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THE
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY
OF
GEORGES SOREL
(1847-1922)

by

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A thesis presented to the Department of
Political Science in candidacy for the degree
of Master of Arts.

American University of Beirut

1932-1933

TO
MY TEACHERS AND MY
COLLEAGUES
IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

**

PREFACE

My purpose in choosing the political philosophy of Georges Sorel as the subject-matter of my thesis is to present in a comprehensive way some of the fundamental ideas of the French philosopher of Syndicalism relative to our present economic and political order, as I have found this field one in which much research and investigation are still to be done.

Indeed, the writer feels quite safe in asserting that there is, for all practical purposes, no literature in English worthy of mention concerning Sorel and his philosophy. Even in France, where one would have expected to find some adequate studies on one who in many ways is a typical representative of that country,⁽¹⁾ nothing is to be found save a few short treatises or essays which do in no wise attempt to present a thorough analysis of our philosopher's theories.

The writer, however, does not pretend to exhaust a subject which necessitates both a deep understanding and a lengthy amount of time for anyone who wishes to write about it. Such an attempt would be beyond his energies and he has, therefore, confined himself to a general survey of the whole field.

(1) This statement sounds paradoxical since Sorel's philosophy is essentially a negation of the political doctrines on which the French state now rests. In politics, France is generally considered as the traditional country of "statisme" and of centralization. Too much emphasis, however, has been put upon this aspect of French politics. If Descartes and Rousseau, Richelieu and Poincaré are typical representatives of French thought the same also is true of Pascal and

Needless to say that the difficulties he has encountered throughout his study were numerous and often insoluble due to the fact that Sorel's ideas are far from being presented in a coherent and logical form. They often lack in consistency and system. They do not constitute a neatly arranged system of thought as most French writings do, but a mass of detached and somewhat disconnected reflections on topics of wide range and great diversity. Add to that the relatively colourless and stiff style of the author which does not appeal very much to the reader.

And yet, despite all these, the writer has been able to find out the underlying unity of Sorel's thought, and for this he has to express his great indebtedness to his teacher, Prof. R. H. Soltau, without whose kind and most valuable help this work would have never assumed its present shape. He has consented to read and correct the manuscript and has greatly enriched it through his suggestions and advice.

The writer wishes also to express his deepest thanks to his teacher Mr. Douglas W. Campbell for his guidance and help in the preparation of this work.

Hussein H. Rabbani,
American University of Beirut,
April, 1935.

Bergson, of Proudhon and Sorel. For France is the country of extremes, and French genius is essentially two-sided. As Ed. Berth puts it; "Tout chez nous", he says, "prend forme extrême, tant dans la vie religieuse et intellectuelle que politique et sociale." (Ed. Berth, "Les Méfaits des Intellectuels" - p. 208).

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatism is, perhaps, one of the outstanding features of our present-day politics¹. For many long years we have been accustomed to judge and estimate our political institutions in the light of some 'a priori' principles, which had been handed down to us either by the philosophers of the past or inculcated in our minds by the leaders of our political, religious or educational organizations. The Church, the School, and the party caucus have greatly contributed to mould our political doctrines and formulae. Whether in our attitude towards problems affecting both the nature and the function of the state or in our relationship with the different groups that stand within its boundaries, these three main social bodies have, and are still to a large extent, shaping our conduct in accordance with the principles with which their organizations stand closely associated. We have been taught to test the validity of a political idea or organisation not by finding out whether it can work in actual practice or not, but by means of some philosophical analysis which can apparently suit our mind.

This method of approach towards political problems which can be rightly called philosophical or metaphysical, is a legacy of that eighteenth century rationalism of which Rousseau and many

1. For an authoritative and a comprehensive account of modern politics in its relation to the philosophy of Pragmatism, Cf. W.Y. Elliott's "The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics."

of his contemporaries are the representatives in the field of politics. It was this same principle that guided the authors of the French Revolution and which subsequently gave birth to doctrines which our statesmen have not yet fully succeeded in putting into practice.

The struggle for liberty and equality before being fought out in the battlefields of the revolutionary wars had been already waged by elaborate philosophical treatises during the eighteenth century. It devolved upon the next century, to find out the ways and means whereby such political principles could be rightly applied. It was, however, not an age of sober and wise experimentation but one in which a set of principles and doctrines were to be applied with relentless logic and in some cases forced upon the people.¹ All through that century parliamentarianism made steady progress. Slowly, though often through violent revolutions, despotic governments were overthrown and in their place a new democratic edifice was erected. Monarchies, which had hitherto been flourishing, gradually came to lose both their prestige and their actual power. And even in those countries where people still cherished their traditional love for kingship a compromise was effected, by which parliamentary government was established at the expense of the authority of the king, following

1. The political history of France in the 19th. cent. is a good illustration of that 'a priori' and rationalistic method in politics. The Constitution of 1814, known as the "Charte" was copied from England. It, however, failed to work. People thought that the framing of constitutions was a mechanical process. Later events served to show that they were mistaken.

in this the example set by England two centuries before.

In the words of a well-known American President the world seemed to have been made safe for democracy. But such was not to be. The World War, with all the sufferings it brought in its wake and all the problems it engendered, was a disappointment to most people. Though originally viewed as a struggle between the two contending forces of monarchical despotism and parliamentary democracy, in which the latter was considered as being inevitably victorious, it served to intensify the anti-democratic forces which were slowly at work in many European countries. And no sooner had the fire of that great conflagration been quenched than these hitherto imperceptible reactionary tendencies made their appearance and openly challenged not only the political principles and doctrines that had been hitherto considered as final and as intrinsically superior to any other one, but the very same institutions which a century before had received unqualified praise by writers and statesmen alike.¹ The fetish of democracy was destroyed in Italy through the genius of its dictator Benito Mussolini, in Poland

1. "Whether the War simply assisted the development of political aspects of problems which were embedded in the whole development of modern capitalistic industrialism or whether Reconstruction stress and strain snapped social bonds that might otherwise have held, it is certain in either case that democratic constitutionalism and the sovereignty based on it are being widely challenged by the Marxian labor forces, particularly by the Syndicalist and Communist left wing. At the other extreme, Fascist reaction, model of an alarming crop, of dictators, although it attacks not sovereignty but the constitutional organization of responsibility for that sovereignty, is equally pragmatic in its savage onslaught on parliamentary futility." W.Y. Elliott, The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics, p.8.

by the iron hands of Marshal Pilsudski, and in several other European and Oriental countries. Mussolini was proclaimed the Prophet of the pragmatic era in politics, and Lenin, who had turned Russia into an extensive political laboratory, became the real master of politics.

This anti-democratic wave which the post-war world has come to witness is but a manifestation in the realm of politics of what is generally called the pragmatic revolt the effects of which are not less significant in other fields of thought, in religion, in education and in philosophy itself. It constitutes an anti-rationalist reaction against the eighteenth century belief in the supremacy of reason and its failure to recognize the instinctive and the intuitive side of our nature. In philosophy its two outstanding representatives are William James and Henri Bergson, both of whom, though admitting the value of reason in the pursuit of knowledge, yet emphasize the close and intimate relationship which our ideas should have with our daily concrete experience. Thus, pragmatism is rather a doctrine which aims at the reconciliation of reason with experience and not a vague romanticist belief in the futility and the utter bankruptcy of human reasoning.

In politics this pragmatic revolt expresses itself in two political forces that stand at two opposite poles and both threaten the very basis of our parliamentary government: Fascism and Bolshevism. Their pragmatism consists in that they both of them attempt to cure the ills of society by resorting first to

an objective diagnosis of the malady and thus applying the remedy after a real observation of the facts. Fascism and Bolshevism are, indeed, true products of their environment.¹ They have arisen out of the necessities of the situation. Their principles and doctrines have not been entirely formulated beforehand and indiscriminately applied without a thorough consideration of the needs of the time. They constitute an application of human reason on the conditions of society.

* * * * *

Bolshevism and Fascism, however, are only the post-war manifestations of that pragmatic wave already mentioned. As a pre-war expression of this pragmatic tendency, and one which has suffered a gradual decline since the war, we should consider the

1. "After the War, an Italy badly divided, sabotaged by Communism grew sicker and sicker under government by blocs, government by unreal coalitions, by log-rolling, and finally by 'decretileggi'. It all amounted to no government at all. Machiavelli's 'Prince' was not more needed, when he wrote, to raise Italy from her divided weakness, than was a dictator, now--one strong enough to seize the reins of governmental power from the lax hands which refused to tighten them on syndicalistic violence."

W.Y. Elliott, OP. CIT., p. 320

Syndicalist Movement which is a French product and which presents striking similarities with our modern revolutionary socialist schools.

French Syndicalism can be studied from three different aspects, each of which is the expression of the same fundamental principle advocated by three different classes of people. When viewed as a revolt of the "fonctionnaires" or the Civil Servants against the favoritism and the corruption of the state administration it is called Administrative Syndicalism or the Syndicalism of the Civil Servants. Next to this first type of Syndicalist Movement and one which is closely related to it comes the Syndicalism of the Jurists of which the late Monsieur Léon Duguit is the outstanding representative. The third branch of Syndicalism is that of the Workers and it is with this third one that George Sorel was connected and for the defence of which he wrote and worked so much.

All these three types of French Syndicalist thought have in common a deep-rooted opposition to the whole body of doctrines on which the French State now rests. They all constitute a Challenge to the Sovereign State and a negation of the principles bequeathed by the France of the Revolution. Emphasizing the economic basis of our present-day social structure they propose to take production as the corner-stone of social organisation and violently repudiate the theory which conceives of the state as an association of equal and free individuals.

We need not at this juncture present a detailed analysis of the principles and doctrines of each of these three forms of Syndicalist movement, as such an attempt would take us beyond the

scope of this work. A brief study of the third type of Syndicalism, namely Labor Syndicalism, will, however, be of a great help as it will throw light on some aspects of Sorel's Philosophy and will show his connection with the Revolutionary Syndicalist Movement as a whole.

The failure of the Commune (1871) and the violent and bloody incidents which accompanied its closing stages together with the forces of repression which it released seemed to have sounded the death-knell of Socialism in France. For a period of almost ten years the working classes suffered in prestige and saw their activities largely hampered, nay paralyzed. The forces of conservatism emerged out of this civil war triumphant and more than ever reactionary and repressive. Not only the state officials and all those who for one reason or another had taken side with them but public opinion itself demanded security and peace and was interested in the maintenance of the "status quo". Even "the mass of labourers, disgusted with violence and with politics in general, turned to more moderate courses. Even strikes ceased to allure. True it is that in the industrial stringency which followed the war, a number of strikes were precipitated in certain trades; but they were unsuccessful, the employers and the Government joining in their repression, and the only result was to confirm the opinion that seemed to pervade labour circles, that strikes brought much misery and little profit."¹

1. J. A. Estey, Revolutionary Syndicalism. p. 3

Socialism, however, despite all these successive blows, did not die, and throughout all the trial which it experienced proved its vitality and its ability to face the most deadly of wars. It had, nevertheless, abandoned its revolutionary and its aggressive methods. The Workers' Congress held in Paris in 1876 definitely repudiated the strike and declared its inadequacy as a method for the promotion and the safeguard of the workers' interests. Its tone was, thus, distinctly moderate. It refused to mix itself with politics, lest further complications should ensue, and abandoned the idea of formulating plans for the total regeneration of society. Such an attitude gave much pleasure to the Republicans and the Moderate friends of Labor but caused great anxiety among the refugees of the Commune, who denounced their former colleagues as traitors to the Socialist Cause.

Three years later, in 1879, at a Congress held in Marseilles, new resolutions were passed to the effect of creating a revolutionary labour party. Thanks to the efforts of Jules Guesde, the foremost member of that Congress and a leading figure in the civil wars of 1871, the cause of militant socialism triumphed and succeeded in rallying under its banner the majority of the workers. The "Guesdisme", which spread in the industrial regions of Central and Northern France aimed at the conquest of the state by the workers through political as well as revolutionary means, and the establishment of a Collectivist state in which the masses of the workers could find their economic and political emancipation. Its actions, however, was soon to be checked by the new forms and

tendencies that had appeared meanwhile in the socialist movement.

From a revolutionary outlook French Socialism was again drifting towards an evolutionary policy. A reaction against the violent methods advocated by Jules Guesde was apparent, and when P. Brousse openly criticized and condemned them a break within socialist ranks had become inevitable. The new school, which repudiated violence and emphasized the necessity of taking moderate and peaceful action, came to be known as "Possibilisme". Henceforth, an ever-widening breach split the French Socialist Movement into two hostile camps: one group following the doctrines of Guesde and standing for revolution and the other under the direction of Brousse recommending the use of political means as the best way of taking hold of the state. Towards 1896 the conflict between these two socialist groups became acute. In this same year M. Millerand delivered his famous speech in favor of the moderate and progressive socialists and from that date onward till the beginnings of the twentieth century evolutionary socialism took the upper hand.

On June 23d., 1899, Millerand became a member of the Waldeck-Rousseau Cabinet and his accession to this post intensified the opposition that had already manifested itself so bitterly among the two socialist groups. It also proved a stumbling-block to evolutionary socialism, since it brought disappointment and regret to all those workers who had centered their hopes for a betterment of their condition

on the promises which the leaders of the "Probabilist" school had so repeatedly made.

M. Millerand's entry into the Waldeck-Rousseau Cabinet and his inability to carry out socialist legislation in a way that would seem satisfactory to the revolutionary labourers had, indeed, been a failure in so far as the revolutionary workers were concerned. State Socialism had been put to test and its inadequacy was realized. It had become evident that the presence of a socialist in the government would not necessarily result in the betterment of the conditions of the working classes. Some even had been led to question the sincerity of those socialists who had come to enjoy a relatively high position in the government offices. It was believed that once in power, a socialist minister was continually tempted to bargain with his colleagues and make compromises of such a nature as would tend to run counter to the best interests of the workers.

The disillusionment that M. Millerand's attitude brought to the masses of the industrial labourers resulted in the revival of that revolutionary spirit of which the doctrines of Jules Guesde had been the embodiment. But this reaction against evolutionary socialism did not cause a full return to the doctrines of Guesde. It gave birth rather to a new revolutionary movement, in some ways similar to "Guesdisme", though quite different from it in its aims and objectives.

This revolutionary movement took the name of Syndicalism. Unlike "Guesdisme" it strives to destroy the state through violent measures and does not believe, as Guesse did, in the efficacy of political methods for the attainment of its aims. It refused to organize any party along political lines and considers cooperation with those in control of the political machinery as treason to the socialist ideal. There are, therefore, two fundamental differences between Guesdisme and Syndicalism. The latter is opposed to the state and aims at its destruction, whereas the former considers it as an essential means for the complete transformation of society into a socialist organisation. Moreover, Syndicalism advocates the direct method of the general strike as the most efficient way of destroying the present order of society and sees in violence the "Sine Qua Non" of success. Guesdism, on the other hand, though it allows its followers to resort to physical coercion when necessary, prefers to it the peaceful method which political life affords, such as the party system and the electoral campaigns conducted for party propaganda. In so far as methods of action are concerned there is, therefore between the two movements only a difference of degree, since both recommend, though not with an equal emphasis, the necessity of violence. The main basic difference between them, however, lies in the fact that in the eyes of the Syndicalists the state is an evil which should be done away with, whereas according to Guesde it is a necessary instrument for the realization of socialism.

Syndicalism as a tendency had existed all through the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Its influence in the various socialist congresses was also remarkable. At a Congress held in Marseilles in 1892 the syndicalist method of striking triumphed. It was advocated by the adherents of two socialist sects: the Allemanists and the Blanquists. The Allemanists, called after their leader Allemane, originally belonged to that evolutionary socialist school that had become known under the name of "Possibilism". But in 1890, after a violent breach, the Allemanists separated themselves from the "Possibilistes" and gradually assumed a revolutionary character. As to the Blanquists, they were the disciples of Ed. Blanqui and were declared revolutionists. They attached to the proletarian strike a very great importance and on this point they received the wholehearted support of the Allemanists. There is also another revolutionary group which joined hands with the preceding two, namely the Anarchists, who were living in isolated groups in the big industrial centres of Paris, Lyon and Marseille.

These three main groups: the Allemanists, the Blanquists and the Anarchists constituted the basic elements out of which the Syndicalist Movement emerged. Through their fusion into a single body the cause of revolutionary socialism was strengthened and its influence among the workers considerably increased.

In 1895 the "Confédération Générale du Travail" (C.G.T.) was created. In this same year Fernand Pelloutier¹ was appointed

1. An ardent militant socialist from early youth, Pelloutier,

the secretary of the "Fédération des Bourses du Travail" (F.B.T.) yet another type of Syndicalist organization, a local association of all Trade Unions in a particular district. The C.G.T. was organized on a functional basis, whereas the F.B.T. was a geographical or regional association of workers. In 1902 the C.G.T. and the F.B.T., which had, hitherto, remained separated, fused into a single body under the common name of the "Confédération Générale du Travail."

Conceiving of economic life as a perpetual class conflict between the employer and the employee, and considering the capitalist order as a system erroneous to its very core, the Revolutionary Syndicalists sought to find out those means whereby the existing political system could be most thoroughly undermined. The weapons they recommended were the strike, the "boycottage" and the sabotage. Through the strike, which will be at first only partial and will become general only when circumstances seem to be favorable, the proletariat was to

thanks to his vision and insight, was the first one to see in both syndicates and bourses ideal centres for revolutionary propaganda and agitation, and necessary weapons for the overthrow of the whole existing regime of parliamentary democracy. Though first a Guesdist, he gradually drifted towards the Anarchists and became an early protagonist of the general strike. His "Histoire des Bourses du Travail" is the "Bible of Revolutionary Syndicalism."

receive both a physical and a mental training destined to prepare it for the final struggle which would witness the complete annihilation of the present day political order. The 'Boycottage' affords the worker the means whereby he can force upon the employer his wishes and desires, since it involves not merely a refusal to work but also a refusal to buy from him. The 'Sabotage' "covers every way in which the employer may be made to suffer through the depreciation of his wealth, damaging of tools and plant, meticulous observation of out-of-date and practically unworkable regulations, defective workmanship when on piecework, increasing of costs of production when on timework by spinning out the duration of jobs. Sabotage can be applied to the whole social organism by the undermining of its chief support, the army; the true proletarian will not directly refuse military service, but during his time with the colors he will carry on propaganda secretly enough not to be caught, so as to make the army an unreliable weapon against the workers, he will also attack the State by attacking the principles of patriotism on which it is based."¹

Revolutionary Syndicalism, however, standing at the very

1. E.H. Soltan, French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century. p. 444

opposite of the newly united socialist parties under the leadership of Jaurès, remained for many long years a mere tendency, rather than a well coordinated system of thought, until it found during the first decade of the twentieth century, in George Sorel and in his chief disciple Ed. Berth¹ the real framers of Syndicalist philosophy. Both of them drew their inspiration from the practices and actions of the syndicalists, and out of the methods and principles which these workers supplied them with, they elaborated a system of ethics and philosophy.

But such a happy agreement between Sorel and the Syndicalists proved to be superficial and temporary.² For, as we shall

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1. Edouard Berth: a follower of Sorel, and like him, essentially a moralist. He is now, however, virtually a Communist. His chief works are: *Les Derniers Aspects du Socialisme* (1908), *Les Méfaits des Intellectuels* (1914), *Guerre des États ou Guerre des Classes* (1924), *La Fin d'une Culture* (1927), Gaetan Pirou estimates Berth's contribution to the "Nouvelle Ecole" as follows: "Mais en même temps, avec le lyrisme et la virtuosité dialectique qui lui sont propres, Edouard Berth apporta aux thèses de la "Nouvelle Ecole" des développements originaux." Gaetan Pirou, Les Doctrines Économiques en France depuis 1870. p. 47
 2. "À la vérité, il n'y eut jamais qu'une concordance partielle entre les thèses très subtiles de ces intellectuels nourris de Proudhon et de Marx, de Nietzsche et de Bergson, et les sentiments des militants révolutionnaires. Sauf H. Lagardelle, qui faisait la liaison entre les uns et les autres, les théoriciens du Syndicalisme furent toujours très éloignés des ouvriers. Ils n'exercèrent à peu près aucune influence sur l'orientation de la C.G.T. et le Syndicalisme ne fut pour eux qu'un thème sur lequel ils brodèrent de savantes variations littéraires et idéologiques." G. Pirou, OP. CIT., pp. 44-45.

point out later on, Sorelian philosophy was too subtle and too intricate for the simple minded and largely uneducated workers, who were unable to digest the elaborate ideas of our philosopher. Thus, "Sorelism, however significant, does not exhaust Syndicalism either in its theory or in its practice..... Syndicalism is, after all, a mode of action even more than a doctrine and it is in the activity of the workers rather than in books that its true expression is to be found." 1

Syndicalism, like all other Socialist Movements, suffered during the Great War of 1914. It lost its revolutionary character and its violent and uncompromising attitude. The forces of nationalism and patriotism proved to be still at the very basis of French national life, and emerged from the great challenge presented by the War as flourishing as ever. At the very opening of hostilities the Socialists together with the Syndicalists adhered to the government of the "Union Sacrée", and the C.G.T., which had hitherto been the bulwark of revolutionary Syndicalism, turned to become, under the leadership of Jouhaux, essentially reformist and democratic.²

1. R.H. Soltau, OP.CIT.; p. 464.

2. For a detailed study of the Syndicalist Movement during and after the War of 1914, confer: Gaetan Pirou's "Les Doctrines Economiques en France depuis 1870", Ch. II, La Guerre et l'Après Guerre. pp. 66-98.

"The War, in fact, dealt revolutionary syndicalism a deadly blow by revealing--to the great surprise of many, that the link of nationality was still stronger in the consciousness of workers than that of class--and although both reformist and revolutionary syndicalisms have since the war become linked up in various forms of international organisation, there is little evidence as yet that patriotism and national defence have become an irrelevant issue to any save a small extremist minority." 1

1. R.H. Soltan, OP.CIT., p. 465.

CHAPTER I

Sorel--His Life, Character and Method.

"Heureux l'homme qui a rencontré la femme dévouée.....qui empêchera son âme de jamais se contenter et qui saura lui rappeler les obligations de sa tâche....."

(Georges Sorel)

Few writers have led a life simpler than that of G. Sorel. Indeed, his whole existence was strikingly "bourgeois" in its simplicity. During a large part of his career he remained an obscure writer, unnoticed by his contemporaries, and had it not been for some specially favourable circumstances he would have remained unknown and his writings would have never assumed the importance they were ^{later} destined to enjoy.

Georges Sorel himself acknowledges this fact in a very modest way.¹ Born of middleclass parents, he never repudiated his simple origins but rather saw in them the best way whereby he could detach himself from the prejudices, the immorality and the corruption of his contemporaries. A "bourgeois" by origin, he lived also a "bourgeois" life and from that class, against which he was to direct his severest criticisms a few years later, he inherited many traits of mind and character, especially ^{the} sense of realism combined with

1. "Ma biographie tient en quelques lignes: Je suis né à Cherbourg le 2 Nov. 1847, j'ai fait mes études au collège de cette ville, sauf un an que j'ai passé au Collège Rollin, à Paris, j'ai été à L'école Polytechnique de 1865 à 1867. En 1892, j'ai laissé le service des Ponts et Chaussées sitôt que j'ai pu le faire honorablement, c'est-à-dire quand j'eus été décoré (la Legion D'honneur est un brevet de loyaux services

a highly critical mind that are attributes of middleclass people.

And yet his life, despite its simplicity, is very significant because of its influence on his writings. If not rich in events, it is at least interesting to everyone who desires to understand adequately the ideas of the writer, and it is for this reason, therefore, that we attempt to present a general sketch of it in the following pages.

Sorel's entire existence is the story of a soul in perpetual quest after truth. It is because of his thirst for certainty that he found it necessary to modify his ideas so as to bring them into full harmony with his changing experiences. His life was thus a perpetual evolution, a long drama in which enthusiasm and disappointment alternated, never allowing him to take any intellectual rest.¹

Sorel's life is, thus, most interesting to the psychologist and to the moralist, as it represents a series of transformations through which a searching mind has passed.

Pour tous les fonctionnaires d'un certain rang) et nommé Ingénieur en chef....etc."

(G. Sorel--quoted by Perrin in "Les Idées Sociales de G. Sorel"
pp. 11-12

1. "C'est seulement dans l'action qu'est la vie et la vérité; mais l'homme tend toujours à concevoir comme définitif le point où il est arrivé, et plus grande et féconde a été l'action, plus forte est la tentation de voir dans ce point d'arrivée la borne définitive où l'on doit s'arrêter. Le germe de la décadence est précisément là, dans cette tendance à l'arrêt."

(M. Ascoli--"Georges Sorel" p. 24)

Born on November 2, 1847, G. Sorel belonged to a middle-class family in which a traditional conservatism in morals was very strong. His mother was very pious and so the child was brought up in a religious environment which greatly influenced his youthful mind. Add to that the morally healthy influence of country life upon his mind and character.¹ From the province of Normandy, in which he was born, he had acquired a profound sense of realism and of keen observation, together with a deep-rooted feeling of individualism, both of which are to be detected in all his writings.²

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1. "On voit que Georges Sorel a peu subi l'influence des villes. S'il a fréquenté quelques cénacles parisiens, il ne s'est point laissé gagner par l'indulgence et le scepticisme qui souvent s'y donnent libre cours et il a conservé, durant toute sa vie, une extrême austérité morale."

(G. Poirou--"Georges Sorel" p. 13

2. "Georges Sorel est normand, il est donc loisible de découvrir en lui, à volonté, soit la prudence d'un "bourgeois" normand qu'on peut retrouver aussi chez Corneille et Flaubert (une prudence, 'prudentia', faite d'un sens à la fois aigu et solide des réalités et des possibilités, et qui est une vérité antique), soit l'audace téméraire et l'esprit d'indépendance effrénée de.....Wikings"

(Ed. Berth--"Guerre des Etats ou Guerre des Classes"--
pp. 44-45)

After having studied for a number of years in the college of Cherbourg Sorel was sent to the "Collège Rollin" in Paris and then to the "Ecole Polytechnique" where he pursued his mathematical studies from 1865 to 1867 . When he completed his courses in the latter school he became a civil engineer and for twenty-five years he kept to his work, though he was not specially interested in that kind of occupation. His natural inclination was towards the study of social sciences, of philosophy, of religion and of political economy. So, while an engineer, he was at the same time making serious study of various social and historical problems, as a result of which he acquired a good intellectual background. At last he retired from the civil ~~service~~ and from that time on he was wholly engaged in the field of study he had chosen for the rest of his life.

In 1889, Sorel published his first book, the "Contribution à l'étude profane de la Bible", in which he had made an attempt to make the Bible accessible and intelligible to the public and specially to the masses who had not yet been thoroughly acquainted with its contents. His aim was, thus, not to make a work of erudition, but to give the people a moral training and the Bible, he thought, could achieve this end.¹

In the same year appeared his second book, "Les Procès de Socrate", which was a criticism of the intellectuals in general and of the Socratic philosophy in particular. As in the former book, Sorel's main preoccupations were ethical, and if he criticized Socrates it is because the latter had taken away from the mind

1. "La vulgarisation de la Bible est aujourd'hui une question sociale. La Bible est le seul livre qui puisse servir à l'instruction du peuple, l'initier à la vie, héroïque, combattre les

of the Greeks the old heroic spirit and replaced it with a cold rationalistic philosophy.

In the "Contribution à l'étude profane de la Bible", and also in the "Procès de Socrate", the influence of Renan and of Proudhon is obvious. Sorel had already become thoroughly acquainted with these two writers. Already in 1882 he had written an article on the philosophy of Proudhon with whose ideas he seemed to agree, and his later writings only intensified this tendency.

It was in this same period of his life that he became also acquainted with the writings of Karl Marx and that he joined the socialist movement. A certain Rumanian student by name of Diamondy, a convinced Marxist, was at that time propagating in France the ideas of Marx, and he had founded a revue called "L'ère Nouvelle". Sorel, who had found in the socialist ideas of Marx something which could satisfy his natural inclination towards a scientific approach of social problems, became very soon an active contributor to the above-mentioned socialist review.¹ What he liked in Marx was his realism as expressed in his materialistic interpretation of history which explains and evaluates our ideas in the light of the economic conditions in the midst of which they arise. Sorel, a professional technician and a scientist, was naturally fond of such a realistic approach to historical events. So, fascinated by the ideas of Marx, he became a Marxist. He followed Marx, however, not as a blind follower, but in his own peculiar way, the same way in which he

tendances délétères de l'utilitarisme, arrêter la propagande de l'idée révolutionnaire." (G. Sorel--Quoted by Perrin in Op. Cit.p. 13

1. "Le Marxisme devait plus spécialement L'attirer par l'insistance qu'il met à étudier l'infrastructure technique de l'économie

followed Proudhon and Bergson.¹ He took Marx's ideas and interpreted them according to his own viewpoint, regardless of what the other disciples of Marx might think of his interpretation. He even condemned the Marxists as sectarians for having too narrow a conception of their master's ideas.

"La Fin du Paganisme" of Gaston Boissier gave him an opportunity to study the problem of the origins of Christianity and its triumph over the forces of paganism. The results of his investigations were published in 1894 in the "Ere Nouvelle" in the form of three articles which were later on collected and reprinted under the title of "La Ruine du Monde Antique".

In 1894 appeared in this same socialist review another article by Sorel entitled "L'Ancienne et la Nouvelle Métaphysique", in which for the first time the name of Bergson is mentioned. Sorel had probably read Bergson's "L'Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience" published in 1889.

The "Ere Nouvelle", however, did not live very long. Another socialist review, "Le Devenir Social", had taken its place. During three years Sorel was a regular contributor to this magazine until its death in 1898.²

Not only through his theoretical analysis of Marx's ideas did Sorel prove his attachment to the Socialist Movement. He went further and became an active socialist, participating in the agitation on behalf of Dreyfus. His efforts in this field of socialist action were not less remarkable than those which he displayed in

à expliquer les doctrines par les faits, à rechercher sous les théories les rapports de production qu'elles traduisent." (G. Pirou, Op. Cit., p. 20.)

1. "Il suit Marx--comme il suivra tous ses maîtres--en disciple très

his attempt to inject French Socialism with the theories of Marx. The Dreyfus case appeared to him as a great moral fight, in which the socialists were called to champion the cause of justice and righteousness and in this way precipitate a moral crisis out of which the bourgeois society might be purged from all its impurities and imperfections. Sorel looked upon the Dreyfus case, therefore, as a moral struggle, and not a political strife aiming at the overthrow of one political party by another. He was even glad to witness that the attitude of Jaurès proved that socialism had an ethics of its own, and so he encouraged the workers to fight for the cause of justice and truth. To the objections raised by the orthodox Marxists regarding the bourgeois character of the Dreyfus agitation, he answers that socialism does not consist in class struggle but that is rather an attempt to unify and coordinate various social groups and parties. Socialism and democracy, therefore, are not exclusive but complementary, socialism being the logical continuation and the ultimate realisation of democracy. Socialism he said "is a working class movement in a democracy."¹

Meanwhile, Sorel had lost his wife who had died in 1897. Her death brought to him incalculable sufferings and left in his life a void which was never destined to be filled.² In his wife he

libre." G. Pirou, Op. Cit., p. 21

2. "Je faisais bien un tiers de la revue en articles et en comptes rendus." G. Sorel, Quoted by G. Pirou, Op. Cit., p. 20

1. G. Sorel, "Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat." p. 179

2. "Sorel, dans sa maison, avec l'aide de sa femme, avait défendu

had found not only a friend and a companion but also a safe refuge where he could retire in his moments of strong moral suffering.¹ Evenmore, his wife was also a faithful collaborator to many of his writings. She had given him the necessary inspiration and incentive to work despite the many obstacles that stood in his way, and this is the reason why Sorel dedicated his main work, his "Réflexions sur la Violence" to her memory. Although he never had any children he had nevertheless, learned, through his daily association with a wife who was all devotion and love to him, what a blessing the family can be, and this impression, that he kept all through his life, was so strong that it influenced, nay revolutionized, all his ideas relative to family organisation and life.

Now that his wife had gone, Sorel found it necessary to express himself to the world. Thus far, he had found in his wife a faithful and penetrating intellectual friend. But now, he felt, more than ever, the urge to write and confess to the world all that he thought and felt.²

et sauvé sa personnalité, et cette personnalité avait conservé toute sa pureté et toute son intégrité, quand la première et majeure partie de sa vie fut tranchée violemment par la mort; mais le fait même de la mort demeura là, fatal et inexorable, enveloppant toute la réalité d'un souffle glacé de pessimisme." (M. Ascoli, Op. Cit., p. 21

1. "Sorel eut un foyer, Sorel eut une femme. C'est-à-dire qu'il put, dans toute la première et majeure partie de sa vie, concentrer autour d'une femme, aidé et protégé par elle, tout ce qu'il y avait de plus profondément original en lui: les murs de sa maison devinrent les murs d'une forteresse contre lesquels vint se briser l'hostilité du monde." (M. Ascoli, Op. Cit., pp. 19-20)

2. "Si Sorel ne commença à écrire ses oeuvres capitales qu'après la mort de sa femme, ce n'est pas naturellement qu'il n'eût commencé à penser déjà bien avant, mais peut-être dut-il sentir dès lors surtout la nécessité de se communiquer davantage aux autres--pour ne pas laisser pourrir en lui ces idées que sa femme savait parfaitement entendre." (M. Ascoli, Op. Cit., pp. 21-22

And, henceforth, we find him in the most productive period of his life. It is in this period that he writes his most important works, and it is also at that time that we find him shifting from one movement to another, in continual search after truth.

