beginning of the properly "historical" period of Rome following on the "legendary" period of the kings, and that it is also known, though in rather a vague manner, that there were important movements among the Celtic peoples at this time; but, without dwelling further on these points, we will pass on to consider Greece. There also the sixth century was the starting point of the civilization termed "classical," the only one of which the moderns recognize the "historical" character, everything previous to it being sufficiently ill-known to be treated

¹ This is a state of affairs not peculiar to India, but met with in the West as well, it is for the same reason that no traces remain of the cities of the Gauls, the existence of which is, however, undeniable, being testified to by contemporary witnesses; and here also modern historians have profited by the lack of monuments to depict the Gauls as savages living in forests

THE DARK AGE

as "legendary," even though recent archæological discoveries no longer leave room for doubt that there was a very real civilization, and we have reasons for supposing that this first Hellenic civilization was much more interesting intellectually than that which followed, and that their relationship offers a certain analogy with that between mediæval and modern Europe. It should be noted, however, that the breach was not so complete as in the latter case, for at least a partial re-adaptation was carried out in the traditional order, principally in the domain of the "mysteries"; one may refer here to the case of Pythagorism, which was primarily a restoration under a new form of the earlier Orphic tradition and whose connection with the Delphic cult of the Hyperborean Apollo bears witness to an unbroken and regular line of descent from one of the most ancient traditions of mankind. But, on the other hand, there very soon appeared something of which there had been no previous example, and which, in the future, was to have an injurious effect on the whole Western world: we refer to that special form of thought which acquired and retained the name of "philosophy"; and this point is important enough for us to dwell on it at somewhat greater length.

It is true that the word "philosophy" can, in itself, be understood in quite a legitimate sense, and one which without doubt originally belonged to it, especially if it be true that Pythagoras himself was the first to use it: etymologically it denotes nothing more than "love of wisdom"; it implies then, first of all, an initial

THE DARK AGE

disposition required for the attainment of wisdom, and, by a quite natural extension of this meaning, the quest which is born from this same disposition and which must lead to knowledge. It is therefore only a preliminary and preparatory stage, a movement, as it were, towards wisdom or a degree corresponding to an inferior state of wisdom¹, the perversion which ensued consisted in taking this transitional stage for an end in itself and in seeking to substitute "philosophy" for wisdom, a process which implied forgetting or ignoring the true nature of the latter. Hence sprang up what can be called "profane" philosophy, that is a pretended wisdom which was purely human and therefore entirely of the rational order, and which took the place of the true, traditional, super-rational and "non-human" wisdom. However, there still remained something of this true wisdom throughout the whole of antiquity, as is proved primarily by the persistence of the "mysteries," whose essentially initiatory character is beyond dispute; and it is also true that the teachings of the philosophers themselves had usually an "exoteric" and an "esoteric" side, the latter leaving open the possibility of connection with a higher point of view, which, as a matter of fact, made itself very clearly, though perhaps in some respects incompletely, apparent some centuries later among the Alexandrians. For "profane" philosophy to be definitively constituted as such, it was necessary for

¹ The relation is almost the same as that which exists in the Taoist doctrine between the "gifted man" and the "transcendent man" or "true man"

THE DARK AGE

exotericism alone to remain and for all esotericism purely and simply to be denied, and it is precisely to this result that the movement inaugurated by the Greeks was to lead in the modern world. The tendencies which had already found expression among the Greeks had to be pushed to their most extreme consequences, the undue importance which had been attached to rational thought had to grow still greater, before men could arrive at "rationalism," a specifically modern attitude which consists in not merely ignoring but expressly denying everything of a super-rational order. But let us not anticipate further, for we shall have to return to these consequences and to trace their development in another part of this book.

In what has been said above, there is one thing that has particular bearing on the point of view with which we are concerned : it is that some of the origins of the modern world are to be sought for in "classical" antiquity ; the modern world is therefore not altogether wrong in claiming to base itself on the Græco-Latin civilization and to be a continuation of it. At the same time, it must be remarked that the continuation is rather remote from and unfaithful to the original, for classical antiquity still possessed many things of the intellectual and spiritual order to which no equivalent is to be found in the modern world , in any case, the two civilizations mark two quite different degrees in the progressive overshadowing of true knowledge. It would, indeed, be possible to conceive of the decadence of the civilization of antiquity leading gradually and without breach of continuity to a state more or

THE DARK AGE

less similar to that which we see to-day ; but in fact this did not occur, and in the meantime there intervened another critical period for the West, a period which was at the same time one of those readjustments to which we have already referred.

This was the epoch which saw the rise and spread of Christianity, coinciding on the one hand with the dispersion of the Jews and on the other with the last phase of the Græco-Latin civilization ; and we can pass over these events more rapidly, despite their importance, as they are more generally known than those of which we have been speaking hitherto, and as their simultaneity has been more remarked upon, even by the historians whose views are the most superficial. Attention has also frequently been drawn to certain features common to the decadence of the "classical" world and to the present time ; and without wishing to push the parallel too far, it must be recognized that there are in reality striking resemblances.

Purely "profane" philosophy had gained ground : the appearance of scepticism on the one hand and of Stoic and Epicurean moralism on the other are sufficient to show to what point intellectuality had declined. At the same time, the ancient sacred doctrines, which scarcely anyone still understood, had degenerated through this lack of understanding into "paganism" in the true sense of the word, that is to say they had become no more than "superstitions," things which, having lost their profound meaning, survived for their own sake as merely

THE DARK AGE

exterior manifestations. There were attempts to react against this decadence : Hellenism itself strove to acquire new vigour by the help of elements borrowed from those Eastern doctrines with which it was able to come in touch, but such means were no longer adequate; the Græco-Latin civilization had to end and the readjustment to come from outside and be carried out in a totally different form. It was Christianity that accomplished this transformation, and it may be noted in this connection that the comparison which can be established in certain respects between that time and our own is, perhaps, one of the factors responsible for the disordered "messianism" to be met with to-day.

After the troubled period of the barbarian invasions, necessary to complete the destruction of the old order of things, a normal order was re-established for a period of some centuries, this period was that of the Middle Ages, of which the moderns, unable to understand its intellectuality, have so false an idea that it certainly appears to them far more alien and distant than classical antiquity.

For us, the real Middle Ages extend from the reign of Charlemagne to the opening of the fourteenth century, at which date a new decadence set in that has continued through various phases and with gathering impetus up to the present time. This date is the real starting point of the modern crisis. It is the beginning of the disruption of Christendom, with which the Western civilization of the Middle Ages was, in its essence, identified : at the same time, it marks the

THE DARK AGE

origin of the formation of "nations" and the end of the feudal system, which was very closely linked up with the existence of Christendom. The modern period must therefore be put back almost two centuries farther than is usual with historians, the Renaissance and Reformation were primarily results, made possible only by the preceding decadence, but, far from being a readjustment, they marked a much deeper falling off, consummating, as they did, the definite rupture with the traditional spirit, the former in the domain of the arts and sciences and the latter in that of religion itself, although this was the domain in which it might have seemed the most difficult to conceive of such a rupture

What is called the Renaissance was in reality, as we have already said on other occasions, not a re-birth but the death of many things, on the pretext of being a return to the Græco-Roman civilization, it took over only the most outward part of it, since this was the only part which could be expressed clearly in written texts; and in any case, this incomplete restoration was bound to have a very artificial character, as it meant a re-establishment of forms whose real life had gone out of them centuries before. As for the traditional sciences of the Middle Ages, after a few final manifestations at about this time, they disappeared as completely as those of distant civilizations long since destroyed by some cataclysm; and this time nothing was to arise in their place. Henceforth there was only "profane" philosophy and "profane" science, that is to say the negation of true

THE DARK AGE

intellectuality, the limitation of knowledge to its lowest order, empirical and analytical study of facts which are attached to no principle, dispersion in an indefinite multitude of unimportant details and the accumulation of unfounded hypotheses which destroy one another incessantly and of fragmentary views which can lead to nothing else than those practical applications that constitute the sole real superiority of modern civilization—a scarcely enviable superiority, moreover, which, in developing so far as to smother all other pre-occupations, has given this civilization a purely material character that makes of it a veritable monstrosity.

An altogether extraordinary fact is the rapidity with which mediæval civilization was completely forgotten, already in the seventeenth century men had not the slightest idea of what it had been, and the monuments that survived from it no longer stood for anything in their eyes, intellectually or even æsthetically, this is proof enough of how far the general mentality had changed in the meantime. We shall not undertake here to probe into the factors—and they are certainly very complex—which contributed to bring about a change so radical that it seems difficult to admit that it can have occurred spontaneously, without the intervention of some directing will, the exact nature of which must remain rather enigmatic; there are very strange circumstances in this connection, such as the popularization at a certain moment, under the form of new discoveries, of things which in reality had been known for a very long time, but the knowledge of which had hitherto not been laid open to the public, as there were certain dangers

THE DARK AGE

in so doing that risked outweighing the advantages.¹ It is also very improbable that the legend which has made of the Middle Ages a time of gloom, ignorance and barbarism arose and became accredited spontaneously, and that the veritable falsification of history in which the moderns have indulged has been accomplished without any preconceived idea ; but we shall not go into this question any further, for, in whatever manner these processes may have taken place, our main concern for the moment is to make clear what are their results

There is a word which rose to honour at the Renaissance and which summarized in advance the whole programme of modern civilization this word is "humanism." Men were indeed concerned to reduce everything to purely human proportions, to eliminate every principle of a higher order, and, one might say symbolically, to turn away from the heavens under pretext of conquering the earth , the Greeks, whose example they claimed to follow, had never gone so far in this direction, even at the time of their greatest intellectual decadence, and with them utilitarian considerations had at least never claimed the first place, as they were very soon to do with the moderns. Humanism was already the first form of what has subsequently become contemporary laicism , and, owing to its desire to reduce everything to the measure

¹ We will quote only two examples from among facts of this sort which were to have consequences of the most serious kind the pretended invention of printing, which had been known by the Chinese before the Christian era, and the "official" discovery of America, with which continent far more extensive relations than is supposed had existed throughout the Middle Ages

THE DARK AGE

of man as an end in himself, modern civilization has gone downwards step by step until it has ended by sinking to the level of the lowest elements in man and aiming at little more than satisfaction of the needs inherent in the material side of his nature, an aim which is, in any case, quite illusory, as it constantly creates more artificial needs than it can satisfy.

Will the modern world follow this fatal course right to the end, or will a new readjustment intervene once more, as it did in the case of the Græco-Latin decadence, before it reaches the bottom of the abyss into which it is being drawn ? It would seem that a halt midway is no longer possible and that according to all the indications furnished by the traditional doctrines, we have in fact entered upon the last phase of the *Kali-Yuga*, the darkest period of this "dark age," the state of dissolution from which it is impossible to emerge otherwise than by a cataclysm, since it is not a mere readjustment which is necessary at such a stage, but a complete renovation. Disorder and confusion prevail in every domain and have been carried to a point far surpassing all that has been known previously, so that, issuing from the West, they now threaten to invade the whole world, we know quite well that their triumph can never be other than apparent and transitory, but such are the proportions to which it has attained that it would appear to be the sign of the gravest of all the crises through which mankind has passed in the course of its present cycle. Have we not reached that terrible age announced by the Sacred Books of India, "when the castes shall

THE DARK AGE

be mingled, when even the family shall no longer exist"? It is only necessary to look about one to become convinced that this state is in actual fact that of the world of to-day, and to recognize everywhere that profound degeneracy which the Gospels term "the abomination of desolation." The gravity of the situation is not to be overlooked ; it should be envisaged such as it is, without optimism but also without pessimism, for, as we have already said, the end of the old world will be also the beginning of a new.

This gives rise to the question : what is the reason for a period such as that in which we live ? Actually, however abnormal present conditions may be when considered in themselves, they must nevertheless enter into the general order of things, that order which, according to a Far-Eastern formula, is made up of the sum of all disorders , this epoch, however distressing and troubled it may be, must also, like all the others, have its allotted place in the complete course of human development, and, indeed, the very fact of its being predicted by the traditional doctrines is indication enough that this is so. What we have said of the general trend of a cycle of manifestation towards progressive materialization gives a direct explanation of such a state, and shows that what is abnormal and disordered from a certain particular point of view is nevertheless only the consequence of a law implied in a higher or more extensive point of view. We will add, without dwelling upon the question, that like every change of state, the passage from one cycle to another can take place only in darkness ; this is

THE DARK AGE

another law of great importance and with numerous applications , but, for that very reason, a detailed exposition of it would carry us too far from our subject ¹

Nor is this all . the modern period must necessarily correspond with the development of certain of the possibilities which have lain within the potentiality of the present cycle since its origin, and however low may be the rank of these possibilities in the hierarchy of the whole, they were bound none the less, as well as the others, to manifest themselves according to the order assigned to them. In this connection, it might be said that what, according to tradition, characterizes the ultimate phase of the cycle is the exploitation of all that has been neglected or cast aside during the preceding phases , and indeed, this is exactly the case with modern civilization, which lives, as it were, only by that for which previous civilizations had no use. To realize that this is so, it is sufficient to see how the representatives of such of these other civilizations as have endured in the East till the present day appreciate Western sciences and their application to industry. These lower forms of knowledge, so worthless to anyone possessing knowledge of another order, were bound, nevertheless, to be realized, but this could

¹ This law was represented in the Eleusian mysteries by the symbolism of the grain of wheat , the alchemists represented it by "putrefaction" and the colour black which marks the beginning of the "Great Work", what the Christian mystics call the "dark night of the soul" is only an application of it to the spiritual development of the being in its ascent to higher states , and it would be easy to indicate many other concordant applications

THE DARK AGE

not occur except at a stage where true intellectuality had disappeared. This research, exclusively practical in the narrowest sense of the word, had to be undertaken, but it could only be carried through in an age at the opposite pole to primordial spirituality, by men so embedded in material things as to be incapable of conceiving anything beyond them. The more they have sought to exploit matter, the more they have become its slaves, thus dooming themselves to ever-increasing agitation, without rule and without objective, to dispersion in pure multiplicity leading to the final dissolution

Such, in broad outline and with essentials alone taken into account, is the true explanation of the modern world, but let it be stated quite clearly, this explanation can in no way be taken for a justification. An inevitable ill is none the less an ill, and even if good is to come out of evil, this does not change the evil character of the evil: we use the words "good" and "evil" here, of course, only to be the better understood and without any specifically "moral" intention. Partial disorders cannot but exist, since they are necessary elements in the total order, but nevertheless a period of disorder is in itself something comparable to a monstrosity, which, while being the consequence of certain natural laws, is none the less a deviation and a sort of error, or to a cataclysm, which, although resulting from the normal course of events, is all the same a subversion and an anomaly when viewed in itself. Modern civilization has of necessity its reason for existing, as have all things, and if indeed it represents the state of affairs that

THE DARK AGE

terminates a cycle, one can say that it is what it should be and that it comes in its appointed time and place, but it should none the less be judged according to the words of the Gospel, so often misunderstood : " Offence must needs come, but woe unto him through whom offence cometh."

CHAPTER II

THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

THERE IS an unmistakable gulf between Oriental and Westerner, and this is one of the peculiar features of the modern world, although we have dealt with this question more fully elsewhere,¹ we must come back to it here in order to clarify certain of its aspects and remove certain misunderstandings. It is true that there have always been many and varied civilizations, each of which has developed in a manner natural to it and in conformity with the aptitudes of this or that people or race, but distinction does not mean opposition, and there can be equivalence of a sort between civilizations with very different forms, so long as they are all based on the same fundamental principles, of which they only represent applications varying in accordance with varied circumstances. This is the case with all civilizations that can be called normal or traditional, which comes to the same thing; there is no essential opposition between them, and such divergences as may exist are merely outward and superficial. On the other hand, a civilization which recognizes no higher principle, but is in reality based only on a negation of principles, is by this very fact ruled out from all mutual understanding with other civilizations, for if such understanding is to be pro-

¹ See *East and West*, Luzac, 1941

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

found and efficacious it can only come from above, that is to say from the very factor which this abnormal and perverted civilization lacks. In the present state of the world, therefore, we have, on the one hand, all the civilizations that have remained faithful to the traditional standpoint, that is to say the civilizations of the East, and, on the other hand, a veritably anti-traditional civilization, that is to say the civilization of the modern West.

There are, it is true, those who have gone so far as to deny that the division of mankind into East and West answers to any real difference ; but it seems beyond doubt that in the present time, at any rate, this difference does actually exist. In the first place, the existence of a Western civilization, common to Europe and America, is a fact that everyone must recognize, whatever opinion may be held as to its value. The question is less simple with regard to the East, for there are actually several Eastern civilizations, and not one only, the distinction and even the opposition between the East and the West is, however, fully justified by the fact that these civilizations have certain common features, such as characterize what we have called a traditional civilization, and that these features are lacking to that of the West. That this is so is due to the fact that all the Eastern civilizations are alike traditional in character. To give a more definite idea of these civilizations, we will repeat here the general division between them that we have already laid down elsewhere, and which, though possibly a little too simplified for anyone who wishes to enter into detail,

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

is nevertheless correct as a main outline the Far East is represented essentially by the Chinese civilization, the Middle East by the Hindu, the Near East by the Islamic. It should be added that in many respects this last is to be regarded as midway between East and West, and that it has many features in common with Western civilization as it was in the Middle Ages, if one consider it in relation to the modern West, however, one cannot but see that it is just as opposed to it as are the properly Eastern civilizations, with which, from this point of view, it must therefore be classed.

The last remark raises an important point there was no reason for opposition between East and West so long as there were traditional civilizations in the West also; the opposition has a meaning only as far as the modern West is concerned, for it is far more an opposition between two mentalities than between two more or less clearly defined geographical entities. In certain periods, of which the nearest to us is the mediæval, the Western mentality was much more akin, in its more important features, to what still is the Eastern mentality than to what it has itself become in modern times; Western civilization was then comparable to the civilizations of the East in the same way in which these are comparable to one another. During recent centuries there has come about a great change that is far more serious than any of the deviations that may have occurred previously in periods of decadence, as it has proceeded to the point of an absolute reversal of the trend of human activity; and this change had its

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

origin only in the West. When, therefore, in speaking of the world of to-day, we use the expression Western mentality, this means the same as the modern mentality ; and since the other mentality has continued to exist only in the East, we can, also with reference to the present state of things, call it the Eastern mentality. These two terms, then, express nothing more than an actual fact ; and, while one of the two mentalities has come into being during recent history and is, in fact, quite clearly Western, we do not wish to imply anything as to the source of the other, which was formerly common to East and West, for its origin must, if truth be told, merge in that of mankind itself, being the mentality which can be described as normal, if only for the reason that it has inspired more or less completely all the civilizations we know, with the exception of one only, that is to say once again the modern Western civilization.

Certain persons, who have doubtless not taken the trouble to read our books, have felt it incumbent on them to reproach us with having said that all traditional doctrines have had their origin in the East, and that Western antiquity itself has, at all periods, always received its traditions from the East ; we have never written anything of the sort, nor even anything that might suggest such an opinion, for the simple reason that we know quite well that it is untrue. Indeed, the traditional data themselves distinctly contradict such a statement : the explicit assertion is to be found everywhere that the Primordial Tradition of the present cycle comes from the hyperborean regions ; later there were several secondary currents corresponding

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

to different periods, and one of the most important of these, at least among those whose traces are still discernible, undoubtedly went from the West eastwards. All this, however, refers to very far off times, such as are commonly called "prehistoric," and with which we are not concerned here, what we do say is this : in the first place, the home of the Primordial Tradition has for a very long time now been in the East and it is there that the doctrinal forms which have issued most directly from it are to be found ; and secondly, in the present state of things the true traditional spirit, with all that it implies, has no longer any authentic representatives except in the East

This explanation would be incomplete without a reference, however brief, to certain proposals that have seen the light in various contemporary circles for restoring a "Western tradition." The only real interest afforded by these ideas is to show that there are people whose minds have ceased to be content with modern negation, and who, feeling the need for something that our own period cannot offer them, see the possibility of an escape from the present crisis only in one way, through a return to tradition in one form or another. Unfortunately, "traditionalism" is not the same thing as the real traditional outlook ; it can be, and most often is, nothing more than a mere inclination, a more or less vague aspiration presupposing no real knowledge ; and it is unfortunately true that in the mental confusion of our times this aspiration usually gives rise to fantastic and imaginary conceptions devoid of any serious foundation. Finding no

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

authentic tradition on which to ground themselves, those affected by this aspiration go so far as to imagine pseudo-traditions that have never existed and which are as lacking in principles as that for which they are to be substituted, the whole modern confusion is reflected in these attempts, and whatever may be the intentions of their authors, their only result is to add still more to the general disequilibrium. From among conceptions of this kind, we will allude only to the so-called "Western tradition" fabricated by certain occultists out of the most incongruous elements and intended primarily to compete with a no less imaginary "Eastern tradition," that of the theosophists, we have spoken of these matters at sufficient length elsewhere, and prefer to pass on without further delay to the examination of other theories more worthy of attention, which reveal at least a desire to refer to traditions that have had a real existence

We alluded above to the current of tradition that had come from western regions; the accounts given by the ancients of Atlantis point to the origin of this, after the disappearance of that continent in the last of the great cataclysms that have occurred in the past, it seems undoubted that the remnants of its tradition were carried into various regions, where they mingled with other already existing traditions, for the most part branches of the great Hyperborean tradition, and it is very possible that the doctrines of the Celts in particular were among the products of this fusion. We are very far from disputing this; but let it not be forgotten that the real "Atlantean" form disappeared

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

thousands of years ago, together with the civilization to which it belonged and whose destruction can have come about only as the outcome of a perversion that may have been comparable in some respects to that which we see to-day, although with the important difference that mankind had not yet entered upon the *Kali-Yuga*. Also it should be remembered that this tradition corresponded only to a secondary period in our cycle, and that it would be a great mistake to seek to identify it with the Primordial Tradition out of which all the others have issued and which alone remains from the beginning to the end. It would be beside the point to set forth here all the data justifying these statements ; we insist merely on the conclusion that it is impossible now to resuscitate an "Atlantean" tradition or even to attach oneself more or less directly to it , and as a matter of fact, there is a good deal of fantasy in the attempts made to do so. It is none the less true that it may be of interest to investigate the origins of the elements that have come together to form later traditions, so long as, in doing so, all necessary precautions are taken to guard against certain illusions , but such investigations cannot in any case lead to the resurrection of a tradition which is not adapted to any of the present conditions of our world.

