THE SUPERSTITION OF LIFE[47]

Rene Guenon

Among the many things that Westerners often blame the Eastern civilizations for are their steadiness and stability; these characteristics amount in their eyes to a denial of progress, which indeed they are, as we readily admit; but to see a fault in this, one must believe in progress. For us, these characteristics show that these civilizations partake of the immutability of the principles which they are based on, and that is one of the essential aspects of the idea of tradition; it is because the modern civilization is lacking in principle that it is eminently unstable. Besides, one should not imagine that the stability we speak of goes to the length of excluding all change; what it does is to reduce the change to being never more than an adaptation to circumstances, by which the principles are not in the least affected, and which may on the contrary be strictly deduced from them, if they are resorted to, not for themselves, but in view of a definite application; and that is the point of all the "traditional sciences," apart from metaphysic which, as knowledge 0f the principles, is self-sufficing, for these sciences cover the range 0f all that may happen to proceed from the principles, including the social institutions. It would also be wrong to confuse immutability with immobility; such misunderstandings are common among Westerners because they are generally incapable of separating conception from imagination, and because their minds are inextricably bound up with representations dictated by the senses; this is very obvious in such philosophers as Kant, who cannot however be ranked among the "sensualists." The immutable is not what is contrary to change, but what is above it; just as the "superational" is not the

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[47] * This is the third chapter of Guenon's long out of print work *East and West.* Very few libraries have a copy of this remark-able critique of the Western civilization and it is almost impossible to come across any copy even in the bookshops that deal in old books. In view of its extreme importance we have reproduced the first two chapters in *Iqbal Review,* Vol. *26,* Nos. 2&3. "The Superstition of Life" is the third chapter of the aforementioned book. — *(Editor)*

"irrational." There is every reason for distrusting the tendency to arrange things in artificial oppositions and antitheses, by an interpretation which is both systematic and falsely simple, arising chiefly from the inability to go further and resolve the apparent contrast in the harmonious unity of a true synthesis. It is none the less true that there is very real opposition, from the point of view that we have in mind here as well as from many others, between East and West, at least as things are at present: there is divergence, but it should not be forgotten that this divergence is one-sided and not symmetrical, being like that of a branch which grows away from the trunk; it is the civilization of the West alone which, by going in the direction that it has followed throughout the last centuries, has become so remote from the civilizations of the East that between it and them there seems to be, as it were, no longer any common element, any term of comparison, or any meeting-ground for agreement and reconciliation.

The Westerner, or rather the modern Westerner (it is always the latter that we mean), shows himself to be essentially changeable and inconstant, as if vowed to ceaseless movement and agitation, and, what is more, to have no ambition to emerge from it; in a word, his plight is that of a being who is unable to find his balance, but who, in his inability to do so, will not admit that the thing is possible in itself or even desirable, going so far as to make his own impotence some-thing to boast of. These changes which he is subject to and which he takes delight in without requiring that they should lead him to any end, because he has come to like them for their own sake, constitute in fact what he calls "progress," as if it were enough simply to walk, quite regardless of direction, to be sure of advancing. As for the goal of his advance, he does not even dream of asking himself what it is; and the scattering of his forces amid the multiplicity which is the inevitable consequence of these changes without principle and without aim, and indeed the only consequence whose reality cannot be contested, he calls "being enriched"; that is yet another word which, in the gross materialism of the image that it calls up, is altogether typical and representative of the modern

mentality. The need for outward activity carried to such a pitch, together with the love of effort for effort's sake, independent of the results that can be got by it, is not at all natural to man, at least not to the normal man,' according to the idea which has always and everywhere been accepted of him; but it has become in a sense natural to the Westerner, perhaps as a result of habit which Aristotle says is like a second nature, but above all through the atrophy of the being's higher faculties, which goes necessarily with the intensive development of the lower elements. A man without means of extricating himself from agitation has nothing left but to be satisfied with it, just as a man whose intelligence stops short at rational activity finds such activity admirable and sublime; to be fully at ease in a limited sphere, whatever it may be, .one must be blind to the possibility of there being anything beyond. The aspirations of the Westerner, alone of all mankind (we are not considering the savages, about whom it is, moreover, very difficult to know what to think), are as a rule strictly confined to the sensible world and to its dependencies, among which we include the whole order of feeling and a good part of the order of reason; no doubt there are praiseworthy exceptions, but we can only consider here the general and common mentality, such as is truly characteristic of the place and the period.

