

CIVILIZATION AND PROGRESS

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The civilization of the modern West appears in history as a veritable anomaly: among all those which are known to us more or less completely, this civilization is the only one which has developed along purely material lines, and this monstrous development, whose beginning coincides with the so-called Renaissance, has been accompanied, as indeed it was fated to be, by a corresponding intellectual regress; we say corresponding and not equivalent, because here are two orders of things between which there can be no common measure. This regress has reached such a point that the Westerners of to-day no longer know what pure intellect is; in fact they do not even suspect that anything of the kind can exist; hence their disdain, not only for eastern civilization, but also for the Middle Ages of Europe; whose spirit escapes them scarcely less completely. How is the interest of a purely speculative knowledge to be brought home to people for whom intelligence is nothing but a means of acting on matter and turning it to practical ends, and for whom science, in their limited understanding of it, is above all important in so far as it may be applied to industrial purposes? We exaggerate nothing; it only needs a glance at one's surroundings to realize that this is indeed the mentality of the vast majority of our contemporaries; and another glance, this time at philosophy from Francis Bacon and Descartes onwards, could only confirm this impression still further. We will mention, by way of reminder, that Descartes limited intelligence to reason, that he granted to what he thought might be called "metaphysics" the mere function of serving as a basis for physics, and that this physics itself was by its very nature destined, in his eyes, to pave the way for the applied sciences, mechanical, medicinal and moral, the final limit of human knowledge as he conceived it. Are not the tendencies which he so affirmed just those which at the first glance may be seen to characterize the whole development of the modern

world? To deny or to ignore all pure and super-rational knowledge was to open up the path which logically could only lead on the one hand to positivism and agnosticism, which resign them-selves to the narrowest limitations of intelligence and of its objects, and on the other hand to all those sentimental and “voluntarist” theories which feverishly seek in the infra-rational for what reason cannot give them. Indeed, those of our contemporaries who wish to react against rationalism accept none the less the complete identification of intelligence with mere reason, and they believe that it is nothing more than a purely practical faculty, incapable of going beyond the realm of matter. Bergson has written as follows: “Intelligence, considered in what seems to be its original feature, is the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, in particular tools to make tools (sic), and of indefinitely varying the manufacture.”¹ And again: “Intelligence, even when it no longer operates upon its own object (i.e., brute matter), follows habits it has contracted in that operation: it applies forms that are indeed those of inorganized matter. It is made for this kind of work. With this kind of work alone is it fully satisfied. And that is what intelligence expresses by saying that thus only it arrives at distinctness and clearness.”² From these last features it becomes obvious that there is no question here of intelligence itself, but quite simply of the Cartesian conception of intelligence, which is very different: and the “new philosophy,” as its adherents call it, substitutes for the superstition of reason another which is in some respects still grosser, namely, the superstition of life. Rationalism, though powerless to attain to absolute truth, at least allowed relative truth to subsist; the intuitionism of today lowers that truth to be nothing more than a representation of sensible reality, in all its inconsistency and ceaseless change; finally, pragmatism succeeds in blotting out altogether the very notion of truth by identifying it with that of utility, which amounts to suppressing it purely and simply. We may have tabulated things a little here, but we have not falsified them in the least, and whatever may have been the intermediate stages, the fundamental

¹ Creative Evolution, p. 146, in the English translation of Arthur Mitchell

² Ibid., p. 169.

tendencies are indeed those which we have just stated; the pragmatists, in going to the limit, show themselves to be the most authentic representatives of modern western thought: what does the truth matter in a world whose aspirations, being solely material and sentimental and not intellectual, find complete satisfaction in industry and morality, two spheres where indeed one can very well do without conceiving the truth? To be sure, this extremity was not reached at a single stride, and many Europeans will protest that they have not reached it yet; but we are thinking particularly of the Americans, who are at a more “advanced” stage of the same civilization. Mentally as well as geographically, modern America is indeed the “Far West”; and Europe will follow, without any doubt, if nothing comes to stop the development of the consequences implied in the present state of things.