There are others who wish to attach themselves to "Celtism," and since the model they take is less remote from us, their purpose may seem less impracticable. But where can one find "Celtism" to-day in a pure state and with vitality enough to be able to serve as a basis ? We are not speaking of archæological or merely

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

“ literary ” reconstructions, of which a certain number have appeared , we have in mind something very different. It is true that clearly recognizable and still usable elements of “ Celtism ” have come down to us through various intermediaries, but these elements are very far from constituting a complete tradition ; moreover, strangely enough, even in the countries where it formerly existed, this tradition is now more completely forgotten than those of many civilizations which never had a home there. Is there not here matter for reflection, at any rate for such as are not completely under the sway of a preconceived idea ? We will go further . in all cases such as this, where one has to do with vestiges left by vanished civilizations, it is impossible really to understand these vestiges except by comparison with similar elements in still living traditional civilizations ; and the same applies even to the Middle Ages, in which there are so many things that have lost their meaning for the modern West. It is only by establishing contact with still living traditions that what is capable of being revived can be made to live again ; and this, as we have so often pointed out, is one of the greatest services that the East can render the West . We do not deny that a certain Celtic spirit has survived and can still manifest itself under various forms, as it has done at different times in the past ; but when anyone goes so far as to assure us that there still exist spiritual centres where the Druid tradition is preserved in its entirety, we require them to show proof of this, and until they do so, consider it very doubtful, if not altogether incredible.

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The truth is that the surviving Celtic elements were for the most part assimilated by Christianity in the Middle Ages ; the legend of the " Holy Grail," with all that it implies, is a particularly apt and significant example of this. Moreover, we think that if a Western tradition could be rebuilt it would be bound to take on a religious form in the strictest sense of the word, and that this form could only be Christian , for, on the one hand, the other possible forms have been too long foreign to the Western mentality, and on the other hand, it is only in Christianity, and we can say still more definitely in Catholicism, that such remnants of a traditional spirit as still exist in the West are to be found. Every " traditionalist " venture that ignores this fact is without foundation and therefore doomed inevitably to failure ; it is self-evident that one can build only upon something that has a real existence, and that where there is lack of continuity, any reconstruction must be artificial and cannot endure. If it be objected that Christianity itself, in our time, is no longer understood in its profound meaning, we should reply that it has at least kept in its very form all that is needed to provide the foundation of which we have been speaking. The least fantastic venture, in fact the only one that does not come up against immediate impossibilities, would therefore be an attempt to restore something comparable to what existed in the Middle Ages, with the differences demanded by modifications in the circumstances , and for all that has been completely lost in the West, it would be necessary to draw upon the traditions that have been

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

preserved in their entirety, as we stated above, and, having done so, to undertake the task of adaptation, which could be the work only of a powerfully established intellectual elect. All this we have said before, but it is useful to insist on it again, because too many inconsistent fantasies are given free rein at present, and also because it is important to have it understood that if the Eastern traditions in their own special forms can certainly be assimilated by an elect, which by its very definition as such must be beyond all forms, they certainly cannot be so by the mass of Western people, for whom they were not made, unless some unforeseen transformation takes place. If a Western elect comes to be formed, real knowledge of the Eastern doctrines will, for the reason that we have just given, be essential to it in the fulfilment of its functions, but the remainder who will only have to reap the benefits of its work, and who will be the greatest number, can quite well remain unaware of this, and they will receive the influence from it unwittingly so to speak, and in any case by means that will be quite beyond their perception, though none the less real and efficacious. We have never said anything different, but we thought it well to repeat it here as clearly as possible, because, if we must expect not to be always fully understood by all, we at least endeavour to avoid having intentions ascribed to us that are in no way our own.

But it is the present state of things that must concern us the most, so let us leave forecasts aside and dwell a moment longer on the suggestions that are at present to be met with for restoring a "Western tradition." There

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

is one observation which would suffice in itself to show that these ideas are not, so to speak, in order it is that they are almost always conceived from an attitude of more or less open hostility towards the East. It must be added that even those who wish to base themselves on Christianity are sometimes governed by this feeling . they seem set above all on finding points of opposition, which are really quite imaginary , and it is for this reason that we have heard the absurd opinion put forward that if the same things are found, expressed in almost identical form, in Christianity and in the Eastern doctrines, they have nevertheless not the same meaning in the two cases, and have even contrary meanings ! Those who make such assertions prove thereby that whatever may be their pretensions, they have not gone very far in the understanding of the traditional doctrines, and have not perceived the fundamental identity underlying all their differences of outward form . such people even go so far as to ignore this identity in cases where it becomes quite plain. Also, the view they hold of Christianity itself is quite superficial and could not answer to the notion of a real traditional doctrine offering a complete synthesis such as to embrace every domain , it is the basic principle that they lack, and in this they are affected far more than they may suppose by the modern outlook against which they wish to react , and when they have occasion to use the word “ tradition ” they certainly do not give it the same meaning that we do.

In the mental confusion that marks our times, the word “ tradition ” itself has come to be applied

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

indifferently to all sorts of things, often quite insignificant, for instance to mere customs with no wider bearing and sometimes of quite recent origin ; we have remarked elsewhere on an abuse of the same kind in the use of the word " religion." These perversions of language should be distrusted, as they reflect a sort of degeneracy of the corresponding ideas ; and the fact that somebody calls himself a " traditionalist " does not prove that he knows, even vaguely, what tradition is in the true sense of the word. For our part, we refuse absolutely to give this name to anything that is of a purely human order ; it is not superfluous to state this outright at a time when expressions such as " traditional philosophy," to take an example, crop up at every turn. A philosophy, though it be all that it should be, has no right to this designation, since it is entirely of the rational order even when it does not deny all that goes beyond this order. It is no more than a structure raised by human individuals without revelation or inspiration of any sort, which means, to condense all into a single word, that it is essentially " profane." Moreover, despite all the illusions that some people seem to cherish, the mentality of a race and an epoch is certainly not to be put right by any merely " bookish " science, but only by something very different from philosophical speculation, which, even at the best of times, is condemned by its very nature to remain completely external and much more verbal than real. The lost tradition can be restored and brought to life again only by contact with the living traditional spirit, and,

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

as we have already said, it is only in the East that this spirit is still fully alive. It is none the less true that the first essential is the existence in the West of an aspiration towards a return to the traditional outlook, but this could hardly be more than a mere aspiration. The various movements of "anti-modern" reaction that have already arisen, all very incomplete in our opinion, can only strengthen us in this conviction, for while doubtless excellent on their negative and critical side, they are nevertheless very far from constituting a restoration of true intellectuality, and flourish only within the limits of a rather narrow mental horizon. They are at least something, however, in that they point to a frame of mind of which it would have been very hard to find the least trace a few years ago if all Westerners are no longer unanimous in contenting themselves with the exclusively material development of modern civilization, this may be a sign that all hope of salvation is not yet wholly lost for them.

However this may be, if the West should somehow or other return to its tradition, its opposition to the East would thereby be resolved and cease to exist, as it has its roots only in the Western deviation and is in reality merely the opposition between the traditional and the anti-traditional outlooks. Therefore, contrary to the opinion of those to whom we have been alluding, one of the first results of a return to tradition would be to make an understanding with the East immediately feasible, such as is possible between all civilizations that possess comparable or equivalent elements,

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

and only between such, since these elements form the only ground on which an effective understanding can be based. The real traditional outlook is always and everywhere fundamentally the same, whatever form it may take, the various forms that are specially suited to different mental conditions and different circumstances of time and place are merely expressions of one and the same truth; but this fundamental unity beneath apparent multiplicity can be grasped only by those who are able to take up a standpoint which is purely intellectual. Moreover, it is in the intellectual realm that are to be found the principles from which normally everything else derives, either consequentially or by way of application, it is therefore on these principles that there must first of all be agreement if there is to be a really profound understanding, as they represent what is really essential; as soon as they are properly understood agreement will come of itself. It should indeed be added that knowledge of the principles is essential knowledge, or metaphysical knowledge in the true sense of the word, and is universal as are the principles themselves, it is therefore entirely independent of all individual contingencies, which must, on the contrary, intervene as soon as one comes down to applications, therefore this purely intellectual domain is the only one in which there is no need for the work of adaptation between different mentalities. Moreover, when the work has been done in this order, it remains only to develop its consequences, and agreement will be reached in all other fields also, since, as we have

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

just said, it is on this that directly or indirectly everything else depends ; on the other hand, agreement reached in any particular domain, outside the principles, will always remain highly unstable and precarious and much more like a diplomatic arrangement than a true understanding. This is why, we repeat once more, a true understanding can come only from above and not from below , and this should be taken in a twofold sense : the work must begin from what is highest, that is to say from the principles, and descend gradually to the various orders of application, always keeping rigorously to the hierarchical dependence that exists between them , and it must also of necessity be the work of an elect in the truest and most complete meaning of this word : by this we mean exclusively an intellectual elect, and in reality, there can be no other.

These few considerations should explain how much is lacking to the modern Western civilization for it to become normal and complete, not only with regard to a possible real understanding with the Eastern civilizations, but also in itself , as a matter of fact, these two questions are so closely connected that they really form only one, and we have just given the reasons why this is the case. We have now to show more fully in what the anti-traditional outlook, which is really the modern outlook, consists, and what are the consequences that it bears in itself and that we see unfolding with a pitiless logic in present events ; but before we pass on to this, one more remark is necessary. To be resolutely " anti-modern " is not to be " anti-Western "

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

in any sense of the word ; it means, on the contrary, making the only effort that can be of any value to save the West from its own confusion. Moreover no Oriental who is faithful to his own tradition can view these matters in a way different from our own, and it is certain that there are far fewer opponents of the West as such—an attitude that would really have little sense—than of the West in so far as it has become identified with modern civilization. There are those who speak to-day of a “ defence of the West,” which is really remarkable when, as we shall see further on, it is the West that is threatening to submerge and drag down the whole of mankind in the whirlpool of its own confused activity , remarkable, as we say, and completely unjustified, if they mean, as despite certain reservations they really seem to do, that this defence is to be against the East, for the true East has no thought of attacking or dominating anybody and asks no more than to be left in independence and tranquillity—a not unreasonable demand, one must admit. Actually, the truth is that the West really is in great need of defence, but only against itself and its own tendencies, which, if they are pushed to their conclusion, will lead inevitably to its ruin and destruction ; it is therefore “ reform of the West ” that should be demanded, and if this reform were what it should be, that is to say a real restoration of tradition, it would entail as a natural consequence an understanding with the East. For our part, we ask no more than to contribute, so far as our means permit, both to the reform and to the understanding, if, indeed, there is still time and if any such result can be attained

OPPOSITION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

before the final catastrophe be reached towards which modern civilization is heading. But even if it were already too late to avoid this catastrophe, the work done to this end would not be useless, for it would serve in any case to prepare, however distantly, the "discrimination" of which we spoke at the beginning, and thereby to assure the preservation of those elements that must escape the shipwreck of the present world to become the germs of the future world.

CHAPTER III

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

WE will now go more closely into one of the main aspects of the opposition that at present exists between the Eastern and the Western mentalities, and which, more generally speaking, coincides with the opposition between the traditional and the anti-traditional outlooks, as we have already explained. From one point of view, and that one of the most important, this conflict reveals itself in the form of an opposition between contemplation and action, or, more strictly speaking, in a difference of opinion as to their relative importance. There are several different ways in which the relation between them can be regarded: are they really contraries, as seems to be the most general opinion, or are they not rather complementary to one another; or is not their relation in reality one of subordination rather than of co-ordination? Such are the various aspects of the question, and these aspects correspond to so many points of view, which, though far from being of equal importance, can all be justified in some respects, and correspond each to a certain order of reality.

We will begin with the shallowest and most external point of view, which consists in treating contemplation

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

and action as purely and simply opposed to one another, as contraries in the true sense of the word. It is beyond dispute that such an opposition does exist to all appearances, and yet, if this opposition were absolutely irreconcilable, there would be complete incompatibility between contemplation and action, and they could never be found together. But in fact this is not so; there is not, at least in normal cases, a people, and possibly not an individual, that can be exclusively contemplative or exclusively active. What is true is that there are two tendencies, one or the other of which must almost inevitably predominate, so that the development of the one seems to take place at the expense of the other, for the simple reason that human activity, in the widest sense of the term, cannot exert itself equally in all realms and all directions at one and the same time. It is this that gives the appearance of opposition; but a reconciliation must be possible between these contraries, or so-called contraries, and as a matter of fact one could say the same for all contraries, which cease to be such as soon as they are viewed from a higher level than the one where their opposition has its reality. Opposition or contrast means disharmony or disequilibrium, that is to say something which, as we have already made sufficiently clear, can exist only from a relative, particular and limited point of view.

To regard contemplation and action as complementary is therefore to adopt a point of view which is already deeper and truer than the foregoing, since the opposition is reconciled and resolved and the two terms balance one another to a certain extent. It would seem, then, to be

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

of contemplation, that is to say of pure intelligence : why is it otherwise in modern times ? Is it because the Westerners have come to lose their intellectuality through over-developing their capacity for action that they console themselves by inventing theories which set action above everything, and even go so far, as in the case of pragmatism, as to deny that there exists anything of value beyond action , or is the contrary true, that it is the acceptance of this point of view that has led to the intellectual atrophy we see to-day ? In both instances, and also in the quite probable case of the truth lying in a combination of the two, the results are exactly the same ; things have reached a point at which it is high time to react ; and this, be it said once more, is where the East can come to the help of the West, always on condition that the West itself is willing, not by thrusting upon it conceptions that are foreign to its mentality, as some persons seem to fear, but by helping it to recover the lost meaning of its own tradition.

The antithesis between East and West, in the present state of things, may be said to dwell in the fact that the East upholds the superiority of contemplation over action, whereas the modern West maintains the contrary, the superiority of action over contemplation. There is no longer any question in this case of points of view of which each may have its justification and be accepted as the expression at least of a certain relative truth, as was the case when we spoke of contemplation and action as being simply opposed or complementary to one another, with a consequent relationship of co-ordination between them : relations of subordination

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

are by their very nature irreversible, and the two conceptions are in truth contradictory and therefore exclusive of one another ; if, therefore, one admits that there really is subordination, one conception must be true and the other false. Before going to the root of the matter, let us note one more point : whereas the outlook which has survived in the East is found in all ages, as we have observed above, the other attitude dates only from quite recently , and this, even apart from all other considerations, should in itself suggest that it is in some way abnormal. This impression is confirmed by the exaggeration into which the modern Western mentality falls through following its own inherent tendency, so that, not content with proclaiming on every occasion the superiority of action, men have come to the point of making action their sole preoccupation and denying all value to contemplation, the true nature of which they ignore or entirely fail to understand. The Eastern doctrines, on the contrary, while asserting as clearly as possible the superiority and even the transcendence of contemplation as compared to action, none the less allow action its legitimate place and make no difficulty in recognizing all its importance in the order of human contingencies.¹

The Eastern doctrines are unanimous, as also were the ancient doctrines of the West, in asserting that contemplation is superior to action, as the unchanging

¹ Those who doubt the very real, though relative, importance assigned to action by the traditional doctrines of the East, and notably of India, have only to refer for evidence to the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, which, as it is important to remember if one is to grasp its meaning aright, is a book destined especially for the *Kshatriyas*

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

is to change.¹ Action, being merely a transitory and momentary modification of the being, could not possibly carry its principle and sufficient reason within itself ; if it does not depend on a principle outside its contingent domain, it is mere illusion , and this principle, from which it draws all the reality it is capable of possessing, both its existence and its very possibility, can be found only in contemplation, or, if one prefer it, in knowledge, for fundamentally these two terms are synonymous, or at least coincide, since it is impossible in any way to separate knowledge from the process by which it is obtained.² In the same way, change, in the most general meaning of the word, is unintelligible and contradictory, which means impossible, without a principle from which it proceeds and which, being its principle, cannot be subject to it, and is therefore necessarily unchanging ; for which reason, in the ancient world of the West, Aristotle asserted that there must be a “ motionless mover ” of all things. It is knowledge which serves as the “ motionless mover ” of action ; it is clear that action belongs completely to the world of change and “ becoming ” ; knowledge alone gives the possibility of leaving this world and the limitations that are

¹ It is in virtue of the relation so established that the *Brāhman* is said to be the type of the stable being and the *Kshatriya* of the mobile or changeable being , so also all the beings of this world are connected more particularly with the one or the other according to their nature, for there is perfect correspondence between the cosmic and the human orders

² On the contrary, it should be remarked that results in the realm of action, owing to its essentially momentary nature, are always separated from that which produces them, whereas knowledge bears its fruit in itself

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

inherent in it, and when it attains the unchanging, as does principal or metaphysical knowledge, that is to say knowledge in its essence, it becomes itself possessed of immutability, for all true knowledge essentially consists in identification with its object. This is precisely what modern Westerners overlook - they admit nothing higher than rational or discursive knowledge, which is necessarily indirect and imperfect, being what might be described as reflected knowledge; and even this inferior knowledge they are coming more and more to appreciate only in proportion as it can be made to serve immediate practical ends. Absorbed by action to the point of denying all that goes beyond it, they do not see that this action itself degenerates, through lack of principle, into an agitation as vain as it is sterile.

Indeed, this is the most conspicuous feature of the modern period - need for ceaseless agitation, for unending change and for ever-increasing speed, matching the speed with which events themselves succeed one another. It is dispersion in multiplicity, and in a multiplicity that is no longer unified by consciousness of any higher principle; in daily life, as in scientific ideas, it is analysis driven to an extreme, endless subdivision, a veritable disintegration of human activity in all the orders in which this can still be exercised, hence the inaptitude for synthesis and the incapacity for any sort of concentration that is so striking in the eyes of Orientals. These are the natural and inevitable results of an ever more pronounced materialisation, for matter is essentially multiplicity and division; and this, be it

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

said in passing, is why all that proceeds from matter can beget only strife and all manner of conflicts between peoples as between individuals. The deeper one sinks into matter, the more the elements of division and opposition gain force and scope ; and, on the other hand, the more one rises towards pure spirituality, the nearer one approaches to that unity which can only be fully realised by consciousness of the universal principles.

What is most remarkable is that movement and change are actually prized for their own sake, not for any end to which they may lead ; this is a state of things resulting directly from the absorption of all human faculties in that external action whose necessarily fleeting character we have already pointed out. Here again we have dispersion, viewed from a different angle and at a more advanced stage it could be described as a tendency towards instantaneity, having for its limit a state of pure disequilibrium, which, if it could be obtained, would coincide with the final dissolution of this world ; and this also is one of the clearest signs that the last phase of the *Kali-Yuga* is at hand.

For that matter, the same trend is noticeable in the scientific realm : research here is for research's sake, far more than for the partial and fragmentary results it achieves ; here we see an ever more rapid succession of unfounded theories and hypotheses, no sooner set up than they crumble to be replaced by others that will have an even shorter life, a veritable chaos amid which one would search in vain for any elements definitely acquired,

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

unless it be a monstrous accumulation of facts and details which can prove nothing and signify nothing. We refer here, of course, to speculative science, so far as this still exists, in applied science there are, on the contrary, undeniable results, and this is easily understandable since these results bear directly on the domain of matter, the only domain in which modern man can boast of a real superiority. It is therefore to be expected that discoveries, or rather mechanical and industrial inventions, will go on developing and multiplying more and more rapidly until the end of the present age; and who knows if, with the dangers of destruction they bear in themselves, they will not be one of the chief agents in the ultimate catastrophe, if things reach a point at which this cannot be averted?