We have already seen the influence which Marx's writings have had on his ideas and we have also witnessed his conversion to Marxism and the way in which he tried to reconcile socialism with democracy. But the alliance with the socialists proved to be temporary. Sorel was too much of a moralist, his preoccupations were too ethical to enable him to agree with ^{the} materially-minded political socialists of his day. His point of view was, thus, different from that of his socialist collaborators. While the latter were mainly interested in the actual conquest of power by the socialist party and in the immediate material advantages that such a conquest would bring to them, Sorel was, on the contrary, not so much interested in the political aspects of socialism as he was in the ethical progress which it might be able to achieve. A breach between him and the socialists was, thus, well-nigh inevitable. The occasion was offered by the Dreyfus case.¹ This same Dreyfus agitation which had created such a fiery enthusiasm in Sorel and had made him think of socialism as an ethical movement was destined a few years later to revolutionize all his ideas regarding the labor movement as a whole.² He turned to become the very enemy of socialism, of

1. Confer G. Sorel, La Révolution Dreyfusienne.

2. "Les premières agitations dreyfusardes m'avaient fait augurer que le socialisme gagnerait beaucoup à acquérir la claire conscience d'être un mouvement ouvrier dans une démocratie; la liquidation de la révolution dreyfusienne devait me conduire à reconnaître que le socialisme prolétarien ou syndicalisme ne réalise pleinement sa nature que s'il est volontairement

democracy and of parliamentarianism. His hopes for the future of socialism had all been turned into utter disappointment. The Dreyfus Affair had disclosed to him that beneath their beautiful words the socialist leaders were working for their own selfish interests, that they were not so much interested in the rehabilitation of Dreyfus as in the immediate realisation of their personal aims.¹ Instead of sacrifice and service for a noble cause he found a lust for power, a jealousy and a selfishness of which he never thought the leaders of the type of Jaurès were capable. Now that they had been victorious they had shown their evil machinations and designs. Instead of strengthening the foundations of socialism they had shaken them so strongly that any hope of further reconstruction seemed to be impossible. Sorel, therefore, saw no way out of this chaos than his complete separation from the socialist movement. He even seemed to have lost all faith in socialism.²

But, if Sorel had completely severed himself from the French Socialist party he, nevertheless, was still confident in the future liberation of the workers. In the latter he was still deeply interested and, henceforth, he directed all his efforts towards the

un mouvement ouvrier dirigé contre les démagogues."
(G. Sorel, Mater. d'une Théorie du Proletariat. p. 268)

1. "Jusqu'au moment où la force serait passée, sans contestation possible, aux dreyfusards, il fallait supprimer l'affaire Dreyfus; c'est pourquoi Waldeck-Rousseau, ne voulant pas entendre parler de procès susceptibles de rouvrir une procédure de révision, fit voter l'amnistie."
(G. Sorel, La Révolution Dreyfusienne. p. 40)
2. "M. Georges Valois rapporte qu'aux environs de 1900, comme il avait rencontré G. Sorel à la Bibliothèque Nationale, et lui avait confié qu'il préparait une étude sur le Socialisme, Sorel lui répondait: "Vous perdez votre temps, le socialisme est fini." (G. Piron, Op. Cit., p. 25)

liberation of the working classes from the hands of both the socialist leaders and of the politicians. To his great satisfaction and joy he found that in England a working class movement (trade unionisme) of the type he was thinking of, a labour movement free from the ceaseless intrusion of the politicians, was gradually taking shape and it was, therefore, to this new labour movement that he now turned in the hope of finding in it the means whereby his ideal could find some sort of realisation. The reading of M.P. de Mousiers' work on the British trade-union movement had convinced him that the key to the success of socialism was not the adoption of revolutionary measures but a whole-hearted cooperation with the other classes of society. He recommended social legislation and social cooperation as indispensable factors for the emancipation of the working classes. In an article published in "L'Humanité Nouvelle", in 1898, Sorel concludes his studies on British trade unionism with these significant words, which clearly indicate that he had become a follower of the evolutionary syndicalist school: "All the future of socialism", he said "is to be found in the autonomous development of the workers' syndicats."¹

Sorel's ideas, however, were all the time changing with every new change in his daily experience with the working class movement. Thus far, he had come only under the influence of British syndicalism, which was essentially evolutionary and reformist. But when he came in touch with the French Syndica-

~~Footnote: Sorel's work on the British trade union movement~~XXXXXXXXXXXX

1. G. Sorel, Matériaux d'une théorie du Proletariat, p. 133

list movement he soon modified his conceptions and was converted to revolutionary syndicalism. The latter was at that time developing in France through the pioneering efforts of F. Pelloutier who was also the head of the "Fédération des Bourses du Travail" founded in 1892.¹ This organisation was making steady progress and in this way was bound up to draw the attention of Sorel who soon became interested in it. With a passionate zeal he started to develop and expand the ideas of Pelloutier, and on this basis formulate a syndicalist philosophy in harmony with the aspirations and the psychology of the working classes. Sorel was thus convinced that the "Syndicat" alone could provide the workers with all the weapons necessary for the overthrow of the present regime and become in its turn the unit of the syndicalist society of the future.

From that time on Sorel devoted all his time to the formulation of the syndicalist philosophy. In his numerous articles published in the "Mouvement Socialiste", in 1906, and later on collected and reprinted in the form of a book entitled "Les Réflexions sur la Violence", he had made an attempt to lay down the foundations of that syndicalist philosophy of which he was soon to become the outstanding exponent.²

1. Confer F. Pelloutier, Histoire des Bourses du Travail.

2. "Les 'Réflexions sur la Violence' avaient conquis au nom de Sorel une soudaine célébrité qui alla jusqu'à cet article du 'Matin', illustré s'il vous plaît d'un portrait de l'auteur, ce qui en fut, certes, le signe le plus sensible, le plus gros, sinon le plus certain et le plus éle ve. Et, chose curieuse, le monde conservateur, ou du moins, ce qui pouvait simuler un restant de monde conservateur, par exemple, M. Paul Bourget et les gens de L' "Action Française", avaient accueilli le livre avec une faveur marquée." (Ed. Berth, Op.Cit. pp. 40-41

The "Nouvelle Ecole Syndicaliste", which he founded at that time with the collaboration of H. Lagardelle and Ed. Berth, made rapid progress and succeeded for a number of years in coordinating the efforts of the workers. But such a happy cooperation ^{between} the "Nouvelle Ecole" and the industrial labourers could not last very long, since it was not based on a solid foundation. The theories elaborated by these syndicalist philosophers were too subtle and too idealistic for the materially-minded working classes. They were unable to grasp the meaning of Sorel's theories and could not appreciate them in a way that would satisfy the theorists of the "Nouvelle Ecole." The workers were interested in the material advantages of the syndicalist revolution. Sorel, on the contrary, was emphasizing the moral effects which the mere idea of this great social cataclysm could have on the life of the workers. It is true that Sorel and his disciples had taken their inspiration from the actual life of the labourers in the syndicat and that their theories were, therefore, essentially pragmatic in their origins. But the philosophy they tried to formulate, though empirical in its sources, tended to become so abstruse and so speculative that it came to lose its practical significance. No wonder then if the workers showed little interest in the writings of these syndicalist philosophers, so that when Sorel's "Réflexions sur la Violence" appeared it was received coldly by the working classes.¹

1. "M. Philippe Serre a déclaré tenir d'un des membres les plus représentatifs de la C.G.T.' que, dans ce milieu, on ne trouverait pas une demi-douzaine de militants ouvriers ayant lu les "Réflexions sur la Violence." (G. Pirou, Op. Cit., p. 37)

Sorel's influence on the labouring classes was, thus, on the decline. A breach was inevitable which finally took place in 1910. Sorel himself had lost his faith in syndicalism and the center of his interest had shifted from that sphere to another one, in which he could spend his energies in a more fruitful way.¹

This new field of activity was very different, to that in which he had been hitherto working. From the syndicalist camp Sorel was, indeed, drifting towards that of the "Action Française" The philosopher of the "anti-étatisme" and the expounder of the philosophy of violence was now taking side with those whose chief interest was to strengthen the foundations of the state and destroy all those elements that tend to undermine the monarchical regime to be established in France. Sorel's attitude, therefore, at least in its outward effects, involved a fundamental contradiction. But as G. Pirou remarks, Sorel was, in reality, quite logical with himself, since what he was striving after was not the liberation of one class but that of society in general. His aim being ethical he was interested in any movement, irrespective of its principles and doctrines, which could achieve this end.²

1. "Je me sens trop vieux pour attendre des espoirs lointains et j'ai résolu d'employer les années dont je puis encore disposer à approfondir d'autres questions qui intéressent vivement la jeunesse française." (G. Sorel, quoted by G. Pirou, Op. cit., p. 40)

2. "De fait, si nous avons pénétré le sens exact de la pensée de Sorel, dans les années où se précise sa philosophie sociale, et s'il est vrai que le fondement de sa sympathie pour le syndicalisme résidait moins dans le caractère ouvrier du mouvement que dans son caractère intransigeant, il n'y avait aucune impossibilité à ce que cette sympathie s'étendit ou se transportât du prolétariat à une autre classe, s'il apparaissait que cette autre classe était autant ou mieux que la classe ouvrière, animée de l'ardeur belliqueuse et de la fermeté sur lesquelles Sorel fondait ses espérances de réno-

As early as 1904-1905 G. Valois had made an attempt to reconcile the syndicalist theories of G. Sorel with those of the "Action Française" and thus give a new life to the nationalist movement in France. He had become convinced that such an alliance between the syndicalists and the nationalists was quite practicable. Many ideas of Sorel, and specially his violent criticism of parliamentary democracy, were quite in harmony with those put forth by the leaders of the "Action Française". Could not Sorelism be thus turned into a philosophy of monarchical nationalism? G. Valois thought that it could and, henceforth he directed all his efforts towards such a reconciliation between syndicalism and nationalism. In his book "L'Homme qui Vient" as well as in his article on "The Monarchy and the working class" published in the "Revue Critique des Idées et des Livres" in 1907, he extended to the labourers an invitation to join their hands with the royalists and fight for the common cause. Three years later M. Paul Bourget wrote a play entitled "La Barricade"¹ in which he tried to show how easily the workers can abandon their revolutionary ideas and work harmoniously with the bourgeoisie. All these various attempts towards a "rapprochement" between

vation morale." (G. Pirou, Op. Cit. p. 40-41)

1. " 'La Barricade', "chronique de 1910"...Les "Réflexions sur la Violence" de Sorel avaient paru en 1908; le syndicalisme révolutionnaire avait pris une place très importante dans les préoccupations générales; et Paul Bourget, observateur toujours très attentif des mouvements sociaux, porta sur la scène les idées syndicalistes en prenant comme sujet une grève. "La Barricade" est donc une pièce dite sociale." (Ed. Berth, La Fin d'une Culture. p. 170)

syndicalism and monarchical nationalism met with success. Sorel and specially his faithful disciple Ed. Berth responded to the nationalist call and until the outbreak of the World War they whole-heartedly cooperated with the leaders of the "Action Française". Together with G. Valois and Ch. Maurras he conducted a campaign against the parliamentary system of government, turned into ridicule the democratic ideals prevailing at that time, and championed, though not as explicitly and as strongly as Berth did, the rights of the French Monarchy. He contributed several articles to the royalist paper, the "Action Française" and together with different nationalist leaders, in particular with G. Valois and Jean Variot, he attempted to found a revue by name of "La Cité Française". He failed, however, in his plans. He made a second attempt, and this time he was successful. Another revue, "L'Indépendance" was founded and it had as its regular contributors Emile Baumann, J. and J. Tharaud, J. Variot, G. Sorel and several other writers. In 1913 appeared the "Cahiers du Cercle Proudhon" in which Sorel and Berth published many articles. Ed. Berth had even become so enthusiastic that he proclaimed Maurras and Sorel as the twin champions of European social regeneration and proposed the establishment of the hereditary monarchy in France.

Sorel, however, never went as far as Berth in his alliance with the monarchists. He agreed with Valois and Maurras on the negative aspect of their program but he was never enthusiastic about their positive plan of social and political reconstruction. And as time went on there gradually arose points of friction

between him and the conservative leaders of the "Action Française". Sorel, who was not interested in the reestablishment of the monarchy, whose sympathies for the workers were still profound, found it increasingly difficult to cooperate with a movement whose main objective was the restoration of the "Ancien Régime" and which regarded the working classes as mere tools for the realization of this end.

The Great War of 1914 brought to Sorel a combined feeling of satisfaction and disgust. He was, on the one hand, expecting that out of this great conflagration a new moral power might appear which would liberate the working classes from the yoke of the bourgeois politicians. His expectations, however, turned to be mere illusions. The victory of the "Entente" appeared to him as the final triumph of his "Bête Noire" democracy. In the defeat of Germany he saw the eventual triumph of bourgeois parliamentarianism with its logical accompaniment the bourgeois ideology.¹

Sorel's disappointment was, thus, immense and had it not been for the Russian Revolution of 1917, which opened before him a new horizon, he would have remained completely discouraged. The overthrow of the Tsarist regime and the advent of the Bolsheviks in Russia renewed his hopes for the future of civilisation, fortified his vigour and gave him the courage to take once more his pen and express his views on the future of the Bolshevik movement.

1. "On sait que Sorel.....a jugé la 'grande guerre' de la manière la plus pessimiste et qu'il n'en a nullement espéré un redressement du capitalisme; il n'a vu en elle qu'un phénomène essentiellement dème-ploutocratique, capable seulement de porter à leur maximum de démence et de nocivité les utopies humanitaires et de plonger le monde dans une prostration morale inouïe." (Ed. Berth , Les Méfaits des Intellectuels

Sorel, by that time, had become very old. His health had deteriorated, and after few days illness he passed away on August 30th. 1922, at the age of seventy-five.

Such was in brief the life of G. Sorel, a life of continual agitation and of perpetual moral suffering. It would seem difficult to find any unity of thought and action in the life of a man, who after becoming a sincere believer in Jauresian Socialism, drifted gradually to the Revolutionary Syndicalist movement only to leave it a few years later and join the leaders of the "Action Française" and turn towards the end of his life into an enthusiastic admirer of Lenin and Mussolini.

These many contradictions in Sorel's life, however, are only apparent and superficial. For a deeper study of the man, and a more thorough appreciation of his writings will reveal that all through these various phases of his intellectual evolution there was a constant aim after which he ^{was} striving. And this goal, was the creation within men's minds and hearts of a sense of heroism and of moral courage, and of an ethical idealism based on a realistic view of life. Ethics, therefore, is the common thread of Sorel's ideas. It is the unifying principle of his life and the cornerstone of his social and political philosophy.

But besides this unity of thought there is still a deeper unity in Sorel's life and writings, namely that of his character.¹

1. "Peut-être n'est-il pas impossible de trouver dans l'œuvre

If we want to understand thoroughly his ideas and explain his conflicting views, it is of a vital necessity that we should get acquainted with his character. For the latter will give us, perhaps more than anything else, the fundamental reason of his changing conceptions and moods.

There is in Sorel a passion for truth, and a sincere desire to get in close touch with the realities of life that is little short of marvelous.¹ All through his tumultuous existence he was a faithful seeker after truth, for whose sake he bore many intellectual torments and sacrificed every other consideration, be it fame or wealth.² If he joined the ranks of the Socialists and became an admirer of Jaurès, if he wrote an apology for Lenin and predicted the future of Mussolini, it is because he thought that all these leaders, despite their conflicting and exclusive opinions, had, nevertheless, enabled the people of their days to come into a deeper touch with the meaning of life, that they had a true vision of the world in which they happened to live, and that, therefore, they had a message to deliver to mankind.

And it is also because of this same enduring quest for certainty that Sorel was forced to discard all his former allegiances,

de Georges Sorel, une unité véritable, sinon de doctrine, au moins de tempérament et de sentiment." (G. Pirou, Op. Cit., p.7)

1. "M. Sorel écrit que ses "Réflexions" ont été 'inspirées par un amour passionné pour la vérité,' parce que 'la passion pour la vérité vaut mieux que les plus savantes méthodologies'" (G. Guy-Grand, La Philosophie Syndicaliste, p. 61)
2. "Chez lui (Sorel), aucune trace de cet odieux esprit de parti, qui rétrécit et rapétisse tout l'horizon intellectuel; aucune courtisanerie--un regard libre, absolument, souverainement libre; aucune passion que la passion de la vérité et de

to sever himself from the Socialists, the Syndicalists and the Nationalists alike, in order to keep himself free from all sorts of intellectual limitations and bondage.

Intellectual freedom, this is, indeed, another outstanding feature of Sorel's mind.¹ It is also the essential, nay the indispensable condition of any successful quest after truth. To keep one's mind free from all sorts of prejudices and protect it from the tyranny of our various social and political leaders who, by the very nature of their position are forced to impose their own interpretation of things on their followers, seems to be vital if the individual wishes to be honest and sincere in his intellectual pursuits.

Though not quite free from such limitations, Sorel had, nevertheless, the desire to be so, and he was able to realise, to a small extent, this ideal all through his intellectual career. Indeed, this constitutes the very secret of his intellectual evolution. If he did not keep very long to any special social movement so that, in this way, his life became a series of transformations,

la grandeur, qu'il saluera avec enthousiasme partout où il la rencontrera, et le souci aigu, perpétuellement inquiet et frémissant, de ne jamais tomber dans le pscittacisme et l'automatisme idéologiques, de conserver toujours avec le réel un contact que ne doivent fausser ni préjugés d'aucune sorte, ni parti-pris, ni routine inconsciente, orgueil de système, ou vanité d'inventeur; et voilà pourquoi il déroute tant de lecteurs, amoureux, de belles architectures intellectuelles bien symétriques."

(Ed. Berth, Guerre des Etats ou Guerre des Classes. pp. 388-389)

1. "Jamais esprit ne fut plus libre que celui de Sorel--même et surtout vis-à-vis de lui-même; et s'il déconcerte, c'est que la vraie liberté spirituelle est chose rarissime et en effet fort déconcertante." (Ed. Berth, Op. Cit., p. 389)

of incessant shifting from one intellectual position to another, it is because he wished to stand above petty dogmas and creeds and keep his mind active and alive. He refused to enslave himself and to follow blindly what his colleagues were bidding him to do.¹

True, he became a Jauresist, a Marxist, a Proudhonist, and a Leninist. But he was never a blind follower of any of these men.²

He twisted their ideas, shaped them according to his own mind, and took out of them what he thought was essential and worth keeping.

His ways of following were, thus, quite peculiar and essentially individualistic. In his book "De L'utilité du Pragmatisme"

commenting on William James' philosophy he writes as follows:

"In this book there will be little enough question of the positions held by William James (les thèses organisées); I shall set myself the task of treating some problems whose importance is universally recognized in the spirit of pragmatism; it is only in rethinking, in a European brain, the philosophy of William James that one can give it the fecundity, the force, and the sureness of application that we exact of every classic doctrine."³

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1. "Il serait difficile de trouver un philosophe dont la pensée se soit aussi peu figée que celle de George Sorel. S'il lui semble tomber dans une sorte d'engrenage spirituel, on le voit aussitôt, d'une main experte et prudente, tâter les pouls à ses idées, pour savoir si en elles la vie palpite, ou s'il n'est pas dupe de quelque fausse analogie mécanique. C'est pourquoi Sorel ne veut pas faire de théories qui prétendent à l'éternité." (M. Ascoli, Op. Cit., p. 43)
 2. "Le vrai disciple s'occupe fort peu des paroles du maître." (G. Sorel, De L'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 31)
 3. G. Sorel, quoted by W.Y. Elliott in "The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics", p. 120

Though apparently a member of a given movement or the disciple of a given school of thought Sorel was, thus, in reality more of a master than a simple follower. He was an individualist and this individualism is an ever recurring note in all his social and political philosophy. It is precisely because of this individualism that he was able to reconcile and harmonize conflicting intellectual currents and take out of them what seemed to him to be in conformity with the needs and requirements of the age.

Sorel's individualism becomes even so extreme that it degenerates into intellectual anarchism. And this intellectual anarchism in its turn leads to a skepticism which produces the same evil results as rigid dogmatism and blind orthodoxy, namely the total incapacity to find and appreciate the value of truth. And Sorel had also become somewhat skeptical during many phases of his career. His skepticism, however, besides being very mild, was mingled with a flame of faith which fortunately prevented his skepticism from weakening his energies, and enabled him to investigate the realities of our social life till the very last days of his existence.

Sorel's eagerness to keep his mind free from all sorts of intellectual servility was bound up to produce in him a deep-rooted opposition to any dogmatic and rigid intellectual system, which would tend to ossify men's ideas and in this way hinder the free development of thought.

The germs of Sorel's anti-intellectualism, therefore, are to be found in his character. It was the inevitable outcome of

his psychological make-up and not the mere adoption of a philosophy that was taking shape at that time.

Sorel was, thus, anti-intellectualist by temperament. It may seem rather strange that a man of his cultural background, who had acquired a vast encyclopedic education, who was at the same time a mathematician, a physicist, an engineer, a philosopher, a theologian and a historian--it would seem strange that a man of such a type could be such a fierce enemy of the "Intellectuals" and even sometimes an unjust critic of intellectualism.

The Sorelian philosophy of anti-intellectualism comprises a twofold attack. It is first a theoretical criticism of the idealistic and the rationalistic philosophy and an analysis of the mental faculties and processes with a special emphasis on the origins of our ideas. It is in the second place an attack on the main representatives of these various idealistic philosophies, such as Socrates, Aristotle, Descartes, Voltaire, Hegel, Renan, Comte, and all the remaining rationalists and positivists who have passed down the rationalistic tradition from one generation to another.

On its constructive side Sorel's anti-intellectualism is an attempt to build up a new system of thought based on pragmatic foundations and having as its two inspirers William James and Henri Bergson.

The chief defect of the idealistic and the rationalistic philosophy, says Sorel, is to be found in its over-simplification of the problem of knowledge and in its optimistic view of human nature.¹ From the time of Socrates down to our present day

1. " 'Intellectuel', selon eux, (les écrivains de la Nouvelle

positivism humanity has been strongly influenced by the principles of that philosophy and has come to think that human nature being essentially good the problem of human organisation and progress can be easily solved provided that some necessary adjustment have been made so~~as~~ to bring our daily life into full harmony with the principles dictated by our reason. Platonism, Peripatetism, Cartesianism, Positivism, all these are but different names through which the same intellectual current expresses itself, since all of them are optimistic and rationalistic philosophies.¹ They all emphasize that man being essentially a "rational animal" all his activities should be subordinated to the rule of reason and that progress consists in the full development of the rational man. Progress, in other words, consists in the extension of the rule of reason and in the disappearance of anything that fails to agree with our rational processes of thinking.

Ecole) est synonyme de rationaliste, de positiviste, de penseur qui a la superstition du "scientifisme", qui croit à la toute-puissance de la raison pour atteindre à la connaissance totale de la nature et de l'homme, et qui ne se rend pas compte des puissances infinies et mystérieuses de l'âme qui échappent à la mesure." (G. Guy-Grand, Op. Cit., p. 16)

1. "Descartes, c'est déjà, avant la lettre et avant le temps, un positiviste, un scientifique, un démocrate de la raison, pour qui le bon sens est chose commune et le progrès chose facile, unilinéaire, s'avancant sans à-coups sur la ligne monotone et plate d'un temps mathématique indéfini. Descartes, c'est donc, incontestablement, le Père du XVIII^e siècle, l'ancêtre des Encyclopédistes; tout le XVIII^e siècle est cartésien dans les moelles."

(Ed. Berth, Les Méfaits des Intellectuels, p. 317-318)

The tremendous development of the physical sciences during the last two centuries made people think that the methods hitherto used in the study of astronomy, of physics, of mathematics, and of biology could be rightly applied in the field of social sciences as it would clarify and simplify the problem of human life and organization. Descartes had made a serious effort towards such an end. The positivists¹, who were very similar to the Cartesians, had even gone further and wished to destroy religion and establish in its place a scientific faith in which all sorts of metaphysical speculations would be banished. They wanted to create a science of human society, or what they called a "sociology", the principles of which would be as rigid and as universal as the laws which govern the physical world. They even used the term "social physics" in order to indicate the scientific character of their social philosophy. "The worshippers of this useless pseudo-science" says Sorel, "did not allow themselves to be stopped by the objection, legitimate in this case, that their methods of calculation were entirely inadequate of their means of determination. Their conception of science, being derived from astronomy, supposes that everything can be expressed by some mathematical law. Evidently there are no laws of this kind in sociology; but man is

1. "Les positivistes, qui représentent, à un degré éminent, la médiocrité, l'orgueil et le pédantisme, avaient décrété que la philosophie devait disparaître devant leur science; mais la philosophie n'est point morte et elle s'est réveillée avec éclat, grâce à Bergson, qui loin de vouloir tout ramener à la science, a revendiqué pour le philosophe le droit de procéder d'une manière tout opposée à celle qu'emploie le savant. On peut dire que la métaphysique a reconquis le terrain perdu en montrant à l'homme l'illusion des prétendues solutions scientifiques et en ramenant l'esprit vers la région mystérieuse que la petite science abhorre."

(G. Sorel, Reflexions sur la Violence, p. 208)

always susceptible to analogies connected with the forms of expression; it was thought that a high degree of perfection had been attained, and that already something had been accomplished for science when starting from a few principles not offensive to common sense, which seem confirmed by a few common experiences-- it had been found possible to present a doctrine in a simple, clear and deductive manner. This so-called science is simply chatter."¹

Abstract rationalism and optimism, these are, indeed, the main shortcomings of the idealistic philosophy, that same philosophy of which Socrates, Aristotle, Descartes and Comte have been the chief exponents. Their system, besides being fallacious, leads to intellectual and moral stagnation. It is morally harmful since it is the very negation of that pessimistic philosophy which is the source of all moral virtues. It is also intellectually inadequate and one-sided. Its fundamental postulate is a deep-rooted belief in the goodness and the perfectibility of human nature together with a blind faith in the power of science in bringing about a better social order. All this, indeed, is a superficial view of the realities of life. Science, reason, progress, all these have their importance in society, but their ~~important~~ role should not be over-emphasized. Scientific investigation and rational thinking are the indispensable factors of social progress and it is only when they tend to go beyond certain necessary limits that they become harmful.² The error of Carte-

1. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, (English translation, by T.E. Hulme), p. 155-156

2. "La vraie science sait se borner et avouer son ignorance; elle

ianism, of Positivism and of the intellectualistic philosophy in general is that they give a one-sided account of the facts of life. They tend to overlook the intuitive and the mystic side of human nature. Religions faith,¹ intuitive and mystic experiences, metaphysical inquiries, all these have their place in our daily life. Their value should not be tested according to the standard set out by scientific and rational knowledge. Since they are spiritual values their method should also be in conformity with the realities of our inner spiritual life.²

And here we find, precisely, the very substance of that pragmatic philosophy which Sorel so often recommends to his Followers.³

ne recherche pas la souplesse des à peu près, mais la rigidité du vrai. La science, de même que le droit, ne comporte pas de souplesse." (G. Sorel, Introduction à L'Economie Moderne, p. 59)

"Les nouveaux critiques de la science ont raison de contester à celle-ci la prétention qu'elle a eue trop souvent d'être réservée comme un Titan portant tout le système de l'esprit."

(G. Sorel, De L'Utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 68)

1. "Il ne semble point que les religions soient sur le point de disparaître. Le Protestantisme libéral meurt parce qu'il a voulu, à tout prix, rabattre la théologie chrétienne sur le plan des expositions parfaitement rationalistes." (G. Sorel, Réflexions sur la Violence, p. 209)
2. "Ce premier examen des trois plus hauts produits de l'esprit (philosophie, religion et art) nous conduit à penser qu'il y a, dans tout ensemble complexe, à distinguer une région claire et une région obscure, et que celle-ci est peut-être la plus importante....." Ibid, p. 211
3. "Aujourd'hui le pragmatisme doit intervenir pour protéger les acquisitions de la science que ne peuvent plus défendre contre l'anarchie intellectualiste les souvenirs inconscients du péripatétisme. Nous n'avons pas à construire un monde nouveau d'idées au moyen des seules ressources de notre raison actuelle, après avoir écarté l'ancien par le doute cartésien; nous avons reçu des doctrines qui ont été éprouvées par l'expérience des siècles; un homme sage ne saurait les abandonner avant que leur fausseté n'ait été démontré par des preuves décisives."
(G. Sorel, De L'Utilité de Pragmatisme, p. 210)

It is an attempt to reconcile rationalism with empiricism, reason with faith, intelligence with intuition. In Kantian terms, its whole emphasis is on the "Primacy of the Practical Reason" as against the Hegelian conception of Pure reason with its logical development into a metaphysical idealism or pan-logism. Its conception of knowledge and of human organisation is essentially pluralistic since it repudiates the monistic philosophy of the idealists who try to reduce everything into unity. It is, thus, far from being a negation of the value of man's rational faculties since it recognizes the legitimate role of reason in the pursuit of knowledge. Nor is it a condemnation of scientific data and methods. It is rather a means whereby science, religion and philosophy can be reconciled and their sphere of action clearly limited so as to prevent any encroachment of each one over the domain of the other. What pragmatism is against is false science and false rationalism.¹ What it condemns is the Cartesian method as applied in the study of social sciences and the Positivism of Aug. Comte which is based on too narrow and exclusive a conception of human reason.

G. Sorel fully agreed with the Pragmatists in their attempt to undermine this false intellectualism. He is, thus, an anti-intellectualist in the pragmatic meaning of the word. His whole philosophy, as we shall point out later on, is essentially pragmatic in its nature. The Sorelian myth philosophy, in particular

1. "L'antirationalisme fondamental de Sorel, comme celui de Bergson d'ailleurs, ne conduit nullement au mépris ni à la méconnaissance de cette raison classique, dont la raison démocratique et cartésienne est au contraire la subversion complète. Il est bien évident que l'on sent, chez Sorel et chez Bergson, un mépris incommensurable pour ce qu'on appelle

is an application of the principles of pragmatism to the field of social psychology. It is also because of their anti-intellectualism and pragmatism that Sorel has such a great admiration for Pascal,¹ Bergson, and Nietzsche. Just as he sees in the "Pensées" of Pascal a source of moral regeneration and uplift so also he salutes in Bergson and in William James the leading creators of the "new metaphysics" which Comte and his followers had vainly attempted to uproot.

Sorel associates the decline of the Greek civilisation with the age of Socrates, and Plato, both of whom, he says, have destroyed the old heroic city and ushered in the era of rationalism and of moral decadence. The "Procès de Socrate" is the trial of the intellectualistic philosophy as expressed through the writings

l'Intelligence, la logique, la Dialectique.....Ce contre quoi Bergson et Sorel ~~visiblement~~ s'élèvent, c'est précisément contre cet emploi de l'Intelligence qui constitue essentiellement l'Idéologie moderne et qui consiste à substituer, dans les questions morales et sociales, à la raison classique, à l'empirisme organisateur, à l'expérience sensible et religieuse, une déesse Raison, une Raison soi-disant créatrice, une Raison mathématique et logique, abstraite et conceptuelle, raide et pédante, qui est une subversion du bon sens et une atteinte à la raison tout court, ce que Molière traduisait en disant du raisonnement qu'il bannissait la raison."

(Ed. Berth, Les Méfaits des Intellectuels, pp. 75-77)

1. "Il ne me paraît point que les admirateurs contemporains de Pascal soient toujours fort heureux dans leur manière de l'interpréter; ainsi Brunetière veut que Pascal ait cherché à abaisser la raison. Il ne faut pas confondre l'emploi scientifique de la raison avec ce qu'on nomme généralement le rationalisme; c'est cette pratique frustratoire que Pascal attaque sans merci, non seulement parce qu'il est chrétien, mais aussi parce que son esprit ne peut admettre l'emploi mal entendu de méthodes imitées des mathématiques. Forment un îlot fort restreint dans l'ensemble des connaissances et qu'on s'expose à une infinité d'erreurs en essayant d'imiter les raisonnements mathématiques dans les études morales."

(G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, pp. 40-41)

of Socrates, of Plato and of Aristotle. "Socrates the non-mystic, the non-artist, Socrates the inspirer of Euripides, the destroyer of the tragedy and the ancestor of Voltaire, and finally Socrates the.....prototype of our Intellectuals",¹ it was he who laid down the foundations of rationalism in Greece and weakened nay destroyed the Homeric cult of heroism. The philosopher Marcus Aurelius was also a real intellectualist of the Socratic type. With the advent of Christianity intellectualism is somewhat on the decline, though the Fathers of the Church try to give it a new life. During the Renaissance intellectualism is once more triumphant. In the 17th. century it is again pushed to the background only to reappear in the 18th. century with the Encyclopedists. To-day, the positivism of Comte is being discredited and a new pragmatist philosophy is developing through the efforts of H. Bergson.²

1. Ed. Berth, Les Méfaits des Intellectuels. pp. 85-86

2. "Le rationalisme socratique, et j'ajouterai, pour lui donner une qualification moderne, cartésien, est fortement battu en brèche: Pascal a vaincu Descartes."
(Ed. Berth, Op. cit. p. 316)

"Il faut venir jusqu'à la propre philosophie de M. Bergson pour trouver la première réaction philosophique nettement caractérisée contre le Platonisme. M. Bergson, en s'attaquant au concept, en ruinant l'intellectualisme, en s'appant l'illusion fondamentale du mathématisme universel, s'est vu traiter de mystique, de réactionnaire, de poète: signe certain que nos Intellectuels, se sont sentis et se sentent menacés dans leur règne par une philosophie qui, redonnant à l'intuition et à l'action la première place, ramène la science à science à des fonctions plus modestes et lui dénie, sur la table des valeurs, le rang de valeur essentielle."

(Ibid, p. 260)

The foundation-stone of this new pragmatism is the belief in the relativity of human thinking and experience, and an emphasis both on intuitive knowledge and on the value of traditions¹ as essential means for the attainment of truth. The "a priori" method of reasoning, of which Descartes was so fond, can no more be used in the study of man and society. "To proceed scientifically" says Sorel, "means, first of all, to know what forces exist in the world, and then to take measures whereby we may utilise them, by reasoning from experience."² Thus science and philosophy should have their roots in experience, otherwise they become mere speculations which do more harm than good.

Moreover, pragmatism does not cherish an optimistic faith in the power of science. This is a bourgeois conception and is fallacious. "For the middle class science is a mill which produces solutions to all the problems we are faced with: science is no longer considered as a perfected means to knowledge, but only as a recipe for procuring certain advantages."³

1. "Pour le pragmatiste, la tradition est un élément de premier ordre dans la connaissance, à la condition que la tradition soit réelle, c'est-à-dire qu'elle soit une suite d'expérimentations faites par des gens compétents.....la tradition doit être entrée depuis longtemps dans des rapports étroits avec la vie d'une glorieuse Cité (savante, esthétique, morale ou religieuse); elle doit avoir été illustrée par des hommes d'un talent supérieur; elle doit avoir été féconde en grands résultats."

(G. Sorel, De L'Utilité du Pragmatisme. p. 185

2. G. Sorel, Reflexions on Violence, p. 166

3. G. Sorel, Op. Cit., pp. 154-155

Not, so with the pragmatist's conception of the function of science. The pragmatists recognize the limitations of science and hence, do not expect from it to solve all their social problems and abolish all the evils which abound in society.

Not only the place of science in our social order should be clearly set up, its methods of investigation should also be transformed.¹ Thus far, scientific research has been confined to a special class of people, the "Intellectuels" who, by their remoteness from the practical aspects of life, were unable to formulate a scientific system in harmony with the social realities of the day. The science of the Intellectuals, like its authors, is too abstract and too speculative.² But in the new order of things scientific investigation and research will be conducted by the workers themselves who, in their daily contact with factory life and work are in good position to make new scientific discoveries.³

1. "La science ne nous apparaît plus, en effet, comme un système définitivement constitué, dont les formules auraient été arrêtées par les experts absolus d'une "Ecclesia docens"; elle jaillit au milieu des agitations d'une "Cité Savante" qui travaille sans relâche à remanier ses constructions en vue de les rendre plus utiles."
(G. Sorel, La Ruine De L'Utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 122)

2. "La science ne gagne point à être reléguée dans les sphères éthérées; elle a besoin, pour vivre et prospérer, de puiser continuellement des principes dans la pratique industrielle toutes les classes doivent collaborer à son progrès."
(G. Sorel, La Ruine du Monde Antique, p. 147)

3. "Il semble que les inventions doivent se produire plus régulièrement qu'auparavant. Les inventions sont comme des créations de la nature, qui paraissent quand les conditions sont favorables, quand les matériaux sont prêts, quand les besoins se sont fait sentir.....Si donc la technique prend ce caractère de développement général, anonyme, inconscient, si ses progrès ressemblent à ceux d'une plante, que devient

To sum up, Sorel's anti-intellectualism involves a condemnation of the rationalistic philosophy as expressed through Socrates, Descartes and Comte and an affirmation of the superiority of pragmatism over the old idealistic system of thought. It is, thus, "a protest against a static idealistic monism that tries to fix the activity of human beings within the confines of some "block universe" conception of a rigid metaphysics. It is essentially a philosophy of revolt against metaphysical monism and the Absolute, against abstractions, against a child-like optimism in the magical power of science.¹

Sorel's anti-intellectualistic attempts brought him in close touch with the mysticism of Pascal, the intuitionism of Bergson and the pragmatism of W. James. But, unfortunately, though a violent and even a harsh critic of intellectualism, Sorel himself was an intellectualist, making use in his writings of the same method which he had condemned. "It is evident from M. Sorel's entire writings" says Elliott, "that he 'thinks too much' ever to be anything but an 'intellectuel' in the labor movement himself."² And G. Guy-Grand in his *La Philosophie Syndicaliste* calls him an "anti-intellectualistic intellectual". In our later study of Sorel's ideas we find that he was, indeed so much an intellectual that few of his followers could grasp the

l'ancienne conception de l'invention divine? C'était pour une société ayant une économie rudimentaire et une mécanique mystérieuse que l'ancienne idéologie avait été constituée; s'il ne reste plus rien de cette vieille économie, de cette technologie préscientifique, que devient donc la doctrine du talent?"