Another strange phenomenon may be noted in the intellectual domain itself, or rather in what is left of it, and this, which is only a particular case of the state of mind that we have just described, is the passion for research taken as an end in itself, quite regardless of seeing it terminate in any solution. While the rest of mankind seeks for the sake of finding and of knowing, the Westerner of to-day seeks for the sake of seeking; the Gospel sentence, "Seek and ye shall find," is a dead letter for him, in the full force of this phrase, since he calls "death" anything and everything that constitutes a definite finality, just as he gives the name "life" to what is no more than fruitless agitation. This unhealthy taste for research, real "mental restlessness" without end and without issue, shows itself at its very plainest in modern philosophy, the greater part of which represents no more than a series of

quite artificial problems, which only exist because they are badly propounded, owing their origin and survival to nothing but carefully kept up verbal confusions; they are problems which, considering how they are formulated, are truly insoluble, but, on the other hand, no one is in the least anxious to solve them, and they were created simply that they might go on indefinitely feeding controversies and discussions which lead nowhere, and which are not meant to lead anywhere. This substituting research for knowledge (and closely bound up with it is the remarkable abuse which consists in "theories of knowledge" to which we have already called attention) is simply giving up the proper object of intelligence, and it is scarcely strange that in these conditions some people have come ultimately to suppress the very idea of truth, for the truth can only be conceived of as the end to be reached, and these people want no end to their research. It follows that there can be nothing intellectual in their efforts, even taking intelligence in its widest, not in its highest and purest sense; and if we have been able to speak. of "passion for research," it is in fact because sentiment has intruded into domains where it ought never to have set foot. Of course we are not protesting against the actual existence of sentiment, which is a natural fact, but only against its abnormal and illegitimate extension; one must know how to put each thing in its place and leave it there, but this calls for an understanding of the universal order, which is beyond the reach of the modern world, where disorder is law. To denounce sentimentalism is not to deny sentiment any more than to denounce rationalism amounts to denying reason; sentimentalism and rationalism are both nothing more than the results of exaggerations and intrusions, although the modern West sees them as the two items of an alternative from which she cannot escape.

We have already said that sentiment is extremely near to the material world; it is not for nothing that the sensible and the sentimental are so closely linked by language, and, although they are not to be altogether confused with one another, they are only two modes of one and the same

order of things.[48] The modern mind faces almost exclusively outwards, towards the world of the senses; sentiment seems inward to it, and it often seeks, in virtue of this, to oppose sentiment to sensation; but that is all very relative; and the truth is, that the psychologist's "introspection" itself grasps nothing but phenomena, or in other words, outward and superficial modifications of the being; there is nothing truly inward and deep except the higher part of the intelligence. This will seem surprising to those who, like the intuitionists of to-day, only know intelligence in its lower part, represented by the sensible faculties and by reason as far as it turns its attention to the objects of sense, and believe it to be more outward than sentiment; but, in relation to the transcendent intellectuality of the Orientals, rationalism and intuitionism go closely together upon one same plane, and stop equally short at the being's outside, despite the illusions by which either of these conceptions believes that it grasps something of the being's intimate nature. In neither of them is there ever any question, when all is said and done, of going beyond sensible things; they disagree simply on the methods to be put into practice for reaching these things, on how they are to "be considered, and on which of their diverse aspects should be put most in evidence: we might say that the ones prefer to insist on the "matter" side, the others on the "life" side. These are, in fact, the limitations which Western thought cannot throw off: the Greeks 'were unable to free themselves from form; modern Westerners seem above all powerless to extricate themselves from matter, and, when they try to do so, they cannot in any case get away from the domain of life. All these, life just as much as matter and still more than form, are merely conditions of existence particular to the sensible world, so that they are all on one same plane, as we have just been saying. The modern West, but for exceptional cases, takes the sensible world as the sole object of knowledge; whether she prefers to attach herself to one or to the other of this world's conditions, or whether she studies it from this or that point of view, scouring it in no matter what direction, the domain that her

