PEASANTS INTO FRENCHMEN
The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914
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INTRODUCTION

In 1948, under the arcades of the Odéon Theater, where in those days one could pick up remaindered books for a few francs (or read them on the spot, standing up for hours on end), I bought a copy of Roger Thibaut's *Mon village*. The book, now much the worse for wear, is still with me. It was my first intimation (I only read André Siegfried's great dissertation later) that a profound sea-change had taken place in Thibaut's little village of Mazières, in the Gâtinais, and in many other villages of the French countryside during the period that his pages covered—1848-1914—and that this change was more than political history as I knew it, though it intertwined with political history.

Thibaut traced the evolution of a commune—bourg, villages, hamlets, scattered farms—a commune in which life had followed the same pattern since long before the Revolution and changed only, but then radically, in the half-century before 1914. Material conditions, mentalities, political awareness, all underwent massive alterations, a sort of precipitation process wholly different from the rather gradual evolutions or sporadic changes that accumulate to make what we describe as a period of history. Historical change rushing in headlong carried Mazières not from one historical period to another, but into a new age of mankind—an altogether different form of civilization.

It was all very interesting, but I was then concerned with other things. The story Thibaut told colored my view of French history but did not really change it. The history I thought and taught and wrote about went on chiefly in cities; the countryside and the little towns were a mere appendage of that history, following, echoing, or simply standing by to watch what was going on, but scarcely relevant on their own account.

Twenty years later I discovered another book that described in its own way the same profound sea-change. I really do not know how I came by it, for this one was not a historian's work either. Written by a folklorist, *Civilisation traditionnelle et genres de vie* was almost contemporary to *Mon village*. On quite
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a different plane, more broadly argued, it talked about the decay and the disappearance of France's traditional rites and lore. These, said its author, André Varagnac, had always altered as far back as we can see to tell. But until the nineteenth century others had always emerged in their stead. The novelty now was that the renewal process ceased: traditions died, and they were not replaced; there was no longer any spontaneous innovation in the countryside. A whole mentality was dying—had died—out. Coincidence? Varagnac, too, situated the crucial changes in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

By now, I was ready to go further. I had begun to sense in my work in political and intellectual history—the sort that we write about and teach, the urban sort—that I was ignoring a vast dimension of reality. What happened in small towns and in the countryside? Was Varagnac right? Was there a culture or rather several cultures that carried on beside the official one we knew and studied, and that at some point gave up or were integrated with the larger whole? If so, how did this happen?

I went back to Thibault. It was not the first time I had reread him; but when one looks for different things, one sees different things. Thibault's hero, in a manner of speaking, the pivot of the modifications that he etches, was the village school. All French historians knew that much, to be sure. But Thibault focuses on the school in a particular context: the passage from a relatively isolated and a relatively closed economy to union with the outside world through roads, railroads, and a money economy. The school was important because conditions changed, because it served new conditions, and the conditions that it helped to change were no longer local ones but national; they were urban, they were modern.

What a discovery! After a quarter of a century spent studying French history, I was inventing for myself what any textbook could have told me. And yet perhaps that is essentially what the study of history is: the rereading of the past, so to speak, in the beginning because one wants to discover it for oneself and assimilate it, and later because what one looks for (hence sees) in familiar territory may be quite different from what one has discerned before or learned from others. So it was with me. Looking for answers to the questions that Varagnac had helped suggest drove me to discover a new France in the nineteenth-century countryside, a France where many did not speak French or knew it (let alone use) the metric system, where pinèdes and 400 were better known than francs, where roads were few and markets distant, and where a subsistence economy reflected the most common prudence. This book is about how all this changed, and about how mentalities altered in the process; in a word, about how undevolved France was integrated into the modern world and the official culture—of Paris, of the cities.

And it is about peasants. Gordon Wright has said, no one can say it better, how dangerous it is to venture into such quicksands: "Rural France is almost infinitely diverse, and almost any generalization about the peasantry becomes partially false as soon as it is formulated." And yet he adds, and I must echo him: "A nagging curiosity about general trends... led me to persist in trying to see the problem in the large."

La Rochefoucauld remarked that one can know things well only when one knows them in detail, yet detail is infinite, hence our knowledge is fated to remain superficial and imperfect. It is a convenient argument for a book like this, in which inferences of a general nature are drawn from documentation that is necessarily partial and incomplete in the first instance. Besides, given my working hypothesis that very significant portions of rural France continued to live in a world of their own until near the end of the nineteenth century, I have deliberately focused on the areas that served my interests best—the west, center, south, and southwest—and on the 40 or 50 years before 1914. And finally, because my purpose from the start was to be not exhaustive but suggestive, the documentation reflects that approach.

The period covered, which is roughly the period encompassed by Thibault, has remained oddly unexplored—from my point of view. Among secondary sources, those from which I learned the most, and the most directly, have been the path-breaking articles of Guy Thuehier and Alain Corbin's massive unpublished dissertation on the Limousin during the middle third of the nineteenth century. The other great studies that cast light on life in the countryside deal with earlier periods (Le Roy Ladurie, Pierre Goubert, Paul Bois) or with the first half of the nineteenth century (Maurice Agulhon, Jean Vidalenc, Philippe Vigier) or with the twentieth century (Gordon Wright, Henri Mendras). From the mid-twentieth century on, indeed, there has been a wealth of sociological investigation, but most of it extends back only sketchily for introductory purposes. There are numbers of monographs, many of them distinguished and sensitive, but few of them linger long on the years I am most concerned with; and those that do (André Siegfried, Georges Dupoux) are chiefly interested in politics. As my pages make clear, my principal interest lies in ways of life and thought—a more elusive quarry. Doubly elusive when documentation is hard to find, still harder to pin down.

Special problems arise when one tries to understand the evolution of conditions and mentalities among the inarticulate masses, inarticulate, that is, on those particular levels that provide most of the records on which historians rely. Most of the subjects of historical investigation have been literate and articulate themselves; many have left clear and often deliberate records or have been described by witnesses who were well acquainted with them. The acts, thoughts, and words of the illiterate (and most of my subjects were illiterate, or as nearly so as makes no difference) remain largely unrecorded. Such records as exist are the work of outsiders who observed and recorded what they saw for purposes of their own. Police, bureaucrats, folklorists, priests, teachers, agronomists, and men of letters looked on, even probed, but whether critical or sympathetic they cannot tell us what went on as true participants. My rule
with this kind of evidence has been to try to indicate its sources and context, so that readers can take any possible prejudice (or at least orientation) into account; and to rely more freely on evidence that appears to be purely incidental to the main purpose of the witness or better still, contrary to his or her apparent interest.

Moreover, the illiterate are not in fact inarticulate; they can and do express their feelings and their minds in several ways. Sociologists, ethnologists, geographers, and most recently demographic historians have shown us new and different means of interpreting evidence, with the result that our fund of facts has turned out to be far richer than we previously believed. I have tried to learn from their work, though I have not followed the lead of any one discipline. A particularly fruitful source of evidence, especially in a work whose principal aim is to explore and suggest, is to be found in the songs, dances, proverbs, tales, and pictures of the country folk—in the whole broad realm of *arts et traditions populaires*. I have tapped this source repeatedly to discover what the rural people used, or said, or did, how these changed or came to be abandoned, and what replaced them.

But even research on traditional lines on the social history of the years 1880-1914 presents special problems. There are serious gaps in the Archives Nationales for the crucial half-century before 1914. This is matched by a corresponding poverty in the departmental archives, which are rich in material right through the Second Empire and emasculated thereafter until the years after World War I. There is considerable documentation even so, and I have mined it for a dozen prefectoral. Other archives yielded much information as well: of the Ministère de la Guerre, of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, of the Institut National de Recherche et de Documentation Pédagogique. So did the rich secondary materials in the Bibliothèque Nationale. To the directors and staffs of these institutions, and of the departmental archives of Allier, Ariège, Cantal, Finistère, Gers, Gironde, Haute-Vienne, Lot, Puy-de-Dôme, Pyrénées-Orientales, Vosges, and Yonne, I owe my thanks for helpfulness beyond the call of duty.

Other thanks are also in order: to the University of California and the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant of leave and subsidies that made the enterprise possible and helped me to carry it through; to Mr. Robert Rockwell and Mlle. N. grané and M. Revel for resourceful research assistance; to Mrs. Claire Pirone for typing and retyping the manuscript with unflagging zeal.

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I might have read much more, talked to more people, attempted a more comprehensive survey. But in the end the study would still have been incomplete, its conclusions still tentative like those of this book. Let this inquiry be taken for what it is, then: a venture in putting some flesh on the bare bones of general facts that we know already in a general way, and a suggestion of the work still to be done.

For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen, before we go to Paradise by way of Kentish Green.
Chapter One

A COUNTRY OF SAVAGES

"You don't need to go to America to see savages," mused a Parisian as he strolled through the Burgundian countryside of the 1830's. "Here are the Redskins of Fenimore Cooper." Thus Balzac, in his Paysans (1844). Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that vast parts of nineteenth-century France were inhabited by savages. Louis Chevalier has told us how this label was pinned on the urban poor—classe laborieuse, classe dangereuse—around mid-century. But it can as readily be applied, and for a longer period of time, to sections of the rural population—equally strange and little known, equally hard-working though perhaps less dangerous for being less concentrated.

In 1811, the prefect of Ariège described the population of his Pyrenean valleys as savage "and as brutal as the bears it breeds." In 1829, an army staff officer found the Morvandiaux of Fours "uttering cries as savage as the bears themselves." Officials, soldiers—who else would venture into the wild countryside, especially the lost regions south of the Loire? In 1845, an infantry battalion marching through the marshy Landes northeast of Dax discovered still more savages: poor, backward, wild. The whole region was savage: wastelands, marshes, moors, heath. In 1832, when Georges (later Baron) Haussmann visited the district of Horsillès in the southwest corner of Lot-et-Garonne, he found no road or landmark, and the highway inspector who guided him had to use a compass. These were only the petites landes; in the Landes proper, as the proverb had it, birds crossing the moors had to carry their own food. Before 1837, when the planting of stands of pine ushered in the dawn of a new era (but only a dim dawn as yet), references to savagery abound, applied equally to the landscape, the conditions, and the population. Pilgrims en route to Santiago de Compostela feared to cross the Landes because they found there "neither bread nor wine nor fish nor fountain." Indeed, Taine declared that he preferred the desert. When Edouard
Peeters published his massive Statistique générale du département de la Gironde in 1874, the draining of marshy Médoc was still within living memory, and many Bordeaux remembered the fevers and stagnant waters that justified its original name—in medios aquae. As for the great crescent to the south of Bordeaux, they still stood unimproved—savage, waterless, the home of pellagra and fever among a population as wild as its environment.²⁵

From Bordeaux to Bayonne all was wilderness. Savagery also from the Île d'Yeu off the Atlantic coast, to the Debarre in the cast, where in 1879 a colonel expressed the hope that railways might improve the lot of “populations two or three centuries behind their fellows” and eliminate “the savage instincts born of isolation and of misery.” The burghers of Tulle called peasants pochets (savages), and a Cortère priest, offering of a humble family of that profession but banished to a rural parish, noted with contempt: “the peasant is just that, sin, original sin, still persistent and visible in all its naive brutality.” His observation, recorded by Joseph Roux, was probably jotted down at the beginning of the Third Republic, but it reflects a consensus that runs through the first three-quarters of the century. “The countryman shows, in his every feature, the face of misery and woe: his eyes are uncertain, timoral, his face expressionless, his gait slow and clumsy; his long hair falling over his shoulders gives him a somber air” (Haute-Vienne, 1822). Terrible ignorance, superstition, distrust (Morbihan, 1823). Lazy, greedy, avuncular, and suspicious (Landes, 1832). Foulness, rags, miserable savagery (Loire-Inférieure, 1853). “Vulgar, hardly civilized, their nature meek but wild” (Loire, 1863). No wonder that in 1873 a Limousin landowner had recourse to terms not unlike those La Brède had used 200 years before: “animals with two feet, hardly resembling a man. [The peasant’s] clothes are filthy; under his thick skin one cannot see the blood flow. The wild, dull gaze betrays no flicker of thought in the brain of this being, morally and physically atrophied.”³⁶

The popular risings of December 1851 produced their own crop of references: savage hordes, a land of savages, barbarians. One does well to remember that to hurl the abusive expression sauvage at someone was considered slanderous and could lead to a fine of even a prison sentence if a case came to court. Yet the litany goes on: in the early 1860s the savagery is waning in Nièvre, but it persists into the 1890s in Sarthe, where the “savage” moorland people live like “troglobytes” and sleep near fire in their huts “on stalks of briar like cats on wood shaving.” It persists in Brittany, too, where the children entering school “are like those of countries where civilization has not penetrated: savage, dirty and don’t understand a word of the language” (1880). And a musical folklore ranging the west from Vendée to the Pyrenees compared the local folk to children and savages who, happily, like all primitive peoples, showed a pronounced taste for rhythm.³⁷ At late as 1903, the theme of rural savagery was still being sounded by a professional travel writer, who on a visit to the Limousin, just north of Brive, was struck by the wild character of the region and the “huttes de sauvages” in which the people lived.³⁸ What a relief after the wildness of the interminable chestnut groves to reach a township, however small. Civilization is urban (civil, civil, civilized), and so of course is urbanity; just as politeness, polities, politics, and police spring from polit— the city again.

Civilization is what the peasants lacked. In 1892 the Gramont Law making the ill-treatment of domestic animals a misdemeanor was inspired by the wish to “civilize people” and children. The 1890s, in fact, never hesitated to make that point. A Beauce priest felt that his parishioners’ greatest need was to become civilized.³⁹ In Haute-Loire, the bootleg of the Allier River showed a strikingly higher “degree of civilization,” thanks to the “more civilized nations” they met on the way to Paris. So did the men of Saint-Didier, where commercial relations with Saint-Etienne had made for “a more advanced civilization.”⁴⁰ In Morvan, by contrast, an 1873 guidebook noted that the villages were “hardly touched by civilization”; military surveys exposed the same state of affairs in Lot and Aveyron.⁴¹ Between the 1860s and the 1880s we find repeated references in the reports of primary school inspectors to the progress of civilization and the role of the schools in civilizing the populations in whose midst they operated. What did such reports mean to contemporaries? We shall examine the question in detail in due course. Right now let us suggest that they reflected the prevailing belief that areas and groups of some importance were uncivilized, that is, un-integrated into, unassimilated to French civilization: poor, backward, ignorant, savage, barbarous, wild, living like beasts with their beasts. They had to be taught manners, morals, literacy, a knowledge of French, and of France, a sense of the legal and institutional structure beyond their immediate community. Léon Gambetta put all this in a nutshell in 1873: the peasants were “intellectually several centuries behind the enlightened part of the country”; there was “an enormous distance between them and us . . . between those who speak our language and those many of our compatriots [who, cruel as it is to say so, can no more than stammer in it]:” material property had to “become the means of their moral progress,” that is, of their civilization.⁴² The peasant had to be integrated into the national society, economy, and culture; the culture of the city and of the City par excellence, Paris.

Progress reports mark the campaign to do so: in the Morbihan of 1880 civilization had yet to penetrate the savage interior and make it similar to the rest of France; but in Ardèche, “softer and politer habits are replacing rude, coarse, and savage ways,” and in the Atlantic West the old customs were being “wiped out by civilization.”⁴³ Until the final success of the campaign, the countryman would continue to be, in the words of two southwestern observers, a rough and incomplete draft of the truly civilized man.⁴⁴ Incomplete, of course, in terms of a model to which he did not conform, and for good reason: he knew nothing of it. A cultural and political aboriginal,
like to beasts and children, and one whom even sympathetic observers found
decidedly odd. In 1830 Stendhal spoke of that deadly triangle between Bor-
ddeaux, Bayonne, and Valence, where "people believe in witches, don't know
how to read, and don't speak French." And Flaubert, walking around Ros-
porden fair in 1856 like a tourist through some exotic bazaar, noted of the
peasants around him: "suspicious, anxious, bewildered by everything he sees
and doesn't understand, he makes great haste to leave the town."44 However
keen his vision, Flaubert made the great mistake of judging the peasant by
the way he behaved in town, a place that he came to only when he had to.
"Because he finds only people who assume a superior and mocking air with
him," explained an observer in Bourbonnais, the peasant was always ill at ease
and constrained in town, and superficial observers took this as evidence of
'savagery and dissimulation.' In effect the savagery was dissimulation,
enhanced by surlieness. This would be worse in an area like Brittany, where the
peasant could not be sure who among the townspeople (apart from small trades-
men and artisans) spoke his language.45 As we shall see, French-speakers
there and elsewhere needed interpreters, which did not make for easier com-
munication or mutual understanding.

II. At ease in urban settings, the peasant made his urban observers ill at ease;
their opinion of him was the mirror image of his mistrust of them. Writing
in the 1860's, one observer of the southwestern peasants—who, he was sure,
hated and feared him—could not hide his own fear of them, or his contempt.
And a square near Nantes could not help noticing the way the peasants looked
at him, "full of hatred and suspicion."46 "Ignorant, full of prejudices," wrote
an officer, speaking of the population near Le Mans, "they have no scruples
in craft or in deceit." Ignorance, apathy, slackness, sloth, inertia, a brutal,
graping, dissembling, and hypocritical nature, are variously attributed to
malice, poverty, and undernourishment.47 We shall hear more of this later.
At any rate, what could one expect? The peasant did not reason; he was
selfish and superstitious. He was insensitive to beauty, indifferent to his sur-
roundings. He was envious and detested anyone who tried to better himself.48

City dwellers, who often (as in the colonial cities of Brittany) did not un-
derstand the rural language, despised the peasants, exaggerated their sav-
gery, insisted on the more picturesque—hence backward—aspects of their
activities, and sometimes compared them unfavorably with other colonized
peoples in North Africa and the New World.49 In nineteenth-century Bent it
was not unusual to hear the surrounding countryside described as "the bush":
"brusée or cabrassée. But colonial parallels were little needed when the
armory of prejudice was as well stocked: "Les pommes de terre pour les
chocnons, les épiluchres pour les Bretons."50

In the mid-eighteenth century, the famous Encyclopédie had expressed the
established view: "Many people see little difference between this class of men
and the animals they use to farm our lands; this manner of thinking is very
old and it is likely that it will endure a very long time." It did. During the
Revolution, writes Jules Boly, the urban national guard in the Maine had the
most profound contempt for the rural barbarians of their region and even
carried back necklaces of ears and noses from their incursions into the rebel-
lous countryside. Nineteenth-century historians of the Vendée, in their turn,
denied that country people could have any purpose or ideas apart from those
suggested by outside sources.51 This theme, which recurred time and again in
discussions of popular culture, permeated the notion of the mindless dolt
whose thinking was inconsequential, if indeed he thought at all.

Early-nineteenth-century folklorists were criticized for showing interest in
the "low class of the population" or for recording patois unworthy of atten-
tion, let alone respect. The Republicans of 1791, with the obvious intent of
demeaning the majority of the national assembly, had called them "rurals."52
The rurals themselves agreed: it was demeaning to be a rural. To walk like
a peasant or eat like a peasant was a sin that the little manuals of etiquette
the peddlers sold condemned out of hand. Others used the notion of race in
this same context. In Languedoc the unprivileged classes were regarded and
regarded themselves as an inferior species: country girls, small, black, and
wizened, were "of another race" than town girls. One result of this belief in
a difference in kind was that well into the nineteenth century village mid-
wives kneaded babies' skulls in an effort "more symbolic than real" to give
the little round heads of peasant babies the elongated skull that was associ-
ated with the more intelligent city folk.53 And just as the superiority assumed
by strangers became a superiority attributed to strangers, so the repressive
judgments of strangers were incorporated into language, and hence inevitably
into thought.

In Lower Brittany the word pêlée (originally used to describe a cloghopper)
came to apply first to all peasants of that area, then to the Breton lan-
guage itself. Terms like pem and beda followed the same route, originally sig-
ifying a clog, then a recruit, and finally any peasant of Lower Brittany. Simi-
larly, in Franche-Comté the term for cow dung, kous, gave rise to bowen for
peasant. Croquants, bumpkins, cloghoppers, culturistes—the list we began
some pages back is far from complete. But as if all this was not enough, the
word peasant itself became a term of contempt, to be rejected as an insult or
accepted as an expression of humility, but in either case to be shed for a more
honorable label at the first opportunity. And indeed an English traveler of the
1860's found the word falling into disuse: "just as soon as he can, the peasant
becomes a cultivateur."54

The peasant was ashamed to be a peasant; he was ashamed to be uncivil-
ized; he agreed with his judges that there was something valuable and vastly
superior that he lacked, that French civilization and notably anything from
Paris were clearly superior and clearly desirable: hence the vogue of the
articles de Paris. Bretons twisted those who sought to ape a refined tone for
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by and the lessons to be drawn from the still-current conflict between French and local speech. Among the spate of surveys that marked the fin-de-siècle and the early twentieth century, none looked beyond Paris and what went on there. And this without reservations, confident that the views and aspirations of a tiny minority taking itself for all did indeed represent all.14

Perhaps that is why Hausmann, writing his memoirs in retirement, could refer to "our country, the most 'one' in the whole world," when France was still very far from one, and when he himself had been in a good position to see this with his own eyes in the administrative posts he had held through the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, before his fatal appointment to Paris.15 The myth was stronger than the reality.

Yet the reality was inescapable. And the reality was diversity. One reason believers in the essential unity of France ignored this most obvious fact may have been that they took that unity for granted. But as the century advanced the division between country and town began to attract comment. The economistic Adolphe Blanqui, who traveled a great deal through darkest France, partly on official missions of exploration, partly to prepare a survey of rural populations that unfortunately never saw the light of day, was one of the first to insist on it. In his preliminary findings, published in 1851, Blanqui noted: "Two different peoples living on the same land a life so different that they seem foreign to each other, though united by the bonds of the most imperious centralization that ever existed." In the countryside, barbarism and misery were still the norm "despite the civilizing movement taking over neighboring towns." In the high Alps and parts of Var and Isère, a simple wheelbarrow would be as extraordinary a sight as a locomotive. "Village and city represent...two completely opposite ways of life." Comfort and well-being were found only in a few "oases."16 And while towns were becoming more alike, country people continued to show a remarkable diversity from one region to another and even from one province to the next.

Diversity had not bothered earlier centuries very much. It seemed part of the nature of things, whether from place to place or between one social group and another. But the Revolution had brought with it the concept of national unity as an integral and integrating ideal at all levels, and the ideal of oneness stirred concern about its shortcomings. Diversity became imperfection, injustice, failure, something to be noted and to be remedied. The contrast Blanqui drew between administrative unity and deep differences in conditions and attitudes became a source of malaise.

In 1845 Benjamin Disraeli had published Sybil with its perceptive reference to the two nations "between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, are not governed by the same laws." Disraeli was referring
to the rich and the poor ("the Privileged and the People"), and to the reforms needed to knit a people together. His ideas, or very similar ones, were discussed and sometimes applied at the urban level. But they applied as apply to France's rural situation—a situation noticed only rarely and by those few whose interest drew them to subjects that the dominant center deemed unimportant.

Blanqui had found occasion to remark that urban and rural civilization had always moved at a different pace, "but nowhere is the distance separating them greater than in France." In the first history of peasants as such, published in 1876, the journalist Eugène Bonnemère predicted the hardening of social lines, culminating in two distinct races, city dwellers and countryfolk, living in mutual ignorance, and in two distinct Frances, different and hostile, that of the country and that of the towns." And if Cambettes, speaking at Belleville in 1875, felt the need to deny the antagonism between country and town ("two Frances opposed one to the other"), it must have been there when he spoke. As late as 1893, Henri Baudrillard still spoke of the deep division between cities, "which have their life apart," and the countryside. At the same time, it is worth noting that he had reference here to the relatively backward Haute-Garonne, not to the French countryside as a whole, suggesting that changes had taken place elsewhere in the meantime, and that different regions evolved at a different pace.

Such time lags and the disparities that ensued from different rates of change are crucial aspects of our story. Most of it deals with regional diversities that have attracted little notice in generalizations made from an urban point of view. If Disraeli concerned himself with rich and poor, it may have been in part because regional differences were of less account in England than in France. Comparing France and England in the 1860s, Léonce de Laverrière found little difference between rural and urban salaries in England, between the Londoner's way of life and that of the Cumberland man. His statistical approach may be disputed, and his impressions too. But it is certain, as he claimed, that nowhere in England could one find anything approaching the distance that separated the departments of Nord and Seine-Infrérieure, say, from Lorraine and Languedoc. Nor, indeed, could one have found the kind of statute that the country paid to the capital, and the countryside grudgingly to cities in general. "You have voted millions to embellish the cities," complained a deputy of Nord in 1861: "you have voted fine monuments and we, we are still in the mud up to our knees.""

In July 1796, after news of the fall of the Bastille, mountain peasants of the Saint-Romain region in Mâconnais revolted and carried their spontaneous justice into the plains, which remembered this always as the time of the brigands. The rebels caused great damage—pillaging and burning—until finally put down by the urban militias of Mâcon, Cluny, and Tournus. Many were hanged at the gates of Cluny or in the town square of Tournus. Traditionally says that those who escaped this summary justice were crucified by mobs on Cluny common. True or false, tradition is revealing: it gives us the venting of popular wrath on men whom some might regard as popular heroes. And the countryside between Igé and Cluny preserves the equivocal memory in Brigands' Roads, Brigands' Crosses, and other tributes to the well-established hostility between mountain and plain, country and town. Writing about the same period, Richard Cobbe talks of the soldiers who marched out of Paris and other urban centers to enforce the economic policies of 1793 and 1794 (that is, to gather provisions), behaving just as if they were in enemy territory: "Indeed, many of these urban soldiers said that they were in enemy territory." The feeling was mutual, and it persisted.

Country and town, bourgeois and hamlet, were complementary, but still incompletely so, and hostile. For the peasant, the bourgeoisie, however humble, was the inhabitant of the bourg, envied and distrusted. The girls who lived on isolated farms or in tiny hamlets traditionally preferred to marry artisans; witness the many Gason tales warning the peasant maid against marrying a "bourgeois" like the village baker or hairdresser, or the equally numerous songs in which a farmer or a shepherd is spurred in favor of a miller or a baker. When the song is of peasant origin it may predict the grief that awaits the girl, the beatings and the moldy bread (no different really from what could be expected on a farm), but the tone is one of rivalry and resentment. This becomes more acute when the rival belongs to a real urban community. A song of Lower Dauphine tells of a peasant lad who tangles with a Lyon silk weaver and thrashes him, then meets a maiden he likes and wants to impress with his feet:"

Had I but known how to tell her my tale! 
Peasants are every bit as good as Gentlemen!

Of course they were not. And the advantages all urban dwellers seemed to have over them prompted thoughts of revenge. All city people were gentes—bourgeois, messieurs—and their habitual superiority contributed to the ambivalence of the peasants' reactions to them and to their influence. Emile Souvestre, who was persuaded of the hatred peasants felt for the bourgeoisie, tells of how, in the peasant siege of Pontivy in Vendée during the Hundred Days, the women who accompanied the assailants carried sacks for the loot they hoped to gain. One had two: the smaller for the money she could find, the bigger to carry off gentes' heads. Several stories of this ilk have circulated, but none has been authenticated so far. They reflect not only the fears of city people, but their accurate perception of how their country neighbors felt about them. Messieurs were many, but the feelings they provoked were the same. In Savoy in 1870, after news of the fall of the Second Empire reached the villages, peasants were reported to have cried, "Ahas les messieurs! Vive la République!"
Nor, as we have seen, did the hostility reflect a clear-cut sense of class divisions. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that peasants distrusted anything with the taint of the town. Around Limoges in the 1840's, young Republicans of the middle classes preached the doctrines of Pierre Leroux, Saint-Simon, Cabot, and Fourier to the local workers, and converted some of them. But neither the burghers nor the workers of the town could get through to the rural masses. Socialist militants trying to indoctrinate the peasantry in patriots got a few leagues out of town, as far as their legs could carry them in one day, but seem to have had little or no impact.  

The troubles that shook France between 1848 and 1851 showed that neither class nor political interests could override traditional hostilities and fears. When the peasants of Ainay marched on their county town, Guire, in 1848, the local workers' club was torn between sympathy for the insurgents and fear of seeing them enter the town. Finally, workmen, firemen, national guard, all "betrayed" the peasants and stood with their fellow townsmen. Again, after December 2, 1851, when the peasants marched on towns throughout the south of the Limousin, the townsmen stood against them. In the Drôme, at Crest, whose burghers had sucked the surrounding country dry with their usury, the peasants came down out of the mountains as poor, wild mountainous have done through history, to pillage the bourgeois of the plains. But "the barbarian army" (as a leader of the municipal resistance called them) found neither help nor sympathy among the workers of Crest, by all accounts a pretty unruly lot themselves in other circumstances.  

We shall encounter these events again when we examine the political evolution of the countryside in detail. My point right now is that age-old hostilities had changed little, that social tensions remained in their archaic pattern, and that what has sometimes been taken as evidence of class war in the countryside was often the extension of an understandable feud between country and town. From Balzac to Zola, via Maeterlinck, the Abbé Roux, and many others, the peasant appears as a dark, mysterious, homile, and menacing figure, and is described as such. When he is not a noble savage, as he was for George Sand, he is simply a savage.  

Those who express regret at the passing of the level-headed, vigorous, hard-working countryman of yore have no idea what he was really like—no more, in many cases, than his contemporaries had. As Philip Gaskell observes, of the Scottish Highlander in roughly the same period: "He lived not in picturesque, rural felicity, but in conditions of penury and squalor that can only be fairly compared with those of a famine area in contemporary India, and that were tolerable only because they were traditional and familiar."

In August 1849, when the Conseil Général of Loiret considered a series of questions submitted by the Minister of the Interior, their answer to one question was terse: "Is poverty hereditary in a great many families? Yes." So rare was the incidence of peasant wealth that when a village managed to grow rich his success was likely to be attributed to trafficking with the devil or to criminal activity. In 1849 one Catherine Bourx of Ally (Caumet) was caught stealing from the mill where she worked, her employers having been alerted by her "acquisition of a pair of shoes, an umbrella, and two handkerchiefs in quick succession, and the purchase of these items in cash."  

Proverbs and songs reflect the situation: "When one has nothing, one has nothing to lose," says the Limousin; and "A patched coat lasts longer than a new one." The tale of Hannel and Greetel, abandoned in the woods by parents too poor to feed them, is told in Auvergne about little Jean and Jeanette. The best known bonnieres of Auvergne and one of the geyset has a swain wondering how to get married on practically nothing. He has five sous, his love has four, they will buy one spoon, they will buy one bowl, and eat their soup together. Further west, omnipresent misery struts through peasant shanties as it does through the peasants' lives, robbing them of everything, in due course of their lives. 

One evidence of poverty, often cited by contemporaries, was the sale of women's hair. This was particularly widespread in the center and the west, where the hair of countrywomen was periodically harvested to be exchanged in the market for a length of cloth, a couple of kerchiefs, or simply a few cens. In the midsummer fair at Limoges was especially dedicated to this trade, attracting buyers from as far as Paris; so did another important center, Treignac, in Corrèze. The practice waned as prosperity spread after the 1870's, and as Chinese competition drove the market down, a development that saw the value of a kilogram of hair drop from 100 francs in the early 1860's to only 50 in 1872. By 1888 a Corrèzien could rejoice that more and more peasant women refused to sell their hair, and that only "shepherdesses and poor servants" still traded it for a few yards of calico. But the practice declined slowly, and it persisted in most of the Limousin and Brittany, the poorest and most backward of French regions, until at least 1904.
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provide the next day's fuel. All slept on dried leaves. Shepherds and other
landless peasants lived even harder. The gendarmes of Lahore described the
ermitage of a Pyrenean shepherd (1888): about one meter high, dry stones, earth
roof, a little straw to lie on; a small heap of potatoes; a sack containing half a
loaf, fat, and salt. The man carried his wealth on him: a box with three or
four matches and nothing else. As a bourrée of the Foix country had it:

Shepherds' life,
Life of rich lacs:
Skinned milk in the morning,
Curdled milk at night.