(G. Sorel, Op. Cit. pp. 271-272)

1. W.Y. Elliott, The Pragmatic Revolt in Politics, p. 72

2. Ibid. p. 122

meaning of his ideas and that, as a result, he remained on the whole an obscure thinker.

Sorel's method is an extension of his character.¹ Just as he boldly refuses to follow blindly and submissively any social or intellectual movement so also he has nothing but contempt for the rules of writing and composition which tend to restrict the free expression of thought. He himself acknowledges this fact in a letter to Daniel Halévy, wherein he sets forth the essentials of his philosophy of pessimism. "I have been frequently reproached" he says, "for not respecting the rules of the art of writing to which all our contemporaries submit, and for thus inconveniencing my readers by the disorder of my explanations..... I am neither a professor, a populariser of knowledge, nor a candidate for party leadership. I am a self-taught man exhibiting to other people the notebooks which have served for my own instruction. That is why the rules of the art of writing have never interested me very much."² And again he says: "My own method of work is

1. "Sa (Sorel) volonté de liberté, on la sent dans chacune de ses paroles. C'est l'essence même de son style et de sa méthode de travail. Je dirai même que Sorel se révèle bien plus dans son style que dans les choses qu'il exprime; car on ne peut pas être plus étranger qu'il ne l'est à toute préoccupation stylistique ou littéraire. Cette volonté d'indépendance, qui lui a permis de traverser, en conservant toute son intégrité spirituelle, sans induration comme sans mutilation, toute sa jeunesse et toute sa maturité, il a su la garder dans toutes les manifestations de sa vie de philosophe."
(M. Ascoli, Op. Cit. pp. 42-43)

2. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, pp. 2-3)

entirely opposed to this; for I put before my readers the working of a mental effort which is continually endeavouring to break through the bonds of what has been previously constructed for common use, in order to discover that which is truly personal and individual."¹

Indeed, Sorel's writings lack in composition and method.² If there is anything anti-French in him it is this. And such a defect in his style is not merely due to his individualism but also to the fact that he never had a university training in social sciences. He called himself in fact, a self-taught man, an obviously exaggerated statement but indicating his consciousness of a serious deficiency in non-scientific and non-mathematical studies. Moreover, was not his aim to stimulate the mind rather than inculcate in it some ready-made formulas and creeds? For a propagandist, whose sole aim is to impose upon others a set of doctrines, the problem of composition is, no doubt, of a fundamental necessity. It is a device whereby he can win the attention and the sympathy of his readers. The same is also true of the school-master, whose teaching work demands a constant emphasis on systematized thinking and clear expression.

1. G. Sorel, Op. Cit., p.4

2. "Nulle part Georges Sorel n'a daigné donner un exposé coordonné et synthétique de ses doctrines, pas même dans le plus réussi de ses livres, ces fameuses "Réflexions sur la Violence" qui révélèrent son nom au grand public. Il semble qu'au contraire il ait tenu à ne livrer ses idées que par bribes et sous une forme volontairement dispersée et opaque: Georges Sorel professait cette théorie qu'il importe moins d'apporter au lecteur une vérité limpide que de l'inciter à penser par lui-même. A cet égard, l'obscurité lui paraissait plutôt une qualité, et il notait, non sans ironie, que les auteurs les plus obscurs sont par-

Sorel's main interest is not so much to prozelytize and to instruct as to enable the individual to think independently for himself on the problems of life. Sorel's method, moreover, is a good way to shake the public out of its laziness, this same public, hitherto accustomed to easy readings and ready-made formulae.¹

Given such an aim it seems but logical that Sorel should somewhat neglect the outward appearance of his style, laying all his emphasis upon the strength and the vividness of the idea to be expressed.

fois ceux que l'on croit les plus profonds."

(G. Pirou, Op. Cit., pp. 5-6)

1. "Le public, plus éclairé que studieux, ne déteste rien tant que des travaux capables de déranger sa quiétude habituelle. Il aime à lire et à s'instruire, mais à la condition que cela ne cause pas une grande fatigue; il demande à ses auteurs de lui apporter des distinctions précises, des formules d'une application facile, des exposés d'une clarté au moins apparente; peu lui importe que ces qualités cartésiennes ne se rencontrent que dans des travaux historiques tout à fait superficiels il se contentera de cette superficialité en raison de ces qualités cartésiennes."

(G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, p.1)

CHAPTER II

SOREL: -THE MORALIST:

"Car, enfin, qu'est-ce que l'homme dans la nature? Un néant à l'égard de l'infini, un tout à l'égard du néant, un milieu entre rien et tout. Infiniment éloigné de comprendre les extrêmes, la fin des choses et leur principes sont pour lui invinciblement cachés dans un secret impénétrable, également incapable de voir le néant d'où il est tiré, et l'infini où il est englouti."

(Pascal)

"Hommes de chair, avant que vous prononciez ce nom sacré de famille, laissez-nous passer le charbon ardent sur vos lèvres."

(Proudhon)

In the previous chapter we came to the conclusion that all through the many contradictory changes in Sorel's life and writings there were, nevertheless, two fundamental aims he was striving after, and we carefully emphasized that these two objectives constituted the underlying unity of his thought and action. We have, already, analyzed his character and found in it the real clue to the evolution of his ideas. There is, however, besides this unity of temperament another unity namely that of his thought. To this a slight reference has been made in our account of Sorel's life, wherein it was stated that his likes and dislikes, his sympathies and his antipathies were inspired by his constant ethical preoccupations. To this moral quest we also attributed Sorel's admiration for Proudhon

and Pascal and his condemnation of Socrates and of intellectualistic philosophy as a whole.

Ethics, indeed, is the corner-stone of the Sorelian social and political philosophy.¹ It is also a test whereby Sorel judges and estimates any movement or any social or political system. If the latter helps the individual to develop and improve his moral life then it has a truly social function and hence deserves to be carefully studied and applied. Religious doctrines, political and economic theories, however laudable in themselves, can be of no worth if they do not enable the individual to raise himself morally.

And here is to be found the real key to Sorel's interest in the syndicalist movement. If he abandoned Jauresist Socialism, repudiated the democratic ideals of Bourgeois politicians and thinkers and embraced the Revolutionary Syndicalist cause it was mainly because he thought that the latter was capable of becoming a moral force through which society could be saved from the moral perversity and decadence into which it had fallen.²

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1. "Plus on essaie de pénétrer la pensée de Sorel, plus on se convainc que le moralisme est sans doute le trait le plus caractéristique de son tempérament et de son oeuvre."

G.Pirou, G. Sorel, p.58

"La préoccupation essentielle de Sorel fut toujours une préoccupation d'ordre moral, son but, découvrir et lutter contre toutes les formes de la décadence....."

M. Ascoli, Op. Cit., p. 28.

2. "Au mois de Mai 1899, J'ai publié, dans la "Rivista Italiana di Sociologia", un article sur le marxisme et la science sociale; je le terminais en exprimant le voeu que le socialisme se transformât en une philosophie des moeurs; ce changement aurait infusé de la grandeur à un mouvement qui en manquait alors

Indeed, the whole socialist movement, of which Syndicalism is according to Sorel the one true expression, appears in the eyes of our philosopher as an essentially moral movement. "The 'new school'" he says, "is rapidly differentiating itself from official Socialism in recognizing the necessity of the improvement of morals. It is thus customary for the dignitaries of Parliamentary Socialism to accuse it of anarchical tendencies; for my part, I should not object to acknowledge myself as an anarchist in this respect, since Parliamentary Socialism professes a contempt for morality equalled only by that which the vilest representatives of the stockbroking middle class have for it."¹

Those narrow-minded thinkers who have approached Socialism from a purely scientific or philosophical point of view and who have seen in it nothing but a set of rigid economic principles have all gone astray. They have kept to the non-essential part of the socialist doctrine and have consequently failed to appreciate adequately its true, inward and substantial value. No, socialism is not and cannot be restricted to some ready-made formulae which our social intellectuals are so clever in devising. It transcends all rationalistic limitations and becomes an ethical movement destined to educate the working masses not by means of books but through their daily contact with factory life and organisation.² Therein lies the whole

à peu près au même degré que la démocratie elle-même. C'est seulement quelques années plus tard que j'ai pu esquisser une solution du problème que j'avais posé: les "Réflexions sur la Violence" sont une philosophie morale fondée sur l'observation des faits qui se produisaient dans le syndicalisme révolutionnaire." G.Sorel, Les Illusions de Progrès, p. 335
1. G. Sorel, Reflections ~~sur~~ on Violence, p. 261

significance of socialism. It is not an intellectualistic philosophy. Nor is it a religion if by the latter we mean a set of rigid dogmas and beliefs. It is above all an ethical movement aiming at the moral regeneration and uplift of society. It does not merely seek to improve the material conditions of our existing social order and relieve the toiling masses from the hardships and the sufferings of their life. It goes further and considers such material improvements as mere stepping-stones leading to something higher and more worth struggling for, namely the full development of man's moral potentialities.¹

It is undoubtedly true that technical efficiency and material welfare are indispensable factors of social progress, that without them no social order can be firmly established, but if they are not accompanied by a similar development in the

2. (from previous page) "Le socialisme pour lui (Sorel) n'est pas un système, mais un mouvement de masses; et qui veut envelopper le socialisme dans le filet d'une théorie, n'est qu'un bourgeois qui veut concilier sa propre raison avec l'instinct des masses: il faut avoir, par suite, la défiance la plus extrême vis-à-vis de tous les théoriciens et de tous les intellectuels. En ce sens, le socialisme acquiert un caractère puissamment religieux quand on entend par religion le lien qui fait d'un ensemble d'hommes une masse fondue en une même espérance."

(M. Ascoli, Op.Cit., p. 35)

1. "Sorel a vu que le socialisme pouvait devenir une philosophie des moeurs, c'est-à-dire un mouvement de caractère moral, et lui-même l'a puissamment lancé sur cette voie, avec sa théorie des mythes et de la violence, qui le rapproche des mouvements collectifs religieux du passé."

(M. Ascoli, Op. Cit. p. 44)

realm of ethics they are of no use to society and cannot last for any appreciable length of time. To lay emphasis on technical proficiency alone is like building a beautiful mansion on foundations of sand. The working classes whose mission is to build a new civilisation should, therefore, be careful lest they miss this essential point namely that moral progress should always keep pace with material and technical improvements, that ethical values should be cultivated with the same eagerness as technical efficiency. Otherwise, the entire social structure will crumble down and the ways will then be wide open to barbarism and social anarchy. No, there is something higher than technical proficiency, something more vital even than a love of labour in the labour movement, namely an exalted moral system capable of bringing a thorough-going change in the consciousness of the workers and thereby enabling them to raise the new social edifice destined to save mankind from moral stagnation and social retrogression. The so-called "morals" of the bourgeoisie, nourished as they are on the exploitation and commercialism which permeates the existing economic and political system should give way to a new system of ethics arising out of the actual life of the workers in the factory and having nothing but contempt for middle-class pacifism and solidarism. It is not through peace that society can improve its morals but through violence, not through the *cult* of social cooperation but by a deep-rooted faith in the proletarian "General Strike" which, though a social myth can, nevertheless, absorb all the energies of the working masses and create within them a new consciousness of right, of

dignity and of respect towards such institutions as the family and the class.

The heroic and the sublime, these are, indeed, the two outstanding moral attributes without which nothing really great has been achieved in this world and which the people of our present generation badly lack.¹ There can be no hope for the future of civilisation if men persist in their traditional ways of looking at life, if they continue to shape their conduct according to the principles dictated to them by various intellectualistic philosophies. As to the intellectuals, wherever they appeared, they brought the germs of moral decadence and stifled the heroic aspirations of the people.

Sorel, is thus, essentially a moralist and his entire philosophy is based on ethical foundations. But what is the nature of Sorel's ethical system? Of what elements is it composed? What are its ingredients? What does it aim at? To these questions we have now to give a fuller answer.

The Sorelian system of ethics, like the Sorelian philosophy of anti-intellectualism, is both a destructive

1. "Pour lutter contre la dégradation des mœurs, qui impressionnait si péniblement Renan, M. Sorel veut un 'enthousiasme' capable de susciter l'héroïsme et de faire naître le {sublime'."

M. Jubineau; L'Idée de Fédéralisme Economique dans le Socialisme Français.p. 97

criticism and a constructive philosophy of life. Viewed from the purely negative aspect it involves a repudiation of optimism as expressed through the writings of the early Greek philosophers like Socrates and Plato and later on expanded by the XVIIIth century Encyclopedists. On its positive side it is an affirmation of the ethical value of pessimism, of the Christian philosophy of pessimism in particular, the best expounders of which are Calvin and Pascal.

If Sorel questions the validity of Greek philosophy it is because the latter cherishes too optimistic a faith in the essential goodness and perfectibility of man and of the universe in which he lives.¹ It is precisely because of its optimism, he says, that Greek philosophy failed to produce high moral results, that it killed the old heroic spirit that animated the Greek warriors of the time^{of} Leonidas and of Themistocles and that it ushered in the era of moral decadence from the effects of which our modern civilisation is still suffering.²

And in what did this Greek optimism consist? Greek philosophy, or more exactly Greek metaphysics, is fundamentally teleological and finalist. Its essential postulate is that all human creatures and all natural phenomena contribute to the realisation of a harmonious, logical and well coordinated rational

1. P. Lasserre, G. Sorel, Théoricien de l'Imperialisme, Ses Idées, Son Action. p. 60.

2. "J'ai eu, il y a longtemps déjà, le sentiment que si la philosophie grecque n'a pas produit de grands résultats moraux, c'est qu'elle était généralement fort optimiste. Socrate l'était même parfois à un degré insupportable."
G. Sorel, Réflexions sur la Violence, p. 13

~~world~~ world the component elements of which, despite their diversity and their relative imperfection, tend to produce the highest beauty and the most perfect order man is capable of thinking about. True, it admits that there is in human society much evil doing, that human beings are by their very nature limited and imperfect and that destitution, misery and wretchedness are not exceptions but the common lot of large sections of the people. Nor does it deny that the solution of all these ills that afflict mankind is a gigantic task that no social reformer has yet been able to offer. It simply observes that all these social and individual imperfections can be viewed from two separate angles; from a purely human angle and from a universal angle.

From a strictly individualistic point of view such human imperfections are no doubt appalling, though inevitable, since they are the necessary outcome of man's inherent nature. Men, like all other creatures, are subject to the law of disintegration and of decomposition. Hence, their manifold defects, their miseries and their torments of all sorts. Such a view, however, loses all its significance when we look at the totality of the universe, when we widen our horizon and cease to look merely at ourselves. If people learn to consider the universal aspect of things they find nothing save beauty and order. Instead of evil they will find goodness; for evil is essentially negative and exists only when we restrict our view to matters that pertain to the domain of mortals.

The universe, therefore, is not a hell. It is not a chaotic but an orderly world. It is from this angle that

every thoughtful individual should look at it and not from a particularistic and an atomistic viewpoint. For the universal aspect of things is also the true one, the one in conformity with the rational laws that govern the universe. Man, whose very intellectual make-up forces him to search after truth should choose this method of outlook and thus break away from all the individualistic and selfish limitations that tend to restrict his breadth of view. Being a rational animal he should always try to bring his views into full conformity with rational principles and methods. For therein lies the key to real understanding and wisdom.

This metaphysical conception of man and of the universe stands at the very basis of the Socratic, the Platonic and the Aristotelian philosophies. It is essentially optimistic, since it oversimplifies the problem of evil which is the kernel of pessimism. Moreover, it disregards the vast range of man's social problems and overlooks the many defects that abound in human society. It attempts to justify the evils of the time by means of some abstract philosophy. Such a metaphysics, says Sorel, has no message for our present-day world. Besides being abstract and unreal it is the very negation of good ethics. It gives to those who accept it the illusion that they are living in a perfectly rational world and that hence they should not give themselves the trouble to bring about any social reform. Since the world, viewed in its totality, is orderly and in conformity with the divine spirit that animates it, why should the individuals be anxious to improve themselves? Are they not a part of that great "cosmos" which presents such a happy combination of various elements that have been brought into a universal harmony? Let them

only detach themselves from petty individualistic limitations and vibrate into full unison with the other parts of the universe. Then and only then can they appreciate the full meaning of life.

This abstract metaphysics, says Sorel, is optimistic and contains the very germ of moral decadence. Instead of inciting the individual to reform his nature it stifles all his constructive energies. For optimism creates with him a psychological make-up which makes him believe that he has to live in peace and comfort, untroubled by the suffering that threaten his well-being and that of his fellow-men. Optimism, indeed, is the negation of moral struggle, of the fight against the limitations of the self. This is why it cannot become a really constructive moral force. For the latter demands a decisive attempt on the part of the individual to overcome the defects of his nature, to cure the many ills that afflict his soul and mind, and to control the conflicting passions with which he is assailed. Optimism leads to moral atrophy since it does not help man to refresh his moral energies through a constant moral struggle. Its watchword is peace and this peace is the secret of its intellectual inadequacy and of its ethical unproductiveness.

Not only is optimism anti-moral because it lacks the power to inspire people with the sense of the heroic and of the sublime, but also because it is too much of an intellectual phenomenon and is too rational in its principles and methods. Optimism, indeed, is a product of reason and as such it is limited both in its scope and in its inherent moral force.¹ Just as human reasoning

1. "Pour que l'homme fasse abstraction des tendances contre

is incapable of stirring our feelings and emotions so also optimism due to its rational foundations cannot create within us the necessary sentiments without which no ethical system can exist. For the domain of ethics, says Sorel, is quite opposite to that of rational thinking. Morals rather pertain to the field of human sentiment since their seeds are deeply rooted in our emotional life. A rational ethics is a mere contradiction in words. No ethical philosophy can be effective if it draws its inspiration from reason. Religion which has been, hitherto one of the greatest moral forces in the world has always had its origins in man's emotional life and its appeals have always been directed to men's feelings and emotions, rather than to their mind. And those narrow-minded philosophers who have attempted to define it in terms of reason and have taken out of it what is in reality its essence namely its mysticism have failed to realize that without the latter it could have no meaning whatever. The scientific religion of an Auguste Comte, like the deism of Voltaire, is meaningless. Ethics, though not identical with religious faith, has at least in common with it an equal contempt for rational processes and methods and a similar emphasis on the value and role of sentiment in bringing about a thorough change in man's inner life.

The philosophy of optimism whenever it had the chance to prevail, did not only fail to establish a new system of ethics, it even served to uproot all the existing social, political and religious institu-

s'élève la morale, il faut qu'il existe chez lui quelque ressort puissant, que la conviction domine toute la conscience et agisse avant que les calculs de la réflexion aient eu le temps de se présenter à l'esprit."

(G. Sorel, Op.Cit., pp. 316-317)

tions of society. It thus destroyed instead of building. By undermining traditional convictions and beliefs and by introducing rational ways of thinking in all domains of activity, even in those where reason is impotent to act, it led to skepticism and to a cynical attitude towards life as a whole.

Cynicism, says Sorel, is the inevitable result of rationalistic optimism. It is in ^{the} Greece of Socrates and in the France of the Encyclopedists that we find it most flourishing. In both cases it was the product of the increasing development of that rationalistic and optimistic philosophy diligently and cleverly formulated by the so-called thinkers of the time. In the same way in which Socrates turned into ridicule the old Greek Mythology, railed at the age-long cherished beliefs of the people in their Gods and thus engendered a skeptical attitude of mind so also the eighteenth century Encyclopedists, like Voltaire and Diderot, by their ceaseless attacks upon the foundations of Christian ethics and by their child-like optimism in an abstract Reason capable of realising the "summum bonum" of life, undermined the whole Christian philosophy of pessimism which could alone save the society of the day from falling into the abyss of moral perversity and of intellectual stagnation.

With Socrates the heroic age of Greece, that which gave birth to Sophocles and Eschylus, was ended and a new era that of rationalism and of optimism was ushered in. Sophocles, it was he who brought in the Greek tragedy the pessimistic conception of life and showed the impotence of man when confronted by the power of the Gods. Greek drama is thus the antithesis of Greek philosophy. While the latter is essentially optimistic, the former is pessimistic to the very

core.¹ And this conflict between the tragic or the pessimistic conception of life and the optimistic is to be found "mutatis mutandis" all through the course of history. We find it particularly in the case of France. Seventeenth century French drama was essentially tragic. Its main keynote was pessimism. Racine, its outstanding representative, had a gloomy conception of human nature as being weak and incapable of overcoming its fiery passions. Towards the end of the century, however, and all through the next one the tragic conception of life was on the decline. Pessimism was defeated by the new cult of optimism. It was the age of d'Alembert, of Diderot and of Holbach. Traditional religion, traditional ethics, mystic faith and intuitive knowledge were all discredited and were even turned into ridicule. Reason, progress, optimism became the idols of the day before which people had to bow in the full expectation of seeing their long-awaited hopes realised. All this resulted in moral stagnation, in destructive individualism and in a cynical attitude towards the past. Optimism and rationalism had, thus, stifled the spirit of true ethical idealism.² For the latter,

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1. "Que la tragédie grecque fût d'inspiration pessimiste, c'est une thèse développée par Nietzsche dans un livre brillant et trouble que semble avoir lu Sorel. Il n'y a pas là une découverte. Les drames d'Eschyle et de Sophocle sont pessimistes pour autant qu'ils sont religieux. Ils nous montrent l'homme accablé sous l'hostilité des puissances célestes, ou infernales et tantôt pliant sous leurs coups, tantôt les bravant, tantôt essayant de les détourner par quelque moyen de conciliation avec ces terribles maîtresses de son destin"
P. Lasserre, Op. Cit., pp. 97-98
 2. "La philosophie du 18^e siècle a exercé sur les objets des passions.. la plus railleuse et corrosive critique. Elle a appliqué la même critique aux institutions morales, Sociales et religieuses qui règlent la vie publique et privée. Par là, selon Sorel, elle a tué la tragédie, ainsi que l'avaient, dans l'antiquité, tuée les sophistes, Socrate en tête. L'existence de la tragédie

if genuine and realistic, stimulates the individual morally, feeds his thoughts and incites him to overcome his weaknesses and thus becomes a constructive moral force.

What the Socratic philosophy did to decadent Greece the eighteenth century philosophy did to decadent France. XVIIIth century ethics was too rationalistic and hence lacked the driving force which is the strength of the Christian philosophy of pessimism. For what can be the use of an ethics which instead of stimulating man to struggle with himself makes him believe that his nature is essentially good and perfect and that, whatever may happen to it, it will safely guide him to the maximum of happiness and progress.¹

And yet, this same optimism because of its over-simplification of human nature and of its naive faith in progress leads sometimes to the most fantastical and absurd revolutionary doctrines. "The optimist in politics" says Sorel, "is an inconstant and even dangerous man, because he takes no account of the great difficulties presented by his projects; these projects seem to him to possess a force of their own, which tends to bring about their realisation all the more easily as they are, in his opinion, destined to produce the happiest results. He frequently thinks that small reforms in the political constitution, and, above all, in the personnel of the government, will be sufficient to direct social development in such a way as to mitigate those evils of the contemporary world which

implique de fortes moeurs. La philosophie du 18^e siècle s'est attaquée aux idées qui soutenaient la force des moeurs."
P. Lasserre, Op.Cit. pp. 114-115.

1. "Selon Sorel, et c'est en cela que consiste son pessimisme, il n'y a point d'arrêt à prévoir, il n'y en a surtout point à désirer. L'arrêt, c'est le croupissement, c'est la corruption et la dégénérescence. L'humanité ne se maintient digne d'elle-même que par la préservation du feu intérieur qui l'anime

seem so harsh to the sensitive mind....The optimist passes with remarkable facility from revolutionary anger to the most ridiculous social pacifism."¹

If optimism, therefore, cannot help us to get out of this great moral crisis that so badly shakes the foundation of our present-day civilisation what force can then save it from falling a prey to the forces of barbarism? The world has, for many long centuries, abandoned the cult of heroism and of the sublime. Its heroes have disappeared. Its moral strength has been sapped. Through the rationalism of Descartes, the positivism of Aug. Comte and the "scientisme" of Renan it has lost its faith in heroic actions and deeds. It lacks vitality, faith and hope. The only way in which it can recover morally is thru the adoption of a new philosophy of life, namely that of pessimism.

For pessimism is not, as it is commonly believed, a negative and a static philosophy leading to passivity and inaction. "So little are we prepared to understand pessimism" says Sorel "that we generally employ the word quite incorrectly: we call pessimists people who are in reality only disillusioned optimists. When we meet a man who, having been unfortunate in his enterprizes, deceived in his most legitimate ambitions, humiliated in his affections, expresses his griefs in the form of a violent revolt against the duplicity of his associates, the stupidity of society, or the blindness of destiny, we are disposed to look upon him as a pessimist; whereas we ought nearly always to regard him as a disheartened optimist who has not had the courage to start afresh, and who is unable to understand

éternellement à de nouvelles rénovations, à de nouvelles croisades."

(P. Lasserre. Op.Cit. p. 218

Reflections on Violence. c.9

why so many misfortunes have befallen him, contrary to what he supposes to be the general law governing the production of happiness."¹

No, Sorelian pessimism is something more constructive and more real to life than the nihilistic conceptions of the Romantics who, instead of finding in their pessimism a source of moral regeneration and uplift, make of it the very instrument of moral and spiritual atrophy.² It is this same pessimistic philosophy which has proved to be such an essential factor of civilisation and progress during by-gone ages. Nothing really genuine has been achieved without it. No movement, no doctrine and no institution whatever, did ever endure which did not give it the place that is its due.

"Pessimism" says Sorel "is quite a different thing from the caricatures of it which are usually presented to us; it is a philosophy of conduct rather than a theory of the world; it considers the march towards deliverance as narrowly conditioned, on the one ~~see~~ hand, by the experimental knowledge that we have acquired from the obstacles which oppose themselves to the satisfaction of our imaginations (or, if we like, by the feeling of social determinism), and, on the other, by a profound conviction of our natural weakness. These two aspects of pessimism should never be separated, although, as a rule, scarcely any attention is paid to their close connection."³

There are, thus, two basic elements in pessimism as viewed by Sorel. There is an element of pessimism proper and an optimistic element. On the one hand, man becomes conscious of his outward and

1. G. Sorel, Op.Cit., pp. 8-9

2. "Les romantiques sont des faibles, à qui le rude talon de fer de la bourgeoisie commerciale conquérante ne peut arracher que des plaintes, des lamentations et des jérémiades: d'où le caractère en partie factice, et même un peu hypocrite,

inward limitations, and realizes that besides being inherently weak there stand in his way all sorts of obstacles that hinder his free onward march. And on the other hand, he finds out that despite the tremendous difficulties which he has to face, there is in him some element of strength which, if properly used, can enable him to overcome, to a certain extent, his weaknesses and his shortcomings. Skepticism and faith, disillusionment and hope, these are, indeed, the elements which enter into the composition of any genuine pessimistic philosophy. It is, thus, not the negation of optimism but its reconciliation with pessimism. It can even be called an optimistic pessimism since it combines the element of hope with that of doubt. With one eye it looks at the gloomy side of our nature, at its miseries and its wretchedness and with the other it discovers manifold opportunities for man's moral freedom and uplift. As Pascal¹ says, there is in man a beast and an angel and Sorel would add it is the latter which should take the upper hand and crush as far as it seems possible the former.

Sorelian pessimism, therefore, cannot agree with the Romantic pessimism which lacks the element of hope and of faith. To the

du pessimisme romantique."

Ed. Berth, "La Fin d'une Culture", pp. 116-117

3. (From previous page) G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, p. 10

1. "Pascal a exprimé, avec une force et une éloquence extraordinaires, ce qui, par delà tous les dogmatismes, fait l'essence de la religion: l'inquiétude de l'infini et le caractère tragique du problème du mal, ces deux sources de perpétuel rajeunissement pour le christianisme éternel."

Ed. Berth, La Fin d'une Culture, p. 94

Romantics human nature is bad and corrupt and human creatures, therefore, have no way of liberating themselves from the yoke of destiny, The only thing they can do is to be resigned to their pitiful condition and to show a submissive attitude. Man is a slave of his passions and a slave of his environment. There is no hope for his future liberation. This idea has been clearly expressed by a great French poet, Alfred de Vigny, in the following verses:

"Gémir, prier, pleurer sont également lâches.
Fais énergiquement ta longue et lourde tâche.
Dans la voie où le sort a voulu t'appeler,
Puis après, comme moi, souffre et meurs sans parler."

Of all the various forms of pessimism, says Sorel, the Christian type is perhaps the most genuine and the most productive.¹ "In primitive Christianity" he remarks "we find a fully developed and completely armed pessimism: man is condemned to slavery from his birth. Satan is the prince of the world--the Christian, already regenerate by baptism, can render himself capable of obtaining the resurrection of the body by means of the Eucharist; he awaits the glorious second coming of Christ, who will destroy the rule of Satan and call his comrades in the fight to the heavenly Jerusalem. The Christian life of that time was dominated by the necessity of membership in the holy army which was constantly exposed to the ambushes set by the accomplices of Satan; this conception produced many heroic acts, engendered a courageous propaganda, and was the cause of considerable moral progress."²

1. P. Laszzerre, Op. cit. p. 80

2. G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence" p. 13

This early Christian philosophy of pessimism, however, has through the hands of the Church suffered a profound modification. As time went on the Fathers of the Church made an attempt to give it a rational basis. The reconciliation between the Christian teachings and Greek philosophy, which had already begun during the third and the fourth century through the efforts of such men like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and which culminated in the great philosophical and religious synthesis operated by St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, served to take away from the Christian ethics of the primitive Church its severity and rigour. Through compromise with various religious and political doctrines it came gradually to lose its rigidity and its specifically Christian character. The Church, indeed, was conquered by rationalism and in this way ceased to inspire its followers as effectively as it used to do in the early days of its establishment. This tendency towards modernism within the Catholic religion, says Sorel, has always been a sign of moral decadence. But fortunately it has always given birth to an opposite movement, and the whole history of the Church is thus one of continual struggle between the modernist and the conservative tendencies. If the Church produced in the person of Origen, of Aquinas and of Leo XIII its conciliatory men who attempted to reconcile its teachings with the changing ideas of the time it similarly gave birth to such conservative leaders and thinkers like Tertullian, Pascal and Pius IX who, in their eagerness to maintain the purity of the Christian doctrines, refused to make any compromise with ^{the} people of their day,

Of these two antagonistic tendencies Sorel takes side with the

conservative one as it appears to him to be more productive in morals, more capable of creating within the individual the love of the heroic and of the sublime. The modernists and the liberals did harm to the Church by disintegrating its ideology and by destroying its war-like attitude towards the infidels and the heretics. The militant church, this is, indeed, the Christian institution "par excellence". And if there is any hope for the Christian religion to become a permanent moral force it depends largely on the extent this militant Church succeeds in maintaining within the faithful this attitude of scission and of moral violence. "If Catholicism" says Sorel "is in danger at the present time, it is to a great extent owing to the fact that the myth of the Church militant tends to disappear."¹

For it is not theology which can in the last resort save the Church from imminent decadence. One thing only can achieve this end and this ^{is} the ethical progress which this same militant Church can create in the life of its followers.

Contemporary Protestantism inspires nothing but contempt to Sorel for it has abandoned its own principles in order to adopt those of the Renaissance. And the Renaissance, as we know, was the revival of paganism. It was the age of cynicism and of crude optimism. Had it not been for the Reformation, which revived once more the old Christian spirit and gave pessimism its right place, Christian civilisation would have since long perished. "Pessimism, which formed no part of the current of ideas which characterised the Renaissance, has never been so strongly affirmed as it was by the Reformers. The dogmas of sin and predestination which correspond to the two first aspects of pessimism, the wretched-

1. G. Sorel, Op. Cit., p. 23

ness of the human species, and social determinism, were pushed to their most extreme consequences."¹

This has been in the past and should continue to be the function of every true religion. For religion is not an intellectual phenomenon, nor does it consist in a set of rigid dogmas severely imposed upon the masses. It is above all a moral force. It is an attitude towards life based on a deep-rooted feeling that because of his inherent weaknesses man should continually strive to fight against his baser instincts and overcome his passions. Pessimism is, thus, the very core of religion. It is its driving force and the secret of its strength. Pessimism is to religion what optimism is to philosophy and science. Whereas philosophy is fundamentally a rational explanation of man and of the universe religion is on the contrary a mystic way of approach towards the meaning of life. Science and philosophy are thus optimistic. Science, in particular, because of the relative simplicity of its field of investigation, tends to believe that all branches of knowledge can be cultivated with the same easiness, the same precision and the same certainty as the physical and mathematical sciences. No, religion does not cherish such an optimistic faith in the power of human reasoning. It affirms that there is in man an obscure and fathomless region, an incomprehensible self the mysteries of which no thinker, however profound and subtle, can be able to unravel. Hence, religion has a pessimistic conception of man. And it is just because of its pessimism that it distrusts scientific investigation when the latter attempts to interfere in the mysterious realm of human conscience. This is also why it has no much confidence in rational processes and methods and gives to dogmas and creeds a secondary role whereas it puts all its emphasis upon faith and

1. G. Sorel. Op.Cit.. p. 14

mystic experiences. No wonder then, if the exponents of our present-day intellectualistic philosophy fail to grasp the essence of religion and to appreciate its full significance. "Religions" says Sorel, "constitute a very troublesome problem for the intellectualists, for they can neither regard them as being without historical importance nor can they explain them. Renan, for example, has written some very strange sentences on this subject. "Religion is a necessary imposture. Even the most obvious ways of throwing dust in people's eyes cannot be neglected when you are dealing with a race as stupid as the human species, a race created for error, which, when it does admit the truth, never does so for the right reasons. It is necessary then to give it the wrong ones." ¹

The eighteenth century Encyclopedists and the nineteenth century positivists thought that the increasing progress of scientific knowledge would result in the gradual weakening and in the final disappearance of religious faith.² Their expectations, however, were vain. Religion, instead of losing ground has made fresh conquests. "Religions" says Sorel "do not seem to be on the point of disappearing. Liberal Protestantism is dying because it attempted, at all costs, to give a perfectly rationalistic exposition of Christian theology. Auguste Comte manufactured a caricature of Catholicism, in which he had retained only the administrative, hierarchical and disciplinary

1. G. Sorel, Op. Cit. p. 25

2. "Les hommes du XVIII^e siècle se figuraient que le progrès des lumières était si grand qu'il fermerait tout retour vers les idées religieuses; le catholicisme leur paraissait une chose bien morte; l'expérience nous a montré qu'ils s'étaient bien trompés."