In any case, the impression is very generally felt that in the present state of things there is no longer any stability, but while there are some who sense the danger and try to react, most of our contemporaries are well satisfied by this confusion, in which they see, as it were, an exteriorised image of their own mentality. Indeed, there is exact correspondence between a world where everything seems to be in a state of mere "becoming", leaving no place for the changeless and permanent, and the state of mind of men who find all reality in this same "becoming," denying by implication true knowledge as well as the object of that knowledge, by which we mean the transcendent and universal principles. One can go even further, and say that there is negation of all real knowledge whatsoever, even of a relative order, since, as we have shown

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

above, the relative is unintelligible and impossible without the absolute, the contingent without the necessary, change without immutability and multiplicity without unity ; " relativism " is self-contradictory, for, in seeking to reduce everything to change, one would arrive logically at a denial of the existence of change itself ; and this was at bottom the sole meaning of the famous arguments of Zeno of Elea. However, we have no wish to exaggerate and must add that theories such as those in question are not exclusively met with in modern times ; examples are to be found in Greek philosophy also, the " universal flux " of Heraclitus being the best known ; indeed, it was this that led the school of Elea to combat his conceptions, as well as those of the atomists, by a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*. Even in India something comparable is to be found, though, of course, considered from a different point of view from that of philosophy, for Buddhism also developed a similar character, one of its essential theses being the " dissolubility of all things."¹ These theories, however, were then no more than exceptions, and such revolts against the traditional outlook, which

¹ Soon after its origin, Buddhism in India became identified with one of the principal manifestations of the *Kshatriyas'* revolt against the authority of the *Brāhmans*, and, as may be easily seen from what has gone before, there is in a general way a very direct connection between denial of any immutable principle and denial of the spiritual authority, between reduction of all reality to " becoming " and assertion of the supremacy of the temporal power, whose proper domain is the world of action, and it could be shown that " naturalist " or anti-metaphysical doctrines always arise when the element representing the temporal power takes the ascendancy in a civilization over that which represents the spiritual authority (See in this connection *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel* referred to in the translator's note on p 51)

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

may well have occurred from time to time throughout the whole course of the *Kali-Yuga* were, when all is said and done, without wider influence ; what is new is the general acceptance of such conceptions that we see in the West to-day.

It should be noted too that under the influence of the very recent idea of "progress," "philosophies of becoming" have, in modern times, taken on a special form which theories of the same type never had among the ancients this form, although it may have multiple varieties, can be covered in general by the name of "evolutionism." We will not return here to what we have already said elsewhere on this subject ; we will merely recall the point that any conception which allows for nothing else than "becoming" is thereby necessarily a "naturalistic" conception, and, as such, implies a formal denial of what lies beyond nature, that is to say of the realm of metaphysic, which is the realm of the immutable and eternal principles. We may point out also, in speaking of these antimetaphysical theories, that the Bergsonian idea of "pure duration" is in complete correspondence with that dispersion in instantaneity of which we spoke earlier on, a pretended intuition which is modelled on the ceaseless flux of the things of the senses, far from being able to serve as an instrument for obtaining true knowledge, represents in reality the dissolution of all knowledge possible.

This leads us once more to repeat a point which is absolutely essential and on which not the slightest ambiguity must be allowed to persist : intellectual

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

intuition, by which alone metaphysical knowledge is to be obtained, has absolutely nothing in common with this other intuition of which certain contemporary philosophers speak : the latter pertains to the sensible realm and in fact is sub-rational, whereas the former, which is pure intelligence, is, on the contrary, super-rational. But the moderns, knowing nothing higher than reason in the order of intelligence, do not even conceive of the possibility of intellectual intuition, whereas the doctrines of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages, even when they were no more than philosophical in character, and therefore incapable of effectively calling this intuition into play, nevertheless recognized explicitly its existence and its supremacy over all the other faculties. This is why there was no rationalism before Descartes, for rationalism also is a specifically modern thing, and is moreover closely connected with individualism, as it is nothing else but the negation of any faculty of a super-individual order. So long as Westerners persist in ignoring or denying intellectual intuition, they can have no tradition in the true sense of the word, nor can they come to an understanding with the authentic representatives of the Eastern civilizations, in which everything is, as it were, suspended from this intuition, immutable and infallible in itself, and the only starting point for all development in conformity with the traditional norms.

CHAPTER IV

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

WE have just seen that in civilizations of a traditional character, intellectual intuition lies at the root of everything ; in other words, it is the pure metaphysical doctrine that is the essential, and all else is connected with it, either consequentially or by way of application to the various orders of contingent reality. Not only is this true of social institutions but also of the sciences, that is to say of knowledge bearing on the domain of the relative, knowledge which, in such civilizations, cannot be regarded otherwise than as a mere dependency and as a sort of prolongation or reflection of absolute or principial knowledge. Thus a true hierarchy is always and everywhere preserved : the relative is not treated as non-existent, which would be absurd ; it is taken into account just in so far as it requires to be, but it is put in its right place, which can only be a secondary and subordinate one ; and even in this relative domain there are very different degrees of reality, according to whether the subject lies near to or far from the sphere of principles.

As regards science, then, there are two radically different and mutually incompatible conceptions, which we may refer to respectively as the traditional and the modern. We have often had occasion to allude to the "traditional sciences" that existed in the ancient world and the Middle Ages and which still

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

exist in the East, though the very idea of them is completely foreign to the Westerners of our days. It should be added that every civilization has had "traditional sciences" of its own and of a particular type; for here we are no longer in the sphere of universal principles, to which pure metaphysic alone belongs, but in the realm of adaptations; in this realm, through the very fact of its being a contingent one, account has to be taken of the whole complex of conditions, mental and otherwise, of a given people and, we may even say, of a given period in the existence of this people, since, as we have seen above, there are times at which "readjustments" become necessary. These readjustments are only changes of form, which do not touch the essence of the tradition with a metaphysical doctrine, only the expression can be modified, in a way that is more or less comparable to translation from one language into another; whatever may be the forms it assumes for its expression, in so far as expression is possible, there is still absolutely only one metaphysic, just as there is only one truth. Naturally, the case is different when one passes to the realm of applications: with the sciences, as with social institutions, we are in the world of form and multiplicity, therefore different forms may really be said to constitute different sciences, even though these sciences have, at least in part, the same subject-matter. Logicians are apt to hold that a science is defined entirely by its subject-matter, but this is too simplified a view and therefore misleading; the angle from which the subject-matter is envisaged should also affect the definition of the science. There

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

are an indefinite number of possible sciences ; it may happen that several sciences study the same things, but under aspects so different, and therefore by methods and with purposes so diverse, that they are none the less in reality different sciences. This is especially liable to be the case with the traditional sciences of various civilizations which, although mutually comparable, nevertheless cannot always be assimilated to one another and often could not correctly be given the same names. The difference is obviously much greater if, instead of comparing the different traditional sciences, which at least all have the same fundamental character, one tries to compare these sciences in general with sciences as conceived by the modern world ; it may sometimes seem, at first sight, that the subject studied is the same in both cases, and yet the knowledge of it which the two kinds of science impart is so different that one hesitates on closer examination to assert that they are identical in any single respect.

It may not be out of place if we make our meaning clearer by one or two examples ; to begin with we will take one of very wide range, namely " physics " as understood by the ancients and by the moderns respectively ; here the profound difference between the two conceptions can be seen without leaving the Western world. The term " physics " in its original and etymological sense means precisely the " science of nature " without any qualification , it is therefore the science that deals with the most general laws of " becoming," for " nature " and " becoming " are

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

really synonymous, and it was thus that the Greeks, and notably Aristotle, understood this science. If there are more specialized sciences dealing with the same order of reality, they can only be mere "specifications" of physics for one or another more narrowly defined province. Here already, then, a certain significance is to be noted in the deviation to which the modern world has subjected the word "physics," using it to designate exclusively one particular science among others which are all equally natural sciences ; and this is an example of that process of subdivision which we have already referred to as being one of the characteristics of modern science . the "specialization" arising from the analytical attitude of mind has been pushed to such a point that those who have undergone its influence are incapable of conceiving of a science dealing with nature in its entirety. Some of the inconveniences of this specialization have not passed without frequent notice, above all the narrowness of outlook which is an inevitable outcome of it ; but even those who perceive this the most clearly seem none the less resigned to accept it as a necessary evil entailed by the accumulation of detailed knowledge such as no man could hope to take in at once ; they have been unable to perceive, on the one hand, that this detailed knowledge is insignificant in itself and not worth the sacrifice of synthetic knowledge which it entails, for synthetic knowledge, even though restricted to what is relative, is of a much higher order ; and on the other hand they have failed to understand that the impossibility of unifying the multiplicity of

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

this detailed knowledge is due only to the refusal to attach it to a higher principle, and to a persistence in proceeding from below and from the outside, whereas it is the opposite method that would be necessary if one wished to have a science of any real speculative value.

If one were to compare the ancient physics, not with what the moderns call by this name, but with the sum of all the natural sciences as at present constituted—for this is its real equivalent—the first difference to be noticed would be the division that it has undergone into multiple “specialities” which are, so to speak, foreign to one another. However, this is only the most outward side of the question, and it is not to be supposed that by joining together all these particular sciences an equivalent of the ancient physics would be obtained. The truth is that the point of view is quite different, and in this lies the essential difference between the two conceptions of which we have just spoken : the traditional conception, as we have said, attaches all the sciences to the principles of which they are the particular applications, and it is this attachment that the modern conception refuses to admit. For Aristotle, physics was only “second” in its relation to metaphysic, that is to say it was dependent on metaphysic and was really only an application to the province of nature of principles that stand above nature and are reflected in its laws ; and one can say the same for the cosmology of the Middle Ages. The modern conception, on the contrary, claims to make the sciences independent, denying everything that goes beyond them, or at least declaring

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

it "unknowable" and refusing to take it into account, which comes to the same thing in practice. This negation existed for a long time as a fact before there was any question of erecting it into a systematic theory under names such as "positivism" and "agnosticism," for it may truly be said to be the real starting point of all modern science. It is, however, only in the nineteenth century that one sees men beginning to glory in their ignorance—for to proclaim oneself an agnostic means nothing else—and claiming to forbid others any knowledge to which they themselves have no access, and this marked one stage further in the intellectual decline of the West.

By seeking to cut the sciences completely away from any higher principle, under pretext of assuring their independence, the modern conception robs them of all deeper meaning and even of all real interest from the point of view of knowledge, and it can only bring them to a blind alley, enclosing them, as it does, in a hopelessly limited realm¹ Moreover, the development achieved within this realm is not a deepening of knowledge, as is sometimes supposed, on the contrary, it remains quite superficial and consists only in that dispersion in detail to which we have already referred

¹ It may be observed that an analogous break has occurred in the social order, where the moderns claim to have separated the temporal from the spiritual. We do not mean to deny that these are distinct, since they are in fact concerned with different provinces, just as in the case of metaphysic and the sciences, but by an error inherent in the analytical attitude of mind, it has been forgotten that distinction does not mean separation. Owing to this separation, the temporal power has lost its legitimacy, and the same could be said, in the intellectual order, of the sciences (See *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*)

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

and in an analysis as fruitless as it is laborious, which can be pursued indefinitely without coming a step nearer to true knowledge. It must also be remarked that it is not for its own sake that Westerners in general pursue science, as they interpret it : their foremost aim is not knowledge, even of an inferior order, but practical applications, as can be deduced from the ease with which the majority of our contemporaries confuse science and industry, and from the number of those for whom the engineer represents the typical man of science ; but this is connected with another question that we shall have to deal with more fully further on.

In taking on its modern form, science has lost not only in depth but also, one might say, in stability, for its attachment to the principles enabled it to share in their immutability in the full measure that its subject-matter allowed, whereas being now completely confined to the world of change, it can find nothing in it that is stable and no fixed point on which to base itself ; no longer starting from any absolute certainty, it is reduced to probabilities and approximations or to purely hypothetical constructions that are the work of mere individual fantasy. Moreover, even if modern science happens by chance to arrive, by a very roundabout route, at certain conclusions that seem to be in agreement with some of the teachings of the ancient traditional sciences, it would be quite wrong to see in this a confirmation, of which these teachings stand in no need ; and it would be a waste of time to try to reconcile such utterly different points of view or to establish a concordance with hypothetical theories

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

which may be completely discredited before many years are out¹ So far as modern science is concerned, the conclusions in question can only belong to the realm of hypothesis ; whereas the teachings of the traditional sciences had a very different character, coming as the indubitable consequences of truths known intuitively, and therefore infallibly, in the metaphysical order² Modern experimentalism involves also the curious illusion that a theory can be proved by facts, whereas in reality the same facts can always be equally well explained by several different theories, and some of the pioneers of the experimental method, such as Claude Bernard, have themselves recognized that they could interpret facts only with the help of preconceived ideas, without which they would remain "brute facts" devoid of all meaning and scientific value.

Since we have been led into speaking of experimentalism, the opportunity may be taken to answer a question which may be raised in this connection : why have the experimental sciences received a development in modern civilization such as they never had in other civilizations ? The reason is that these sciences are those pertaining to the world of the senses, those of matter,

¹ The same observation applies, from the religious point of view, to a certain "apologetic" which claims to establish an agreement with the results of modern science, an utterly illusory task and one constantly needing to be started anew, involving the grave danger of appearing to bind up religion with changing and ephemeral conceptions of which it should remain totally independent

² It would be easy to give examples of this we will mention only, as being one of the most striking, the different nature of the conceptions of ether to be found in Hindu cosmology and in modern physics

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

and also those which lend themselves the most directly to practical applications ; their development, going hand in hand with what might well be called the "superstition of facts," is therefore quite in accordance with specifically modern tendencies, whereas earlier ages could not find them sufficiently interesting to pursue them so far as to neglect knowledge of a higher order for their sake. It should be clearly understood that this point of view does not involve declaring any kind of knowledge illegitimate, even though it be inferior ; what is unlawful is only the abuse that arises when things of this kind absorb the whole of human activity, as we see them doing at present. One could even conceive, in a normal civilization, of sciences built up by an experimental method being attached to the principles in the same way as other sciences and thus acquiring a real speculative value ; actually, if this does not seem to have happened, it is because attention was turned for preference in a different direction, and also because, even when it was a question of studying the sensible world so far as it could appear interesting to do so, the traditional data made it possible to undertake this study more advantageously by other methods and from another point or view.

We remarked above that one of the characteristics of the present time is the exploitation of all those things that had hitherto been neglected as being of insufficient importance for men to devote their time and energy to them ; but these things too had nevertheless to be developed before the end of the cycle,

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

since they also have their place among the possibilities destined to be realised within it ; such in particular is the case of the experimental sciences that have come to birth in recent centuries. There are even some modern sciences which represent, quite literally, "residues" of ancient sciences which are no longer understood : in a period of decadence, the lowest part of these sciences became isolated from all the rest, and this part, grossly materialized, served as the starting point for a completely different development, in a direction conforming to modern tendencies ; this resulted in the formation of sciences which have really ceased to have anything in common with those that preceded them. Thus, for example, general opinion is wrong in holding that astrology and alchemy have become respectively modern astronomy and modern chemistry, even though this contains a certain element of truth from the purely historical point of view ; it contains, in fact, the very element of truth to which we have just alluded, for, if the latter sciences do in a certain sense come from the former, it is not by "evolution" or "progress," as is claimed, but, on the contrary, by degeneration. This seems to call for some further explanations.

In the first place, it should be noted that the attribution of different meanings to the terms "astrology" and "astronomy" is relatively recent ; the two words were used indifferently by the Greeks to denote the whole ground now covered by both. It would seem, then, at first sight, that we have here another instance of one of those divisions set up by specialization between what

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

were originally only parts of a single science. But there is a certain difference in this case, for whereas one of the parts, namely that which represented the more material side of the science in question, has taken on an independent development, the other has, on the contrary, completely disappeared. A measure of the truth of this lies in the fact that it is no longer known to-day what ancient astrology may have been, and that even those who have tried to reconstruct it have managed to create nothing more than parodies of it. Some have tried to assimilate it to a modern experimental science with the use of statistics and the calculation of probabilities, a method arising from a point of view which could not in any way be that of the ancient or mediæval world. Others again confined their efforts to the restoration of an "art of divination," which existed formerly, but which was merely a perversion of astrology in its decline and could be regarded at the best only as a very inferior application unworthy of serious consideration, as may still be seen in the civilizations of the East.

The case of chemistry is perhaps even more clear and characteristic ; and modern ignorance concerning alchemy is certainly no less than in the case of astrology. True alchemy was essentially a science of the cosmological order, and it was also applicable at the same time to the human order, in virtue of the analogy between the "macrocosm" and the "microcosm", apart from this, it was constructed expressly so as to permit of a transposition into the purely spiritual domain, and this gave a symbolical value and a higher significance to its teaching,

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

making it one of the most typical and complete of the traditional sciences. It is not from this alchemy, with which, as a matter of fact, it has nothing in common, that modern chemistry has sprung ; the latter is only a corruption and, in the strictest sense of the word, a deviation from that science, arising, perhaps as early as the Middle Ages, from the incomprehension of persons who were incapable of penetrating the true meaning of the symbols and took everything literally. Believing that no more than material operations were in question they launched out upon a more or less confused experimentation , it is these men, referred to by the alchemists ironically as “blowers ” and “ charcoal burners,” who are the real forerunners of the present-day chemists , and thus it is that modern science is constructed from the ruins of ancient sciences with the materials that had been rejected and left to the ignorant and the “profane.” It should be added that the so-called restorers of alchemy, of whom there are a certain number among our contemporaries, are merely continuing this same deviation, and that their research is as far from traditional alchemy as that of the astrologers to whom we have just referred is from ancient astrology ; and that is why we have a right to say that the traditional sciences of the West are really lost for the moderns.

We will confine ourselves to these few examples, although it would be easy to give others taken from slightly different realms and showing everywhere the same degeneration. One could show, for instance, that psychology as it is understood to-day, that is to

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

say the study of mental phenomena as such, is a natural product of Anglo-Saxon empiricism and of the attitude of mind of the eighteenth century, and that the point of view to which it corresponds was so negligible for the ancient world that even if it happened sometimes to be taken incidentally into consideration, no one would have dreamed of making a special science of it, since all that it might contain of any value was transformed and assimilated in higher points of view. In quite a different field, one could show also that modern mathematics represent no more than the outer crust, so to speak, or the "exoteric" side of Pythagorean mathematics, the ancient idea of numbers has, indeed, become quite unintelligible to the moderns, because, here also, the higher portion of the science, which gave it its traditional character and therewith a truly intellectual value, has completely disappeared; a case which is very similar to that of astrology. But to pass all the sciences in review, one after another, would be somewhat tedious; we consider that we have said enough to make clear the nature of the change to which modern sciences owe their origin, a change which is the direct opposite of "progress," amounting to a veritable regression of intelligence. We will now return to considerations of a general order concerning the purposes served by the traditional sciences and modern sciences respectively, so as to show the profound difference that exists between the real destination of the one and of the other.

According to the traditional conception, any science is of interest less in itself than as a prolongation

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

or secondary branch of the doctrine, whose essential part consists, as we have said above, in pure metaphysic.¹ Actually, though every science is certainly legitimate so long as it keeps to the place that belongs to it in virtue of its own nature, it is nevertheless easy to understand that knowledge of a lower order, for anyone who possesses knowledge of a higher order, is bound to lose much of its interest. It remains of interest only, so to speak, as a function of the principal knowledge, that is to say in so far as it is capable, on the one hand, of reflecting this knowledge in a certain contingent domain, and, on the other hand, of leading to this knowledge itself which, in the case that we have in mind, must never be lost sight of or sacrificed to more or less accidental considerations.

These are the two complementary functions proper to the traditional sciences : on the one hand, as applications of the doctrine, they make it possible to link up the different orders of reality and articulate them into the unity of a single synthesis ; and on the other hand, they constitute, for some people at least, and in accordance with their individual aptitudes, a preparation for a higher knowledge and a way of approach to it, and by virtue of their hierarchical arrangement according to the levels of existence to which they refer, they form, as it were, so many rungs by which it is possible to climb to the level

¹ This is expressed, for example, in a title such as *upavêda*, used in India for certain traditional sciences and showing their subordination to the *Vêda*, that is to say to sacred knowledge

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

of pure intellectuality.¹ It is only too clear that modern sciences cannot in any way serve either of these purposes ; this is why they can be no more than "profane science," whereas the traditional sciences, through their connection with metaphysical principles, are effectively incorporated in "sacred science."