Most shepherds were able to keep body and soul together, but how they
managed to exist, they and the many other landless denizens of the countryside,
remains an enigma. Of course they worked—when they could—and those who worked, worked
very hard indeed. It has been suggested that new methods of farming, notably
the shift from the biannual to the triannual rotation of crops, created a peasant
without leisure. Again, we shall see that new methods of cultivation progressed
at rates that varied greatly; and so did access to leisure. But I should think
that peasants had enough to do even under the old system. What observers in
fact noted was the result of the peasant's new opportunities to improve his
lot at the cost of immense effort and with no certainty of success—more sim-
ply, the novelty of hope. Peasants in Upper Queyras began work at dawn, ended
late at night, often went to work their own plot by moonlight after having worked
another's land by day. "No more rest and no more ease," lamented a
landowner near Nantes in 1856. "Everyone scrounges... works without care for
rest or food,... to buy a plot of land from some neighbor ruined by usury."

The more ambitious you were, the harder you worked. Benoît Malon's fa-
ther, employed on a Forez farm, was free to work his potato patch and his
kitchen garden Sunday after church. He died at thirty-three of pleurisy, which
he contracted as he hurried to get to his freshly planted potatoes. As late as
1908 in the marshlands of the Vendée a man farming four hectares with only
a spade (thus able to work no more than four ares a day) left home at
five in the morning, returned at seven in the evening, and never saw his chil-
dren. Hard labor without chains—to which one remained bound by necessity
and from which only death could bring release.

That the release was often yearned for is attested by the Alpine adage: "hez-
roux com'un cérbaç"—happy as a carcass. Malon's grandmother entertained
the little boy to accompany her in death; his mother envied him because she
believed he would die young. There is a Berry song in which a woman dreams
of escape, but every hope proves false: perhaps when she is married she will

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work in the fields no more; but marriage comes and still she works; pregnancy
is no better, children are no help, so the years for death, and death at last sets her free. No wonder the Bourbons's peasant holds life as nothing:

"La vie, on tien de tout." A life of labor is easily dispensed with.

So much misery, so much fear. Of menaces known and unknown; of the
known, above all wolves, mad dogs, and fires. Forests were still vast and
fearsome around mid-century. In Mâconnia the wolves disappeared in the 1840's, and in Orléans one
could cross the forest without risk of attack by 1850. But elsewhere wolves ran
freely in packs through forests and mountain regions until close to the end of
the century. The last wolf in Châtelaix forest was killed in 1877. In Brit-
tany they were attacking animals into the early 1880's, and in 1882 Maupas-
sant recorded that in Lower Brittany sheep were put out to graze with cows to
provide "la part du lois." Wolves were hunted in the Morvan into the 1890's
(as were boars, which devastated the fields) and in the Vosges, Brittany, the
Charantes and Périgord. In 1889, 1336 wolves were killed in France or, rather,
official bounty were paid for that many heads; in 1890, 467 were killed, in
1900 only 150. Bounty, gun, and poison were gaining the upper hand. Forests
were shrinking, roads made wolves' lives more accessible, and the noisy new
railroads and highways frightened off the beasts. But the tales told over win-
ter evenings and the persistence of the increasingly vague but still menacing
image of the wolf show better than mere statistics the grip the animal had on
the popular imagination. Evil-smelling spots were linked with wolves, like the
notorious Carroi de Marloz or Mareloup in Sancerres, where witches' abd
abs were rumored into the twentieth century; and so were the activities of
the terrifying meneurs de loups, who could set the beasts on one. For city dwellers
the wolf was a storybook character, seldom closer than a tale from Jules Verne
or the Comtesse de Ségour. But for people over great portions of France he was
a bowing in the night, a disquieting presence not far off, a hazard or even an
interdiction of certain winter paths, and worst of all, a source of the dreaded
rabies.

I have found little information about the incidence of rabies, but rabid dogs
were not unusual and with news of one in the neighborhood fear spread very
fast. An inatement to the moon used in Charente and Poitou asked first of
all for protection against mad dogs—more dangerous seemingly than snakes. Since the farm dogs were typically half-wild themselves (they would

6 René Dumont, Voyages en France (Paris: Arthème梯, p. 397. One hectare = 10,000 square me-
ters = 2.47 acres. One acre = 100 square meters = 2.4956 square yards.

* But the peasant of Bourbonnais feared both, judging by his traditional prayer for protection
"against evil beasts": "Saincte-Honoré glorieux, de toute chauve ne difende / Des chaus loues, des
lopes foues, / Des veruj [vipers] et des serpents." A medical report estimated that in Lozère 25
people died of bites by rabid animals, mostly dogs, between 1895 and 1896. Not so many, it
would seem, until we remember that some of those bitten survived alier castratation of
the wound or amputation, and that others were mordered to death by their terrified families,
then buried with no further inquiry on the part of local authorities. (France Bousso, Dictionnaire
du parler bouronnais, p. 247. L'Aubine, 1657-58.)
not have been much use had they not been aggressive), mad dogs were not always so and could easily bite several persons before being identified. It is not surprising that Pasteur became such a national hero.

Fires, by contrast, are well documented. Police and judicial files offer an endless recital of fires, accidental and deliberate, attributed to envy, resentment, spite, greed, or, sometimes, lightning. Anyone and everyone might have been the culprit: an eight-year-old child working on a farm; an unbalanced or jealous spouse; a neighbor, rival, or servant; a tramp (though the matches of passing vagabonds were taken into custody when they dosed down in the barn); an owner hoping to cash in on insurance. Some confraternal matches tended to burst into flames at the slightest friction. More often, no matches were to be had, and the constant fetching and carrying of embers between neighbors led easily to accidents.44

Fires were sometimes catastrophic. Two such configurations occurred in 1879 alone, one destroying 114 dwellings in the little village of Fréne-sur-Apance (Haute-Marne), and the other consuming all 17 houses in the hamlet of Fréterans in Bresse, leaving 100 persons destitute. Considering that the means of fighting fires were primitive at best and most of the time were practically useless, it is small wonder that people were easily aroused to panic. In October 1865, as the result of a series of fires around Néris (Lot-et-Garonne), a wave of fear spread through the department and neighboring cantons of Gers, a fear so deep, thought the imperial prosecutor, as to invite comparison with the Great Fear of 1793: armed patrols, shots fired in the night, people barricading themselves in their homes, beggars and tramps arrested or run out of villages, even a "mao levy" on the rumor that clerical and legitimist bands were setting the fires in retaliation for the Emperor's papal policies. Such notions proved contagious, and one poor man set fire to a mill "because he heard it said that it was the thing to do, and that he would be richly rewarded." Finally, the alarm abated just as it had swelled, like other waves of panic in anxious times.45

The greatest fire hazard lay in the thatched roofs that covered so many structures. "If covered with straw," went the Gascon saying, "don't let fire come near it." Authorities and insurance companies waged bitter campaigns against thatch. But many factors worked against change, above all the cost of a suitable substitute until improved transportation made slate or tile more readily available. Furthermore, in the mountains and other areas the thatch nicely insulated the huts so that food could be stocked in quantity. More important, perhaps, the walls and timberwork of the peasants' huts were too weak for heavier covering and had to be strengthened, if not totally rebuilt. This helps explain

44 Émile Ducharne calls this the favorite crime of the lower orders (Le Crime d'Incendie, Paris, 1913, p. 53). And Gabriel Tarde notes: "A la campagne, incendier la grange de son ennemi, quand on sait qu'elle n'est pas assurée, est le moyen de vengeance le plus souvent et le plus infailliblement employé" (Essais et souvenirs sociologiques, 1700, 1875, p. 121).

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the obstinate resistance to outside pressure where building and roofing materials were not easily come by. And it almost certainly explains the strange thatched roof rebellion that shook the Angers countryside in 1854, when the prefect of Maine-et-Loire, eager to eliminate the source of so many fires, decided that all thatch had to be replaced by slate or tile. Many peasants too poor to bear the cost of a new roof, let alone the cost of rebuilding their houses in stone rather than clay and wood, resisted the order and were evicted. They marched on Angers, several thousand strong, and the army had to intervene and disperse them. The prefect was replaced, the decree rescinded, and thatched roofs allowed to disappear more gradually. The relatively prosperous farmers who carried insurance were finally forced into compliance under a concerted attack by insurance companies in the 1860's and after. But the final slide to oblivion came when the threshing machine began to replace the ancient flail. The straw used for roofs had to be flailed; mechanical threshers broke the straw and made it useless. Insurance rates had made thatch impractical for the prosperous; machines made it almost impossible for the poor.46

Hunger and the fear of it were a more constant dread even than fire, the ubiquitous presence at many a hearth, the principal problem of many a province. The anxiety of providing daily bread or mush or bran for oneself and one's family was greater in some places, like Morvanne, than in others. But everywhere it shaped behavior, attitudes, and decisions.

In 1772 a royal official at Foix remarked that the poor "keep more fasts than the Church orders." The nineteenth century had its share of dieters: 1812, 1819, 1837, 1857, and especially the great hunger of 1846-47. In Ariège families ate grass, hungry peasants were "eager to get into prison," mendicancy was chronic, armies of beggars descended into the plains, and to the end of the century, travelers were beset by legions of children seeking alms.47

Songs and sayings record the wisdom of dearth: "Year of beechnut, year of famine; year of acorns, year of naught.2 "Bread arse goes along, empty belly goes no more." "Never mind about rags as long as there is food." "Full of cabbage, full of turnips, as long as one is full." And the importance of conserving precious bread: "Hard bread makes a safe house." Warm bread could mean ruin; one ate too much of it. Stale bread encouraged frugality.48 As Cobb emphasizes, the problems of subsistence—that is, of a minimum substantially below subsistence-level—persisted well into the nineteenth century. Hungry peasants facing a grain shortage behaved as their forefathers had: blockading

46 Yet in Yonne thatch seems to have been abandoned quite early. See Justice of the Peace, Saint-Florimont, to Prefect, March 5, 1857, in Archives Départementales, Yonne III M 142, inveigling against the continued use of watchtowers: "Ces murs ont eu, je le sais, leur raison d'être; elles étaient un mal nécessaire quand toutes les maisons étaient construites en bois, couvertes en chaume et peuplées ainsi des aliments faciles aux ravages du feu. Maintenant, grâce au bien-être qui se répand dans les campagnes, grâce aux incendies eux-mêmes, le chaume a disparu presque partout." But then, Saint-Florimont is in the plains of northeastern Yonne and not subject to the harsh conditions of the areas farther south.
or plundering convoys of grain. From the 1830's on, to the end of the Second Empire, ministers, prefects, and sub-prefects kept an anxious eye on crops and police chiefs reported monthly and sometimes weekly on the state of crops in their area and of grain supplies in general. As the prefect of Loiret recognized in October 1856, distress and want were inevitable "in this season." One could only congratulate oneself if an extreme calamity was avoided. A year when want did not stir up trouble was cause for official comment. In 1854, government measures, public works and aid in Maine-et-Loir kept the countryside calm through a hungry winter and a hungrier spring. "For the first time... a calamitous year will have passed without sedition and almost without muttering," boasted the local prefect.

Even at this late date, a rigorous winter, a barren spring, a crop failure, could still cause misery and grain riots that called for public works, subsidies, charitable initiatives, and police action. Slowly—but only very slowly—roads and railroads were getting the better of the situation. In 1857, the Orléans Company was ready to proclaim its "glorious satisfaction that the land along its railway have been spared [not hunger, but] the scenes of disorder that food shortages have caused elsewhere." The directors of the company rejoiced too soon, but the point would be made by others with better reason: Lavergne in 1855, glad that new rail links could stave off a dietette even when the price of wheat was high; J. A. Barral in 1854, relieved that with the railway the Limousin was no longer exposed to frequent famines.

Though provisioning the populace was a continuing problem to the very end of the Empire, there were fewer and fewer food riots, evidence of a growing success in solving subsistence problems. In 1868, a bad year, turbulence marked the hungry months of spring and summer, when the grain from the previous harvest ran out before the new harvest had been brought in. Soaring prices, along with rumors of hoarding and speculation, set off food riots from Manshe to Ardèche and Tarn. Serious disturbances broke out at Galliac and Albi, and magistrates in Toulouse reported the tensest situation in 15 years. But this seems to have been the last old-fashioned food crisis. Increased productivity and improved communications together banished the fear of hunger from the public to the private sphere, from the general to the particular level. Death, which had ruled social life for thousands of years, became an exceptional event. For clear evidence of how death left its impress on society, we can look at the most intimate of indexes: between 1836 and 1860 we see a statistically significant correlation between the price of grain and the marriage rate (−0.61); between 1896 and 1900 the correlation disappears (−0.05).

Something else, though hard to define, began to disappear about that time: the habitual peasant resignation. The militant Louise Michel remembered what an old woman in her native village had said, recalling a year when profitiers threw the region into famine: "Of course the poor people have to resign themselves to the things they can't prevent!" Endure what you can not help, submit to what is inevitable. "Queu'queux voixles, faut bât durer," says the peasant of Bourbonnais; and durer means both to endure and to keep going. The peasant knows that he who bears, lasts. There is nothing to be done about a dry summer or a hard winter, about a sudden storm, about injustice or fate except wait, bend, and perhaps pray. The poor will always be poor, and always oppressed and exploited, teaches the wisdom of ages. All they can do is remember and act accordingly: "The scrounger the beast, the more the fliers will sting it." "Poor people's bread always burns in the oven." "A swinehard in this world, a swineherd in the next." "Hard times for the poor are as inevitable as ease for the rich." "The poor man's cock sings winter long; the mower's cock answers it soon after." Accept your condition and endure. "Don't try to fart higher than your arse." "Dragged arse creeps along, high arse perishes." Do not expect help: "There is more pity shown to a clod than to an orphan." And watch out, for pride, no matter how little, goes before a fall: "Who has no trouble must expect it." "Swim well, drown well." "One never knows what death one will die." "You think the eggs are on the fire when only shells are left." "When you've got a good soup made, the devil comes and shits in it." Never say "fountain I'll not drink your water." You may have to do so, even if you have pissed in it. A stoic pessimism.

One accepted what had always been, tried to learn from experience, adjusted to circumstances instead of trying to change them. The assumption of an eternal order with limited alternatives—the order éternel des champs? Or just narrow horizons, ignorance, inertia? Something of both, I think, and rooted in perceptions that altered only as the century grew old. The Limousin farmer worked all year but, however hard he tried, he could not feed his tribe. That is the way it had always been. Yet, in his hovel, the crofter thought himself well enough off "because he has known nothing better." That was in 1857. In 1907 an old farmhand recalled for Jules Renard his life in earlier days: he had never slept in a bed before he married, had tasted no wine, and had first eaten meat only because a horse had died (which the employees feasted on for 15 straight days, eating it to the last hoof). "Didn't you dare ask for better?" "We never thought of it." By 1907 the peasants had learned better. They had learned to ask. And as the century turned, some found reason to rue the passing of resignation: "No one is resigned these days; the utopia of the right to happiness has replaced the utopia of the right to work." The right to work was utopia indeed. The need to work was not. In the northern hemisphere, at any rate, man seemed as naturally born to work as the bird was to fly. The word travail seems to have shed its original sense of toil, fatigue, and pain in the sixteenth century, taking on the meaning of two older words that referred to work, labourer and borrower, though it retained shades of its origins to the eighteenth century (suggesting fatigue, anxiety, or pain, as in the old-fashioned English travail). For the privileged few, the word also embodied the idea that manual labor was demeaning; the ascetics of Port
Royal, for example, could find no better way to mortify themselves than to work in the fields or carve coops. But in the countryside, where work appeared to be a necessary part of life and where most knew no other way to keep body and soul together, work became a virtue, perhaps the greatest virtue to be found in man or wife.

Good and bad work could be described by a broad vocabulary with many nuances. The good worker was noble, hardy, brave, courageous, valiant. Comparisons for bad work were significantly drawn from non-natural professions or from despised strangers. One who bungled his work was a cobber; one who puttered around was a horse-dealer; one who promised to do something and then did not do it was an apothecary. All this varied with local fancy and experience: the apothecary was more often an extortioner than a liar; the horse trader was more often a chiseler than a pottering bricoleur. But in Franche-Comté, for instance, the chiseler was an argonnier, a peddler from the Argonne, a bit of a crook like most peddlers. My purpose here is not to discuss nicknames, but to point to the scorn that was attached to bad work. Perhaps the most striking example of the association of the two can be found in the evolution of the word faissant, which from its original sense of idle or lazy grew increasingly pejorative and insulting, to the point where, in 1906, we find a trade union leader ludicrously calling on striking workers to go after the scalps with the cry "Go beat up the idlers who are working!!"

Of course, men worked because they had to. "Man works and scrimp," reasoned the prefect of Haute-Vienne in 1848, "produces and saves, only under the pressure of present need or of the fear of need to come. Were the inferior classes to be delivered by charity from this vigorous stimulus and cushioned from this salutary threat, it would simply end the great motivation for work. There was virtue in "mediocrity," in poverty, in need, because they forced men to work, to obey "the divine law of labor," to keep busy and, hence, to keep out of trouble.

Clearly the prefect of Haute-Vienne could envisage no means of relief from present need or need to come other than drudgery or charity. In 1848 necessity still ruled life, and its hold would relax very slowly. As it relaxed, we hear more references to work as an obligation, a duty to society and to God. Mandatory labor requires increasing justification and defense as it becomes less truly mandatory. Or, rather, as need becomes less ponderous and the obligation to work less stringent. Once it was clear which way the wind was blowing, there was a veritable chorus of complaint from outside observers (prefects and other officials, authors of statistics and reports, teachers, priests, and travelers), all in praise of sobriety and the simple life, and deprecating what was often described as luxury, which is to say, the tendency to live above one's station, trying to eat, dress, act, and even relax as the upper classes did.

The earliest references to this regrettable trend were aimed not at the peasants but at the urban workers, too quick to "adopt the ways of the idle class."

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Though untypically early, 1848 may serve as a symbolic landmark of the rot spreading in the countryside. We find a Limousin priest chiding his flock for frittering their time away at pubs and fairs and wearing clothes "not of your condition." Four years later, a landowner of Bourbonsais echoed the criticism: "Too much leisure, too many holidays despite the opposition of the Church, too much going to fairs to satisfy idle curiosity, above all perhaps too little abstemiousness—the more the peasant grows, the more he consumes." What good was greater productivity if its results served mainly to bring the peasant up from the low-water mark of traditional shortage to a subsistence level? A middle-class growing rich on the expansion of the market existed virtuous external to the market and to an industrial economy. Like dogs in an anachronistic manger, they wanted to see the poor as producers for the market (low prices), not as consumers (higher prices). Thus consumption (extravagance) was deprecated, and the traditional values of sobriety, economy, and industry were exalted.

Few critics were as clear or as explicit as this about the reasons for the disapproval. But the trickle of criticism became a regular flow after the late 1860's, when conditions perceptibly improved. Most of it reflected simple outrage at the lower classes' unheard of behavior. Too many women dressed like their betters, too many working men indulged in luxury and intemperance—turned to pipes, cards, kershefs or cravats, often even books (preferably something ribald or the Petit Albert), expected to wear hats, boots, and broadcloth suits, grew accustomed to high living, dressed their wives and children in finery, and drank more than was good for them.

As the earliest and most visible evidence of improvement, dress drew the most criticism. The numerous teachers' monographs on village life in 1886 refer to the growing extravagance and suggestiveness of clothes' attire and sometimes hint at some deeper motivation. Clothes, suggested a teacher in the Meurthe, were used as a status symbol, designed to demonstrate an equality of rank that did not in fact exist. But the often-noted "unbridled longing" for material possessions was really no more than the simple perception of new possibilities, the satisfaction of newly discovered wants. "What used to be superfluous has become indispensable; we suffer deprivations of things our ancestors never heard of." Was this development entirely bad? Even some teachers who condemned it in one breath could see the progress that it reflected. A teacher in the Vosges, after expressing the ritual regrets over the growing luxury, expenditure of money, and drinking, admitted these were coupled with comforts that none could have imagined a few short years before: "Our grandfathers would find it difficult to recognize their village, and wouldn't believe our natty youth to be of the same race as themselves."

By the 1890's Baudrillard had to marvel at the luxury and rising standard of living of the lower classes of rural Provence, who were fed, lodged, and dressed pretty much as bourgeois and property owners used to be. This last gives
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us a clue, for by this time the standards of mid-century had so changed that what had once constituted a comfortable living was now felt to be a relatively spare and spartan existence. Théon de Montaigé saw the point clearly as early as 1865: "the more the general well-being improved, the higher the poverty line.

If poverty is defined as the inability to satisfy one's needs, there could be little sense of deprivation so long as the perceived needs were sharply limited and the aspiration for something more abnormal. "The absence of an unknown good," Calembert de Lafayette told the agricultural society of Puy in 1874, "cannot constitute a need, or, consequently, become a deprivation." Or as Théon de Montaigé put it in 1869: "Poverty is measured by comparisons. One cannot feel deprived of possessions and pleasures one is unaware of."

This is what urbanization—or more precisely, the spread of urban values through the countryside—was going to change. New expectations, and new frustrations when they were not met; desires that became needs; the fading of the ages-old resignation and passivity. How these changes came to pass, and how slowly they passed—that is what this book is all about.

Chapter Two

THE MAD BELIEFS

There is a Superstition in avoiding Superstition.

—FRANCIS BACON

"Do not believe in witches," warned a widely used elementary textbook of 1895. "... People who say they can steal or work harm by muttering certain words, those who claim to know the future, are madmen or thieves. Do not believe in ghosts, in specters, in spirits, in phantoms... Do not imagine one can avoid harm or accidents with... amulets, talismans, fetishes, such as... herbs gathered on St. John's Eve." If Ernest Lavisse warned against such beliefs, it must have been because they were widespread. Others agreed. "For the least little reason, the peasant thought a spell had been cast on his cattle or his field. He bought talismans and wore them around his neck like a scapulary... medallions, magic rings, a piece of hangingman's rope, a piece of the devil's bane in anything out of the way and ran to a sorcerer."9

In 1888 Emile Littré thought that the word charme was being used less in its primitive sense of spell, and that even the reciting or singing of incantatory spells was on the wane. But spells and prayers for protection against devils or storms, snakes or mad dogs, seemed in no hurry to disappear. As late as 1928 we find the belief current that a hunter's gun would be charmed if he shot at a cross and drew blood from it. In 1892 an agricultural commission visiting Roquefort in the Landes was shocked at the hold of superstition there: the small farmers did not want beehives because they brought bad luck; branches of fern to ward off the evil eye hung from the roof of every sheepfold. The Bourbonnais had long believed in the efficacy of the marcos, the eldest of seven sons born consecutively, who was supposed to be able to heal scrofula by simply touching the victim before sunrise on the night of Saint John. Marcosa drew great crowds in Bourbonnais until the end of the century and were paid for their help in kind. They continued to be called on still later in Beauce.10

Well into the twentieth century, in Berry, everything was of fearsome or fantastic potent; the buzzing of insects announced a ghostly hunt; the ribbons of mist above the marshes were mysterious drivers of clouds; newly pruned elms,
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weight of traditional morality argued against turning away the stranger or
the poor. Many popular tales taught that reward came to those who fed
the hungry or sheltered the weary traveler. Fear of supernatural retribution,
especially if predicted by a desperate or unscrupulous supplicant, must have been
more effective than a branded cudgel. At the same time, charity (which
frequently meant hospitality) to strangers and especially to the poor reflected
more than fear of supernatural or criminal retribution. It attested to the social func-
tion of the wayfarer, who repaid hospitality by carrying news and telling
what he had learned on his travels. Beggars, and part-time beggars like rag-
and-bone merchants, hawkers, peddlers, knife-grinders, were also gatherers and
dispensers of information, as were others who read the roads: millers and tai-
lores, carvers and showmen. In Lower Brittany especially, as Emile Souvestre
noted, "the beggar is also the bard, the news carrier and commercial traveler
of this wholly patriarchal civilization."43

But the two useful functions that begging may have performed—supple-
menting an uncertain subsistence in an economy in which catastrophes were
frequent and remedies rare, providing a loose communications network—
were outdated. Beggary survived, as we have seen, but it ceased to be endemic.
What is perhaps more important, it was no longer taken for granted. It be-
came an anomaly. Beggars themselves grew ashamed to beg. The Vergo-
gnans of the Pyrénées-Orientales wore a mask so as not to be recognized when
they came to the door. And when, in Bresilhann and in Hérault, the crisis of
1937 brought back misery of a kind unknown by most for over a generation,
a local doctor saw the new beggars wearing masks too.44

Indigence continued. But now it wore a mask. That was not only new in
itself; it was indicative of the modern attitude toward grinding poverty.

* Charity could be a source of solid prosperity; conversely, stigma could tell against one.
In Aubrac one candidate for the elections of 1930 seems to have tried to dominate an opponent
by getting local tramps to complain of the man's ill-treatment of them (L'Aubrac, 21: 186).

Chapter Six

A WEALTH OF TONGUES

"Poulez français," says the master to the pupil. "Monsieur, je parle
comme je suis, et comme je peux." The village forgot a little of
his mother tongue at school, and learned only a parody of French.

—A. MÉM. CORRE

In 1863, according to official figures, 8,381 of France's 37,520 communes
spoke no French; about a quarter of the country's population. The Ministry
of Public Instruction found that 448,328 of the 4,016,427 schoolchildren (ages
seven to thirteen) spoke no French at all, and that another 1,490,269 spoke or
understood it but could not write it, suggesting an indifferent grasp of the
tongue. In 24 of the country's 89 departments, more than half the communes
did not speak French, and in six others a significant proportion of the com-

43 In Bouches-du-Rhône, Cantal, Haute-Savoie, and Vaucluse the schools
reported that more than 10 percent of their pupils did not speak French, a
strange discrepancy when all around them that tongue was supposed to be
in general use. Still more odd, in Hérault more than a quarter of the children
did not speak French, in Lozère an even higher percentage did not, and in
Dordogne fully a third did not—but all three departments were "French-
spaking." Yet a third of the children suggests at least a third of their elders
and, sure enough, the Etat de l'instruction primaire for 1864 reported patois
"in general use" in Dordogne and, despite the schools' efforts, "as indestructible
as the air breathed in each locality."

44
Other figures in the survey conflict with outside evidence. In Loire-Inférieure French seems to have the department to itself. And yet as late as 1894 a linguist insisted that throughout the inland sections of the department, people spoke Vaudens or Poitevin patois, and that at Bats (a small Celtic enclave near Le Coute) they still spoke Breton. Not a grave oversight, perhaps, but enough to shake one’s confidence. Nièvre too seems wholly French-speaking in the 1893 statistics. Yet the Etat de l’Instruction primaire remarked with some pride that in Morvan (the eastern part of the department), “over two-thirds of the children know French,” which even if true means that about one-third did not. In Cantal, of the 1,124 men in the conscript class of 1864, 529 were French-speaking, and the other 555 spoke French badly (340) or not at all (215). In cantons like Montsalvy in the southeast, contiguous to the wilder parts of Aveyron, and Larochette to the west, bordering the narrow gorges of the Cère, the proportion of French speakers ranged between one in five and one in three; yet the survey of 1863 showed French in general use in all of Cantal’s 229 communes.

In several departments some schools were conducted in local speech to teach what none could otherwise understand: Alpes-Maritimes, Ardèche, Bas-Rhin, Basse-Pyrénées, Corse, Côtes-du-Nord, Finistère, Haut-Rhin, Meurthe, Morbihan, Moselle, and Nord. In Basse-Pyrénées, the survey reported that 975 schools taught exclusively in French and only 66 used Basque or Breton in whole or part; yet a general inspector’s report of 1877 indicated that only around Oloron were classes given in French. In the Pyrénées-Orientales, by the 1853 survey, nearly half the children did not speak French, yet there is no indication that any other tongue competed with the national idiom; 12 years later, in 1865, the truth came out: “Catalan is the only language used throughout the Roussillon.” No wonder school inspectors complained that children read their French “like parrots”!

Other questions arise. Several departments included sizable areas where the local speech was alien to French: Flemish in Nord, Germanic dialects in Bas- and Haut-Rhin. But nearby regions were held to be wholly French-speaking, though they had a similar problem. In the Pas-de-Calais, for example, much of the countryside spoke Flemish, Artesien, or Picard through the 1900’s. Teachers’ reports submitted to a school exhibition in 1893 reveal that the department’s northwestern corner, especially the points between Boulogne and Saint-Omer and extending as far east as the hinterland of Bethune, accepted French slowly and with reluctance. At Bouvetelhomm, Dothom, Haut-Loquin, Audincourt, and Alguinie, French was “unfamiliar” or “almost unknown.” The dialects of Boulogne, Arras, and Picardy reigned there, in some form, as they did at Eguisheim, Fauquembergues, Aquis, Bléguin, Blanquefonds, Mainnord, and Argues. Far to the south, Tarn-et-Garonne stood as an island of French speech amid the dark waves of neighboring Oc departments. Perhaps the Protestant influences of Montauban contributed to that.
A Wealth of Tongues

spoken beyond Montmorillon in Poitou; and Racine, at Uzès in darkest Gard, needed "an interpreter as much as a Muscovite would need one in Paris."

Burgers of the bigger towns, men of law of course, notables, and clerics became bilingual or multilingual. Universities and colleges continued to teach in Latin through the seventeenth century and, in many cases, to the mid-eighteenth. So in a fashion did many rural schools, as we shall see in another chapter. It was only in the eighteenth century that the speech of Paris made headway among the rural populations of Oïl and in the Lyonnais.

Everywhere else, it remained a preserve of city dwellers, adding still further to the growing gulf between city and village, and, in the city itself, creating a linguistic division between rich and poor.

Devoted as were the many academies, provincial counterparts of the Académie Française, to the propagation of the French language, they functioned in the midst of populations that knew little or no French. In 1726 the Academy of Marseilles held no public sitting because the public did not understand the language in which they were conducted. Members of the academies themselves must have been rather like foreign students of French literature and language: approaching the culture of Paris as something strange to their own everyday speech and practice; they might write in French, but they thought in their own language. Still, the growing prestige of French was winning converts among the middle and upper classes. There was the increasing vogue and availability of theaters and opera houses; an influence comparable to that of twentieth-century cinema, with everyone eager to adopt the admired accents and turns of phrase used on the stage. There was the spread of educational establishments and their increasing interest in French, especially with respect to seventeenth-century authors. There were learned societies—sociétés de pensee—lodges, clubs, drawing rooms, and reading rooms, along with an endless flood of works of literature and philosophy, fashion bulletins, newspapers, and periodicals—preferably from Paris. The whole notion of comme il faut focused on the capital, for language as for fashions, for manners as for ideas. By 1793 the prelate Henri Grégoire was ready to report to the Convention that three-quarters of the people of France knew some French, though admittedly not all of them could sustain a conversation in it, let alone speak or write it properly.

Like the report of 1659, Grégoire's seems to have taken an optimistic view.