[48] This corresponds to what we once said about the two conflicting varities of "monism," the one spiritualistic and the other materialistic.

mind works in continues none the less to be always the same; if this domain appears to become at all enlarged, it never does so to any real extent, even supposing that the appearance is not altogether illusory. There are moreover, bordering on the sensible world, various prolongations which also belong to the same degree of universal existence. According to whether a man has in mind this or that condition, among those which define this world, he may at times reach one or another of these prolongations, but he will remain none the less shut in a special and determined domain. When Bergson says that the natural object of intelligence is matter, he is wrong in giving the name intelligence to what he means, and he does so through his ignorance of what is truly intellectual; but he is substantially right if, by this faulty designation, he means no more than the lowest part of the intelligence, or, to be more precise, the use that is commonly made of it in the West of to-day. As for him, it is indeed to life that he attaches himself essentially: the part played by "vital dash" in his theories is well known, as is also the meaning he gives to what he calls "pure duration"; but life, whatever "value" be attributed to it, is none the less inextricably bound up with matter, and it is always the same world that is being considered here, whether it is looked at with the eyes of an "organicist" or "vitalist" or, on the other hand, with those of a "mechanist." Only, when, of the elements which make up this world, the vital element is held to be more important than the material one, it is natural that sentiment should take precedence over so-called intelligence; the intuitionists with their "mental contortions," the pragmatists with their "inner experience," simply address themselves to the dark powers of instinct and sentiment, which they take for the being's very depth, and, when they follow their thought 0r rather their tendency to its conclusion, they end, like Williams James, in proclaiming the supremacy of the "sub-conscious," by the most incredible subversion of the natural order that the history of ideas has ever had to chronicle.

Life, considered in itself, is always full of change and ceaseless modification; it is, then, understandable that it should hold such fascinating

sway over the outlook of the modern civilization, whose changefulness is also its most striking characteristic, obvious at first sight, even if one stops short at an altogether superficial examination. When a man is imprisoned like this in life and in the conceptions directly connected with it, he can know nothing about what escapes from change, about the transcendent and immutable order, which is that of the universal principles; in this case there can no longer be any possibility of metaphysical knowledge, and we are always brought round again to this same conclusive statement of fact, which is the inevitable consequence of each of the modern West's characteristics. We say here change rather than movement, because the former word is wider in scope than the latter: movement is only the physical or rather the mechanical modality of change, and there are conceptions which have in view other modalities that cannot be brought under the heading of movement, and which even hold these modalities to be more strictly "vital" in character to the exclusion of movement in its ordinary sense, that is, as meaning just a change of position. There again, it would be wrong to exaggerate certain oppositions, since they only appear as such from a more or less limited point of view: for example, a mechanistic theory is, by definition, a theory which claims to explain everything by matter and movement; but if the idea of life were given its widest possible extension, movement itself could be made to fit into it, and it would be seen that the so-called opposed or antagonistic theories are, at bottom, much more equivalent than their respective partisans will admit; there is scarcely any difference between the two except for a little more or a little less narrowness of outlook. In any case, a conception which gives itself out as a "philosophy of life" is necessarily, then and there, a "philosophy of becoming"; we mean that it is confined to this state, and cannot escape from it (to become and to change being synonymous), which leads it to place here all reality and to deny that there is anything whatever outside or beyond, since the systematic mind is so framed as to imagine that it comprises within its formulae the whole of the Universe; that is yet another formal negation of metaphysic. Of such is, amongst others, evolutionism in all its forms, from the most mechanistic conceptions,