But most extraordinary of all is perhaps the claim to set up this abnormal civilization as the very type of all civilization, to regard it as Civilization with a capital letter, and even as the only one which deserves the name. Extraordinary too, and also complementary to this illusion, is the belief in “progress,” considered no less absolutely, and naturally identified, at heart, with this material development which absorbs the entire activity of the modern West. It is curious to note how promptly and successfully certain ideas come to spread and impose themselves, provided, of course, that they correspond to the general tendencies of the particular environment and epoch; it is so with these ideas of “civilization” and “progress,” which so many people willingly believe universal and necessary, whereas in reality they have been quite recently invented and, even to-day, at least three-quarters of mankind persist either in being ignorant of them or in considering them quite negligible. Mr. Jacques Bainville has remarked that “if the verb civilize is already found to have been used by the good authors of the XVIIIth century in the sense which we give it, the noun civilization is only to be met with in the economists of the years which immediately preceded the French Revolution. Littré’ quotes an example taken from Turgot Littré’, who had ransacked all French literature, could not trace it any further back. Thus the

word civilization has no more than a century and a half of existence. It was only in 1835, less than a hundred years ago, that it finally found its way into the dictionary of the Academy... The ancients, from whom we still consciously trace our descent, were equally without a term for what we mean by civilization. If this word were given to be translated in a Latin prose, the school-boy would indeed find himself in difficulties... The life of words is not independent of the life of ideas. The word civilization, which our ancestors did very well without, perhaps because they had the thing itself, spread during the XIXth century under the influence of new ideas. The scientific discoveries, the development of industry, of commerce, of prosperity and of material welfare, had created a kind of enthusiasm and even a kind of prophetic. The conception of indefinite progress, dating from the second half of the XVIIIth century, helped to convince mankind that it had entered upon a new era, that of absolute civilization. It is the now quite forgotten Fourier, an utter Utopian, who was responsible for first calling the present age the age of civilization, and for identifying civilization with modern times----so civilization was the degree of development and perfection which the nations of Europe had reached in the XIXth century. This term, understood by everyone, although no one had defined it, included material and moral progress side by side, the one bringing with it the other, the one united to the other, both inseparable. In a word, civilization was Europe itself, it was a patent which the European world granted itself.”³ This is exactly what we think yourself; and we were bent on making this quotation, although it is rather long, to show that we are not alone in thinking so.

These two ideas, then, of “civilization” and “progress,” which are very closely connected, both date only from the second half of the XVIIIth century, that is to say from the epoch which saw, amongst other things, the birth of materialism;⁴ and they were propagated and popularized especially by

³ L'Avenir de la Civilisation: Revue Universelle, iermars 1922, pp. 586-587.

⁴ The word “materialism” was invented by Berkeley, who only used it to design belief in the

the socialist dreamers of the beginning of the XIXth century. It cannot be denied that the history of ideas leads sometimes to rather surprising observations, and helps to reduce certain fantastic ideas to their proper value; it would do so more than ever if it were not, as is moreover the case with ordinary history, falsified by biased interpretations, or limited to efforts of mere scholarship and to pointless research into questions of detail. True history might endanger certain political interests; and it may be wondered if this is not the reason, where education is concerned, why certain methods are officially imposed to the exclusion of all others: consciously or not, they begin by removing everything that might make it possible to see certain things clearly, and that is how "public opinion" is formed. But to go back to two ideas that we have just been speaking of, let us make it quite clear that in giving them so close an origin we have in mind simply this absolute, and, as we think, illusory, interpretation, which is the one most usually given them to-day. As for the relative meaning in which the same words may be used, that is quite another question, and as this meaning is very legitimate, there can be no question here of ideas which originated at some definite moment; it matters little that they may have been expressed-in one way or another and, if a term, is convenient, it is not because of its recent creation that we see disadvantages in using it. Thus we do not hesitate to say that there have been and still are many different "civilizations"; it would be rather hard to define exactly this complex assemblage of elements of different orders which make up what is called a civilization, but none the less everyone knows fairly well what is to be understood by it. We do not even think that it is necessary to try to enclose in a rigid formula the general characteristics of civilization as a whole, or the special characteristics of some particular civilization; that is a somewhat artificial process, and we greatly distrust these narrow "pigeon-holes" that the systematic turn of mind delights in. Just as there are "civilizations," there are also, during the development of each of them, or for