G. Sorel, "Ruine du Monde Antique", p. 166

machinery of that Church; his attempt obtained success only with those people who like to laugh at the simplicity of their dupes. In the course of the nineteenth century, Catholicism recovered strength to an extraordinary degree because it would abandon nothing; it even strengthened its mysteries, and, what is very curious, it gains ground in cultivated circles where the rationalism which was formerly in fashion at the University is scoffed at."¹

And now, if we try to give an explanation of this sudden religious renaissance at a time when science and philosophy had reached almost the zenith of their glory we shall find that the fundamental reason of this revival can be attributed to the mythical and the mystical foundations of religion. The Sorelian conception of religion, as we have already pointed out, is that it neither consists in an intellectual adhesion to a set of ready-made dogmas and beliefs nor in the minute observation of religious rites and observances.² Its kernel, we said, is a feeling of pessimism and of a keen realization that man is naturally weak and that he is in need of a strong force capable of inspiring him to overcome the weaknesses of his nature. This inspiring power, says Sorel, religion can provide through the assurance it gives its followers that eternal salvation and blessedness is the reward of every one who wages a successful war against evil and thereby saves his soul from damnation. The second coming of Christ was

1. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, pp. 157-158

2. "Pour les Modernistes avancés la religion se réduit à des rites qu'ils croient nécessaire d'accomplir pour entrer dans le ciel, nous sommes ainsi ramenés aux mystères païens auxquels on se faisait initier pour écarter les terreurs de la vie d'outre-tombe." G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, pp. 327-328

such a sort of promise, Though it was never realized and was, therefore, a mere religious myth, it, nevertheless, created such an enthusiasm within the heart of the early Christians that it enabled them to withstand the opposition of the whole pagan world. It is not only the case of Christianity but that of every genuine religious movement to set before its followers a myth capable of absorbing all their energies. For religion is a myth in the same way that philosophy is a myth with the difference, however, that while religious myth is essentially constructive philosophical myth is destructive. Religion being pessimistic cannot become a revolutionary force aiming at the complete destruction of all man's social heritage. Its revolutionary tendencies are somewhat counteracted by its emphasis upon the value of tradition. Philosophy, however, does not only draw its inspiration from a different source but differs also from religion in its aims and methods. Philosophy as we have said is essentially an intellectual phenomenon and is optimistic to the very core. It is, thus, led to underestimate the value of tradition. Its aim is not to blend the past with the present but to abolish once for all the legacy of the past ages. Its optimistic faith makes it believe that it is all-sufficient and all-wise. Not so with religion. It recognizes its indebtedness to the past and values the role of tradition. It is, thus, essentially constructive, whereas philosophy is destructive. Religion engenders a genuine and a constructive faith, philosophy produces a blind and a destructive fanaticism. Religion is a social force and, hence, is a civilizing power, whereas philosophy is a social nuisance and the bitter enemy of civilization and progress.

The whole emphasis of Sorel, as we see, is on the fundamental contradiction existing between rationalism and intuitionism, between religious pessimism and philosophical optimism, between religious ethics and philosophical ethics. Without having the least desire to deny the truth that underlies the Sorelian system of ethics let us, however, point out that in all this antagonism that Sorel establishes between rational knowledge and religious faith there is evidently a good deal of exaggeration that no fair-minded critic can fail to see.

There have been always two widely different tendencies in the field of religious and philosophical thought, a tendency towards rationalism and idealism and a tendency towards mysticism and anti-intellectualism. All through history these two currents of thought have been in continual conflict and only occasionally we find thinkers of a sufficient breadth of view to be able to reconcile them and take out of each what seems worthwhile to be kept and applied. Such men, however, like Aristotle, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, have been very rare and humanity, therefore, has practically always been under the influence of either one of these two tendencies. To the pre-Socratic period of mythology and of superstition succeeded the age of rational thinking and of rational faith in which the ideas of Socrates, of Plato and of Aristotle flourished. During the first part of the Medieval period philosophy was once more on the decline until it was revived during the eleventh, the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. The writings of Aristotle which had been hitherto translated only into semitic languages and specially into Arabic gradually spread in Europe and challenged the intellectual supremacy of the

Church. The Renaissance was the culmination of the pagan philosophy. It well-nigh threatened to undermine the Christian civilization, and had it not been for the Reformation and the counter-Reformation it would have swept away the whole social and religious fabric of the time. In modern times we find again this conflict between the intellectualistic philosophy which in its present form is a legacy of Cartesianism, and the anti-intellectualistic one the best representatives of which are Bergson and W. James. M. Ed. Berth, in "La Fin d'une Culture" presents a thorough analysis of this age-long conflict and comes to the conclusion that the whole tendency in the intellectual world to-day is towards anti-intellectualism.

That there is some real opposition between religion and philosophy, between optimism and pessimism, between reason and faith, at least in the way they are usually interpreted, there can be but little doubt. How can we possibly reconcile Cartesian rationalism with the mysticism of Pascal, the positivism of Aug. Comte with the intuitionism of Bergson, the "scientisme" of Renan with ^{the} pragmatism of W. James. Reconciliation, no doubt, is possible provided we purge each one of these doctrines from their exaggerations and, thus, alter their original purity. But as they stand it is impossible to make out of them a real synthesis.

Rationalism and mysticism, if taken separately, can never give us a comprehensive view of life. There is no inherent contradiction between reason and faith, between philosophy and religion, between pessimism and optimism. The contradictions are man-made, due to man's incapacity to see the many sides of life. Most of our intellectual systems are fundamentally defective just because they consider only one side of the reality of things and over-exaggerate it to such a

degree as to make it a rigid and an orthodox system of thought. Sorel is no exception to the rule. He is just as one-sided as those writers whom he loathes and condemns, though he often professes to be a fair-minded critic. His religion, and his pessimism as well, are too wild, too extremist. They lack in sobriety and in proportion. And only reason, if rightly applied, can make of them a working conception of life.¹

It is not only in its constructive philosophy that Sorelian ethics shows its inadequacy but also in its destructive criticisms which, beside being mostly unjust, are presented in such a paradoxical way as to make the reader revolt at every turn of page. That Sorel is underestimating the contributions of Socrates to the Hellenic philosophy is beyond any shadow of doubt. Socrates built more than he destroyed. He gave the crude and primitive ethical ideas of the Greeks a rational basis that was essential for its full development into a constructive philosophy. Such a process, no doubt, necessitated a diminution of the old heroic faith in the Gods of the Greek mythology in favor of a rational explanation of the world and of the laws of human conduct. And as is always the case reason hindered the

1. "A première vue, religion et rationalisme se contredisent. Pourtant, un esprit purement rationaliste sans religion nous offense par sa sécheresse, sa dureté, son opacité; un esprit religieux qui supporte mal le joug d'une discipline rationnelle nous rebute par sa faiblesse. A l'un comme à l'autre manque quelque chose et quelque chose d'humain. Il doit donc y avoir, nous devons en tout cas chercher et trouver une certaine manière de concilier en nous-même l'exigence rationaliste et le sentiment religieux."

free development of man's instinctive nature and the full expression of man's love for heroic deeds. The work of reason, therefore, is to subordinate man's instinctive nature to the laws of reason. Sorel was, therefore, not illogical with himself when he condemned Socrates for having stifled the old heroic spirit and replaced it with a cold and static rationalism. But is his emphasis upon the superiority of man's emotions and instincts over human intellect and reason fully justified? To this question we may give an answer according as to whether we belong to this or that school of thought. But one thing is certain and it is that the whole history of civilisation is but an illustration of the fact that progress consists in the gradual extension of the rule of reason over the instinctive and the semi-wild human tendencies.

Sorel's moralism is not a mere abstract philosophy. Besides his theoretical views on religion and on pessimism he has very interesting ideas concerning sexual morality, marriage life and family organisation. He considers syndicalism as a legitimate reaction against the moral perversion of the bourgeois democratic society.¹ For socialism, he says, is essentially a philosophy of life and it is only as such that

1. "Le syndicalisme ayant la prétention de changer l'ordre économique au profit de la masse entière du prolétariat, les écrivains tromperaient impudemment les travailleurs s'ils leur promettaient la vie facile, ils doivent suivre sur ce point très fidèlement ce que leur a enseigné Proudhon."
(G. Sorel, Matériaux, pp. 294-295)

it can hope to achieve all the necessary political, economic and social transformations. "No truth" says Sorel, "is more certain than this, that the world will become more just as far as it will become more chaste."¹ The workers, therefore, cannot hope to transform the economic and political institutions if they do not acquire a moral culture above that of the present order. Sorel loathed any suggestion that might involve any revision of current morality in the direction of easier or freer sex relations. He believed in strict temperance in drink and encouraged working men and women to organize themselves in special unions for their moral emancipation and the maintenance of a high moral standard among themselves.²

Sorel admires Proudhon because of the latter's emphasis on the necessity of ethical progress.³ On the contrary he has nothing but

1. G. Sorel, Op.cit., p. 199

2. "Une morale se juge par la manière dont se pratiquent les relations sexuelles."

G. Sorel, Le Système Historique de Renan, p. 159

3. "La question, pour Proudhon, est toute morale. Il y a progrès quand se produit 'la justification ou le perfectionnement de l'humanité par elle-même'; alors l'humanité croit en liberté et en justice, en développant sa puissance, ses facultés, ses moyens; elle s'élève au-dessus de ce qu'il y a en elle de fatal."

G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, p. 262

contempt for the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists whom he loathes just because of the looseness of their moral teachings.¹ He even reproaches Karl Marx for having laid all his emphasis on economic facts and theories, and for having neglected the moral progress of the proletariat. Karl Marx's materialism and his belief that religious faith would tend to disappear before the increasing development of industry and science inspired Sorel with a sense of indignation.²

The time was fully ripe for a serious reaction against the immorality, the skepticism and the epicureanism of the age. To achieve this end Sorel put all his confidence in the free development of the "syndicats" and especially on the reorganisation of the family. "The mysterious region" he said "is the family, which influences all social relationships."³

The modern conception of family life, says Sorel, is deeply interwoven with our existing ideas relative to marriage. Without a thorough change in our views on matrimony we cannot reform our family relationships and restore the traditional respect that the family has for so long enjoyed. The religious and sacred character

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1. "L'immoralité des saint-simoniens, qui me paraît ressembler à celle des gnostiques, était admise comme un fait incontestable par tous leurs contemporains."
G. Sorel, Matériaux, p. 350
 2. "Marx suppose évidemment que les philosophies de l'esprit et de la nature, telles que les avait conçues Hegel, seraient appelées à se manifester complètement, aux dépens de la religion. Ce sont là des vues de l'esprit, sur lesquelles on peut discuter indéfiniment; on doit cependant observer que la conception marxiste de l'esprit libre a contre elle toutes les inductions que fournit l'histoire."
G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, pp. 346-347
 3. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, p. 160

of marriage, so strongly emphasized by the Catholic Church, is to-day disappearing giving place to conceptions which make of it a mere contract based on economic interests. Gone is the traditional purity of family life. The idea of sacrifice and of devotion that constitutes the very secret of its strength, has been replaced by mere selfish interests. Sorel would like to restore the traditional foundations of the family. He proposes to abolish the system of contract in favor of a system of liberty. But he carefully distinguishes between freedom and licence. While the former aims at the spiritual and moral development of the component parts of the family the latter is merely interested in their physical welfare and happiness.

Marriage^{is}/not merely a way in which the individual can satisfy his sex instinct. It is essentially a spiritual and a moral bond whereby a person can develop and satisfy his highest moral aspirations.

Given such an aim, marriage should lead to an increase in the spirit of cooperation and love between the spouses. Otherwise its suppression would be much more advantageous to both parties. Hence, the necessity of divorce when the married persons can no more agree not because of the mere satisfaction of their lust but because of some psychical and moral considerations. Divorce, therefore, should have its limits. In principle it is not wrong but very useful provided it is not misused and abused.¹

The resemblances between the ethical teachings of Sorel and of Proudhon are very striking. Both of them, indeed, were essen-

1. "La règle de l'indissolubilité du mariage est certainement appelée à disparaître de toutes les législations; mais le divorce peut exister de deux manières bien différentes: soit que le tribunal le prononce en raison d'actes criminels, ou presque criminels qui ruinent la dignité des époux et rendent le maintien de la famille impossible; soit qu'il exprime seulement

tially moralists,¹ and if they joined the ranks of the socialists it was mainly because they thought that socialism was capable of becoming a moral force destined to save society from moral decadence.

"Not only are their statements of historical materialism virtually identical, but so are their whole outlooks on political and economic problems, their preaching of sexual ethics as essential to the real emancipation of the workers, of the sanctity of the family, of the dignity of labour, their belief in the individual conscience, their praise of an abstract war heroism while detesting brute force and the horrors of so-called modern warfare. The one serious divergence would be in their philosophical temperament, Proudhon's rationalism being poles asunder from Sorel's Bergsonian anti-intellectualism."²

la volonté de rompre une union dont on est ennuyé; c'est vers cette seconde forme que s'oriente le divorce dans les pays les plus civilisés, par suite des facilités de plus en plus grandes que les tribunaux accordent aux mariées qui veulent se séparer...."

G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, pp. 301-302

1. "Etre homme, nous élever au-dessus des fatalités d'ici-bas, reproduire en nous l'image divine, comme dit la Bible, réaliser enfin sur la terre, le règne de l'esprit: voilà notre fin. Or, ce n'est ni dans la jeunesse, ni même dans la virilité, ce n'est point dans les grands travaux de la production et les luttes d'affaires que nous pouvons y atteindre; c'est, je vous le répète, à la complète maturité, quand les passions commencent à faire silence, et que l'âme, de plus en plus dégagée, étend ses ailes vers l'infini."
P.J. Proudhon, Lettres, pp. 343-344

2. R.H. Soltau, Op.Cit., p. 462

Besides his rationalism¹ and his anti-religious tendencies,² Proudhon differs from Sorel in that his ethical teachings are much more conservative and much stricter than those of Sorel. Proudhon's "passionate defence of moral purity, pushed to a Puritan extreme to which many a Puritan would refuse to follow him, forms one of the most fascinating chapters in the history of French ethics"³

Whereas Sorel recognizes the necessity of divorce Proudhon cannot even tolerate the idea of such a separation between the spouses. Moreover, Proudhon has a rather low conception of women. According to him the father is the supreme ruler in the family. He is the "pater familias" to whom all the members of the family owe complete obedience. Not so with Sorel. Though he admits the necessity of the division of labour between the husband and the wife he does in no way emphasize the rulership of the father over his wife and his children. He has a much hobler conception of the woman than Proudhon.⁴

"La raison pure est ma divinité."

1. P. J. Proudhon, Op. cit., p. 41
2. "La religion et la Philosophie sont, selon moi, deux états préparatoires de la société, la thèse et l'anti-thèse de l'esprit humain. Réellement elles ne sont rien, formellement elles sont illogiques illégitimes, anormales, partant non permanentes."
Ibid., pp. 63-64
3. R. H. Soltau, Op.Cit. p. 275
4. "Malheur à celui qui, trompé par une amourette, n'a pas rencontré la femme forte qui aurait dû lui révéler sa destinée et lui donner du coeur dans les jours de défaillance!"
G. Sorel, quoted by Perrin, Op.Cit. p. 151

Sorel's ethical philosophy, unlike the former systems of ethics, is deeply rooted in the economic and the material conditions of the working classes. Its basis is essentially economic, and in direct opposition to the transcendental ethics of the Catholic Church. Whereas the latter affirms that the only true source of morals is to be found in the teachings of Christ as revealed, interpreted and enforced by various ecclesiastical bodies, Sorel on the contrary takes side with those thinkers who believe that the individual can find within himself, and in his social environment as well, the necessary forces which can insure his moral progress and welfare. To the transcendental ethics of the revealed religion he opposes the pragmatic ethics which arises out of man's experiences with his daily work.

Not only so. Sorel even believes that if Christianity failed to influence the masses with its moral teachings it is mainly because it did not emphasize the intimate relationship which should exist between religion and production, between ethics and economics. Its conception of human nature was one sided. It considered only the metaphysical and ~~the~~ the idealistic aspect of human nature and neglected the role which man's material life inevitably plays in the formation of his intellectual and religious make-up.

Not so with the syndicalist movement. Its entire philosophy and in particular its ethical principles are essentially pragmatic in their origins. It is through their daily contact with factory work that the working-classes should strive to develop those heroic qualities destined to save them from the pitfalls of moral dissolution and anarchy.¹

1. "Le sentiment juridique est d'autant plus rigide que la vie de l'homme est plus fortement ramassée autour de son travail."
G. Sorel, Introduction à L'Economie Moderne, p. 71

In one of the chapters of his "Reflexions sur la Violence" entitled "La Morale des Producteurs", Sorel develops the thesis that the workers can find in the factory organisation and life all those moral elements that constitute the essence of any sane and constructive ethical philosophy. The workers should not be taught in an abstract way how to behave towards themselves and towards their fellow-men but should come to experience, through their daily association with their co-workers, the nature and the importance of such a moral behaviour. The cathetical method of teaching religion and ethics that prevails in Catholic circles should, therefore, be abandoned and give way to an empirical and a pragmatic one, based on the personal experiences of the individual with his daily work.¹

In the factory, or more precisely, in the "syndicat" of which the factory is a part, the workers acquire those traits of mind and character destined to enable them at once to overthrow the existing regime and to build in its place a new social edifice in harmony with ^{the} changing needs of the time. The daily experiences of the worker with his work create in him a consciousness of individualism, a desire to improve his methods of work and a sincere love of labour that are the essential conditions of a healthy moral life. The worker will come to love his work and will develop a sense of initiative and of responsibility. He becomes conscious

"La conscience juridique populaire a pour base économique un ensemble de conditions mettant l'ouvrier en état de se juger chef d'entreprise
G. Sorel, Op.Cit., p. 95

1. "Au point de vue de la formation éthique du prolétariat, le régime de l'atelier progressif est très important: le travailleur se regard comme étant un mandataire, il fait usage de l'outillage comme s'il en était propriétaire et il se préoccupe d'améliorer l'emploi comme si l'avenir lui appartenait."
G. Sorel, Op. Cit., p. 222

of his potentialities and will strive to develop them so as to strengthen his own personality and to increase both the value and the quantity of the finished goods he produces. Instead of becoming a slave to the machine he becomes its master. He will, thus, cease to be a mechanical worker, performing his tasks with the interest, the devotion and the accuracy of a real artist. In this way the worker becomes a free individual and acquires those heroic features that our present-day social organisation so badly lacks.

That the transcendental system of ethics, if taken alone is unproductive of high moral results, is undesirable. Man should not be turned into a mere recipient, but should be given a chance to experience and to test for himself the moral principles that are presented to him.¹ He is not a mere passive agent but an intellectually free individual whose personality should not be crushed but should be given a full chance to develop and expand. The defects of abstract ethics, therefore, should be compensated by the advantages of a genuine pragmatic ethics.

Thus far Sorel's emphasis is quite legitimate and sound. But the concrete applications of this ethical pragmatism that he makes seem to be too optimistic and far-fetched. The real danger in Sorel is that his faith in the future role of the proletariat leads him to draw conclusions which are not so much the result of a dispassionate observation of facts as the outcome of a fiery imagination and of a keen sensibility.

1. "L'éducation et l'instruction ne déterminent pas la conduite des classes; ce qu'il faut examiner en premier lieu, c'est la vie de ces classes."
G. Sorel, Op. Cit., p. 207

CHAPTER III

SOREL'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

"La continuation de l'oeuvre politique de Marx est beaucoup plus difficile que la continuation de son oeuvre scientifique."

(Benedetto Croce.)

"Le matérialisme de Marx, ce n'est plus le matérialisme sensualiste et statique du XVIII^e siècle, c'est un matérialisme idéaliste, mais d'un idéalisme très concret, tout inséré dans le réel, dans l'action, dans la pratique révolutionnaire."

(Ed. Berth)

Sorel's constant moral considerations led him to the study of history and to a thorough investigation of various historical movements which had signalized the birth of a new civilisation based on the ethical rejuvenation of man and of society. He did not study the past from the standpoint of mere erudition. His aim was essentially practical and moral. His extensive researches in the historical field, and particularly his careful study of the origins of Judaism and of Christianity, made him realize that the methods hitherto in vogue among historians were inadequate to the difficulty of their task, their approach towards history being one-sided and abstract when not wholly mistaken.

To his delight Sorel discovered that Marx had found in the "materialistic conception of history" a clue to a more satisfactory explanation of historical movements and facts. This new method of approach suited his temperament and his essentially scientific

and practical mind much more than the abstruse theories of a Bossuet or of a Hegel. He was, thus, converted to Marxism and adopted Marx's economic interpretation of history.

But, as we have already emphasized, Sorel's discipleship was very peculiar. He was not an uncritical follower of Marx. He had his own interpretation of Marxism and he refused to join either the Revisionist school of Marxist thought led by Bernstein or the orthodox school led by Kautsky.¹ He carefully distinguished between the essential and the non-essential parts of Marx's theories and recommended his followers to keep to the spirit of Marx's theories and teachings and repudiate the literal and the narrow interpretation of the various Marxist schools. "The new school" he said, "does not in the least feel itself bound to admire the illusions, the faults, and the errors of the man who did so much to work out revolutionary ideas; it endeavours to separate what disfigures the work of Marx from what will immortalise his name; its attitude is thus the reverse of that of official Socialists, who admire especially in Marx that which is not Marxian."²

1. "Les idées de Bernstein furent accueillies avec beaucoup de faveur par les gens qui désiraient voir le marxisme échapper à cet immobilisme dans lequel Kautsky prétendait le retenir; en signalant l'incohérence du système, Bernstein montrait la nécessité de chercher de nouveaux équilibres, toujours instables et provisoires, entre les tendances fondamentales du socialisme moderne; ainsi la vie était introduite dans une doctrine jusqu'alors condamnée à la stérilité; mais c'était une décomposition du Marxisme. En France, l'étude des organisations syndicales a conduit à se demander, s'il n'y aurait pas lieu de considérer une décomposition du Marxisme autre que celle que Bernstein a examinée."

G. Sorel, La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 12

2. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, p. 203

There is in Marx's thought, says Sorel, a fundamental dualism and this dualism owes its origin to the existence of two opposite tendencies in Marx's nature. There is Marx the scientist, the determinist, the utopist, the materialist and the reformist versus the idealist, the moralist and the revolutionist. There is the man of thought and of abstraction opposed to the man of action and of passion. There is Marx the economist and Marx the philosopher of the working class revolution. These two antagonistic aspects of Marx's character and ideas we find in continual conflict and it is well-nigh impossible to establish between them a full and an abiding harmony.

If reconciliation between Marx's theories is in the opinion of Sorel an impossibility there is, however, one way he suggests to solve this dilemma. Instead of synthesizing we should analyze and determine the superiority of one part over the other. For through this process of sifting the unessential and weak parts of Marx's teachings will be eliminated, and their essence will be more adequately appreciated and understood.

"There is a real Marxism, what Sorel calls the (Marxism of Marx', a precious legacy bequeathed by Marx, which Revisionists, in their iconoclastic zeal, had quite neglected to preserve. This notable contribution, both to socialistic theory and to human knowledge, is his doctrine of class war, his exposition of the absolute and irremediable hostility between capital and labour. If he was wrong in his notions of value, if he was a false prophet as to the near approach of the day when the expropriators would be expropriated, his theory of class war was a divine inspiration."¹

1. "Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire réalisé, à l'heure actuelle,

It forms the very essence of the "Communist Manifesto", and "Das Kapital" is one long testimony to its existence and its necessity."¹

Sorel admits that there is a good deal of exaggeration in the Marxist conception of social classes and that Marx's description of the increasing separation of society into two antagonistic camps, though very alluring, is nevertheless somewhat unreal. As a historical event, he says, such a process of class division has not yet taken place and most probably will never be realized.² Its value, however, should not be found in its objective reality but in its intrinsic power, as an idea capable of inspiring the workers to noble and heroic deeds. It is a social myth and its truth, therefore, is essentially subjective.

Edward Bernstein and the whole Revisionist School of Marxism failed to grasp this fundamental truth. They were blinded by mere superficial appearances. They attached an undue importance to the abstract analysis of Marx's idea relative to the principle of class

ce qu'il y a de vraiment vrai dans le marxisme, de puissamment original, de supérieur à toutes les formules: à savoir que la lutte de classe est l'alpha et l'oméga du socialisme."

G. Sorel, Matériaux d'une Théorie du Proletariat, p. 67

"La gloire immortelle de Marx reste là, dans le fait d'avoir le premier, nettement, sans ambages et sans réticences, reconnu la mission du prolétariat moderne et discerné l'opposition métaphysique qui le dresse en face de la société bourgeoise."

Ed. Berth, Guerre des Etats ou Guerre des Classes, p. 180

1. J.A. Estey, Op.Cit., p. 53

2. "La conception marxiste semble supposer que la société est formée de deux êtres appartenant à des espèces différentes, qu'elle est un monstre comme en imaginaient les sculpteurs du Moyen-Age."

G. Sorel, Quoted by Perrin, Op. cit., p. 87

"Toutes les classes ne forment pas une masse réactionnaire vis-à-vis de la classe ouvrière."

Ibid, p. 87

struggle. Instead of realizing that, despite its intellectual shortcomings, this theory of class war could be used as a valuable means of creating within the workers a war psychology, an attitude of total uncompromise and of separatism essential for the gradual establishment of a proletarian civilisation, they merely rejected it. Their shortsightedness resulted in their total abandonment of the Marxist revolutionary spirit and their emphasis on the reconciliation between socialism and democracy.¹

Not only the Revisionists but the orthodox marxists as well, of whom K. Kautsky is the most outstanding representative, fell into the same trap, though for quite different reasons. Whereas the Revisionists thought that they could give Marxism a flexibility without which it could not outlive its founder, and in this way become the very enemies of Marx, the orthodox Marxists, on the contrary, asserted that Marx's teachings were still in harmony with social facts and tendencies and that, therefore, there was no need for a fundamental, revision of Marxist socialism. They still insisted that Marx's theory of class struggle could be looked upon as scientifically valid, a thing which no impartial observer can any longer admit.

In both cases, remarks Sorel, we see thus a misinterpretation of the teachings of Marx. Both the orthodox marxists and the Revisionists have given us a caricature of Marxism. They both

1. "Le Marxisme ne saurait se transformer comme le pensait Bernstein..
.....On devrait dire de lui qu'il est une philosophie des bras
et non une philosophie des têtes, car il n'a qu'une seule chose
en vue: amener la classe ouvrière à comprendre que tout son
avenir dépend de la notion de lutte de classe."

G. Sorel, La Décomposition du Marxisme, p. 60

have deformed it, with the difference that whereas the Revisionists have given it such a great flexibility that it has ceased to resemble its original purity, the orthodox marxists have turned it into a rigid and hence barren intellectual system.

Sorel, therefore, though admitting that the doctrine of class war is the very essence of Marx and while acknowledging himself a follower of the great Socialist by no means exhibits that attitude of unquestioning faith in his dogmas which the orthodox Marxists display. An enemy of moral and intellectual, as well as of material despotism, he was not the kind of man to invest "Das Kapital" with the infallibility of sacred writings; nor did Sorel, eager as he was to give a new interpretation to Marx's theories, wish to join hands with Bernstein's group for he considered the latter as being unfaithful to the master's teachings.

A new interpretation, however, was needed and Sorel started to give it through his study of the syndicalist movement which alone could realize the socialist ideal of Marx. "Perhaps, no better proof" he said, "can be given of Marx's genius than the remarkable agreement which is found to exist between his views and the doctrine which revolutionary syndicalism is to-day building up slowly and laboriously keeping always strictly to strike tactics."¹

Unlike the orthodox Marxists (and in this he fully agreed with Bernstein), Sorel believed that the theories of Marx contained many inaccurate ideas and conceptions which clouded the purity of his essential teachings and that hence a new revision of Marxism

1. G. Sorel, Reflections of Violence, p. 153

was indispensable.¹ He, however, refused to cooperate with the Revisionist movement of Bernstein on the ground that it was too loose and too liberal. While the latter stands for evolutionary socialism and its reconciliation with democracy, Sorelian syndicalism preaches a revolutionary doctrine incompatible with the ideals of democracy.

The doctrine of class struggle is not the only valuable principle Sorel finds in Marxism. Marx's economic interpretation of history is also a vitally important contribution the great Socialist has made to the history of thought. Though originally an old doctrine, at least in some of its aspects, it remained for many years a rather vague principle until it received at the hands of Marx a definite formulation. Its fundamental postulate is that the economic conditions of society exert a preponderating influence upon its social, political, intellectual and ethical life, that consequently in order to have a thorough understanding of the social and intellectual life of a given people we should make a careful study of their economic life and in particular of the system of production that prevails among them.

The economic interpretation of history, however, does not, as it is often believed, explain historical conditions and events in economic terms alone. It "means, not that the economic relations exert an exclusive influence, but that they exert a preponderant influence in shaping the progress of society."² This is at least

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1. "Sorel signalait naguère qu'il restait beaucoup d'utopie dans le marxisme."
Ed. Berth, Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence, p. 14
 2. E.R.A. Seligman, The Economic Interpretation of History, p. 67

Marx's view of it. "The mode of production in material life, " he said, "determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life."¹ And F. Engels commenting on this wrote in 1890: "According to the materialistic conception of history the factor which is in the last instance decisive in history is the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. But when any one distorts this so as to read that the economic factor is the sole element, he converts the statement into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase."²

Sorel's economic determinism is very similar to that of Marx and it is even, as we shall point out, more idealistic in its materialism than the latter. For Marxist determinism, at least as interpreted by Sorel and his chief disciple Ed. Berth, is not as materialistic as one may think. Besides its material aspect it has a decidedly idealistic side. It is true that Marx's analysis of the process of social disintegration through which our existing economic ^{world} is passing betrays a fatalism that can hardly be reconciled with the Sorelian interpretation of the proletarian revolution as being essentially a social myth.³ This is, however, the syndicalist philo-

1. K. Marx. Critique of Political Economy, p. 11

2. F. Engels, quoted by H. W. Laidler in , A History of Socialist Thought. p. 202

3. "La différence profonde qu'on pourra établir entre Marx et Sorel, sera précisément que, chez Marx, et surtout chez le Marx des Marxistes, le devenir social est conçu comme un déterminisme historique.....tandis que, chez Sorel, il est conçu comme la création libre, sous l'influence de mythes sociaux, d'un groupe passionné et porté aux plus hauts sommets de l'enthousiasme poétique." Ed. Berth, Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence, p. 130

sophers remark, a superficial view of Marxism. The true spirit of Marx should be found elsewhere, in his unwavering faith in the active and revolutionary attitude of mind which the workers should develop rather than in his rigid economic doctrines which abound in chimerical and fantastic ideas.

The doctrine of the class war and the materialist or economic interpretation of history are, indeed, according to Sorel the two cornerstones of Marxian theory. All the other teachings of Marx are either irrelevant to the socialist movement or they actually harm the essential doctrines of Marxism since they lead to countless misunderstandings and disputes. The long story of the fiery dispute which split the followers of Marx into two hostile camps, Revisionist and orthodox, is a good illustration of how a movement whose sole aim was to unite the working classes and to enable them to conquer their freedom came through the selfishness and the shortsightedness of its leaders, to act in contradiction to the best interests of the proletariat.

It is thanks to the syndicalist movement and to its sincere and able leaders, men like Pelloutier, that true Marxism has had the chance to survive. "The 'new school' which calls itself Marxist, Syndicalist, and Revolutionary" attempts to revise Marx's teachings, and whereas it has nothing but contempt for Marx the scientist, the economist and the utopist, it cannot refrain from admiring Marx the moralist, the philosopher and the revolutionist. For it is Marx the revolutionist who is the real author of Marxism, of which Revolutionary Syndicalism is the one faithful child.¹

1. "Mais quel fut à son tour le défaut, l'insuffisance fondamentale

There are in Marx, says Sorel, many utopian doctrines and abstract principles which he had acquired in his university training and particularly through his study of Hegel. "Marx had acquired in Germany a taste for very condensed formulas, and these formulas were so admirably suited to the conditions in the midst of which he worked that he naturally made great use of them."¹ He was, as we know, a "Young Hegelian" and was specially attracted by the Hegelian dialectic, which he thought could explain the rapid transformations through which the world was passing. And, even though he gave this dialectic process a totally different mechanism he still had some Hegelian habits of abstract language and of clear and simple formulae. It is true that unlike Hegel, who based his system of dialectic on purely metaphysical foundations and conceived of social changes and transformations as the outcome of some abstract idea or principle which he thought was the prime-mover of all the universe, Marx explained historical movements and events on the basis of their material and economic background and was thus far more real and more concrete in his views than Hegel. Nevertheless, Marx, though laying emphasis on experience and on the material side of life, went so far in his economic laws that he got out of touch with the facts of the situation and in this way elaborated a philosophical system which though very logical

du marxisme? Ce fut de tomber.....dans ce qu'on a appelé le scientisme....Il restait en effet un progrès à faire accomplir au socialisme; il était passé avec Marx de l'utopie à la science; il restait à le promouvoir de la science ~~de la science~~ à la phase de l'éthique vivante; et de cette promotion nouvelle, l'honneur immortel revient à Sorel: les "Réflexions sur La Violence", comme je le disais plus haut, sont un traité d'éthique prolétarienne, dont on peut dire qu'il constitue une synthèse admirable de l'esprit Marxiste et de l'esprit Proudhonien."

Ed. Berth, Guerre des Etats ou Guerre des Classes, pp. 180-181

WAS yet full of abstractions.¹

For it was impossible, at the time Marx wrote his main works, for any social philosopher to formulate any system having the ambition to foretell future changes and particularly the future transformations of the economic and of the industrial system. Marx lacked sufficient facts in his studies on the conditions of the working classes and on the future role of the proletariat. "This absence of knowledge gained from experience very much hampered Marx's thought."² "He gave very little detail about the organization of the proletariat..... He was ill-provided with matter on which he could argue about the organization of the proletariat; he was obliged, therefore, to remain content with an explanation, in very abstract formulas, of his ideas on the subject of the path which the proletariat must take, in order to arrive at the final revolutionary struggle. The consequence of this inadequacy of Marx's work was that Marxism has deviated from the path assigned to it by its real nature."³

The syndicalist philosophy, remarks Sorel, through its abandonment of Marx's economic doctrines, has succeeded in grasping the essential truth of his teachings. For it is in

i.* (from previous page). G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, p. 153

1. "Il ya chez Marx une sorte de divinisation de la Force historique, qu'il a héritée évidemment de Hegel, mais avec cette différence que Hegel voyait encore dans l'histoire la réalisation progressive de l'Idée, tandis que Marx, rejetant l'Idée hégélienne, ~~ne~~ semble ne plus garder que la force historique toute nue." Ed. Berth, Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence, p. 137

2. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, p. 153

3. G. Sorel, Op. Cit., p. 200

his economic doctrines that our great Socialist reveals his weaknesses and displays his rationalistic and his utopian tendencies. His economic determinism, though right in its essence, is a good instance of the way in which he indulges in abstract economic laws which make one think of Hegel.¹

"As Sorel regards the matter", J.A. Estey points out "it is a great mistake to treat "Das Kapital" as if it were a treatise³ on political economy, illustrated with historical examples. It is not that. It is an essay on the philosophy of history², and if there are developed therein certain economic doctrines, such as that of surplus value, it is only because Marx wished to throw light on his ideas of historical evolution. By a strange and unfortunate error, these excursions into abstract economics, to Sorel by far the least satisfactory part of the book, have become

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1. "La marche au socialisme ne se produira pas d'une façon aussi simple, aussi nécessaire et par suite aussi facile à décrire par avance que l'avait supposé Marx. Les souvenirs hégéliens le conduisaient à admettre, sans qu'il en eût généralement conscience, que l'histoire s'avance (au moins chez les peuples regardés comme doués d'une civilisation supérieure) sous l'influence de la force du mystérieux Weltgeist."

G. Sorel, Les Illusions du Progrès, pp. 372-373

2. "Quand on lit le "Capital", il ne faut jamais oublier que c'est un livre d'histoire philosophique et ne pas le prendre pour un traité d'économie, illustré par des exemples fournis par l'histoire."