* Augustine Beau, Fables régionales, p. 9. And their French was sometimes closer to their everyday speech than to the French of Paris. J. Béral, Situation économique et hospitalière du Vénétie à la veille de la Révolution (Aubagne, 1957), cited in Annales du Midi, 369-Oct. 1956, p. 523. published a memorandum from Blachier, sub-delegate of Aubagne, dated Dec. 10, 1786. It was remarked that Béral "a respecté la syntaxe et l'orthographe de Blachier, homme bien informé et de bon sens, mais qui dérivait un francourt pointant, pratiqué dans les Cévennes par la bourgeoisie et la noblesse jusqu'au milieu du 19e siècle, le peuple ne parlant et ne comprenant guère que le patois. Le langage de Blachier passa, à l'ESCO, si différent de celui de Vennes, qu'il prit scrit de mettre en français lâches passages à censer."
Many of the provincial assemblies discussing the cahiers of 1789 had encountered linguistic problems, and the great survey Grégoire set on foot revealed more areas where French was hardly spoken than places where it was known. This was serious. Linguistic diversity had been irrelevant to administrative unity. But it became significant when it was perceived as a threat to political— that is, ideological—unity. All citizens had to understand what the interests of the Republic were and what the Republic was up to. Barthélemy de Lanthemas told the Convention in December 1792. Otherwise, they could not participate, were not equipped to participate in it. A didactic and integrative regime needed an effective vehicle for information and propaganda; but it could hardly have one if the population did not know French. In November 1792, just a month before Lanthemas's speech, the Minister of Justice had set up an office to translate laws and decrees into the German, Italian, Catalan, Basque, and Lower Breton languages. This could be no more than an expedient. The ideal of the Revolution lay in uniformity and the extinction of particularisms. "Reaction... speaks Breton," insisted the Jacobins. "The unity of the Republic demands the unity of speech... Speech must be one, like the Republic." Most agreed with Lanthemas that the various tongues "have no kind of distinction and are simply remnants of the barbarisms of past ages." Grégoire put it best when he called for the elimination of "the diversity of primitive idioms that extended the infancy of reason and prolonged obsescent prejudices." The Convention agreed with Grégoire. It acted to abolish dialects, and to replace them with the speech of the Republic, "the language of the Declaration of Rights." It decreed that throughout the Republic children must learn "to speak, read and write in the French language," and that everywhere "instruction should take place only in French." All this was easier said than done. The policy foundered. If revolutionary patriots spoke French, it often spoke it badly. And where the people did not speak French, revolutionaries who wanted to reach the people addressed them in their local tongue. What survived from the shipwreck was the principle. A state unencumbered by linguistic diversity, a catholic cultural ideal largely indifferent to the problem, were replaced by an ideology that embraced unity as a positive good and recognized language as a significant factor in achieving it. As the Cahiers Committee of Primary Education declared in 1834, "the political and administrative unity of the kingdom urgently requires the unity of language in all its parts." In any case, the committee added, the southern dialects were inferior—a view that earlier ages had developed more discreetly, that the revolutionaries had trumpeted, and that didactic propaganda henceforth helped to spread.

Teaching the people French was an important facet in "civilizing" them.
Documentation is hard to find at best. But beyond that, many documents are deceptive—unintentionally as a rule—because they render in French what actually took place in another language. Even some local scholars in this way, reporting a song or phrase of their region in their own French. Particularly troublesome are the reports of priests, police, and gendarmes, where only the occasional hint intimates that the exchanges rendered in (often-stilized) French actually took place in a local tongue. The reader has to keep a sharp lookout. "He spoke patois and so did I," observes a Limousin priest, very much in passing. How else, indeed, could he have communicated with a villager in the early years of the Second Empire? A new sub-prefect posted to Saint-Flour in 1879 complained that though he could communicate with the village mayors in French, he could neither understand nor make himself understood by anyone else in his area (but, he added, "at my age I am not about to learn Auvergnat"). Policemen sometimes admitted they could not understand what they heard. In Gers they often were unable to follow the sermon in the church; and one police superintendent in 1879, reporting on a home search for contraband matches, noted: "It's true that I have great difficulty understanding the local speech." One wonders what Flaugnart's police superintendent of Pont-Aven, who needed a translator to deal with his charges, wrote in his reports. The occasional clue appears when an officer of the law quesses some untranslatable local term.7

There is some indication that many of the accused and the witnesses called before the courts spoke patois—some translating what they could themselves, others having their testimony translated by sworn interpreters. As late as 1890 the Ariège assizes tried a man for homicide who spoke for himself in patois. But the hard evidence on this point is scanty. So are the true facts about what went on during the great "cri de Midi" in 1879. The copious testimony on events in Narbonne, Béziers, Persignan, Agde, and other rebellious centers says not a word about the language that the rioters and their leaders used; silence the more revealing when witnesses stressed the social class or garb of their interlocutors or assailants.8 I do not think the silence was deliberate; likely, the information was not considered pertinent. But it does mean one has to rely on rather restricted sources.

The reports of officers reconnoitering the French countryside from the Restoration through the Second Empire swarm with references to incomprehensible local speech. In predictable areas (Brittany, the Limousin, the southwest, the Pyrenees) the soldiers employed or called for interpreters, just as the doctors who were sent to Ariège during the cholera epidemic of 1854 had to do.9 In Lozère and Cantal, remarked a distraught soldier, the speech was unintelligible. "As difficult as it is to make oneself understood, it is even more difficult to understand an answer." But that was in 1844. In 1891 the Virgin who appeared to Berthelette Soubirous needed no interpreter; but she did

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find it necessary to address the girl, at least in part, in the Pyrenean dialect of Lourdes, where her words are now engraved: "Que soit immolée conception." By the end of the Second Empire many country people understood French even if they did not speak it. But familiarity with French in the countryside was still cause for comment. And there were those like the old Auvergnat who, sent as a prisoner to Hesse, in 1870, had married and stayed on. When Jacques Duclos met him, in 1979, the old man got by in local Hessian dialect; after half a century, he still knew neither French nor German.9

This state of affairs did not change significantly until the Third Republic. In 1874 an officer reporting on the area near Azay-le-Rideau (Indre-et-Loire)

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Map 4. Documented entrenched areas of patois under the Third Republic.

SOURCES: Various documents cited in the text. Note that this map and others of the kind that follow are not to be taken as exhaustive.
found it worth mentioning that “all speak French,” so that though the people
used the patois of Touraine, he was able to make himself understood.
In 1879, reporting on the itinerary of a convoy through Haute-Pyrénées, an
officer complained that since most of the inhabitants hardly understood any
French, one was often forced to have recourse to an interpreter to get any in-
formation at all from them. That same year in Périgord another officer noted
that while the residents of Périgueux could speak French, though they pre-
ferred patois, “it is almost impossible for the stranger to understand [the
peasants] or to make himself understood.” In 1819 a folklorist could still pub-
lish the parable of the prodigal son in 88 different patois. Walking through
Lower Brittany in 1882, Maupassant found the linguistic situation little
changed since Flaubert’s visit two-score years before. Hospitality was as ready,
but information was still hard to get, “for often during a whole week, while
roaming through the villages, one does not meet a single person who knows
a word of French.” And at the Paris Exposition of 1889 the operators of one
of the attractions, the little narrow-gauge Decauville railroad, thought it
worthwhile to print their warning posters in Breton and Provençal as well
as French. Of course, anyone who could actually read Breton or Provençal
could probably read French too.
This is where teachers and school inspectors, whom we shall meet again in
a later chapter on education, furnish useful information (or sometimes help-
ful hints). The picture that we get from their reports is of shrinking but still
significant areas where patois prevailed. In Tarn patois was still heard every-
where through the 1890s. This was the case as well throughout the Limousin,
one of the most stubborn holdouts. In Haute-Vienne even the teachers used
patois for business activities outside the school. There, noted an inspector in
1881, French was not the normal language for most inhabitants, and those
that used it mangled it. French continued to be an uncertain thing for the
inhabitants of several regions into the twentieth century, as we can see from
a police report of 1910 on a union meeting noting that a labor leader from the
Tarn addressed his audience “in bad French.”
In Lot-et-Garonne and Basses-Pyrénées (1880) the children spoke French
only during school hours. “Mediocre results,” reads Pécaut’s report, “because
the child, outside school, thinks and speaks in patois.” Same song in the 1881
inspection reports, in those departments and in Aveyron and Alps-Maritimes,
where even at the junior high school of Cannes, “the difficulty is to get the
students who think in patois talking in French.” In Dordogne “the obstinate
indifference to French” would probably not be overcome for another genera-
tion, in a school inspector’s judgment. In Haute-Loire (1882) the child “studies
a language that he never uses outside school, and that he finds very difficult to
understand.”
There, a tourist guide of 1886 advised travelers that patois was in
general use. As it was in Ariege, where in 1879 we find a teacher having real
problems with her little charges, who could speak nothing else.
and spoke only a few mangled words. In Roussillon, too, Catalan remained the everyday speech, but there French was mostly misunderstood. Barker wrote of an earlier occasion, in 1854, when he asked his way of a shepherd boy in Dordogne and was not understood. But he added that this was a rare occurrence, especially among the young: "In the Haut-Quercy, where patois is the language of everybody, even in the towns, one soon learns the advantage of asking the young for the information that one may need." School and military service were at work. Only women and the old escaped their influence. Hence the professional travel writer who in 1903 found himself in a village in the Ambazac Mountains, not far from Limoges, where he could neither make himself understood nor understand the women, who spoke only patois. He could not find his way until at last he encountered men who "spoke French pure."

In the decade preceding 1914 such blank spots must have become exceptional indeed. As a 1911 survey of rural speech in Savoy indicates, the peasants now made a point of speaking to their children in French, something they had refused to do only a few years before, so that the child had less trouble at school learning the new language. The generation gap stands out: an old peasant addressed by a city man (un monsieur) answered in patois; a young one answered in French. The old peasant spoke patois to priest and teacher; the young one spoke to them in French. In workshops and factories patois was hardly heard at all; because so many of the workers were "foreign" immigrants from Bresse and other provinces—French had to be used as a lingua franca. Increased mobility and social exchanges played their part in the spread of the national language, as they had in the spread of the national currency and measures. Industrialization also helped speed the process. In Vosges, for example, the installation of a cotton industry in the 1870's and its expansion after the 1880's all but wiped out the local dialect when country people moved into small industrial centers where French or an unfamiliar dialect obtained; they also worked alongside Alsatian immigrants, whose speech was different still. As a teacher noted: "The mixture of patois favors a common language." The war of 1914 saw the culmination of the process, though not its end. With vast numbers of refugees set in motion and soldiers from every part of the country serving together, millions were forced to use French on a daily rather than a sometime basis. Jacques Duras, mobilized at Pau in 1915, met a Basque soldier who did not know a word of French, "but events would force him to learn it." At the start men were mustered into local units and so could rely on their familiar patois. But as the war went on, new units were set up with the survivors of decimated ones and old units were bolstered with recruits.

\* Adolphe-Durand, Voyage en France, vol. 41 (see also pp. 85, 172). Shortly before the war, as France M. Coeling and her husband motored down the Dordogne valley toward St.-Pierre and Argentat (Correze), they tried to ask the way in the villages, but were not always successful. "For the Auvergnat patois will prevent us." Improprietés guèdes were incomprehensible, their French "but indifferent." (Auvergne and Its People, New York, 1911, p. 256.)

\* Yet Auguste Beau asserts that the war had no influence on the use of Provençal: "As contre, il passa a série de ralentissement entre pays, au région, au front ou en captivité." (La Langue française en Provence, p. 165). But of course such a development does not necessarily rule out a spreading knowledge and use of French.
rialled against the renegade Franciscos who spoke it. Grammarians and lexicographers admonished and advised. Yet increasingly after the late 1860s the realm of Oc became the home not of two languages but of three: the local idiom, which was Provençal, Gascon, or some other tongue; French as taught in the schools; and the confused mixture of the two that scholars describe as français régional. In Auguste Bru’s succinct definition, a language is a dialect that has made good, a patois is a debased dialect. By the 1890s Provençal was a patois: it had ceased to be written; it had become fragmented into local idioms; the upper classes no longer used it except to deal with the manual on the street.26

In 1854 a group of young poets and intellectuals concerned for the preservation of the speech and literature of Oc founded the Félibrige, and in the following year they began publication of a yearly almanac, the Armana pro-vencal, with an initial printing of 500 copies.27 To revivify their native language, the Félibrige sought to create a literature. But literature needs a reading public, and such a public was hard to find. The country people, when they learned to read, learned to read in French; they thus found reading “patois” difficult—the more so since French orthography is not designed to express the sounds of Oc. Furthermore, people who used forms of speech that were highly localized and in constant evolution found it hard to understand a literary language that was often archaic and incomprehensible, as Petrarch’s Ciceronian Latin must have been to his contemporaries of the fourteenth century. At Toulon in 1872, according to François Beslay, “men of the people hardly understand the poems of Roumaillie,” the Félibre of Avignon.28 Beslay was a prejudiced witness, but he was buttressed to some extent by the experiences related by the Félibres themselves: such as addressing country people in literary Provençal and being met with incomprehending stares.

In fact, the Félibrige seems to have been a political reaction initiated on a plane several removes away from ordinary people, and from their concerns. Its populist ideals had originally been set forth in French, because French stood for liberalism and emancipation and because already in the 1850s fashion and school made French the favorite vehicle for poetic and political expression. In 1848 the eighteen-year-old poet Frédéric Mistral had composed an ode to liberty in French. But after 1848 and, even more, after December 3, 1851, he turned to his native Provençal to express the sentiments that had once seemed best said in French. But the circumstances that had first suggested using French were not changing; and the Félibrige fell between two stools. By the time it masterworked, Mèrens, appeared in 1899, the literate upper classes in the south had been Frenchified. Their reaction was reflected in the words of M. Meyer de Pontmartin: “What a pity that this masterpiece should be written in the language of our servants?” Unfortunately the servants agreed.29 Seeing

*It is worth noting that in the dedication to Mèrens, Mistral characterized himself as a peasant, and Lamousine, to whom the work was dedicated, was quick to accept him as such. The claim

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the rich, the noble, the intellectuals, the city people, businessmen, and civil servants abandoning dialect as a spoken language, the common man accepted their scorn for it even if he did not imitate their practice. He spoke patois at home; but beyond parochial limits patois was despised and useless, an irrelevant anachronism good perhaps for intellectual games but no use to peasant children.

Provençal, Gascon, and the multitude of local dialects continued to be spoken, of course, as they still were in Laurence Wyllie’s Roussillon. At the turn of the century street vendors from Bayonne and Périgueux to Marseille and the Alpes still hawked their wares in the local dialect. But the regionalists could not revive or recreate a common popular speech because they could not deal with the causes of its decline.30 And the same process was at work in other regions.

Shepherd Clough notes, in his fine History of the Flemish Movement, unerringly foreseen today, that Flemish “reigned supreme in the rural sections of French Flanders,” north and northeast of Hazebrouck. Though by 1895, when Clough’s book was published, the supremacy was dubious, Flemish was not easily dethroned. The French Revolution, suspicions of dialects, does not seem to have attacked Flemish. And the survival of Latin in the drawing up of administrative acts, which were executed in French elsewhere, closed one avenue by which French had penetrated other regions.31 It was mainly in the nineteenth century that the superior attractions of French sapped the cultural and literary activities without which a language cannot survive— except as a patois. The old literary and poetic societies (chambres) decayed, the traditional songwriters (dichter) died away. The chamber of Eekholt celebrated handjarenstoelen—poetic contests—in 1835, 1861, and 1874. But in 1861, though the theme of the prize competition was given in Flemish, all the poetry entries bore French titles, and only four of the 16 songs submitted had Flemish titles.32 A Belgian contemporary of Mistral, the poet-priest Guido Geesse, sparked a last effort to compete with the French influence, but this was the final flicker of the culture that had been.

Deprived of an intellectual and literary base, Flemish in France was condemned. It did not die an easy death, however. André Malraux’s grandfather, a Dunkirk shipowner who died in 1909, did not speak French but Flemish. The Abbé Lemire, born near Hazebrouck but on the French side of the linguistic frontier, had to learn Flemish after 1876 in order to fulfill his pastoral duties. In the middle and late 1880s primary education was still hampered by

however, is difficult to take seriously. We may note, too, that though poets and songwriters produced works in Oc throughout the nineteenth century (see Jean Giron, Vie des personnages célèbres de l’Oc, Montpellier, 1841), very few of the works represented what could be called popular culture; in the main these writers presented a populist point of view. Significantly enough, when the songwriters published in 1907, the songs they compiled (which are to be found in many village townhalls in Aude and Hérault) were written in Oc. But their leader, Marcilhac Alberti, wrote his many popular folk texts in French.
the general dominion of that tongue. Bandrillart, who visited and observed the region in his usual thorough way, was interested to find himself speaking a thoroughly understood language to people who answered in a patois he did not understand at all: "a painful feeling to find oneself a stranger in one's own country." 268

The Third Republic, suspicious of regionalism in general, disliked it even more on this sensitive periphery. After 1871 this attitude was reinforced by the government's rigid anticlericalism. Like most linguistic minorities, the Flemish-speaking French had the support of the Catholic clergy. Sermons and catechism in Flemish raised political problems. A ministerial decree in 1894 prohibited religious instruction in the language, but though the perfect suspended mayors who failed to enforce the decree, the campaign proved ineffective, and in 1906 the Archbishop of Cambrai had to be asked to intervene. He refused, and the friction did not abate until 1905. After that, with the separation of church and state, the documents on the conflict peter out, though the practices to which the state objected continued. In the meantime, however, the teaching of the schools had been making itself felt, and so had the culturally destructive attractions of nearby industrial centers. Between the turn of the century and the First World War, this seems to have produced a generation of children who did not really know their mother tongue—which was no longer taught in any structured way—and who had an even poorer grasp of French. 269

The growing pains of modernity.

Last but not least, Lower Brittany. "The Breton people," wrote an agriculturalist in 1869, "forms, in the middle of the nation... a population apart." Visiting Frenchmen felt this strongly. What one of them called the Chinese wall of Breton speech made communication hopeless, and strange things happened still. Several times in the 1860s young Flaubert and his traveling companion, Maxime du Camp, found themselves lost and could not raise help. Thus between Audierne and Plogoff, "We lose our way. Deserted village; barking dogs; no one speaks French." 270

All the same, French marched through the Breton peninsula, moving slowly but surely along the highways, then the railways, from Rennes and Nantes to Brest. It spread outward in growing circles from ports and naval installations like Brest, from administrative centers like Vannes, and generally inland from the coast. On the eve of the Revolution, Breton or Gallo was spoken in all but two of Brittany's seven dioceses. 271 By Ferry's time only two still held out. Everywhere else the situation had been reversed. The rivulets and inlets of French had become an advancing tide that nibbled at and washed over the still-resistant reefs. But on the tip of the peninsula over a million people clung to the Breton spoken in Finistère in 1881: four out of every five women, one out of two

*The Dukes of Brittany had tried to colonize their gallows lands with both lords and serfs from Lower Brittany, but the only result was to create small Breton-speaking islands, which shrunk to practically nothing after 1855 (see Marie Dormeur, L'État actuel du folklore, pp. 4-5).
book and they painfully copy a line or two: they can write." Their French was like the village precentor's Latin: a song without meaning. As late as 1916 a soldier from Mollins (Oise-Nord), François Laurent, was excused as a spy because he could not make himself understood in French.45

But Baudrillard, that excellent chronicler of French's imperial progress, had noted the Chinese wall beginning to crumble in 1885. Those who could not speak French, he said, felt ashamed. Perhaps not yet. More important, he noted that literary Breton was becoming the purview of the learned.46 The gulf between literary language and everyday speech, in which the cultural revival of the south had foundered, was opening up in Brittany as well.

One has only to read the desperate plaints of local traditionalists against the shift to French speech, dress, and manners,47 and browse through the Breton newspapers, especially the Catholic ones in 1894 and 1895, to realize that more and more parents and children were becoming committed to integration, to Frenchification, which stood for mobility, advancement, economic and social promotion, and escape from the restrictive bonds of home. One can sympathize with the fears of what this commitment implied, but also with the needs and yearnings it reflected. In any case, not sympathy but elucidation is the scholar's business. And so we turn to the question: what made patois recede?

We have already accepted that the schools and schoolteachers played a crucial role. None thinks to gainay it. As Auguste Brus well put it, the inkwell and the pen worked for French.48 He might have added, and worked only in French, Arithmetic, for example, was taught in French. Thus, even those who normally spoke in some other tongue could reckon sums only in French, the language in which they had learned the skill. And if the catechism was often a bastion of local dialect, Protestantism, which was an active movement in the countryside through the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, and whose propaganda I have found from Yonne down to the Pyrenees, was a powerful instrument of Frenchification, spreading Calvin's language along with his heresy. We shall consider two other significant influences in due course: military service and the printed word. In the meantime, we may note what the veteran linguist Albert Daussat had to say about his own Auvergne village, Vizelles, near the Dore: that French came in after the French Revolution and spread during the Second Empire "by newspaper and barracks even more than school."49

French could, and did, enter through such channels where the local language was relatively close to French. The teachers knew the difference this made. In places like the Doubs (1894), where the local tongue was used everywhere but French co-existed with it, the extinction of the competing language was deemed less necessary "than in certain departments where the traveler who speaks only French cannot make himself understood in many villages."50

Even the wild Morvan, whose denizens in the eighteenth century were like "people of another continent," speaking a jargon that in the last years of the Empire remained unintelligible even to their neighbors—even the wild Morvan accepted French before the lands of the southwest. By 1866 the local idiom had retreated to the fastnesses of the forests east of Château-Chinon: Planches, Arlesuf, Villapousson. In the Morvan, as in more open country, the speech of the countryside did not wait upon the schools to give in to French: the patois of Burgundy, of Champagne, of Poitou, of Beauce and Perche were already fading in the 1860s and 1870s. Indeed, the success or failure of the schools simply reflected their linguistic environment, either predisposed to French or alien to it. This is quite clear on the linguistic frontier between Oc and Oïl, where Marche (north Creuse and northern Haute-Vienne) proved more open to French than the true Limousin only a few miles away. Even in poor regions like Perche the proportion of literate conscripts was far higher than in comparable areas of, say, the southwest. However backward, Oïl regions raised no particular obstacles to the advance of official culture. Thus French was being spoken "reasonably well" in the Moulins area in 1906, whereas Limousin speech held on in the Cher valley to the west.

But above all, what worked first for and then against patois was the way of life in many rural quarters. It was in 1889 that Ernest Renan insisted that no work of science, philosophy, or political economy could be produced in patois. One hears a confirming echo of this at that very time from a village teacher in Lorraine: of course everyone spoke patois, he wrote, but when a peasant wanted to discourse on politics or current events he was likely to try to impress his hearers by turning to (terrible) French. Politics (as opposed to village business) was done in French, and we shall see that national politics, which entered the unilingual countryside just about this time, accompanied the national language. Official business was done in French too. Flamish and Corsican had begun to give way after the legislation that ordered people's everyday life was translated into the national language during the Second Empire. And Wylie has shown how, at Roussilon, a dispute over a bowling game caused men to shift from Provençal to French: another result of legislation, in this case requiring associations to submit for official use a copy of their statutes, naturally in the national language. Rules, regulations, and consequently litigation all were exclusively in the domain of French.51

So were dealings with officialdom. That had not always been the case before 1879. Indeed, as late as 1892 we find the new sub-prefect of Saint-Flour complaining to his superior, the prefect of Cantal, that all the officials in his jurisdiction were local men, which meant, among other things, that the villagers and peasants there, "always sure of being understood by them in their impossible gibberish," did their business in patois, and made no effort to learn or retain French, "quickly losing what the schools have taught them."52 This free and easy exchange between citizen and officials ended after the Third Republic made the certificat d'école a prerequisite for even minor civil service jobs. The minor public servant became a man who had learned French, often
with much pain, in the midst of populations who had not. The consequent sense of superiority on the part of such petty bureaucrats and its effects on relations between officials and the public can still be felt today.

One of the greatest enemies of patois was simply its own parochialism. The factors that worked against French in the old isolated worlds, self-sufficient in far more realms than mere subsistence, turned against local idioms as the world changed. Breton was useless beyond a certain area that had once seemed vast but that became increasingly limited in the perspective of the modern world. Nor was Breton one tongue, or Limousin, or the so-called langue d'Oc. Vannetais was incomprehensible to most other Bretons; men from Léon found it hard to understand those from Guingamp. The old dialectal world was fragmented in the extreme. Dialect might change from one valley to another, from high ground to low, from one riverbank to the next, if physical barriers made communications difficult. In 1816 a man held up by thieves near Avallon in Yonne had been able to place their origin in a particular pays of Nièvre, by their speech and manner of dress. In 1844 an officer in Lot noted that "the natives found it very difficult to make themselves understood outside their own village." One of the arguments in a famous impersonation trial of the 1890s was that the accused, who came from Saint-Marcouf in León, could not have known the patois of Corps that she was said to have used because, though Corps was also in León, its patois was different from her own. And when, at the end of the century, pork butchers from small towns went north for the fairs in the Cessenon districts close to Berry, no one could easily understand their speech. "O y a pas d'besoin de faire trotter en chèvres," declared the Charentais, "pour qu'on enferme de là vache i sort." If the wisdom of Saintonge said that you did not need to make a man trot around (like a horse at a fair) in order to know where he was from, it was because his speech would tell you. As time went on, and especially as more and more people moved about, the advantages of knowing French became increasingly obvious. Recognition of the fact spurred the decay of local speech. As we have noted, industrial development worked for the linguistic unification of the polyglot labor force that migrated to the cities. Market changes worked more slowly but to similar effect in the countryside. "Le francis rapporte, le patois ne rapporte rien," was Arnold Van Gennep's response to a Savoy linguist who deplored the trend. Even children, especially children perhaps, had come to despise patois. When, on the eve of the First World War, the schools became somewhat more friendly to local dialects, it was the country people's turn to reject them.  

* This was the case in Arligue, where Massat and its valley spoke a Langue d'Oc similar to that of Puiset, and the rest of the Comtat spoke Gascogne (J.-M. Serres, Histoire de Massat, pp. 75-135). As a language officer Pierre philologist remarks: "Le patois, on le sait, váre partús fun vilà fun vènc, fun famúl fun vilà fun vènc, partús fun vilà fun vòc. L'ovr fun famúl fun vilà fun vènc, partús fun vilà fun vòc." (Gaston Vaucau, Lexique vernacul. p. 17).  

A Wealth of Tongues

Knowing French had become a matter of pride for them, just as one's dialect had once been a matter of pride. For people who lived in coherent communities with their own life, patois retained its earliest sense of a language one did not understand. It was not that they who spoke patois; it was everyone else, the strangers. And the language strangers spoke was part of their strangeness and their ridiculousness, something that was likely to be derided rather than imitated, let alone admired. Basque peasant farces, as we have seen, often used arrogance jargon for the Blacks, always with satirical intent: Latin or French for jasawen, Béarnais and Spanish for barbers, tinkers, vainglorious odd-bodies or giants to be bested. And later, when the prestige of French began to be recognized, most peasant communities still felt that its use was inappropriate in their midst and acced to discouragement—chiefly by ridicule—those who tried to use it (clumsily as a rule) when a particular function or situation did not call for it.

French was a "langage de parure et de cérémonie" and country people knew quite well the difference between excited speech and their own usage. As a basker maker recently explained to a folklorist to whom he told his tales: "Il y a bien des mots en grandeur, il y a bien des mots en maguisson arnitz." One used French forms, which were considered more noble, to show respect. A Gascon peasant speaking to a bourgeois would not use the homely pay and may in referring to the man's parent's, but would say bastet pèro, basto mèro. The use of French could also emphasize quality. Gascogne for hat is capet; but for a gentleman's top hat a lady's bonnet one preferred chapeau. In lower Armagnac the shepherds called the strawberries that were theirs for the picking arurgut; but in Auch and upper Armagnac, where strawberries did not grow wild but were cultivated as delicacies for a rich man's table, they were known in frênes. Aïnê Giron's novel of 1884, La Bête, about life in Velay, opens with a peasant couple visiting a convent. The man addresses the mother superior in French, a mark of respect. His wife would do so if she could, but she has no French. The mother superior, "a very distinguished woman," naturally speaks French. In the Loire country, where patois was still used in general conversation down to the Second World War, polite usage called for French. At a dance, for instance, a lad invited a girl to dance in French, and they preserved that formality through their early exchanges.

The pulpit, too, so often represented as a fortress of patois, was often the chief stage for recitals in the honored language—as it was expected to be. There was nothing a popular audience liked so much, remarked a priest at the end of the century, as to be addressed in a tongue that was not its own but

* Or, on occasion, to try to gain a little respect, as when a peasant gave his children French names, taking his cue from the local ajar. In that connection Albert Douzat relates this anecdote. Around 1930 a priest wanted to bless a little girl at Vic-le-Comte, and asked her by her name. "Mary!" she answered. "Mary! But that is a young lady's name, not a name for a peasant. You must be called Marie ou Marion." To which the little girl responded, "I'm as entitled to bear the Holy Virgin's name in any laddy!" (Gesnerine et linguolog. pp. 18-19).
was understood. For that matter, understanding was not always requisite. As early as the 18th, we are told, the villagers of Morière near Avignon, who spoke 100 French, were resentful when the priest chose patois for the sermon at a first communion ceremony. "It struck us as common, trivial, grottesque, unworthy of so great a solemnity," Agricol Perdiguier remembered many years later.

What language to use in church was a thorny problem for the clergy, though perhaps no thornier than the authorities’ problem of what to do about a recalcitrant priest. True, political orientation, as well as sympathy, may have been a factor in some cases, but my own impression is that in general the priest’s resistance to calling for him to use the national language reflected rather than led local resistance. Priests, after all, were trained in French. They too thought French superior to the debased idioms of their charges. Many might have preferred it. Beyond mere suppositions, one finds cases—in Aixelles, Allier, the Limousin—where a priest simply declared that he had to preach in patois if he wanted his parishioners to understand him. Some priests had trouble mastering the local tongue but were forced to use it. Oblates sent out on preaching missions seem to have run up against that problem, too. Even the Ministère des Cultes recognized that there were parts of France where a priest might be forced to use local dialect. Father Lermire, we recall, had to learn Flemish in order to do his job. He might well have preferred to save himself the trouble.

In any case, where there was a public for French it was catered to: people were given a choice of masses, with the sermon in French or patois as suited them.68

This practice fell off sharply at the turn of the century, in part under government pressure, but mostly because this period witnessed the triumph of French. In 1901, La Semaine religieuse of Auch lamented the passing, in Armagnac, of the Gascon-language catechism and of homilies and sermons in Gascon, which had far outnumbered those in French through the whole of the nineteenth century. Thereafter, sermons in French, “which used to mark particularly solemn occasions,” became increasingly routine in this region.69 In Brittany, by contrast, many priests refused to observe the government’s ban in 1902 on Breton-language sermons and catechism; in Finistère alone 91 priests saw their salaries suspended.6 It was only when—and where—French had advanced sufficiently that the clergy turned to it. The Church reflected regional conditions; it did not create them.68

Once patois came to be widely scorned, its fate was sealed. It was increasingly rejected after the 1890’s by the young and especially by girls and women, who

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"M. Durel, Des manifestations des ministres des cultes à travers le pays des autorités politiques (Paris, 1903), p. 16. In 1909 or thereabouts the term euséohie became a Breton slang word for a seminarian or priest who was born in Lower Brittany but did not know Breton; such men were often assigned to a Breton parish, yet were still "eusöhe," like a cockerel in a weasel’s mouth. In another extension: any Breton born in a Breton-speaking region "who is ignorant of his native tongue" (Gaston Reau, L’Imagination populaire, p. 117)."

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were to become strong carriers of a language that was seen as a badge of refinement and of emancipation. A similar scorn of patois grew among those who had improved their condition or were eager to do so. A receptive officer of the Restoration had predicted: “Le discreté du patois est l’effet naturel du progrès du luxe et de la civilisation des capitales . . . qui s’étendent peu à peu jusqu’à leurs extrémités.”70 The little by little was slower than some expected. At Latenne (Droits), an agricultural village 28 kilometers from Brantôme, we are told that in 1896, 179 of 195 men and 153 of 197 women still spoke patois; during the 1914 war all the Latenner boys at the front spoke only patois. Still, a century after the officer quoted, Auguste Brun could note: "One dresses as in town, one will speak as in town. New way of life, new way of speech."71

What did all this mean, what did it do, to the people involved? Local tongues had not endured unchanged until the nineteenth century. They had evolved under the influence of fashion or need, or both, however isolated the regions where they were spoken. When, after the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, local ruling classes ceased to treat the speech of Oc as a literary language, when the cities, lost for Oc but not yet won for France, ceased to act as unifying centers for rural speech, particularism took over. The more self-sufficient a region, the more likely it was to develop its own dialect. Relative wealth could work this way as easily as poverty and isolation. The rich Limagne, where every village was virtually self-sufficient, kept its own speech and ways longer than some poor mountain areas whose people were wont to move from place to place, and carried in the culture of the outside world.72

By 1858 many entwined languages had been let loose from all the disciplines that maintain a language, to become what the Revolutionaries called jargons: unified by writing, ignored by literature, without formal structure or grammar. That was when they caught the eye of intellectuals, poets, and linguists, who sought to regulate and revive them. But by then it was too late: conditions worked against the dialects, just as the official campaigns against them could succeed only when conditions were right.