reality of matter; materialism in its modern sense, that is to say the theory that nothing exists but matter, originates only with La Mettrie and Holbach; it should not be confused with mechanism, several examples of which are to be found even among the ancients.

certain more or less limited periods of this development, “progresses” which far from influencing everything indiscriminately, affect only this or that particular domain; in fact this is only another way of saying that a civilization develops along certain lines and in a certain direction ;but just as there are progresses, there are also regresses, and sometimes the two are brought about at one and the same time in different domains. We insist then that all this is eminently relative; if the same words are accepted in an absolute sense they no longer correspond to any reality, and it is then that they come to represent these new ideas which have existed for barely a century and a half and then only in the West. Certainly “Progress” and “Civilization,” with capital letters, may be very effective in certain sentences, as hollow as they are rhetorical, most suitable for imposing on a mob, for which words are rather a substitute for thought than a means of expressing it ; thus it is that these two words play one of the most important parts in the battery of formulae which those “in control” to-day use to accomplish their strange task of collective suggestion without which the mentality that is characteristic of modern times would indeed be short-lived. In this respect we doubt whether enough notice has ever been given to the analogy, which is none the less striking, between, for example, the actions of the orator and the hypnotist (and that of the tamer belongs equally to the same class) ; here is another subject for the psychologist to study, and we call their attention to it in passing. No doubt the power of words has been more or less made use of in other times than ours; but what has no parallel is this gigantic collective hallucination by which a whole section of humanity has come to take the vainest fantasies for incontestable realities; and, among these idols of modern worship, the two which we are at the moment denouncing are perhaps the most pernicious of all.

We must revert once more to the birth of the idea of progress, or rather of indefinite progress, to exclude these particular and limited progresses whose existence we have not the least desire to dispute. It is probably in the writings of Pascal that the first trace of this idea is to be found, applied

moreover to a single point of view: the passage⁵ is the well-known one where he compares humanity to “one and the same man who always exists and who learns continually during the course of the centuries,” and where he shows evidence of that anti-traditional spirit which is one of the peculiarities of the modern West, declaring that “those whom we call ancient were actually new in everything,” and that consequently their opinions have very little weight; and in this respect Pascal had at least, one predecessor, since Bacon had already said with the same implication: *Antiquitas saucily, juvenus mundi*. It is easy to see the unconscious sophism that such a conception is based on: it consists in supposing that humanity as a whole develops continuously along the same lines: the false simplicity in this outlook is quite blatant, since it is in contradiction with all the known facts. Indeed history shows us, at every epoch, civilizations independent of one another, often divergent, some of which are born and develop while others grow decadent and die, or are annihilated at one blow in some cataclysm ; and the new civilization by no means always gather in the inheritance of the old ones. Who would venture to maintain seriously, for example, that the West of to-day has benefited, however indirectly, by the knowledge which the Chaldeans or the Egyptians had accumulated, let alone some civilizations which have not even come down to us in name ? But there is no need to go back so far into the past, as there are sciences which were studied in Europe during the Middle Ages, and of which there remains no longer the least notion. If Pascal’s idea of “collective man” (whom he very improperly calls “universal man”) is to be kept, it must then be said that if there are periods in which he learns, there are others in which he forgets, or rather, that while he learns certain things he forgets others; but the reality is even more complex, since there are simultaneously, as there have always been, civilizations which do not penetrate one another, but remain unknown to each other: that is indeed, today more than ever, the situation of the western civilization with regard to the eastern ones. All told, the origin of the illusion expressed by Pascal is simply this: the people of the West, starting from the Renaissance, took to