G. Sorel, Introduction à l'Economie Moderne, p. 38

for the majority of Marxists the very core of the teaching ~~of~~ ~~Marx~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~teaching~~ of their master, and have been defended with a dogmatism of attitude which has tended greatly to exaggerate the evil effects of the misconception."¹

Besides these fruitless excursions of Marx in the field of abstract economics there is on his part a real neglect of what Sorel calls "les"préoccupations juridiques", that is to say of all the vital problems connected with the consciousness of the workers of their legal rights and of the essential means whereby such rights can find their adequate realisation.² It is due to such a neglect that Marx proposes the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which instead of promoting and safeguarding the workers' rights tends to crush their individual personality, leaving them at the mercy of some tyrannical and selfish leaders.³

Sorelian syndicalism, on the contrary, because of its legal preoccupations, wants to throw off the yoke of the politicians and in this way insure the free development of the workers in their "syndicats". With it a new era begins in the history of the

1. J.A. Estey, Op. Cit., pp. 52-53

2. "L'absence de préoccupations juridiques est ce qui constitue, en dernière analyse, la faiblesse du Marxisme."

Ed. Berth, Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence, p. 108

3. "C'est contre cette dictature représentative du prolétariat que protestent les syndicats: ils pensent avec raison qu'elle ne produirait pas du tout les heureux résultats que devrait engendrer, d'après les théoriciens, la dictature du prolétariat."

G. Sorel, Matériaux, p. 94

socialist movement, namely that of the "Living Ethics".

The two cornerstones of Marxism in the opinion of Sorel, we have already remarked, are the doctrine of class struggle and the economic interpretation of history. In our later study on the myth of the Proletarian general strike we shall have an opportunity to develop the Sorelian conception of class struggle. In the present chapter an attempt will be made to explain more fully Sorel's materialistic interpretation of history and his views on various historical methods.

According to Sorel, and here we find a striking instance of his pragmatic approach towards social problems, historical events are not the mere outcome of men's intellectual and moral ideas but are shaped by the material conditions of the people and more particularly by their economic system of production. Man cannot prevent his material life from influencing his thoughts and actions in the same way that he cannot abolish the interdependence of his body and soul.¹ Although it is quite difficult to explain the exact way in which such influences operate it is, nevertheless, possible to find out cases which testify to their existence and their working in the actual life of the people.²

In "La Ruine du Monde Antique" and "Le Système Historique de Renan" Sorel finds innumerable instances in which economic conditions

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1. "Les conditions économiques fournissent à l'homme des cadres dont il est très difficile de s'affranchir; quelques penseurs isolés peuvent raisonner d'une manière indépendante, mais cela n'est pas possible pour des groupes nombreux; une collectivité est rivée aux catégories économiques comme l'individu est rivé ~~aux catégories économiques~~ à son système nerveux." G. Sorel, La Ruine du Monde Antique, p. 168
 2. "Il est fort difficile de se rendre compte, d'une manière générale, de l'influence que l'économie exerce sur la pensée humaine." G. Sorel, Cp.Cit., p. 197

influenced the social, the political and the religious ideas of the time. He finds most of his examples in the history of Judaism¹ and of Christianity and reproaches theologians for having underestimated the economic interpretation of historical events. In the history of Greece he finds also many interesting cases of the influence of economics on the social and the intellectual life of the people.²

Not only so. Revolutionary movements even fail or succeed depending upon whether they happen in an age of economic chaos and decline or in one of high economic productivity and wealth. The relation between economic forces and revolutionary movements is thus a twofold one. Economic conditions are not only the motivating factor of social, political and religious upheavals but they also determine the nature of their outcome. For history abounds in cases in which a revolution took place at a time when society was in economic collapse, with the result that the new social order lacked constructive energies and that civilisation suffered a real

1. "La politique religieuse de Salomon est en étroite connexité avec sa politique économique: élever un grand temple dans une ville fréquentée par beaucoup de marchands, était alors une excellente opération."
G. Sorel, Le Système Historique de Renan, p. 110

2. "Une partie notable des "Eléments" dérive des considérations issues de l'art de bâtir." G. Sorel, De L'utilité du Pragmatisme, p. 251

"La définition si obscure qu'on trouve dans le préambule des 'Eléments' pour la ligne droite, se rattache à une pratique des architectes grecs." Ibid., p. 253

"Se fondant sur une longue pratique des ingénieurs, Archimède formula les cinquième et sixième de mandes de son traité "De l'Equilibre des Plans". Ibid., p. 256

set back. The history of Christianity illustrates this point. For the early Church neglected the role of economics in the life of its followers. Sorel points out that the failure of the new religion to bring vital and genuine transformations in the falling Roman Empire is due to two basic economic factors. To begin with, Christianity appeared at a time when the Roman society was on its way to economic collapse. The "Economie Idéaliste" of the Romans, he says, which involved vast expenditures on things of an economically unimportant character, like statues, theatres, military monuments and buildings of all sorts, led to the exploitation of the rural classes by the urban population. Such an economically static society ruined the Empire and left the doors open for the Barbarian invaders. It is evident that in such a time of economic disorder Christianity could not flourish even if it had all the means necessary for the economic reconstruction of the Roman world.

Christianity, however, besides being born in a society which was economically static, failed also to emphasize the importance of the material and of the economic aspects of life. Its whole energies were concentrated on spiritual matters and on affairs of organisation. Instead of encouraging production it extolled poverty. Its entire economic life was one-sided. It consumed but failed to produce. So economic production suffered a decline. In such a society of non-producers economic life was reduced to mere subsistence with the result that civilisation fell a prey to the forces of barbarism. "All the old Christian authors agree" says Sorel, "in informing us that the new religion brought no serious improvement in the situation of the world, corruption, oppression, and

disasters continued to crush the people as in the past.What was still more disheartening, the immorality, so often denounced as the result of idolatry, had spread to the adorers of Christ. Far from imposing a far-reaching reform on the profane world, the Church itself had become corrupted by imitating the profane world.... Shortly after the Christian conquest, the barbarian invasions began,....The economic decadence was accentuated under these barbarian kings...At least four centuries of barbarism had to be gone through before a progressive movement showed itself.....Thus a revolution which took place in a time of economic decadence had forced the world to pass again through a period of almost primitive civilisation, and had stopped all progress for several centuries."¹

If Christianity and the Barbarian invasions are clear instances of revolutions that took place in an economically backward society the French Revolution of 1789, on the contrary, is the example of a revolution which happened in days of high economic prosperity. "The ease with which the Revolution and the Empire succeeded in radically transforming the country while still retaining such a large number of the acquisitions of the past, is bound up with a fact to which our historians have not always called attention, and which Taine does not seem to have noticed: industrial production was making great progress, and this progress was such that, towards 1780, everybody believed in the dogma of the indefinite progress of mankind."²

1. G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, pp. 95-98

2. G. Sorel, Op.Cit., p. 99

And if we try to find out the secret of this intimate relation between revolution and economic prosperity we shall see that Marx was fully right when he "compared the passage from one historical era to another to a civil inheritance; the new age inherits prior acquisitions. If the revolution took place during a period of economic decadence, would not the inheritance be very much compromised, and in that case could there be any hope of the speedy re-appearance of progress in the economic system?"¹

If as Sorel emphasizes, revolutionary movements and doctrines are fundamentally economic in their origins what then becomes of the traditional interpretation of historical events as being the outcome of men's ideal patterns for a better social order? How far can we then admit the theory which conceives of changes in history as the result of some idea or ideal that men strive to realize? The metaphysical or the idealistic approach to history when pushed to the extreme is undoubtedly incompatible with the economic interpretation of historical facts of which Marx and Sorel are so fond.

According to the idealists, man by virtue of his moral nature, possesses certain natural rights which are sacred and inviolable and to which social institutions and laws that determine the civil and the political relations of men in society should be adapted and conformed. It becomes, therefore, evident that whenever a discrepancy occurs between man's natural rights and the

1. Ibid., p. 92

existing social and political institutions and laws the individual has not only the right but the moral obligation to protest. For institutions and laws are but means and consequently, when they tend to act against the aims they ^{are} supposed to realize, their existence can no more be justified. Revolutions, therefore, are sometimes not only legitimate but even beneficial to the human race. Such has been for instance, the French Revolution of 1799, the real cause of which was the longing of the masses to obtain their freedom and to vindicate hitherto denied rights.

To this idealistic theory of the "natural rights", elaborated by Rousseau and the 18th century Encyclopedists, Sorel opposes that of historical materialism. To Rousseau and the "doctrinaires" of the Revolution he opposes Taine and Marx. In his view the idea of natural rights is a myth, a social myth. It has no positive reality since it is a mere justification of force. Whenever an individual or a group finds that he has a "de facto" power he inevitably strives to give it a "de jure" character so as to make it sacred and inviolable. Such abstract theories, therefore, have a material foundation without which they cannot be understood and appreciated. Revolutions no doubt, have often been fought in the name of some abstract principle or doctrine. But beneath such idealistic superstructures we find a material and an economic basis. Most of the revolutionists even have a material interest which they cover under such fine names as liberty, equality and the rest. And those few people who sincerely believe in the reality of such abstractions are poor, victims of an illusion.

Sorel carries his idea of economic determinism somewhat too far. His negation of the reality of human rights is a pure chimera

and is even more an insult to human personality and to the essential attributes of man's nature. We cannot agree with him on this point. The consciousness of human rights, with its logical accompaniment the notion of man's duties and obligations towards his fellow-men, is a truth about which no unprejudiced man can have any doubt. To deny it means to lower man to the station of a beast.

Sorel's conception of natural rights represents the most exaggerated point of his historical materialism. There is, however, another aspect to his theory relative to the influence of economic and material forces upon man's social and intellectual life. His materialistic conceptions are counteracted by what we may call his historical idealism. For Sorel does not believe in the exclusive influence of economic factors in moulding the life and the institutions of society.¹ He gives to spiritual and intellectual forces an equally important role in the formation of our ideas. The Sorelian myth philosophy is a good instance in which psychological factors shape the conduct of men, create in them a devotion and an enthusiasm before which material considerations, lose their sting. Religion itself, as we have previously mentioned, is in the opinion of Sorel a myth and we emphasized that it was mainly because of its mythical character that it has succeeded in winning the allegiance of so many people.

1. "Je suis moins disposé que personne à négliger le côté intérieur."
G. Sorel, Introduction à l'Economie Moderne, p. 123

"M. Sorel ne croit pas que l'influence de l'économie sur la pensée soit exclusive."
G. Guy-Grand, op. cit., p. 24

"En définitive, le matérialisme ~~strictement~~ économique n'est

Sorel's economic materialism is thus but a purer form of true idealism.¹ It is even materialism and idealism reconciled and combined. No wonder then if Sorel began his career by becoming an ardent follower of Marx and turned towards the rest of his life into an enthusiastic disciple of Bergson. We can go further and say that in Sorel's writings Marx and Bergson are fused into a single whole and their respective philosophies are brought into harmony. But as a certain writer puts it: "M. Sorel, having started out with Marx, ends up with Bergson. The attempt to connect his views with the philosophy of Bergson has been made in all his later works. But all along M. Sorel claims to be true to the "spirit of Marx"....It is doubtful however, whether there is an affinity between the "spirit of Marx" and that of Bergson. It appears rather that Sorel has tacitly assumed that affinity because he interprets the "spirit of Marx" in a peculiar and

qu'un idéalisme plus épuré, plus subtil, plus idéaliste.....
le matérialisme historique est donc une application de la
doctrine de Marx complétée par celle de M. Bergson."

Ibid., pp. 26-27

1. "On a trop cru que le matérialisme historique impliquait le matérialisme moral et métaphysique et supposait le déterminisme absolu; il est temps de s'élever à une métaphysique de la liberté, et ce n'est pas un hasard, certes, si le philosophe auquel s'est rattaché Sorel s'appelle Bergson, d'est-à-dire le philosophe qui a combattu le mécanisme et relevé, en philosophie, le drapeau de la liberté."

Ed. Berth, Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence, pp. 44-45

arbitrary way."¹

In fact Sorel differed from Marx in his emphasis on the mystical and mythical factors as contrasted with economic factors in historical development and in his belief that the proletarian civilisation would not be established through the operation of economic laws alone but by means of the possible or probable general strike.

That Sorel refuses to admit the exclusive role of economic factors in social development is abundantly demonstrated by his emphasis on the influence of tradition and of religious faith in the life of the people. He even goes further in his analysis and remarks that human activity expresses itself through three different ways.² To begin with, man has a metaphysical and an aesthetic nature which manifests itself through such highly remarkable works as poetry and philosophy. In this realm of pure spirit the mind enjoys a spontaneity and a freedom which remove all sorts of material obstacles. It is the world of the ideal as opposed to the world of reality; the inner world of human conscience as contrasted with the outward realm of objectivity. Visionaries, prophets and religious ascetes are typical representatives of this tendency in human nature. Next to this we find man not as an isolated individual but as a social being as a member of various associations, like the family, the religious

1. L. Lévine, Syndicalism in France, pp. 150-151

2. "Je considère trois grands aspects de l'activité humaine, suivant: qu'elle se révèle comme une libre spontanéité qui supprime tout obstacle matériel et remplace la réalité par les créations de sa fantaisie, --ou bien qu'elle est engagée dans des relations avec d'autres activités humaines, sous des rapports réglés par la loi ou la coutume, --ou encore qu'elle prend contact avec le monde

organization and the state. And lastly there is the world of economic relations, that of the production and of the distribution of social wealth.

Historical materialism versus historical idealism, these are, indeed, the two extreme poles between which Sorel's thought continually wavers. And this dualism in his thought is but the projection of a still deeper dualism that we find in the very essence of his personality. For Sorel's nature is two-sided. He is at the same time a realist and a visionary, a materialist and an idealist, a pragmatist and an intellectualist, a technician and a moralist, a revolutionary and a traditionalist, a metaphysician and a scientist. He is a person in whom extremes of thought meet together in a spirit of happy compromise. An adequate comprehension of Sorel's dual personality is, therefore, of a vital importance for a sympathetic understanding of his philosophy.

From his materialistic interpretation of history Sorel deduced many important conclusions relative to historical method. There are two fundamentally different ways of approach towards the study of history, remarks Sorel, and these two methods, though equally valid, should not be mixed together for each of them has a definite field in which it can be properly used.

par l'économie et les conceptions qui en dérivent."
G.Sorel, Le Système Historique de Renan, pp. 84-85

To begin with there is what we may call the psychological method or the "système psychologique" which is based on the assumption that historical events are mainly the result of the operation of psychological factors in human life and that historical movements are the outcome of men's feelings of all sorts. It views history as being essentially a social drama in which human emotions constitute the decisive factor in the shaping of our institutions. It conceives of man as a bundle of emotions and passions which, when properly stimulated turn to become the driving force in all human history.

Revolutions, whether social, religious or political, have always been the work of those few leaders who have had the insight to discover the latent potentialities of the masses and have had the power to stimulate their feelings and make them revolt against the evils of the day. Revolutionary movements owe thus their origin to the inspiration of able and enthusiastic leaders. The historian, therefore, in order that he may fully understand the meaning of various historical movements and events should try to get into the psychology of the leaders and of the masses they inspire.¹ His study should thus consist in the careful analysis of the psychological attitudes of men. He has to penetrate into the mysterious realm of human conscience, to unravel the secrets that are enclosed in it and establish upon them a psychological interpretation.

1. "Il faut noter cependant que nous ne pouvons espérer jamais connaître toute la psychologie d'une nation à une époque déterminée.....La connaissance psychologique ne serait possible qu'à la condition de se borner aux exploits de quelques hommes."

G. Sorel, Ibid, pp. 7-8

This is the historical method adopted by Renan in his studies on the origins of Christianity.¹ Renan thought that in order to understand the origins of the Christian faith it was necessary to discover the true biography of Christ. All his efforts were thus concentrated on the life of Jesus. He wanted to give an exact and a purely human account of the life and the teachings of the Prophet of Galilee, tearing to pieces the miraculous descriptions that the Church had imposed upon its members. Renan's intellectualistic temperament and his love for rational processes and methods led him inevitably to repudiate every miraculous explanation and made him think that thereby he could easily solve the problems of the origins of Christianity. His ambitions, however, met with failure. He gave of Jesus and of his early disciples an imaginary and idyllic account ^{of} their ways of living ^{and of} and a naive explanation of their religious teachings. Renan, indeed, was too optimistic. He thought that by discarding all miraculous and supernatural elements in the life of Jesus he could easily discover the true origins of Christianity. He was oblivious of the fact that the more he denied the rôle of miracles the more difficult would become his task.²

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1. "Renan a adopté pour les origines du christianisme un plan inspiré des auteurs ecclésiastiques. Parmi les raisons qui l'ont déterminé, on peut supposer une influence allemande; retrouver la biographie exacte de Jésus est le grand but que se proposait la théologie des protestants libéraux. Ceux-ci voulaient, par réaction contre la théologie luthérienne, déchirer le tissu paulinien du protestantisme, orthodoxe et retrouver par delà St. Paul, le véritable enseignement de Jésus." G. Sorel, Cp. Cit. p. 12
 2. "La difficulté que Renan avait rencontrée, était celle contre laquelle échouent tous les efforts du protestantisme libéral: il est impossible de faire reposer sur une tête humaine l'oeuvre colossale que l'on attribue à Jésus, la fondation d'une religion qui gouvernera l'humanité civilisée depuis 18 siècles." *Ibid* p. 13

The inadequacy of Renan's method should not be attributed only to his positivism and intellectualism but to the inherent weakness of the psychological method of approach in history. For the latter has too great a faith in man's power to unravel the mysteries of man's inner conscience. Man's methods of investigation are limited, especially when they are applied to fields in which human reasoning is impotent to act. To know the origins of things and to discover their essence are beyond the powers of science.¹

And here is to be found the kernel of yet another historical method, namely the scientific. The "système scientifique", says Sorel, "though not inherently superior to the "système psychologique" is at least more modest in its aims and more in harmony with the materialistic interpretation of historical facts. Unlike the psychological method it does not believe that historical events are shaped by individual personalities. Nor does it attach any value to the conception that human emotions and passions exert a preponderating influence upon the course of history. It does not pretend to throw full light upon historical origins but merely seeks to find out the relation that exists between the life of people at a given time and their various social institutions and laws. Its field is thus restricted to the observation of historical data and facts and in the discovery of the laws that govern their operation.

1. "L'historien a continuellement à lutter contre le préjugé de causalité totale; ses études, pour approfondies qu'elles puissent être, n'épuisent jamais le sujet; elles aboutissent à des éclaircissements qui portent sur certains aspects seulement de l'histoire."
G. Sorel, Op.Cit., p. 22

When viewed as such scientific history cannot come into conflict with theological history.¹ In the same way that there is no inherent contradiction between science and religion so also there can be no true antagonism between the psychological or metaphysical approach to history and the scientific. The scientific historian deals with objective data and facts. His field is thus restricted to the domain of sensible experience. The religious historian, on the contrary, views history from a different angle. To Bossuet the history of the world is controlled by Providence and men appear as mere instruments in his divine hands. He thus gives to history a law not arising out of the objective analysis of facts but out of some metaphysical truth in which he believes.

The psychological method, of which the theological is but another aspect, is thus different from the scientific method but is not a negation of it. Both of them indeed, are two different viewpoints but are not necessarily antagonistic. Each one of them has its own field and provided one of them does not overstep the boundaries of the other, there can be no real ground for conflict between them.

"Pour obtenir un peu de science, il faut faire d'énormes sacrifices. ne pas avoir la prétention de satisfaire toutes les curiosités du lecteur, rejeter dans l'inconnaissable ce qui, le rapproche l'histoire du roman." G.Sorel, Op.Cit., p. 457

1. "La science ignore et déclare qu'elle se doit à elle-même d'ignorer; la théologie adore; chaque domaine est ainsi parfaitement délimité." Ibid, p. 459

"Le théologien est libre d'expliquer les choses comme il lui convient, par une action surnaturelle; l'historien n'a rien objecter à une telle solution qui sort de sa compétence."
Ibid, p. 74

Chapter IV

Sorel and the Bourgeoisie

"Tout est mensonger, truqué et artificiel, dans la civilisation bourgeoise - l'art, comme la politique, la philosophie et la religion comme l'économie elle-même."
(Ed. Berth.)

"C'est dans le sein de la société capitaliste que doivent se développer, non seulement les forces productives nouvelles, mais encore les relations d'un nouvel ordre social, ce qu'on peut appeler les forces morales de l'avenir." (G. Sorel)

If there was any conclusion which Sorel could draw from his extensive researches in the historical field and particularly from his studies on the origins of Judaism and of Christianity it was that social reform had always been the work of an elite, of a particular small social group having the necessary enthusiasm and moral energy to stand against the evils of the day and lay down the foundations of a better and more progressive civilisation. The masses have always been intellectually and morally stagnant. They have never been able to give a new direction to the course of history. They have followed more than they have directed. The pioneers of every civilisation have always been very few in number. They have often been persecuted and turned into ridicule. And even today the work of civilization building must needs be entrusted to that social group or class which possesses the greatest moral resources and is endowed with the highest and noblest ideals.

But on which social class or group Sorel centers his hopes for a better world order? He first turns towards the bourgeoisie and examines its achievements in various social fields. His expectations, however, are soon turned into utter disillusionment. He discovers that the bourgeois capitalists who in the past had done so much to foster the best interests of civilisation have now become slaves of the very forces they have tended to produce. The fortunes of the bourgeoisie have, indeed, sunk to their lowest ebb. The old enterprising spirit which characterized its early activities have given place to a consciousness of solidarity and peace that are the germs of moral and material decadence. (1)

A careful study of the origins of the bourgeois class will reveal the fact that all the material progress which the modern world is enjoying is due to the pioneering efforts of the bourgeois capitalists. It was the bourgeoisie which, ever since its emergence out of the feudal society of the XIII th. century, gave production such a strong stimulus and thus paved the way for the Commercial revolution of the XVIth. Century and the Industrial revolution of the XVIIth. and the XIX th. Its origins are closely associated with the appearance and the development of cities. In the latter the bourgeoisie grew in wealth and power and gradually undermined the feudal edifice that had been reared for so many long centuries in Medieval Europe. Through its alliance

(1) "Aux yeux de la bourgeoisie contemporaine, tout est admirable qui écarte l'idée de violences. Nos bourgeois désirent mourir en paix;- après eux le déluge." (G. Sorel, "Réflexions

with the kings it gave feudalism a death blow and started a thorough work of social reconstruction. The centralised monarchies which had began to appear in the XIV th. and the XV th. centuries, Europe gave it yet another opportunity to fasten its grip upon the state administration. From a mere economic power the bourgeoisie thus became a political force, so much so that it finally succeeded in overthrowing the aristocratic class from which it had received such a great help in the early days of its establishment. (1)

Capitalism in the domain of economics and state centralisation in the field of politics - these are, indeed, the two outstanding achievements of the bourgeoisie. But, whereas the old bourgeois capitalists were animated by a war-like spirit and had a deeprooted class consciousness, the modern capitalists, on the contrary, are after peace and compromise with other social classes. To the race of bold captains who made the greatness of modern industry has succeeded a middle class and a so-called "civilised" bourgeoisie which only asks to be allowed to live in peace. Through the influence of the intellectuals it has neglected its original aim, namely the widest possible development of industry and of technical proficiency and the elaboration out of these material improvements of a system of ethics in harmony with the industrial and economic exigencies of the time.

(1) "Selon Sorel, qui reproduit en ce point une vue d'histoire devenue classique, les origines du Tiers-Etat se relient étroitement aux origines de la monarchie absolue. Il est né avec celle-ci, et de celle-ci. Il en a suivi le destin, prospérant et grandissant à mesure que l'absolutisme politique de la royauté s'accroissait et balayait devant lui les restes d'institutions féodales. Finalement, il a dépassé de la tête sa génératrice et s'est retourné contre elle pour l'étouffer."
(P. Lasserre, *Op. cit.*, pp. 232-233)

The bourgeoisie, indeed, has abandoned its conquering power and has sought a safe refuge in the solidarist doctrines. Through conciliation and compromise it has lost the essential purity of its principles and has degenerated into a static social group. Whereas the old bourgeoisie was after fresh conquests in the economic and social fields, the new one preaches the gospel of social solidarity and peace. And this peace is the secret of its moral and material decline. For peace leads to mediocrity and eventual death. Instead of stimulating the individual to heroic acts it stifles his heroic aspirations and in this way leads to passivity and inaction.

And the secret of this downfall of the bourgeoisie is to be found in its optimism which is itself the inevitable outcome of the increasing development of material civilisation. The bourgeoisie is, indeed, optimistic. The tremendous progress achieved along industrial lines has made it think that the world is inevitably progressing, that this increase in material welfare will by itself produce the necessary moral and spiritual growth. Later developments in industrial life demonstrated the fallacy of such a belief. Material progress should be accompanied by moral progress; otherwise it will not liberate the individual but rather enslave him.

In order, however, to remedy the industrial evils that abound in society the bourgeoisie has thought to limit

the expansion of industry, whereas it ought to have given a new impetus to moral development and brought it to the same level of industrial and technical proficiency. "The friends of ~~Maures~~, the clericals, and the democrats all take the Middle Ages as their ideal for the future; they would like competition to be tempered, riches limited, production subordinated to needs." (1)

Not only the bourgeoisie cherishes an optimistic and a humanitarian philosophy and seeks in the limitation of production a means to cure the industrial ills that afflict present-day society. It has even lost its close contact with industrial life. It is increasingly getting farther from factory production and is drifting towards the abstract realm of factory management. Instead of producing it consumes. For production involves an intimate contact between the machinery and the worker. The so-called managers and administrators are superfluous. They even hinder the real work that is being done in the factory. They take away from the workers their freedom of action by enforcing innumerable regulations which may have been necessary in the past but which render no service in the modern factory when organized along syndicalist lines.

But if the bourgeoisie is increasingly losing its class consciousness and is getting humanitarian and peaceful, what will then happen with the Marxist principle of class struggle which according to Sorel is the strongest moral

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", p.91

force which Syndicalism can use for the emancipation of the working classes? If the bourgeoisie falls under the influence of solidarist conceptions it may appear, at first sight, that this should lead to a similar abandonment of class consciousness in the proletariat. But such is not the case. (1) For, however conciliatory the bourgeois attitude may appear it will inevitably serve to intensify the hatred and the animosity of the working classes and the fanaticism and the staunchness of the workers in their turn are bound up to create within the bourgeois capitalists the consciousness that their very best interests are challenged.

"Workmen" remarks Sorel "quickly perceive that the labour of conciliation or of arbitration rests on no economico-judicial basis, and their tactics have been conducted - instinctively perhaps-in accordance with this datum. Since the feelings, and, above all, the vanity of the peacemakers are in question, a strong appeal must be made to their imaginations, and they must be given the idea that they ~~may~~ have to accomplish a titanic task:

(1) "On peut dire, d'une manière générale, que l'esprit révolutionnaire gagne du terrain chaque fois que le sentiment de la nécessité économique s'affaiblit. De là résultent ces apparents paradoxes: que la législation sociale, fabriquée dans le but de calmer les ardeurs socialistes, a si souvent pour résultat de favoriser le socialisme; que les concessions faites par les patrons à la suite de grèves constituent, généralement, un des facteurs du progrès du syndicalisme révolutionnaire."
(G. Sorel, "Les Illusions du Progrès", pp. 211-212)

demands are piled up, therefore, figures are fixed in a rather haphazard way, and there are no scruples about exaggerating them." (1) And further he says: "The day in which employers perceive that they have nothing to gain by works which promote social peace, or by democracy, they will understand that they have been ill-advised by the people who persuaded them to abandon their trade of creators of productive forces for the noble profession of educators of the proletariat --- The two antagonistic classes therefore influence each other in a partly indirect but decisive manner. Capitalism drives the proletariat into revolt, because in daily life the employers use their force in a direction opposed to the desire of their workers." (2)

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Towards the end of the XVIII th. century the bourgeoisie had become the strongest economic power in France and as political power inevitably shifts with economic power, a transfer of political authority from the hands of the aristocracy to those of the bourgeoisie was bound to take place. It is in this light that Sorel views the French Revolution of 1789. The latter, he says, gave a "de jure" character to the "de facto" power of the bourgeoisie. For although before 1789 the bourgeoisie had not yet received the legal authority to act and manage the state affairs it was,

was

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", p.64

(2) G. Sorel, Op. cit. pp. 89-90

nevertheless, the class which for all practical purposes was holding the reins of power.

The French Revolution was thus the consummation of a long historical movement which had already begun during the reign of Louis XI and which was intensified by Richelieu and his successors.

But now that the bourgeoisie had added political authority to its economic power the need was felt more than ever to justify the authority thus conquered. Hence, the bourgeois ideology which was an attempt to give a philosophical interpretation to the powers newly assumed by that class. (1) The whole eighteenth century philosophy cannot be fully understood unless we approach it from this angle. Whether we read Rousseau or Montesquieu, Sieyès or Condorcet, we find all of them striving to give a philosophical foundation to the political authority of the bourgeoisie. Their ideas are but the expression of the tendencies of the time and more particularly of the aspirations of the bourgeois class.

Every ideology has thus a material and an economic basis. Behind the ideas and thoughts there are always some material

(1) "Pour bien comprendre les idées que le XVIII^e siècle se formait, il faut partir de ce fait que la France était, peu à peu, conquise par une oligarchie bourgeoise que la royauté avait créée pour son service et qui devait la mener à la ruine."

(G. Sorel, "Les Illusions du Progrès", p. 65)

"L'idéologie du 18^e s. est celle qui convient aux conditions de la vie d'une classe d'auxiliaires de la royauté".

(Ibid. p.80)

interests which express themselves indirectly through the writings of the time. Philosophical history and economic history thus go always hand in hand and shed light on each others domain.

The bourgeois ideology expresses itself through such conceptions as Progress, Science and Democracy which are typically bourgeois in their origins and which are still deeply appreciated by that class.

To begin with the idea of Progress, we find it developed as early as the Renaissance - The latter, indeed, had an optimistic faith in human power and intellect and this optimism despite the strong reaction towards pessimism initiated by the Reformation - made headway in the whole of Europe. The age of the Renaissance was particularly favourable for the eclosion of such ideas. The economic prosperity of the time together with the growth of national monarchies which flourished in most parts, of the continent made people very optimistic. Add to that the appearance of an influential bourgeois class whose advent was signalised by wonderful geographical discoveries and a growth in commerce and industry.

This bourgeois conception of progress we find also flourishing in the XVIII th. century. France for almost the same reasons which justified its existence during the Renaissance. For the France of the XVIII th. century was economically one of the most prosperous countries of Europe. The period was also the golden age of the bourgeoisie, the age in which the Encyclopedists flourished. Most of these

Encyclopedists were bourgeois and in their writings they gave a full expression of bourgeois ideas. Among these was the idea of Progress, the belief that the world, whatever may happen to it, is evolving through a mysterious power towards the highest material and spiritual advancement. Such a faith in the inevitability of progress resulted in a slackness of morals and produced all the disadvantages which optimism entails. (1)

Not only did the bourgeoisie develop a theory of progress. It also formulated a philosophy of science and of education. The bourgeois conception of science is best expressed in the writings of the XVIIIth. century French writers. According to the Encyclopedists science is not something to be cultivated for its own sake. Nor does it consist in the specialisation of knowledge and in technical investigation and research. It is rather a means whereby the individual can acquire a general knowledge so that he may understand a bit of everything. Hence the necessity of having a vast encyclopedia wherein the individual can find what he wants on various topics. What was needed, therefore, was not specialisation but a universal coordination of various branches of knowledge. It was not a genuine passion for truth that led the XVIIIth. century bourgeoisie to the study of sciences but a simple and child-like curiosity.

(1) "Pour nos démocrates comme pour les beaux esprits cartésiens, le progrès ne consiste point dans l'accumulation de moyens techniques, ni même de connaissances scientifiques, mais dans l'ornement de l'esprit qui, débarrassé des préjugés, sûr de lui-même et confiant dans ~~le~~ l'avenir, s'est fait une philosophie assurant le bonheur à tous les gens qui possèdent les moyens de vivre largement." (G. Sorel, "Les

The middle classes wanted to know in order to entertain their friends and in this way to satisfy their vanity. Eighteenth century science was thus not genuine but artificial and pedantic. From such a conception of science we can well imagine what bourgeois education might have been in the XVIII th century. The philosophers and the educationalists of that time had inherited from the church many ideas relative to the transforming power of education. It was thought that human nature could be easily moulded through the effect of enlightenment and that consequently it was easy to civilize backward ^craes. These thinkers were even so optimistic that they expected the whole world to be entirely transformed in a very short space of time. If education had such a magical power upon the human mind and if human nature was so malleable why should not people think that the whole surface of the earth might very soon be turned into a paradise, in which conflicts of all sorts would disappear and the supremacy of reason over the lower instincts of men would be finally insured.

The optimism of the bourgeoisie also expresses itself through its political literature. Parliamentary democracy, for instance, is a typically middle class production. In it the bourgeoisie shows its love for abstracted formulae and its humanitarian tendencies. The Dreyfus Case, which we have already analyzed, had proved to Sorel what he termed the "putrefaction of Democracy". "Its first phase, down to 1902, showed the utter moral and political rottenness of the Conservative parties, ready to sacrifice an innocent man rather than admit that a court martial could have been

mistaken, and stopping short at no denial of justice, at no violation of law or equity, not even at civil war to preserve the "honour" of the army. Those so-called governingⁿ classes were enough to turn any honest man utterly sick. But there were those at least who had not bowed the knee to Baal, who had risked reputation, livelihood, life even, in defence of the unjustly accused; and behind leaders like Maurès, were the organised Socialist and Radical parties who could be trusted to defend morality and law. But were they indeed? The defenders of Dreyfus had resorted to illegality to obtain the final quashing of the verdict: and the parties of the Left, once in office, had used their power with the same selfish immorality, packing army, university, civil service with their nominees, using the body of Dreyfus as a spring-board for their own advancement, and showing in their policy towards the Church a petty revengeful spirit which showed them to be on the same ethical level as those whom they had displaced." (1)

Sorel's hostility to bourgeois parliamentarianism and to socialist democracy was thus born originally from a moral revolt against the political rottenness of the bourgeois political system. The so-called "advanced" middle class democracy appeared to him as the essence of political corruption and of moral decay. Its central principle is

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(1) R.H. Soltau, op. cit. p.449

class solidarity and peace and just because of this fictitious belief in social unity it is rotten to the core. For, as we have already pointed out, class struggle is the indispensable condition of social progress. And since democracy denies the reality and the moral value of such a class antagonism it can have no message to the modern world.

There was a time when Sorel still believed in the possible alliance between socialism and democracy. Later events, however, showed this to have been a pure illusion, since democracy "prevents revolutionary ideology from preserving that keenness which it needs for the accomplishment of its historical mission." (1) Democracy "is the bog in which the proletariat remains stuck fast. By reducing all men to an equal fineness, as if they had been ground by the mills of the gods, democracy" mixes the classes" into a single class, and takes away the only protection men find against economic slavery: the right to protection through association. Therefore, down with democracy, at its best a vulgar tyranny of the majority, at its worst, a hypocritical subterfuge, masking from sight the chains they wear! The way out: the General Strike. Destroy the old, and the "élan vital" of living will take care of the new." (2)

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(1) G. Sorel, "Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat", p. 263.
(2) W.Y. Elliott, Op. cit. p.122

That the bourgeoisie has demonstrated its utter incapacity to bring new moral values to a decadent and desperate humanity the syndicalist philosophers persistently maintain. They loathe the idea of a possible reconciliation between the middle and the working classes. The bourgeoisie, they say, has degenerated to such a point that, unless its activities are strongly counteracted by new civilizing forces, it will bring the world to the verge of destruction. In the moral, in the intellectual and in the economic spheres of human activity it has displayed its love for abstract and even abstruse rationalism and in this way has stultified the mind of the public. The Idea in the domain of philosophy, the state in the realm of politics and the concept of Exchange in that of economics, all these three abstractions, remarks Berth, are typical productions of the bourgeois mind and as such they should be eliminated in favor of new social realities.