The social function of language is to permit members of a society to understand each other. When the national society became more significant than the various local societies, national language was able at last to override its local rivals, and other particularisms as well. Yet what developed was not always truly national. Notably in the center and the south there developed a whole series of compromises between official or school French on one hand and the local speech on the other: buffers between patois and French, drawing on both, applying the structures and the accent of patois to French, changing the meaning of terms in order to use them in vernaculars that ran from Frenchified patois to patoisified French, a boodgeodge that its users accurately described as
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were no doubt rare, as they were in many rural areas, most ornaments carried French names. Similarly, horses, which were not in much use there, had most of their anatomy described in French. A new word was adopted for a new form of a familiar object, as when lampo (the oil lamp and its offspring) edged out the old calee. Sometimes the adoption of new words in French relegated old terms to an inferior function, as when Savoy's pare and mare, bending to pare and mare, came to be used exclusively for animals. Of course, words related to agricultural and technical innovations, to changes in furniture, dress, and dwelling, to administration, and to newly identified maladies were borrowed from French. As were all the many terms related to moral and intellectual life. The poteau of Auvergne had no words for poet, musician, painter, or artist. It had functional terms, to be sure, for men who made music with certain types of instrument or who made up songs, but it had no way—or need—to deal with art in the abstract. French supplied such words when the need arose, but those who found them relevant used French anyway. Some abstractions, though, were very relevant indeed; and so, little Jules of the Breton song, who is tired of service and wants her freedom, sings: "Me zo skuiz o servicia, La meh boul va libreit!" Altogether, the evolution of local speech looks less like decadence than like adaptation. All language is connected to the needs and interests of its speakers. As these changed language changed, more slowly, of course, but revealingly, and in good part responsively. Necessity created the expression. Waning need laid it away. This does not mean, however, that mentalities were quite unaffected in the meantime. On the contrary, the simple shift from a spoken language to one based on writing alone was an immense change. The stylized style of official reports bears witness to the awkwardness of the adjustments involved. The music of discourse, once sparse or lyrical, became coldly didactic, swollen with the terminology of administrative French. The very notion of language, like the term, refers to speech not writing; and oral style has little in common with its literate neighbor. The rhythm of the phrase in the spoken language models the idea and its nuances—repetitive, melodic structures frame the fleeting thought, punctuated with sonorities, with striking images, with inflections of sound that convey inflections of meaning. When, in September 1846, the Virgin appeared to two young shepherds at La Sallette, she addressed them first in what sounds like the formal French they could have heard in church, and dealt with themes they might well have heard in a sermon, complaining that people swore and worked on Sundays.

Albert Boiteux, *La vie dans les montagnes du Sud* (p. 47), p. 52. The wodd bouquet was borrowed from French. On the other hand, paniers, wounds, and wild herbs, like the terms in the farm orchard, bore local names. In Auvergne, too, words and a few local flowers had their own names, whereas named geraniums and chrysanthemums bore French names. Likewise, the horse, more expensive (terme riche) than other animals, was ad

Albert Boiteux, *Rare sur l'histoire et l'industrie du sud lyonnais* (p. 71). “Thou dost cry mockingly, child, / Or dost cast a rat-quin on my father's hat?” (Stills, l. 2, 3, 4; Can, nous raire / Le rat de mon pain paire!)
The Way Things Were

When she turned to patois, however, predicting retribution and famine, the language became more lyrically rich, more "biblical" in a recognizably popular vein:

Let him who has wheet not sow it; the cattle shall eat it, and, if any should grope, it will fall to dust in the threshing. There will come a great famine; before the famine comes, the little children under seven will be taken tremblingly, will die in the arms of those who hold them, and the grownups will do penance by hunger. The grapes will rot and the nuts turn bad. If they refrain their ways, the stones, the rocks will turn to wheat; and the potatoes will be restored by the earth itself.

Simple, concise ideas full of images, specific and based on local experience. That was the nature of rural speech, poor in abstract terms, rich in concrete ones, and in pejoratives. 

And then, of course, it was local. The way of life affects speech in its purely physical aspects. The breathing of people operating in different terrain affects the rhythm of their speech and their pronunciation. A doctor traveling through Ardèche in the 1890's noted the sonorous endings of the local patois, which made the voice carry further. A Corrèzien today has similarly pointed to the preponderance of consonants in his native Occitan, which helped to make speech more audible so that it carried further in difficult natural circumstances. Audibility was also served by the hard "e" of the old pronunciation, abandoned in school and in Paris French but retained by actors, whose voices must carry a long way. Modern French falls lightly on the ear. Popular speech is harsher, more abrupt, more perceptibly rhythmic. French, meant to be spoken in a relaxed manner with a relaxed body, has more open vowels and fewer diphthongs. The phonetic evolution from a wealth of rude diphthongs to more delicate sounds is clearly related to changing conditions; or, at least, to the triumph of values related to such conditions.

Modern students of rural language have stressed how important body language—gestures and posture—is for the peasant. This, too, reflects a society where all share in a common fund of knowledge that makes much explanation superfluous. As Henri Mendras says, the peasant shows what he does or is about to do in forms of behavior that are wholly familiar to his fellows and so are easily interpreted by all of them. If one sees a man in such a place, at such and such a time, one can generally tell what he is up to. Deduction based on concrete observation is what counts, and speech adds little to this. It is used more often to conceal the true sense of an act or gesture than to express an attitude.

Writing sets up a screen between practice and our inner selves, and so does the mentality that is based on it. This is perhaps why patois clung on longest where practice and thought were closest: "Quand il s'agit de la terre," wrote Emmanuel Labor in 1912, "on pense en patois." 

It would take time before one ceased to think in patois. The patoisant child knew birds, trees, and watercourses under their local names. The French names he learned at school were never attached to familiar things but remained detached, evoking a distant realm and abstract images. This tended to two results. In the first stage, newly bilingual people had difficulty understanding ideas conveyed or developed in French. A little girl of above average intelligence and able to read well, might follow every turn of stories in Oc but stumble over French stories with language that departed from the patterns caught at school. French stories called for great effort: the individual words might be understood but not the sense of a phrase. Older persons, similarly limited to a schoolbook French, would mostly have the same problems interpreting, say, a news item. Intelligence is not enough to ensure mastering ideas in an alien medium. All the signs we read, whether they are letters, words, or simple images, are symbols whose reference is more or less familiar, hence more or less easily registered and comprehended. The peasant reader had to master not only the elusive French alphabet, orthography, and grammar, but also the references that were meant to serve—that is, the symbols of an alien culture.

A word calls up an image, or a whole covey of images, and there can be serious problems of adjustment when a word familiar in one's own speech carries quite different connotations in another—as was the case, among others, with the word renier, which in the south denoted not a man who drew a rent and lived on it, but a man who paid it. Even on the level of sheer practicality, difficulties of mental adjustment may arise when an object endowed with a particular gender or personality in one frame of mind has to be given another in translation. Gaston Bonheur cites a striking illustration of this problem involving the river Aude. In the local patois the river was treated, not as an object, but as a person. The article was accordingly never employed in referring to it: one went to Aude, or said that Aude was high, that Aude grew, and so forth. A whole mentality had to be built for a small article to be added. Small wonder children and adults both had difficulty in coping with a language that was not only alien in itself but also represented an alien vision. A schoolteacher writing about teaching French in his rural school of Arlège remarked that people tended to think city children were cleverer or quicker on the uptake than rural children, when it was just that the city child heard French spoken all the time, and the country child heard it not at all. One might add that the entire frame of reference was also different.

In the second stage, when French had become more fully assimilated, the effect could be more alienating still, because the novice passed from a point where words were close to the things they stood for, to one where they were far apart. French, which prizes abstract terms over concrete ones, abandons pointed reference and analogy for tenuousness. It refines language by eliminating the details that count so much in popular speech and the great variety of specific and descriptive terms that flourished in patois. It prefers to interpret
rather than describe reality, to express ideas, not just to relate facts. Accordingly, it tends to lead its user to attribute less importance to the what of things, acts, or events and more importance to the why. A cultural equipment that makes words triumph over things may be appropriate to a society in which necessity and immediate experience play a secondary role, or which has learned to adjust its ideas to that way of thinking. For simpler minds operating in a harsh, concrete world, such implicit values can only be confusing if not totally alienating.*

Language is one technique for mastering reality. Local dialects had mastered the everyday world of the peasants' experience, personified it in its details, coped with it. As urban speech edged those dialects out, the familiar became alien. New speech, new words, new forms did not permit the same easy, immediate participation in situations that time and habit had made familiar and that words had, so to speak, domesticated too. The new words were more abstract. The values and ideas they reflected were more distant. Intellectual effort was required to reestablish contact with objects and experiences. This need to readjust made for a certain timidity—the savagery that we hear above—not only in public expression but in the private acceptance of a new world that was very different from the old.

"Right now," said Father Gorce of his fin-de-siecle Corbières, "the peasant has no language to serve him. Patois he has unlearned; he even lacks the words to express his thought. And when he uses them it is absurdly. He does not know what they stand for. The French into which he is brutally thrown... makes him forget his Limousin language, but does not get through to him."

Not all French peasants lived through such painful transitions, to be sure. And if, in certain parts of France, the transition did cause pain, it did so only for limited periods—though longer than in a land like the United States, where the adjustment was less long-drawn-out, more forcibly sudden. But the experience marked the minds of generations. Its high-water mark, around the end of the nineteenth century, was also a high point of political and social terror. And its products, like the daughters and sons of the American immigrants, would face the great challenge of the First World War with a resignation born of their condition, but also with the firm certitude of neophytes.

* Speaking of the alienation involved in the peasant's conversion to a new tongue that reflected none of his feelings or experience, Father Gorce wrote: "The peasant cannot say what he sees, what he feels. French lacks words for many of his implements, etc. How does one translate aille, pelle, pié, poteau,...? How does one say: silencieux, étrangère, forêt, jardin; abreuvoir, aboie, accoude? What does one call: le fumier, les ranc, les palissades, le palissard, les écluses, les pelouses, le serre...? Le canardier, la barbe, le couvert, la bouquinerie, les talons?" The problem would be settled only when the acts or objects described disappeared. (De la lois de Léonard, pp. 9-11.)
had to become a patrie, a fatherland; the latter abstraction had to replace the immediate experience of a man's pays. The concept of the patrie, land of one's father, can mediate between private society (the family) and official society (the nation). And the concept was extended as the father's realm itself was extended beyond the natural limits of the pays or petite patrie to a broader, much more mobile world. The question is, how long did this process of extension take? How fast was a coincidence established, then perceived, acknowledged, assimilated, between pays, patrie, and France?

When, in 1860, an officer noted that the people of Puy-de-Dôme "possèdent un très haut degré l'amour de leur pays," his concept of the pays was as limited as theirs. Some of these men, he reported, were forced to emigrate themselves to other parts of France and to seek "on foreign soil" the food their fatherland (patrie) denied them. Clearly pays and patrie were one, and everything beyond was still foreign soil. If, as Benda (and others) insist, being French is not a mere abstract acknowledgment, but rather a consciousness and an everyday experience, then these people who lived in the middle of France in 1860 were scarcely French.

This is something one seldom finds acknowledged, and then only discreetly, in an undertone. Carlson Hayes, who described France as a nation of patriots, perceptively noted the survival of "centrifugal forces" in the 1920s—"localism, provincialism—then explained, "The history of the development of national spirit in France [the spirit that he describes as a supreme national loyalty] has been the history of the overcoming of centrifugal forces in the life of the nation by centripetal forces." The image "centrifugal," whether he intended it to or not, suggests a preordained unity. It assumes an existing "center" that is more than a base for conquest of opportunity; and it obscures the existence of societies for which the "center" remained largely unknown and irrelevant until it subjugated them—let alone assimilated them. Traveling in the French Alps in 1866 Adolphe Blanqui found "populations further from French influence than those of the Marquis Islands." Some 20 years later, an English voyager at the other end of the country expressed very similar feelings. The people of the Landes, he wrote, "live on French soil, but cannot be called Frenchmen. They speak a language as unintelligible to a Frenchman as an Englishman; they have none of the national characteristics—little, perhaps, of the national blood." But holdouts and mere "superficial counter currents" are as nothing next to the transcendent reality of France's being molded into a nation. What matters, in Ernest Renan's words, is "the general line, the great facts that stem from it and that remain true even if all the details were to be wrong." There is a level on which this may be true. But it discards detail and covers the intricate pattern of things as they were with a general mantle of things as they should be, as if a France become one and indivisible had thereby become uniform as well. We might do better by following the precept of the old romantic Thierry, and distinguish rather than confuse the conditions under which national consciousness developed. We shall find that the process was more varied than is generally conceived, far slower and more complex than most historians would have it.

To begin with what is least disputed, but at the same time is little acknowledged, the state astride the revolutionary watershed—the kingdoms, Republic, and Empire called France—was at best loosely integrated. In 1751 Charles Pinot Duclos, permanent secretary to the French Academy and a former mayor of Dijon, published certain astute Considerations sur les moeurs in which he compared the difference between Paris and the provinces to that between separate peoples: those who lived a scant one hundred leagues from the capital were a hundred years removed from it in their manner of thought and action. This equation of time and space is one we should retain, for it can as appropriately be applied to nineteenth-century France as it can to different continents today. It appealed to one of Duclos's Limousin readers, who found it just as relevant to conditions some 60 years later. It might have appealed to Arthur Young as well, who, on the eve of the Revolution, found that "that universal circulation of intelligence which in England transmits the least vibration of feeling or alarm, with electrical sensibility, from one end of the kingdom to another ... has no existence in France." When a new edition of Duclos appeared in 1838, it carried as a preface a notice by the critic La Harpe, written in 1799. In it La Harpe contended that it is the period between 1776 and 1780 the difference Duclos had perceived had "become almost unnoticeable so far as concerns the large cities, which are here the only objects of comparison." This judgment, if we accept it, emphasizes less the growing cultural integration of the land than the deepening gulf between a few great urban centers and the rest of the country. The Revolution stressed the same fact. Separatist tendencies asserted themselves even before the Estates had met in 1789, and several regions might have echoed the sentiment of the Béarnais that their region was bound to France much as
Ireland was bound to England. Grégoire’s correspondents noted sadly the “there is no patriotism in the countryside.” Only “the more enlightened” could conceive the notion. Patriotism was an urban thought, a handle for an urban conquest of the rural world that looked at times like colonial expla-
tion. 13

Certainly the Revolution and revolutionary agitation carried national poli-
tics and the national language into quarters they had not touched before. Clubs, appeals, speeches, gazettes, and broadsheets, propa-
gandas of every sort, cleared eagerly awaited and discussed with passion by groups once oblivious to anything but their immediate world, a new terminology that had no counterpart in native speech, war, military service, troop movements, the political promotion of men of lower level status when their superiors had been elimi-
nated by Terror and Counter-Terror, the pride of simple people bent on show-
ing that they could handle their betters’ tools—all these created a situation that invites comparison with the China of the 1960’s, breaking down the peasants’ isolation and crumbling traditional societies. In the ten years of Revolution, in the words of Auguste Brun, “a crack appeared in the block of peasant habits.” But only a crack. Much of the block held fast. 14

A school inspector tells us how Franche-Comté, whose character had re-

tained the same strongly as Brittany’s, was “Frenchified” after 1830 and turned into “a natural frontier of solid military populations.” A witness like Maurice Barrès testifies to Lorraine’s attachment “to the memories of independence, glorious and not long past” in the 1840’s. And Les Olivettes de Lorraine sings of the French as if they were unfriendly aliens: 15

Lou, lou, la, laissez les passer,
Les Français dans la Lorraine,
Lou, lou, la, laissez les passer,
Il s’aurait du mal a se caser.

The France of local songs and speech was not the patrie but somewhere else, as in the Limousin soldiers’ song “Soudard ve de la guerre,” where the soldier has a French girlfriend, described as such over and over—“ma Francine... tu es Francine—until the last strophe:

Adieu, adieu, ma Francine,
Que j’aurai un jour revue.

If one’s home happened to be on the south, then one could get to France by traveling toward Loire and Seine. Near Murmance in Loi-et-Garonne the road toward Virazell (then north to Bergerac) was still remembered in the 1930’s as “la côte-de-France”; and other lieux-dits of the same kind abound elsewhere. What is of interest here is not the particular names used, but the deep-seated sense of difference that gave rise to them. When the Dominican Emmanuel Latais passed through Marseille in 1756, he was struck by the re-

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doesn’t refusal to admit that they were French. Some 150 years later a historian from that city still spoke of “the Frenchman” and “the French” as if they were 2 race apart (and not a very nice one). The same at Toulon, where true na-

tives seldom mixed with regicides, “whom they don’t yet consider their com-
patriots, and whom they always designate as Francius.” 16

“Great love of their pay... great scorn for the foreigners from the north,”
reported an officer from Tarascon in 1849. “The old hatreds are not completely dead,” wrote another from the Marseille area in 1862. 17 And as late as 1875 a

staff officer warned of the hazards of an army corps formed exclusively of

Provençaux, or the presence of too many of them in any one unit. 18

We have little information on unpatriotic attitudes in this period, not only because some took them for granted in certain circles and made no remark, and others (teachers, for example) preferred to ignore what they deplored, but also because such views became socially unacceptable and their holders chose to conceal them. Thus at Cognac near the Italian border the great local saint, Saint Bénigne, had the power to exempt his from military service and was in fact invoked to that end for many a decade. But on the eve of the First

World War, though people still sought his intercession, a visiting folklorist

found few who were willing to admit that the practice continued, and some who flatly denied it. 19 Accordingly, one’s sources are bound to be patchy and impressionistic, and one’s argument simply tentative.

No one in the nineteenth century undertook any sort of broad survey of national consciousness and patriotism. And discussions of the subject in the early years of the twentieth century focused spottily on urban—mostly student groups. Later ones, for that matter, do not seem all that thorough. The rather thin evidence I am able to marshal should suggest the need for more systematic study. Yet, as it stands, it shows a very incompletely integrated nation. Again, the center, the southwest, and the west were the notable hold-

outs. The Basques were said to have not one sympathy in common with the rest of France. “Closed to outside influences,” deplored Félix Pécoul in 1880, they had so far been hardly touched by “the emancipating action of French genius.” At the other end of the Pyrenees, where in 1845 the French were referred to as dogs, “French blood is still lightly grated on the Spanish stock.”

It was quite clear, during the 1907 crisis, that the French conquest was readily

* Archives de la Guerre, MR 2269 (Marseille, Nov. 12, 1875). The good captain no doubt would have scored himself on his precipice if he could have foreseen that the Fifth Corps, recruited in Provence, would be accorded cowardice before the enemy at Mochague during the attack of August 1914. The charge and the counting would have been hard for soldiers who for years had been less French than other Francophones, a little less aggressive or reliable; it was said, exactly in the traditional Tartarin image made them out to be. (See Le Matin, Aug. 24, 1914: J. Perlmutter, Le Légende du Vex Corps: L’Affaire de Domme, Aragon, 1976; and Maurice Agul-

hon in Edward Baszler, ed., Histoire de la Provence, pp. 519-21). For all that, numerous streets in other towns bear the name of the maligned Fifth Corps.
recalled by many in the areas most affected—Gard, Hérault, and Aude, as well as Pyrénées-Orientales. The winegrowers, echoing the Néronnais charge, compared the south's position to that of exploited Ireland and denounced the "victorious barbarians who treated them as slaves." It was not the reality that counted, but the rival myths.47

Even where no local myths survived, the national myth did not have an easy going. La patrie, noted Father Roux in his Corrèze parish, was "the word...that thrills everyone except the peasant." In Velay, wrote a novelist quite incidentally in 1884, "the word patrie signifies nothing and stirs nothing. It exists no more in local speech than in local hearts." A few years later, when General Georges Boulanger stood for election at Dunkirk, his bilingual poster ended: "Vive la patrie. Love the Fatherland!" This led to strife between Boulanger's Republican opponents and his irredentist Flemish supporters, who proceeded to put up a poster that boldly declared: "Flemish, that's what we are, not French. We have no other fatherland than Flanders; France is not our fatherland, it is the pump that has been sucking up our sweat for over 300 years."

Expectsably, it was Brittany that held out longest. In 1870, when, alone of all French provinces, Brittany organized a levée en masse, the news of the action gave rise to fears of separatist intentions. Léon Gambetta himself wrote to De Keratry, leader of the Breton forces, before the bloody battle of Le Mans: "I beg you to forget that you are Bretons, and to remember only that you are French." Other political factors were at work, of course, but Gambetta obviously thought that this point was worth emphasizing. So did the author of an important report on the Breton departments written ten years later, who placed the issue in historical perspective: "Brittany, which was not unwillingly joined to France [again the term used is reunited], which never wholeheartedly accepted its annexation, which still protests," had yet to be merged into the nation: "Frenchify Brittany as promptly as possible... integrate western Brittany with the rest of France." This, said the writer, the rector of the Academy of Rennes, Baudoin, would be accomplished only through schooling. That was how Franche-Comté was conquered half a century earlier. And that was how Prussia set out to Germanize "our poor Alaise-Lorrainë," and there, at least, the people knew colloquial German. The parallel with Alsace-Lorraine is revealing. But despite the spread of the schools in which Baudoin put his trust, we still find a Breton delegation in 1919 pleading with President Woodrow Wilson for "the right of national self-determination."48

Even the war of 1870 had not evoked a universally patriotic reaction, variations to the contrary notwithstanding. Reaction to wars in France had always varied with their impact on local affairs—the further off the better—and with their success. The nineteenth century saw no great change in this respect. A good war aroused enthusiasm as long as it went well, made few demands in terms of taxes and recruitment, and furnished occasions for excitement and celebration. Thus the Crimean War was greeted, in the beginning at least, with a "military spirit," "warlike songs," "enthusiasm," and "a festive air," according to a newspaper in Franche-Comté.49 But the newspapers of the period are uncertain sources, first because they expressed the kind of emotional response one would expect in the circumstances, and second because they tended to reflect urban attitudes—which in this case were somewhat ambivalent. The cities had their own way of seeing things, as can be seen from an editorial in La Franche-Comté: "Better get it over. Business has not been the same since 1866." And though, in the Douds, for instance, all local papers of every imaginable tendency were awaring through July 1870 in their warlike enthusiasm and national indignation, they also continued to publish the advertisements of companies that provided substitutes for restless recruits. Such scenes as were reported in July and August 1870 almost certainly took place, suggesting that a "remarkable patriotic excitement" probably could be found in the little towns, where the local band played the recuits out of town, old men, women, and girls escorted them to the next village, and people readily drank to La Patrie.50 But, first of all, how many scenes to the contrary would have gotten into print? And second, how far beyond urban limits did such sentiments extend, even at the height of the war fever?

Arthur de Goëbienn's iconoclastic views on the events of the period reflect strong prejudices, but also his personal experience of what he saw around him. By his account, the government tried hard to convince everyone that the French people as a whole were burning to drive back the invaders, but the "masses persisted in believing that it was not their business." George Sand in her country retreat recorded the contrast in July 1870 between Paris, "braying with enthusiasm," and the provinces, in which the overwhelming feelings were consternation and fear. In Ardèche: "little enthusiasm," "poor reception for conscripts," "general negative attitude." In the Limousin, though the bourgeois and the city workers were for the war, the peasants quickly turned against it, against recruitment and taxes. Riots broke out when the war continued: "Down with the Republic! Long live the Emperor! Long live Prussian!" By September, in the center, what people wanted was an end to war: "peace at any price." In more exposed regions, Saisonnais, Beauvaisis, Vexin, the villagers had stubbornly refused to join the local national guard. If Gobienn is to be believed, everyone in the 35 commeunes of his rural canton of

"Everywhere local songs whose naivity betrays their authorship aimed to the courage that animates these conscripts," wrote the prefect of Jura on May 23, 1876: "The people are induced not only a whole French spirit," observed the prefect of the Doubs on March 1, 1874. (See Roger Malin, L'Opinion franc-comtoise, pp. 27-31.) On the other hand, around Langres, the conscripts of Ardèche were singing quite different songs: "O petit roi de France, Viens donc nous voir, Je veux me faire monter, J'ai cing cent mille pères. En bouteilles et caisses, Je t'en ferai peur/ A toi et à ta Nation." (Pierre Cherel, Folklore du Bas-Préalps, p. 46.) It is not clear quite where the Prussians came in in a song of the 1850's, but Prussia and Prussian could have been confused either in the locals' mind or in reaching the pubs original into French. In any event, there is little doubt about the spirit of the words.
THE WAY THINGS WERE

Chaumont-en-Vexin insisted that under no circumstances would they go to fight the Prussians. Indeed, French villagers even were known to refuse food to the French troops and to give it to the Germans, of whom they were more afraid. The peasants resented anyone and anything that threatened their security and homes, and perhaps most of all the francois-recruited in the towns, whose depredations they feared and whose foolishly thrusts to resist the enemy provoked ever more hostile reactions. By September villagers fearful of German reprisals were denouncing the guerrillas to the enemy, leading enemy troops to their hideouts and places of ambush, or arresting them themselves and handing them over. Even if Gobineau stretched the truth for his own purposes, a recent doctoral dissertation supports the general impression of his account; and the officers who reconnoitered the countryside through the 1870's clearly despised at the thought of what the army might expect in case of conflict.

As Léonce de Vogüé made his way to Versailles after the preliminary peace settlement at Boulogne; he noted the relief and happiness of the peasants in Périgord and the Limousin. It would take some time to teach the peasants that Alsace and Lorraine mattered to them. Perhaps, as an Englishman suggested in the 1880's, the patriotic reaction was in direct proportion to the German presence, feeble where the Germans were far away, strong where they came close. It is certainly true that in some regions the German threat had virtually no effect on the tempo of life. From an Ain village, for example, we have a family journal that carefully noted the year's events, crops, prices, and conditions, yet made no mention of the war. Neither did the diary of a retired magistrate, who simply noted: "They say that the Republic has been proclaimed in Paris."

But what of the evidence of out-and-out anti-patriotism? We find some cases that fit the bill, or come perilously close to it. Madame de Gobineau in Oise seemed more in fear of French looters than of the Prussians. And her husband did not hold too bad a memory of the German occupation. In Normandy Flaubert noted with disgust "the bourgeois' universal cry: 'Thank God the Prussians are here!'" At Nancy it was the laborers who, when the town surrendered, cried: "Down with the French! Long live Prussia!" And when German troops were quartered in girls' school at Bar-sur-Seine (Aube), they received constant visits from the children, who taught them the Muscillaise and even bought a German-French dictionary the better to communicate with the soldiers. Apathy, collaboration, or simple human nature.

* Léonce de Vogüé, cited in Louis A.-M. de Vogüé, Une Famille seconde, p. 143; Philip G. Hamerton, France and England, pp. 75-76; Real Dumont, Voyages en France, p. 18; Martin Naunard, who was the prefect of Creuse in 1870-71, recounted of the general lack of enthusiasm: "One might have thought the country wasn't threatened.... No, France did not feel that terror of patriotic wrath that carried our fathers to the borders in 1792; it didn't rise as one against the invaders.... What pride?" (Diœse et conférences, 2: 23). The general prosecutor at Reims found the popular mood no better in his area: "spécie, insouciance, abronce d'esprit public.... du patriotisme.... grande inextüme" (Archives Nationales, RB 30 000, Mar. 23, 1874).

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uncomplicated by abstract considerations—in the end we have a mixed bag of evidence, and probably other instances can be adduced to show deep patriotic grief or, at least, shock, particularly among urban populations. Yet there is one impressive clue to how little impact the war had on the popular mind in the countryside, a Holsteinian one of the negative dog's-not-barking variety: practically no folk songs have survived to preserve the memory of the année terrible, and no episode of 1870-71 seems to have so caught the popular imagination as to be preserved in legend.

It was only human that time and a change of the political winds should persuade many in retrospect that conditions had been worse than they had in fact been, and that their patriotism had been of the deepest order; that being led to school as an eight-year-old by a Bavarian soldier had been a real humiliation; that one had done, seen, and felt things as the new national orthodoxy now demanded. In the event, most people seem to have seen war as a nuisance, to have greeted its end with relief.

What is more surprising is how quickly separatist movements grew in newly annexed territories. Savoy, which had voted to join France in the 1860's, had hardly been assimilated by 1870—as soldiers and officials, treated as carpet-baggers and smearing under the Savoyards' "unjust hatred for all that bears the French name," well knew. Men of Savoy fought bravely in 1870-71, but "apart from the departure of a few soldiers" the unexpected war, the rapid and still less expected defeat, had little effect on local life. "Everything took place as if in a far-off dream." When the dream turned to nightmare and a German occupation loomed, some Savoyard groups urged drastic measures: an occupation by Swiss troops, a separation from France, a declaration of neutral autonomy. At Bonneville in February 1871 the local Republican committee discussed the possibility of an association to Switzerland. The historian Jacques Lovic has charted Gambetta's difficult struggle to persuade his own Republican supporters that the notion of France overbore any one regime, and so, though they might dislike a given regime, they could not just reject it and go on their own way. Gambetta's efforts to instill this notion of a permanent fatherland that would be more than a target of opportunity may have succeeded in educating some; they left others untouched. Like the radical of Saint-Julien who was heard to shout in 1873: "Down with France! Down with the French!... We hate the French. We have to make a revolution to get rid of them." Brought to court for insulting a gentleman ("I don't give a damn about you, you are French, I hate the French, I've never been French and never will be!"), the man was merely fined by sympathetic local judges. No hope for patriotism in this department, complained the prefect in 1874.

A subordinate saw things more clearly; it was too soon to expect the Savoyards to feel French. We have seen that this could apply with equal justice to...

* The sub-prefect of Thouzon wrote on June 2, 1873: "Savoyards, these populations de nos compagnons, qui ne sont aujourd'hui que du mistral, et dont l'opinion n'est pas nourrie des traditions qui font le patriotisme, demandant avant tout la tranquillité et se contentant sans effort à...
to regions beyond Savoy. There too, as the authors of a recent study of rural change in Maurienne perceived: "These people had not yet reached a national consciousness. ... Submission to the state does not mean that they share in the common traditions and the common enterprise that define a nation."44 Dependence without participation: here is an idea and a state of affairs that we shall encounter again.

The most reliable evidence I have found on patriotic sentiments is furnished by military authorities, either indirectly through conscription records or directly in the reconnaissance reports of officers. E. Le Roy Ladurie and a team of scholars have thoroughly explored the first source with the aid of computers. But their work only covers the period 1819-26, too early for my purpose. Just how closely their findings coincide with my more spotty ones, however, can be seen from Map 5, showing the departments where the Ladaurie team found the greatest incidence of draft evasion and self-mutilation to avoid military service, e.g., cutting or biting off a finger, knocking out the front teeth (which were needed to bite the bullet). Le Roy Ladurie remarks that these departments tend to be grouped in Occitan France, where tax resistance was also greatest. He wonders whether this reflects "a certain lack of national integration of the Midi at this time," especially when compared with the departments of the northeast, which "present strong evidence of national integration." This is borne out by his map of volunteers for military service, which shows a fertile crescent of martial commitment running from Nord to the Doubs, very close to the results recorded in my Map 8.45 It is further borne out by a map taken from Adolphe d'Angeville's statistical survey of France in the early 1890's (Map 6), which shows those departments where government agents encountered the greatest difficulties in collecting taxes. If patriotism and a sense of civil obligations go together, reluctance or refusal to discharge the latter testify to a slight sense of the former (and to the state's inability to impose both).