⁵ Fragment of a *Trait due Vide*.

considering themselves exclusively as the heirs and carriers-on of Greco-Roman antiquity, and to misunderstanding or ignoring all the rest ; that is what we call the “classical prejudice.” The humanity that Pascal speaks of begins with the Greeks, continues with the Romans, then there is a discontinuity in its existence corresponding to the Middle Ages, in which he can only see, like all the people of the XVIIth century, a period of sleep; then at last comes the Renaissance, that is, the awakening of this humanity, which, from then on, is to be composed of all the European peoples together. It is a grotesque error, and one which indicates a strangely limited mental horizon, consisting, as it does, in taking the part for the whole. Its influence might be found in more than one sphere: the psychologists, for example, usually confine their observations to a single type of humanity, the modern Westerner, and they stretch inadmissibly the results so obtained even to the pretension of drawing from them, without exception, the characteristics of man in general.

It is essential to remember that Pascal only visualized an intellectual progress, within the limits of his and his time’s conception of intellectuality; it was towards the very end of the XVIIIth century that there appeared, with Turgot and Condorcet, the idea of progress extended to all branches of activity; and this idea was then so far from being generally accepted that Voltaire eagerly set about ridiculing it. We cannot think of giving here the complete history of the different modifications which this same idea underwent during the XIXth century, and of the pseudo-scientific complications in which it was involved when, under the name of “evolution”, people sought to apply it, not only to humanity, but to the whole animal world. Evolutionism, despite many more or less important divergencies, has become a real official dogma: it is taught like a law which it is forbidden to discuss, when actually it is nothing more than the most idle and ill-founded of all hypotheses ; this applies a fortiori to the conception of human progress, which is now taken for granted as being no more than a particular case of “evolution.” But before reaching this position there were many ups and

downs, and, even among the champions of progress, there were some who could not help making one or two rather serious reservations: Auguste Comte, who had started by being a disciple of Saint-Simon, admitted a progress that was indefinite in duration but not in extent; for him the march of humanity might be represented by a curve with an asymptote which it approaches indefinitely without ever reaching it, so that the extent of progress possible, that is to say the distance from the present state to the ideal state, represented by the distance from the curve to the asymptote, grows perpetually less. Nothing easier than to show the confusions that underlie the fantastic Cheury which Comte named the “law of the three states,” and of which the chief consists in supposing that the sole object of all possible knowledge is the explanation of natural phenomena. Like Bacon and Pascal he compared the ancient to children, and others, more recently, have thought to improve on this by likening them to the savages, whom they call primitives, but whom we on the contrary consider as degenerates.⁶ Apart from these there are some who, unable to help noticing the ups and downs in what they know of the history of mankind, have come to talk of a “rhythm of progress”; it would be perhaps simpler and more logical in these circumstances to stop talking about progress altogether, but, since the modern dogma must be safe-guarded at all costs, progress is supposed to exist none the less as the final result of all the partial progresses and all the regresses. These reservations and disagreements ought to serve as food for reflection, but very few seem to have realized this. The different schools can come to no mutual agreement, but it remains understood that progress and evolution must be admitted ; without these it seems that one would lose all right to the title of “civilized man” There is still another point which is worth

⁶ Despite the influence of the “sociological school,” there are, even in “official circles,” some authorities who agree with us on this point, notably M. Georges Foucart, who, in the introduction of his work entitled *Histoire des religions, et Methode comparative*, upholds the theory of “degeneration” and mentions several of its supporters. In connection with this, M. Foucart criticizes admirably the “sociological school” and its methods, and he very properly declares that “totemism or sociology should not be confused with serious ethnology.”