That Sorel, and Berth his disciple, are too violent, too harsh and too unjust in their criticism of the bourgeoisie there can be little doubt. Their fiery imagination stimulated as it is by a keen feeling of disgust and revenge often beclouds their judgment and prevents them from realising that the services rendered by the bourgeois middle classes to the development of civilisation are not only manifold but quite precious and in many ways unique.

There is, however, one thing Sorel readily admits and this is the material and technological contribution of the bourgeois class. If there is any real progress the bourgeoisie may be said to have accomplished it is to be found in its tremendous achievements along scientific and technological lines. For modern civilization is quite rich in material things. The increasing development of scientific knowledge and its application to the every-day needs of life is a gigantic task the bourgeoisie has achieved. Therein lies the secret of the strength as well as of the weakness of capitalism. I say "weakness" in order to emphasize the insufficiency of science as a civilising power. For scientific knowledge should always be accompanied with moral progress. And it is just because of the widening discrepancy between science and ethics that modern civilisation stands helpless and perplexed.

Proletarian socialism, being the real heir of bourgeois capitalism, should avail itself of all the contributions the latter has made to the material side of civilisation. It should inherit not only the machinery which capitalism has created for its use and the marvellous scientific discoveries it has made. It should also learn and adopt those methods of factory organization which serve to increase the efficiency of industrial production. (1)

(1) "Le socialisme héritera non seulement de l'outillage qui aura été créé par le capitalisme et de la science qui est sortie du développement technique, mais encore des procédés de coopération qui se seront constitués à la longue dans les usines pour tirer le meilleur parti possible du temps, des forces et de l'adresse des hommes."
(G. Sorel, "Matériaux d'une théorie du prolétariat," p.70)

The proletariat, therefore, "has but to follow in the footsteps of capitalism. For the mechanical perfection, the concentrated and efficient organisation of modern industrialism, are rather legacies of Capitalism to the wage-earners than peculiar features of Capitalism, to disappear with it. The proletariat is the legitimate child, of Capitalism, its heir-presumptive, whose interest it is, not to abjure the achievements of its parent, but to render its inheritance as generous as may be; whose future task will be facilitated, not by hindering the progress of production, but by encouraging in every way the development of its technical capacity." (1)

If proletarian socialism is the child of bourgeois capitalism and its heir presumptive it becomes, therefore, evident that it should be very careful lest its inheritance may be seriously jeopardized by various syndicalist methods of war. Accordingly, Sorel repudiates every attempt made by the workers to damage the tools and the machinery in case of strikes. (2) The method of systematic sabotage, he says, which involves the destruction of all the material equipment of the modern factory, is sheer vandalism and does not only bring no help whatever to the proletariat but it will even retard its work of civilisation building.

(1) J.A. Estey, Op. cit. p. 120.

(2) "Le sabotage (comme on dit en France) est un procédé de l'Ancien régime et il ne tend nullement à orienter les travailleurs dans la voie de l'émancipation."
(G. Sorel, op. cit., p.70.)

CHAPTER V.

The Proletarian Revolution
and the Myth of the
General Strike.

"G. Sorel est, ce me semble, un esprit trop original et trop indépendant pour s'enrôler sous la bannière de qui que ce soit; ce n'est pas un disciple. Mais il accepte quelques-unes de mes vues, et, quand il me cite, il le fait en homme qui m'a lu attentivement et qui m'a parfaitement compris." (H. Bergson)

"Si Hegel.....est le philosophe de Marx, on pourra sans aucun doute voir dans Bergson le philosophe de Sorel." (Ed. Berth)

As already pointed out in the chapter on Sorelian ethics Sorel's philosophy of pessimism contains two distinct elements: an element of pessimism proper and an optimistic element. On the one hand man realises his inward and outward limitations and on the other he conceives of a "march towards deliverance" which will give him the necessary inspiration to act and wage a successful war against the forces of moral and economic retrogression.

We have thus far analyzed the first part of the Sorelian philosophy of pessimism and contrasted it with the optimistic philosophy as interpreted by the Encyclopedists of the XVIIIth century and the positivists of the XIXth. It remains for us to find out the dynamic and the constructive side of Sorel's pessimistic conceptions. In other words, what is that driving force destined to stimulate the working classes to realise the best of themselves?

What ideal does Sorel put before the workers in order to galvanize their souls and make out of them a united and powerful group of civilisation builders? Is there still any idea or ideal capable of inspiring the masses to noble and heroic endeavours? In the past religion adequately fulfilled this purpose. Christianity, for instance, through the myth of the second coming of Christ, succeeded in creating among its adherents the enthusiasm and the faith that were indispensable for the eventual establishment of the Christian civilisation, "The first Christians expected the return of Christ and the total ruin of the pagan world, with the inauguration of the kingdom of the saints, at the end of the first generation. The catastrophe did not come to pass, but Christian thought profited so greatly from the apocalyptic myth that certain contemporary scholars maintain that the whole preaching of Christ referred solely to this one point. The hopes which Luther and Calvin had formed of the religious exaltation of Europe were by no means realised; these fathers of the Reformation very soon seemed men of a past era; for present-day Protestants they belong rather to the Middle-ages than to modern times, and the problems which troubled them most occupy very little place in contemporary Protestantism. Must we for that reason deny the immense result which came from their dreams of Christian renovation?" (1)

History, therefore, bears testimony to the indispensable role which social myths have played in the development of civilisation. To-day, however, with the growing industrialism of our social

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", p. 134.

order, new social myths are needed. For the religious myth of former ages we should substitute a new one in harmony with the actual needs of the existing industrial society. Since the outstanding characteristic of the world of to-day is the tremendous growth of industrial life it is, therefore, of paramount importance that any plan of social reorganisation should arise out of the life of the workers in their factory. Religious and theological myths should be replaced by industrial and proletarian myths. The working class revolution which attempts to lay down the foundations of a new civilization should, therefore, adopt a new social myth and this myth is what Sorel calls the General Strike myth.

But what is a myth? What is its nature and significance? A myth, says Sorel, is essentially a product of the combined action of man's imagination and feeling upon the human mind. It is not an intellectual phenomenon, like a utopia, but the vivid representation of a state of feeling. It is the vision of a new world, a fascinating picture round which are gathered like a halo a mass of strong sentiments and emotions. Whereas an utopia is a description of a future social order, a definite and well thought program of social reconstruction, a social myth, on the contrary, is not the outcome of an intellectual effort but the spontaneous expression of mass psychology. The myth is "not a description of things", but an "expression of the will". It will not be satisfied, like utopias, by granting it parts of its wants, because its wants are not formulated.

The proletarian myth of the General Strike, ^{should} thus be clearly distinguished from an utopia. The latter is an intellectualistic construction, the fruit of deep and patient study, whereas the former

is a product of the collective emotion of the masses. The myth has an intuitive origin. It does not lend itself to a thorough analysis like utopias. Its appeal is directed to the emotional, intuitive and volitional side of human nature. It is an act of faith, a pragmatic "will to believe" and not an intellectual adhesion to a rational principle or doctrine. "Myths" says Sorel "are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act. A utopia is, on the contrary, an intellectual product; it is the work of theorists who, after observing and discussing the known facts, seek to establish a model to which they can compare existing society in order to estimate the amount of good and evil it contains. It is a combination of imaginary institutions having sufficient analogies to real institutions for the jurist to be able to reason about them; it is a construction which can be taken to pieces, and certain parts of it have been shaped in such a way that they can (with a few alterations by way of adjustment) be fitted into approaching legislation. Whilst contemporary myths lead men to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things, the effect of utopias has always been to direct men's minds towards reforms which can be brought about by patching up the existing system" (1)

"The myth, then," Elliott remarks, "partakes of the nature of Plato's 'noble lies'; its object is to stir men to the heroic and the sublime, to carry them 'out of themselves', and it cannot be justly submitted to a 'detailed critique' by such intellectualistic critics as 'accumulate objections against its practical possibilities

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", pp. 32-33.

'It is a belief, and its justification is the effect it has upon men's lives. It is, in pragmatic terms, the result of willing, not of logical analysis.' (1)

Such an abstract way of regarding the General Strike myth has undoubtedly its advantages. It places it above criticism. If this myth is a purely non-rational and non-logical truth, if its sole value resides in its power to inflame the emotions of the crowd and to carry it to the highest possible moral exaltation then all the objections which the rationalist might accumulate against it can be of no avail. If it makes little difference whether the revolutionary strike takes place or not, objections as to the impossibility of naming time or place, or of describing the circumstances of the uprising have no weight. "For in the reasonings of Sorel the practical issues, which exercise the minds of the militant labourers, shrink into insignificance. Ask him when and how the general strike will take place and he would reply that it would make but little difference, if any, whether it took place or not, whether it were a reality or only a product of popular imagination."⁽²⁾ As Sorel himself puts it: "In employing the term myth I believed that I had made a happy choice, because I thus put myself in a position to refuse any discussion whatever with the people who wish to submit the idea of a general strike to a detailed criticism, and who accumulate objections against its practical possibility."⁽³⁾

(1) W.Y. Elliott, Op. cit., p. 129.

(2) F.A. Estey, Op. cit., p. 90.

(3) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", pp. 23-24.

The myth of the General Strike, therefore, is to the proletarian masses what the myth of the second Coming of Christ was to the early Christians. It is the symbol round which the working classes center all their aspirations and their hopes for the dawn of a better day. It is their rallying center and the one inexhaustible fountain of their inspiration. Through it they can develop the spirit of scission and of uncompromission so essential for the consummation of their historic mission. The General Strike myth gives them at once a warning and a promise, a warning that nothing short of a sincer^e adherence to the principle of class struggle can save the proletariat from falling a prey to the capitalistic forces of the day, and a promise that their liberation is at hand. It will then be asked how a myth can at the same time give the workers the faith that their cause is certain to triumph. In other words how can we reconcile the myth of the General Strike with the faith in the reality of this General Strike. How can a myth lead to certainty and faith when it is essentially a negation of faith itself? To such a fundamental objection Sorel would answer that the working masses do not actually realize that the cause for which they are fighting is a myth. Masses obey and follow and are incapable of intellectual analysis and thinking. This answer, however, does not eliminate the contradiction inherent in the Sorelian myth philosophy. To this point we shall soon come back in our examination of the defects of Sorel's theory of myth. Whatever the contradiction, Sorel continues, the fact is that the workers have such a deeprooted faith in the General Strike myth that they are even ready to sacrifice their existence for its sake. Sorel, therefore, has no objection if the workers partly abandon in practice the

pure theory of myth and adopt certain utopian conceptions since the latter, though objectionable ⁱⁿ theory, have at least a practical value as they stimulate the workers to act by inspiring them with faith and hope.

The proletarian myth of the General Strike, being essentially an act of will based on the emotional experience of the workers in the factory, it becomes evident, therefore, that it cannot be understood and appreciated by means of rational thinking. Since its truth is pragmatic it should neither be approached from a logical standpoint nor should its value be tested on rational and logical grounds. The only way of ascertaining its validity is to find out whether it "works" in actual practice, i.e. whether it can be harmonized with the experiences of the individual. You cannot teach a myth and make people have faith in it. It is not a doctrine which you can force and impose upon others. In the same way that we cannot create within an individual the love of beauty unless he himself can experience it in his daily life so also it is impossible to teach the masses to believe in the General Strike myth. The workers can get it only through their intuitive knowledge. External circumstances, no doubt, influence and facilitate this process of moral conversion but they only provide the stimuli. The response is always intuitive in its origins and manifestations. For the only reliable method of exploring the moral world of inner conscience is by means of Intuition whereas the external world of sense experience is the domain of Intelligence. There exist thus two widely different methods of approach in every intellectual domain, corresponding to two opposing spheres of intellectual activity. There is the domain of sense experience, of scientific knowledge, in which Intelligence is a reliable means of approach and there is

also the domain of subjective experience, of metaphysical and moral verities, in which Intuition is the sole means of attaining reality.

We are now in the very heart of the Bergsonian philosophy of Intuitionism. (1) The similarity between Sorelian conceptions and Bergson's philosophy are, indeed, striking. Not that Sorel had no idea of the role of intuitive knowledge in man's experience before having become familiar with Bergson's writings. As a matter of fact Sorel had become conscious of this fundamental problem long before Bergson wrote his main works. But one thing is certain, and with this both Sorel and Bergson agree, that bergsonism has greatly influenced the later developments of Sorelism. Bergson's philosophy provided Sorel with the necessary facts and arguments that he needed for the elaboration of his myth philosophy. The Sorelian myth philosophy is, indeed, an application of Bergson's ideas to the social and economic field. (2) This same philosophy which Bergson used in order to revolutionize the old mechanistic conceptions of human psychology and of social evolution Sorel has applied to the domain of sociology and of political economy. This should in no way imply that Sorel was a disciple of Bergson. For as we have seen, he was too much of an individualist and of an independent thinker to be able to keep to any one particular doctrine or school. (3)

(1) For a general but penetrating analysis of Bergsonianism See C.E. Moad's "Introduction to Modern Philosophy", pp.86-110. In French the following works are highly recommended: J. Chevalier "Bergson"; F. Challaye "Bergson"; A. Thibaudet "Le Bergsonisme"; Gillouin "La Philosophie de M. Henri Bergson."

(2) "Il est hors de doute que sans Bergson Sorel n'aurait rien écrit. Il serait resté un causeur étonnant, un prodigieux excitateur en chambre, découvreur inlassable de perspectives ignorées, mais

Bergson, therefore, though not Sorel's master is at least his main inspirer. In the same way that Edouard Le Roy⁽⁴⁾ and Blöndel found out the religious implications of Bergsonism so also Sorel attempted to apply the doctrines of Bergson to the field of social psychology. Just as Le Roy emphasizes that dogmas in order to be fully grasped should be first believed in, Sorel stresses that social myths should also become a part of our inner life in order² to produce their maximum of effectiveness. Le Roy stresses the necessity of faith as an essential prerequisite to fruitful action while Sorel recommends to the workers that they develop and enrich their intuitive and mystic experiences through their collective action and life.

The Sorelian myth philosophy is thus Bergsonian in its inspiration and its essential characteristics. It is, indeed, a very forceful and genuine idea. It contains, nevertheless, a fundamental contradiction. For Sorel suggests that the General Strike is to be regarded as a myth, like the Second Coming in Christian doctrine, and

incapable de se formuler. Il me l'a dit cent fois. La théorie du mythe en particulier, du mythe idée-force....lui vient de Bergson....Les deux penseurs s'estimaient. La dernière fois qu'ils se rencontrèrent, ce fut, vers 1918, devant la petite gare d'Auteuil: "Lénine, expliqua Sorel, Lénine, c'est Pierre le Grand...." "(R. Johannet, 'Visite à Bergson' in Journal 'Le Temps', 3 Nov. 1932)",

(3) "On fausse, me semble-t-il, la pensée de Sorel et on en diminue l'originalité quand on met au premier plan la part" (G. Pirou, "G. Sorel", p. 56): *de Bergsonisme qu'elle comporte.*"

(4) Cf. Ed. Le Roy, "Dogme et Critique".

although he quite evidently does not believe in the possibility of his social myth's attaining anything but mythical reality, he expresses the belief that it can and it should keep alive the faith of the proletariat in their sacred mission. This view, however, by no means suits the active syndicalists. If they are told that the General Strike is a mere myth, their energy will flag and their whole outlook become disillusioned. It is the vivid belief in its possibility which actually inspires them. As a certain writer puts it: "For the myth to keep faith alive it must be really believed in as true; so that Sorel's own skepticism as to the practical likelihood of a general strike cuts to the very root of his conception

In elaborating his philosophy of myth Sorel, therefore, involved himself in a dilemma. There is in his conception relative to the role of social myths a fundamental contradiction. For he is attempting to reconcile two elements which can not be adequately harmonized as they describe two basically antagonistic attitudes of mind. The real problem before him is, indeed, to reconcile skepticism and faith. How can the workers be skeptical about the possibility and the practicality of the General Strike and yet at the same time have faith in its realisation? It is necessary for this myth to produce a healthy effect on the mentality of the masses in order to create in them an unshakable faith, a deep-rooted conviction in its workability. . To tell the workers to embrace an ideal and work for it and to assure them at the same time that such an ideal is empty, mythical and imaginary is to put them in the most cruel state of mind.

(1) R. H. Soltau, Op. cit., p. 456.

The historical example which Sorel cites in order to confirm his view does not even strengthen his position. He tells us that in the primitive Church the idea of the Second Coming of Christ constituted for the early Christians a "Myth" by the help of which they were able to withstand all the attacks of their enemies. It was this same myth which gave birth to so many heroic souls through whose moral strength the Church succeeded in undermining the Roman civilization.

But we can not agree with Sorel when he attributes to the Second Coming of Christ a mythical character. For the early Christians the return of Christ was far from being a mere vision, an imaginary device. It was, indeed, a reality, a truth which no true believer could possibly doubt. It is we who consider such a return as being purely mythical and imaginary. Considered as such, there was no contradiction, as there is in the case of Sorel, in the position taken by the primitive Christians.

Admitting thus far that there is an obvious contradiction in the Sorelian myth philosophy is it not possible, one might contend, that despite its contradiction this philosophy of myth may become a working theory when put into practice? Without denying the possibility of such an attempt it should be pointed out, that it requires an intellectual effort which an ordinary worker cannot make, either because it runs counter to his mentality or because of lack of time and of interest. You may tell the workers that, though a myth, the mere idea or vision of the General Strike will create in them ethical qualities of such a vital importance that would outweigh its logical inconsistency. But such an argument will prove of no avail to them as they are guided all through their activities by considerations of

an utilitarian character.

Moreover, Sorel himself would be the first one to refuse to follow such a method as it involves the rational analysis of a myth and that consequently takes from the latter its essentially intuitive character. For when intellectually described a myth loses its power to inflame the imagination and to act as a driving force. The workers should have faith in the myth of the general strike. It is thus not an intellectual phenomenon but an act of the will.

All these considerations, however, can now be better understood and estimated than at the time Sorel wrote. For since the date of his writings so many strikes have occurred and have been successful that we can no longer attribute to them the mythical character which Sorel considered to be so inherent in them. The problem, indeed, is not so much to find out whether the strike is a possibility or not as to discover the best way in which it should take place. The proletarian strike is to-day a reality and it has created so many problems for our governments that our political leaders are forced to take these problems into consideration whenever they tend to affect the interests of a given influential group.

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The proletarian myth of the General Strike is the living force behind the working class revolution. It is this myth which makes the principle of class struggle not a mere intellectual truth but a working reality. For without a myth the proletarian revolution which is itself based on the doctrine of class war will remain ineffective. The General Strike myth and the principle of class struggle

are thus the twin pillars upon which the Syndicalist revolution is based. We have seen the nature and the significance of the Sorelian myth. We have now to explain the Sorelian doctrine of class war. In our chapter on Sorel's philosophy of history we emphasized that according to Sorel the really essential things in Marx's teaching are his historical materialism and his theory of class war. A short analysis of Sorel's economic determinism has already been presented. It remains for us to study more deeply the nature of the Sorelian conception of class war.

The principle of class war, says Sorel, is the very essence of Marxist Socialism, as interpreted by the syndicalists. Whoever keeps this alive is keeping alive the spirit of socialism much more truly than those who adhere to the letter of Social-Democratic orthodoxy. In his "Reflections on Violence" Sorel carried to its logical extreme this doctrine of class war. According to him society reaches its "historic perfection" when Capitalism entrenched in a highly concentrated industrial system stands opposed to a well-organised and powerful Labour. This state of opposition will attain its maturity when it becomes so fierce as to be nothing less than war to the knife. Anything which may retard the appearance of this historic perfection is a hindrance and whatever helps to bring it about an aid to the social revolution. This is why the General Strike myth is of such a fundamental importance since it intensifies the separation of classes and feeds class antagonism and conflict. Thus, if the working classes can be induced to put all their faith in revolutionary activity, if they can be encouraged to develop, expand and improve their syndicates, they will ultimately be able to take over the industry to-day in the hands of Capital and in this

way establish a new civilisation which has had no like in history.

But, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie must feel the spur. Never should the bourgeois capitalists be allowed to slacken in the fight. For however desirable it may be ^{that the labouring classes be} active in revolution, it is equally important that the bourgeoisie be ardently capitalistic. The more the bourgeois capitalists occupy themselves with the business of production, the more they display their selfishness and their cruelty, the fiercer will become the antagonism between them and the proletariat. It would be a real disaster for the socialist cause if they indulged in brotherly impulses of charity.

The doctrine of class war constitutes one of the main differences between the proletarian revolution of the syndicalists and the ^{revolution of the bourgeois capitalists. The political} political general strike (la grève générale politique), indeed, does not involve the principle of class war. It is even the negation of it since its avowed goal is the maintenance of the maximum national unity. Whereas the bourgeois revolution is essentially political and "étatist" the proletarian revolution tries to undermine the very basis of the national sovereign state. The bourgeois revolution preaches the gospel of social solidarity and peace while the syndicalist revolution is a class revolution. The political general strike is thus conservative. It keeps the state but transfers its powers from the hands of the capitalists to those of the proletariat. Consequently it does not help to abolish the evils of state organisation. The principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat which is a typically bourgeois conception is thus the negation of the syndicalist general strike. The latter differs also from the bourgeois general strike in its methods of action. The syndicalist strike conceives of violence as having a moral and a healthy effect on the

workers in general. It is, therefore, idealistic whereas the political strike is materialistic to the core since it uses force simply in order to take hold of the state. To the bourgeois politicians the workers are looked upon as mere tools or instruments for the selfish interests of a class. Syndicalism, however, aims at their liberation and is thus desinterested in its aims and motives.

Another difference which exists between the two general strikes is that the syndicalist strike is the spontaneous expression of the feelings of the working masses whereas the political strike is a carefully worked out plan of war. The syndicalists do not have an idea of the exact way in which the social revolution will take place. They do not have a definite program. They believe in the "élan vital" which, they say, will lead the workers in the right path. The bourgeois politicians, on the contrary, just because of their optimism, carefully plan their work. They build utopias and prepare detailed plans according to which the workers should shape their activities.

One more difference. The syndicalist general strike takes place in conditions of economic prosperity, whereas the political general strike usually happens at a time when social classes have, from a moral and ethical viewpoint, sunk to their lowest ebb. "If the syndicalist general strike is connected with the idea of an era of great economic progress, the political general strike calls up rather that of a period of decadence. Experience shows that classes on the downgrade are more easily captured by the fallacious harangues of politicians than classes on the upgrade, so that there seems to be a close relation between the political perspicacity of men and the conditions under which they live. Prosperous classes

may often act very imprudently, because they have too much confidence in their own strength; they face the future with too much boldness, and they are overcome for the moment by a frenzied desire for renown. Enfeebled classes habitually put their trust in people who promise them the protection of the State, without ever trying to understand how this protection could possibly harmonize their discordant interests." (1)

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But what is the chief aim of the syndicalist general strike and of the proletarian revolution based upon it? What are they after? What vision of a new society do they give us? How far are they compatible with our existing administrative system and what mechanism do they provide for the abolition of our present social evils?

To all these questions we have thus far given the theoretical answer. We have analyzed carefully the ethical and economic foundations of the syndicalist social order and have given a brief though a comprehensive account of the philosophical criticisms and objections the syndicalists have put forth against the bourgeois civilisation as a whole. It remains for us to examine the kind of edifice Sorel and his followers try to build upon these theoretical foundations. In other words what institutions do the syndicalists seek to establish for the purpose of carrying out their ideals? Is there any syndicalist plan of social reconstruction and if so how far does it agree with our present-day political organisation?

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence" pp. 179-180.

Questions of this sort probably never puzzled Sorel as they are not quite in harmony with the spirit of his philosophy in general. For as we know, our Syndicalist philosopher had a great contempt for utopian and abstract constructions. He was never sure of what the future had in store for the masses of the proletariat. The future, he said, is unknown and undetermined. Hence the futility of detailed plans of social reconstruction. As Estey rightly points out: "Revolutionary Syndicalism being primarily a philosophy of action, the ingenuity of its exponents has been largely directed to the development of the theory and method of class war, as exemplified in the activities of the labouring class. Hence, though they have indicated clearly and emphatically enough that the new order will be based on the syndicates, and that the work of preparation must be constant and thorough, syndicalists have bestowed but little thought upon the elaboration of the details of future society; a neglect quite in accordance with their contempt for idle prophecies, for the spinning of dreams, for all that savours of utopia. Leaders in a reaction against a Socialism grown somewhat too idealist, proud of a movement depending on action rather than on speculation, they laugh at the "prophetic mania" of the socialist parties, and profess their willingness to leave to the "childish optimism" of others the task of elaborating "detailed plans and minute descriptions" of the new industrialism." (1)

Nevertheless, we find that Sorel and his disciple Berth as well, do draw for us, though somewhat unconsciously and despite their will, a general picture of the society they want to establish.

(1) J. A. Estey, Op. cit., p. 119.

Like the theoretical foundations of his system, Sorel's conception of the future syndicalist organisation, or rather of that syndicalist organisation, which is in the process of being shaped, involves a negative and a positive aspect. On the one hand it is the negation of all forms of state organisation and on the other it is the affirmation of the superiority of the social or the syndicalist anarchism over all other governmental types. It is not, however, a complete repudiation of all the institutions now existing. For "if evolution be not a false guide, every new form of society must gradually be developed from the material conditions of the old, and the revolution, when it takes place, will consist not in the sudden appearance of some hitherto non-existent set of institutions, but rather in the consummation and formal recognition of a system slowly evolved in the very bosom of that which has been replaced." (1)

The modern state, says Sorel, "is a body of intellectuals, which is invested with privileges, and which possesses means of the kind called political for defending itself against the attacks made on it by other groups of intellectuals, eager to possess the profits of public employment. Parties are constituted in order to acquire the conquest of these employments, and they are analogous to the state." (2) The state is thus the quintessence of capitalism, of the exploitation of the *laboures* by the bourgeoisie. It is the parasite "par excellence", being the best form of political government which corresponds to the capitalistic era. And if the doctrine of historic materialism is not to be falsified it

(1) J. A. Estey, Op. cit., p. 112.

(2) G. Sorel "La Décomposition du Marxisme", p. 53.

must disappear with that era. The state in the domain of politics plays the same role as capitalism in the field of economics. Both of them are the manifestations of the same force and have the same fate.

The state, therefore, "with all its aspects, legislative, judicial, executive, regarded by Syndicalists as the political expression of Capitalism, must disappear with Capitalism itself. To attempt to use the state for the emancipation of Labour, or to give the state an aspect adapted to an industrial system from which the capitalist has disappeared, is hopeless. Evenmore, it is absurd. How can we conserve the very "quintessence of Capitalism" in a society based on the labouring classes? Were the state not abolished by those who would inaugurate a new system of production, it would be the negation of all the teaching of historic materialism which postulates a harmony between the economic and political manifestations of society. It is for this reason that state socialism, endeavouring to emancipate the wage-earners by concentrating all industry in the power of the state, is utterly impossible. The emancipation of Labour and the preservation of the state cannot go hand in hand. They are as opposite as the poles; for the one depends on the destruction, the other on the perpetuation of capitalistic industry." (1)

Syndicalism, therefore, is anti-state as well as anti-nationalist, anti-patriotic and anti-militarist. "Syndicalism" Sorel remarks "is engaged on an antimilitarist propaganda, which shows clearly the immense distance which separates it from Parliamentary

(1) J. A. Estey, Op. cit., p. 126.

Socialism in its conception of the nature of the state.The army is the clearest and the most tangible of all possible manifestations of the state, and the one which is most firmly connected with its origins and traditions. Syndicalists do not propose to reform the state, as the men of the eighteenth century did; they want to destroy it, because they wish to realise this idea of Marx's that the socialist revolution ought not to culminate in the replacement of one governing minority by another minority." (1) And in conclusion he says: "Thus it cannot any longer be contested that there is an absolute opposition between revolutionary syndicalism and the State; this opposition takes in France the particularly harsh form of antipatriotism." (2)

Sorel's anti-state philosophy, however, does not involve a complete repudiation of all forms of political organisation. It is anti-state but not anti-political. What it dislikes and aims to abolish in every organisation is the element of sovereignty and of external authority exercised by a group of individuals over the masses. Sorel, indeed, has no objection against authority "per se". He is against the particular form which this authority has come to assume. Nor does he believe in the unlimited freedom of the individual. His conception of liberty is not entirely negative since it emphasizes the necessity of some sort of organisation for the adequate and safe expression of man's freedom. This is the reason why he finds in our existing political system an element of order

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", pp. 122-123.

(2) Ibid., p. 124.

and of efficiency which he thinks should be considered as the true legacies of the bourgeois capitalistic society. To the "Idealistic state", Hegelian in its all-comprehensiveness and Hobbesian in its tyranny he opposes what he calls the "Administrative State" which is more of a follower than of a master, possessing neither the absoluteness nor the infallibility of the former. (1) Whereas the "Idealistic State" is centripetal, authoritarian and abstract, the "Administrative State" is decentralized, federated and concrete. The former is but a replica of Hobbes' Leviathan, the latter is Proudhonian in its features and forms. The syndicalist political organisation thus differs from the bourgeois political system as much as Syndicalism differs from Capitalism. In the Syndicalist social order the State, "L'Etat", will be forever abolished, for according to the syndicalist theory, "L'Etat" is the particular form of political society which corresponds to Capitalism in industry. Roughly speaking, the absence of centralisation constitutes the outstanding feature in which, from a political standpoint, the syndicalist society would be a novelty. Administrative functions are performed by the syndicats, for without the necessary

(1) " Nous trouvons partout deux formes de l'Etat qui se mêlent à d'une manière si intime que le plus souvent les théoriciens ne semblent même pas soupçonner qu'il y ait lieu de les distinguer; ces deux formes ne sont pas deux variétés, susceptibles d'être distinguées par les degrés d'une même qualité; il y a entre elles contradiction absolue L'Etat idéaliste se donne comme la Volonté et l'Intelligence incarnées en quelque sorte, dans des pouvoirs publics; il est le maître, l'éducateur, le directeur des volontés et des intelligences particulières L'Etat administratif paraît se modeler sur les institutions économiques Tandis que l'Etat idéaliste est exclusif et tend même à posséder tout contrôle sérieux, l'Etat administratif accepte le concours de corporations librement formées." (G. Sorel, "Introduction à l'Economie Moderne", pp. 229-230.)

amount of administration social solidarity will never be adequately promoted and insured. The syndicate is, indeed, the basic social unit in which the workers can develop their collective and class consciousness and give production the maximum of impetus and make it thereby as highly efficient as possible. For although there must be no neglect of the moral qualities which are to give the future society that ethical perfection from which the present has sadly fallen, yet capacity for production is equally vital for the realization of the syndicalist goal. For the supreme test of any economic system lies in the efficiency with which it supplies the needs of society. That society has solved its chiefest problem, which has solved the problem of efficient production. For when production has reached its highest efficiency, the problems of distribution and exchange are solved of themselves.

The syndicate therefore, has a twofold function. It is both a moral and an economic institution. By bringing the workers together it creates in them a collective spirit and at the same time gives them the necessary technical education essential for productive efficiency. In the syndicate there will be, indeed, some discipline. But for the discipline imposed from without must be substituted the self-discipline arising from within. To the bourgeois conception of external and transcendental authority the syndicalists oppose that of an immanent and internal authority. For only thereby can the system of industry be an organism and not a mechanism as it is to-day. (1)

(1) "Les anciennes idées sur la discipline deviennent surannées; il ne s'agit plus de savoir comment on impose aux ouvriers une volonté extérieure, mais de savoir comment ils acquerrant

Syndicalism, therefore, condemns the hierarchical principle on which the present-day division of workers into intellectual and manual labourers rests. It even more repudiates the political applications of this hierarchical principle. Not that it believes in the complete and the perfect equality of the individuals in both their economic and political activities. It admits the existence of differences of all sorts which make any philosophy of pure equality a mere chimera. What it wants to abolish is the prevailing conception that the intellectual labourers should constitute a class of their own, since they are inherently superior to the other workers. Syndicalism considers such individual differences not as absolute but as essentially relative, not qualitative but quantitative. In this way the exploitation of one class by another and the domination of one class over the other will cease and authority and liberty, equality and inequality will be harmonized and reconciled. (1)

How far then can we say that Sorelian syndicalism resembles Anarchism? Is there any fundamental doctrine on which both of

la conception de l'usage progressif à faire de la machine mise entre leurs mains. Le passage au socialisme ne peut se comprendre que si la volonté du maître se dissout dans le corps général des travailleurs." (G. Sorel, "Introd. à l'Econ. Moderne", pp. 215-216).

- (4) "Ceci ne veut pas dire que dans les ateliers disparaisse toute différence; car tout droit est inégalitaire et il y aura, comme aujourd'hui, des gens plus habiles et plus expéditifs que d'autres; mais les différences seront appréciées dans l'ordre quantitatif, tous les travaux étant devenus de même espèce et par suite commensurables entre eux L'expérience montre que les qualités de direction n'ont rien d'exceptionnel et qu'elles se trouvent très communément parmi les travailleurs manuels, peut-être même plus souvent que chez les intellectuels." (G. Sorel, "Matériaux d'une théorie du Prolétariat", pp. 91-92).

these schools agree? Are there no differences between them? To all these questions M. Edouard Berth has given a very comprehensive and authoritative answer in his "Les Derniers Aspects du Socialisme", wherein he states that the Sorelian or the Syndicalist Anarchism has nothing in common with the abstract metaphysical doctrines of a Stirner. To regard Syndicalists as Anarchists of a Stirnerian type would be a fundamental mistake. Undoubtedly all anarchists desire the abolition of the state, but it is not true that all those who desire the abolition of the state are anarchists. Anarchism and Syndicalism agree in so far as their negative program is concerned, since both of them cherish an anti-state philosophy. But as soon as they attempt to construct a positive system of philosophy and of social organisation, they begin to disagree. Whereas the philosophic anarchist of the type of Stirner proposes not only to destroy the existing state, but to remain free, without developing any social consciousness and having no conception whatever of his social duties and obligations, the syndicalist anarchist, on the contrary, like the Proudhonian anarchist, is essentially a social creature, who would abolish the state as we know it only to set up in its place a new political system, more just, more equitable, with no tyranny, centralisation and coercive machinery of any sort. (1) The first type of anarchist is a law unto himself, an anti-social and abstract creature. The second one is essentially social and by far more concrete and more real to life than

(1) "Pour le Socialisme, la société est la vraie réalité, et l'individu n'en est pour ainsi dire qu'une abstraction, c'est-à-dire une partie; l'être social a une réalité dont l'individu n'est qu'un aspect, un phénomène--ce que nie

the former. Sorelian anarchism is Proudhonian in its essentials and hence is social; that of Stirner is individualistic to the core. (1)

Syndicalism, therefore, agrees with Anarchism only in its desire to abolish the state. But the syndicalist "opposes the state not because all government is objectionable, but because this particular form of government is suited only to capitalistic society, and is utterly incompatible with the economic society which he proposes to introduce. Far from seeing in association any repression or diminution of individuality, the syndicalist believes that it increases rather than lessens the powers of individuals; that in solitude there is "impotence, misery, incapacity", in association "power, riches, capacity increased a hundredfold". For syndicalism is essentially a social philosophy, its method of action a social method." (2)

précisément l'anarchisme qui, au contraire, voit dans l'individu la seule réalité." (E. Berth, "Les Derniers Aspects du Socialisme", p. 85).