The co-existence of the two rôles we have just mentioned does not imply contradiction or a vicious circle, as those who take a superficial view of the question might suppose, but it is a point which calls for further discussion. It could be explained by saying that there are two points of view, one descending and the other ascending, the one corresponding to the unfolding of knowledge starting from principles and proceeding to applications farther and farther removed from them, while the other implies a gradual acquisition of this knowledge, proceeding from the lower to the higher, or, if preferred, from the outer to the inner. The question does not have to be asked, therefore, whether the sciences should proceed from below upwards or from above downwards, or whether, to make their existence possible, they should be based on knowledge of the principles or on knowledge of the sensible world, this question can arise from the point of view of "profane" philosophy and seems, indeed, to have arisen more or less explicitly in this

¹ In our study, *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, we spoke of the symbolism of the ladder, the rungs of which correspond, in various traditions, to certain sciences and, at the same time, to states of the being, this necessarily implies that these sciences were not regarded in a merely "profane" manner, as in the modern world, but allowed of a transposition which bestowed on them a real initiatory significance

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

domain in ancient Greece, but it cannot exist for "sacred science," which can be based only on universal principles; the reason why it is pointless in the latter case is that the prime factor here is intellectual intuition, which is the most direct of all forms of knowledge, as well as the highest, and which is absolutely independent of the exercise of any faculty of the sensible or even the rational order. Sciences can only be validly constituted as sacred sciences by those who, before all else, are in full possession of the principal knowledge and are thereby alone qualified to carry out, in conformity with the strictest traditional orthodoxy, all the adaptations required by circumstances of time and place. However, when the sciences have been so established, their teaching may follow an inverse order: they serve then, as it were, as "illustrations" of the pure doctrine, which they render more easily accessible to certain minds, and the fact that they are concerned with the world of multiplicity gives them an almost indefinite variety of points of view, adapted to the no less great variety of the individual aptitudes of those whose minds are still limited to that same world of multiplicity. The ways leading to knowledge may be extremely different at the lowest degree, but they draw closer and closer together as higher levels are reached. This is not to say that any of these preparatory degrees are absolutely necessary, since they are mere contingent methods having no common measure with the end to be attained; it is even possible for some persons, in whom the tendency to contemplation is predominant, to

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

attain directly to true intellectual intuition without the aid of such means¹ ; but this is a more or less exceptional case, and in general it is accepted as being necessary to proceed upwards gradually. The whole question may also be illustrated by means of the traditional image of the "cosmic wheel" : the circumference in reality exists only in virtue of the centre, but the beings who stand upon the circumference must necessarily start from there, or more precisely from the point thereon at which they actually find themselves, and follow the radius that leads to the centre. Moreover, because of the correspondence that exists between all the orders of reality, the truths of a lower order can be taken as symbols of those of higher orders, and can therefore serve as "supports" by which to arrive at an understanding of these ; and this fact makes it possible for any science to become a sacred science, giving it a higher or "anagogical" meaning deeper than that which it possesses in itself.²

Every science, we say, can assume this character, whatever may be its subject-matter, on the sole condition of being constructed and regarded from the traditional standpoint ; it is only necessary to keep in mind the degrees of importance attaching to the various sciences according to the hierarchical rank of the various

¹ This is why, according to the Hindu doctrine, the *Brâhmans* should keep their minds constantly turned towards the supreme knowledge, whereas the *Kshatriyas* should rather apply themselves to a study of the successive stages by which this is gradually to be reached

² This is the purpose, for instance, of the astronomical symbolism so commonly used in the various traditional doctrines, and what we say here can serve to give an idea of the true nature of ancient astrology

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

realities studied by them, but whatever degree they may occupy, their character and functions are essentially similar in the traditional conception. What is true of the sciences is equally true of the arts, since every art can have a truly symbolic value which enables it to serve as a support for meditation, and because its rules, like the laws studied by the sciences, are reflections and applications of the fundamental principles therefore in every normal civilization there are "traditional arts," but these are no less unknown to the modern West than are the traditional sciences.¹ The truth is that there is really no "profane realm" which could in any way be opposed to a "sacred realm", there is only a "profane point of view," which is really none other than the point of view of ignorance² For this reason, "profane science," the science of the moderns, can, as we have remarked elsewhere, be justly styled "ignorant knowledge," knowledge of an inferior order confining itself entirely to the lowest level of reality, knowledge ignorant of all that lies beyond it, of any aim more lofty than itself, and of any principle which could give it a legitimate place, however humble, among the various orders of knowledge as a whole. Irremediably enclosed in

¹ The art of the mediæval builders can be quoted as a particularly remarkable example of these traditional arts, whose practice, moreover, implied a real knowledge of the corresponding sciences

² To see the truth of this, it is sufficient to note facts such as the following cosmogony, one of the most sacred of the sciences, a science which has its place in all the inspired books, including the Hebrew Bible, has become for the modern world a subject for completely "profane" hypotheses, the domain of the science is the same in both cases, but the point of view is utterly different

SACRED AND PROFANE SCIENCE

the relative and narrow realm in which it has striven to proclaim itself independent, thereby voluntarily breaking all connection with transcendent truth and supreme wisdom, it is only a vain and illusory knowledge, which, to tell the truth, comes from nothing and leads nowhere.

This survey will suffice to show how great is the deficiency of the modern world in the realm of science, and how that very science of which it is so proud represents no more than a deviation and, as it were, a downfall of true science, which, for us, is absolutely identical with what we have called "sacred" or "traditional" science. Modern science, arising out of an arbitrary limitation of knowledge to a particular order, and that the lowest of all, the order of material or sensible reality, has lost all intellectual value through this limitation and the consequences it immediately entails ; so long, that is, as one gives to the word "intellectuality" the fullness of its real meaning and refuses to share the rationalist error of assimilating pure intelligence to reason, or, which comes to the same thing, of denying intellectual intuition. The root of this error, as of a great many other moderns errors, and the cause of the entire deviation of science which we have just described, is what may be called "individualism," an attitude which is indistinguishable from the anti-traditional attitude itself and whose many manifestations in all domains constitute one of the most important factors in the confusion of our time ; we shall therefore now study this individualism more closely

CHAPTER V

INDIVIDUALISM

By individualism we understand the negation of any principle higher than individuality, and the consequent restriction of civilization, in all its provinces, to purely human elements, fundamentally, therefore, individualism is, as we have already seen, identical with what at the time of the Renaissance was called "humanism"; it is also the characteristic feature of the "profane point of view" as we have just described it. Actually these are merely different names for the same thing; and we have also shown that this "profane" outlook is really one with the anti-traditional outlook which lies at the root of all specifically modern tendencies. That is not to say, of course, that this outlook is entirely new; it has already appeared in a more or less pronounced form in other periods, but its manifestations were always limited in scope and outside the main trend, and they never went so far as to overrun the whole of a civilization, as has happened during recent centuries in the West. What has never been seen before is the erection of an entire civilization on something purely negative, on what in fact might be called an absence of principle; and it is this that gives to the modern world its abnormal character and makes of it a sort of monstrosity, only to be understood if one

INDIVIDUALISM

thinks of it as corresponding to the end of a cyclic period, as we explained at the beginning of this work. Individualism, thus defined, is therefore the determining cause of the present decline of the West, precisely because it is, as it were, the mainspring for the development of only the lowest possibilities of mankind, namely those possibilities that do not require the intervention of any superhuman element and which, on the contrary, can only expand freely if every superhuman element be absent, since they stand, in point of fact, at the antipodes of all spirituality and genuine intellectuality.

Individualism implies, in the first place, the negation of intellectual intuition—inasmuch as this is essentially a super-individual faculty—and of the knowledge that constitutes the true province of this intuition, that is to say of metaphysic understood in its true sense. That is why all that modern philosophers understand by the word metaphysic, when they admit the existence of anything at all to which they can apply this name, is completely foreign to real metaphysic ; it consists, in fact, of nothing but rational structures or imaginative hypotheses, purely individual conceptions, most of which, moreover, bear only on the domain of “ physics,” or in other words, of nature. Even if any question is touched upon which could really belong to the metaphysical order, the manner in which it is envisaged and treated reduces it to the level of “ pseudo-metaphysic,” and precludes any real or valid solution. It would seem, indeed, as if the philosophers are much more interested in setting problems, however artificial and illusory, than in answering them ; and this

INDIVIDUALISM

is but one aspect of the confused love of research for its own sake, that is to say of the most futile agitation in both the mental and the corporeal domains. It is also an important consideration for these philosophers to be able to put their name to a "system," that is, to a strictly limited and circumscribed set of theories, which shall belong to them and be exclusively their own creation, hence the desire to be original at all costs, even if truth should have to be sacrificed to this originality. A philosopher's renown is raised more by inventing a new error than by repeating a truth which has already been expressed by others. This form of individualism, the begetter of so many "systems" that are mutually contradictory even when they are not intrinsically so, is to be found also among modern scholars and artists; but it is, perhaps, in philosophy that the intellectual anarchy to which it inevitably gives rise is the most apparent.

In a traditional civilization, it is almost inconceivable that a man should claim an idea as his own; and, in any case, were he to do so, he would thereby deprive it of all credit and authority, reducing it to the level of a meaningless fantasy. If an idea is true, it belongs equally to all who are capable of understanding it; if it is false, there is no credit in having invented it. A true idea cannot be "new," for truth is not a product of the human mind; it exists independently of us, and all that we have to do is to get to know it, outside this knowledge there can be nothing but error: but do the moderns on the whole care much about truth, or do they even still know what

INDIVIDUALISM

it is ? Here again words have lost their real meaning, inasmuch as some people, for instance the contemporary pragmatists, go so far as to misappropriate the word "truth" for what is simply practical utility, that is to say for something that is quite foreign to the intellectual order ; and this, the negation of truth as well as of the intelligence of which truth is the object, appears as a logical outcome of the modern deviation. But let us not anticipate further, and on this point let us merely add here that the kind of individualism we have been speaking of is the chief source of the illusion about the importance of so-called "great men" ; "genius," in the "profane" sense of the word, is really a very small matter and utterly unable to make up for the lack of true knowledge.

As we are speaking of philosophy, we will go on to point out some of the consequences of individualism in this field, though without entering into every detail first of all came the negation of intellectual intuition and the consequent setting of reason above everything else, this purely human and relative faculty being treated as the highest part of the intelligence, or even regarded as coinciding with the whole of intelligence , it is this which constitutes rationalism, whose real founder was Descartes. This limitation of intelligence was, however, only a first stage , reason itself was bound before long to be relegated more and more to mainly practical functions, in proportion as applications began to predominate over such sciences as might still have kept a certain speculative character ; and Descartes himself was already at

INDIVIDUALISM

heart much more concerned with these practical applications than with pure science. More than this : individualism inevitably implies naturalism, since all that lies beyond nature is, for that very reason, out of reach of the individual as such ; naturalism and the negation of metaphysic are, indeed, but one and the same thing, and once intellectual intuition is no longer recognized, no metaphysic is any longer possible ; but whereas some persist in inventing a "pseudo-metaphysic" of one kind or another, others more frankly admit its impossibility, and from this has arisen "relativity" in all its forms, whether it be the "criticism" of Kant or the positivism of Auguste Comte ; and since reason is itself quite relative and can deal validly only with a domain that is equally relative, it is quite true that "relativity" is the only logical outcome of rationalism. By this means, however, rationalism was bringing about its own destruction : "nature" and "becoming," as we pointed out above, are in reality synonymous ; a consistent naturalism can therefore only be one of the "philosophies of becoming" we have already mentioned, of which the specifically modern type is evolutionism but it is just this that was finally to turn against rationalism, accusing reason of being unable, on the one hand, to deal adequately with what is nothing but change and multiplicity or, on the other hand, to embrace the indefinite complexity of the things of the senses. This is in fact the position taken up by one form of evolutionism, namely Bergsonian intuitionism, which is

INDIVIDUALISM

nevertheless not less individualistic and anti-metaphysical than rationalism itself ; indeed, although just in its criticism of the latter, it sinks even lower, appealing as it does to a faculty that is really infra-rational, to a vaguely defined sensory intuition, more or less mixed up with imagination, instinct and sentiment. It is highly significant that there is no longer any question here of "truth," but only of "reality" reduced exclusively to the sensible order and conceived as something essentially moving and unstable ; with such theories, intelligence is in very fact reduced to its lowest part, and reason itself is no longer admitted except in so far as it is applied to fashioning matter for industrial uses. After this there remained but one more step to take—the denial of intelligence and knowledge altogether and the substitution of "utility" for "truth." This step was pragmatism, to which we have just referred ; here we are no longer even in the merely human domain as with rationalism, for the appeal to the "sub-conscious," which marks the complete reversal of the whole normal hierarchy, brings us, in actual fact, down to the sub-human. This, in its main outlines, is the course which "profane" philosophy, left to itself and claiming to limit all knowledge to its own horizon, was bound to tread, and has indeed trodden : so long as there existed a higher knowledge, nothing of this sort could happen, for philosophy was bound at least to respect what it did not know, and could not deny its existence ; but when this higher knowledge had disappeared, its negation, already a fact, was soon

INDIVIDUALISM

erected into a theory, and it is from this that all modern philosophy has sprung

But we have dwelt long enough on philosophy, to which it would be wrong to attribute overmuch importance, whatever place it may appear to hold in the modern world, from our point of view it is interesting mainly because it expresses, in a form as clearly defined as possible, the tendencies of this or that period, much more than it really creates them, and even if it can be said to direct them to a certain extent, it does so only secondarily and when they are already formed. Thus, for instance, it is certain that all modern philosophy has its origin in Descartes; but the influence exerted by him first on his own time and then on those that followed, an influence not confined to philosophers alone, would not have been possible had his conceptions not been in agreement with already existing tendencies which, as a matter of fact, prevailed among his contemporaries in general, the modern outlook is reflected in Cartesianism, and through Cartesianism it acquired a clearer knowledge of itself than it possessed before. Moreover, if a movement in any domain is as conspicuous as Cartesianism has been in that of philosophy, it is always rather a result than a real starting point; it is not spontaneous, but is the result of a whole series of diffused labours. If a man like Descartes is especially representative of the modern deviation, so that to some extent and from a certain point of view one can say that he personifies it, it remains none the less true that he is not its sole or first originator and that one would have to go much

INDIVIDUALISM

further back to trace its source. In the same way, the Renaissance and Reformation, which are usually considered to be the first great manifestations of the modern outlook, completed the breach with tradition rather than provoked it, for us, the beginning of this breach is to be found in the fourteenth century, and it is at this date, and not a century or two centuries later, that the beginning of modern times should be fixed.

This breach with tradition calls for further comment, for it is just this that gave birth to the modern world, all of whose characteristics could be summed up in one—opposition to the traditional outlook; and negation of tradition is once again the same as individualism. In point of fact, this is in perfect agreement with what has already been said, since it is intellectual intuition and metaphysical doctrine that bind every traditional civilization to its principle, once the principle is denied all its consequences must be denied also, at least implicitly, and thereby everything that really merits the name of tradition is destroyed at once. We have seen already how this process has worked with regard to the sciences, and we will therefore not return to them but will pass on to another province, in which the manifestations of the anti-traditional outlook strike the eye perhaps even more immediately, since the changes brought about have had a direct effect on the great mass of the people in the West. Actually, the traditional sciences of the Middle Ages were confined to a not very numerous elect, and some of them were even a monopoly of strictly closed

INDIVIDUALISM

schools, and therefore constituted an esotericism in the true sense of the word ; but there was also a part of the tradition which belonged to all without distinction, and it is of this external part that we wish to speak. At that time the tradition of the West bore outwardly a specifically religious form, being represented by Catholicism , it is therefore in the realm of religion that we shall have to consider the revolt against the traditional outlook, a revolt which, when it had acquired a definite form, became known as Protestantism : and it is not difficult to see that this is really a manifestation of individualism ; indeed, so marked is this that one could call it individualism applied to religion. Protestantism, like the modern world, is built upon mere negation, the same negation of principles which is the very essence of individualism ; and one can see in it one more example, and a most striking one, of the state of anarchy and dissolution that has arisen from this negation.

Individualism necessarily implies the refusal to admit of any authority higher than the individual, as well as of any means of knowledge higher than individual reason ; and these two attitudes are inseparable. Consequently the modern outlook was bound to reject all spiritual authority in the true sense of the word, authority, that is, which is based on the superhuman order, and all traditional organisation, that is to say all organisation based essentially on this authority, whatever form it may assume, for the form will naturally vary with every civilization. This is what did in fact happen . Protestantism denied the authority of the

INDIVIDUALISM

organization qualified to interpret legitimately the religious tradition of the West and in its place claimed to set up "free criticism," that is to say interpretations resulting from private judgement, even of the ignorant and the incompetent, and based exclusively on the exercise of human reason. What happened in the realm of religion was therefore analogous to the part to be played by rationalism in philosophy : the door was left open to all manner of discussions, divergencies and deviations , and the result was what it was bound to be : dispersion in an ever growing multitude of sects, each of which represents no more than the private opinion of certain individuals. As it was impossible under such conditions to come to an agreement on doctrine, this was soon thrust into the background, and the secondary aspect of religion, namely morality, came to the fore hence the degeneration into moralism which is so patent in present-day Protestantism. Thus there arose a phenomenon parallel to that to which we have referred in philosophy, as an inevitable consequence of the dissolution of doctrine and the disappearance from religion of its intellectual elements. From rationalism religion was bound to sink into sentimentalism, and it is in the Anglo-Saxon countries that the most striking examples of this are to be found. What remains is therefore no longer even a dwindling and deformed religion, but simply "religiosity," that is to say vague sentimental aspirations unjustified by any real knowledge : to this final stage correspond theories such as that of the "religious experience" of William James,

INDIVIDUALISM

which goes to the point of finding in the "subconscious" man's means of entering into communication with the divine. At this stage the final products of religious and of philosophical decline mingle together and "religious experience" becomes merged in pragmatism, in the name of which a limited God is stipulated as being more "advantageous" than an infinite God, in so far as one can feel for him sentiments comparable to those one would feel for a higher man. At the same time, the appeal to the "subconscious" joins hands with modern spiritualism and all those "pseudo-religions" which are so characteristic of our time and which we have studied in other works. In another direction, Protestant moralism, having gradually eliminated all doctrinal basis, has ended by degenerating into what is called "lay morality," which counts among its adherents the representatives of all the varieties of "liberal Protestantism," as well as the open enemies of every religious idea, at heart both groups are guided by the same tendencies, and the only difference is that not all go equally far in the logical development of everything that these tendencies imply.

Actually, religion being essentially a form of tradition, the anti-traditional outlook cannot help being anti-religious, it begins by distorting religion and, when it can, ends by suppressing it altogether. Protestantism is illogical: while doing all it can to "humanise" religion, it nevertheless, in theory at least, retains revelation, which is a superhuman element. It does not dare carry its negation to the logical conclusion, but by subjecting revelation to all the discussions result-

INDIVIDUALISM

ing from purely human interpretations, it does in fact reduce it to next to nothing ; and seeing as one does people who persist in calling themselves Christians even though they deny the very divinity of Christ, one cannot avoid the supposition that they are much nearer to complete negation than to real Christianity, although they may not realize the fact. Such contradictions, however, should not occasion too much surprise, for they are, in every field, one of the symptoms of the disorder and confusion of our times, just as the incessant subdivision of Protestantism is one of the many manifestations of that dispersion in multiplicity which, as we have shown, is to be found everywhere in modern life and science. Moreover, it is natural that Protestantism, owing to the spirit of negation by which it is animated, should have given birth to that destructive "criticism" which in the hands of the so-called "historians of religion" has been turned into a weapon against all religion, so that, while claiming to recognize no other authority than that of the Sacred Books, the Protestant movement has in this way contributed very largely towards the destruction of this very authority, that is to say of the minimum of tradition that it still retained. Once started, the revolt against the traditional outlook could not be stopped halfway.

An objection might here be raised : even though it broke away from the Catholic organization, might not Protestantism, in that it continued to admit the validity of the Sacred Books, have preserved the traditional doctrine contained therein ? But the intro-

INDIVIDUALISM

duction of "free criticism" completely refutes such a hypothesis, since it opens the door to all manner of individual fantasies ; moreover, the preservation of the doctrine presupposes an organized traditional teaching to keep alive the orthodox interpretation, and in actual fact this teaching has, in the Western world, been identified with Catholicism. No doubt other civilizations may possess organizations of very different form to fulfil the corresponding function, but it is the civilization of the West with all the conditions peculiar to it that concerns us here. It would be to no purpose, therefore, to plead that there is no institution comparable to the Papacy in India : the case is quite different, in the first place because the tradition there does not take the form of a religion in the Western meaning of the word, so that the means by which it is preserved and transmitted cannot be the same, and also because, the Hindu mentality being quite different from the European, the Hindu tradition possesses within itself an inherent power such as the European tradition could not enjoy without the support of an organization much more rigidly defined in its outward constitution. We have already said that the Western tradition has necessarily borne a religious form since the introduction of Christianity. It would take too long to explain here all the reasons for this, reasons which could not be fully understood without entering into rather complex considerations ; but it is an actual fact with which one cannot refuse to reckon¹ ; and once admitted, one has to admit

¹ Moreover, according to the Gospel, this state is to continue until "the end of the world," that is to say until the end of the present cycle

INDIVIDUALISM

also all the consequences it entails with regard to an organization suited to this kind of traditional form.

It is moreover quite certain, as we showed above, that it is in Catholicism alone that all that may still remain of the traditional spirit in the West has been preserved ; but does this mean that in Catholicism at least one can speak of complete preservation of the tradition, quite untainted by the modern outlook ? Unfortunately this does not appear to be the case , or, more strictly speaking, if the home of the tradition has remained intact, which is in itself much, it is very doubtful whether its deeper meaning is still fully understood, even by a small elect, whose existence would certainly be manifested by action, or rather by an influence, which, in fact, is nowhere discernible. Most probably, therefore, there is only what might be termed a preservation of the tradition in a latent state, in which state it is always possible for those who are capable of it to recover its meaning, even though nobody were at present fully conscious of it ; moreover, outside the religious domain, scattered here and there in the Western world, there are also many signs or symbols descended from ancient traditional doctrines and preserved without being understood. In such cases, contact with the fully living traditional spirit is necessary to awaken what has thus fallen into a kind of sleep, and to restore the lost understanding , and, be it said once more, it is mainly in this direction that the West will require help from the East if it is to recover knowledge of its own tradition.