noticing: if one examines which branches of the pretended progress most often come up for consideration to-day, which ones are imagined by our contemporaries to be the starting point of all the rest, it will be seen that they only amount to two, "material progress" and "moral progress." These are the only ones mentioned by M. Jacques Bainville as included in the current idea of "civilization," and we think he was right. To be sure, there are some who still talk about "intellectual progress," but for them this phrase is essentially a synonym of "scientific progress," and it applies above all to the development of the experimental sciences and of their applications.' Here again there comes to light this degradation of intelligence which ends in identifying it with the most limited and inferior of all its uses, experimenting upon matter for solely practical purposes ; the so-called "intellectual progress" is thus no more, to be accurate, than "material progress" itself, and if intelligence was only that, Bergson's definition of it would have to be accepted. Actually it never enters the heads of most Westerners of to-day that intelligence is anything else ; for them it no longer amounts even to reason in its Cartesian sense, but to the lowest part of this reason, to its most elementary functions, to what always remains closely, connected with this world of the senses which they have made the one exclusive field of their activity. For those who know that there is something else and who persist in giving words their true meaning there can be no question in our time of "intellectual progress,' but on the contrary of decadence, or to be still more accurate, of intellectual ruin ; and, because there are some lines of development which are incompatible, it is precisely this which is the forfeit paid for "material progress," the only progress whose existence during the last centuries is a real fact: it may be called scientific progress if one insists, but only in an extremely limited acceptance of the word, and a progress which is very much more industrial than scientific. Material development and pure intellectuality go in opposite directions he who sinks himself in the one becomes necessarily further removed from the other. It should be carefully noted that we say here intellectuality and not rationality, for the domain of reason is only intermediate, as it were, between that of the senses and that of the higher

intellect: though reason receives a reflection of intellect, even while denying it and believing itself to be the human being's highest faculty, it is always from the evidence of the senses that the notions which it works on are drawn. In other words, what is general, the proper object of reason and consequently of science which is reason's work, though it is not of the sensible order of things, proceeds none the less from what is individual, which is perceived by the senses; it may be said to be beyond the sensible, but not above it; it is only the universal, the object of pure intellect, that is transcendent, and in the light of the universal even the general itself becomes one with the individual. That is the fundamental distinction between meta-physical knowledge and scientific knowledge, such as we have shown it to be more fully elsewhere⁷ ; and, if we call it to notice again here, it is because the total absence of the former and the disordered development of the latter are the most striking characteristics of the western civilization in its present state.

As for the conception of "moral progress," it represents the other predominant factor in the modern mentality, that is, sentimentality. The presence of this element does not serve in the least to make us modify the judgment which we formulated in saying that the western civilization is altogether material. We are well aware that some people seek to oppose the domain of sentiment to that of matter, to make the development of the one a sort of counterbalance against the spread of the other, and to take for their ideal an equilibrium as settled as possible between these two complementary elements. Such is perhaps, when all is said and done, the thought of the intuitionists who, associating intelligence inseparably with matter, hope to deliver themselves from it with the help of a rather vaguely defined instinct. Such is still more certainly the thought of the pragmatists, who make utility a substitute for truth and consider it at one and the same time under its material and moral aspects ; and we see here too how fully pragmatism expresses the particular tendencies of the modern world, and above all of the Anglo-Saxon world, which is one of its most typical portions. Indeed,

⁷ Introduction generale al'etude des doctrines hindoues, pp.96 - 104.