The evidence recorded in my own maps is drawn from the War Ministry's files of the military reconnaissances carried out between the Restoration and the fall of President MacMahon. It is of quite a different order from the exhaustive work of Le Roy Ladurie. For one thing, it is based on the subjective impressions of men, and men who were moreover often strange to the locality they were reporting on. For another, it depends on the luck of assignments and on what was preserved in the files. All available files have been read, but their contents by no means cover the country, far from it; and it is well to remember that the army made most of its reconnaissances in areas around garrison centers, along highways, and so on. But even thus limited, the results are suggestive.

* * *

I have noted every statement that refers clearly to the local population's indifference to the interests of the army, open hostility to troops, or active avoidance of military service (Map 7); and likewise every reference to its patriotism or lack of patriotism (Map 8). All dubious or equivocal remarks have been set aside; and we shall see presently that the statements whose meaning could not be questioned reflect something more than "a certain lack of national integration." In the meantime, what emerges clearly is a sizable pocket of patriotism along the northern and northeastern borders; its county at the opposite, southwestern end of the country; and a disparate but important jumble south of a line running roughly from Saint-Malo to the Italian border, where negative attitudes to one's patriotic duties encounter negative attitudes to the patrie itself.

The army had a very matter-of-fact attitude to the population: were the people friendly, could one expect aid, could one expect trouble, what was the best way to handle them? Since the reports were not for publication, the officers could speak frankly, and their assessments generally reflected few illusions. The local population would feel no moral or patriotic grief about the loss of territory to Spain, wrote an officer in the Pyrenees: "Je ne les crois pas, en effet, assez français par le coeur" (1853). From another, at Pont-de-Cé in Maine-et-Loire, where one could find good fighting men provided they could stay near home: "They are still Angevin, not French" (1859). The Corsican, of course, "has always borne the foreign yoke impatiently; it is not [our] conquest that bids him to France forever" (1863). In Hérault: "the population is not very patriotic in general" and "little inclined to make sacrifices" (1863). "Like all the populations of central France," Allier's "has little patriotism" (1864).46

One did not need to trouble overmuch about such things, but should be prepared to take appropriate action. "There is no reason to apprehend the inhabitants...easy to hold down by fear" (Loret, 1828). "The peasants of the are timorous and have little guile, and all resistance on their part would be easily put down" (Seine-et-Marne, 1850). Southerners possessed "a memory of their past liberties that makes them awkward," hard to handle, unwilling to take orders; "the deployment of force will nevertheless suffice to break these resistances" (Hérault, 1852). Double-check any information furnished by the natives because "most of them have kept wholly Italian sympathies. One shouldn't fear at need to assert oneself" (Nice, 1856). They did not mind soldiers in most parts of Auvergne, but "you can't expect help except by payment, requisition, or threats" (Puy-de-Dôme, 1872). The inhabitants would not refuse aid, "but rather out of fear than out of true patriotism" (Gironde, 1872). Same note a few months later at the very gates of Bordeaux: guides and informers should be tempted by gain or threatened with guns (Gironde, 1873).47

Defeat had made military men bolder. "Limoges people are both aggressive...
Map 5. Lack of patriotism as reflected in attempts to avoid military service. \( \text{Source: E. A. Sheehan, American Studies} \). Note: Darker colors indicate more aggressive attempts to avoid service.

Map 6. Lack of patriotism as reflected in the cost of collecting taxes. \( \text{Source: E. A. Sheehan, American Studies} \). Note: Areas with darker shading indicate higher costs for tax collection.

Map 7. Lack of patriotism as reflected in indifference or open hostility to the military, 1820's-1830's. \( \text{Source: Archives de la Guerre, Mémoires et reconnaissances} \). Note: In every case the latest report has been shown.

Map 8. Areas of patriotic and non-patriotic sentiment as observed by military officers, 1820's-1830's. \( \text{Source: See Map 7. Note: For reports on patriotic feeling I have used the earliest date; for those on non-patriotic sentiment, I show the latest.} \).
and cowardly. All in town and country have very underdeveloped patriotic feelings. In case of combat in the region, one should count on no help from the population (Haute-Vienne, 1879). In the Indre valley, unfortunately, "military spirit and patriotism are little developed" (Indre-et-Loire, 1875). Further south, the spirit was still worse. The population "completely lacks patriotism"; not only would it accept no sacrifice, it would not hesitate to make trouble (Haute-Loire, 1879). Generally quite hostile to the army; troops could expect difficulties (Gard and Vaucluse, 1879). Things had not changed radically since the days when conscription had been resisted with pitchforks or by flight to the hills. True, conditions now made such reactions difficult, but there had been little change in the mentalities that justified them.

There is a story told in a Peruvian novel about Indian peasants who thought that a war with Chile was being waged against a general of that name, and were nonplussed when told that Chile was one country and Peru another to which they belonged. To be sure, few French peasants could have been that uninformed, but one may still wonder what their image of their country was, how much they knew about the country to which they belonged.

For a start, their historical notions were usually vague and personalized. In Vivarais the stories told of evening recognized four legendary periods: that of the giants, imps and elves; that of the Carmaïs; that of the Revolution; and finally, that of the "ferocious beast," probably a wolf, which scourged the countryside around 1812-16. Fantasies based on fact coexisted with fantasies based on pure fancy, the whole jumbled and telescoped in time, food for entertainment or admonishment. The Breton peasants said that all the red moors' castles fell down in one night, and in truth, Philip the Fair had ordered all Templars arrested on the same day. The wars of the Catholic League took place, not in the sixteenth century, but simply in a time beyond the recall of the oldest grandfathers in the parish. So far as the Ermenonvillais knew, Henry IV, the best remembered of French kings, was a contemporary of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Brittany, where peasant persons had not heard of their own countryman Bertrand Du Guesclin, grand constable of France in the fourteenth century, one thought he might have been a Revolutionary general who beat the English. The historical memory of illiterate societies, brief and selective, grants personalities and events the accolade of remembrance only by attaching them to saws and common sayings. Thus, Henry IV survived in the Lower Limousin as a Henrico-quatre—an old worn thing. Charette, the only Vendean leader remembered in Upper Brittany and along the Lower Loire until the schools revived to memory his anti-Revolutionary fellows, lived in such locations as "Chouan like Charette," "brave like Charette," "patriot like Charette" (this last ironic). The Swedes, who ravaged Franche-Comté during the Thirty Years' War, survived in the Doubs as synonyms for brigands or symbols of wickedness (chouls); around Belfort, in the mid-nineteenth century, all ruins and destruction were still attributed to them. About the only historical event that served as a chronological milestone for all French people of the fin-de-siècle was the Revolution, the great dividing point that separated the present from the past. In Upper Brittany storytellers placed the departure of fairies at the time of the Revolution. But they were not quite sure when these events happened, and reference to them seems to have meant simply "a long time ago"—hence the placing of Du Guesclin about the time of the Revolution. Stories often begin with reference to a time when things were utterly different from the present; the Revolution sets the limits of that time.

Like all cataclysmic events, the legendary Revolution seems to have been petitioned by wondrous sights: great battles between cats, chasses fantaisistes in the sky, statues that shed tears. Similar wonders were sometimes attached to Napoleon's name. But Napoleon's legend was one that he himself largely fostered after 1814, in history books, in army communiques, and in the arts. A favorite medium was the popular engraving, designed in some cases to indicate that he possessed almost supernatural powers (Napoleon crossing the bridge at Arcule, Napoleon touching the men stricken by the plague at Jaffa), in others to depict him as the pluperfect democrat, simple and good (Napoleon and the grenadier's mother, Napoleon and the sleeping sentinel).

Psd by the Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène (1845), stirred by the policy of Louis Philippe (who ordered Napoleon's statue repositioned atop the Vendôme column, had the Arc de Triomphe completed and opened, and enshrined Napoleon's ashes in the Invalides), and fanned by the songs of Béroul, the image of Napoleon-heir-of-the-Revolution inspired semipopular stories born of publicity rather than oral spontaneousness. Naturally, that image flourished in the 1860's under Napoleon III. But its popular vague, such as it was, had waned by the end of the century; and what survived, significantly, was a strong memory of the great butchers over which the Emperor had presided. In Champagne, Franche-Comté, and Upper and Lower Brittany the Te Deums that celebrated his victories turned into tue-hommes in peasant language, or tue-hommes ("Lower Brittany: "need men").

Te Deum, Il faut des hommes, Lansudon te, C'est pour les tuer.

We can be sure, at any rate, that not everybody in France at the end of the century knew Napoleon. J. F. M. Rodley, putting up at an inn by the Durance, due to the spot where Napoleon crossed the river on his way from Elba, asked an old woman if she had known elders who might have seen him there.
"Napoléon," she replied in her broad Provençal accent, "n'aimais pas ce nom-là. Peut-être bien c'est un voyager de commerce."

I am inclined to think that the "awareness of great things done together," or suffered together, may well have been less widespread than we believe.

In 1893 a squire in the Rhone Valley was accused to find that at one school he visited not a single child could answer questions like "Are you English or Russian?" or "What country is the department of the Rhône in?" Among most of these children, the inspector added bitterly, "thought doesn't go beyond the radius of the poor parish in which they live." Every year, reported Bolley shortly before 1914, "there are students who had never heard of the Franco-German war" of 1870. He quoted a 1911 survey in which an average of six out of every ten recruits in a cavalry squadron had never heard of the war. A similar inquiry among recruits of 1906 revealed that 36 percent were "une aware that France was vanquished in 1870 and barely half knew of the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine." Indeed, only one man in four could explain why July 14 was a national holiday. A military novel of that period confirmed his findings: many privates did not know about the war of 1870 either, to say nothing of the Franco-Russian alliance closer to their day. On the other hand, we may safely assume that when a Corrèze farmer whose barn was requisitioned in 1919 to billet an artillery troop on maneuvers asked if the soldiers were French or Prussians, he knew about the war, if only vaguely:

"The idea of the fatherland," wrote Joseph Fleurant in a revealing but unconvincing discussion of Alsatian patriotism, "is above all the love of one's country as state, then as a legal and economic structure." This is far from the idea most advocates of patricide had of the nation, or wanted others to have of it. But it is not far removed from the way the alien notion struck the peasant. As with the Indians of Peru, the only figures that represented national authority in their eyes were the recruiting sergeant, the tax collector, and the judge. A variety of evidence shows that Fleurant came closer to the truth.

\* Cardinal Manning and Other Essays, p. 184. See also Bolley, France, p. 676, on villages in Hautes-Alpes who, in 1874, believed Napoleon III was still Emperor. In 1873, Hamonson noted that the French peasants had no solution for Alsace-Lorraine and were indifferent to its loss. They did not "really know what the word France means... Why should they make sacrifices for the people of Alsatia, who were always foreigners to them?" (Hamonson, p. 232).

\* Inquests primo, p. 71. The point was well taken—and still valid around 1890, when peasants near Bryg (Corrèze), nine or ten miles from Brive, did not know the names of villages less than two miles away, even those they could see on nearby slopes (André A. Moret, "Dix huit mois d'embarque," pp. 3658). Another writer, another area: "L'État a été quelque chose de vague. On ne pensait guère plus loin que Villeneuve et certainement pas plus loin que Mâcon" (V. Coton, Quand Etais Bleu, p. 118).

\* Ernest Laviole disclosed the fact that at every examination session (session de bail) examiners for young girls who knew French, but not German, of the new central boards of France, who forget that Metz was in German hands or placed Nancy in German territory ("L'Enseignement de l'Histoire," p. 224). So perhaps we should not insist on such ignorance as peculiar to the common people.
THE WAY THINGS WERE

but the Petit Lavisce and its fellows may have had something to do with the new interest in Joan. What do I dare conclude from all this information? There is many a weary step, said Edmund Burke, before "a number of vague, loose individuals" form themselves into a mass that has a true political personality: people, nation.

In a lecture in 1882, Renan criticized the German concept of nationhood, as worked out by Herder, Fichte, and Humboldt, which contended that there were four basic elements of nationhood: language, tradition, race, and state. Renan proposed his own list instead: present consent, the desire to live together, common possession of a rich heritage of memories, and the will to exploit the inheritance one has received in joint tenancy. One can understand why Renan would reject the German principles of nationhood. It would be hard for a Breton to ignore the absence of common language; tradition might well be taken in a political sense where division, not community, was the rule; race was a dubious concept; and only state remained, but as an expression of power, not of organic growth. Still, Renan's own desiderata served as better. In 1888 consent might be assumed from indifference, but there could be little desire to live together with people who might as well have come from another world. The heritage of memories was not held in common, but differed according to region and to social stock—witness Renan's own assumptions. And there was no inheritance in joint tenancy. The Republic under which Renan formulated his idea had inherited a territorial unit but a cultural jigsaw. It was up to the Republic to turn the legal formulas into actual practice.

What Renan reflects is the assumptions and the serene conscience of his kind. But it matters little really if he is right or wrong. His France, like that of Barrès's Professor Boussetier, is an ensemble d'idées. One is French, says Boussetier, if one assimilates certain ideas, an abstract approach to something very concrete: being, feeling, however elusive these may be. There is something strange about the talk that swelled in the late nineteenth century, and that continues to this day, about being French. If the French were (are?) as French as we have been led to believe, why so much fuss? The fact is, the French fuss so much about the nation because it is a living problem, became one when they set the nation up as an ideal, remained one because they found they could not realize the ideal. The more abstractly the concept of France-as-nation is presented, the less one notes discrepancies between theory and practice. When one gets down to facts, things become awkward. Take, for example, Carlton Hay's native definition of nationality: "a group of people who speak either the same language or closely related dialects, who cherish common historical traditions, and who constitute or think they constitute a distinct cultural society." This would never do for the France we have been talking about, because it simply does not fit French conditions. A lot of Frenchmen did not know that they belonged together until the long didactic campaigns of the later nineteenth century told them they did, and their own experience as conditions changed told them that this made sense.

Finally there was force. Finally, but also originally and throughout. In the end it was a republican of Toulouse, albeit a Gaulist, who told the truth in the clearest and bluntest terms: it was centralization, said Alexandre Sanguinetti, "which permitted the making of France despite the French, or in the midst of their indifference... France is a deliberate political construction for whose creation the central power has never ceased to fight." Companionships perhaps, but too often forgotten.

E. J. Hitchcock recently asked whether the "nation" might be "an attempt to fill the void left by the dismantling of earlier community and social structures." This actually reverses the order of events, at least in regard to France. In France the political nation of the Ancien Régime functioned side by side with traditional community and social structures. The ideological nation of the Revolution had to compete with these. It was not invented upon their dismantling; its invention implied their dismantling. It is interesting in this context to read the reflections of the sociologist Marcel Mauss on the injustice of cultural imperialism, of a Pan-German or Pan-Slav movement that attempts to impose a "dominant civilization on a composite society." It never occurs to Mauss, a humane and learned man, that his criticism could apply to France as well. All these difficulties arise, it seems to me, because the theory of nation and patrie is too rigid, hence too brittle. In other words, its generalizations are particularly liable to collapse under the weight of exceptions, which in this case do not prove the rule but crack it. All the familiar imagery of patriotism and nationhood is based on unity, To question the assumption of unity is like Phebe's holding a light over sleeping Amor. Amor has to go away. Unity vanishes. Perhaps salvation lies in an alternative formula, suggested appropriately enough by a folklorist, Arnold van Gennep. In Van Gennep's view the nation is a complex of collective bodies, all in process of perpetual change and in a constantly varying relationship with one another. The static view of the nation as a precise entity that having once been forged is thereafter stable or threatened by corruption is thus replaced by a Bergsonian model of continual interaction much closer to what actually went on.

* "La Nation," especially p. 40, Mauss shows the same blindness in a later passage when he refers to the linguistic attitudes and expansionism of others (pp. 62-63). We may note also his own misunderstanding of the nation: "a materially and morally integrated society, with a stable permanent central power, with fixed frontiers, with inhabitants relatively at one morally, mentally, and culturally who consciously adhere to the State and to its laws." He clearly thinks that national integration involves the disappearance of every kind of subgroup: nation and others coming to be each other with no intermediaries between them (pp. 20, 24).
The purpose of my argument in this chapter is not to prove that the French were unpatriotic, but to demonstrate that they had no uniform conception of patriotism at the Revolution or at any other time in our period, and that patriotic feelings on the national level, far from instinctive, had to be learned. They were learned at different speeds in different places, mostly through the latter part of the nineteenth century. When, in 1881, the teacher of Castelnau (Lot) claimed that France was moving toward unity, he was right, of course. When he concluded from this that local history must be abolished, merged, lost in the history of the nation, of the one French people, he was premature. And wrong. But he was doing what he conceived to be his job. He and his fellows did their job so conscientiously, in fact, that until quite recently there has been little hint of anything else. And yet, within the nation, Castelnau and its like had, have, a history too.

Chapter Eight

THE WORKING OF THE LAND

Il ne faut pas regretter les choses, ni même les plus jolies, quand un peu de misère et de fatigue humaine s'ajoute avec elles.
—RÉNÉ BAZIN

All through the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth the rural and agricultural populations were a majority in France. On that everyone agrees. But the figures vary depending on how such populations are defined. The data most often cited are also the least enlightening. Official definition classes as urban any locality with 2,000 or more inhabitants, and on this standard, estimates that in 1871 three-quarters of the French population lived in rural areas, that by 1911 the proportion of rural to urban inhabitants had shifted to about 3 to 2, and that between 1921 and 1939 the urban population gained a slight edge over the rural.1 The difficulty, of course, is that some localities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants were essentially small towns, and some with more than 2,000 remained largely rural. A bourg of Provence or Languedoc, for example, would have had more urban characteristics than a bourg of the same size in Lorraine. For this reason, such figures are useful only in indicating and to some extent charting a general trend.

The same applies to more precise statistics. First, because they also vary; witness the recent works of Theodore Zeldin and J.-M. Mayeur, who though they agree that the agricultural sector of the French economy employed the largest proportion of the population in the late nineteenth century, differ on what the exact proportion was.2 But no one disputes, at least, that in absolute numbers the active agricultural population continued to grow through the end of the century. As Table 1 shows, there were more people earning their living in agriculture, fishing, and forestry in 1896 than in 1856 or 1876 (or in fact ever before).3 According to the table, they no longer constituted a majority of the working population, as they had during the Crimean War, but taking into account the people catering to them in the small towns dotting the countryside, the French population would still have been a predominantly rural one.

All this is by way of saying, if it needs to be said, that we are talking about
further encouraged this tendency by offering men who had been farmers posts as servants, bus conductors, delivery boys, or maintenance men. The result was striking: over the ten-year period ending in 1896, reports a correspondent from one rural parish, one in three conscripts failed to return when his service was done. The record of a Doubs village shows that only a little better than one in two opted to go back:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of recruits</th>
<th>Returned on discharge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, the army turned out to be an agency for emigration, acculturation, and in the final analysis, civilization, an agency as potent in its way as the schools, about which we tend to talk a great deal more. Its contribution in all these realms matters less in and of itself than as one factor among many. It was the conjunction of a multiplicity of factors, like the bound rods in the lecteur’s bundle, that made their force; it was their coincidence in time that made their effectiveness and their mutual significance.

The School, notably the village school, compulsory and free, has been credited with the ultimate acculturation process that made the French people French—finally civilized them, as many nineteenth-century educators liked to say. The schoolteachers, in their worn, dark suits, appear as the militia of the new age, harbingers of enlightenment and of the Republican message that reconciled the benighted masses with a new world, superior in well-being and democracy. Observers have pointed out that there were schools before the 1880’s, and have quarreled with implicit assumptions or explicit statements that there was no popular education under the Ancien Régime. But we shall see that the now-classic image of a profound change of pace, tone, and impact under the Third Republic is roughly correct if it is placed in the proper context.

The context matters because schools did in fact exist before Jules Ferry, although there were many; and so, to a large extent, did free education. What made the Republic’s laws so effective was not just that they required all children to attend school and granted them the right to do so free. It was the attendant circumstances that made adequate facilities and teachers more accessible; that provided roads on which children could get to school; that, above all, made school meaningful and profitable, once what the school offered made sense in terms of altered values and perceptions.

It is my purpose in this chapter to sketch the development of schooling in this particular context, to suggest how it fits the changes indicated above, and to show that its success was an integral part of a total process. It was only when what the schools taught made sense that they became important to those they had to teach. It was only when what the schools said became relevant to recently created needs and demands that people listened to them; and listening, also needed the rest of their offerings. People went to school not because school was offered or imposed, but because it was useful. The world had to change before this could come about.
The schools that priests or laymen ran for the poorer classes before the last quarter of the nineteenth century tended, in the nature of things, to put first things first. First things were those the masters thought important: the ability to gabble the catechism or a part of the Latin service. The teaching of even elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic was rare before the Revolution, reflected the prefect of Yonne in 1810, and teachers were little interested in "broad public education, I mean the sort concerning the greatest number of people." In any case, a great many teachers taught whatever they taught with limited competence. Until 1836, no title or proof of competence was required from a teacher. And though in the cities and larger towns this could be remedied, popular schooling suffered. It went on suffering on this score for quite some time, under the rod of men like the dominie of the secondary school of Noyers (Yonne), whose schoolroom was so ill-swept and so full of spiders "that one could hardly make out Citizen Colbeau through the spiderwebs, especially when he gave his lesson as he habitually did in nightcap, dressing gown, and sabots."

The schoolroom or schoolhouse tended to be ramshackle. At Mouille (Pas-de-Calais) a whole wall collapsed in 1828 during a friendly scuffle between teacher and pupils. In 1830 the school at Saurat (Cantal) was an abandoned bakehouse whose roof was separated from the walls, so that the snow got in. Throughout the 1830s we hear of ceilings crumbling, floors collapsing, paneless windows—sometimes no windows at all, the chimney providing the only ventilation. Living and teaching quarters were hard to tell apart; in Eure-et-Loir teachers or their wives did their household chores, prepared meals, and basted bread during class, and some also slept in the classroom on a folding bed. Perhaps just as well, since otherwise the schoolroom might have been even more poorly equipped: quite a few lacked tables; some until the 1880s had neither seats nor stove. Body heat helped, and we find one mayor (in 1857) asserting that the children's breath ensured a reasonable temperature. Dark, humid, crowded, unventilated, unfurnished, unlit, unheated or smelly and smoky when a fire or stove was lit, drafty, unwelcoming, and ugly, such was the great majority of schools right through the end of the 1890s. Most had no yard, let alone a latrine. In 1854 a school inspector, reporting on the lack of cellars or other sanitary facilities, noted that some schools did provide a fenced-in area in a corner of the backyard. The manure amassed there was removed from time to time and used as fertilizer—"the beginning of progress...unknown a dozen years ago."

At Noyon-en-Thiérache (Aisne) there were "no maps, no blackboards, no tables or desks" in the 1850s. Each pupil had a wooden plank that he placed on his knees for writing; the master sharpened the students' quills, and when he was called away to sing in the church, his sister kept the class in order while she cleaned her salad. This was not unusual, and informality of this sort must have interrupted many a dreary lesson. If the schoolroom was

in the village hall, the community's records were likely to be kept in a corner cupboard, with adults filing in at any time to verify a document or to seek the teacher out for other functions; and it was not unknown for a wedding celebration to be held there, even sometimes during class.

The teacher himself was another problem. In the first half of the nineteenth century, he could well have been a retired soldier, a rural constable, the local barber, innkeeper, or grocer, or simply a half-educated peasant's son. Seven of the 15 teachers in Rennes in 1835 were ex-convicts. Balzac's figure of the village teacher, Fouchon, who ended as a poacher, part-cordwainer, part-beggar, and fulltime drunk, was evidently an acceptable stereotype under the July Monarchy. In any case, most teachers worked at another job, ranging from farming their own land or someone else's, weaving (in Eure-et-Loir one kept his loom in the schoolroom), mending shoes, and digging graves to serving as the village choirmaster or village registrar. Even in 1879, when teachers had moved up in the world from their low condition of the 1830s, we find what must have been most if not all of the 355 public teachers of Eure-et-Loir doing something else on the side: 339 acted as registrars, 273 as choirmasters or church organists, and 14 as sextons, beadle, or bellringers; two were janitors and sweepers, one a gravel digger, and ten tobacco growers; two ran the local telegraph office, and 36 sold insurance.

Teaching was a trade like any other, and a man or lad would hire himself out—sometimes at the fair, like the "mercenaries" who "taught what they didn't know" from Hautes-Alpes to Ardèche into the 1830s. They wore one quill stuck in their hats if they taught how to read, two if they also taught arithmetic, three if their mental equipment included Latin. The peasants would put their heads together at the autumn fair to hire such a teacher, himself but a more learned peasant, for the winter. If they did not know him already, they gave him an informal examination at the inn, and during his stay they took turns in providing his bed and board, a place in the stable for classes, and light and ink for the children he taught. In the spring the teacher returned to his farm with a bright golden louis, 20 francs the richer.

The moral worth of such teachers was often as shaky as their enlightenment. Physical and intellectual isolation permitted them to play strange tricks with their slender powers. In Yonne we hear of a village teacher being fired in 1835 because he used calisthenic formulas to heal the sick, tasted toads as a cure for cancer, sold cheap brandy, and "excited his pupils to drink." Such schoolbooks as could be found were ancient. Authorities denounced them as Gothic, anarchistic, and absurd. They seem to have been all of these things. We hear of an alphabet book in Latin, of a work called Christian Civility printed in Gothic characters; of a life of Christ dating back to the fifteenth
century "full of miracles, superstitions, and fear of devils"; of a text telling how the Virgin Mary spent her youth in the temple learning the psalter and the prayer book, as a good saint should. Once the basic essentials were learned, children practiced reading in old family papers, legal documents, marriage contracts. They learned to read old scripts, to know and remember the ways of the past, not very different from the world they lived in under Louis Philippe. This "vicous usage" began to disappear in the 1860's as more and more schools were equipped with standard texts. But most of these texts were, in their own fashion, equally useless; and teaching standards continued to be sadly low.

One hears of village schools that imparted a good fund of knowledge, and of countrymen who knew how to read and actually did read. But these were the exceptions. Most country schools must have been more like the one at Selins (Cantal) in the 1840's, which was conducted by Sister Gandlinho, who could teach only prayers, the catechism, and the first two rules of arithmetic ("she had heard of a third, but never learned it"). In consequence, if poor men read, it was because they had taught themselves. And that came hard. When Martin Nadaud was elected to Parliament in 1849, he could not write a letter, though he had worked at educating himself for over a decade. Where French was not native to the region, some teachers were as ignorant of it as their charges; and others bent it to their needs in a special pidgin, as in Cerdagne, where the school idiom was a strange mixture of Latin, Catalan, and French. At Olette (Pyrénées-Orientales) in the 1840's, where the teacher did not know French but had Leonard's Latin grammar by heart, those children who progressed beyond simple spelling read The Imitation of Jesus Christ and Telemachus. But, recalled a survivor, they read only in a manner of speaking: no one could read a book that was written in French for the simple reason that the teacher could not read it either.

It takes real effort today to conceive such an educational system, one in which both teacher and taught were ignorant of the material they were dealing with, and in which the capacity to draw letters or pronounce them completely outweighed any capacity to comprehend. Letters, words, and sentences were formulas and spells. "No child understands what he reads," reported a school inspector from Var in 1864. And in Brittany the inspectors noted that, though the children read along with fair fluency, "no child can give account of what he has read or translate it into Breton; hence there is no proof that anything is understood." In such circumstances, Latin was no more difficult, no more incomprehensible than French, and many a bright village child "learned" Latin in this fashion and left school full of bits of scripture, can- ticles, and the catechism, "rattling along in Latin like a phonograph, with- out understanding a word of it," and capable of writing in four different hands, accomplishments most impressive to his illiterate parents.46

46 Yet in 1879 a school inspector in Châtillon attacked children using the Royalist Bible as their only text (cited in Pierre Zado, L'Enseignement religieux, p. 153).

Schools and Schooling

Most simply learned by rote. At Soignes (Vaucluse), school authorities reported in 1869 that up to 40 girls were admitted to school every year for a few months, just long enough to learn the catechism by hearing it repeated, so they could make their first communion. Thirteen years later at Privas (Ardèche), nearly half the children were enrolled for this purpose alone. From Louis XVI to Louis Napoleon, the words of one of Grégoire's correspondents continued to apply, though less and less: "Education in the countryside comes down to enabling pupils to help their pastors on Sundays and holidays to sing the praise of God in a language they don't understand." 47

No wonder in such circumstances that outside reading continued rare. In 1864 a survey tells us: "very little" (Vaucluse); "the local paper, a letter, the prayerbook" (Doubs); "no one thinks to read in the countryside" (Landes); "the taste for reading doesn't exist" (Loi-et-Garonne); the same in Basses-Pyrénées. As for writing, it was rarer still. "To write several pages, one needs a practiced hand," a Dorogné priest had written to Grégoire in 1791. 48 Two generations later few could trace even a few words. Children left school able to make their way painfully through shreds of letters, but only a handful had been taught to write. Writing was a stage of learning to which few aspired, the fewer since it called for higher fees. 49

I have quoted the reports of school inspectors. They came into existence in 1853 as part of a law introduced by François Guizot, then Minister of Public Instruction. That law set the foundations of the people's schooling. It required every commune or group of neighboring communes to set up and maintain at least one elementary school; it reaffirmed the standards of competence for teaching that had been set by royal ordinance in 1816, and prohibited the operation of a school without an official certificate that such standards had been met; it decreed that each department should set up, alone or jointly with its neighbors, a normal school to train primary school teachers; and it produced quick results. In 1833 France had 31,420 schools attended by 1,714,000 children; by 1867 the number of schools had doubled, and the number of pupils had increased almost threefold. In the same period the number of normal schools increased from 38 to 47. This last had its importance. We must realize that the mass of the teachers in the public elementary schools in the mid-1850's probably came out of these normal schools of the July Monarchy; and that, however slowly, their training and quality improved as a result.

We can see that Guizot's was an important measure. We must be careful not to overrate its effectiveness. The normal schools continued to provide only rudimentary training. The "schools," as we have seen, varied in grandeur and facilities—but varied mostly downward. They were (I speak of the countryside) still supplemented by the ad hoc establishments of religious teaching orders, like the biètes of Haute-Loire and Ardèche, who could not teach their charges how to read, but were very effective babysitters and cordial hostesses for feminine gatherings where one embrodered, gossiped, and prayed. Beyond this, there were unofficial, or "clandestine," establishments, numerous into the...
1896, where some local man or woman gathered a group of paying students during the winter nights. In 1896 the school inspector of Vannes (Morbihan) reported on the clandestine schools he had discovered, with more than 40 girls from three to thirteen crowded in a tiny room already filled by a wardrobe, bed, and chest. The woman who kept the school taught them “neither reading nor writing, and no word of French. Only the catechism and prayers in Breton, and songs in a Latin book for the bigger girls.” In 1897 the lattice still flourished in Velay and Vivarais, to the great indignation of the local authorities. Though they were officially suppressed in 1884, Arduin-Dumazet found them still operating at the turn of the century and avowed that without the shelter they offered the women for their work and the children for their catechism, long winters would have been unbearable.[4]

As for the public schools, official attendance figures are scarcely credible. For one thing, the claims made for the 1840’s equal the more reliable figures that appeared in the 1860’s. And for another, in drawing up statistics, no one gave any thought to girls. When not taught at home—scarcely a frequent case among the masses—girls were left to local hazard, which often meant no school. In 1867 a law was passed requiring every commune of 400 souls and over to have a girls school, but it provided certain outs, with the result that at the end of the 1870’s half of the communes in France still lacked such facilities.[5]

Despite all these shortcomings, from 1833 onward the government, supported by a steadily growing vested interest, bent itself to advance and develop public education. Nationally, the conscripts affected by the law of 1833 showed a much smaller measure of illiteracy than their forebears. And in an illiterate department like Corrèze, the change was equally evident. The proportion of conscripts who knew the elements of reading rose from 14.3 percent in 1829 to 31.9 percent in 1835, 34.8 percent in 1866, 47 percent in 1865, 59 percent in 1866, and 62 percent in 1875.[8] By 1865 only about one-fifth of the children between seven and thirteen received no instruction whatever. What we want to know is the kind of instruction that was given and who got it. The evidence suggests, and so does common sense, that urban areas had more schools than rural areas, that these schools were more regularly attended by more of the local children, and that the quality of the teaching in them was better. By 1870 nearly 800,000 of 4.5 million school-age children were still not registered in any school. Most of these belonged to rural communes; and many who were registered hardly ever attended class.[7] This was the enduring problem.