- (1) "Le syndicalisme ne veut pas plus détruire l'Etat, au sens négatif et réactionnaire qu'on imagine, que M. Bergson ne veut détruire la Science; mais ce qu'il veut, c'est, tout en restant sur le terrain de l'Etat moderne, retrouver la vie sociale défigurée et étouffée sous les exagérations étatistes, comme M. Bergson veut, tout en s'appuyant sur la science, retrouver la vie profonde dénaturée et faussée sous les exagérations conceptuelles." (E. Berth, "Les Méfaits des Intellectuels", p. 172).
- (2) J. A. Estey, Op. cit., p. 129.

CHAPTER VI.

Sorel's Philosophy of Violence.

"Philanthrope, vous parlez d'abolir la guerre, prenez garde de dégrader le genre humain." (Proudhon)

"Les épuisés veulent le repos, le délassement, la paix, la tranquillité--c'est le bonheur des religions et des philosophes nihilistes; les riches et les vivants veulent la victoire, les adversaires surmontés, l'extension du sentiment de puissance sur des domaines nouveaux." (Nietzsche)

The preceding chapter gave us a graphic picture of the syndicalist revolution and of the syndicalist society destined to grow and develop upon such a foundation. We have stated the aim of the proletarian General Strike. It remains for us to explain the method through which according to ^{Sorel} it should take place.

The method Sorel recommends his followers to adopt is the direct method of revolutionary action, that of violence. But before trying to analyze what Sorel's conception of violence is, let us first say what, in the opinion of Sorel, it should not be. For in this way we will be able to have a more correct idea of the Sorelian philosophy of violence and will be in a better position to grasp its essential truth.

Sorelian violence is quite different from, and is even the negation of, the Jacobin violence so thoroughly practiced and displayed by the French Revolutionists. The syndicalists consider the bloody incidents that always accompany political revolutions as the manifestations of the bourgeois philosophy

of ethics and war. Not so with the proletarian violence. It does not involve a return to barbarism, since it repudiates physical coercion and force. In its view violence is more of an attitude of mind, of ^a psychological and mental process; and although it manifests itself in the daily life of the workers through such social phenomena as strikes and boycotting yet it does not degenerate into actual warfare, as is the case with all bourgeois revolutions. (1)

The difficulty we encounter in distinguishing between proletarian and bourgeois violence is due to the fact that we often think of the former in terms of the latter. "It is very difficult" says Sorel "to understand proletarian violence as long as we think in terms of the ideas disseminated by middle-class philosophers; according to their philosophy, violence is a relic of barbarism which is bound to disappear under the influence of the progress of enlighten^mment." (2) And again he says: "The ideas current among the outside public on the subject of proletarian violence are not founded on observation of contemporary facts, and on a rational interpretation of the present

(1) "Georges Sorel donne à la notion de violence un contenu idéologique bien plus que réaliste. La violence n'est point la force, puisqu'elle exprime la révolte alors que la force traduit la contrainte." (G. Pirou, "Georges Sorel", p. 35).

(2) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", p. 74.

Syndicalist movement; they are derived from a comparison of the present with the past--an infinitely simpler mental process; they are shaped by the memories which the word "revolution" evokes almost automatically. It is supposed that the Syndicalists, merely because they call themselves revolutionaries, wish to reproduce the history of the revolutionaries of 1793."⁽¹⁾

The differences between syndicalist violence and bourgeois violence are, therefore, essential. Whereas the latter is accompanied by acts of physical brutality and is thus an extension of bourgeois exclusiveness and of bourgeois egoistic tendencies, the former is void of all those petty acts which make every honest man revolt. "Proletarian acts of violence have no resemblance to these proscriptions; they are purely and simply acts of war; they have the value of military demonstrations, and serve to mark the separation of classes. Everything in war is carried on without hatred and without the spirit of revenge: in war the vanquished are not killed; noncombatants are not made to bear the consequences of the disappointments which the armies may have experienced on the fields of battle."⁽²⁾

But why should such a difference exist between syndicalist violence and bourgeois violence? What makes the former so much more idealistic, more ennobling and more humane than the latter? Is there any convincing reason behind such differences?

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", p. 100.

(2) G. Sorel, Op. cit., pp. 121-122.

What makes Sorel believe that the workers will not let violence degenerate into barbarism? On what basis does he build his faith in the ethical idealism and the high moral standard of the working classes? To such challenging questions Sorel has given definite, though not quite convincing, answers. In his opinion the main reason why the workers are destined to keep this idea of violence pure and untarnished, without having the least temptation to use it for selfish and base purposes, is because they cherish no love for political domination. The syndicalists who, unlike the bourgeois parliamentarians, do not only propose to transfer the powers of the state from the hands of one class to those of another, but want to make a "tabula rasa" of all types of external authority, cannot indulge like the former revolutionists into acts of barbarism. They have no lust for power and have no State-God to whom they wish to offer human sacrifices. For political rivalries and ambition have been always the chief causes of proscriptions and of bloody upheavals. They have given birth to political factions which, because of the jealousy that existed among them, were in a continual state of war. "We have to ask ourselves" Sorel remarks "whether the ferocity of the old revolutionaries was not due to reasons depending on the past history of the middle class, so that in confusing the abuses of the revolutionary middle-class force of 1793 with the violence of our revolutionary Syndicalists a grave error would be committed: the word "revolutionary" would, in this case have two perfectly

distinct meanings." (1) And further he says: "We are perhaps no better nor more human, or more sensitive to the misfortunes of others than were the men of 1793; and I should even be rather disposed to assert that the country is probably less moral than it was at that time; but we are no longer dominated to the same extent that our fathers were by this superstition of the God-State, to which they sacrificed so many victims." (2) And in conclusion he says: "We have the right to conclude from the preceding analysis that syndicalist violence, perpetrated in the course of strikes by proletarians who desire the overthrow of the State, must not be confused with those acts of savagery which the superstition of the State suggested to the revolutionaries of 1793, when they had power in their hands and were able to oppress the conquered-following the principles which they had received from the Church and from the Monarchy." (3)

Here Sorel demonstrates in a peculiar way how deep-rooted his optimism is. Though himself an avowed pessimist he has sometimes a child-like faith in the high moral potentialities of that class from which he expects the total regeneration of existing society. We agree with him when he attributes the bloody character of former revolutions to the political ambitions of various parties and factions. All this seems to us to be correct and in harmony with historical facts and events. But we cannot believe that the workers are in reality immune

(1) G. Sorel, *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 116.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 125.

from political ambitions of any sort. Power is by its very nature alluring. And man who has^a love for domination cannot resist its temptations. The lust for authority and domination is, therefore, not an accidental phenomenon but is deeply rooted in human nature. Hence, it cannot be the peculiar feature of a given group or class but is common to all social classes, irrespective of their origin and of their nature. The workers, if they are given an adequate chance, will display the same zeal for class domination and rule as that displayed by the bourgeois capitalists. Sorel's faith in the incorruptibility of the working classes is not based on any positive ground. His assurance that they will resist the temptations of power is not sufficiently warranted by social facts. Evenmore, we can say that the post-war history of Europe has witnessed the establishment of a semi-proletarian government in Russia, and that by itself is sufficient to discredit his optimistic faith in the incorruptibility of the working classes. (1)

The Sorelian idea of violence, therefore, though in theory a denial of physical force, becomes, when put into practice,

(1) "M. Sorel a cru pouvoir prophétiser, en 1906, que les révolutions prolétariennes ne seraient sans doute pas souillées "d'abominations", comme la révolution bourgeoise: un tel espoir dépassait les données de l'observation. La révolution russe, œuvre d'une violence dont le système doctrinal paraît lui être emprunté, a fourni un autre démenti aux prévisions du célèbre philosophe pamphlétaire. ...Si partisan soit-il de la terreur, M. Sorel a cependant fait cette réserve: "Qu'il n'est point nécessaire qu'il y ait un grand développement de la brutalité et que le sang soit versé à flots" :Mais qui fixera une limite normale à ce développement?" (M. Leroy, "Les Techniques Nouvelles du Syndicalisme", p. 69).

the very essence of brutality. Sorel may reprove physical coercion. He may condemn any war which aims to damage the person or the property of the enemy, and reprehend all the savage acts which, he says, are the inevitable accompaniments of political revolutions. His approvals and disapprovals, his likes and dislikes, however, cannot change the bare reality which he has to face.

From the negative aspect of Sorel's philosophy of violence let us now turn to the positive. We have seen what Sorel thinks proletarian violence should not be. It remains for us to discover what he wants it to be. What does, indeed, Sorel expect from violence? What beneficial effects does he want it to produce? There are, in his opinion, two main services proletarian violence can actually render. To begin with, it can create within the workers the necessary enthusiasm and conviction without which no work of social reconstruction is possible. In the second place it serves to stimulate production by keeping alive the spirit of competition among the various factors of production. The syndicalist violence, therefore, has a twofold function: moral and economic and hence, it should be studied from both an ethical and an economic standpoint.

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Sorel was a moralist, disillusioned and perplexed by the moral vices and corruption that were rampant in the society of his day and was eager, in his constant quest after the heroic

and the sublime, to revive that little moral sense which he could still find in the proletarian class; he thought that violence could be used as the magna "par excellence" whereby to shake the proletarian as well as the bourgeois classes out of their moral laziness. The masses, he remarks, often tend to remain stagnant. They need something to spur them on and to awaken them from their age-long slumber. For only in action is there life. Peace, and particularly that social peace which our so-called Solidarists and Humanitarians are craving after, leads only to moral atrophy since it stifles our energies and kills our aspirations at their very source. Mediocrity, in all its aspects and in its worst forms, is the inevitable outcome of any gospel of social peace. Since the latter carries within itself the germs of moral perversity and of ethical unproductiveness. For the simple fact of being a living human creature whose natural tendency is to follow those lines which demand the minimum of effort makes it doubly imperative for man to wage a persistent and relentless war against the weak and the malignant forces of his nature. Without struggle against the inner and the outer enemies that assail him, man is corrupted and eventually declines. In peace, in stability, in quietism there is death. In continued struggle, in daily effort, in enemies overcome and crushed we find the element of life and of progress. (1)

(1) "Ce qui nous guette tous, peuples, classes ou individus, c'est ce quiétisme éternel, qui s'insinue au coeur des plus braves, et les fait aspirer à ce repos et à cette béatitude pour lesquels l'homme n'est pas né et que ne saurait être la loi de ce monde, qui est une loi de guerre, de travail, de création, d'invention et de production perpétuelle. Marche, marche toujours jamais satisfait,

The test of any good ethics is, indeed, the degree in which it can stimulate the masses to develop their heroic aspirations. For ethics is not a collection of abstract moral formulae. It is a conviction, a vivid and constructive faith in an ideal capable of stirring the emotions of the people and stimulating them to action. "Morality", Sorel remarks, "is not doomed to perish because the motive forces behind it will change; it is not destined to become a mere collection of precepts as long as it can still vivify itself by an alliance with an enthusiasm capable of conquering all the obstacles, prejudices, and the need of immediate enjoyment, which oppose its progress..... There is only one force which can produce to-day that enthusiasm without whose cooperation no morality is possible, and that is the force resulting from the propaganda in favour of a general strike." (1) And in another passage he says: "In the total ruin of institutions and of morals there remains something which is powerful, new, and intact, and it is that which constitutes, properly speaking, the soul of the revolutionary proletariat." (2) And the only thing which to-day can keep the proletarian soul intact and alive is violence

toujours travaillé par le tourment de l'infini à réaliser et irréalisable, tel est "l'impératif catégorique" qui s'adresse infatigablement à l'homme et auquel il ne peut désobéir, sous peine de dégénérescence et de décadence immédiates." (Ed. Berth, "Guerre des Etats ou Guerre des Classes", p. 115).

(1) G. Sorel, "Reflections on Violence", p. 294.

(2) Ibid., p. 295.

which feeds the energies of the working masses and enables them to withstand the opposition of all the other social classes.

Violence, therefore, is in the opinion of Sorel a source of good ethics, and war which is but an expression of violence, is an indispensable factor of social progress. There are, however, two different aspects of war: war as a manifestation of physical force, of sheer brutality and as a noble and heroic act, as it has been considered by poets celebrating triumphant armies and illustrious generals." The whole of classical history" says Sorel, "is dominated by the idea of war conceived heroically: in their origin, the institutions of the Greek republics had as their basis the organisation of armies of citizens; Greek art reached its apex in the citadels; philosophers conceived of no other possible form of education than that which fostered in youth the heroic tradition, and they endeavoured to keep the study and practice of music within bounds, because they wished to prevent the development of sentiments foreign to this discipline." (1) "There is another aspect of war", Sorel adds, "which does not possess this character of nobility, and on which the pacifists always dwell. The object of war is no longer war itself; its object is to allow politicians to satisfy their ambitions." (2)

(1) G. Sorel, Op. cit., p. 188.

(2) Ibid., p. 189.

Comparing these two different aspects of war, Sorel Says: "The syndicalist general strike presents a very great number of analogies with the first conception of war: the proletariat organizes itself for battle, separating itself distinctly from the other parts of the nation, and regarding itself as the great motive power of history, all other social considerations being subordinated to that of combat." (1)

The fundamental differences between war conceived as an heroic action and war as a political conquest thus resolve themselves into a distinction between violence and force. Whereas "the object of force is to impose a certain social order in which the minority governs..... violence tends to the destruction of that order. The middle class have used force since the beginning of modern times, while the proletariat now reacts against the middle class and against the state by violence." (2)

The syndicalist violence, therefore, is more of a psychological attitude of mind, of a mental state than the manifestation of physical coercion and brutality. It is a war psychology, an ideology of scission rather than the expression of a savage barbarism. Nevertheless, it has and it should have its outward manifestations. For ideas and facts, thought and action cannot be separated by water-tight compartments. They react on each other and should, therefore, be considered as

(1) G. Sorel, Op. cit., p. 189.

(2) Ibid., p. 195.

being at the same time cause and effect. It becomes thus evident that the proletarian revolution will not only be waged in the inner conscience of every worker but will find its concrete expression in such social conflicts as the strike. Such conflicts, however, need not be very long and bloody in the same way as the conflict between the Christian and the Pagan world. "We may make use here" Sorel remarks "of the great historical example provided by the persecutions which Christians were obliged to suffer during the first centuries. Modern authors have been so struck by the language of the Fathers of the Church, and by the details given in the Acts of the Martyrs, that they have generally imagined the Christians as outlaws whose blood was continually being spilt....Renan still asserted that the literature of martyrdom should be taken seriously.....The researches of Harnack lead to quite another conclusion: the language of the Christian authors was entirely disproportionate to the actual importance of the persecutions; there were very few martyrs before the middle of the third century.....The statistics of persecutions therefore play no great part in this question; what was of much greater importance than the frequency of the torments were the remarkable occurrences which took place during the scenes of martyrdom. The Christian ideology was based on these rather rare but very heroic events; there was no necessity for the martyrdoms to be numerous in order to prove, by the test of experience, the absolute truth of the new religion and the absolute truth of the new religion and the absolute error of the old, to establish thus that there were two incompatible

ways, and to make it clear that the reign of evil would come to an end." (1) And in conclusion he says: "It is possible, therefore, to conceive Socialism as being perfectly revolutionary, although there may only be a few short conflicts, provided that these have strength enough to evoke the idea of the general strike: all the events of the conflict will then appear under a magnified form, and the idea of catastrophe being maintained, the cleavage will be perfect. Thus one objection often urged against revolutionary Socialism may be set aside, there is no danger of civilisation succumbing under the consequences of a development of brutality, since the idea of the general strike may foster the notion of the class war by means of incidents which would appear to middle-class historians as of small importance." (2)

Sorel, following in this the theories of Harnack, evidently underestimates both the intensity and the frequency of the persecutions. This is at least the opinion of P. Henri du Passage, the eminent Jesuit writer. (3) And even if we agree with Sorel on this point we cannot admit that if in the past the conflict between the Roman and the Christian religions had been of a relatively mild character the same condition will necessarily prevail in the future syndicalist revolution. How does Sorel, who refuses to admit that the future can be

(1) G. Sorel, Op. cit., pp. 208-211.

(2) Ibid., pp. 212-213.

(3) Cf. "Les Etudes", Feb. 20th and March 5th 1913.

ever adequately known and its secrets be clearly disclosed, come to entertain such strong hopes in regard to the exact character of the syndicalist revolution? What can possibly give him the certainty that the working-class catastrophe will not be characterized by savage actions and deeds? Can we foretell the course of future events in the light of the past? Did not Sorel himself condemn such a method of reasoning in regard to the prevailing conceptions relative to violence? Our philosopher thus involves himself again in a contradiction. Though an anti-intellectualist and a firm believer in the Bergsonian "élan vital" he actually indulges in intellectualistic constructions that are at the opposite pole of the entire anti-intellectualistic philosophy.

Not only does Sorel adopt a method which, besides being dubious, is in fundamental contradiction with the entire spirit of his philosophy. He actually betrays a definite lack of understanding of the psychology of the masses. To talk to the workers about the ethical advantages of violence and to draw before them subtle distinctions between force and violence is to speak to them in a language not well suited to their mentality. The masses, indeed, are not capable of grasping such minute differences between proletarian and bourgeois violence. They are apt to follow their own dispositions and tendencies. And we know only too well the inevitable outcome of such a state of things. (1)

(1) "M. Sorel a établi de subtiles distinctions entre la force bourgeoise menée par la jalousie et la violence prolétarienne poursuivant une idée plus haute, entre

Here the resemblances between Sorel and Nietzsche appear to be particularly significant. Since both of them preached the gospel of war and had an equal contempt for humanitarian and solidarist conceptions. The moral exaltation which Nietzsche wants to create in his "Superman" Sorel wants to infuse within the very heart of the proletariat. But whereas Sorel takes side with the working classes and through them hopes to establish a new civilisation, Nietzsche, on the contrary, as a convinced aristocrat despises the masses and looks down upon them. (1) Nietzsche is an aristocrat and a monarchist. Sorel is proletarian and anti-monarchic. Nietzsche was a strong believer in hierarchical authority. Sorel was against any doctrine of external authority. And yet, in both of these philosophers we find a similar anti-intellectualistic mood and a profound sense of pessimism. (2)

entre les excès de la révolution politique et les gestes nécessaires d'une transformation économique..... Mais la foule est simpliste et ses façons demeurent brutales. Il y a toujours danger à lui parler d'abord et surtout de violence, parce que ce mot correspond souvent à ses dispositions intimes et qu'après l'avoir entendu, elle n'écoute plus les explications ultérieures." (H. du Passage, "Les Etudes", 5 Mars, 1913, p. 643).

- (1) "Nietzsche, aristocrate et classique, n'entrevoit de vraie culture que celle dont le peuple serait exclu; M. Sorel, au contraire, rêve avec Marx et Proudhon d'une culture qui serait fondée sur le travail, et qui serait propre à toute la classe productrice." (G. Guy-Grand, "La Philosophie Syndicaliste", p. 80).
- (2) "Chez les deux maîtres, même souci de méthode purement expérimentale, enfin même idée de théologisme.... Par contre coup, même dé fiance du rationalisme logicien, qui ne doit pas troubler l'expansion de la vie, et en ce sens même pragmatisme." (G. Guy-Grand, Op. cit., p. 80)

Should we conclude from that that Sorel had come under the direct influence of Nietzsche and had borrowed his ideas entirely from this German philosopher. M. Berth refuses to think so. He attributes the similarity between the ideas of Sorel and those of Nietzsche to a simple coincidence rather than to any direct influence of Nietzscheism on Sorelism. (1)

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So much for the ethical advantages and results of violence. What influence can the latter have, or does Sorel think it should have, on the economic system of production? As a moralist, whose ethical preoccupations are mainly centered around the problem of production, Sorel can not but attack to such a question all the importance it deserves. For Sorel is not a moralist in the same way as Pascal and Bossuet are. His ethics is not theological but economic. Its foundations are not supernatural and divine but essentially material. It is in the factory life that the workers have to seek those essential moral elements which taken together form what Sorel calls the "Ethics of the Producers". Not so with the religious ethics of Pascal who finds in God the ultimate source of all moral principles and laws. To the transcendental and revealed ethics

(1) "Sans doute, comme tout le monde, Sorel avait lu Nietzsche; mais je crois bien que si, dans le "Procès de Socrate", par exemple, ses thèses rencontrent celles de l'auteur de l'"Origine de la Tragédie", c'est là un pur synchronisme, comme il s'en produit souvent dans l'histoire des idées, mais non influence directe." (E. Berth, "Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la violence", pp. 178-179)

of religion Sorel opposes a purely pragmatic ethics having its roots deeply imbedded in the life of the workers in the factory and aiming at the increase of production. Viewed as such Sorelianism is essentially an ethico-economic system, one in which economic and moral considerations go hand in hand and react on each other in such a way as to become at the same time cause and effect. The Sorelian ethics not only arises out of the material conditions of life. It also aims to improve these same material conditions.

The economic implications of violence, therefore, constitute one of the fundamental aspects of Sorel's philosophy of war. Proletarian violence, indeed, stimulates the bourgeoisie and through the bourgeoisie the whole system of production now under capitalistic control. In this way Capitalism will reach its historic perfection, a perfection essential for the success of the proletarian civilisation. Through violence the bourgeoisie will abandon its humanitarian tendencies and instead of seeking to limit production will be led to bring it to the maximum of efficiency. The economic aspect or manifestation of violence is competition. Without the latter production decreases both in quality and in actual output. With its help it acquires such a momentum as to enrich a hundredfold the material conditions of life. Social solidarity and peace make production static by limiting its power, by taking away from the workers, both mental and manual, the incentive to work, whereas social conflict and war give production its dynamic power through the maximum use of the energy of the producers and of the machinery they control.

Thus, as Estey rightly points out: "To the mind of Sorel the greatest danger lurking in the way of modern civilisation is the danger lest Capitalism should sink into an easy philanthropy, a lazy altruism, and follow the level paths of social peace. For they are paths not easy to avoid. Tempted thither by the blandishments and seductive arguments of Philanthropists, Humanitarians, Solidarist^s, Christian Socialists, and even of Revisionists, the bourgeoisie is only too readily deluded with vain hopes of removing by social reform all the ills by which the masses are oppressed. But in these comfortable paths lies the destruction of all progress. When the ruling classes and the industrial magnates of any society succumb to the temptation to be altruistic and unselfish, when they endeavour both to ease the lot of the workers and bind Capital and Labour with the bonds of common interest, that society is doomed, it is on the downward road of decadence. Let the social struggle cease, and the country hastens towards its fall. If modern civilisation is to escape the decadence which preceded ~~the~~ the fall of Rome, it will be through the friendly aid not of Social Peace but of Industrial War. And if the capitalists shrink from the duty which is laid upon them, if they allow themselves to be deluded with policies of reform, it is for the proletariat to apply the spur of violence, and by rudely shattering their ideals of altruism, keep them to their proper sphere, which is production, not philanthropy." (1)

(1) J. A. Estey, Op. cit., pp. 55-58.

There is a good deal of truth in all the reasoning of Sorel relative to the economic advantages of the proletarian violence. But there is perhaps an equal, if not a greater, amount of fallacy in all that he says. As usual Sorel is full of paradoxes. Behind his big words and his fiery sentences we can discern a good deal of exaggeration. That economic competition is in many ways advantageous no one can deny. Competition not only acts as an incentive, it actually encourages the producer to raise the quality of his product. It moreover increases the quantity of the goods produced. All this, however, is only one aspect of the truth. If competition serves to improve the quality of goods it sometimes lowers it so as to meet the demand of the public. And by far the most obvious danger of competition is the large amount of waste^e it causes in production. The overproduction of certain goods (not total overproduction since human wants are unlimited in number though limited in intensity) which is to-day one of the outstanding economic ills that afflict human society is mainly the outcome of insufficient social control in the industrial field. The world is to-day suffering from lack of organisation. In the political and in the economic sphere as well war and competition have brought the world to the verge of bankruptcy. Material comfort and welfare have undoubtedly increased. But at the same time economic waste, political unrest, social conflicts of all sorts have immensely added to human wretchedness and misery. And all this because of war, because of lack of social organisation and control. It is not sufficient, as Sorel bids us to do, to think only of production

and to consider distribution and exchange as of a purely secondary importance. The most challenging problems in the economic world of to-day are those which arise out of the unsatisfactory conditions of the exchange and of the distribution of goods. Our production has increased both in quality and in quantity. Our markets are being flooded with manufactured goods. But where are those who can really avail themselves of such goods? Our trouble, therefore, is not so much due to inefficient production but to the difficulties involved in the problem of distribution and exchange. Hence, the glaring social inequality which is one of the basic causes of our present-day instability.

In putting all his emphasis on the economic consequences of war as expressed through competition, and in stressing the importance of production alone, Sorel has evidently restricted his view and has become one-sided. He has failed to see the other side of the picture. If economic war helps to raise the standard of production, it makes at the same time the problem of distribution and exchange infinitely more complex than in time of peace. No, we cannot accept the Sorelian doctrine on this point without bringing to it the necessary modifications. Social control and organisation are to-day indispensable, and only in a world of peace can they be adequately realised.

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CHAPTER VII.

Sorel's Influence in France.

"Les purs syndicaux ont plus à nous apprendre qu'ils n'ont à apprendre de nous!"

(G. Sorel)

"Je considère en effet que Proudhon est le premier théoricien socialiste vraiment prolétarien que la France ait produit; et je vois dans Sorel son héritier spirituel le plus authentique." (Ed. Berthé)

"No one is a prophet in his own country" (Nul n'est prophète en son pays) is a statement the truth of which is well confirmed by the almost insignificant influence of Sorel in the land of his birth. Though born a Frenchman and expressing in his writings one of the most genuine tendencies of his age and of the France of the XXth C. he failed to initiate a Solid Social movement or to establish a permanent school of thought. Not that he was intellectually inferior to many of his contemporaries who succeeded in giving direction to new social and political tendencies. Nor is it because he lacked the enthusiasm and the zest necessary for the success of every social reformer. Sorel, indeed, was intellectually and morally well-equipped. His keen and penetrating intelligence, his highly critical mind, and his ability as a polemist all these ought to have helped him considerably in his mighty work of social reconstruction. Sorel was not a mere closet philosopher. Though he liked theorizing he never allowed himself to get out of touch with the practical aspects of social reform. This is why he always liked to be connected with some social or political movement. And if the

failure of any movement or school of thought is to be attributed to the insincerity and the selfishness of its leaders this can in no ways be applied to Sorel. For if there was any outstanding feature in Sorel's character it was ^{his} sincerity, his devotion to an ideal.

And yet, despite all these gifts of mind and character, Sorel failed to make an abiding impression upon the mind of the French public. Whether in his relations with the syndicalism of the workers or in his cooperation with the leaders of the Action Française he never acquired the fame which many of his friends like Maurras and Daudet were destined to enjoy.

The history of Sorelism in France falls into three parts. We have first to examine how far Sorel did influence the syndicalist movement, then to review briefly his relations with the Action Française and lastly to find out whether he was able to establish in France a school of his own.

As we have already pointed out in our chapter on the life of Sorel, he failed on the whole to impress the workers with his philosophy mainly because it was too subtle, too abstruse and too idealistic for the materially minded masses of industrial workers.

The syndicalist movement, indeed, influenced Sorel more than it was influenced by him. Sorel himself acknowledges this fact. And how could it be otherwise? Sorel was too original, too much of an individualist to become a real leader. For leadership implies two contradictory attitudes: subordination and superordination. In other words, in order to lead one has also to follow at the same time. And this Sorel could not do just

because of his individualism. Even when he seemed to follow he did so in his own peculiar way. The result was that he had a partial understanding of the psychology of the proletarian class and hence could not impress it with his ideas. The idealism of Sorel could not be reconciled with the materialism of the workers. ⁽¹⁾ The latter were too practical in their views, too real in their outlook upon life, and too much inclined to give a literal interpretation of Sorelism to make a full cooperation between them and Sorel possible. The Sorelian myth philosophy, which could in no way give the workers the assurance of final victory, and which invited them to wage a moral war for an abstract ideal was evidently incapable of arousing the enthusiasm of the working masses and of taking hold of their entire personality. ⁽²⁾ The proletarian revolution as viewed by Sorel is, indeed, too abstract. It calls the workers to destroy but does not put before them a positive program of social reconstruction. And even more it tells them to refrain from bloody actions and not to indulge in acts of physical violence. Such an abstract war the workers could not understand and appreciate, a war, which besides giving those

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- (1) "Le progrès moral, essentiel aux yeux de Sorel, est resté complètement indifférent aux syndicalistes militants qui ne voient, dans la lutte de classe, qu'un moyen d'obtenir des avantages matériels plus grands." (Perrin, "Les Idées Sociales de G. Sorel", 169)
- (2) "Les militants ne doutent pas de la future révolution sociale, que Sorel présente sous la forme hypothétique d'un mythe." (Ibid., p. 169)

who wage it no assurance of victory, restricts its actions to mere moral protest and revolt.

The failure of Sorelism among the syndicalist workers can be, therefore, easily understood and explained provided we adequately understand Sorel's individualistic temperament and character. It is not because he was intellectually weak nor because he lacked fiery enthusiasm that Sorel failed to influence the workers with his doctrines. It was mainly because of his individualism, which restricted his powers of observation and made him one-sided. Add to that his tendency towards speculation and abstract intellectualism, which can also be partially explained on the basis of his individualism. His individualism was so extreme that it took him farther and farther from the actual experiences of his contemporaries. For individualism when pushed too far results in intellectual isolation which in its turn, leads to abstract speculation.

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The history of the relations between Sorel and the leaders of the Action Française is another chapter in the history of Sorelism in France. We need not repeat what we have already written on this subject in the first chapter of our book. Suffice it to say that the alliance between the national monarchists and the syndicalists was by its very nature weak since it was not based on any solid program of positive reform, or on any agreement in fundamental principles. It was, therefore, bound by its very nature to be but a passing episode. In the following pages an attempt will be made to compare the

syndicalist philosophy with the philosophy of nationalism in order to understand more adequately the early success and the eventual failure of the syndico-nationalist alliance.

There are some striking similarities between Sorelian Syndicalism and Maurrassian nationalism. To begin with, Sorel and the nationalist leaders agree on the essential points of their negative program. They both stand in complete opposition to the political doctrines bequeathed by the France of the Revolution and upon which the entire edifice of the French Republic now rests. Both are thus reactionary and propose a fundamental transformation of the existing social order. But, whereas Maurras and his disciples look to the past as their ideal, Sorel refuses to go backward and wants his followers to be imbued with the spirit of the age. Viewed as such the school of Maurras is essentially traditionalist and conservative whereas Sorel is a modernist and a progressist. The monarchists aim at the reestablishment of the "Ancien Régime", Sorel proposes to undermine the very basis upon which it rests. Maurras cherishes an "étatist" philosophy Sorel's entire philosophy is anti-state and anti-authoritarian. Maurras is a monarchist and a nationalist, Sorel preaches the gospel of anti-nationalism and anti-patriotism. The nationalist ideal is a well coordinated and well unified state of which the king is the symbol; the syndicalist ideal is a federation of independent and equal "syndicats". The nationalist social order is essentially a politico-religious system, one in which State and Church hold the highest ranks. The syndicalist society, on

the contrary, attaches to economic and moral forces the greatest value and affirms the superiority of the economic over the religious and the political factors.

In their violent repudiation of the existing parliamentary regime and of the democratic principles on which it rests both the nationalists and the syndicalists do in no way content themselves with partial reform. They propose a thorough and radical transformation of our social order. Everything or nothing they widely proclaim. Either the whole system should be turned upside down or it should be left as it is. For partial change will not cure its many ills. It will even made them worse. Revolution and not reform, for revolution is the only way in which society can be saved from eventual destruction.

But, although both the nationalists and the syndicalists are revolutionists they are so in totally different ways. Whereas the nationalist revolution is retrogressive and conservative, the syndicalist or proletarian revolution is progressive and radical.

Not only do Maurras and Sorel differ in their conceptions of revolution, they also differ in their conceptions of violence. As we have pointed out in the previous chapter Sorel carefully distinguished between violence and force. The former is more of a psychological or moral attitude of mind; the latter is physical power. Violence does not involve the feeling of hatred and of blood-thirsty opposition. It is an attitude of seission and uncompromise. Force, on the contrary, is pure brutality.

What Sorel recommends is violence and not force. Maurras, however, does not make such a distinction. The Revolution he preaches is the very expression of what Sorel condemns. Syndicalist violence is considered as having an intrinsic value, irrespective of its actual material advantages. Its value is above all ethical. The nationalist violence is but a replica of the revolutionary acts of war, similar to those that took place during the 1789 Revolution of France.

Furthermore, both the nationalist and the syndicalist revolutions should be the work of a given social class, with the difference, however, that the nationalists call upon the upper bourgeoisie to take the responsibility for the realisation of their aim, whereas the syndicalists look to the industrial working masses to fulfill their plans of social reconstruction. The nationalism of Maurras is aristocratic; the syndicalism of Sorel is proletarian.

The differences between the nationalist philosophy and the syndicalist philosophy go still deeper. There is between them a fundamental antagonism from an intellectual standpoint. The intellectualism of Maurras stands at the opposite pole of the anti-intellectualism of Sorel and Berth. The philosophy of nationalism is based on rational foundations. Its whole political theory is expressed in terms of reason and of what Sorel calls abstract speculation. In this sense Maurras is a true Cartesian. What a difference with Sorel! The latter's anti-intellectualism and pragmatism, as best formulated in his myth philosophy and in his pessimistic conception of life and of

the universe, make of him a true Bergsonian. When Maurras appeals to Reason Sorel appeals to Intuition; the former is a Cartesian, the latter a Bergsonian.

To what conclusion such a comparison between the monarchical nationalism of Maurras and Barrès and the workers' syndicalism of Sorel and Berth can lead us? The answer is self evident, namely that any alliance between the syndicalists and the nationalists could not but be superficial and temporary. ⁽¹⁾ And this is exactly what took place. The imminentⁿ clash at last happened in 1910, in the way already described in the first chapter.

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Sorel's failure to captivate the heart of the French workers and his inability to cooperate with the national monarchists of the Action Française left him apparently in a desperate situation. He was rejected by the most extreme parties, by the syndicalists and the nationalists alike. His ideas were either mutilated or entirely thrust aside. Sorelism seemed to have completely failed to realize its mission. Even Sorel himself had lost his hopes for the future of the working classes and had

(1) "L'influence de Sorel sur le nationalisme apparaît donc comme limitée à la partie critique de son action, tandis que la partie positive et constructive s'inspire d'un idéal opposé à celui de notre auteur... Le nationalisme de Ch. Maurras et le syndicalisme de G. Sorel nous paraissent donc inconciliables, en dépit de certaines haines communes et d'analogies plus apparentes que réelles." (Perrin, Op. cit., p. 175).

had sought in solitude the means whereby to keep intact his ideas and his personality.

And yet, despite its many drawbacks, Sorelism was not completely dead. Thanks to Edouard Berth, Sorel's avowed and only faithful disciple, it was given a new impetus and a new life. Berth, though not as original as his master, is at least superior to him in his power of expression and in his wonderful talent as a polemist. He is, indeed, a first class writer though not a first class thinker. The fluency and the vigour of his style coupled with his irreproachable logical method make of him an extremely interesting writer. His ways of argumentation are very clear and convincing. He is thus the right man to interpret the somewhat confused ideas of Sorel. He possesses some of those qualities which Sorel badly lacks and lacks some of those qualities which are the peculiar traits of Sorel's mind. He, therefore, completes his master. Berth and Sorel are thus complementary.

Like his master's, Berth's entire existence as ^a writer is the story of a soul in perpetual evolution. Like Sorel also, Berth began his career as a socialist, then turned into a Syndicalist, drifted afterwards towards the nationalist camp and right after the Great War became a Bolshevik. Throughout all these intellectual transformations, however, Berth was more whole-hearted in his cooperation with this or that movement than Sorel. We have already mentioned the enthusiasm with which he greeted the nationalist call and the zeal he displayed in his

work with the leaders of the Action Française. Sorel never went so far as that in his friendships and alliances. He was thus much more individualistic than Berth.