materialism and sentimentality, far from being in opposition, can scarcely exist one without the other, and they both attain side by side to their maximum development ; the proof of this lies in America, where, as we have had occasion to remark in our books on theosophism and spiritualism, the worst pseudo-mystical extravagances come to birth and spread with incredible ease, at the very time when industrialism and the passion for “business” are being carried to a pitch that borders on madness ; when things have reached this state it is no longer an equilibrium which is set up between the two tendencies, but two disequilibrium. side by side which aggravate each other, instead of counterbalancing. It is easy to see the cause of this phenomenon: where intellectuality is reduced to a minimum, it is quite natural that sentiment should assume the mastery; and sentiment, in itself, is very close to the material order of things: there is nothing, in all that concerns psychology, more narrowly dependant on organism, and, in spite of Bergson, it is obviously sentiment and not intellect which is bound up with matter. The intuitionists may reply, as we are well aware, that intelligence, such as they conceive it, is bound up with inorganic matter (it is always Cartesian mechanics and its derivations that they have in mind) and sentiment with living matter, which seems to them to rank higher in the scale of existences. But whether inorganic or living, it is always matter, and in its domain there can never be any but sensible things; it is indeed impossible for the modern mentality, and for the philosophers who represent it, to escape from this limitation. Strictly speaking, if it be insisted that there are two different tendencies, then one must be assigned to matter and one to life, and this distinction may serve as a fairly satisfactory way of classing the great superstitions of our epoch; but we repeat, they both belong to the same order of things and cannot really be dissociated from each other; they are on one same plane, and not superposed in hierarchy. It follows then that the “moralism” of our contemporaries is really nothing but the necessary complement of their practical materialism,⁸ and it would be an utter illusion

⁸ We say practical materialism to denote a tendency and to distinguish it from philosophic materialism, which is a theory, and on which this tendency is not necessarily dependent.

to seek to exalt one to the detriment of the other because, going necessarily together, they both develop simultaneously along the same lines, which are those of what is termed, by common accord, "civilization."

We have just seen why the conceptions of "material progress" and "moral progress" are inseparable, and why our contemporaries are almost as indefatigably engrossed with the latter as with the former. We have in no way contested the existence of "material progress," but only its importance: we maintain that it is not worth the intellectual loss which it causes, and it is impossible to think differently without being altogether ignorant of true intellectuality. Now, what is to be thought of the reality of "moral progress" ? That is a question which it is scarcely possible to discuss seriously, because, in this realm of sentiment, everything depends on individual appreciation and preferences; everyone gives the name "progress" to what is in conformity with his own inclinations, and, in a word, it is impossible to say that one is right any more than another. They whose tendencies are in harmony with those of their time cannot be other than satisfied with the present state of things, and this is what they express after their fashion when they say that this epoch marks a progress over those which preceded it; but often this satisfaction of their sentimental aspirations is only relative, because the sequence of events is not always what they would have wished, and that is why they suppose that the progress will be continued during future epochs. The facts come sometimes to belie those who are convinced of the present reality of "moral progress," according to the most usual-conception of it; but all they do is to modify their ideas a little in this respect, or to refer the realization of their ideal to a more or less remote future, and they, too, might crawl out of their difficulties by talking about a "rhythm of progress." Besides this, by a much simpler solution, they usually strive to forget the lesson of experience: such are the incorrigible dreamers who, at each new war, do not fail to prophesy that it will be the last. The belief in indefinite progress is, all told, nothing more than the most ingenuous and the grossest of all kinds of "optimism"; whatever forms this belief may take, it is always

sentimental in essence, even when it is concerned with “material progress.” If it be objected that we yourself have recognized the existence of this progress, we reply that we have only done so as far as the facts warrant, which does not in the least imply an admission that it should, or even that it can, continue its course indefinitely; furthermore, as we are far from thinking it the best thing in the world, instead of calling it progress we would rather call it quite simply development ; it is not in itself that the word progress offends us, but because of the idea of “value” which has come almost invariably to be attached to it. This brings us to another point: there is indeed also a reality which cloaks itself under the so-called “moral progress,” or which, in other words, keeps up the illusion of it ; this reality is the development of sentimentalism, which, whether one likes it or not, does actually exist in the modern world, just as incontestably as does the development of industry and commerce (and we have said why one does not go without the other). This development, in our eyes excessive and abnormal, cannot fail to seem a progress to those who put feelings above everything ; and it may perhaps be said that in speaking of mere preferences, as we did not long ago, we have robbed yourself in advance of the right to confute them. But we have done nothing of the kind: what we said then applies to sentiment, and to sentiment taken alone, in its variations from one individual to another: it sentiment, considered in general, is to be put into its proper place in relation to intelligence, the case is quite different, because then there is a hierarchy to be observed. The modern world has precisely reserved the natural relations between the different orders of things: once again, it is depreciation of the intellectual order (and even absence of pure intellectuality), and exaggeration of the material and the sentimental orders, which all go together to make the western civilization of to-day an anomaly, not to say a monstrosity.