including gross "transformism," to theories like Bergson's; there is no room to be found there for anything except the state of becoming, and even then, strictly speaking, it is only a more or less limited part of this state that is kept in view. Evolution, all told, is nothing but change, backed up by an illusion with regard to the direction and quality of this change; evolution and progress are one and the same thing, to all intents and purposes, but the former term is often preferred to-day because it seems to give the impression of being more "scientific". Evolutionism is, as it were, a. product of these two great modern superstitions, that of science and that of life, and its success is made for the very reason that both rationalism and sentimentalism find full satisfaction in it; the variable proportions in which these two tendencies are combined account very largely for the diversity of forms in which this theory is clothed. The evolutionists put change everywhere, even in God Himself when they admit Him: Bergson is no exception when he imagines God as: "a centre from which worlds shoot out, and which is not a *thing* but a continuity of shooting out"; and he added expressly: "God thus defined has nothing of the already made; He is unceasing life, action, freedom."[49] It is, then, nothing more nor less than these ideas of life and of action which our contemporaries are literally obsessed with, and which, as in the above case, intrude themselves into a domain that seeks to be speculative; in other words they suppress speculation in the interests of action which encroaches everywhere and absorbs everything. This conception of a God in a state of becoming, who is only immanent and not transcendent, together with that (which amounts to the same) of a truth in the making, which is nothing more than a sort of ideal limit, devoid of all present reality, is by no means exceptional in modern thought; the pragmatists, who have adopted the idea of a limited God for chiefly "moralist" motives, are not its original inventors, since what is held to develop must necessarily be conceived of as limited. Pragmatism, by its very name, poses above all as "philosophy of action"; its more or less avowed assumption is that man only has needs of a practical order, material ones and, together with these, sentimental ones. It

[49] *Creative Evolution,* p. 362.

means, then, the doing away with intellectuality; but, if this is so, why go on wanting to evolve theories? That is rather hard to understand; and if pragmatism, like scepticism which it only differs from with regard to action, wished to conform to its own standards, it would have to limit itself to a mere mental attitude, which it cannot even seek to justify logically, without giving itself the lie; but there is no doubt that it is very difficult to keep strictly within such bounds. However degraded a man may be intellectually, he cannot at least help reasoning, if only in order to deny reason; moreover the pragmatists do not deny it as the sceptics do, but they seek to reduce it to serving purely practical ends; as the followers of those who sought to reduce the whole of intelligence to reason, though without denying it a theoretic function, they have gone one degree lower-in the scale of degradation. There is even one point where the pragmatists carry their denying further than the pure sceptics; the latter do not contest the existence of truth outside us, but only our ability to reach it; the pragmatists, in limitation of one or two Greek sophists (who very probably did not take themselves seriously), go to the lengths of suppressing truth itself.

Life and action go closely together; the one's domain is also the other's, and it is to this limited domain that the whole Western civilization keeps, to-day more than ever. We have told elsewhere what view the Orientals take of the limitations of action and its consequences, and how for them, in this respect, knowledge is the opposite of action: the Far Eastern theory of "Non-doing" and the Hindu theory of "Deliverance" are inaccessible to the ordinary Western mind, which cannot conceive that a man may dream of freeing himself from action, still less that he may actually come to do so. Besides, action is not generally considered except in its most out-ward forms, in those that strictly correspond to physical movement: hence this growing desire for speed and this feverish restlessness which are so peculiar to modern life; it is all action for the pleasure of action, and this can only be called agitation, for even in action there are certain degrees to observe and certain distinctions to make. Nothing would be easier than to show how