After the death of his master Berth was gradually converted to Communism. In "Les Derniers Aspects du Socialisme" he developed the thesis that the Bolshevism of Lenin, or what he called Leninism, was the embodiment of the spirit and of the teaching of syndicalism as interpreted by Sorel. He regarded Lenin as the true heir of Sorel, as the only living social reformer who had a full grasp of the teachings of the syndicalist philosophy. To those who objected that syndicalism and proletarian dictatorship were incompatible he answered that the latter was a necessary Stage in the final establishment of the syndicalist society. Such differences, he said, are but superficial. What is of vital importance is the creation of a war psychology in the mind of the workers and a reinforcement of the spirit of class struggle which is the essence of Sorelian syndicalism.

The later developments of the Bolshevist movement, however, especially the new direction given to it by Stalin, turned his hopes into utter disappointment, so much so that he finally lost his faith in communism and returned once more to the pure doctrines of the Sorelian revolutionary syndicalism. And so, today, Berth is no more a Communist but a pure syndicalist of the Sorelian type. In his recent book, "Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence" this tendency is very marked. The only true apostles of revolutionary syndicalism, according to the writer, are Marx, Proudhon and Sorel. From Marx syndicalism took the

idea of class struggle, from Proudhon it received the very essence of its ethics, and from Sorel it inherited its entire philosophy of life and of society. Sorel was the synthesist of the movement, the one who brought the essential teachings of Marx into harmony with those of Proudhon. For Proudhon, he says, when thoroughly examined is a syndicalist, at least in spirit if not in name. The idea of class struggle is potential in his teachings. (1) In his "De la Capacité politique des classes ouvrières" Proudhon states that the time has come when the workers should develop their own organisations and thus recover their independence.

Berth discovers three main stages in the evolution of socialism. The first one is what he calls the intellectual or the dogmatic stage, in which socialism is a mere abstract philosophy. It was at that time that Saint-Simonism, Fourierism and the whole Utopian Socialism made their appearance. During the second stage socialism evolves into a well organised political party. This is the political stage, the one which witnessed the coming into the scene of Marx and Proudhon. And the last stage is that of what he calls the "Living Ethics", during which

(1) "Chez Proudhon, l'idée de la lutte de classes est comme perpétuellement sous-entendue, perpétuellement affleurante; elle semble être toujours sur le point de jaillir et d'éclater, comme la conclusion nécessaire et invincible de prémisses fortement enchaînées; et, néanmoins, elle ne sort pas--elle est comme perpétuellement refoulée, combattue, contrariée ou obscurcie par d'autres idées et d'autres sentiments ayant une origine plus spécifiquement démocratique." (Ed. Berth, "Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence", p. 72)

socialism becomes an independent force in the hands of the proletariat, free from the ceaseless intrusion of the political leaders. We are to-day living in that era, the era of syndicalism, of which Sorel is the outstanding representative. (1)

Berth, therefore, has returned once more to the pure syndicalism of Sorel and it is quite improbable whether he will abandon it again, unless some fundamental changes take place in the socialist world, such as that which witnessed the birth of the Bolshevist Movement.

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(1) "De l'Utopie à la Science, et de la Science à la phase de l'Éthique vivante: telle est, en dernière analyse, l'évolution qui a fait passer le socialisme de l'état dogmatique à l'état de Parti..... pour parvenir enfin à l'état de vrai mouvement prolétarien." (Ed. Berth, Op. cit., pp. 202-203).

CHAPTER VIII

Sorelism, Bolshevism

and

Fascism

"Il faut être aveugle pour ne pas voir que la révolution russe est l'aurore d'une ~~être~~ nouvelle." (G. Sorel)

"G. Sorel a été mon maître. J'estime avec lui qu'à un moment donné la violence est nécessaire. La violence est morale."
(B. Mussolini)

The significance of Sorelism as a really influential political force is clearly demonstrated by the relative success of its doctrines in two countries where dictatorship flourishes, namely, Russia and Italy. For if Sorel's influence in France was on the whole meagre and temporary, the same cannot be said of his influence abroad, and particularly in Italy where it did not only affect the socialist ideas of the time but gave a new direction to the evolution of Italian political organisation and thought. ⁽¹⁾ And yet, this influence should not be ^{ex}aggerated since both in Russia and Italy Sorelism never kept its original purity but was rather mutilated and transformed. Some of Sorel's ideas, no doubt, met with great success but never was the entire Sorelian doctrine adopted and applied by any individual or group.

(1) "En un sens le fascisme a des rapports plus étroits que le bolchévisme avec les idées de G. Sorel. Le lien direct de filiation, douteux pour le bolchévisme, est certain pour le

In Russia, in particular, the influence of Sorel never did go very far and it is doubtful whether Sorelism had any direct connection with the Bolshevist movement. For Russian Revolution owed its existence less to the inspiration of Sorel than to the teachings of Marx. Lenin himself never met Sorel and his only acquaintance with Sorelian teachings is supposed to have been made while he was in Switzerland. And even then Lenin does not seem to have been specially attracted by the doctrines of our Syndicalist philosopher.⁽¹⁾ The many contradictions in Sorel's teachings and the absence of any sound method of composition in his ways of writing had made him revolt against Sorel.

And yet, despite the fact that Lenin was disgusted by Sorel's philosophy, Sorelism was viewed with sympathy by the Bolshevists who even founded in Leningrad a "G. Sorel Club". They could not but be deeply touched by the remarkable way in which Sorel had championed their cause and hailed Lenin as the

fascisme. Mussolini et Sorel avaient été en relations avant 1914, et il semble que Sorel ait eu une véritable divination du rôle que Mussolini devait jouer." (G. Pirou, "Georges Sorel", p. 53)

- (1) "Lénine paraît avoir été offusqué des contradictions de notre auteur. Dans son ouvrage ancien intitulé 'Le Matérialisme et l'empiro-criticisme' Lénine s'adressant au mathématicien Henri Poincaré avait écrit: "Vous vous trompez, Monsieur Poincaré. Vos œuvres prouvent qu'il est des gens capables de penser uniquement l'absurde. A cette catégorie de gens appartient l'esprit brouillon bien connu: Georges Sorel." (Perrin, Op., cit., p. 178)

new saviour of Russia and the worthy heir of Peter the Great. (1)

As already pointed out, Sorel was, indeed, converted ^{to} Bolshevism. We can, nevertheless, be safe in affirming that had he lived longer and witnessed the later developments of the Bolshevist movement he would have been the first one to turn against it his severest criticisms. For Sorelism and Bolshevism though in many ways similar, yet differ on some fundamental points.

To begin with, both Sorelism and Bolshevism are anti-democratic and anti-parliamentarian. They emphasize that the task of civilisation building should be undertaken by an elite, by a given social class, that the masses are incapable of giving a new direction to the course of history and that consequently they should be turned into simple followers. Democracy, therefore, is a mere sham since it is based on false assumptions. Democracy mixes the classes and stands for unity in the economic as well as in the political domain, whereas the proletarian civilisation ceters ⁿ all its hopes on the increasing division of society into two antagonistic social groups. Not that it believes that class selfishness should be substituted for class solidarity and that the workers should seek only their own welfare but because any social transformation to be successful should

(1) "Je n'ai aucune raison de supposer que Lénine ait pris des idées dans mes livres; mais si cela était, je ne serais pas médiocrement fier d'avoir contribué à la formation intellectuelle d'un homme qui me semble être, à la fois, le plus grand théoricien que le socialisme ait eu depuis Marx et un chef d'Etat dont le génie rappelle celui de Pierre le Grand." (G. Sorel, "Réflexions", p. 441)

be the work of one single group or class. The working classes, therefore, are not only working for themselves but for the interest of society as a whole. The proletarian civilisation is not self centered but universal.

The syndicalism of Sorel and the Communism of Lenin go still deeper in their denunciation of the existing social order. They are not only anti-democratic and anti-liberal but anti-state and anti-authoritarian. The ideal of Lenin, like that of Marx, is a society in which the political authority of the state has been completely curtailed, and in which the people organise themselves freely along lines that tend to insure the best interests of production. Sorel's ideal is exactly similar to that of Lenin and Marx.

The main point of disagreement between Lenin and Sorel, however, is to be found in the ways and means they provide for the final establishment of the proletarian social order. Whereas Lenin maintains that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a necessary stage in the gradual emergence of the proletarian society out of the chaotic world of to-day, Sorel asserts that not through the political authority of a so-called proletarian state can such a goal be attained but by means of the myth of the General Strike which can give the workers the moral education necessary for the realisation of the syndicalist society. (1) Lenin stands for force, Sorel preaches violence. And here we can detect the basic mental and psychological differences that

(1) Cf. G. Sorel, "Réflexions sur la Violence", pp. 250-253.

separate these two thinkers. Lenin is essentially an administrator, endowed with a keen sense of realism. Sorel is more of a closet philosopher, an idealist, a social dreamer. Lenin has^a a pessimistic conception of human nature, as being weak, inconsistent, capricious and hard to mould and shape. Sorel, despite his deep appreciation of pessimism and his condemnation of optimism, is himself an optimist. He has too great a faith in individual initiative and depends too much on the devotion and the enthusiasm of the workers. He apparently fails to realize that martyrs of any cause, however inspiring and powerful the latter may be, have always been very few in number. Heroic and sincere souls are exceptions and not the rule.

One more point of similarity between Sorel and Lenin should be noted. Both of them are anti-intellectualists and pragmatists. They both hold in contempt the so-called thinkers and intellectuals who wish to restrict the freedom and the initiative of the masses within the limits of rational thinking. They both emphasize the necessity of technical and industrial efficiency and give to theory a secondary role. They readily sacrifice the latter whenever it acts as an obstacle in the way of social reconstruction. (1)

Despite all these similarities between Sorelism and Bolshevism there is, nevertheless, a wide gap between them and this

(1) "Lénine n'est point de ces idéologues qui croient que leur génie les met au-dessus des indications de la réalité; aussi est-il très attentif à noter les enseignements que lui fournit la pratique depuis la révolution." (G. Sorel, "Réflexions sur la Violence", p. 446)

gap has tended to increase since Sorel wrote his famous defence of Lenin. Russian Communism, remarks Berth, is indeed evolving rapidly in the direction of bourgeois capitalism. The old heroic spirit which signalized its birth is giving way to a tendency towards compromise. There is a general slackness in its attitude towards the capitalistic governments. The old Leninism has thus been replaced by modern Stalinism. (1) Despotism is crushing the freedom of the workers and there are no signs of any improvement along this line. The third International will not have a better fate than the second. (2) Revolutionary syndicalism, therefore, has to sever itself as completely as possible from the Communism of Stalin and liberate itself from the yoke of the Communists. It is to Marx, Proudhon and Sorel that it should stretch its hand for guidance and help and not to Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky.

Sorel, if he were to live again and could be given the chance to study the existing conditions in Russia, would most probably confirm Berth's opinion. For the crushing tyranny of

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- (1) "La Révolution russe, depuis la mort de Lénine, et sous la direction de Staline, est entrée dans une période de régression telle, et présente l'aspect d'une dictature bureaucratique si contraire à toutes les aspirations proudhoniennes que les révolutionnaires véritables sont obligés de..... déchanter et de reconnaître que leurs espérances ont été déçues." (Ed. Berth, "Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence", p. 98)
- (2) "La IIIème Internationale, dirigée par Moscou, n'a pas eu, en somme, jusqu'ici, un destin plus glorieux que la IIème conduite par Berlin." (Ibid., p. 34)

the Moscow government and its tendency to abandon the proletarian ideology of class struggle are, in the eyes of Sorel, signs of imminent decadence.

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"It is possible that before long both Hegelian and Marxian philosophers will discover that syndicalism is the middle term by which socialism and fascism have been joined in higher dialectic unity." (1) These significant words describe in a concise and vivid language a tendency in the modern world towards the reconciliation between two conflicting political schools of thought, between state nationalism on the one hand and socialist or proletarian internationalism on the other. In other words the fundamental problem which socialism is facing to-day is whether it will remain faithful to the international policy which it has hitherto adopted or whether it will be gradually assimilated by the nationalist forces that are developing with a terrific power in many parts of the world. The conflict is one between allegiance to the class and allegiance to the state or the nation. In Italy Fascism has attempted to harmonize the interests of the proletariat with those of the nation as a whole. Its philosophy is based on the belief that only through the organized power of the state can the working classes liberate themselves from the yoke of the capitalists. Communist Russia, on the contrary,

(1) H. Schneider, "Making the Fascist State", p. 213.

still faithful to the Marxist principle of class struggle, maintains that the workers have no other allegiance than allegiance to their class and that consequently they should repudiate every nationalist proposal tending to reconcile class interests with national interests. Which of these two tendencies in the socialist world is destined to triumph time alone can reveal. But one thing is certain namely, that the success of nationalism and its effectiveness as a political force depend largely on its ability to safeguard and promote the best interests of the proletarian class.

Fascism claims to have found an adequate solution to this problem. The Fascist Corporate state is an attempt to ~~re~~^econcile socialism with nationalism by establishing those necessary institutions through which the workers can protect their essential rights. And, as H. Schneider seems to imply, it was by means of syndicalism that socialism was brought into harmony with fascist nationalism. Historically, as we shall presently see, this is correct. But whether such a fusion is in the spirit of both socialism and nationalism it is difficult to answer. The Fascists assert that there can be no genuine antagonism between the interests of the workers and those of the nation. They even maintain that it is more beneficial for the workers to recognize their allegiance to the state as superior, though not in opposition, to any class allegiance for it is only in this way that they can conquer their true freedom. The revolutionary syndicalists, on the other hand, and particularly Berth, condemn the fascist policy as being in complete opposition to

the spirit as well as to the actual meaning of the syndicalist philosophy.

Let us, therefore, first examine the way in which syndicalism was introduced in Italy and was later on incorporated in the Fascist nationalist policy. For through such a study the influence of Sorel upon Fascism will be made apparent. And then we shall try to discover how far the revolutionary syndicalism of Sorel can be reconciled with the fascist syndicalism of Mussolini.

"The syndicalist doctrine as conceived by Sorel was brought to Italy by Arturo Labriola at the beginning of the twentieth century. The publication of the Italian translation of Sorel's "L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats" in 1903, gave a strong impetus to the syndicalist movement, which opposed the evolutionary and pacific methods of the democratic socialists, represented by Filippo Turati and Claudio Treves. The friction within the socialist party resulted in the definite expulsion of the syndicalists in 1908. Immediately after the war, at the nationalist congress of Bologna, in 1919, Alfredo Rocco advocated the incorporation of syndicalist ideas into the program of the nationalist party, while even before the war some of the revolutionary syndicalists, such as Roberto Forges-Davanzatti and Maurizio Meraviglia, had become nationalists, and thereby abandoned their anti-state attitude. This drawing together of the two movements of nationalism and syndicalism prepared the way for the so-called integral syndicalism of fascism."⁽¹⁾

(1) Carmen Haider, "Capital and Labor under Fascism", p. 36.

Sorel's influence in Italy was, therefore, very strong. Syndicalist ideas had found there a very fertile soil. Many newspapers and magazines devoted their pages to the study of the doctrines of "Giorgio Sorel". Sorel himself wrote some of his works in Italian.

Among the young militant socialists at that time was a fiery extremist called Benito Mussolini. He had lived for some years in Switzerland and was expelled from there because of his revolutionary doctrines. While in Switzerland, however, he had read Sorel's works. "As early as 1912 Sorel is supposed to have said of him: 'Our Mussolini is no ordinary socialist. You may expect to see him some day saluting the Italian flag, sword in hand at the head of some Holy Brigade. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century, a condottiero.'" (1)

Sorel's prophecy was soon materialised. On October 1922, a few weeks after Sorel's death, Mussolini at the head of his Black Shirts made his triumphal entry in Rome, and taking advantage of the weakness of the King and the Prime Minister seized the government and established a dictatorial regime. The threat of Communism and the failure of the democratic government of Nitti to save Italy from impending chaos made Mussolini think of the vehemence with which Sorel had condemned parliamentary democracy and of his declaration that the bourgeoisie had lost all its vitality and force.

(1) H. Schneider, Op. cit., p. 10.

But this is apparently all that Mussolini remembered of Sorel's teachings. He had lost sight of the positive doctrines^t of syndicalism and considered only the negative aspect of its principles. Mussolini, indeed, was no more the ardent socialist who had violently criticized and condemned the capitalistic system of production and had repudiated the "étatist" and the nationalist philosophy at the famous Congress of Ancône. The Great War had operated a thorough change in his ideas. He had lost his faith in Sorelian syndicalism and was converted to nationalism. And although he had kept from Sorelism its violent opposition to bourgeois ideology and to the parliamentary democracy built upon it he was still a nationalist in heart. During the war years he had championed the cause of the "Entente" in his paper "Le Popolo d'Italia" and when the war had come to an end he seized his opportunity and attempted to reconcile the hitherto conflicting philosophies of socialism and nationalism. And here is to be found the origin of the Fascist corporate state which is an effort to bring the socialist and proletarian forces within the national orbit.

Fascism, therefore, is essentially a synthetic philosophy, the result of the fusion of two divergent currents of thought: syndicalism and nationalism. The Fascist state also, which is based on that same philosophy, is an effort to give a tangible expression to the reconciliation between Labour and Capital.

Such a process of reconciliation^a between two fundamentally antagonistic political tendencies, however, has^{been} made possible^t only through the elimination of the essential doctrines of both

syndicalism and nationalism. Hence, the basic differences between Sorelian syndicalism and Fascist syndicalism.

As in the case of Maurrassist nationalism, Fascism and Syndicalism agree only on the negative aspect of their program, since both of them are anti-democratic, anti-parliamentarian and anti-liberal. But, whereas revolutionary syndicalism is anti-state and anti-authoritarian Fascism is the deification of the state and the nation. To the proletarian myth of the General Strike Mussolini opposes the national myth of Patriotism. As Elliott puts it: "Signor Benito Mussolini, well schooled in the Sorelian doctrines of the sublimity of violence as he boasts, from his earlier role as a Socialist leader, simply turned the reverse side of the shield, and showed that the myth of patriotism which the Syndicalist theories had considered only a war camouflage for national self-interest, could be used to enlist violence more successfully than the General Strike myth." (1)

Moreover, contrary to Sorelian syndicalism, which gives consideration only to one class, Fascist syndicalism which claims to be integral, regards all classes as productive and assigns to each its own place in the national complex. Whereas revolutionary syndicalism opposes Labor and Capital, integral syndicalism brings them into harmony and includes them within the all-inclusive national sphere. It thus accepts both capitalism and the capitalist and considers them as use-

(1) W. Y. Elliott, Op. cit., p. 139.

ful and even necessary for efficient production. It emphasizes at the same time that property must show a consciousness of its social function by cooperating with the working classes. The common goal is not the class but the nation. Class struggle should give way to national solidarity and national aggrandisement.

Not only do Fascism and Syndicalism differ in their conceptions of the state and of the class. They have also two widely different philosophies in regard to the nature and the aim of violence. The Fascist conception of violence differs, indeed, from the syndicalist one in that it considers violence as being a necessary evil, a hard obligation from which one should do his best to escape whenever possible. In the eyes of Sorel, on the contrary, violence has an intrinsic value, being a stimulus to action and the indispensable factor of ethical progress.

There is, however, one more feature common to Fascism and Syndicalism namely, the emphasis which both of them place upon mystical and moral factors in social development. Fascism, indeed, is a semi-religious and ethical movement in the sense that it attaches to the moral education and progress of the nation as a whole a vital importance. The Fascist ideology is permeated with religious and moral influences. It has religion's love for tradition and for ethical conservatism. Like religion also it distrusts abstract rationalism and gives to mystical factors the greatest importance. The mysticism and the anti-intellectualism of the Fascist doctrine are thus very near to

the Sorelian pragmatic philosophy. For both Syndicalism and Fascism direct their appeals to the feelings of the masses rather than to their reason and base their entire philosophical system on the assumption that the masses are moved to action not by the power of logic but by means of a social myth capable of taking hold of their entire personality.

To sum up, there are two fundamental points on which the fascists and the syndicalists agree. They both have an equal contempt for the democratic ideology and for the parliamentary system based upon it, and they attach a great importance to mythical and mystical factors, since both of them are anti-intellectualistic, anti-rationalistic and pragmatic. As Elliott says: "The ideology of Fascism contains a very queer 'Potpourri' of a sort of Machiavellian Pragmatism, Gentilean Idealism, Sorelian myth-making and violence, and even the functionalism of the Guild-Socialists and Syndicalists of Italy. Mussolini's schemes for a functional state have been compounded of these elements. Through Papini, Pantaleone, Pareto, and Sorel he has sucked up his ideas of pragmatism." (1)

Apart from these similarities Fascist syndicalism and Sorelian syndicalism stand at two opposite poles. (2) "In its

(1) W. J. Elliott, Op. cit., p. 10.

(2) "Le fascisme, lui, est un simple aspect de la force bourgeoise; il tend à exalter l'Etat et à concentrer en lui toutes les puissances de la nation incarnée en un dictateur; il est donc absolument vain et dérisoire de vouloir transformer Sorel en "père spirituel" du fascisme." (H. Berth, "Du Capital aux Réflexions sur la Violence," P. 194).

acceptance of capitalism and its advocacy of a state superior to individuals and classes, fascism breaks with the syndicalism of Sorel. It is further distinguished from it by the stress it lays on hierarchic organisation." (1)

Should we conclude from all this that Sorelism was a failure in Italy? Far from that. For, although we cannot fully agree with Perrin⁽²⁾ when he asserts that had it not been for the syndicalism of Sorel Fascism would have never existed, we can at least state that the present-day philosophy and organisation of Fascism owe a good deal to the Syndicalist ideas of Sorel.

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(1) C. Haider, Op. cit., p. 271.

(2) "Ce qu'on peut affirmer seulement, c'est que, sans Georges Sorel, qui a contribué à débarrasser les esprits italiens des préjugés démocratiques, qui leur a appris à n'avoir pas peur des actes et à ne pas craindre l'action violente, le fascisme n'aurait peut-être pas existé." (Perrin, Op. cit., p. 190)

CHAPTER IX

Conclusion -- Final Estimation

"Il faut un Dieu pour l'ascension de la pente rude et glissante. Il faut Dieu pour donner, dans le devoir, un point d'appui où se racrocher, Dieu pour soutenir au long du chemin, Dieu pour attendre au faite. Tout le reste est incapable d'arrêter la descente qui, suivant la loi de la pesanteur des âmes, va chaque jour en s'accélégrant, chez ceux qui s'y abandonnent." (H. Du Passage)

We have now come to the end of our task. We first attempted to study the social and the intellectual environment in which Sorel lived and we tried to find out, in our analysis of his character, the various influences that tended to shape his ideas. We then exposed and analyzed his philosophy proper, beginning with the theoretical aspects of his thought (his ethics, his pessimism and his myth philosophy) and ending with his positive program of social reconstruction. And finally we studied his influence in France, in Russia and in Italy.

Apart from some criticisms here and there we tried, all through our analysis of Sorelism, to be as objective as possible. We acted on the belief that a sympathetic understanding of our philosopher's life and of his personality in general was essential for a just and intelligent estimation of his work.

To what conclusion, therefore, has our study of Sorelism brought us? What weight should we attach to his philosophy? How far can we agree with him in his criticisms of our existing

social order and in his constructive philosophy of life and of social organisation?

We have already expressed our views in regard to many aspects of Sorel's thought. But such occasional criticisms do not suffice. We should present a more general criticism of his writings and come to a definite and final estimation of his work.

To do this we propose to consider Sorel's philosophy from two different points of view: first from a destructive and second from a constructive aspect.

Viewed from a purely destructive standpoint Sorelism is, indeed, a very genuine philosophy. A fiery polemist by nature and endowed with a penetrating intelligence, Sorel was the right man to destroy, through his violent and even harsh criticisms, the entire social fabric of his day. His Soul could not be at rest in an environment in which moral vices of all types were rampant. He saw around him exploitation, hypocrisy, the lust for domination and a general moral slackness which, like a cancer, was slowly though persistently eating into the vitals of society. In the political, in the economic and in the religious domain he witnessed signs of impending chaos. Instead of progress and uplift he saw corruption and decadence. A pessimist by nature, his pessimism increased at the sight of such appalling wretchedness and misery. So, he became disillusioned but not discouraged. He saw that man, despite all his inherent weakness and in spite of all the obstacles that stood in his way, ^{is} still capable of being saved through his own efforts, that in him could be found infinite possibilities ^{was}

which, if adequately understood and rightly directed, could safely guide him to the highest and the noblest goal.

The first step towards such a social revival, Sorel believed, could not be taken unless the bourgeoisie was completely crushed. For although the proletarian civilisation is the true heir of bourgeois Capitalism and has to grow on the foundations laid down by it yet, it cannot co-exist with it. These two civilisations are absolutely exclusive. The existence of the one means the extinction of the other and vice versa. And who constitute this bourgeois class? The intellectuals in the realm of science, the merchants in the field of commerce and the capitalists in the domain of industry. And the politicians are those who belong to either one of these groups and whose work consists in exploiting their fellow-men.

In his violent attacks against the bourgeoisie and against the entire intellectualistic philosophy elaborated by that class Sorel evidently commits many exaggerations that are often revolting. (1) It is true that the bourgeoisie has its shortcomings and defects, that it has in many cases brought oppression and misery, that it has abandoned its former moral enthusiasm and sought in peace and cooperation a safe refuge against its pitiless enemies. But is Sorel justified in all that he says?

(1) "La partie polémique de l'oeuvre de M. Sorel n'est pas ce qui survivra de lui, et ses admirateurs seraient plus à l'aise pour la goûter s'ils n'étaient pas trop souvent violemment indignés par des injustices flagrantes." (G. Guy-Grand, Op. cit., p. 12)

Should we consider the bourgeoisie as doomed because it has lost its consciousness of class struggle and has become conciliatory in its attitude towards other social classes? Are social peace and solidarity so dangerous for the progress of the world? Surely, the mere fact that the bourgeoisie is gradually drifting towards a conciliatory attitude of mind and is thereby on the way of losing the spirit of exclusiveness and of egotism is a sign of healthy moral development. We admit that violence, at least in its pure and idealistic form as viewed by Sorel, is sometimes socially useful since it stimulates us to work and refreshes our energies. But we can never allow it to become a rule. For us it should always be an exception.

Nor can we fully agree with Sorel in his denial of the intellectualistic philosophy. His anti-intellectualism, so much in fashion in these days which are characterized by what is often termed the "flight from reason to feeling", appears to us too wild, too unstable and too harsh. We still maintain that human reason has certain essential rights which it can and it should vindicate. We can never admit that man is a mere bundle of emotions and feelings and we can never ^{consider} ~~admit~~ these as being inherently superior to human reason and intellect. We still believe with Aristotle that man is a "rational animal" and that therein lies the secret of his strength. If the pure and extreme rationalists make us revolt because of their one-sidedness, so also the anti-intellectualists, just because they consider only one aspect

of human nature, make their position untenable.

Both the rationalists and the anti-rationalists give us a one-sided account of man. Human nature is complex and hence cannot be reduced to a simple formula. It is, as one has rightly remarked, "a bundle of contradictions". How can we then say that the real man is exclusively instinctive and emotional and that reason is therefore artificial and of a purely secondary importance? The truth, as usual, is between the two. Human emotions and feelings are perhaps as vitally important as human intellect and reason. Nothing great has been achieved in this world without them. For they do not act only as stimulants, they actually help to deepen our understanding. Through "sympathetic understanding" many abstruse problems which have puzzled the power of reason have been solved. The rational method of approach in the pursuit of knowledge is, indeed, not the only method, one can use. There is another way, perhaps more reliable in certain domains, which involves the combined action of our emotional faculties.

And yet, human emotions and feelings, unless controlled and checked by the power of reason, lead to disastrous consequences. We know only too well that when the masses are under a strong emotional reaction they are likely to commit all sorts of crimes. History is full of such instances. And even in modern times we can witness what a terrific effect the feeling of nationalism has had upon the psychology of the masses. For the masses are easily influenced by mob leaders and freely respond to any call which is directed to their

emotions. All the horrors of war are but the outcome of human passions and instinct. And this would be sufficient to discredit any philosophy which takes into account only the emotional side of human nature.

For it is precisely the role of reason to temper the feelings of man. Reason checks, guides and regulates our instinct but does not destroy it. Without reason man's conduct would be similar to the animal behaviour. Reason, therefore, is the distinguishing feature of man, and its importance should consequently increase with the development of civilisation.

And it is just this which Sorel refuses to admit. His appeals are all directed to the emotions and the passions of the masses. His ethics, his religion and his myth philosophy as well are also fundamentally emotional. It is because of its emotionalism and its anti-intellectualism that Sorel's philosophy fails to give us a comprehensive view of life. To put all emphasis upon feeling, faith and action to the exclusion of rational thinking is to lower man to the station of a beast and to leave the doors widely open to social and intellectual anarchy.

Not only does Sorel commit obvious exaggerations in his criticism of the bourgeois class and in his denial of the intellectualistic philosophy and of the intellectuals as a whole. He displays a similar inability when he comes to formulate the positive part of his program. A pessimist by nature he, nevertheless, indulges in optimistic hopes and reflections in regard to the nature and the mechanism of the syndicalist society. (1)

After having destroyed the state and done away with external authority he proposes to build a social organisation wherein every worker will learn to obey the laws of his own conscience. We, however, can hardly think that a syndicalist society of the Sorelian type could ever work harmoniously. How can we have organisation without external authority? Is social life possible in an environment in which every man is considered as a law unto himself? The principle of internal authority or in other words the authority of the inner conscience is too vague, too subjective and too unstable to be able to regulate and adjust the complex relationships involved in the industrial life of the "syndicat". Indeed, the fundamental problem which Sorel thought to have successfully solved¹ is whether we can have organisation without some external authority. Our answer is a negative one. For we cannot dissociate authority and organisation without destroying them at the same time. External authority and organisation do and should always accompany each other. Sorel has apparently failed to realize this rather simple truth. His attempt to reconcile anarchism with social life has been a failure. For the one is the negation of the

(1) "Les syndicalistes, si sévères à la société, sont trop indulgents à la nature; ils limitent leur pessimisme aux institutions humaines sans l'étendre à l'homme; ils paraissent garder au fond du cœur le naïf optimisme des vieux anarchistes: la bonté naturelle de l'homme, voilà l'erreur profonde cachée à la base de l'espérance syndicaliste." (J. Challaye, "Syndicalisme Révolutionnaire et Syndicalisme Réformiste", p. 78)

other. Whereas anarchism involves the destruction of all external authority social life, on the contrary, presupposes it. (1) For social life carries with it, at least potentially, the germs of a possible friction between the individuals. Authority, therefore, is the "sine qua non" of every social life. This authority, however, should not only be external; it should also be sovereign, since without an ultimate power of coordination and adjustment life will be sheer impossibility. Instead of peace and tranquillity we shall find conflict and war. And, as history clearly indicates, the result of such a state of affairs is a return to tyranny. Thus, anarchism, though essentially the negation of authority, ultimately leads to the establishment of that same authority. Social revolution and anarchy always end in repressive force. For as Elliott points out: "Tested by the pragmatic test of history, the romanticist doctrine of instinctive revolution translates itself into calculated despotism. The anti-intellectualist faith in intuition lends itself to the preachers of such social myths, just as the pragmatic criterion of the good is used to justify the Nietzschean gospel of force. But in the issue of fact, the myth of violence suffers a seachange: slow^{ly} ~~ly~~ it turns to repressive force." (2)

(1) "Il semble à qui réfléchit sur ces problèmes généraux qu'organisation et autorité sont deux termes corrélatifs ou, pour mieux dire, que le premier appelle nécessairement le second." (H. du Passage, Op. cit., p. 444)

(2) W. Y. Elliott, Op. cit., p. 140.

Syndicalist anarchism, therefore, though essentially social, cannot actually work when put into practice. (1) Sorel, indeed, was too optimistic about the possibility of his social plan being realized. He depended too much on the goodness and the perfectibility of human nature. It is just because of this optimism that he became chimerical. Sorel, in fact, was a pessimist who hoped so much that he was transformed into the very essence of optimism. And this is the paradox which we had to face all through our study of Sorel's philosophy. Though an avowed pessimist yet he was an optimist at heart and this optimism we find at the very basis of his philosophy of anarchism.

One final criticism. We have seen that Sorel's pessimism involved a twofold psychological reaction, that it contained an element of pessimism proper and an optimistic element. This optimistic element, we further remarked, Sorel had found in his myth philosophy wherein he had developed the thesis that through a deep-rooted faith in the proletarian General Strike the workers would be able to overcome their weaknesses and to find the necessary moral uplift.

But can such a myth really inspire the masses and feed their moral energies? Does it contain that essential requirement without which no doctrine can possibly become effective?

(1) "Quoi? plus de direction, rien que la spontanéité et la liberté! Et cela vraiment doit suffire? En quel heureux monde ont-ils donc vécu ceux qui gardent, au-delà de leurs vingt ans, des illusions aussi robustes?" (H. du Passage, Op. cit., pp. 442-443)

Sorel thinks that to-day the General Strike myth can exercise among the working masses the same influence which the myth of the Second Coming had exercised among the primitive Christians. In other words, according to Sorel, syndicalism, though not a religion, can at least play the same role which the latter has thus far played in the life of humanity. If religious faith has been hitherto one of the greatest constructive forces in the world, cannot the same thing happen in the future with the syndicalist faith? Sorel affirms that it can. But we refuse to share his view⁽¹⁾ For we believe that there is in religion something which is quite peculiar to it and which constitutes the very secret of its strength. This something we can hardly analyze but we can experience and feel in the innermost recesses of our hearts and it is that mystic faith in a supernatural power with whom we are united by a mystic bond and whose will we are called upon to realize in this world. Syndicalism has no "metaphysics of the soul". It cherishes no faith in an Omnipotent

(1) "Ainsi c'est là que vient aboutir la meilleure tentative pour découvrir une morale à la mesure de la société rêvée. Pas une fois il n'a été question d'un but supérieur aux besoins immédiats de la terre, pas un mot n'a fait allusion à une fin plus haute qui commanderait les actes de l'homme et orienterait sa vie. Tout se réduit et se ravale à une méthode d'économie sociale, et les mœurs y tirent surtout leur prix de ce qu'elles régularisent ou multiplient la production, comme le volant d'une machine ou les courroies d'une transmission. Ah! la pauvre théorie de l'existence où toutes les idées, les tendances, les aspirations des âmes gravitent, en dernière analyse, autour d'une question alimentaire." (H. du Passage, Op. cit., pp. 640-641)

God. Hence its weakness and its relative imperfection. It is too material, too terrestrial to be able to take hold of our entire personality and to animate us with that devotion and enthusiasm of which the religious saints and martyrs have been the perfect embodiment.

And yet, despite all its shortcomings and defects, the Sorelian philosophy is one of the most stimulating systems of thought that have appeared since the beginning of our century. In its criticisms of our existing social order and in its affirmation that the foundation of all social progress is ethical it has a real message for the modern world. Not less inspiring and stimulating is the bearer of that same message. We may dislike his methods of writing and we may revolt against the contradictions ⁽¹⁾ and the obscurities with which his writings abound. But one thing we cannot fail to admire and this is the lofty enthusiasm and the splendid zeal he displayed in his everlasting quest after certainty.

END

(1) "No man who has brought about a great revolution in thought has ever been without inconsistencies. The original thinker is too much occupied in trying to express the creative thought which is welling up in him to trouble himself about getting it all straightened out.... There are always bits of dead wood in a great man's work." (A. D. Lindsay, "Karl Marx's Capital", p. 10)

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