That is how things look when considered without any prejudice; and that is how they are seen by the most qualified representatives of the eastern civilizations who view them quite without bias, for bias is always something sentimental, not intellectual, and their point of view is purely intellectual. If

the people of the West have some difficulty in understanding this attitude, it is because they are incorrigibly prone to judge others according to themselves, and to attribute to them their own concerns, as well as their ways of thinking, and their mental horizon is so narrow that they do not even take into account the possibility of other ones existing; hence their utter failure to understand all the eastern conceptions. This failure is not reciprocated: the Orientals, when they are faced with eastern science, and when they are willing to give themselves the trouble, have scarcely any difficulty in penetrating and understanding its special branches, because they are used to far wider and deeper speculations, and he that can do the greater can do the less ; but in general they feel scarcely any temptation to devote themselves to this work, which, for the sake of things that in their eyes are insignificant, might make them lose sight of, or at least neglect, what is for them the essential. Western science means analysis and dispersion; eastern knowledge means synthesis and concentration; but we shall have occasion to come back to this point. In any case, what the westerners call civilization, the others would call barbarity, because it is precisely lacking in the essential, that is to say a principle of a higher order. By what right do Westerners claim to impose on everyone their own likes and dislikes? Besides, they should not forget that among earthly mankind taken as a whole they form only a minority; of course, this consideration of number proves nothing in our eyes, but it ought to make some impression on people who have invented “universal suffrage,” and who believe in its efficacy. If they merely took pleasure in affirming their imagined superiority, the illusion would only do harm to themselves ; but their most terrible offence is their proselytizing fury: in them the spirit of conquest goes under the disguise of “moralist” pretexts, and it is in the name of “liberty” that they would force the whole world to imitate them ! Most astonishing of all, they genuinely imagine in their infatuation that they enjoy prestige amongst all other people; because they are dreaded as a brutal force is dreaded, they believe themselves to be admired; when a man is in danger of being crushed by an avalanche, does it follow that he is smitten with respect and admiration for it ? The only

impression that, for example, mechanical inventions make on most Orientals is one of deep repulsion ; certainly it all seems to them far more harmful than beneficial, and if they find themselves obliged to accept certain things which the present epoch has made necessary, they do so in the hope of future riddance ; these things do not interest them, and they will never really interest them What Westerns call nrraracc is for Orientals nothing but change and instability ; and the need for change, so characteristic of modern times, is in their eyes a mark of manifest inferiority: he that has reached a state of equilibrium no longer feels this need, just as he that has found no longer seeks. In these circumstances it is indeed difficult to understand one another, since the same facts give place, on this side and on that, to interpretations which are diametrically opposed. What if the Orientals also sought, after the manner of the West, and by its methods, to impose their own outlook? But one may rest assured: nothing is more contrary to their nature than propaganda, and such considerations are quite foreign to them ; without preaching “liberty,” they let others think what they will, and are even indifferent as to what is thought of them. All they ask, in fact, is to be left in peace ; but that is just what the people of the West refuse to allow them, and it must be remembered that they went to seek them out in their own home, and have behaved there in a way which might well-exasperate the most peaceful of men. We are thus faced with a state of affairs which cannot last indefinitely ; there is only one way for the West to make itself bearable: this is, to use the customary language of colonial politics, that it should give up “assimilation” and practice instead “association” in every domain ; but that alone would already mean some modification of their mentality, and the understanding of at least one or two of the ideas which form part of our present exposition.