The next great change came in the 1880’s. It would have come earlier had the Minister of Education Victor Duruy had the chance to develop the plans he elaborated in 1867. But he did not, and most of his initiatives remained in the project stage.[8] Hence the importance of the reforms introduced by Jules Ferry. In 1881 all fees and tuition charges in public elementary schools were abolished. In 1882 enrollment in a public or private school was made compulsory. In 1889 each village or hamlet with more than 10 school-age children was required to maintain a public elementary school. In 1886 subsidies were allotted for the building and maintenance of schools and for the pay of teachers. In 1886 an elementary teaching program was instituted, along with elaborate provisions for inspection and control.

We may observe that the adoption of these policies coincided with the vast expenditures of the Freycinet Plan. The millions that were spent on building roads were matched by vast sums for schools: 17,320 schools had to be built, 5428 enlarged, 8,581 repaired. A school fund set up in 1878 dispersed 31 million francs in subsidies, 23 million more in loans in the space of seven years. Meanwhile, the budget for public instruction rose from 55,649,714 francs in 1878 to 155,572,672 francs in 1885, enough to set money flowing through the country to convince the undecided of the virtues of the new policies.[9]

In certain parts of France the educators had their work cut out for them. South of the line that marked off the best and worst areas in primary education, a diagonal running from Saint-Malo to Geneva, 16 departments, representing a population of 65 million souls, showed a higher than 20 percent rate of illiteracy among conscripts in 1871; nine of these ranged between 26.1 percent (Corrèze) and 41.3 percent (Morbihan).[10] Even these figures under-rated the degree of illiteracy by several percentage points. They did not include males who were not conscripts. They did not include women, who had a much higher rate of illiteracy than men. And they did not discriminate between urban and rural areas to show that even in the most backward regions—Lower Brittany, the center from Cher to Dordogne and Ardèche, the Pyrenées—rural areas were consistently worse off. In this same year, 1881, teachers in Lot reported that in their communes seven persons in ten were illiterate, and that only one of the three who could read could also write, and then “very badly.” By the turn of the century conscript literacy in Finistère was not far below the national average. But when the 1919 draft board examined a group at Châteaulin, it found about one in three of the men from Pleyben, Châteaulin, Huelgoat, and Carhaix to be illiterate.[11]

In a society recently come to mass education, the rate of literacy among the conscripts would necessarily have been higher than the rate among adults. This means that in the 1880’s the illiteracy rate among men in their fifities (the figures for women being even worse) would have corresponded to the rate found among conscripts in the later 1840’s, and the illiteracy rate among older people to the rate noted in the conscripts of the early 1830’s, which ran between 60 percent and 80 percent throughout the 54 departments of the center and south of France.

It is because figures and statistics tend to be misleading that an impressionist account may come closer to the truth. School inspectors of the 1870’s plainly appreciated the point in expressing a certain skepticism about the lists of
literate and illiterate children that they themselves passed on. "Reality has nothing to do with administrative figures or statistics," complained Félix Pécaut in 1879. The number of those who could not read or write belied the official claims. Passing remarks give us some useful clues. Jean-Paul Girtet in his study on popular education in Eure-et-Loir observes that to say people knew how to read or write does not mean that they could in fact do it, but says only that they had been taught to do it. A teacher in Vosges remarked on the enormous difference between being able to sign one's name and being able to read, let alone write (1893). In 1877 the General Council of Haute-Loire found occasion to point out that most of the people statistically listed as able to read and write were completely illiterate. A year later, a local official confirmed that school attendance often resulted only in the ability to scrawl a questionable signature and to spell out the shop signs (1878). And the reports to that effect are endless. Many conscripts have attended school but have retained nothing from it (Allier, 1865). They learn how to sign their names and think they know everything (Charente-Inférieure, 1866). In any case, the last few left school at twelve would return for a winner's cramming before they faced the draft board, to give them a minimum appearance of literacy (Cantal, 1880). Conversely, other men claimed illiteracy in order to escape service, and lists of illiterates in Ariège in 1885 included a fair measure of seminarians, students, and teachers. The statistics clearly must be taken with more than a few grains of salt.

One reason for the slow progress in eliminating illiteracy, strangely ignored by even the best accounts of education in France, was the fact that so many adults—and consequently children—did not speak French. As we have seen, in 1865 by official tally (as reproduced in the Appendix, pp. 408–409, below) some 7.5 million people, a fifth of the population, did not know the language. And as we have also seen, even that figure is questionable. The actual number was probably much larger, particularly if one includes those whose notions of the language were extremely vague.

The greatest problem faced by the public schools in the 8,811 non-French-speaking communes, and in a good few of the other 29,139 where French was said to be in general use, was how to teach the language to children who never or hardly ever heard it. The oft-repeated claim that they were learning their mother tongue could hardly have rung true to those whose mothers did not understand a word of it. "The children [of Lauragais] don't have to learn simply how to read and write," commented M. P. Pariset in 1869. "They have to learn how to do so in French, that is, in another language than the one they know." The result was that, for a long time, the instruction received in school "leaves no more trace than Latin leaves on most of those who graduate from secondary school. The child...returns to patois when he gets home. French is for him an erudite language, he forgets quickly, never speaking it." Officially, the problem was faced by denying its existence and forcing even those who could scarcely master a few words to proclaim, as in a catechism, that what should be true was true and what they knew to be true was not. (1) We call mother tongue the tongue that is spoken by our parents, and in particular by our mothers; spoken also by our fellow citizens and by the persons who inhabit the same pays as us. (2) Our mother tongue is French. So read an army examination manual in 1875. Unofficially, the schools continued to struggle to make the slogan true. Teaching French, "our beautiful and noble mother tongue," asserted Ferdinand Buisson, the leading light of Republican education in the 1880's, "is the chief work of the elementary school—a labor of patriotic character." The labor proved long and hard.

The printed forms school inspectors used in the 1890's in making their rounds included a section headed "Need to teach exclusively in French. Regulations to be reviewed in pays where Basque, Breton, Flemish, German patois, etc., are spoken." The section was put to use, and one may assume that the rules were reviewed with some frequency at least for some decades. Yet the results were patchy. "We have been teaching French regularly for 30 years in nearly every commune of the Empire," exclaimed a schoolteacher of Châteauneuf-du-Rhône, a village near Montélimar, in 1881. Yet what were the results? "Look at the difficulty with which young peasants manage to mumble a few words of French!" The situation in Vaudax was no different: "They leave rural schools with scarcely a notion of French." And how could one ask more of them, especially when "only high society habitually speaks French"? In Dorogène reports of 1875 tell us that French was studied "without much result," and young people read without understanding. In Basque-Pyrénées the French language was known by only a few, and children could hardly cope with a language they never heard. When the two young heroes of Bruno's Tour de France (1877) stop at a rural hostel south of Valence, they cannot communicate with the nice old landlady or any of the other patrons, who speak only patois—that is, the Franche-Comtè dialect of the Drôme. Little Julien asks his older brother, "Why is it all the people of this pays do not speak French?" "It is because they have not all been to school," André answers. "But in a number of years it will be different, and everywhere in France people will know how to speak the language of the fatherland." Symbolically, at this point the landlady's children come home from school. They can speak French: Julien and André are no longer isolated.

Here was the promise of great change to come. And Bruno's scene is confirmed from all quarters. By 1875 in the schools of Hérault French "tends to replace the patois idiom." By 1878 in the Cévennes "all the youths today know how to speak French." And by 1875 in Tarn-et-Garonne "even the country people want their children to know how to read, write, and do sums." Unfortunately, what they wanted was not that easily accomplished. The fact
that classes were taught in a foreign language played its part in maintaining a high rate of illiteracy, making it much harder to assimilate courses that were strange twice over. It helps explain complaints about how, for all the number of schools, there were so few graduates who could read and write. It also explains why priests continued to preach and teach the catechism in the only language most of their parishioners really understood. Even where acquaintance with French was spreading, the children affected remained a minority for many years. Only in the 1880's at the earliest, more likely by the turn of the century, could one expect the efforts of the 1860's and 1870's to have produced a majority of adults familiar with the national tongue.

"In the villages, anyone who tried to speak French wouldn't escape the jeers of his neighbors," explained an educator in Loire in 1864. "He would be turned to ridicule." This and other kinds of pressure have to be taken into consideration. Regard for the majority or simply for one's elders, the presence of non-French-speaking relatives in a family or a congregation, kept local speech in use. Jacques Duclos was born in 1856. His parents knew French (the date is right for that), but did not use it at home, perhaps because his grandmother did not understand it. The little boy only learned French at school.

So the transition was bound to be slow. Until a large enough segment of the population had been reached to shift the balance in favor of French, the pressures of environment, that is, of general practice, worked to promote and enforce the use of local speech, and schoolmasters felt that they were fighting lonely battles. Even when parents began to want their children schooled, the war was not won: the "teaching of French makes no progress...everyone speaks Gascon" (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1873); "teaching is everywhere in French but everywhere outside school one speaks patois" (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1877); "pupils express themselves badly in writing...It is difficult in a pays where patois is spoken constantly" (Puy-de-Dôme, 1877); "it is necessary to teach French to students" (Vaucluse, 1889). The best one could say of Corrèze in 1893 was that "everyone speaks and understands French well enough, but the usual language is still patois." Yet here, by the end of the century, the balance had swung to the side of French; witness the local priest who discontinued giving the sermon and the catechism in Limousin.

But the effort that produced this result had to be made in the 1870's. Article 24 of the official regulations for public schools in the Basses-Pyrénées, published in 1874, "expressly prohibited the use of patois in Béarnais schools where French had made progress and recommended "translation exercises and other methods" to make Basque children "acquire the usage of French." As late as 1876, a report emphasized that teachers in Basque schools who did not speak Basque had great difficulties, since none of the children could speak French. By 1881, though both Basque and Béarnais children never spoke French except at school, the latter were at least beginning to "join in the general movement," whereas the Basques persisted in avoiding "the emancipating action of French genius." Many Pyreneans seem to have stubbornly resisted this "emancipation" from their local speech. From one end of the mountain chain to another, Basque, Béarnais, Catalan, Gascon, or other Occitan dialects predominated, and teachers in the late 1880's found French the most difficult thing that they had to teach. In 1887 Paul Beaulaygue, a schoolmaster in Ariège, pointed out that pedagogic works assumed children spoke French when the "truth is quite different. In the great majority of our rural schools, children come...knowing only a little French and hearing only patois spoken at home. This is and will long remain a general rule."

Perhaps Beaulaygue generalized too much from his Ariège experience; but surely not too much where Brittany was concerned. Inspection reports of the 1890's bear witness to the slight effect schools had had on regions where thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys at school could hardly understand the things they read or learned in French—and the number of those who attend school as long as that is very limited," added one inspector, Rector Bandel in Finistère, in his great report of 1890, spoke of the need to "Frenchify" the peninsula—especially the three departments of Lower Brittany—by the spread of schools, which alone could "truly unify the peninsula with the rest of France and complete the historical annexation always ready to dissolve." Ends set so high justified all means. Breton was hauled out of the schools. Children caught using it were systematically punished—put on dry bread and water or sent to clean out the school latrine. Rector Bandel in Finistère cited as an example worth following the methods used to Germanize Aluze-Lorouze; in 1895 a Breton patriot from Saint-Brieuc compared the school policies of France unfavorably to those of the Germans.

A favorite punishment, inherited from the Jénien who had ironically used it to enforce Latin on their French-speaking charges, was the token of shame to be displayed by the child caught using his native tongue. The token varied. It could be a cardboard ticket (Dorès, Pyrénées-Orientales), a bar or a stick (Ariège, Pyrénées-Orientales), a peg (Cantal), a paper ribbon or metal object (Flandres), or a brick to be held out at arm's length (Corrèze). A child saddled with such a "symbol" kept it until he caught another child not speaking French, denounced him, and passed it on. The pupil left with the token at the end of the day received a punishment. In the country schools of Brittany the symbol of shame was a sabot. Morvan Lebesque, who attended those schools in the years after the First World War, remembered the punishment with bitterness, which suggests that Breton did not die lightly. Yet by 1895 our anonymous Breton patriot could decry "the systematic exclusion of the Breton language," which helped discredit it in the eyes of those speaking it, who saw it as a badge of ignorance and shame.
of the way they spoke. This was in 1836. By 1875, some 40 years later, the normal school had moved from Salers to Aurillac, but "the study of French was still the greatest problem because of the patois." Two years later the director took further stock, to find that "for most of our students French is almost a foreign language." In Gard the inspector reported from Nîmes in 1872: "The use of patois, the students' backgrounds, and the relatively brief time they spend at [normal] school make teaching in the French style pretty difficult." At the normal school in Mende (Lozère) in 1872 the student teachers were weak in French, "primarily because of insufficient knowledge on admission." A decade later every student in school still spoke the Lozère patois at home. French "comes down to purely grammatical exercises."39

Neither students nor teachers read enough to be familiar with, let alone teach, French literature. In Basses-Pyrénées we hear that cultivated people knew French (1874). But what kind of French? A year later the normal school at Lescar reported having problems with the language because "even the cultivated who speak it don't speak it very well, and that's all the students have heard when they have heard it." In Dordogne in the same year, 1875, examiners for the teaching diploma were warned to make sure that every teacher "knows at least how to write his language correctly." (To be certain the point got across, the warning was underlined.) In the Landes in 1876 student teachers and their mentors had mastered the language only shakily. "Many masters read no better than their students," and in explaining a reading both sides offered plain absurdities. At the Avignon normal school, also in 1876, "the master himself knows French badly." At Perpignan in 1879 student teachers read and understood French badly; they were used to Catalan and only great efforts could "familiarize them with French." Much the same thing in Puy-de-Dôme in 1877: "Detestable local accent," and patois hindering everyone. The reports of 1881 carry similar criticisms. The teachers don't do very well in French because they have been insufficiently prepared to handle it (Lot-et-Garonne). The teachers are insecure in their use of French; they lack solid training in using it on their own account (Basses-Pyrénées). Even many of the normal school teachers are local men who have never left the department; they retain the local accent and habits, and pass them on to their students (Aveyron).39

In short, with few exceptions teachers were merely peasant lads who hoped to improve their condition or wanted to escape military service. Only in extraordinary circumstances would a man who expected to inherit property have wasted his time on something that until the 1880's brought little profit or prestige. The reports amassed in the government's survey of the state of primary instruction in 1874 show that student teachers came from the "working class" and from families of small farmers chiefly interested in getting an exemption from military service for their sons (Dordogne, Eure, Savoy); that they were recruited from the poor families of the countryside (Lot-et-Garonne); that they had the defective pronunciation and habits of the peasant.

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39 Schools and Schooling

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Our friend from Saint-Brice was both right and wrong. French was gaining ground. But not so fast. Although the growing appreciation of the usefulness of a less parochial language and of the skills learned in the schools. Universal military service both spread the use of French and made at least a smattering of it important to more people. The introduction and spread of kindergartens—salles d'asile—to relieve teachers of the care of three- and four-year-olds given into their charge familiarized very young children with authority figures who spoke French rather than the mother's language.

Most important of all, perhaps, more girls were being schooled, more girls and women learned French, more children learned French, more children learned French; if they chose to do so. Women had willy-nilly perpetuated local speech. Girls had been left unsung at the village level much longer than in burgs and towns, a fact that the available statistics hardly mirror at all. Only in 1867 were communes over 500 souls required to provide a girls school (they had been required to provide schools for boys in 1853), and it took some time before the results of this law were felt. In any case, girls schools were generally run by members of religious orders, and their standards remained quite low until the 1880's. Nor did the girls have the benefit of military service as a refresher course in French and "civilization." It follows that the school laws of the 1860's had the broadest impact on the literacy and schooling of girls, both of which had lagged far behind. And that when the results came to be felt in the 1890's, the women's cultural role in the family would suddenly change and, with it, attitudes to schooling and to the use of French.

There was another great problem that had to be mastered before French could truly be made the national language: the teacher's own poor knowledge of the language that he had to teach. "Most teachers don't know French," complained a report of 1863 in Ardèche. Half a century later things had hardly improved. A special summer refresher course for teachers held in 1889 at Privas reported great success: when it ended those who began with 60 to 80 mistakes in a page of dictation made only 25 to 40 errors when the exercise was repeated. Through the 1840's and 1850's many teachers still found it difficult to spell or to form a proper sentence.

During the first two-thirds of the century, normal schools south of the Saint-Malo-Geneva line reported grave difficulties in teaching apprentice teachers French. At Salers (Cantal) "every kind of trouble getting the students... to speak French out of class." Even some of the normal school's teaching staff found the national language awkward, and students made fun

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38 Consider this note penned by the teacher at Saint-Brachon (Vienne): "Je vous observe que je suis infère de la main gauche, qui mettot totalement la faiblesse de mon servir. Je suis attaqué de lâche que je couvre, que je traye la faiblesse de voire. Dites que je suis aperçu d'êtres un peu mal qui me donne une inéité improbable, surtout lors que j'apprend des gens." (Quoted in H. Forester, "Perrette décélée," Annales de Bourgogne, 1972, p. 183.)
new enlightened style. Above all, they were not to go around “dressed in
smocks, caps, and sabots, keeping their heads covered in class like their
students... as uncivilized as the populations in whose midst they live.”

In their persons and in their actions teachers were expected to maintain
standards that would reflect their elevated functions and their representative
role.

Though pay improved somewhat, such standards were difficult to main-
tain. Beginning teachers earned 700 francs a year in 1885, 800 ten years later,
and 900 between 1897 and 1905, when the starting salary was raised to 1,100
 francs. The highest pay doubled in the same period. By the turn of the
century, after withholdings for pensions and other things, country teachers at
least earned as much as a miner and more than a Paris laundress or a textile
worker. But they had to “dress suitably,” and to keep up at least outwardly
a style of living that went with their position as fonctionnaires d’état (1889)
and aspiring nobles. That they were willing and able to make the attempt
was due to the training inculcated by the reformed normal schools.

A monograph on the normal school of Puy-de-Dôme shows how impov-
erished the curriculum of such schools was until late in the century. Only
a handful of subjects was offered: religious instruction; grammar; a cat’s
cradle of formal rules far removed from everyday speech; writing, that is,
calligraphy; drawing; music, a course in which the future teacher learned
plainchant for the masses he would have to help serve, then got some instru-
mental training because most teachers sang badly; horticulture, a subject
offered primarily in aid of the teacher’s own garden; and arithmetic and
land surveying, the only practical skills most teachers truly mastered, recognizing,
as did villagers and schoolchildren, that they related to practical needs.
Only the 1880’s saw innovations—an enrichment of the teaching of French,
the introduction of history and geography, an attempt to relate duty formalities
to living experience. The whole character of the normal school changed.
Students formed clubs, went in for hiking and mountain climbing. “The school
is no longer the sinister establishment that it used to be... it lives, it acts.”

And as for concrete advantages and rewards that went with this, which the mother of an
agricultural teacher voices in Hélène Ploy’s play, “La Reyne mance” (quoted in Guston
Guillaume, Le Pédagogue, Paris, 1931, pp. 114-118): “Une reyne!”, says the mother:

Mes, ši iše pas quia ŉy bery, per u paya,
D’il de sèt reyney à ouel? Un reyney! ...
De lihe qui rap de tout, e qui n’i pas
Brassou, in bibo, de trimo coure nuv ait,
Pone rampo, per la purpul, un diari dou brotu,
Ha lea harkat dou pozo, airon, heneyra.

*André Burguères describes a revealing scene that took place at Ploëvre (Plounétre) in 1910.
The local priest attempted to speak at a political meeting, was interrupted, and called on the
teacher to clear the room. “Monseigneur le curé,” answered the teacher: “I am neither your servant
toe a policeman” (Brèves de Ploëvre, p. 815.) Not long before he had been a bit ad both.

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endured—at least in a position of influence. The teachers were recorders and scribes, very often secretaries to the mayor and municipal council. In many places the village councilmen conducted their business in the local tongue, leaving it to the teacher to keep the minutes in French. As secrétaire de mairie, the teacher prepared the documents required of the mayor, and often wrote all his letters as well. Many mayors, many municipal councilmen, were illiterate or as good as. Throughout the July Monarchy and the Second Empire the odd remark surfaces in some documents to say that most mayors "hardly know how to write," that lacking schooling they did not understand the forms they were to sign, that municipal councils and mayors were "practically illiterate." In a department where a third of the mayors were completely ignorant of the French language and five-sixths of the fonctionnaires could not write it, reasoned the prefect of Bas-Rhin in 1853, the teacher was indispensable. Such conditions still prevailed much later in isolated areas, so that in the Pyrenees in 1866 "most of our mayors can hardly read or write" (quite natural for men who had grown up unshodded around mid-century). They could not read, did not know what the official regulations were, and left everything to their secretaries. 49

As early as 1865 the teachers' growing influence rated an official warning. Teachers were running the affairs of neglective, often illiterate mayors. They had become legal advisers to the villagers; lent farmers money, wrote their letters, and surveyed their fields; had "become occult powers." Their prestige was great, their status in the community almost "sacerdotal." Most alarming of all, warned the sub-préfet of Jouy (Yonne), teachers were even beginning to go into politics. 50 Hardly the browbeaten figure that Flaubert etched.

Such forbodings became serious fact when village teachers, trained to greater competence and new self-respect, became the licensed representatives of the Republic. By the 1870's they not only ran the administration in almost all the communes, but also in some instances worked as correspondents for the local newspapers, earning a useful increment in salary and prestige. A theme that recurs frequently in political accounts is the observation that the local schoolteacher "had turned the commune round politically by his influence on the young." The teacher was the municipal lampost, the soc de gaz municipal, a half-friendly but suggestive nickname. 51 The political influence attributed to him was probably a reflection of shifts that we have seen to have had more complex roots. But even if exaggerated, such reports attest to the growing role of the man whose light, however dim, shone strongly on his parish.

This could not have happened as long as schools remained irrelevant to a great many people and this they did into the last quarter of the century. Most peasants wanted their children to work and contribute to the family budget. If they sent them to school at all, it was usually for the sole purpose of getting them past their first communion, a crucial rite of passage. Once that was accomplished, the child was withdrawn. Parents send their children to school for a few winter months before their communion, grumbled a Breton teacher in 1861, and that short time was almost exclusively devoted to learning the catechism, an awkward business since the children could not read. For this reason communes were made as early as possible, between the ages of ten and twelve. As a result school enrollments of children past that age diminished sharply, and children soon forgot the little they had learned, mostly by rote, lapsing once again into a "state of complete ignorance." 52

In any case the country school provided little stimulus to learning for its pupils, not even the challenge of exposure to more motivated students. Parents in comfortable circumstances who were willing and able to keep their children in school for a time preferred to send them to the bourg or to a boarding school. More important, the offspring of wealthier parents, aware that schooling would play a part in their later activities, assimilated more and retained more of what they learned. The parents took more interest in their work. 53 Thus the children of the poor had access to poorer schools, less time to attend them, and far less reason to make the most of such opportunity than their better-off mates. 54

Some poorer families kept their children out of school under the pressure of local landowners who did not want their future work force to be subverted or diminished by even a modicum of book-learning. More were discouraged by the distance the children had to cover to get to school and by the state of the roads. Where the peasants lived in small, dispersed settlements or in isolated houses the problem was twice as difficult. One village in Finistère refused to build a school because "the distance from the hamlets to the center does not permit farmers to send their children there. In summer they need them to watch the cattle; in winter they could not get to school because of the bad state of the roads." Another, in Ille-et-Vilaine, pointed out that though the present school seemed to have cramped quarters, the space was adequate because no child could make his way to school before the age of eight or nine, which cut the potential attendance by half. In Sarthe the rural roads were too bad for children to negotiate in the winter months; in Maine-et-Loire, Tarentaise, and Savoy generally, only the twelve- or thirteen-year-old child had the stamina to get to school regularly. At that point they left! Not especially surprising,

* But little attention has been paid to the institution of camaritins, in which a teacher or a poor family of the bourg took in boarders from outlying farms and hamlets. Around 1860 Pierre Bouton's mother placed him chez le Tissans, who lodged him (his mother supplied the bed), provided soap, and cooked whatever he brought to eat. For these accommodations Tissans received 1.5 francs a month, plus a pound of butter and a cupful of flour a year. There were 20 camaritins of both sexes at Tissans'. (Un Père du Canton, p. 6.) See also Archives Départementales, Cantal 951 (295), 1953; and IF 553, 1895.
considering that they might have had to cover three to five miles on foot each way or hire a boat to get there. In the Lannion district of Côtes-du-Nord, where, in 1877, one child in three was not enrolled in a school, though nearly every parish had one, the figures show that distance from isolated farms and hamlets made a significant difference, with the loneliest cantons averaging only half the enrollment of the others. Nor was the problem by any means a rare one. In many mountain communes less than a tenth of the population lived in the parish center. In Vendée, too, where in 1881 one-third of the twenty-year-olds could not spell out a word, the population was widely scattered. Only 224 of the inhabitants of a commune like Saint-Hilaire-de-Tollemé lived in the bourg; the remaining 2,515 were spread over 83 km. La Garnache, with a population of 3,617, had three large villages (as well as many farms and hamlets), each 8 km from the bourg, where fewer than 300 people lived. Reports from Brittany ring with desperation. No one could understand who had not been there to see the conditions and terrain, an official reported in 1880. He selected as an example the commune of Lanouée, which was spread over 22,500 acres divided by a great forest. The bourg had 250 inhabitants; more than 3,000 other people were dotted about in solitary farms.12 Here, as elsewhere, schools set up in the bourgs served a tiny minority, leaving the vast dispersed majority illiterate and untouched. The roads were impossible from November to March, which was just the season when most children would be free to attend them.

This problem would cause much ado into the 1880's, when better local roads began to help the situation, and the school-building program provided even hamlets with schools of their own. Yet the pressures exerted by landowners and difficult communications were minor obstacles compared to those raised by indifference and poverty. Poor, isolated departments maintained unexpectedly low attendance rates. In 1885, when the national average was 69.1 percent, Corrèze had a rate of 40.2 percent, and Haute-Vienne's was 39.2 percent. In 1876, against a national average of 72.6 percent, the Limousin departments sent 66.3 percent and 55 percent of the school-age children to their schools. In Perche attendance in 1888 was lower than in the rest of Maine-et-Loire. The Breton departments made a still worse showing. A general report of 1880 shows that more than a third of the children in the 6-13 age group did not go to school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>No. attending</th>
<th>No. not attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morbihan</td>
<td>40,842</td>
<td>31,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ille-et-Vilaine</td>
<td>59,309</td>
<td>30,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loire-Inférieure</td>
<td>58,016</td>
<td>27,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côtes-du-Nord</td>
<td>60,421</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finistère</td>
<td>44,084</td>
<td>49,234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion attending must have been far lower than two-thirds in rural areas—even if one provides for some undue optimism in the figures.13 "The parish school we have suffices for the poor," reported a Cantal mayor in 1839, because, as he explained, their children left it at the earliest possible age to work. Once they had gone to work, learning was out of the question; they were at their tasks "by candlelight in winter, and in summer from one twilit to the other." There was no time or energy for anything else. In the Nive valley of the Pyrenees an officer found little trace of school enrollment in 1844. "The land is so poor that its people cannot make any sacrifice. The children guard the cattle in the mountains, while the parents work without a stop." These statements might as easily have been made a quarter century later, when many a country child still attended school—as they say in Franche-Comté—"behind a cow's udder."14

Where there were mills, as in Ardèche or Franche-Comté, for instance, children could find work at the tender age of eight or nine. By 1869 only a "very few" children under eight were still working 15-17 hours a day in the mills of Privas or Annobay, but there were plenty of children aged eight to twelve who continued to do so.15 The ones who interest us, however, mostly stayed close to home where they were needed to guard birds and cattle. Age was no object, provided they could trot. In Rouergue and Lauragais all children were clearly put to work at the age of six or seven throughout the 1860's, and boys as soon as they were strong enough were put to plowing or leading the plowing team—heavy work that stunted their growth, as draft boards commented. In 1875 we have a police report from Seissane (Gers) concerning a seven-year-old girl who set a rick on fire while guarding turkeys. As late as 1895 at Billy (Meuse) children were still being put to work at around the age of eight. Unfortunately, said the teacher, those who should have enforced attendance were the very persons interested in hiring them. Another teacher, at Sainte-Alauzie (Lot), put the blame more squarely on parents, complaining about how easily they sacrificed their children's schooling to the gains they could make from their work. The simple fact is that the sacrifice was easy because it was scarcely a sacrifice. The gains were important because the children's contribution, however skimpy, was crucial to the budget of households on the brink of misery. Small wonder that the Socialist Egalité should oppose compulsory schooling, which threatened to "force the poor man's child into school" and to "wrest from the working family a resource it cannot spare." Sauce for the rural as for the urban poor. More so, indeed, for country parents who depended on their children's services to meet the family's immediate needs.16

Where and when children were registered in school, what matters, after

*Elie Reymes, Histoire de Privas, 31:173-73. The situation was no different in Meurthe-et-Moselle in 1888. At Etigny, where a local glassworks hired ten-year-olds, that was the age when boys left school. At Ballaison the possibility of working meant that some children never set foot in school, and others left it as soon as they had made their first communion. At Moustiers in the many families where both parents worked in the local textile mills, the children stayed home "to take care of the house." (François Rouset et al., "La vie ouvrière vue par les institu- teurs . . . ." Monumment social, 1965, pp. 88-99.)
all, is not their enrollment as such, but their attendance.* This varied with the region and its ways, but tended generally to be restricted to the winter months. As actual or potential workers, children were free for school only when there was no work. In the Limousin they did not say that a child had been in school for three years but that he had three winters in school. He entered in December, after the chestnuts had been gathered and the migrants he had helped replace had returned home, and left in late March or early April when the migrants set off again. Similarly, in Côtes-d'Or and the Jura, which had more elementary schools for their outlying villages and hamlets than most departments, children usually had to work much of the year, and attended class for only a few months in the winter, forgetting in the interval whatever they had learned. The only ones who benefited from schooling were the sons of those with sufficient means to do without their help. In the Doubs, on the other hand, winter is hard and long. This kept the children in school longer, and they picked up more. Yet even children who did not help their parents left school in March or April. In Lonzère children attended school four months a year at most. After Easter, only infants were left; schools were either closed down or turned into day nurseries (1877). In Manche parents were happy to leave children in school during the years when they would only get underfoot around the house, but wanted to withdraw them as soon as they were able-bodied, precisely when they would be at their most teachable (1892). Alain Corbin concludes that child labor disappeared only slowly, between the 1870's and the late 1880's. By the end of the century, at any rate, inspectors could note a greater regularity in school attendance in the winter. Continued complaints of irregularity now referred to the rest of the year. Grumbles were bitter, but standards had been raised.69

It is important to realize how regional conditions affected these gains. In the Doubs, about which we have heard already, some of the explanation for the department's slightly greater literacy may well be found in the Protestant influence radiating from Montbéliard. A more important factor may have been the predominance of the cattle industry in the mountain country around Pontarlier. With little cultivation, there was less call for children to work in the fields or be otherwise employed, so they were sent to school more often during the winter than elsewhere—"if only to get them out of the way."70 At Bansat (Puy-de-Dôme), on the other hand, attendance problems were made worse by the seasonal migrations that required the additional use of children to fill in for their absent fathers or elder brothers. In Sarthe, despite roads best described as excruciating, the "children of indigents attend more regularly (than others), since their parents have no lands on which their work is needed." In Cher and Indre, where cattle were kept and fed in the

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* As usual, one must be wary of figures provided by the Ministry of Public Instruction. Checking them against the Annuaire du Bureau des Longitudes, Sanford Easter concludes that in 1864, of 4,339,724 children between seven and thirteen years of age, 3,066,490 did not attend school ("Début 1871," p. 122).