incompatible this is with all that concerns reflection and concentration, or in other words with the essential means of all true knowledge; it is indeed the triumph of dispersion, in the most complete turning of all things inside out that can be conceived; it means the definite ruin of whatever remains there may still be of intellecttality, if nothing comes to react in time against these fatal tendencies. Fortunately the excess of evil may bring on a reaction, and even the physical dangers which are inherent in so abnormal a development may end by inspiring salutary dread; besides, the very fact that the domain of action only admits of very limited possibilities, even if it may seem to do otherwise, makes it impossible that this development should go on indefinitely, and sooner or later the nature of things will forcibly impose a change of direction. But, for the moment, we are not bent on considering the possibilities of a future that is perhaps remote; what we have in view is the present state of the West, and all that we see of it is clear confirming evidence that material progress and intellectual decadence are closely knit together; we have no wish to decide which of the two is the cause or effect of the other, especially as we are dealing, in the main, with a complex whole in which the relations of the different elements are sometimes reciprocal and alternating. Without trying to trace the modern world back to its beginnings and to study the way in which its special mentality may have been formed, as we should have to do if the question were to be fully disposed of, we can say this much: there must have been already a depreciation and adwindling of intellectuality for material progress to become important enough to overstep certain bounds; but once this movement had started, with the concerns of material progress absorbing little by little all man's faculties, intellectuality went on growing gradually weaker and weaker, until it reached the-plight that we see it in to-day, with perhaps a still worse one in store for it, although that certainly seems difficult. On the other hand, the expansion of sentimentality is by no means incompatible with material progress, because the two are, fundamentally, things of almost the same order; we shall be excused for coming back to this point so often, as, unless it can be understood, there can be no understanding of what goes on about us. This expansion of

sentimentality corresponding to the progress of intellectuality will be all the more excessive and disordered for not meeting anything that might effectively check it or direct it, since this part could certainly not be played by "scientism," which, as we have seen, is far from being immune from sentimental contagion, and which offers no more than a false semblance of intellectuality.

One of the most noticeable symptoms of the preponderance acquired by sentimentality is what we call "moralism," which is the clearly marked tendency to refer everything to concerns of a moral order, or at least to subordinate everything else to them, especially what is considered as corning within the domain of intelligence. Morality in itself is something essentially sentimental; it represents as relative and contingent a point of view as possible and one, moreover, which has never been held except by the West; but "moralism," in the already defined sense of the word, is an exaggeration of this point of view, and only came into being quite recently. A moral code, whatever foundation is given it, and whatever importance is attributed to it, is not and cannot be anything more than a rule of action. For men who are no longer interested in anything but action, it is clear that morality must figure very largely indeed, and they attach themselves to it all the more because considerations of this order may be made to pass for thought in a period of intellectual decadence; it is this that explains the birth of "moralism." Some-thing of the kind had already come to light towards the end of the Greek civilization, but without growing, as far as one can tell, to the proportions which it has taken on in our time; in fact, from Kant on-wards, almost all modern philosophy has been saturated with "moralism," which amounts to saying that it gives precedence to the practical over the speculative, the former being moreover considered from a special angle; this tendency reached its full development with the philosophies of life and of action that we have spoken of. On the other hand we have mentioned the obsession, which haunts even the most avowed materialists, of what are called "scientific morals," which represent exactly the same tendency; it may

be called scientific or philosophical according to individual tastes, but it is never any more than an expression of sentimentality, and this expression does not even vary to any appreciable extent. Indeed, a curious thing about it all is that the moral conceptions within any given sphere of society are all extraordinarily alike, in spite of their claim to be based on considerations that are different and sometimes even conflicting this is what shows up the artificiality of the theories by which each man strives to justify certain practical rules which are always the ones commonly observed about him. All told, these theories simply represent the particular preferences of those who formulate or adopt them; often a party interest plays no small part either: as proof of this no more is needed than the way in which "lay morals" (it matters little whether they are called scientific or philosophical) are put in opposition to religious morals. Besides, as the moral point of view only exists for social reasons and none other, the intrusion of politics into the same domain is not to be unduly wondered at; it is perhaps less shocking than the utilization, for similar ends, of theories which are made out to be purely scientific; but, after all, has not the "scientist" turn of mind itself been created to serve certain political interests? We doubt very much whether most champions of evolutionism are altogether innocent of any such hidden motive, and, to take another example, the so-called "science of religious" is much more like a weapon of controversy than a serious science; these are among the cases that we have already alluded to, where rationalism is chiefly a mask for sentimentality.