What we have just said refers to the possibilities

INDIVIDUALISM

which Catholicism, through its principle, constantly and unalterably contains , with Catholicism, therefore, the influence of the modern outlook is unable to do more than prevent certain things from being effectively understood, at least for a certain time. However, one would have to admit a more positive effect of the modern outlook on the present state of Catholicism if one judged it by the way in which the great majority of its adherents understand it to-day ; that is, if one can use the expression " positive " for something which is, in reality, essentially negative. In saying this, we are thinking not only of more or less definite movements, such as that which was actually called " modernism " and which was nothing else than an attempt, happily frustrated, to smuggle the Protestant outlook into the Catholic Church itself , we are thinking more particularly of a state of mind which is more general and diffused, less easily definable, and therefore still more dangerous, and whose great danger lies in the fact that those who are affected by it are often unaware of its existence. It is possible to think oneself sincerely religious and not be at all religious at heart, it is even possible to consider oneself a " traditionalist " without having the least notion of the real traditional spirit ; and this is one more symptom of the mental confusion of our time. The state of mind we are referring to is primarily one which consists, so to speak, in " minimising " religion, in treating it as something to be kept on one side and relegated to as limited and narrow a field as possible ; so that it remains completely fenced off, with no real influence on the rest of existence ; are there

INDIVIDUALISM

many Catholics to-day whose way of thinking and acting in everyday life differs noticeably from that of the most unreligious of their contemporaries ? We allude also to the almost complete ignorance of doctrine, and even indifference to everything connected with doctrine ; religion for many people is simply a matter of " performance " and custom, not to say of routine, and there is a deliberate refusal to attempt to understand anything at all about it, a refusal that even reaches the point of thinking that it is impossible to understand it, or perhaps that there is nothing there to be understood ; and, indeed, could anyone who really understood religion give it such an unimportant place among his general preoccupations ? The doctrine is consequently in fact forgotten or reduced to next to nothing, a process which brings Catholic practice very close to the Protestant conception, being an outcome of the same modern tendencies, tendencies that are opposed to all intellectuality ; and what is even more regrettable, the teaching commonly given, instead of reacting against this state of mind, favours it by adapting itself only too readily to it ; there is constant talk of morality, while very little is said about doctrine, on the pretext that this would not be understood , religion has become mere moralism, or at least it seems as if nobody cares any longer to see what it really is. If, nevertheless, doctrine is still sometimes made a subject of discussion, it is too often only degraded by being debated with its adversaries on their own " profane " ground, which inevitably leads to the making of completely unjustifiable

INDIVIDUALISM

concessions. A striking instance is the necessity under which people feel themselves of taking into consideration, to a greater or less extent, the results claimed by modern "criticism," whereas, if they were to take up a different standpoint, nothing would be easier than to show how inane this is ; under such conditions, how can anything really remain of the true traditional spirit ?

The digression into which we have been led by our review of the manifestations of individualism in the religious field does not seem unjustified, for it shows that the evil is, in this respect, even more serious and widespread than might at first sight be supposed . moreover, it is not really foreign to the question we are considering, and our last remark bears directly on this question, for it is individualism which sponsors everywhere the spirit of debate. It is very difficult to make our contemporaries see that there are things which by their very nature cannot be discussed. Modern man, instead of attempting to raise himself to truth, claims to drag truth down to his own level, which is doubtless the reason why there are so many who imagine, when one speaks to them of " traditional sciences," or even of pure metaphysic, that one is speaking only of " profane science " and of " philosophy." It is always possible to hold discussions within the realm of individual opinion, as this does not go beyond the rational order, and it is easy to find more or less valid arguments on both sides of a question when there is no appeal to any higher principle. Indeed, in many cases, discussion can be carried on

INDIVIDUALISM

indefinitely without arriving at any solution, which is the reason why almost all modern philosophy is built up of quibbles and ill-framed propositions. Far from clearing up these questions, as it is commonly supposed to do, discussion usually only entangles or obscures them still further, and its commonest result is for each participant, in trying to convert his opponent, to become more firmly wedded to his own opinion and to shut himself up in it more exclusively than ever. The real motive is not the wish to attain to knowledge of the truth, but to prove oneself right in spite of opposition, or at least, if one cannot convince others, to convince oneself of one's own rightness; though failure to convince others invariably occasions regret in consequence of the craving for "proselytism" which is one of the most characteristic features of the modern Western mentality. Sometimes individualism, in the lowest and most vulgar sense of the word, is manifested in a still more obvious way, as in the desire that is frequently shown to judge a man's work by what is known of his private life, as though there could be any sort of connection between the two. The same tendency, combined with a mania for detail, is also responsible for the interest shown in the smallest peculiarities in the lives of "great men" and for the illusion that all that they have done can be explained by a sort of "psycho-physiological" analysis, all this is very significant for anyone who wishes to understand the real nature of the contemporary mentality.

To return for a moment to the introduction of

INDIVIDUALISM

the habit of discussion into realms in which it has no rightful place, it must be stated quite clearly that an "apologetic" attitude is in itself extremely weak, being merely "defensive" in the juridical meaning of the word ; it is not without reason that it is expressed by a word derived from "apology," the real meaning of which is the plea of an advocate, and which, in English, has even taken on, in current use, the meaning of "excuse", the excessive importance attached to apologetics is therefore an undeniable proof of the decline of the religious spirit. This weakness becomes still greater when apologetics degenerate, as we remarked above, into discussions as completely 'profane' in their method as in their point of view, in which religion is put upon the same plane as the most contingent and hypothetical of philosophic, scientific or pseudo-scientific theories, and in which, in order to appear "conciliatory," the apologists go to the length of admitting, to some extent, conceptions invented for the sole purpose of ruining all religion ; such apologists themselves furnish the proof of their complete ignorance of the real character of the doctrine whose more or less authorised representatives they believe themselves to be. Those who are qualified to speak in the name of a traditional doctrine do not need to discuss with the "profane" or to engage in polemics ; they have only to expound the doctrine as it is, for such as can understand it, and, at the same time, to denounce error wherever it arises, and expose it by casting upon it the light of true knowledge. Their function is not to

INDIVIDUALISM

compromise the doctrine by taking part in any strife, but to pronounce the judgment which they have the right to pronounce, if they effectvely possess the principles that should infallibly inspire them. The domain of strife is the domain of action, that is to say the individual and temporal domain ; the " motionless mover " produces and directs movements without being involved in it , knowledge enlightens action without partaking of its vicissitudes , the spiritual guides the temporal without mingling with it ; and thus everything remains in its right order, in the rank that is its own in the universal hierarchy ; but where is the notion of a real hierarchy still to be found in the modern world ? Nothing and nobody is any longer in the right place ; men no longer recognize any effective authority in the spiritual order or any legitimate power in the temporal ; the " profane " presume to discuss what is sacred, and to contest its character and even its existence ; the inferior judges the superior, ignorance sets bounds to wisdom, error prevails over truth, the human supersedes the divine, earth overtops heaven, the individual sets the measure for all things and claims to dictate to the universe laws drawn entirely from his own relative and fallible reason. " Woe unto you, ye blind guides," the Gospel says , and indeed everywhere to-day one sees nothing but blind leaders of the blind, who, unless restrained by some timely check, will inevitably lead them into the abyss, there to perish with them.

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

IN the present work we do not intend to dwell with particular emphasis on the social point of view, for it interests us only indirectly, representing as it does only a distant application of the fundamental principles, it cannot therefore under any circumstances be the domain in which a readjustment of the modern world might begin. Indeed, if this readjustment were to be undertaken thus, backwards as it were, starting from consequences instead of from principles, it would be bound to lack all real foundation and would be altogether illusory. Nothing stable could ever come of it, and the whole work would constantly have to be begun anew, because the necessity of coming to an agreement on the essential truths first of all would have been overlooked. It is for this reason that we find it impossible to consider political contingencies, even in the widest meaning of the term, as being more than mere outward signs of the mentality of a period ; but even though we treat them in this light, we cannot altogether overlook the manifestations of the modern confusion as they affect the social sphere.

As we have already pointed out, under the present state of affairs in the West, nobody any longer occupies the place that he should normally occupy in virtue of his own nature : this is what is meant by saying that the castes no longer exist, for caste, in its tradi-

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

tional meaning, is nothing else than individual nature, with the whole array of special aptitudes that this carries with it and which predispose each man to the fulfilment of one or another particular function. Since the undertaking of a function, no matter of what sort, is no longer dictated by any legitimate rule, the inevitable result is that each person finds himself obliged to do whatever kind of work he can get, often that for which he is the least^a qualified. The part he plays in the community is determined, not by chance, which does not in reality exist,¹ but by what might appear to be chance, that is, by a network of all sorts of incidental circumstances. What exerts the least influence is just the one factor that should count for most in the matter, we mean the differences of nature that exist between one man and another. It is the negation of these differences, bringing with it the negation of all social hierarchy, that is the cause of the whole disorder; this negation may not have been deliberate at first, and may have been more practical than theoretical, since the mingling of the castes preceded their complete suppression or, to put it differently, the nature of individuals was misunderstood before it began to be altogether ignored; at all events this same negation has subsequently been raised by the moderns to the rank of a pseudo-principle under the name of "equality." It would be quite easy to show that equality can nowhere exist, for the simple reason that there cannot be two beings

¹ What men call chance is simply their ignorance of causes, if the statement that something had happened by chance were to mean that it had no cause, it would be a contradiction in terms.

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

who are at the same time really distinct and completely alike in every respect ; and it would be no less easy to bring out all the ridiculous consequences arising out of this fantastical idea, in the name of which men claim to impose a complete uniformity on everyone, in such ways, for example, as by meting out identical teaching to all, as though all were equally capable of understanding the same things, and as though the same methods for making them understand these things were suitable to all indiscriminately. However, it may well be asked whether it is not a question of "learning" rather than of really "understanding," that is to say, whether memory is not put in the place of intelligence in the modern, purely verbal and "bookish" conception of education, whose object is only the accumulation of rudimentary and heterogenous notions, and in which quality is sacrificed entirely to quantity, as happens—for reasons that we shall explain more fully below—everywhere in the modern world : here again we have dispersion in multiplicity. Much could be added here concerning the evils of "compulsory education" ; but we cannot dwell on them, and to keep within the scheme of the present work, we must confine ourselves to remarking incidentally on this particular consequence of the equalitarian theories, as being one of those elements of confusion which are to-day too numerous for it to be possible to undertake to enumerate every single one of them.

Naturally, when we meet with an idea such as that of "equality" or "progress" or any other of the lay dogmas that almost all our contemporaries blindly

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

accept—ideas most of which began to take definite shape in the eighteenth century—it is impossible for us to admit that they arose spontaneously. They are, in fact, veritable “ suggestions ” in the strictest sense of the word, though, of course, they could not have had any effect in a society that was not already prepared to receive them ; such ideas have not themselves actually created the mental outlook that is characteristic of modern times, but they have contributed largely to maintaining it and to bringing it to a stage which it would doubtless not have reached without them. If these suggestions were to disappear, the general mentality would come very near to changing direction ; and this is why they are so assiduously kept up by all those who have some interest in maintaining the confusion, if not in making it still worse, and also why, at a time when it is claimed that everything is open to discussion, they are the only things that may never be discussed. Moreover, it is not easy to judge the exact degree of sincerity of those who become the propagators of such ideas, or to know to what extent certain people succeed in falling a prey to their own lies and deceiving themselves as they deceive others ; in fact, in propaganda of this sort, those who play the part of dupes are often the best instruments, as they bring to the work a conviction that the others would have some difficulty in simulating, and which is readily contagious. But behind all this, at least at the outset, a much more deliberate kind of action is necessary, and the direction can be set only by men knowing perfectly well the real nature of the

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

ideas they are launching. We have spoken of "ideas," but it is only very incorrectly that this word can be made to apply in the present case, for it is quite clear that they are by no means "pure ideas," having nothing whatever in common with the intellectual order ; they are rather "false ideas," though it would be still better to call them "pseudo-ideas," intended primarily to evoke sentimental reactions, since this is in fact the easiest and most efficacious way of working on the masses. Indeed, for this purpose, the word used is more important than the notion it is supposed to represent, and most of the modern "idols" are really mere words, for a remarkable phenomenon has arisen known as "verbalism," by which sonorous words succeed in creating the illusion of thought ; the influence that orators have over the crowd is particularly characteristic in this connection, and it does not require much study to see that it is a process of suggestion altogether comparable to that used by hypnotists.

But without dwelling at greater length on these points, let us return to the consequences involved by the negation of all true hierarchy, it must be noticed that not merely does a man, in the present state of affairs, fulfil his proper function in exceptional cases only and as though by accident, whereas his not doing so should be the exception, but it also happens that the same man is called upon to fulfil successively quite different functions, as though he could change his aptitudes at will. This may seem paradoxical in an era of extreme "specialization," and yet it is in fact the case, especially in the realm of politics.

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

If the competence of specialists is often quite illusory, and is in any case limited to a very narrow field, the belief in this competence is nevertheless a fact, and it may well be asked why it is that this belief is not made to apply to the careers of politicians and why, with them, the most complete incompetence is seldom an obstacle. A little reflection, however, will show that there is nothing surprising in this, and that it is, in fact, a very natural outcome of the democratic conception, according to which power comes from below and is based essentially on the majority, for a necessary corollary of this conception is the exclusion of all real competence, which is always at least a relative superiority, and therefore belongs necessarily to a minority.

A certain amount of explanation may be useful here to bring out, on the one hand, the sophistries underlying the democratic idea, and, on the other hand, to show the connection between this idea and the modern mental outlook as a whole. It need hardly be added, considering the point of view at which we place ourself, that these observations will remain entirely aloof from all party questions and all political quarrels, with which we intend to have nothing whatsoever to do. We regard these matters in an absolutely disinterested way, just as we would any other subject of study, and wish only to bring out as clearly as possible what lies at the bottom of them ; to do this is indeed necessary, and it is the one thing that is necessary, if all the illusions that our contemporaries harbour on this subject are to be dispelled. Here also, it is really a

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

question of "suggestion," as it was with the somewhat different but nevertheless kindred ideas of which we have just spoken ; and as soon as something is recognized to be a suggestion and its way of working perceived, it can have no more influence : in dealing with things of this sort, a somewhat closer and purely "objective" scrutiny—as it is fashionable to say nowadays in the special jargon borrowed from the German philosophers—is very much more effective than all the sentimental declamations and party controversies that prove nothing and are no more than an expression of individual preferences.

The most decisive argument against democracy can be summed up in a few words : the higher cannot emanate from the lower, because the greater cannot come out of the less ; this is an absolute mathematical certainty that nothing can gainsay. It should be remarked that this same argument, applied to a different order of things, can be used against materialism also ; there is nothing fortuitous in this, for these two attitudes are much more closely connected than might at first sight appear. It is abundantly clear that the people cannot confer a power that they do not themselves possess , true power can only come from above, and this is why, be it said in passing, it can be legitimized only by the sanction of something which stands above the social order, that is to say by a spiritual authority ; otherwise it is a mere counterfeit of power, unjustifiable through lack of any principle, and in which there can be nothing but disorder and confusion. This reversal

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

of the true hierarchical order begins when the temporal power seeks to make itself independent of the spiritual authority, and then even to subordinate the latter by claiming to make it serve political ends. This is an initial usurpation that opens the way to all the others ; thus it could be shown, for example, that the French monarchy was itself working unconsciously from the fourteenth century onwards to prepare the Revolution which was to overthrow it ; it may be that we shall have the opportunity some day to expound this point of view adequately, but for the moment we can only refer briefly to it in passing.

If the word "democracy" is defined as the government of the people by themselves, it expresses an absolute impossibility and cannot even have a mere *de facto* existence, in our time any more than in any other. One must guard against being misled by words : it is contradictory to say that the same persons can be at the same time rulers and ruled, because, to use the Aristotelian phraseology, the same being cannot be "in act" and "in potency" at the same time and in the same circle of relations. The relationship of ruler and ruled necessitates the joint presence of two terms : there could be no ruled if there were not also rulers, even though these be illegitimate and have no other title to power than their own pretensions ; but the great ability of those who are in control in the modern world lies in making the people believe that they are governing themselves, and the people are the more inclined to believe this as they are flattered by it, and as they are in any case incapable

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

of sufficient reflection to see its impossibility. It was to create this illusion that "universal suffrage" was invented : the law is supposed to be made by the opinion of the majority, but what is overlooked is that this opinion is something that can very easily be guided and modified ; it is always possible, by means of suitable suggestions, to arouse in it currents moving in this or that direction as desired. We cannot recall who it was who first spoke of " manufacturing opinion," but this expression is very apt, although it must be added that it is not always those who are in apparent control who really have the necessary means at their disposal. This last remark should make it clear why it is that the incompetence of the most prominent politicians seems to have only a very relative importance ; but since we are not undertaking here to unmask the working of what might be called the " machine of government," we will do no more than point out that this incompetence itself serves the purpose of keeping up the illusion of which we have been speaking : indeed, it is a necessary condition if the politicians in question are to appear to issue from the majority, for it makes them in its likeness, inasmuch as the majority, on whatever question it may be called on to give its opinion, is always composed of the incompetent, whose number is vastly greater than that of the men who can give an opinion based on a full knowledge of the subject.

We are thus brought face to face with the error by which it is supposed that the majority should make the law ; even if this idea necessarily remains mainly

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

theoretical and cannot correspond to any effective reality, an explanation' is nevertheless called for as to how it has come to take root in the modern mental outlook, and which are the tendencies it corresponds to and which it satisfies, at least in appearance. Its most obvious flaw is the one we have just remarked on . the opinion of the majority cannot be anything but an expression of incompetence, whether this be due to lack of intelligence or to ignorance pure and simple ; certain observations of " mass psychology " might be quoted here, in particular the widely known fact that the aggregate of mental reactions aroused among the component individuals of a crowd crystallizes into a sort of general psychosis whose level is not merely not that of the average, but actually that of the lowest elements. It should also be noted, though in a slightly different connection, that certain modern philosophers have even tried to introduce the democratic theory, according to which the opinion of the majority should prevail, into the intellectual realm itself, and that chiefly by claiming to find a " criterion of truth " in what they call " universal consent." Even supposing there were some question upon which all men were in agreement, this agreement would prove nothing in itself ; moreover, even if this unanimity really existed—which is the more unlikely in that, whatever the question, there are always many people who have no opinion on it and have never even thought about it—it would in any case be impossible to prove it in practice, so that what is put forward in support of an opinion and as a sign of its truth comes

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

down to the mere consent of the majority, and moreover, the majority of a group that is necessarily very limited in space and in time. In this domain the groundlessness of the theory is even more obvious, as it is easier to discount the influence of sentiment, which, on the other hand, almost invariably comes into play when one has to do with the field of politics. It is this influence that is one of the chief obstacles in the way of an understanding of certain things, even for those who would otherwise be of an intellectual capacity amply sufficient to understand them without difficulty, emotional impulses hinder reflection, and turning this incompatibility to account is one of the vulgar tricks practised in politics.

But let us probe still deeper into the question : what is this law of the greatest number which modern governments invoke and in which they claim to find their sole justification ? It is simply the law of matter and brute force, the same law by which a mass, carried down by its weight, crushes everything that lies in its track. It is precisely here that we find the point of junction of the democratic conception and materialism, and here also is to be found the reason why this conception is so firmly rooted in the present-day mentality. By its means the normal order of things is completely reversed and the supremacy of multiplicity as such is upheld, a supremacy which actually exists only in the material world¹ ; in the spiritual world, on the other hand, and more clearly still, in the universal order,

¹ One has only to read St Thomas Aquinas to see that "*numerus stat ex parte materiæ*" (number is on matter's side)

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

it is unity that is at the summit of the hierarchy, since unity is the principle out of which all multiplicity arises.¹ Once let the principle be denied or lost sight of, then nothing remains but multiplicity pure and simple, which is the same thing as matter. Furthermore, the allusion to weight that we have just made has more significance than that of a mere comparison, for in the field of physical forces in the commonest meaning of the word, weight does actually represent the downward and compressive tendency, which involves an ever increasing limitation of the being, and at the same time makes for multiplicity, represented here by greater and greater density²: this tendency has been shaping the development of human activity since the beginning of modern times. It should be noted also that matter, owing to its power of both dividing and limiting at the same time, is what scholastic philosophy calls "the principle of individuation." This establishes a connection between the questions we are dealing with now and our earlier remarks about individualism: the tendency of which we have just spoken is identical with that "individualizing" tendency which is represented in

¹ In this case, as in all others, the analogy between one order of reality and another applies in a strictly inverse sense

² This tendency is the one that the Hindu doctrine calls *tamas* and assimilates to ignorance and darkness. From what we have just said about the inverse application of all analogy, it will be seen that the compression or condensation in question is directly opposed to concentration of the spiritual or intellectual order, so much so that it is in reality correlative with division and dispersion in multiplicity, however strange this may appear at first sight. The same applies to uniformity obtained, according to the equalitarian conception, from below and at the lowest level, which is the direct opposite of the higher and principal unity.

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

the Judæo-Christian tradition as the "Fall" of those who broke away from the original unity.¹ Multiplicity, considered apart from its principle, and therefore as no longer capable of being reduced to unity, takes the form in the social realm of a community conceived only as the arithmetical sum of its component individuals ; a community is, in fact, no more than this once it ceases to be attached to any principle higher than the individuals. The law of such a community is truly that of the greatest number, and it is on this that the democratic idea is based.

We must pause here to clear up a possible misunderstanding : in speaking of modern individualism we have dealt almost entirely with its manifestation in the intellectual order, and it might be supposed that matters would be quite different in the social field. It is true that if one took the word "individualism" in its narrowest sense, one might be tempted to oppose the community to the individual and to think that facts such as the ever greater encroachments of the State in all departments, together with the growing complexity of social institutions, are signs of a tendency which is opposed to individualism. Actually this is not the case, for, since the community is nothing more than the sum of the individuals, it cannot be opposed to them, any more than can the State itself in its modern conception, that is to say as a mere representation of the masses reflecting no higher principle : and it will be remembered

¹ This is why Dante puts the symbolical abode of Lucifer at the centre of the earth, that is to say at the point where the forces of weight converge from all sides, from this point of view it is the opposite of the spiritual or "heavenly" centre of attraction which is symbolized in most traditional doctrines by the sun.

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

that individualism, as we have defined it, consists precisely in the negation of any super-individual principle. Therefore, if conflicts arise in the social sphere between tendencies which all equally find their place within the modern outlook, they are not conflicts between individualism and something else, but simply between the various forms which individualism itself is capable of assuming ; and it is easy to see that such conflicts must be more numerous and more serious in our time than they have ever been before, owing to the absence of any principle capable of unifying the multiplicity, and because individualism necessarily implies division. This division, with the chaotic state of things arising out of it, is the fatal outcome of an utterly material civilization, for it is matter itself that is really the source of division and multiplicity.