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fields, and sheep were tended in separate flocks based on sex and age, there were greater demands on the services of children than in neighboring Nièvre, where such practices were not followed. As a result, the absentee rate among school-age children in Nièvre was about 22 percent, compared with a rate of 30 percent in Cher and 43 percent in Indre.71

In Vendée, where agriculture had made great strides, children were in great demand to pull out weeds, which the humid climate treated with special favor. In Leire job opportunities had a marked effect on the school attendance of the two sexes. Thousands of boys went into the factories and mills of Loire as soon as they had made their first communion, but girls had no hope of finding work before they were fourteen or so. As a result, in 1876 only six in ten school-age boys attended school, against almost eight in nine girls. Within a single department like Saône-et-Loire there were significant differences between the Mâcon region, whose vineyards called for no child labor and whose dense population had put schools within relatively easy reach; the Autun region, mountainous, harsh, less densely populated, where peasants could not afford to hire workers and used their own children instead; Charolles, a thinly populated pastoral region, where children grazed the fat, white cattle in summer and found the roads to school too long in lonely winter; and the low-lying plains of Louthans, easily inundated, full of meers and ponds, where the high rate of fever cut further into school attendance.72

Such regional differences may explain how Ardoise-Dumazet, crossing the Millévaches plateau at the turn of the century, could still find the cattle being tended from April to November by boys of ten to twelve, "literally wild in manner," despite the school laws that had been in operation for nearly 20 years. Was the need of the parents still greater than the promises that the schools held out? Had their perceptions not yet awakened to new possibilities? Or were they merely waiting for pastures to be enclosed by wire or wood, so they could hand the small shepherds over to the meris of the schools?73

After the 1880's the striking regional inequalities mirrored in school attendance tended to recede. Laws played their part in this. So did improvements that facilitated access to school or made the economic and physical effort of attendance seem worthwhile. In Sarthe, where inequalities between the schools of the eastern and western parts of the department had been very great, Paul Bois has found that "after 1885-90 these regional inequalities in popular instruction practically disappear."74 Another step in cultural homogenization was being taken.

It had been helped along by the law of 1881, which made schooling free. Free schooling for the poor, or some of the poor, had long been a fact. Church schools, at least in theory, had always opened their doors to those who could not pay. The First Republic had set a quota by which a quarter of the children could be admitted free; the Guizot law, like the ordinance of 1816, had re-
affirmed that practice. By 1879 one pupil in three attended public elementary schools free of charge. Victor Duruy, the great reformer, supported the principle of free schooling for all. His education law of 1869 gave municipal councils the option of eliminating all tuition fees by the use of local taxes. Results on the national plane were striking: the proportion of free students in the school population, 38 percent in 1869, rose to 54 percent in 1873, and to 57 percent in 1877. Seen from this angle, the law of 1881 was the logical conclusion of a long process.48

However, the process of free schooling did not move forward as smoothly as these developments may suggest. National figures once again provide only a general view. In Eure-et-Loir the proportion of free students in 1863 was 26 percent, in 1875, 36 percent, well below the national average of 38 percent and 57 percent at those dates. In Gers the percentage of free students almost doubled in ten years, rising from 26 percent in 1861 to 46 percent in 1872, but still remained below the national average. On the other hand, by 1874 68 percent of the schoolchildren in Hérault and a full 86 percent in Lorraine were free students.49 Clearly the course municipal councils chose to follow varied greatly. As we have seen, the people of some means generally chose to send their sons to school in town. At Oulins (Eure-et-Loir) "indifference or misery of most," reported the teacher in 1873, who was left with such students because it was "easy for the better-off to send their children to good neighboring schools"—presumably at Azer, even Dreuex or Mantos not too far away. Similarly, in Finistère, those who could afford to do so preferred to send their children to Quimperc, Morlaix, Quimperc, or Pont-Croix. It is not so prouing, after all, to find notables reluctant to subsidize schools that their children did not need, and that might produce French-speaking competitors for their offspring among the lower orders.49

The authority to exempt students from school fees rested with municipal officials, and this gave rise to abuse. In Cazal, where school inspection reports reflect the rising numbers of free pupils, a mayor in 1852 certified three-quarters of the school's students as needy. Many local mayors played favorites in deciding who was to be certified as indigent. In 1863 one man was found to have listed his own grandson and the son of his deputy, boys who came from the two richest families in the commune. In 1859, and again in 1862, official circulars invited prefects to hold local magistrates to the letter of the law.49

Some schools themselves—especially those that were run by nuns—violated at least the spirit of the law by making a distinction between paying pupils and indigents admitted as free students; and not only in their treatment but in the quality of their education. In Loire-Inférieure many church schools in 1875 had separate classes for poor children and neglected them. There and elsewhere the indigent schoolchild was made to feel his inferiority. There were quite a few such children in the school at Dammartin-en-Goële in 1875, but it was painful to be admitted on that basis. "It was then practically a disgrace," remembered a teacher who had had to endure the pain himself. The poor did not want to send their children to school, explained the parish doctor of Pouldevat (Finistère) in 1853, because they were badly clothed. In any case they had to find bread and firewood. This last suggests that gratuity was only a partial answer when need was very great.49

We hear of a large Périgord village, with a quota of 20 scholarships, whose school in mid-century was attended by only three paying and three non-paying pupils. It was not enough to admit the needy free. In 1854 Georges Clément-Beau met a peasant in a field with his son, and asked him why the child was not in school. "Will you give him a private income?" the peasant answered. The child who went to school had to bring a log for the fire, or a few sous instead. He had to provide his own ink, pen, and paper for writing—and though a slate could be used, the results were less than satisfactory. "A great number of children admitted to schools feel no benefit because they cannot acquire the indispensable books and class materials," read a report of 1875. "The well off send their children away to school," reported a teacher from Tien in the 1860's. "The poor don't send them to the elementary schools, because it costs 18-24 francs a year plus books, paper, etc., which can raise the cost to 50 francs." So, even if tuition was free, the child attending school, a useless mouth around the household board, was an expense. The "unexplainable inertia," the "indifference" that perplexed and annoyed apostles of the school, was in good part due to poverty—a lack of cash so great that, as a pastor in the Pyrenees explained in 1861, "even if the school fees were only 50 cents, they would still be a painful subject of anxiety and concern for the farmers." We must conclude, with a correspondent from Gironde, that "it is not easy for schooling to be free; the child's work must bring in some revenue to cover his keep or simply because the family needs it."

But the same report held out the hope of change: "The remedy to this state of things lies in public opinion. Even the most ignorant portion of the masses begins to understand that instruction is useful to all [and not just to their betters], Country people know now that reading, writing, and arithmetic are means of rising in the world."4949 Let us say at least that they began to know it. Free education had been gratuitous, that is, seemingly useless, to the children of the poor because it did not serve any needs that their parents could discern. The remitting of fees did not prove a critical factor in rural school attendance. There is no good evidence that the poor children who were admitted as free students attended school more diligently as a result; indeed, often they attended less regularly than the paying students. The crux of school attendance lay in the social practice: when going to school was the thing to...
do, all would do it. It also lay in the dawning comprehension, related to changing circumstances, that instruction was useful. With this realization, even lack of means would not deter many from sending their children to school.  

We have arrived at the fundamental cause of that "indifference" to book learning that Philippe Ariès, like Desaix de Tracy before him, finds indigenous to the countryside. The urban poor had occasion to use the skills picked up in parish schools and to observe the opportunities of improving their position with that learning. In the countryside, such skills brought little profit, their absence small disadvantage, and there were fewer chinks in the armor of misery through which curiosity or enterprise could find escape. The Statistique de Vendée, regretting in 1844 that the department's inhabitants "showed little inclination for the study of sciences and polite literature, or for the culture of fine arts," sounds ridiculous until it shows that it understands why this was not surprising: "Far from the sources of inspiration and taste, they were rarely in a position to know their value or [to find] any object of emulation."  

Objects of emulation were scarce in the countryside, sources of inspiration even scarcer. School was perceived as useless and what it taught had little relation to local life and needs. The teacher taught the metric system when toises, cordes, and pouces were in current use; counted money in francs when prices were in livres and deniers. French was of little use when everyone spoke patois and official announcements were made by a public crier in the local speech. Anyway, the school did not teach French, but arc rules of grammar. In short, school had no practical application. It was a luxury at best, a form of more or less conspicuous consumption. Corbin has pointed out the significant role that all this played in the lack of interest displayed by parents and children.  

When Martin Nadaud's father wanted to send him to school, neighbors and relatives argued that for a country child school learning was useless, enabling him merely to make a few letters and carry books at mass. Teachers and school inspectors failed to persuade the peasants that reading and writing had any value in themselves. And parents found their reluctance justified by the slight difference in the situation of those who attended school and of those who did not. When Ferdinand Buisson linked poor school attendance to a lack of concern for the moral benefits that children could derive, he was in the great (abstract) tradition. Yet show people a practical benefit that they could understand, and the problem would shrink to manageable proportions. Rural inhabitants, explained a village mayor, were "only very vaguely conscious of an intellectual or moral culture that has no immediate or tangible relation to pecuniary profit." That seemed to make sense. Before a man could want his child to go to school, he would have to abandon "the gross material interests" that were all he understood. Not so. It was when the school mobilized those interests that men began to care.  

* According to Arnaud Audiguier, one of all the workers at Saint-Ouen the lace-and-lard workers were the best educated for the simple reason that they had to keep tabs on their daily output and transactions. As a result, they well appreciated the usefulness of writing and did not forget the skill as soon as they left school (Les Populations maritimes, p. 159).
school authorities made haste to refer to these facets of the law to persuade parents to send their children to school. In Isère a poster was even displayed in every schoolroom, and teachers were required to read and discuss it at least every two weeks, presumably arguing that the fulfillment of one patriotic duty could help lighten the burden of another. But another army was growing, as important as the regular one—the body of public and private employees, access to which was opened by the school certificate, the certificate of elementary studies. The little school of Roger Thibault’s Mazères put its graduates into the numerous jobs that opened up there (and elsewhere), with economic, social, and political development: the town’s 15 civil servants in 1876 had become 25 in 1886, and there were seven railway employees as well. Ambition was encouraged by propaganda. “A good primary education allows one to secure a post in several state services,” the student was told in a first-year civics text published in 1880. “The government servant has a secure position. That is why government posts are in great demand.” They were. Given the chance, many peasants wanted to stop being peasants, to change something else. In 1893, of the former natives of the little village of Soye in Doubs, population of 444, worked as functionaries elsewhere, and 14 inhabitants worked as domestics in town. The prefecture of Sèine received 50,000 applications for 400 openings in its departments.

Other times had seen the growth of a state bureaucracy that triggered the expansion of education to fill the available posts. Such educational booms, however, had been restricted to relatively high social groups. Under the Third Republic the means for those too humble to have gotten their share of the educational pie were made available just when the means (i.e., the jobs) emerged to reinforce and justify their use. Around the 1880’s even rural laborers began to lend attention to the schools. As the number of jobs expanded and getting one became more than an idle dream, the education that would help secure such prestigious jobs became important. Even more so the certificate to which it led. Scattered economies to its practical uses appear in the late 1870’s. By 1882, P. Claret could report that the school certificate “is slowly being accepted. Families realize that this small diploma can be of use for several kinds of jobs; hence they consent even more frequently to leave their children in school for a longer time.” Schools were steadily housed, still far from home, but children now were made to attend even when they lived six km away, because “the idea of the utility and the necessity of elementary schooling” had caught on so well.

The recognition of new possibilities and of the school as a key to their exploitation was in full evidence by the 1890’s. By 1894 practically every child in a village of Lower Provence that had been almost totally illiterate a generation earlier was attending school, even those who lived one and a half hours’ walk away. In the southwest the image of little boys doing their homework of an evening by the light of the dining embers became a reality. Municipal councils voted rewards for teachers whose pupils won the coveted certificate. Families became avid for it; they celebrated when a child got one; too many failures could become issues raised at council meetings.” In a natural evolution, the school certificate, significant because of the material advantages it could help secure, became an end in itself. “It is an honor to get it,” wrote a little girl (and wrote it very badly: “être admissible et devenir un écrivain son certificat d’étude”), about what popular parlance dubbed the “Sanctificat.” The passing of the examination became an emblematic occasion, competing in importance with the first communion. Men who had taken it in the 1880’s remembered the questions that they had to answer, had every detail of their examination day graven in their memories. To take one example among many, here is Charles Moureau, member of the Academy of Medicine and professor at the Collège de France, speaking at the graduation ceremony of his native village in the Pyrenees in 1911: “I could if I wanted to recite by heart the exact details of the problem that turned on the things Peter and Nicholas bought and sold.”

There were of course more immediate gains: there would be no more need to go to the nearest town to consult a solicitor or a notary when one wanted to draw up a simple bill or promissory note, make out a receipt, settle an account in arrears, or merely write a letter, explained a thirteen-year-old schoolboy in the Aisle. The literate man did not have to reveal his friendships, his secrets, his affairs to some third party. And he could better himself—indeed politics, or teaching, or the army (whence he returned with a pension and decorations, achieving a position “that places him above the vulgar crowd”).

The vulgar crowd was full of the sort of peasants whose stereotyped image filled current literature: they spoke ungrammatically, used characteristic locations, mishandled the small vocabulary at their command, and “do not look more intelligent than other peasant farmers around them.” The only escape from this was education, which taught order, cleanliness, efficiency, success, and civilization. Official reports couched poor education with rude, brutal ways. Where schooling did not take hold, “ways are coarse, characters are violent, excitable, and hotheaded, troubles and brawls are frequent.” The school was supposed to improve manners and customs, and soothe the savage breast. The polite forms it inculcated “softened the savagery and harshness natural to peasants.” Improved behavior and morality would be attributed

* Honor and profit lay in scholarly accomplishments. This may be why agriculture courses seldom caught on: “Occupation manuelle nuisible au travail intellectuel,” it made no contribution to passing exams. See O. Draper, Congrès pédagogique de 1870: Délivrance et mort des établissements (Château, 1870), p. 48. Louis Cherrier remarks that the teaching of agriculture was also generally considered extraneous. Around 1900 and after, he claims, such courses were left largely to church schools; the secular schools made vague gestures toward competing with them but abandoned the field when the church schools closed (Les Pères, p. 203.) I am not certain this was so, but for all the attempts to teach “useful” topics, the school in fact concentrated on alienated intellectual attainments, which were increasingly perceived as even more useful.
to the effects of schooling. Schools set out "to modify the habits of bodily hygiene and cleanliness, social and domestic manners, and the way of looking at things and judging them." Savage children were taught new manners: how to greet strangers, how to knock on doors, how to behave in decent company. "A bourgeois facts when his belly is empty; a Breton [peasant] burps when his belly is full," declared a proverb that seems to confuse urban and rural differences with race. Children were taught that propriety prohibited either manifestation; and also that cleanliness was an essential part of wisdom.8

The schools played a crucial role in forcing children to keep clean (er), but the teachers had to struggle mightily to that end.9 Hair, nails, and ears were subject to regular review; the waterpump was pressed into frequent use; the state of clothes, like the standards of the child's behavior out of school, received critical attention and constant reproof. Study, ran the text of one exercise, "fills the mind, corrects false prejudices, helps us order speech and writing, teaches love of work and improves capacity for business and for jobs." What does study tell us? Among other things: cold baths are dangerous; the observance of festivals is a religious duty; labor abuses the body less than pleasure; justice protects the good and punishes the wicked; tobacco is a poison, a useless expenditure that destroys one's memory, and those who use it to excess live in a sort of dream, their eye dead, incapable of paying attention to anything, indifferent and selfish. And then there was the lesson of Jules and Julie, who are rich and therefore do not work at school; and who, having learned nothing, are embarrassed later by their ignorance, blushing with shame when people laugh at them for the mistakes they make when speaking. Only the schools could "change primitive conditions," declared Ardois-Dumayere.10 The primitive conditions themselves were changing, and schools helped their charges to adapt to this.

Of course they did more—or they did it more broadly. If we are prepared to set up categories with well-drawn limits, society educates and school instructs. The school imparts particular kinds of learned knowledge, society inculcates the conclusions of experience assimilated over a span of time. But such a view, applicable to specific skills and subjects, has to be altered when the instruction offered by the school directs itself to realms that are at variance with social education (as in the case of language or measures), or that social education ignores (as in the case of patriotism). In other words, the schools provide a complementary, even a counter-education, because the education of the local society does not coincide with that needed to create a national one. This is where schooling becomes a major agent of acculturation:

"Mightily, and long! At Plaisance [Pleiades], school inspector never cease criticizing the guilty hair, long hair, and bad manners of students. In 1843 "les filières sont malpropre... Une grande partie viennent en classe pieds nus et sans chaussures, la figure et les mains noires de crème." In 1878 "l'éducation des élèves est complètement à faire quand ils arrivent en classe" (my italics), André Burgault, Bretons de Plaisance, p. 294."

Schools and Schooling

shaping individuals to fit into societies and cultures broader than their own, and persuading them that these broader realms are their own, as much as the pays they really know and more so.

The great problem of modern societies, or so François Guizot considered in his Mémoires, is the governance of minds. Guizot had done his best to make elementary education "a guarantee of order and social stability." In its first article, his law of 1833 defined the instruction it was intended to provide: the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic would furnish essential skills; the teaching of French and of the metric system would impart or increase the sense of unity under French nationality; moral and religious instruction would serve social and spiritual needs.11

What these social needs were is laid out clearly in various writings, both official and unofficial. "Instructing the people," explained an anonymous writer of 1860, "is to condition them to understand and appreciate the beneficence of the government." Eight years later, the inspecteur d'Académie of Montauban concurred: "The people must learn from education all the reasons they have for appreciating their condition." A first-year civics textbook set out to perform this task:

Society (summary): 1. French society is ruled by just laws, because it is a democratic society. 2. All the French are equal in their rights; but there are inequalities between us that stem from nature or from wealth. 3. These inequalities cannot disappear. 4. Men works to become rich; if he lacked this hope, work would cease and France would decline. It is therefore necessary that each of us should be able to keep the money he has earned.12

The ideals of the educators were to be fulfilled at least in part. Schools taught potent lessons of morality focused on duty, effort, and seriousness of purpose. Hard work and rectitude were bound to bring improvements, internal and external. You must be just and honest. The Roman Capitols refuses to take a town by treachery: the people of the town become the allies of Rome. Never forget that no end, however useful, can justify injustice. Progress is good, routine is bad. "Routine consists in refusing to make any improvement and in following the methods of our ancestors." Progress was new schools, fire companies, municipal bands. It was M. Autier Tardieu, mayor of Brives, who built a bridge that permitted people to sell their goods in the market on the other side of the river, and thus increased the prosperity of his town: "The Briviers perceived the possibilities of gain, and the more they worked, the richer they got." A Vosges village teacher's report of 1839 echoes what he taught and what his students learned: "The farmers are better educated and understand that they have to break with their routine, if they want to earn more. In 1870 they only did what they had seen their forebears doing."13

"Believe in progress with a sincere and ardent faith... Never forget that
the history of all civilization is a perpetual glorification of work.” Perhaps it is true that men are seldom so harmlessly employed as when their energies are bent on making money. “Work draws men together and prepares the reign of peace.” “Work is the instrument of all progress.” Fracastor and his little friends are told the story of the sagr tree, which feeds a man during a whole year in return for only a few hours’ work, but in so doing, destroys his moral values. Conclusion: “Work is moralizing and instructive par excellence. But man only resigns himself to constant and regular labor under the pressure of need.” One rises in the world by work, order, thrift: “Not all at once, of course. My father had nothing, I have something; my children, if they do like me, will double, triple what I leave behind. My grandchildren will be gentlemen. This is how one rises in the world.” The speaker is the shoemaker Grégoire, hero of several little moral tales in a collection published by Ernest Lavisse in 1887. They warn against idleness, indolence, and thriftlessness, and make their point with lots of solid detail (“his charming wife brought a dowry of 5,000 francs; he had 3,000...”), with useful explanations of things like bankruptcy law and fraud, and not least, with a profoundly realistic sense of values.

Such is the tale of Pierre, who, called to serve in the 1790 war, escapes death when a German bullet is deflected by two five-franc pieces sent him by his father and his brother as tokens of their affection. Decorated with the military medal, which the proud father frames and garnishes with flowers, Pierre “will go every year to draw the 100 francs to which his medal entitles him until his death, and place the money in the savings bank.” Both family affection and heroism are expressed and rewarded not only in elevated feelings but in concrete terms: a thoroughly sensible view. No wonder that patriotism was advocated in similar terms. The fatherland was a source of funds for road repairs, subsidies, school scholarships, and police protection against thieves—“one great family of which we are all a part, and which we must defend always.”

We come here to the greatest function of the modern school: to teach not so much useful skills as a new patriotism beyond the limits naturally acknowledged by its charges. The revolutionaries of 1793 had replaced old terms like schoolmaster, regent, and rector, with instituteur, because the teacher was intended to institute the nation. But the desired effect, that elusive unity of spirit, was recognized as lacking in the 1860s and 1870s as it had been four score years before.

School was a great socializing agent, wrote a village teacher from Gard in 1861. It had to teach children national and patriotic sentiments, explain what the state did for them and why it exacted taxes and military service, and show them their true interest in the fatherland. It seems that there was a great deal to do. The theme remained a constant preoccupation of eminent educators. Twenty years after this, student teachers “must above all be told... that their first duty is to make [their charges] love and understand the fatherland.” Another ten years, and the high aim is again repeated, that a “national pedagogy” might yet become the soul of popular education. The school is “an instrument of unity,” “an answer to dangerous centrifugal tendencies,” and of course “the keystone of national defense.”

First, the national pedagogy, “The fatherland is not your village, your province, it is all of France. The fatherland is like a great family.” This was not learned without some telescoping. “Your fatherland is you,” wrote a thirteen-year-old schoolboy dutifully in 1878. “It is your family, it is your people [les tiens], in a word it is France, your country.” “The fatherland is the pays where we are born,” wrote another, “where our parents are born and our dearest thoughts lie; it is not only this pays we live in, but the region [conseil] we inhabit; our fatherland is France.” The exercise was a sort of catechism designed to teach the child that it was his duty to defend the fatherland, to shed his blood or die for the commonweal (“When France is threatened, your duty is to take up arms and fly to her rescue”), to obey the government, to perform military service, to work, learn, pay taxes, and so on.

At the very start of school, children were taught that their first duty was to defend their country as soldiers. The army—and this was important, considering the past and enduring hostility to soldiers and soldiering—“is composed of our brothers or parents” or relatives. Commencement speeches called this sacred duty in ritual terms—our boys will defend the soil of the fatherland; the whole school program turned on expanding the theme. Gymnastics were meant “to develop in the child the idea of discipline, and prepare him... to be a good soldier and a good Frenchman.” Children sang stirring songs like the “Flag of France,” the “Lost Sentry,” and “La Marseillaise.” Compositions on the theme were ordered up, with title and content provided: “Letter of a Young Soldier to His Parents, He tells them that he has fought against the enemies of the fatherland, has been wounded... and is proud (as they must be too) that he has shed his blood for the fatherland.” And teachers reported with satisfaction how they implanted the love of the fatherland by evoking “those memories that attach our hearts to the fatherland” from history, and then “developed” this sentiment by showing France strong and powerful when united.

There were no better instruments of indoctrination and patriotic conditioning than French history and geography, especially history, which “when properly taught [is] the only means of maintaining patriotism in the generations we are bringing up.” Could it be that other social forces were doing little to stir or incite it? Unfortunately, most teachers knew history badly, * Archives Nationales, F457/279 (Tunis-et-Gazonne, 1879). The point was well taken. When the seven candidates for the examination were asked to discuss the use and purpose of history in education, 80 percent replied essentially that it was to teach patriotism (*Ch. V. Laugniard and Ch. Seignobos, Introduction aux études historiques, Paris, 1874, pp. 280-81).
geography still worse. When, around the 1870s, they taught French history—or began to teach it—they tended to string out reigns and dates, and seldom seem to have got further than the Middle Ages. History was ignored, and civics absent from the teaching program, complained Félix Pécaut in 1871. It was quite possible "to use French history to form French citizens, make the free fatherland be known and loved; but no elementary attempt of this sort has yet been made." This was not surprising. "Teachers certified in 1870-1868," more than half those teaching in 1879, "have never studied French history and do not know it," grumbled a school inspector in Vendée. And "teachers begin, it is still new and rare, to present the chief events of French history," reported another in Haute-Saône. The job would be undertaken in textbooks like Lavisse's First Year of French History, a book thoroughly bent to show and to justify the rise of French patriotism and unity—refined from the petite patrie to the larger one. Reading it, children were told, "you will learn what you owe your fathers and why your first duty is to love above all else your fatherland—that is, the land of your fathers." Just as the mother tongue was not the tongue of their mothers, so the fatherland was somewhere more (indeed, something else) than where their fathers rather obviously lived. A vast program of indoctrination was plainly called for to persuade people that the fatherland extended beyond its evident limits to something vast and intangible called France. Adults were too deeply rooted in their backwardness. But it was hard work to persuade even children, for all their malleability, without the panoply of material that became available only in the 1870s. Under the Second Empire, "children know no geography, see no maps, know nothing concerning their department or their fatherland" (Lec-é-Garonne). Children were completely unaware of the existence of their department or of France (Dordogne). "Notions of geography have become a general need" (Droits). Maps of France began to be supplied soon after the Franco-Prussian War, distributed by the state. First urban schools, then rural ones, were endowed with wall maps. By 1881 few classrooms, however small, appear to have lacked a map. Some, of course, served "only as ornaments." But they included all with the image of the national hexagon, and served as a reminder that the eastern border should lie not on the Vosges but on the Rhine. They were also powerful symbols, not only of the asserted fatherland, but of the abstractions young minds had to get used to. How difficult this latter exercise remained is suggested by a circular of 1899 announcing the distribution of engravings of "views of different French regions that will lead concretely to the idea of the fatherland." By the 1880s the determined assault against provincialism began to show results. "France ceased being a Kingdom and became a fatherland." Little boys in country schools were fascinated by tales of past French glories. Preparing for the school certificate examination in his Log Cantal valley, Pierre

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"Of course, there had been teachers in an earlier day who had infused their students with their own patriotic enthusiasm, but one suspects they may have been found more frequently in urban schools. At any rate, we know that Ambroise Vennermann was one such filled with patriotism as a schoolboy at the École Supérieure des Petits des Écoles Chrétienne at Arras. In the mid 1860s, he learned to play the trumpet simply so he could play "La Marseillaise" (Croix de Cantal, Aug. 11, 1895; July 30, 1903)."
VENGE ONLY SECOND. IT IS DIFFICULT TO DISCRIMINATE; THE THEMES ARE OFTEN MINGLED. BUT SIMPLY MAKING MILITARY SERVICE ACCEPTABLE WAS ITSELF AN IMMENSE TASK. THE THEME OF A GOOD CITIZEN'S DUTY TO SERVE HIS COUNTRY AND TO DEFEND THE FATHERLAND, CONSTANTLY RECURRING, CAN EASILY BE TAKEN FOR MILITARISM, UNTIL WE REMEMBER THAT IT Sought TO INculcate SENTIMENTS WHERE TOTAL ABSENCE ENDANGERED A MODERN STATE.18

THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION WENT FAR BEYOND THE ARMY. WHOLE GENERATIONS HAD TO RECEIVE A BASIC TRAINING, QUITE SIMPLY TO BECOME AMENABLE TO BEING TRAINED IN RADICALLY NEW WAYS. ALL THE EFFORTS OF THE SCHOOLS WERE NOT TOO GREAT TO CIVILIZE A CITIZENARY—OR EVEN HALF OF IT: "WELL-TAUGHT CHILDREN WILL MAKE WISE CITIZENS. THEY WILL ALSO MAKE GOOD SOLDIERS." NOTE THE ORDER. THE FOUR ESSENTIAL OBLIGATIONS OF THE CITIZEN WERE TO GET AN EDUCATION WHEN YOUNG, AND LATER TO MAKE SURE THAT HIS CHILDREN GOT ONE; TO CARRY OUT HIS MILITARY DUTY LOYAL AND ALWAYS BE READY TO DEFEND THE FATHERLAND; TO PAY TAXES REGULARLY; AND TO VOTE AND ELECT THE MOST HONEST AND CAPABLE CANDIDATES.19 WE HAVE SEEN HOW MUCH THERE WAS TO DO ON EVERY SCORE, AND IT IS WELL TO VIEW TEACHERS AND TEXTBOOKS IN THAT CONTEXT.

TEACHERS TAUGHT OR WERE EXPECTED TO TEACH "NOT JUST FOR THE LOVE OF ART OR SCIENCE... BUT FOR THE LOVE OF FRANCE"—A FRANCE WHOSE CREED HAD TO BE INCREASINGLY PROCLAIMED IN ALL BELIEVERS. A CATHOLIC GOD, PARTICULARLY AND ONLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE FATHERLAND BY REVOLUTIONARIES AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, WAS REPLACED BY A SECULAR GOD: THE FATHERLAND AND ITS LIVING SYMBOLS, THE ARMY AND THE FLAG. CATECHISM WAS REPLACED BY CIVIC LESSONS. BIBLICAL HISTORY, PROSCRIBED IN SECULAR SCHOOLS, WAS REPLACED BY THE SACRED HISTORY OF FRANCE. FRENCH BECAME MORE THAN A POSSESSION OF THE ELITE: IT BECAME A PATRIMONY IN WHICH ALL COULD SHARE, WITH SIGNIFICANT RESULTS FOR NATIONAL BONDAGE, AS THE 1914 WAR WOULD SHOW.20

But the effects of school went further. In the first place, the literary or written language learned in schools was as alien to the spoken tongue as spoken French itself was to their native dialect. In other words, schools began their work by propagating an artificial language, and this was true even for French-speakers.88 They did this largely through the discipline of dictation, "the instrument of a learned and universal language" beyond the local ico. As a result, many students learned to express themselves freely and easily in speech, but had difficulty when it came to writing or to expressing thought in an idiom close to that of the written word. We can glimpse this best in the surviving files of gendarmerie reports, which are often drawn up in a stilted administrative style and relate even simple events in an awkward and convoluted manner.

A striking result of this (much worse in areas estranged by dialect) was that "for months or years [the children] give no sign of intelligence, merely imitate what they see done." Just as legislation can create crime by fiat, so

EDUCATION CREATED STUPIDITY BY SETTING UP STANDARDS OF COMMUNICATION THAT MANY FOUND DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE. "OUR CHILDREN CANNOT FLY, AND INDEED HAVE NO WAY TO FIND, ENOUGH FRENCH WORDS TO EXPRESS THEIR THOUGHTS," REPORTED A CANTAL TEACHER. THE RESULT was a divorce between school learning, often acquiesced by rote, and assimilation, which helped slow down the progress of the schools. Memorization saved the trouble of "having to translate one's thoughts into correct French." IT also divorced word from reality. MANY CHILDREN "CAN SPELL, BUT SYLLABLES HAVE NO MEANING FOR THEM; CAN READ, BUT FAIL TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY READ, OR TO RECOGNIZE IN WRITING SOME WORDS THEY KNOW BUT WHOSE ORTHOGRAPHY IS ALIEN," OR TO IDENTIFY WORDS LEARNED IN FRENCH WITH THE OBJECTS AROUND THEM. "YOU WILL LEARN IT, THIS LANGUAGE OF WELL-BRED PEOPLE, AND YOU WILL SPEAK IT SOME DAY," PROMISED A PRIZE-GIVER IN DORDOGNE IN 1897.