It is not. only among the "scientists" and among the philosophers that the encroachment of "moralism" may be noticed; notice must also be taken, in this respect, of the degeneration of the religious idea, such as it is found to be in the innumerable sects that have sprung from Protestantism. These are the only forms of religion which are specifically modern, and they are characterized by a progressive reduction of the doctrinal element in the interests of the moral or sentimental element; this phenomenon is a particular instance of the general diminishing of intellectuality, and it is no

mere chance that the epoch of the Reformation coincides with that of the Renaissance, that is, precisely with the beginning of the modern period. In certain branches of contemporary Protestantism the doctrine has dwindled into nothing at all, and, as the worship, in a parallel way, has also been reduced to practically nothing, the moral element is ultimately all that is left: "Liberal Protestantism" is no more than a "moralism" with a religious label; it cannot be said that it is still a religion in the strict sense of the word, because, of the three elements that enter into the definition of religion, there re-mains no more than one alone. Having reached this stage, it should rather be classed as a sort of special philosophical way of thinking; besides, its representatives are as a rule fairly well in sympathy with the champions of "lay morals," which are also styled independent, and they have even been known on occasion to associate themselves openly with them, which shows that they are conscious of their real affinities. As a name for things of this kind, we willingly use the word "pseudo-religion"; and we apply also this same word to all the "Neo-Spiritualist" sects, which are born and prosper above all in the protestant countries, because "Neo-Spiritualism" and "Liberal Protestantism" spring from the same tendencies and from the same state of mind. The place of religion, owing to the suppression of the intellectual element (or its absence in the case of new creations), is taken by religiosity, or, in other words, by a mere sentimental aspiration, more or less vague and inconsistent; and this religiosity is to religion just about what the shadow is to the body. Here can be seen traces of the "religious experience" of William James (which is further complicated by its appeal to the "subconscious"), and also the "inner life" in the sense which the modernists give it, for modernism was nothing other than an attempt at introducing the mentality in question into Catholicism itself, an attempt which was broken against the force of the traditional outlook, whose sole refuge, in the modern West, appears to be Catholicism, save for individual exceptions which may always exist apart from all organization.

It is among the Anglo-Saxon peoples that "moralism" rages with its greatest intensity, and it is there too that the love of action may be seen in its most extreme forms, which shows that these two things are indeed closely knit together, as we have said. There is a strange irony in the current conception of the English as being a people essentially attached to tradition, and those who think so are quite simply confusing tradition with custom. The ease with which certain words come to be misused is truly extraordinary: there are some who have gone so far as to give the name "traditions" to popular habits, or even to conventions of quite recent origin, without importance or real significance. As for ourself, we refuse to give this name to what is only a more or less automatic respect for certain outward forms, which are sometimes nothing more than "superstitions" in the etymological sense of the word; true tradition dwells in the outlook of a people or race or civilization, and it springs from causes that lie far deeper. The Anglo-Saxon outlook is in reality quite as anti-traditional as the French and Germanic outlooks, but in what seems to be rather a different way, for in Germany it is more the tendency of "scientism" which predominates and the French tend more towards scholarship; little matter however whether it is "moralism" or the "scientist" attitude that prevails, for it would, we repeat once again, be artificial to seek to separate entirely these two tendencies which represent the two sides of the modern outlook, and which are to be found in varying proportions amongst all the peoples of the West. It seems that to-day the "moralist" tendency has fairly generally the upper hand, though it is only a few years since the domination of "scientism" was the more marked; but the one's gain is not necessarily the other's loss, since the two can be very well reconciled, and, in spite of all fluctuations, the common mind links them fairly closely together: it has room, at one and the same time, for all those idols that we spoke of earIier. However, a sort of crystallization of the different anti-traditional elements of the modern outlook is now taking place rather with the idea of "life," and what goes with it, as centre, just as a similar crystallization took place in the XIXth century round about the idea of "science," and in the XVIIIth about that of "reason." We speak of ideas, but