Finally, there still remains one direct consequence of the democratic idea to be dealt with, that is the negation of the idea of an elect ; it is not for nothing that " democracy " is opposed to " aristocracy," for this word, at least when taken in its etymological sense, means precisely the power of the elect. The elect, by the very definition of the word, can only be the few, and their power, or rather their authority, being due to their intellectual superiority, has nothing in common with the numerical strength on which democracy is based, a strength whose inherent tendency is to sacrifice the minority to the majority, and therefore quality to quantity and the elect to the masses. Hence the guiding function exercised by a true elect, and even the very existence

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

of this elect—since it must exercise this function if it exists at all—is utterly incompatible with democracy, which is closely bound up with the equalitarian conception, and thereby with the negation of all hierarchy : the very foundation of the democratic idea is the supposition that one individual is as good as another because they are equal numerically and in spite of the fact that they can never be equal other than numerically. A real elect, as we have already said, can only be an intellectual one ; and that is why democracy can arise only where pure intellectuality no longer exists, as is the case in the modern world. However, since equality is in fact impossible, and since, despite all attempts at reducing everything to one level, the differences between one man and another cannot in practice be entirely suppressed, men have been brought, illogically enough, to invent false hierarchies, whose higher ranks claim to take the place of the only true elect ; and these false hierarchies are built up exclusively on the basis of relative and contingent considerations, always of a purely material order. This is very obvious from the fact that the kind of social distinction which counts the most in the present state of things is that based on wealth, that is to say on a merely external superiority of an exclusively quantitative order, the only superiority, as a matter of fact, that is consistent with democracy, based as it is on the same point of view. It may also be added that even those who set themselves up as opponents of this state of affairs are incapable of producing any real remedy for the disorder, and are even liable

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

to aggravate it by going ever further in the same direction, because they also make no appeal to any principle of a higher order. The struggle is only between different aspects of democracy, in which more or less stress is laid on the equalitarian tendency, just as in the other case it is only, as we have already said, a struggle between different aspects of individualism, which in fact comes to exactly the same thing.

These few reflections seem sufficient to give an idea of the social conditions of the contemporary world and, at the same time, to show that there can be only one way out of the chaos, in the social domain as in all others : the restoration of intellectuality, which would result in the formation once more of an elect. This elect must be regarded as at present non-existent in the West, since the name cannot be applied to the few isolated and disconnected elements which represent, in a way, mere undeveloped possibilities. Indeed, these elements show, as a rule, little more than tendencies or aspirations, which lead them, it is true, to react against the modern outlook, but without their being able to influence it in any effective way. What they lack is true knowledge and traditional data, which are not to be improvised and which an intelligence left to its own resources, especially in circumstances so unfavourable in every respect, can only supply imperfectly and to a very slight extent. Consequently, there are nothing but disjointed efforts, which often go astray owing to lack of principle and of doctrinal guidance ; it might be said that the modern world protects

THE SOCIAL CHAOS

itself by its very dispersion, from which even its adversaries do not succeed in escaping. This will continue to be the case so long as the latter keep to the "profane" field, in which the modern spirit enjoys an obvious advantage, as this is its proper and exclusive province ; and, as a matter of fact, their keeping to this field shows that despite all appearances this spirit still has a very strong hold over them. It is for this reason that so many people, although moved by undeniably good intentions, are unable to understand that a beginning can be made only from principles, and persist in frittering away their energies in some relative sphere, social or otherwise, in which, under such conditions, nothing real or durable can ever be accomplished. The real elect, on the other hand, would not have to intervene directly in these spheres or to take any part in external action ; it would direct everything by an influence of which the people were unaware, and which would be the more powerful the less visible it was. It is enough to consider the power of suggestion mentioned earlier on, which does not moreover demand any real intellectuality, to get an idea of how much greater would be the power of an influence such as this, working even more invisibly because of its very nature, and having its source in pure intellectuality. Instead of this power being lessened by the division inherent in multiplicity and by the weakness involved by allies and illusions, it would, on the contrary, be intensified by concentration in the principal unity and would become identified with the strength of truth itself.

CHAPTER VII

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

FROM all that has been said above it seems sufficiently clear that the Orientals are quite justified in reproaching modern Western civilization with being exclusively material : it has developed along material lines only, and from whatever point of view it is considered, one is faced with the more or less direct results of this materialisation. However, there is still something to be added to what we have already said about this : in the first place, we must explain the different meanings that can be given to a word such as "materialism," for if we use it to characterize the contemporary world, people who claim to be very modern without considering themselves in any way materialistic will be sure to protest and will feel convinced that this is mere calumny ; we must therefore begin with an explanation that will remove in advance any ambiguity which might arise on this point.

It is significant in itself that the very word "materialism" is no older than the eighteenth century ; it was invented by the philosopher Berkeley, who used it to denote any theory admitting the real existence of matter ; it is scarcely necessary to say that it is not this meaning of the word that concerns us here, since we

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

are not raising the question of the existence of matter. A little later the same word took on a narrower meaning, the one in fact which it has still retained : it came to denote a conception according to which nothing else exists but matter and its derivatives. It should be remarked that such a conception is something quite new, and essentially a product of the modern outlook, and therefore corresponds to some at least of the tendencies inherent in this outlook.¹ But we intend at present to speak of materialism mainly in another, much wider and yet very definite sense : in this sense, materialism stands for a complete mental outlook, of which the conception that we have just described is only one manifestation among many others, and which is, in itself, independent of any philosophical theory. This mental outlook is one that consists in more or less consciously putting material things and the preoccupations arising out of them in the first place, whether these preoccupations still make some show of being speculative or are purely practical ; and it cannot be seriously disputed that this is, in fact, the mental outlook of the immense majority of our contemporaries.

The whole of the "profane" science that has developed in the course of recent centuries is a study only of the sensible world, is enclosed entirely within this world, and works by methods that can be applied only to this one domain ; but these methods have been pro-

¹ Prior to the eighteenth century there were "mechanistic" theories, from Greek atomism down to Cartesian physics, but mechanism should not be confused with materialism, despite certain affinities which may have subsequently brought about a kind of fellowship between them.

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

claimed "scientific" to the exclusion of all others, which is equivalent to denying that any science not concerned with material things can exist. There are, however, many who share this opinion, many even who have devoted themselves specially to the sciences in question, but who would refuse to call themselves materialists or to accept the philosophical theory that bears this name. There are even some who are glad to profess a religious faith, the sincerity of which is beyond doubt; but their scientific attitude does not differ appreciably from that of the avowed materialists. The question has often been raised, whether from the religious point of view modern science should be denounced as atheistical or materialistic, but as a rule the question has been badly put: it is quite certain that this science does not explicitly profess atheism or materialism, it merely ignores certain things as a result of its prejudices, without formally denying them as this or that philosopher may have done; in connection with modern science, therefore, one can only speak of *de facto* materialism or what might be called practical materialism; but the evil is perhaps even more serious, as it is deeper and more widespread. A philosophical attitude may be something very superficial, even with the "professional" philosophers; and besides, there are people whose mind would recoil from actual negation, but who have no objection to complete indifference; and it is this that is the most to be feared, for, to deny something, one must think about it to some extent, however little that may be, whereas an attitude of indifference makes it

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

possible not to think about it at all. When an exclusively material science claims to be the only science possible, and when men are accustomed to admit as an unquestionable truth that there can be no valid knowledge outside this science, and when all the education they receive tends to instil into them the superstition of this science, or "scientism" as it should really be called, how could these men not in fact be materialists, or in other words, how could they fail to have all their preoccupations turned in the direction of matter ?

It seems that nothing exists for modern men beyond what can be seen and touched ; or at least, even if they admit theoretically that something more may exist, they immediately declare it not merely unknown but "unknowable," which absolves them from having to think about it. There are, it is true, certain people who try to build up for themselves some idea of an "other world," but, relying as they do on nothing but their imagination, they represent it in the likeness of the terrestrial world and endow it with all the conditions of existence that belong to this world, including space and time and even a sort of "corporality" ; we have shown elsewhere, in speaking of spiritualist conceptions, some particularly striking examples of this kind of grossly materialised representation. But if these conceptions represent an extreme case in which this trait is exaggerated to the point of caricature, it would be wrong to suppose that this sort of thing is confined to spiritualism and to the sects that are more or less akin to it. Indeed, in a more general

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

way, the intrusion of the imagination into realms in which it can be of no service, and which should normally be closed to it, in itself shows very clearly the inability of modern Westerners to rise above the sensible domain. There are many who can see no difference between "conceiving" and "imagining," and some philosophers, such as Kant, have gone so far as to declare "inconceivable" or "unthinkable" everything that is not susceptible of representation. So also, all that is called spiritualism or idealism is usually nothing but a sort of transposed materialism ; and this is true not only of what we have termed " neo-spiritualism," but also of philosophical spiritualism itself, even though this holds itself to be the opposite of materialism. To tell the truth, spiritualism and materialism, in the philosophical sense of the words, are incomprehensible apart, being merely the two halves of the Cartesian dualism, whose radical separation has been transformed into a sort of antagonism ; and since that time the whole of philosophy has wavered between these two terms without being able to get beyond them. Despite its name, spiritualism has nothing in common with spirituality ; its war with materialism cannot interest in the slightest those who adopt a higher point of view and who see that these two opposites are, at bottom, very near to being simple equivalents, and that on many points their pretended opposition comes down ultimately to no more than a mere verbal disagreement.

The moderns in general cannot conceive of any other science than that of things that can be measured,

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

counted and weighed, which really comes to the same as saying material things, since it is to these only that the quantitative point of view can be applied ; and the claim to reduce quality to quantity is very typical of modern science. This tendency has reached the point of supposing that there can be no science, in the real meaning of the word, except where it is possible to introduce measurement, and that there can be no scientific laws except those that express quantitative relations. It is a tendency that arose with the mechanism of Descartes, since when it has grown more and more pronounced, notwithstanding the rejection of Cartesian physics, for it is not bound up with any particular theory but with a general conception of scientific knowledge. To-day attempts are made to apply measurement even in the psychological field, the very nature of which excludes such a method. The point has been reached of no longer understanding that the possibility of measurement derives from a quality inherent in matter, that is to say from its indefinite divisibility ; or else it is thought that this quality is to be found in all that exists, which comes to the same as materialising everything. As we have said before, it is matter which is the principle of division and of all that is multiplicity the predominance given to the quantitative point of view, a predominance to be found, as we have already shown, even in the social domain, is therefore really materialism in the sense that we spoke of above ; but it is not necessarily connected with philosophical materialism, which, as a matter

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

of fact, it preceded in the development of the tendencies inherent in the modern outlook. We will not dwell upon the mistake of seeking to reduce quality to quantity or on the inadequacy of all the attempts at explanation that are more or less of the "mechanistic" type. That is not our present purpose, and we will remark only, in this connection, that even in the sensible order a science of this type has but little connection with reality, the greater part of which is bound to elude it.

Speaking of "reality" leads us to mention another fact, which might be overlooked by many, but which is very significant as a sign of the mental outlook we are speaking of: it is that people commonly use the word "reality" exclusively to denote reality of the sensible order. As all language expresses the mentality of a people or of a period, one must conclude that for such people everything that cannot be grasped by the senses is "unreal," that is to say illusory or even completely non-existent. They may not be clearly aware of this, but they have none the less this negative conviction at heart, and if they deny it, one can be certain that their denial is only an expression of some much more superficial element in their mentality, although they may not be conscious of the fact, and that it may even be purely verbal. If anyone should be tempted to think that we are exaggerating, he has only to examine, for example, what the so-called religious convictions of many people amount to: certain notions learnt by heart in a purely academic and mechanical way without being assimilated, to

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

which they have never devoted serious thought, but which they store in their memory and repeat on occasion as part of a certain convention or formal attitude which is all that they can understand by the name of religion. We have already spoken of this "minimizing" of religion, of which the verbalism in question represents one of the final stages, and it is this that explains why so-called "believers" go no less far than "unbelievers" in practical materialism. We shall come back to this, but first we must finish pointing out the materialistic character of modern science, for this is a subject that requires to be treated from various angles.

We must recall once more a point that has already been mentioned : modern sciences do not possess the character of disinterested knowledge, nor is their speculative value, even for those who believe in it, much more than a mask beneath which quite practical considerations are hidden ; but this mask makes it possible to retain the illusion of a false intellectuality. Descartes himself, in working out his physics, was primarily interested in extracting from it a system of mechanics, medicine and morality , but a still greater change was brought about by the spreading of the influence of Anglo-Saxon empiricism. Moreover, it is almost exclusively the practical results which science makes possible that gives it so much prestige in the eyes of the general public, because here again are things that can be seen and touched. We have said that pragmatism represents the outcome of all modern philosophy and the last stage in its decline ; but outside philosophy

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

there is also and there has long been a widespread and unsystematised pragmatism that is to philosophical pragmatism what practical is to theoretical materialism, and which is really the same as what people call "common sense." What is more, this almost instinctive utilitarianism is inseparable from the materialist tendency, for "common sense" consists in not going beyond the things of this earth, as well as in ignoring all that does not make an immediate practical appeal. It is "common sense" in particular that sees only the world of the senses as real and that admits of no knowledge but that coming from the senses ; moreover it ascribes value to this narrow form of knowledge only in so far as it offers a possibility of satisfying either material needs or else a certain sentimentalism, for sentiment—and this must be frankly stated at the risk of shocking contemporary moralism—lies in reality quite close to matter. In all this there remains no place for the intelligence, or at most only in so far as it consents to serve for the attainment of practical ends and to become no more than a mere instrument subordinated to the requirements of the lowest and corporeal part of the human individual, "a tool for making tools," to quote a significant expression of Bergson's · it is an utter indifference to truth that begets pragmatism in all its forms.

Under such conditions, industry is no longer merely an application of science, an application of which science should, in itself, remain completely independent , it has become the reason for and justification of science, in such a way that here also the normal

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

relations between things have been reversed. What the modern world has striven after with all its power, even when it has claimed in its own way to pursue science, is really nothing else than the development of industry and machinery ; and in thus seeking to dominate matter and bend it to their service, men have only succeeded, as we said at the beginning of this work, in becoming its slaves. Not only have they limited their intellectual ambition—if such a term can still be used in the present state of things—to inventing and constructing machines, but they have ended by becoming in actual fact machines themselves. Indeed, it is not only scholars but also technicians and even labourers who have to undergo the specialization which certain sociologists praise so highly under the name of “division of labour”, and for these last it makes intelligent work quite impossible. Very different from the artisans of former days, they have become mere slaves of machines with which they may be said to form part of a single body. In a purely mechanical way they have constantly to repeat certain definite movements, which are always the same and always performed in the same way, so as to avoid the slightest loss of time ; such at least is required by the American methods which are supposed to represent the most advanced stage of “progress.” Indeed, the object is merely to produce as much as possible ; quality matters little, it is quantity only that is of importance, which brings us back once more to the remark we have already made in other contexts : modern civilization may really be called a quantitative

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

civilization, and this is only another way of saying it is a material civilization.

Anyone who wants still further evidence of this truth can find it in the tremendous importance that economic factors take on nowadays, alike in the lives of peoples and of individuals : industry, commerce, finance, these seem to be the only things that count ; and this is in agreement with the fact we have already mentioned, that the only social distinction which has survived is one based on material wealth. Politics seem to be altogether controlled by finance, and trade competition seems to be the dominant influence in determining the relations between peoples ; it may be that this is only so in appearance, and that these factors are really not so much causes as means of action, but the choice of such means is a clear sign of the character of the period to which they are suited. Moreover, our contemporaries are convinced that it is almost exclusively economic conditions that dictate historical events, and they even imagine that it has always been so ; a theory has even been invented according to which everything is to be explained by economic factors alone, and has been significantly named " historical materialism." Here also may be seen the effect of one of those suggestions to which we referred above, suggestions whose power is all the greater in that they correspond to the tendencies of the general mentality , and the result of this suggestion is that economic factors have really come to decide almost everything that occurs in the social sphere. It is true that the masses have always been led in one manner or

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

another, and it could be said that their part in history consists primarily in allowing themselves to be led, since they represent a merely passive element, a "matter" in the Aristotelian sense of the word. But, to lead them to-day, it is sufficient to dispose of purely material means, this time in the ordinary sense of the word, and this shows clearly to what depths our age has sunk. At the same time the masses are made to believe that they are not being led, but that they are acting spontaneously and governing themselves, and the fact that they believe this is a sign from which the extent of their stupidity may be inferred.

As we are speaking of economic factors, we will take the opportunity to point out a widespread illusion on this subject, namely that of supposing that relations established in the field of commerce can serve to draw peoples closer together and bring about an understanding between them, whereas in reality they have exactly the opposite effect. Matter, as we have often pointed out, is essentially multiplicity and division, and therefore the source of struggles and conflicts ; also, whether with peoples or individuals, the economic field is and can only be that of rival interests. In particular the West cannot count on industry, any more than on modern science which is inseparable from it, to serve as a basis for understanding with the East ; if the Orientals bring themselves to accept this industry as an unpleasant and moreover transitory necessity—and for them it could never be anything more than this—it will only be as a weapon to enable them to resist the invasion of the West and to safeguard their own

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

existence. It should be clearly understood that this is bound to be so : Orientals who bring themselves to consider economic competition with the West, despite the repugnance they feel for this kind of activity, can do so only with one purpose, to rid themselves of a foreign domination that is based on mere brute force and on the material power that industry itself supplies ; violence brings forth violence, but it should be recognised that it is certainly not the Orientals who have sought for war in this field.

Moreover, apart from the question of the relations between East and West, it is easy to see that one of the most conspicuous results of industrial development is that engines of war are being constantly perfected and their power of destruction increased at an ominous rate. This alone should be enough to shatter the pacifist dreams of some of the admirers of modern "progress" ; but the dreamers and idealists are incorrigible, and their gullibility seems to know no bounds. The "humanitarianism" that is so much in vogue is certainly not worth taking seriously , but it is strange that people should talk so much about ending all war at a time when the ravages it causes are greater than they have ever been, not only because the means of destruction have been multiplied, but also because, as wars are no longer fought between comparatively small armies composed entirely of professional soldiers, all the individuals on both sides are flung against each other indiscriminately, including those who are the least qualified for this kind of function. Here again is a striking example

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

of modern confusion, and it is truly portentous, for those who care to reflect upon it, that a "mass uprising" or a "general mobilisation" should have come to be considered quite natural, and that with very few exceptions the minds of all should have accepted the idea of an "armed nation." In this also can be seen an outcome of the belief in the power of numbers alone: it is in keeping with the quantitative character of modern civilization to set in motion enormous masses of combatants; and at the same time, equalitarianism finds its expression here also, as well as in systems such as "compulsory education" and "universal suffrage." Let it be added that these generalised wars have only been made possible by another specifically modern phenomenon, that is by the formation of "nations," a consequence, on the one hand, of the destruction of the feudal system, and, on the other hand, of the disruption of the higher unity of mediæval Christendom, and, without pausing over considerations that would carry us too far afield, let us point out that matters have been made still worse by the non-recognition of any spiritual authority which, under normal conditions, could be an effective arbiter, standing as it does by its very nature above all conflicts of the political order. Denial of the spiritual authority is also the same thing as practical materialism; and even those people who in theory claim to recognize such an authority, refuse in practice to allow it any real influence or any power of intervention in the social domain, exactly in the same way that they fence off religion from the

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

concerns of their every-day existence : whether in public or in private life, it is the same mental outlook that prevails.

Even if we admit that material development has certain advantages—though, indeed, from a very relative point of view—the sight of consequences such as those we have just remarked upon leads one to question whether they are not far outweighed by the inconveniences. We say this without referring to the many things of incomparably greater value which have been sacrificed to this one form of development, we do not speak of the higher knowledge that has been forgotten, the intellectuality that has been overthrown and the spirituality that has disappeared. Simply taking modern civilization on its merits, we affirm that if the advantages and inconveniences of what has been brought about were set against each other, the result might well on balance prove to be negative. The inventions whose number is at present growing at an ever increasing rate are all the more dangerous in that they bring into play forces whose real nature is quite unknown to the men who utilize them ; and this ignorance is the best proof of the worthlessness of modern science as an explanatory means, that is to say considered as knowledge, even if one confined one's attention entirely to the physical realm. At the same time the fact that such ignorance in no way interferes with practical applications, proves that this science is in reality directed only to practical ends, and that it is industry that is the only real object of all its research. The danger inherent in these inventions, even in those

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

that are not expressly created for a purpose destructive to mankind, but which none the less cause just as many catastrophes, without mentioning the unsuspected disturbances that they create in the physical environment, this danger, we say, will undoubtedly continue to grow, and that to an extent difficult to foretell, so that, as we have already shown, it is by no means improbable that it will be through these inventions that the modern world will bring about its own destruction, unless it can check its course in this direction while there is still time.