The future tense used in such improbable circumstances suggests a possible reason why, by 1907, the number of illiterate conscripts seems to have been slightly higher than in the immediate past. The absolute banning of the native tongue, which had been helpful in teaching French as a second language, inhibited the learning of idiomatic French and impeded its full assimilation.89

This is not to say that French did not make great strides forward. It did. But writing remained a socially privileged form of expression, and the French of the schools and of the dictates was an alienating as well as an integrative force. Perhaps that was what a school inspector meant when, looking back from 1897, he declared: "Ignorance used to precede school; today on the contrary it follows schooling."88

Of course there were (from the school's point of view) positive results; and these too went beyond the immediately obvious. The symbolism of images learned at school created a whole new language and provided common points of reference that straddled regional boundaries exactly as national patriotism was meant to do.* Where local dialect and locutions insulated and preserved, the lessons of the school, standardized throughout France, taught a unifying idiom. In Ais, the Arvernes, Vendée, all children became familiar with references or identities that could thereafter be used by the authorities, the press, and the politicians to appeal to them as a single body. Lessons emphasizing certain associations bound generations together. The Kings of France were the older sons of the Church, time was the river that carried all in its waters, a poet was a favorite of the muses, Touraine was the garden of France, and Joan of Arc the shepherdess of Lorraine. Local saws and proverbs were replaced by nationally valid ones, regional locutions by others learned in books:

* In a lesson given in the second year (four- to seven-year-olds), for example, children learned to interpret road signs. They began with the one all knew as a cross, then were taught to recognize it as a sign helping a person to find his way, and further, as an indication of how much better roads were in their own day ("Il n'y avait pas de routes dans le temps... "). Desvres d'Études françaises, pp. 536-40. This cross-in-script image, as René Balme has shown (Les Pruniers créoles, Paris, 1924, p. 194), played an important role in the writing of Charles Péguy, who had unknowingly been taught the lesson.
castles in Spain rose above local ruins, and golden calves bleated more loudly than the stabled ones. The very mythology of ambition was now illustrated by landscapes that education had suggested, more stirring than the humbler ones at hand and by this time no less familiar. These are only aspects of the wide-ranging process of standardization that helped create and reinforce French unity, while contributing to the disintegration of rival allegiances.

The cultural underpinnings of rural society, already battered by material changes, were further weakened by shifting values. First of all, manual labor was devalued—or better still, the natural aversion to its drudgery was reinforced. The elementary schools, designed to form citizens, neglected producers. The school glorified labor as a moral value, but ignored work as an everyday form of culture. The well-established contrast between the plucky, meticulous spirit of the courageux and the idle faintant—the one hardworking, especially or only with his hands, the other avoiding manual labor—was translated into scholastic terms. Soon, the idle boy was the one likely to be the most pressed into hard physical labor, the plucky boy the one most enterprising with his books. It made good sense, for the rewards of work now came to those not doing what had once been recognized as work. But it opened a crack—one more—in age-old solidarities.

In a great many homes, illiterate adults depended on small children to carry out what were becoming essential tasks—accounting, correspondence, taking notes, reading aloud pertinent documents or newspaper items. And new literacies at whatever level made new ideas accessible, especially to the young, to whom certain profound changes in the political climate of country districts were now attributed. In any case, the relationship between school and social claims was not ignored in their own time: "The Republic has founded schools," sang Montchus, the revolutionary chansonnier, "so that now the people have learned how to count. The people have had enough of the pauper's mitre; they want an accounting, and not charity!" More important, where, as in Brittany, a determined campaign taught new generations French, "children and parents form two worlds apart, so separated in spirit, so estranged by speech, that there is no more community of ideas and feelings, hence no intimacy. Often, as a matter of fact, any kind of relationship becomes impossible. This is both exaggerated and suggestive of a generation gap more easily discerned in modern societies than in traditional ones. But even granting the exaggeration, the corrosive effects of one sort of education on a society based on another kind are undeniable.

Like migration, politics, and economic development, schools brought suggestions of alternative values and hierarchies; and of commitments to other bodies than the local group. They eased individuals out of the latter's grip and shattered the hold of unchallenged cultural and political creeds—but only to train their votaries for another faith.

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Chapter Nineteen

Dieu est-il français?

There's good and evil, God and the devil. God is good, we pray to him in church, we give him his due, that is religion. But religion does not allow us to ask God for earthly goods—at most, one can pray for everybody. Now, what's good for one isn't good for the others, for if my neighbour's land is worth by half that's too much less [profit] on his land and my wheat, if I save it, will be worth double. This religion is about saving our souls from the eternal fire by observing the prayers and the services of Sundays and holidays. But religion has nothing to do with our private interests. In the same way, the priest preaches that our happiness is not of this world and that we have been put here to suffer. That's well said, but too much is too much.

—George Sand

In the mid-1879's, 36,927,791 of the 36,000,000 people in France were listed in the official census as Catholics. The rest declared themselves Protestants (something under 600,000), Jews (35,000), or freethinkers (80,000). The secular clergy of the Catholic church alone included 35,569 priests, one for every 659 inhabitants. Roman Catholicism remained, as it had been in 1811, "the religion of the majority of Frenchmen."44

Whatever else this meant, it meant that the Church was an integral part of life. It presided over all the major occasions in a person's life—birth, marriage, death—and over the welfare of the community and the conduct of its members. It helped the crops increase and the cattle prosper. It healed, taught, and preserved from harm. Its pervasive power was apparent in the appropriation of godly terminology for more vulgar use: hyetelle (litany) for a long string of words or a tedious story; gloria for a confused noise of voices; glose for carpeaux; personae or faire des dominus for hollow chatter; brimborion (from the breviary) for empty babbles or knickknacks. Most of the terms refer to uselessness or confusion, like rapanaooii or ouvrapanooii, used to describe something incongruous or stupid, or at any rate complicated, expressed in incomprehensible words taken from the most obvious place where the people would hear them—the language of the Church.

Dissect imitations of veners, hymns, or canticles were abundant. Even more so, jocular graces thanking God for the soup being poured and praying heaven that no more mouths should appear to consume what was not enough already. Such playful familiarities do not tell us much about people's feelings, only that religious practices were part of everyday experience. They offered formulas that were repeated as charms and benedictions, even though their meaning was inevitably obscure. Witness this "Latin" grace pronounced after supper with no intention of levity.45
CHANGE AND ASSIMILATION

man and nature. The earth lost its sacredness, the gods their divinity, magic its power. Machines were not a bad thing; they replaced animals or men doing the work of animals. But they destroyed men's harmony with their world by rendering their hard-won skills and movements useless. The peasant's skilled hand was as little needed in the new world as his patience. Marx relates workers' alienation fundamentally to the question of who actually owned the means of production; but the alienation of the rural worker, where it occurred, lay less in being deprived of property than in the discontinuity between his body and his work. The results of work done by machine could be observed, but the sense of control and the pleasures of craftsmanship were gone. Traditionally work was "a way of life, not just a way of earning a living. Man at work was almost the whole of man. The man with a machine was only half a working unit, and in productivity terms the less important half."

Peasants did not keep accounts. What they did with their time was determined not by the market but by family needs, and working any harder than most people did was probably impossible anyway. The universal view was that of an old winegrower in Mâcon: "When a man works as hard as he can, he must earn enough to feed himself and keep his family alive. That is justice."* Only around 1900-1905, wrote an Aveyron observer, did peasants there begin to grasp "the notions of productivity and the use of time."** Only about then did many see at last that subsistence farming, far from the road to a glorious autonomy, was the essence of futility and self-exploitation. Like the nineteenth-century factory worker before him, the twentieth-century peasant came to see work in a new light: no longer for subsistence but for pay. The logic of a money economy took over. One result was that since all work was expected to produce cash revenue in proportion to the effort involved, a lot of work was seen as no longer worth doing.*** Where work had once encompassed a multitude of undertakings—weeding, mending enclosures or buildings or tools, pruning or cutting trees, protecting young shoots against cattle, splitting firewood, making rope or baskets—it was now judged by the norms of salaried labor. Tasks that did not yield ready returns in cash were considered not work but pottering, like going around the fields to look them over. Modern people paid others to do them or let them go undone.

Most of all this is neither good nor bad. It is, It happened. It is the essence of what happened in France between 1870 and 1944.

* Y. Dupont, Grand Retour, p. 9. This confirms what we know already, that official values shaded imperceptibly into local ones. The work ethic had been part of official morality and religion since the seventeenth century, of common sense as far back as the mind can go. It did not take Guiraud or the teaching of the schools to spread it. Thirteenth, self-help, were no strangers to the peasant. Only their possibilities were severely limited. Peasants knew all about deferred gratification. Only there was so little gratification that it left scarcely a mark on statistics. What changed in the nineteenth century, and the more so as the century moved on, were the limits of possibility, hence the applicability of values known but relatively irrelevant before that time, a matter of degree.

Chapter Twenty-nine

CULTURES AND CIVILIZATION

Every countryman who has learned to read treasures the countryside in his heart.

—JOSÈP BOIX

The colonist only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits load and clear the supremacy of the white man's values.

—FERNANDO PÉROLA

The famous hexagon can itself be seen as a colonial empire shaped over the centuries: a complex of territories conquered, annexed, and integrated in a political and administrative whole, many of them with strongly developed national or regional personalities, some of them with traditions that were specifically non-French. A partial roll call serves as a reminder: in the thirteenth century, Languedoc and parts of the center; in the fifteenth, Aquitaine and Provence; in the sixteenth, Brittany; in the seventeenth, Navarre, Béarn, Pays Basque, Roussillon and Cerdaña, parts of Alsace and French Flanders, Franche-Comté; in the eighteenth, the Duchy of Lorraine, Corsica, the papal Comtat-Venaissin; in the nineteenth, Savoy and Nice. By 1870 this had produced a political entity called France—kingdom or republic—an entity formed by conquest and by political or administrative decisions formulated in (or near) Paris. The modern view of the nation as a body of people united according to their own will and having certain attributes in common (not least history) was at best dubiously applicable to the France of 1870.

Just after the First World War, Marcel Mauss pondered the difference between peoples or empires and nations. A people or an empire he saw as loosely integrated and governed by an extrinsic central power. A nation, by contrast, was "a materially and morally integrated society" characterized by the "relative moral, mental, and cultural unity of its inhabitants, who conscientiously support the state and its laws." It is clear that France around 1870 did not conform to Mauss's model of a nation. It was neither morally nor materially integrated; what unity it had was less cultural than administrative. Many of its inhabitants, moreover, were indifferent to the state and its laws, and many others rejected them altogether. "A country," says Karl Deutsch, "is as large as the interdependence it perceives." By that standard the hexagon shrivels away.
The question here is not political; political conflict about the nature of the state and who shall rule it reflects a higher degree of integration than our outlying populations had attained. The question turns rather on "the wide complementarity of social communication" that for Deutsch makes a people one. Outside the urban centers, over much of France there was no "common history to be experienced as common," no "community of complementary habits," little interdependency furthered by the division of labor in the production of goods and services, and only limited "channels of social communication and economic intercourse." If by "society" we mean a group of people who have learned to work together, French society was limited indeed.

Despite evidence to the contrary, inhabitants of the hexagon in 1870 generally knew themselves to be French subjects, but to many this status was no more than an abstraction. The people of whole regions felt little identity with the state or with people of other regions. Before this changed, before the inhabitants of France could come to feel a significant community, they had to share significant experiences with each other. Roads, railroads, schools, markets, military service, and the circulation of money, goods, and printed matter provided those experiences, swept away old commitments, instilled a national view of things in regional minds, and confirmed the power of that view by offering advancement to those who adopted it. The national ideology was still diffuse and amorphous around the middle of the nineteenth century. French culture became truly national only in the last years of the century.

We are talking about the process of acculturation: the civilization of the French by urban France, the disintegration of local cultures by modernity and their absorption into the dominant civilization of Paris and the schools. Left largely to their own devices until their promotion to citizenship, the unassimilated rural masses had to be integrated into the dominant culture as they had been integrated into an administrative entity. What happened was akin to colonization, and may be easier to understand if one bears that in mind.

"Conquest is a necessary stage on the road to nationalism," wrote a student of the subject in 1931. A nation cannot or should not conquer "major peoples," but "to bring into a larger unity groups without a clear cultural identity, to draw in, to enrich, to enlighten the un instructed tribal mind, this is the civilizing mission we cannot renounce." Many of the themes of national integration, and of colonialism too, are to be found in this brief statement: conquered peoples are not peoples, have no culture of their own; they can only benefit from the enrichment and enlightenment the civilization brings. We must ask now whether this colonial image can be applied to France.

* Compare Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication, p. 431: "Group assimilation can only be further accelerated by reducing or destroying the competing information spread from the unassimilated past, and by reducing or representing the unassimilated responses to which it would give rise in the present. . . . However, assimilation can be accelerated very greatly by increasing the rate of new experiences from society."

The simplest answer comes from French sources. In Franche-Comté in the nineteenth century, it was remembered that people had for many years had themselves buried facedown as a protest against that region's annexation by France. The fact need not be true; the memory and the claim are significant.

Current references to French conquest are found mainly in the south and in the west, where they are confused by present-day political issues. Yet, ambiguous as they are, the hearing they find suggests the reality behind them. The strain must have been intense when the forces of order—army, gendarmes, judges (except justices of the peace), and police—came from outside, and when the normal friction between police and natives was rendered more acute by linguistic differences. Order imposed by men of different code and speech, somebody else's order, is not easily distinguished from foreign conquest. In the southwest, wrote M.F. Parinet in 1870, union with France "was suffered, not accepted. The fusion was accomplished slowly and against the will."

Four years later, when Ernest Forreald, the Socialist mayor of Narbonne, charged that the barons of the north were invading the Midi as in the olden days of the Albigensians, Le Figaro warned its readers: "Make no mistake, this is a country to be reconquered, as in the days of Simon de Montfort." Education—by politics as by schools—was inculcating a new allusiveness. Together with such symbolic literary figures as Tartarin and, later, Bécassine, historical allusions like these reinforced a view of the provincial population as childlike, backward, garrulous, unenterprising natives of underdeveloped lands.

Throughout the century the overseas colonies provided comparisons for certain parts of France. In 1843 Adolphe Blanqui compared the people of France's Alpine provinces to those of Kabylia and the Marquises, and the comparison was several times repeated in official reports and in print: 1853, 1875, 1885. The natives and the customs of rural France, their superstitions and their oddities, were studied and described only too often with uncomprehending condescension. Their ways seemed simple and devoid of reason, their reasonings were ignored. Native communities were despised of their rights (forest code, pasture, commons, fishing and hunting rights) in the name of progress, of freedom, of productivity, and of a common good that made no sense to those in whose name it was proclaimed. Because the forces of order ignored and scattered the logic of the societies they administered, "because this ignorance and contempt were the very essence of their action, the men responsible for this policy could not estimate its disastrous consequences." These words of Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, writing about colonial administration, apply quite well to rural France through the nineteenth century.

In the forests of the Pyrenees, and notably in Ariège, people took up arms against police and administrators who were "newcomers to the region and ignorant of our rights, our needs, and the local situation," alleging that they
were "crushing the local people" with their corrupt exactions. Native rebellions kept flaring up as late as 1900 "all the mountain resounded to the din of horns and savage calls." In Corsica, an utterly foreign land whose inhabitants did not aspire to independence but prized their autonomy in matters close to home, "the locals would have nothing to do with 'continentalism,' By the First World War the island was no better assimilated to France than Gévaudan had been a century before. A despairing report of November 1937 tells us that bandits, deserters, and defaulting recruits were more numerous than gendarmes—"the only people one can count on, more or less."

If Corsica provides too easy an argument, take the Landes, which in 1855 was called "our African Sahara: a desert where the Gallic cock could only sharpen his spurs." A Restoration writer described the Landes as "a trackless desert where one needs a compass to find one's way," inhabited by a "people alien to civilization." A writer of the 1830's compared the region to the wastes of Kamchatka and Libya, and even Michelet wrote about the idios of the Landes. Travelers, army officers, and officials all used the same language: vastes solitudes, immenses solitudes. The natives, if mentioned at all, were a subject of pity. Settlements were colonies, isolated and sparse. The "emptiness wastes" were waiting to be "claimed for civilization," i.e. developed for economic exploitation. And developed they were by engineers like François-Hilaire Chamberet, who undertook drainage and planting of pines at his own expense in 1857-59 before the law of 1877 forced communes to follow his example. Since parishes were poor, the law permitted them to raise funds for the improvements they had to make by selling off portions of their commons: a perfect instance of a colonial law that forced the natives either to use their lands productively or to cede them to those who would. The results proved advantageous not just to outside capitalists but to the Landais, who had long suffered grievously from pellagra and debilitating fevers in this poorest corner of France. The developers' intentions were good, even if they were also profitable to some of those who formulated them. Prophylactic in any case was part of good intentions, as was the good conscience of men who—in the way of men—ignored values other than their own. Balzac had deplored the waste of land in unprofitable commons. "Many of these lands could produce immensely, enough to feed whole villages. But they belong to rustic communes that refuse to sell them to speculators, preferring to keep them as pasture for a few score cows." That those few score cows (in the Landes, sheep) were the very essence of a functioning economy and an established way of life made no difference to Balzac or the speculators. History, as usual, was written by the victors.

Ardouin-Dumazet, visiting the Landes at the turn of the century, claimed that the new generations appreciated the change: better nutrition, better health, longer life expectancy. But he admitted that the old remained hostile to the developers. Nor did the colonial references cease with the improvement of the region's economy. As late as 1900 or 1911 Jean Richeard could describe the settlements of resin-tappers established by turpentine companies north of Arles as resembling "in some African land, a gathering of huts grouped in the shadow of the Republic's flag." And yet, surprisingly, "we are in France."

To be in France meant to be ruled by French officials. In Savoy, where friction between the French administration and the natives was intense, it was said that French officials "arrived there as for a tour of duty in the colonies." In 1869 a writer in the Revue des deux monde compared Savoie to Ireland. People in other regions made even more explicit comparisons. "They are sending colonists to faraway lands to cultivate the desert," complained a Breton, "and the desert is here!" "They are building railway lines in Africa," wrote the Revue du Livemouin in 1862. "If only they would treat us like Arabs!" An agricultural review took up the cry: "There is in the heart of France a region to be colonized that asks only to be accorded the same working conditions... as the colonies."

Equally explicit references were made to the development of Sologne. "Here is clearly a question of colonization," wrote Ardouin-Dumazet in 1920; Sologne's developers were as enthusiastic about their work as Algerian's. A little later, de Salieris (Loir-et-Cher): "There is an interesting parallel between the recent colonization of Tunisia and the development work going on in Sologne. In Tunisia, as in Sologne, the capitalists have played an important part." Still, "everything considered... the colonization of Sologne is more marvellous."

The greatest colonial opportunities, of course, were offered by Britany. After its forced union with France in the sixteenth century, Britany's towns were invaded by Frenchmen who overtook or replaced the native merchants and Frenchified the people they employed or otherwise influenced. Royal ports like Lorient and Brest were garrison towns in foreign territory, and the term colony was frequently employed to describe them.

As we have seen, things in Britany had changed only slightly by the 1880's. In 1892, France's inspector general of education, Carrel, published an article in the Revue pédagogique on teaching the first elements of French to the natives of our colonies and the countries subject to our protectorate. The article advocated the méthode maternelle—no more translation, but direct framing of French as in the Berlitz schools today. More interesting, it was a reprint of an article published three years earlier in the same journal on teaching the first elements of French in the schools of Lower Brittany. The method was reasonable; the problems were identical. Another educator, in a speech delivered at Algiers in 1894, praised Carrel's method for being "as
applicable to little Flemings, little Basques, little Bretons, as to little Arabs and little Berbers. By 1844 Carre’s method was being used in primary schools in Lower Brittany, Flanders, Corsica, and the Basque country. Attached that year as unsuitable for teaching French to natives of Algeria and Tunisia, it was defended by one of Carre’s students, Abel Poitrineau, then inspector at Rennes, on the basis of his experience in Brittany.19 The debate was logical, the logic inescapable.

But the similarity between Brittany and French colonies overseas was deeper still. Between 1826 and 1838, 600,000 hectares—one-fifth of the peninsula’s territory—was converted from waste to plowland. In a 1946 study Jean Chambart de Lavaur described this effort as “a true colonizing enterprise,”20 and a glance at one of its heroes, Jules Riefelt, bears him out. Born in Alsace in 1806, Riefelt went to Lorraine to study agriculture under the great agronomist Mathieu de Dombalieu. Graduated in 1818, he decided to seek an agronomist’s fortune in Egypt; but before taking off he visited his master’s family in Brittany. During his visit there, Riefelt met a Nantes shipowner named Hervé Limouzy who had just bought a domain called Grandjonac. Riefelt was persuaded to shift his sights, and under his direction Grandjonac became first a model farm, then a distinguished agricultural school.

In short, two central performers in the agricultural development of Brittany were an ambitious Alsatian for whom a Breton domain appeared an acceptable alternative to Egypt, and a Flemish shipowner turned estate owner who provided capital of urban and international origin. What could be more typical of a colonizing enterprise? Chambart de Lavaur put it in a nutshell: “The clearing of the moors was made possible by an abundance of labor, the availability of capital, the initiative of a team of agronomists, and the discovery of new techniques.”21 All but the first were foreign.

In a book of 1914 Camille Le Mercier d’Ern compared Brittany to other oppressed and vanquished nations as Ireland, Bohemia, Finland, and Poland. Le Mercier d’Ern and his friends represented mostly themselves; far more Bretons would have preferred full membership in the French commonwealth.22 But each aspiration in its own way reflects a sense of incomplete integration, and that is what concerns us here.

Let us now try another tack and see how well Franz Fanon’s _Wretched of the Earth—one of the great denunciations of colonialism—applies to the conditions we have described. The following passages, some of them cited rather than uninterrupted quotations, are representative:

Underdeveloped regions, absence of infrastructure, a world without doctors, without engineers, without administrators.

Cultural alienation, as colonialism tries to force the natives to give up their unenlightened ways, [to believe that] it was colonialism that came to lighten their darkness.

Colonial domination disrupts the cultural life of a conquered people (death of the noble, colony, cultural lethargy). New legal relations are introduced by the occupying power. Intellectuals seek to acquire the occupying power’s culture. The customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths—all above, all their myths—are the very sign of [their] poverty of spirit and of their constitutional deficiencies.

Colonialism turns to the past of the oppressed peoples, and distortions, disguises, and destroys it, devaluing precolonial history. It is the colonist who makes history: “This land, it is we who made it.”23

The more brutal aspects of the occupying power’s presence may perfectly well disappear, [battered for] a less blatant but more complete enslavement.

The native bourgeoisie, which wholeheartedly adopted the ways of thinking characteristic of the occupying country, becomes a spokesman for the colonial culture, as does the intellectual, who seeks it up greedily.24

The violence so prominent in Fanon’s pages was rare in nineteenth-century France, perhaps because risings capable of seriously threatening the state were a thing of the past. Given time and skills of the same color, assimilation worked. But otherwise Fanon’s account of the colonial experience is an apt description of what happened in the Indies and Coree. In France as in Algeria, the destruction of what Fanon called national culture, and what I would call local or regional culture, was systematically pursued. Insofar as it persisted, it was plagued by inertia and growing isolation. “There is a thriving around an ever more shrunked scope, ever more of a more hollow.” After a while, says Fanon, native creativity ebbs and what is left is

* Friedrich Engels, for whom the French conquest of Algeria was “fortemate ... for the progress of civilization,” would agree with this view: “After all, the modern bourgeois, with civilized industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord or to the murdering robber” (quoted in Silvio Ariosto, ed., _Karl Marx on Colonialism_, New York, 1956, p. 43).

* “Il sill being deprived of history,” Morris Leboucq would write (Comment peut-on lire Breton?, p. 43). See also Fanon Frans, _Les Derniers_, p. 40: monde ou le de la lutte (“A world of struggle the name of the general who carried out the conquest, the name of the engineer who built the headquarters, a world that is sure of itself”). And note the battle waged around statues under the Third Republic: in 1903 Combes dedicated the statue of Renan opposite Triguer’s cathedral; in 1913 the monument at Rennes celebrating Brittany’s incorporation into France was buried on the fourth centennial of that occasion.
"rigid, sedimentary, petrified." Local reality and local culture wane together. So it was in nineteenth-century France.

And yet... Taken as generalizations such accounts as Fanon’s seem to me to understate the choice and the autonomy of the colonized. Neither Bourdieu and Sazy, nor Fanon, nor our own observations suggest that the traditional societies were inert to start with. It seems to follow that they gave way to force, were vanquished by superior powers and "colonized" against their will.

Is this what really happened? Not in France.

There, as we have seen, traditional culture was itself a mass of assimilations, the traditional way of life a series of adjustments to physical circumstance. Change is always awkward, but the changes modernity brought were often emancipations, and were frequently recognized as such. Old ways died unment. New goods created new needs; but even deprivation was measured at a higher level. And the old remembered. New ways that had once seemed objectionable were now deliberately pursued and assimilated—not by a fawning "bourgeoisie" or self-indulgent "intellectuals," as in Fanon’s account, but by people of all sorts who had been exposed to such ways and acquired a taste for them. Perhaps this should make us think twice about "colonialism" in underdeveloped countries, which also reflects regional inequalities in development. It certainly qualifies the meaning of colonization as an internal process.

Development is not an equivocal term. It means only one thing: greater production of material goods and greater accessibility of material advantages to all. And that is what development brings, whatever disillusions may follow in its wake. The notion of underdevelopment has been criticized because it takes as its norm for underdeveloped societies the economy and culture of quite different societies. Yet few underdeveloped societies live so isolated from developed societies as to be ignorant of their advantages. By the nineteenth century the broadening scope of social and economic relations could well allow development and underdevelopment to be perceived objectively as rungs on the same ladder.

Thus, when we describe a given society as underdeveloped, we say not what the society is but what it is not. We describe what it is lacking: means of production, levels of productivity, forms of culture, life-styles, attitudes. In the present study, we have examined what may be called underdevelopment in nineteenth-century France. We have seen that the positive aspects and institutions of the underdeveloped regions were ways of coming to terms with want and insecurity. Custom and inertia made for their survival, opportunity for their abandonment. Perhaps not, and the currently accepted views of colonialism need some qualification in this light; perhaps the fashionable "fin de siècle" views of "progress" deserve another look. Or is the colonization of underdeveloped regions acceptable internally but unacceptable beyond the colonizer's homeland? What is a homeland? Something that time, accident, and opportunity allow to be hammered into shape and be accepted as a political entity: India, China, Mexico, the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom.

Let us now return to France and stay there. Conquest and colonization created it, as they did other realms, and the process was completed in the nineteenth century. What was the critical period? I have argued for the two score years on either side of 1900. Other arguments have been made, sometimes quite forcefully, for other periods. The more or less accepted view of the Great Revolution as a watershed cannot be ignored, bolstered as it has been by recent work on the profound changes affecting French family and sexual behavior long before 1895. Laurence Wylie and other sociologists have drilled on the 1950s, when tractors, cars, and television sets hastened the cultural homogenization of slow-changing villages. One can make a similar case for the mid-nineteenth century, revolving around 1850 and the coming of the railways. Every such argument, including mine, is plausible; none is overwhelming.

Nor need one be. History, says Fernand Braudel, is the sum of all possible histories. The question to ask is not whether an argument is right enough to exclude all others, but how right it is, how much it tells us that we did not know. In these pages we have seen profound changes in productivity and diet shift portions of rural France away from the verge of catastrophe, from primitive want needs that are more familiar. We have seen national unity painfully forged at a later date than is generally supposed. We have seen cultural homogenization following economic integration, itself achieved after much effort and pain. We have seen that certain parts of France impressed their values and techniques (sometimes deliberately) on other parts, altering their way of life. We have seen that this process proceeded slowly and unevenly, far more so than most accounts of the nineteenth century suggest. We have seen, in short, the nation not as a given reality but as a work-in-progress, a model of something at once to be built and to be treated for political reasons as already in existence.

My argument has not been that the early years of the Third Republic were the time of transition from the traditional to the modern world in great portions of rural France, but rather that they were one such time—as important as any other, more important than most. To make this point, I have tried to show not only that many things changed during the period, but that they changed faster or more significantly than they had done before that period or would do after it.

I submit that this has been shown. Between 1880 and 1910 fundamental changes took place on at least three fronts. Roads and railroads brought hitherto remote and inaccessible regions into easy contact with the markets and lifeways of the modern world. Schooling taught hitherto indifferent mil-
lions the language of the dominant culture, and its values as well, among those patriotism. And military service drove these lessons home. The forces of modernization affected different areas in different ways at different times. But after the changes described in this book had taken place, variations in language and behavior were significantly less and the ascendency of modernity was significantly greater. The regions of France were vastly more alike in 1960 than they had been before Jules Ferry, before Charles Freycinet, before Jules Rieffel.

In 1836 Adolphe d'Angeville concluded the introduction of his pioneer statistical essay with the observation, anticipating Durkheim, that there were two nations in France, divided by the now familiar imaginary line running from Saint-Malo to Geneva. North of that line peasants were fewer but taller, better fed, better schooled, and housed in homes lit by more windows. Their prices tended to be those of the new society (suicide, illegitimacy), their crimes to be against property rather than persons. They were relatively easy to recruit for army service and relatively quick to pay their taxes, as befits citizens of a modern nation. In the south people were shorter, worse fed, and worse housed. They were violent in both crime and politics, hostile to taxes, and slow to accept conscription. Roads in the south were thinner on the ground. Land was less productive, and the tools and methods of working it were less developed.  

This geographical division was in effect the division between urban and rural France—better still, between the poor, backward countryside and the areas of France, rural or not, that were to some degree permeated by the values of the modern world. As a Tulle newspaper put it in 1849, the peasants of Nord were like bourgeois, the peasants of Corrèze like beggars. That was the distinction that had to end if the real France was to be the France of political rhetoric. And we have seen it ending. In the event, more and more peasants of Corrèze became like bourgeois, too, in exactly the sense that the writer of 1849 had meant.  

*Common sense and the evidence I have seen suggest that the various regions succeeded to civilization roughly in relation to their exposure to urban—and especially Parisian—insuffe and to the degree of such insuffe, the facility, hence the scale, of migration, the proximity of railroads, and so on. Yet even here there is no watertight rule: the Limousins, close to Paris, were opened to its influence later than Provence, which of course only benefited from the traditions of a valley link and earlier railway connections, but was more urbanized. Still, why did the men of faraway Aisne move to Paris in greater numbers than those of Nîmes or Oyon? (See L. M. Guerres, "Les Migrations agricoles," p. 156.) Explanations can be found, of course, but they encumber any general rule with numerous exceptions. The point about generalizations is that they are only generally true, at best.*  

The two France that d'Angeville evoked still jostled each other as the nineteenth century ended; but their differences had been ameliorated. Deficiencies in diet were less noticeable. After all, the deficiencies of the southern peasants, after all, the southern peasantry began to close the gap between themselves and the tall men of the north. By then they had already caught up with the north in literacy. And though fertility among married couples (not indicative of a change in mentality) tended to decline later in departments south of the line, the proportion of women giving birth increased in the south almost as fast as in the north. (See Etienne Van de Walle, The Female Population of France, especially pp. 175, 184.)
At best, most people approached change hesitantly and experienced its effects with great ambivalence. But once they had drunk of its fountain, there was no turning back. The pattern of nineteenth-century belief continued to be, as Jacob Burckhardt said, "rationalism for the few and magic for the many." Yet, by the end of the century, the nature of the magic, and the authority on which it was accepted, had profoundly changed. People still took their cultural norms and assumptions from others; but popular and elite culture had come together again.