we should do better simply to speak of words, since all this is a triumph of the hypnotic power of mere words. What is sometimes called "ideology," with an unfavourable implication by those who are not its dupes (for in spite of everything there are still one or two to be met with who remain undeluded), is really nothing more than verbalism, and in this connection we can take up again the word "superstition" in the etymological sense which we have last alluded to and which designs a thing that survives in itself, when it has lost its real point. Actually the sole point of words is the expression of ideas; attributing a value to the words by themselves, independently of the ideas, failing even to base these words on any idea at all, and letting oneself be influenced by their mere sonority, is indeed superstition. "Nominalism," in its different degrees, is the philosophical expression of this negation of the idea, for which it professes to substitute the word or the image; and in confusing conception and sensible representation, it really leaves nothing but the latter. In one form or another, "nominalism" is extremely rife in modern philosophy, while formerly it was no more than an exception. This is very significant; and it must be added that nominalism almost always goes hand in hand with empiricism, that is to say with the tendency to make experience, and especially experience of the senses, the origin and end of all knowledge: this negation of everything truly intellectual is what we always come back to, as common element, at the bottom of all these tendencies and all these opinions, because it is, in fact, the root of all mental deformation, and because this negation is implied, as the necessary starting-point, in all that contributes to pervert modern Western conceptions.

So far we have been mainly concerned with giving a general view of the present state of the Western world considered with regard to its mentality; this must come first, for it is on this that all the rest depends, and there can be no important and lasting change which does not start by influencing the general mentality. Those who maintain the contrary are still the victims of a very modern illusion; seeing only the outward manifestations, they take the effects for the causes, and they readily believe that what they do not see does

not exist. What is called "historical materialism," or the tendency to trace everything to economic facts, is a remarkable example of this illusion. Things have reached such a state that the facts of this order have actually acquired, in the history of to-day, an importance which they never had in the past; but none the less the part they play is not and never can be exclusive. Besides, let there be no mistake about it: those "in control," known or unknown, are well aware that, to act effectively, they must first of all create and keep up currents of ideas or of pseudo-ideas, and they do not fail to do-so; even when these currents are purely negative, they are none the less of a mental nature, and it is in the minds of men that first the germs must be spawned that will later attain to outward realization; even for intellectuality to be done away with, minds must first be persuaded of its inexistence and their activity turned in another direction. This does not mean that we are among those who hold that the world is led by ideas directly; this again is a formula which has been much misused and most of its users scarcely know what an idea is, even supposing that they do not confuse it altogether with the mere word; in other terms, they are very often nothing more than "ideologists," and the worst "moralist" dreamers belong precisely to this category: in the name of the chimeras which they call "right and justice," and which have nothing to do with true ideas, they have had too fatal and lamentable an influence on recent events, an influence whose con-sequences are making themselves too keenly felt for it to be necessary to insist on what we mean. But the simpletons are not the only. ones concerned: there are also, as always, those who lead them without their knowing, who exploit them and make use of them in view of much more positive interests. In any case, as we are continually tempted to repeat, what matters above all is to know how to put everything in its proper place; the pure idea has no immediate relation with the domain of action, and it cannot have the direct influence on outward things that sentiment has; but the idea is, none' the less, the principle, the necessary starting point of all things, without which they would be robbed of any sound basis. Sentiment, if it is not guided and controlled by the idea, brings forth nothing but error, disorder, and obscurity; there is no question of doing away with sentiment,

but of keeping it within its legitimate bounds, and the same applies to all the other contingencies. The restoration of a real intellectuality, even if at first it was only within a limited elect, appears to be the sole means of putting an end to the mental confusion which reigns in the West; it is only this which could disperse the mob of empty illusions that encumber modern minds, and of superstitions far more ridiculous and unfounded than all those which are made a butt for random mockery by people who seek to be thought "enlightened"; and it is only that which will make it possible to find a common ground for understanding with the peoples of the East. In fact all we have said represents faithfully, not merely our own view, which in itself hardly matters, but also, what is far more worth considering, the judgment that is passed by the East upon the West, when the Orientals deign to extend their interest in the West beyond merely counteracting her invasive action by that altogether passive resistance of theirs which she cannot understand, because it implies an inner power of which she has not the equivalent, and against which no brutal force can prevail. This power is beyond life, it is superior to action and to all that takes place, it has nothing to do with time, and partakes of supreme immutability; if the Oriental can patiently undergo the material domination of the West, it is because he knows how relative transitory things are, and because he carries, in the very depth of his being, the consciousness of eternity.