However it is not enough to withhold approval of modern inventions on the grounds of their dangerous side alone, there is more than this to the matter. One hears of the "benefits" claimed for what men have agreed to call "progress," and which one might even consent so to call provided one took care to make it quite clear that there is no question of any but a purely material progress; but are not these "benefits" of which people are so proud very largely illusory? The men of our time claim that they increase their "welfare" by this means; in our opinion the end they set themselves, even if it were really attained, is hardly worth the expenditure of so much effort, but what is more, it seems a very debatable question whether they do attain it. In the first place, the fact should be taken into account that not all men have the same tastes or the same needs, and that there are still some who would wish to avoid modern commotion and craving for speed but who can no longer do so; could anyone presume to uphold

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

that it is a "benefit" to these people to have thrust on them what is most contrary to their nature? It will be said, in reply, that there are few such men to-day, and this is considered a justification for treating them as a negligible quantity; in this, as in the field of politics, the majority arrogates to itself the right to crush minorities, which, in its eyes, have evidently no right to exist, since their very existence defies the equalitarian mania for uniformity. But, if the whole of mankind be taken into consideration instead of merely the Western world, the question bears a different aspect: the majority we have just spoken of now becomes a minority. A different argument is therefore used in this case, and by a strange contradiction it is in the name of their "superiority" that these "equalitarians" seek to impose their civilization on the rest of the world and that they bring trouble to people who have never asked them for anything, and since this "superiority" exists only from the material point of view, it is quite natural that the most brutal means are used to assert it. Moreover, let there be no confusion on this point. if the general public accept the pretext of "civilization" in all good faith, there are those for whom it is no more than mere moralist hypocrisy, serving as a mask for designs of conquest or for economic ambitions. It is really an extraordinary epoch in which so many men can be made to believe that a people is being given happiness by being reduced to subjection, by being robbed of all that is most precious to it, that is to say of its own civilization, by being forced to

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

adopt manners and institutions that were made for a different race, and by being constrained to the most distasteful kinds of work, in order to make it acquire things for which it has not the slightest use. For that is what is taking place : the modern West cannot tolerate that men should prefer to work less and be content to live on little ; as it is only quantity that counts, and as everything that escapes the senses is held to be non-existent, it is taken for granted that anyone who is not in a state of agitation and who does not produce much in a material way must be an "idler."

In evidence of this and without speaking of the opinions commonly expressed about Eastern peoples, it is enough to note the attitude taken up towards the contemplative orders, even in circles which consider themselves religious. In such a world, there is no longer any place for intelligence or for anything that is of a purely inward nature, for these are things which can neither be seen nor touched, which can neither be counted nor weighed ; there is a place only for outward action in all its forms, even those that are the most completely meaningless. For this reason it should not be a matter for surprise that the Anglo-Saxon mania for sport gains ground day by day : the ideal of the modern world is the "human animal" who has developed his muscular strength to the highest pitch ; its heroes are the athletes, even though they be mere brutes ; it is they who awaken the popular enthusiasm and it is their exploits that command the passionate interest of the crowd.

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

A world in which such things are seen has indeed sunk low and seems near its end.

However, let us consider things for a moment from the standpoint of those whose ideal is material welfare and who therefore rejoice at all the improvements to life furnished by modern "progress"; are they quite sure they are not duped? Is it true that owing to their command of swifter means of communication and of other things of the kind, and because of their more agitated and complicated manner of life, men are happier to-day than they were formerly? The very opposite seems to us to be true: disequilibrium cannot be a condition of real happiness. Moreover, the more needs a man has, the greater likelihood there is that he will lack something, and thereby be made unhappy; modern civilization aims at creating ever more and more artificial needs, and as we have already said, it will always create more needs than it can satisfy, for once one has started on this path, it is very hard to pull up, and, indeed, there is no reason for pulling up at any particular point. It could have been no hardship to men to do without things that did not exist and of which they had never dreamed, now, on the contrary, they are bound to suffer if they lack these things, since they have become accustomed to consider them as necessities, with the result that they have, in fact, really become necessary to them. Therefore men struggle in every possible way to obtain the means of procuring all material satisfactions, the only ones that they are capable of appreciating: they are

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

interested only in "making money," because it is money that enables them to obtain these things, of which the more they have the more they wish to have, as they go on discovering fresh needs ; and this passion becomes for them the sole end in life.

Hence the savage competition which certain evolutionists have raised to the dignity of a scientific law under the name of "struggle for existence," whose logical consequence is that only the strongest, in the narrowly material sense of the word, have a right to exist. Hence also the envy and even the hatred felt towards those who possess wealth by those who do not, how could men to whom equalitarian theories have been preached fail to revolt when they see all around them inequality in the most material order of things, the order to which they are bound to be the most sensitive ? If modern civilization should some day be destroyed by the disordered appetites that it has awakened in the masses, one would have to be very blind not to see in this the just punishment of its basic vice, or, without resorting to the language of morality, the repercussion of its own action in the same domain in which this action has taken place. The Gospel says : " All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword " ; those who unchain the brute forces of matter will perish, crushed by these same forces, of which they will no longer be masters ; once having imprudently set them in motion, they cannot hope to hold their fatal course indefinitely in check. It is of little consequence whether it be the forces of

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

nature or the forces of the human mob, or both together : in any case it is the laws of matter that are called into play and that inexorably destroy him who has aspired to dominate them without raising himself above matter. The Gospel also says : " If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand " , this saying also applies fully to the modern world with its material civilization, which cannot fail, by its very nature, to cause strife and division everywhere. The conclusion is obvious, and, even without appealing to other considerations, it is possible to predict with all certainty that this world will come to a tragic end, unless a change so radical as to amount to a complete reversal of direction should intervene and that very soon.

In speaking as we have done of the materialism of modern civilization, we are aware that some will reproach us with having overlooked certain elements which seem at least to alleviate this materialism ; and indeed, if there were none such, one could truly say that this civilization would most probably have already perished miserably. We do not, therefore, in the least dispute that there are such elements, but, on the other hand, there should be no illusions on this subject : in the first place, the various philosophical movements that assume labels such as " spiritualism " and " idealism " are not to be counted among them, any more than are the contemporary tendencies that take the form of moralism and sentimentalism. We have already explained the reasons for this, and would here merely recall that, for us, these points of view are no less " profane " than theoretical or

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

practical materialism, and far less remote from it in reality than in appearance. In the second place, if there still are remnants of real spirituality, it is in spite of the modern outlook and in opposition to it that they have persisted. Such remnants of spirituality, in so far as they are really Western, are to be found only in religion ; but we have already remarked how shrunk religion is to-day, what a narrow and mediocre conception of it even believers hold, and to what point it has been deprived of intellectuality, which is the same as true spirituality ; under such conditions, if certain possibilities still remain, it is merely in a latent state, and their effective influence amounts to very little. It is, however, none the less remarkable to see the vitality of a religious tradition which, even though sunk thus into a sort of virtual state, still endures despite all the attempts made in the course of several centuries to crush it out and destroy it. Those who are capable of reflection must see in this resistance signs of a " non-human " power , but, we must repeat once more, this tradition does not belong to the modern world, nor is it one of its component elements, but is the direct opposite of its tendencies and aspirations. This should be admitted frankly, instead of seeking for a vain conciliation : there can be nothing but antagonism between the religious frame of mind, in the true sense of the word, and the modern frame of mind, and any compromise is bound to weaken the former and favour the latter, whose hostility, moreover, will not be placated thereby, since it can aim only at the utter

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

destruction of everything that reflects in mankind a reality higher than the human.

The modern West is said to be Christian, but this is untrue : the modern outlook is anti-Christian, because it is essentially anti-religious ; and it is anti-religious because, still more generally, it is anti-traditional ; this is its distinguishing characteristic and is what makes it what it is. Undoubtedly, something of Christianity has passed even into the anti-Christian civilization of our time, even the most "advanced" - of whose representatives, to use their own jargon, cannot help, involuntarily and perhaps unconsciously, having undergone and still undergoing a certain Christian influence, though an indirect one ; however radical a breach with the past may be, it can never be quite complete and such as to break all continuity. More than this : we even assert that everything there may be of value in the modern world has come to it from Christianity, or at any rate through Christianity, for Christianity has brought with it the whole heritage of former traditions, has kept this heritage alive so far as the state of things in the West made it possible, and still contains its latent possibilities. But is there anybody to-day, even among those calling themselves Christians, who has any real consciousness of these possibilities ? Where are to be found, even in Catholicism, the men who know the deeper meaning of the doctrine that they profess outwardly, and who, not content with "believing" in a more or less superficial way and more through sentiment than intelligence, really "know"

A MATERIAL CIVILIZATION

the truth of the tradition they hold to be theirs? We would wish to see a proof that there are at least a few such men, for this would be the greatest and perhaps the sole hope of salvation for the West; but we have to admit that, up to the present, we have not encountered any: is one to suppose that they live in hiding, like certain Eastern sages, in some almost inaccessible retreat, or must this last hope be definitely abandoned? The West was Christian in the Middle Ages, but is so no longer; if anyone should reply that it may again become so, we will add that no one desires this more than we do, and may it come about sooner than all we see round about us would lead us to expect. But let no one delude himself on this point: if this should happen, the modern world will have lived its day.

CHAPTER VIII

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

THE modern confusion had its origin in the West, as we have already said, and until the last few years remained there as something quite local. But now a process is taking place the gravity of which should not be overlooked : the confusion is spreading everywhere, and even the East seems to be succumbing to it. It is true that the encroachments of the West are nothing new, but hitherto they have been confined to a more or less brutal domination over other peoples, whose effects went no deeper than the domain of politics and economics : despite all the efforts of a propaganda that worked under many different guises, the Eastern attitude of mind remained unaffected by all deviations, and the ancient traditional civilizations survived intact. To-day, on the contrary, there are Orientals who are more or less completely "Westernised," who have forsaken their tradition and adopted all the aberrations of the modern outlook, and these denatured elements, led astray by the teachings of European and American Universities, have become a cause of trouble and agitation in their own countries. At the same time, their importance, at least for the moment, should not be exaggerated : Westerners are apt to imagine that these noisy but not very numerous individuals represent the East of to-day, whereas

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

actually their influence is neither very widespread nor very deep. This mistake is easily explained, since the real Orientals make no effort at all to become known, and are therefore ignored by the West, while the Modernists, if one may so call them, are the only ones who thrust themselves forward, make speeches, write, and indulge in all manner of external activity. It is none the less true that this anti-traditional movement may gain ground, and all eventualities, even the most unfavourable, must be considered. The traditional spirit is already tending as it were to withdraw into itself, and the centres where it is preserved in its entirety are becoming more and more closed and difficult of access ; this generalisation of the confusion answers effectively to what must come about in the final phase of the *Kali-Yuga*.

Let it be stated quite clearly : the modern outlook is purely Western, and those who are affected by it should be classed as Westerners mentally even though they may be Orientals by birth ; all Eastern ideas are completely alien to them, and their ignorance of the traditional doctrines is the only excuse for their hostility towards them. What may seem remarkable and even contradictory is that these same individuals who become the auxiliaries of " Westernism " from the intellectual point of view, or, more correctly, in opposition to all real intellectuality, sometimes come forward as its opponents in the field of politics. But there is nothing very surprising in this ; for it is they who strive to form various " nations " in the East, and all nationalism is essentially opposed to the

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

traditional outlook ; they may wish to resist foreign domination, but to do so they make use of Western methods, such as are used by the various Western peoples in struggling among themselves ; and it may be that in this fact lies the justification for their existence. Indeed, if things have reached a point where the employment of such methods is inevitable, the sort of work involved can only be carried out by those elements of the community that have severed all connection with the tradition. It is possible, therefore, that these elements may be temporarily utilised to this end and then eliminated, like the Westerners themselves. Moreover, it would be quite logical for the ideas spread by the Westerners to turn against them, since they are of a kind that can never beget anything but division and ruin. It is through these ideas that the modern world will perish in one way or another ; it is of small importance whether this be by way of quarrels among the Westerners themselves, quarrels between nations or between social classes, or, as some people assert, through the attacks of "Westernised" Orientals, or, another possibility, as the result of a cataclysm brought about by the "progress of science", in any case, the dangers facing the Western world are entirely of its own making and proceed from itself.

The only question to arise is this : will the East, as a result of modern influence, have to undergo a merely transitory and superficial crisis, or will the West involve the whole of mankind in its own downfall ? It would be difficult at present to give any answer based on undeniable evidence ; both the two

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

contrary outlooks are now to be found in the East, but the spiritual power inherent in tradition—of which its adversaries moreover know nothing—may triumph over the material power when this has played its part, and disperse it as light disperses the shadows ; we may even say that it must triumph sooner or later, but it is possible that there will be a period of complete darkness before this happens. The traditional spirit cannot die, being in its essence above death and change ; but it can withdraw completely from the outer world, and then there would really be the “end of a world.” From all that has been said one may conclude that such an eventuality in the not far distant future is by no means unlikely ; and in the confusion that has arisen in the West and that is at present overflowing into the East we may see the “beginning of the end,” the preliminary sign of the moment when, according to the Hindu tradition, the whole of the sacred doctrine is to be shut in a conch-shell, from which it will once more come forth intact at the dawn of the new world.

But let us cease anticipating and turn to present events : the West is undeniably encroaching everywhere ; its influence first made itself felt in the material domain, since this comes most directly within its reach, working through conquest by violence or through commerce and by securing control over the resources of other countries ; but now things are going still further. The Westerners, always animated by that need for proselytism which is so exclusively theirs, have succeeded to a certain extent in intro-

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

ducing their own anti-traditional and materialistic outlook among other peoples ; and whereas the first form of invasion after all only affected men's bodies, this newer form poisons their minds and kills all spirituality. In point of fact, it was the first kind of invasion that made the second one possible, so that it is ultimately only by brute force that the West has succeeded in imposing itself upon the rest of the world, as, indeed, must necessarily be the case, since in this sphere lies the sole real superiority of its civilization, so inferior from every other point of view. The Western encroachment is the encroachment of materialism under all its guises and cannot be other than this ; none of the more or less hypocritical veils, none of the moralist pretexts, none of the humanitarian declamations, none of the wiles of a propaganda that knows how to become insinuating on occasion, the better to attain its destructive ends, nothing can gainsay this truth, which could only be disputed by the gullible or by those who have some interest to serve in a work that is truly "satanic" in the strictest sense of the word.¹

It is an extraordinary thing that the moment when Western encroachment is penetrating everywhere is just the moment chosen by certain persons to raise a cry against the peril, dreadful for them, of a supposed

¹ *Satan*, in Hebrew, is the "adversary," that is to say he who reverses all things and turns them, so to speak, upside down, this spirit of negation and subversion is identical with the downward or "debasing" tendency, "infernal" in the etymological meaning of the word, which governs beings in this process of materialization upon which the whole development of modern civilization is based

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

infiltration of Eastern ideas into the West ; what new aberration can this be ? Despite the wish to confine ourselves to considerations of a general order, we cannot avoid saying at least a few words here about a *Défense de l'Occident* recently published by M. Henri Massis, which is one of the most characteristic manifestations of this frame of mind. It is a book full of confusions and even of contradictions, and shows once more how incapable most of those who seek to react against the modern disorder are of doing so in a really effective way, since they are not even very clear as to what they are fighting against. The author at times disclaims the intention of attacking the real East ; and if he had in fact confined himself to a criticism of "pseudo-oriental" fantasies, that is to say of purely Western theories that are being spread abroad under deceptive names and that are merely one of the many products of the present disequilibrium, this could only meet with our full approval, especially as we have ourselves drawn attention to the real danger of this sort of thing, as well as to its inanity from the intellectual point of view. Unfortunately however, he does not stop there, but feels the need to attribute to the East conceptions scarcely better than these, and, to do so, he relies upon quotations taken from certain more or less "official" orientalists, in which the Eastern doctrines are, as usually happens, deformed to the point of caricature. What would he say if somebody were to adopt the same method in dealing with Christianity and claim to judge it on the basis of the works of the university "hypercritics ?" This is exactly what he does

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

with the doctrines of India and China, with the aggravating circumstance that the Westerners whose testimony he produces have not the slightest direct knowledge of these doctrines, whereas their fellow-critics who occupy themselves with Christianity must at least be familiar with it to a certain extent, even if their hostility towards all that has to do with religion prevents them from really understanding it. Moreover we must add in this connection that we have sometimes found it hard to convince Orientals that the studies of some orientalist or other were the outcome of incomprehension pure and simple and not of a conscious and deliberate bias, so imbued are these writings with that same hostility which is inherent in the anti-traditional outlook, and we might well ask M. Massis whether he really considers it advisable to attack tradition abroad while striving to restore it at home. We say "advisable," because the whole discussion is, for him, really placed within the realm of politics; since we take a different point of view, that of pure intellectuality, the only question that matters to us is that of truth; but such a point of view is doubtless too high and too serene for polemists to find any satisfaction in it, and it is even doubtful whether, in their capacity as controversialists, the truth can concern them very much.¹

M. Massis attacks what he calls "Eastern propa-

¹ We know that M. Massis is not unacquainted with our works, but he carefully avoids making the least allusion to them, since they would tell against his thesis, this procedure is, to say the least, lacking in frankness. However, such an omission is not without advantages, as it prevents things that should, by their very nature, remain above all discussion being dragged into displeasing polemics, there is always something distressing in the sight of profane incomprehension, even though the truth of the sacred doctrine is, in itself, too lofty to be reached by its assaults.

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

gandists," an expression which is itself a contradiction in terms, since, as we have said often enough, the lust for propaganda is a purely Western thing ; and this alone shows that there is some misunderstanding. In fact, among the propagandists he has in mind, we can distinguish two groups, and the first of them is exclusively composed of Westerners ; to see Germans and Russians included among the representatives of the Eastern outlook would be truly ludicrous if it were not a sign of the most deplorable ignorance of all that concerns the East ; some of the observations made by the author concerning this group are very appropriate, but why does he not show them up openly for what they really are ? To this first group should also be added the Anglo-Saxon " theosophists " and all the inventors of other sects of the same kind, whose oriental terminology is no more than a mask serving to impose upon the gullible and ill-informed, and concealing ideas no less foreign to the East than they are dear to the modern West. People of this sort are more dangerous than mere philosophers, owing to their pretensions to an esotericism they do not possess any more than the philosophers, but which they simulate fraudulently in order to attract persons who are in search of something better than " profane " speculations and who, in the midst of the present chaos, do not know where to turn , we are rather surprised that M. Massis scarcely mentions them. As to the second group, we find in it several of the Westernised Orientals to whom we referred above ; such people are as ignorant of real Eastern ideas as are the first group, and they would therefore be quite incapable of spreading them in the

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

West even should they wish to do so. As a matter of fact, the aim they really set themselves is just the opposite of this, since they wish to destroy these very ideas in the East, and, at the same time, to exhibit to the West their modernised East made to conform to the theories that have been instilled into them in Europe and America. Avowed agents, as they are, of the most baneful of all forms of Western propaganda, bearing as it does directly on the intelligence, they are a danger only to the East, not to the West of which they are a mere reflection. Of the real Orientals, M. Massis does not mention a single one, and he would have found it very hard to do so, for he certainly does not know any, his total inability to cite the name of any Oriental who was not Westernised should have given him cause for thought and made him understand that "Eastern propagandists" do not in fact exist.

Furthermore, although this compels us to speak personally, which we are not in the habit of doing, the following formal declaration is necessary: so far as we are aware there is no one else who has expounded authentic Eastern ideas in the West; and we have always done so exactly as any Oriental would have done in the same circumstances, that is to say without the slightest intention of propaganda or popularisation, and exclusively for the sake of those who are capable of understanding the doctrines as they are, without having recourse to any distortion so as to bring them within their reach; and we may add that despite the decline of intellectuality in the West, those who understand, though obviously only a small minority, are nevertheless not so few as

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

might have been expected. Such an undertaking is certainly not of the kind imagined by M. Massis—we do not presume to say out of zeal for his cause, though the political character of his book would justify the words ; instead, in order to be as kind as possible, we suggest that his mind is troubled by fear born of a foreboding that Western civilization is near its end, and this, it seems, has put the idea of the existence of an “ Eastern propaganda ” into his head. But we may also regret that he has been unable to see clearly where the real causes lie that may bring about this collapse, even though he does at times show a just severity towards certain aspects of the modern world. Indeed, it is this uncertainty that accounts for the constant shifting of his argument ; on the one hand, he is not quite sure who are the adversaries he has to fight against, and, on the other hand, his “ traditionalism ” leaves him very ignorant of all that constitutes the real essence of tradition, so that he obviously confuses tradition with a sort of politico-religious conservatism of the most outward kind.

The best proof that M. Massis's mind is disturbed by fear is the extraordinary and altogether incredible attitude that he ascribes to these so-called “ Eastern propagandists.” He would have us believe that they are animated by a savage hatred of the West, and that it is only to injure the West that they are striving to impart their own doctrines to her, that is to say to bestow on her the most precious thing they possess, which constitutes, in a way, the very essence of their spirit ! One is reduced to a state of bewilderment by the sheer contradictoriness of such a

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

hypothesis : the whole laboriously erected argument crumbles in a moment, yet it would seem that the author has not even perceived this, for we are loth to suppose that he can have been aware of all the improbability of such a theory and simply counted on his readers' lack of insight to make them believe it. A little elementary reflection should be enough to make it plain that the first thing for Orientals to do, if they hated the West so violently, would be to guard their doctrines jealously for their own exclusive use, and that all their efforts would be towards denying the Westerners access to them ; indeed, this is a reproach that has sometimes been levelled against the Orientals, and with more appearance of justification. The truth, however, is rather different : the authentic representatives of the Eastern doctrines feel hatred for nobody, and there is only one reason for their reserve : it is that they consider it utterly useless to display certain truths before those who are incapable of understanding them ; but they have never refused to make them known to those who possess the necessary "qualifications," whatever may be their place of origin ; is it their fault if, among such, there are very few Westerners ? And, at the same time, if the mass of Orientals have come at last to be really hostile to the Westerners, after having long regarded them with indifference, whose fault is it ? Must one blame the elect, who, given over to intellectual contemplation, hold themselves strictly aloof from all outward agitation, or is it not rather the fault of the Westerners themselves, who have done everything to make their presence odious and intolerable ? As soon as the question is thus put

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

as it should be, the answer becomes clear to everybody, and even if one admit that the Orientals, who have hitherto given evidence of incredible patience, show at last a desire to be masters in their own home, who can bring himself honestly to blame them? It is true that when certain passions come into play the same things can be appreciated in a very different and even quite contrary sense according to the circumstances : so, for instance, when a Western people resists a foreign invasion, this is called "patriotism" and merits the highest praise, but when an Eastern people does so it is called "fanaticism" or "xenophobia" and merits nothing but hatred and contempt. So also, is it not in the name of "Right" and "Liberty," of "Justice" and "Civilization" that the Europeans claim to impose their domination on all others and to forbid anyone to live and think otherwise than they do themselves? It cannot be denied that moralism is a truly remarkable thing, at least unless one prefers to conclude, as we do, that, save for exceptions as honourable as they are rare, there remain in the West really only two kinds of people, neither of them very interesting : the gullible, who take these big words at their face value and believe in their "civilizing mission," completely unaware of the materialist barbarism in which they are sunk, and the guileful, who exploit this state of mind to gratify their instincts of violence and cupidity. In any case one thing is certain and that is that the Orientals are a menace to nobody and do not dream of invading the West in any way whatsoever : they have enough to do for the moment in defending

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

themselves against European oppression, which threatens now to assail even their minds ; and it is curious, to say the least, to see the aggressors taking up the pose of victims.

This clarification was necessary, for there are things which needed to be said , but we should hold it a waste of time to dwell at any greater length on this theme, for the argument of the " defenders of the West " is really far too flimsy and inconsistent. Moreover, if we have momentarily abandoned our usual attitude of reserve towards individuals in order to quote M. Henri Massis, it is mainly because, in the circumstances, he represents one part of the contemporary mentality, a part which must also be taken into account in the present study of the state of the modern world. How can this traditionalism of a lower order, with its narrow horizons and lack of understanding, perhaps even to a large extent artificial, offer any real and efficacious resistance to an outlook so many of whose prejudices it shares ? Both outlooks imply very much the same ignorance of true principles , there is the same biassed denial of everything that surpasses a certain limit, the same inability to understand the existence of different civilizations and the same superstition of Græco-Latin classicism. This inadequate reaction has no other interest for us than that it shows a certain dissatisfaction with the present state of things among some of our contemporaries. There are, moreover, other manifestations of the same dissatisfaction that might prove capable of going farther if they were guided aright ; but for the time being all this is very chaotic, and it is still very difficult to say what will come of it. Certain

WESTERN ENCROACHMENT

predictions on this point may nevertheless be of use, and, as they bear directly on the destiny of the present world, they can serve at the same time to conclude the present work, so far as it is possible to draw conclusions without giving "profane" ignorance an easy opening for attack by imprudently developing considerations that it would be impossible to justify in the ordinary ways. We are not one of those who think that all things can be spoken of indiscriminately, at least when one leaves pure doctrine and passes on to its applications ; certain reservations are necessary, and there are questions of opportunity that cannot be overlooked. But this rightful and even indispensable reserve has nothing in common with certain puerile fears that are but the outcome of ignorance, comparable to the terror of the man in the Hindu proverb who " mistakes a rope for a snake." Whether people like it or not, what should be said will be said as circumstances dictate ; neither the self-interested efforts of some people nor the unconscious hostility of others can prevent this, nor, on the other hand, will the impatience of those who are caught up by the feverish hurry of the modern world, and who would like to know everything at once, cause certain things to be made known before their proper time. But the latter can at least console themselves with the thought that the ever increasing speed of events will doubtless satisfy their desires before long ; may they then not come to regret having insufficiently prepared themselves to receive knowledge that they have sought for with enthusiasm more often than with true discernment.

CHAPTER IX

SOME CONCLUSIONS

OUR chief purpose in this work has been to show how it is possible, by the application of traditional data, to find the most direct solution to the questions that are being asked nowadays, to explain the present state of mankind, and at the same time to judge all that really makes up modern civilization in accordance with truth instead of by conventional rules or sentimental preferences. We make no claim to have exhausted the subject or treated it in full detail, nor to have developed all its aspects completely without omissions. The principles that inspire us throughout make it necessary, in any case, to put forward views which are essentially synthetic and not analytical, as are those of "profane" learning ; but just because these views are synthetic, they go much farther in the direction of a true explanation than could any analysis, which, indeed, can scarcely have more than a merely descriptive value. At least we consider that enough has been said to enable those who are capable of understanding to deduce for themselves a part at least of the consequences contained implicitly therein ; and they can rest assured that the work of doing so will be of far more value to them than reading something that leaves no matter for reflection and meditation, for which, on the con-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

trary, we have sought to provide an appropriate starting point, that is to say a foundation from which to rise above the meaningless multitude of individual opinions.

It still remains to speak briefly of what might be called the practical bearing of such a study ; this could be passed over or ignored if we had confined ourselves to purely metaphysical doctrine, in relation to which no application is more than contingent and accidental ; but in the present study applications are just the thing with which we are concerned. These have, moreover, a twofold justification, quite apart from the practical point of view : they are the legitimate consequence of the principles, the normal development of a doctrine which, as it is one and universal, must embrace all orders of reality without exception ; and at the same time, as we explained when speaking of " sacred science," they also form, at least for some persons, a preparatory means of attaining to a higher knowledge. Furthermore, when in the realm of applications, there is no harm in considering these for their own sake as well, provided in so doing one is never led into losing sight of their dependence on the principles. This last is a very real danger, since it is indeed the source of the degeneracy that made " profane science " possible, but it does not exist for those who know that everything derives from and is altogether dependent on pure intellectuality, and consequently that anything which does not proceed consciously from it can be no more than mere illusion. As we have said many times already, the starting point of

SOME CONCLUSIONS

everything should be knowledge ; and thus what appears the most remote from the practical order is nevertheless the most potent even within this order, since it is impossible, here as everywhere else, to accomplish without it anything of real value or anything that will prove more than a vain and superficial agitation. But to return more particularly to the question that concerns us here, it may be said that the modern world would cease to exist at once if men understood what it really is, since its existence, like that of ignorance and all that implies limitation, is purely negative : it exists only through negation of the traditional and superhuman truth. Thus, through knowledge, the change could be brought about without the intervention of a catastrophe, a thing that seems scarcely possible in any other way ; is it not right, then, to say that such knowledge can have truly incalculable practical consequences ? At the same time, however, it is unfortunately very difficult to conceive of all men attaining to such knowledge, from which most of them are further removed than was ever the case before , but as a matter of fact, it is quite unnecessary for them to do so and it would be enough if there were a numerically small but powerfully established elect to guide the masses, who would obey their suggestions without even suspecting their existence or having any idea of their means of action ; is it still possible for this elect to be effectively established in the West ?

We do not intend to repeat here all that we have already had occasion to say elsewhere as to the part that the intellectual elect will have to play in the various

SOME CONCLUSIONS

circumstances that can be regarded as possible in a not too distant future. We will confine ourself to saying this : in whatever way the change, which may be described as a passage from one world to another, may come about—whether these “ worlds ” be larger or smaller cycles does not matter—it can never involve absolute discontinuity, since there is always a causal chain linking the cycles together, even though the change may have the appearance of an abrupt breach. If the elect of which we spoke could be formed while there is still time, they could so prepare the change that it would take place in the most favourable conditions possible, and the disturbances that must inevitably accompany it would in this way be reduced to a minimum, but even if they cannot do this, they will still have before them another yet more important task, that of helping to preserve the elements which must survive from the present world to be used in building up the one that is to follow. Once one knows that a re-ascent must come, even though it may prove impossible to prevent the downward movement first ending in some cataclysm, there is clearly no reason for waiting until the descent has reached its nadir before preparing the way for the re-ascent. This means that whatever may happen the work done will not be wasted : it cannot be useless in so far as the benefit that the elect will draw from it for themselves is concerned, but neither will it be wasted in so far as concerns its later effects on mankind as a whole.

The question, then, should be viewed in this way : the elect still exists in the Eastern civilizations, and

SOME CONCLUSIONS

granting that it is becoming less and less numerous owing to modernist encroachments, it will nevertheless continue to exist until the end, because this is necessary in order to safeguard the "ark" of the tradition, which cannot perish, and to ensure the transmission of all that is to be preserved. In the West, on the other hand, the elect now no longer exists, the question may be asked, therefore, whether it will be reconstituted before the end of our epoch, that is to say whether the Western world, despite its deviation, will take part in this work of preservation and transmission. If not, the result will be that Western civilization will have to disappear completely, since, having lost all trace of the traditional spirit, it will no longer contain any element that is of use for the future. The question, thus framed, may have only a very secondary importance in so far as the final result is concerned; it has, nevertheless, from a relative point of view, a certain interest that cannot be overlooked once we consent to take into consideration the particular conditions of the times in which we are living. In principle, it would be sufficient to remark that this Western world is a part of the whole, even though it seems to have broken away since the beginning of modern times, and that all parts must to a certain extent contribute towards the ultimate reintegration of the cycle. But this does not necessarily involve a preliminary restoration of the Western tradition, which, indeed, may be preserved only in a state of permanent possibility at its source and not in the special form that it has taken on at any time. We merely indicate this

SOME CONCLUSIONS

in passing, for, in order to make it fully understandable, it would be necessary to branch off into considerations affecting the relations between the Primordial Tradition and the subordinate traditions, for which there is no place here. Considered in itself this would be the most unfavourable solution for the Western world, but the present state of things in the West gives rise to the fear that it is the one which is actually being realised ; however, there are, as we have said, certain signs which seem to show that all hope of a better solution need not yet be quite abandoned.

There are at present more people in the West than one might suppose who are beginning to see what is wanting in their civilization ; if they fall back on vague aspirations and embark on research that is too often barren, and if they sometimes even lose their way altogether, it is because they lack real knowledge, which nothing can replace, and because there is no organisation that can give them the doctrinal guidance they need. We do not refer here, of course, to those who have succeeded in finding such guidance in the Eastern traditions and who are therefore, intellectually, outside the Western world ; such persons must necessarily remain exceptional cases and cannot in any way form an integral part of a Western elect ; they are, in reality, a prolongation of the Eastern elects and might form a link between these and that of the West once this was really established ; but the latter, by very definition, can only be established through the initiative of the West, and therein lies the whole difficulty. This

SOME CONCLUSIONS

initiative could come in one of two ways only : either the West would have to find in itself the means of bringing it about through a direct return to its own tradition, a return which would be a sort of spontaneous re-awakening of latent possibilities ; or certain Western elements would have to bring about this restoration with the help afforded by a knowledge of the Eastern doctrines, which, however, could not for them be quite direct, since they would have to remain Westerners, but which could be obtained by a sort of second-hand influence working through intermediaries such as those of whom we have just spoken. The first of these two hypotheses is very unlikely, since it depends on the existence in the West of at least one rallying point where the traditional spirit has been preserved intact, and as we have already said, this seems to us very doubtful, notwithstanding certain affirmations to the contrary ; it is therefore the second hypothesis that needs to be examined more closely.

In this case it would be better, although not absolutely necessary, for the elect to be able to take as its basis a Western organization already enjoying an effective existence. It seems quite clear that there is now but one organization in the West that is of a traditional character and that has preserved a doctrine which could serve as an appropriate basis for the work in question, and this organization is the Catholic Church. It would be enough to restore to the doctrine of the Church, without changing anything of the religious form that it bears outwardly, the deeper meaning really contained in it, but of which its present representatives seem to

SOME CONCLUSIONS

be unaware, just as they are unaware of its essential unity with the other traditional forms , these two things are, as a matter of fact, inseparable from one another. This would mean the realization of Catholicism in the true sense of the word, which etymologically expresses the idea of " universality," a fact that is too apt to be forgotten by those who seek to make of it no more than the denomination of one special and purely Western form, without any real connection with the other traditions. Indeed it may be said that in the present state of things, Catholicism has no more than a virtual existence, since we do not see in it any real consciousness of universality ; but it is none the less true that the existence of an organization bearing such a name is in itself an indication that there is a possible basis for a restoration of the traditional spirit in its fullest sense, the more so because throughout the Middle Ages it has already served as a support for it in the West. Really, therefore, all that would be necessary would be to re-establish what already existed prior to the modern deviation, though with the adaptations called for by the conditions of another period ; and if such an idea astonishes or offends certain people, it is because they themselves, though unconsciously and perhaps even against their will, are so completely governed by the modern outlook as to have quite forgotten the meaning of a tradition of which they retain only the outer shell. The important question is whether the formalism of the " letter," which is also a variety of materialism as we have defined it earlier on, has utterly smothered spirituality or only temporarily

SOME CONCLUSIONS

overshadowed it, leaving the possibility of a re-awakening within the existing organization ; only the course of events will give an answer to this question.

It is possible, moreover, that this same course of events might sooner or later force on the leaders of the Catholic Church, as an unavoidable necessity, a decision whose intellectual import they would be far from properly understanding. It would certainly be matter for regret if they should be driven to reflection by circumstances as contingent as those springing from the field of politics—so long, that is, as this is considered apart from any higher principle. But at the same time, it must be admitted that the opportunity for the development of latent possibilities must be accorded to each person through those means that fall the most immediately within the scope of his present understanding. For this reason, we do not hesitate to assert, in view of the ever increasing state of confusion that is becoming more and more widespread, that it has become necessary to call for the union of all the spiritual forces whose action still makes itself felt in the outer world, as well in the West as in the East ; and so far as the West is concerned, we can see no other such force than the Catholic Church. If the latter could thus be brought into touch with the representatives of the Eastern traditions, it would be a preliminary step we could not but rejoice at, and might serve as the starting point for what we have in mind, inasmuch as it would doubtless not be long before it became apparent that a merely outward and “ diplomatic ” understanding was illusory and

SOME CONCLUSIONS

could not yield the desired results ; it would then become necessary to pass on to what should normally have come first, that is to considering a possible agreement on principles. For this agreement the essential and only essential condition is for the representatives of the West to return to a real consciousness of these principles, which the East has never lost. A true mutual understanding, be it said once more, can come only from above and within, which means that it must be in the domain which can equally well be called intellectual or spiritual, since the two words really bear exactly the same meaning ; later, and starting from this point, the understanding would be bound to extend over all other domains, just as, once a principle is enunciated, it only remains to extract, or rather to make more explicit, all the consequences implied therein. There can only be one obstacle in the way of such an understanding : that is Western proselytism, which cannot bring itself to admit that it is sometimes necessary to have "allies" who are not "subjects" ; to put it more correctly, the obstacle is the lack of understanding of which this proselytism is only one of the products ; can this obstacle be overcome ? If it were not, the elect, in establishing themselves, would be able to count only on the efforts of those who were qualified by their intellectual capacity, apart from any particular environment, and also, of course, on the support of the East ; its work would thereby be made more difficult and its influence could only make itself felt after a long interval, as it would itself have to create all the necessary instru-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

ments, instead of finding them ready to hand, as in the other case ; but we are far from supposing that these difficulties, however great they may be, are of a kind that could in any way whatsoever prevent the work that has to be done.

We therefore consider it opportune to make also the following statement : there are now already, in the Western world, signs of a movement which is still ill-defined but which may, and even, if things take their normal course, must lead to the re-establishment of an intellectual elect, unless a cataclysm comes too quickly for it to have had time to develop fully. It is scarcely necessary to say that the Church would have every interest, so far as the part to be played by it in the future is concerned, in giving its support to such a movement rather than letting it take place quite independently and being obliged later on to follow it in order to retain an influence that threatened to melt away. Without attaining to a very lofty and difficult standpoint it can be understood that it is the Church that would benefit the most by an attitude which, in fact, far from involving the slightest compromise in the field of doctrine, would have the contrary result of freeing it from all infiltration of the modern spirit, and which, moreover, would entail no outward changes. It would be something of a paradox to see integral Catholicism realized without the collaboration of the Catholic Church, which might find itself under the strange necessity of submitting to be defended against onslaughts more terrible than any it has yet faced,

SOME CONCLUSIONS

by men whom its leaders, or at any rate those whom they allow to speak in their name, had at first tried to discredit by casting on them the most ill-founded suspicions. For our own part, we should be sorry to see this happen ; but if it is not to come to this, it is high time for those on whom their position places grave responsibilities to act with their eyes fully open to the matters at issue and no longer to allow attempts which might have consequences of the utmost importance to run the danger of frustration owing to the incomprehension or ill-will of certain more or less subordinate individuals, a thing which has happened before now, and which is one more sign of the extent to which confusion reigns everywhere to-day. Doubtless we shall receive no gratitude for this warning, which is given quite independently and disinterestedly ; but this is of no importance, and we shall continue none the less to say what has to be said whenever it becomes necessary and in the form that we consider most suited to the circumstances. The foregoing is only a summary of the conclusions to which we have been led by certain quite recent investigations, carried out, it is scarcely necessary to add, in a purely intellectual field. There is no need, at least for the moment, to give a detailed description of them, and as a matter of fact this could have little interest in itself ; but it may be affirmed that not a single word of what has been said above has been written without ample reflection. It should be clearly understood that it would be utterly useless to put forward here by way of objection any more or less specious

SOME CONCLUSIONS

philosophical arguments ; we are speaking seriously of serious matters, and have no time to spend over verbal disputes that would be of no interest and could serve no useful purpose. Moreover it is our intention to remain entirely aloof from all controversies and quarrels of school or party, just as we refuse absolutely to accept any Western "label" or definition, since there is none applicable ; whether this prove pleasing or displeasing, it is a fact, and nothing will make us change our attitude in this regard.

A warning must also be addressed to those who, through their capacity for a higher understanding if not through the degree of knowledge to which they have actually attained, seem destined to become elements of a possible elect. There is no doubt that the force of modernism, which is truly "diabolic" in every sense of the word, strives by every means within its power to prevent these elements, to-day isolated and scattered, from achieving the cohesion that is necessary if they are to exert any real influence on the general mentality. It is therefore for those who have already more or less completely become aware of the end towards which their efforts should be directed to stand firm against the difficulties, whatever they may be, that arise in their path and threaten to turn them aside. Those who have not yet reached the point beyond which an infallible guidance makes it impossible henceforth to stray from the true path, remain always in danger of the most serious deviations ; they need to display the utmost prudence ; we may even go further and say that

SOME CONCLUSIONS

it should be carried to the point of distrust, for the "adversary," who up to this point has not yet been definitely overcome, can take on the most varied and, at times, the most unexpected forms. It happens that those who think they have escaped from modern materialism fall a prey to things which, while seemingly opposed to it, are really of the same order ; and in view of the turn of mind of modern Westerners, a special warning needs to be uttered against the attraction that more or less extraordinary phenomena may hold out for them , it is this attraction that is to a large extent responsible for all the errors of " neo-spiritualism " and it is to be foreseen that the dangers it represents will grow still worse, for the forces of darkness that keep alive the present confusion find in it one of their most potent instruments. It is even probable that we are not very far from the time referred to by the prophecy of the Gospel to which we have already alluded elsewhere : " For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect." The " elect " here referred to is the elect in the fullness of its real meaning, according to the sense in which we have invariably used the word, those who, in virtue of the inner " realization " they have achieved, can no longer be seduced ; but this is not the case with those who, as yet, possess in themselves only the possibilities of knowledge, and who are therefore, properly speaking, only the " called " ; and this is why the Gospels say that " many are called but few are chosen." We are entering upon a period when it will be extremely

SOME CONCLUSIONS

difficult to "separate the chaff from the grain" and carry out effectively what theologians call the "testing of the spirits", owing to disordered manifestations that will only grow stronger and more frequent, and also owing to the want of true knowledge on the part of those whose normal function should be to guide the rest, but who to-day are too often nothing but "blind guides." We shall see then whether the subtleties of dialectic avail anything in such circumstances, and whether any philosophy, even were it the best possible, can have the strength to prevent the "infernal powers" from being let loose; this also is an illusion against which some people need to guard, for it is too often supposed, in ignorance of what pure intellectuality really is, that a merely philosophical knowledge, which even in the best of cases is a bare shadow of true knowledge, can put everything to rights and lead back the contemporary mentality from its deviation; in the same way, there are those who think they can find in modern science itself a means of raising themselves to the higher truths, whereas this science is in fact founded on the negation of these truths. All these illusions are so many influences leading people astray, and by means of them many of those who sincerely desire to react against the modern outlook are reduced to impotence, since, having failed to find the essential principles without which all action is absolutely vain, they have been swept aside into blind alleys from which there is no hope of escape.

Doubtless, the number will be small of those who will succeed in overcoming all these obstacles and triumph-

SOME CONCLUSIONS

ing over the hostility of an environment opposed to all spirituality , but let it be said once more, it is not numbers that matter, for we are here in a domain whose laws are quite different from those of matter. There is therefore no cause for despair, and, even were there no hope of achieving any visible result before the modern world collapses under some catastrophe, this would still be no valid reason for not undertaking a work whose scope extends far beyond the present time. Those who might be tempted to give way to despair should realise that nothing accomplished in this order can ever be lost, that confusion, error and darkness can win the day only apparently and in a purely ephemeral way, that all partial and transitory disequilibriums must perforce contribute towards the great equilibrium of the whole, and that nothing can ultimately prevail against the power of truth ; their device should be that used formerly by certain initiatory organizations of the West : *Vincit omnia Veritas.*

BERSERKER

BOOKS

