

DEFENSE OF THE WEST¹

BY HENRI MASSIS

(Translated by F. S. Flint)

[THIS is the last half of a long study of the decay of Western civilization. The author's thesis is that Europe is now being subjected to an organized attack of destructive Eastern ideas. He devoted the first half of his essay to symptoms and manifestations; here he develops his idea to its conclusion.]

'PUT a Russian desire under a fortress,' said Joseph de Maistre, 'and it will blow it up.' And Michelet himself was alarmed at the power for destruction of a nation so badly trained among the human races. 'When it is said that one of the West is a doubter, a skeptic,' he wrote in 1863, 'it is never absolutely true. A man may be a skeptic in history who is a firm believer in chemistry or physics. Here everyone believes in something; the soul is never empty. But in this Russian world, ignorant, barbarous, kept empty of mind and becoming so by tradition, if this state were to last, if man were once to start down the slope of doubt, there would be nothing to stop him, nothing to act as a counterpoise or balance; we should have the terrible spectacle of a populace without ideas, principles, or feelings; a people who would march toward the West with a blind movement, having lost its soul and will, striking at random, like a fearful automaton, like a dead body galvanized

into action that strikes and can still kill.' The frontier of the world of Law is where it was in the Middle Ages, on the Vistula and the Danube. . . . When we admit Russia, we admit cholera, dissolution, death. 'What, O philosopher,' remonstrates in its softest voice the young Russian school that flourishes in our reviews, 'you set yourselves apart from your brothers! Where is your philosophy?' Such is Russian propaganda, infinitely varied according to the peoples and countries. Yesterday it said, 'I am Christianity.' Tomorrow it will say, 'I am Socialism.'

To-day, going back to its origins, Russia is turning toward the East, that East whose instincts she has inherited from her rude Tatar masters, and kept alive by the contact of centuries. She is now saying to these peoples, who are well fitted to understand her: 'Russia stretches out her hand to Asia, not for her to embrace her ideal, nor for her to share her social conceptions, but because she needs eight hundred million Asiatics to fight European imperialism and capitalism.' These words of Zinoviev, the President of the Committee of the Third International, at the Baku Congress in 1920, are merely a commentary on the famous phrase of Lenin: 'Let us turn toward Asia; we shall overcome the West by way of the East.'

But in Asia the Bolsheviks pose as idealists, mystics, and liberators. In

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secret, they dream of giving an overlord to these Asiatic peoples, in whom there is an inarticulate desire for unity; and, in the Moscow Orientalist review, *Novii Vostok* (The New East), may be read: 'Recently Russia has taken the name of Eurasia, and this new Russia is above all the master and guide of the East, which is groaning in the chains of moral and economic slavery, and which is struggling for a better future. Moscow is the Mekka and the Medina for all these subject peoples.'

And by the paths followed in the past by 'the soldiers and *techinovniks* (bureaucrats) of the Tsar, pioneers and organizers of another kind are penetrating to-day into Persia, India, China, Japan, Korea, and the Near East.' They bring with them, or find on the spot, the experimental formula of organization suited to their scheme: 'to fertilize the latent nationalism of these Asiatic communities subject to foreign dominations and for long rendered immune against any outside germ, but which, having arrived at a certain point of decadence, are in that state of expectation, of prophetic, messianic, and millennial exaltation, which is the precursor of great migratory movements, and which has been excited by the universal upheaval of the war.' The period foretold by Renan seems at hand when the Slav, like the dragon of the Apocalypse, whose tail swept a third part of the stars, will drag in his train the masses of Central Asia, the old following of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.

While Bolshevism is thus preparing to reopen the old roads of invasion that have been closed for many centuries, Germany is in a mood of anxious questioning. Will she ally herself with Soviet Russia, or try again to find her stay in the West? These two tendencies in turn tempt an identical nationalism. But as the internal recovery of Ger-

many advances, she looks less and less to Asia. Asiaticism, which was characteristic of her mental depression, was never so flourishing as at the time of the worst collapse of the mark. But even those of her thinkers who are inclining her toward Asia are preparing the way for a realistic policy of Germano-Slav domination. Germany intends to remain Occidental in the measure of her belief that she possesses a genius for organization. She feels that she is fitted to become again the permanent conscience of the world (*das dauernde Weltgewissen*), or at least the centre of gravity of the East. For if she thinks that the axis of Europe is going to shift, she conceives of herself as the magnetic pole of the Slav and Asiatic peoples, as the initiator of the 'Russian civilization' prophesied by Spengler. And did she not, even at the height of her despair, dream of becoming the Rome that should discipline the Neo-Messianism of the East, the capital of that vast Eurasia which would unite the east of Europe to the Asiatic steppes, excluding entirely the overthrown Latin races? On this last point Germanism and Russian Asiaticism are in agreement; and it is here that they are a danger of the same kind for the future of civilization.

Such an agreement is in a way in the nature of things. Astonishment has often been expressed at the extreme favor that Protestantism enjoys among the Orthodox, when it should have been as hated on the Neva as it is on the Tiber. It is because all isolated communities are at one in their hatred of united Catholicism. Thomas Mann quotes with praise the passage in which Dostoevskii shows that Germany is a living protest against the Latin civilization imposed by the Roman Empire on Western Europe — and this since the victory of Hermann over the legions of Varus. 'Although,' he says, 'the

Germans have never given voice to their own ideal and doctrine, in order to substitute their positivity for the old Roman idea they have shaken, I believe that one day they will be in a position to say this word, radiantly new, and, in so doing, decisively to take the lead of a higher humanity. At the time of the Lutheran Reformation the voice of God thundered through them over the world to announce the liberation of the mind. The formula of protest had been found, although it remained negative and although the positive liberating word had never been said.'

In this spiritual war that it has declared on the human race the Russo-Bolshevist idea should find in the German idea a sort of preëstablished complicity, of secret connivance, a same basis of permanent hostility to the principles of Latin civilization. Germanism, Slavism; it is at these common sources that all that is in revolt against the eternal order takes its strength. It is at their contact that all the old Asiatic heresies, which are always ready to revive as soon as the solidarity of Europe is threatened, are galvanized into action and awaken their slumbering forces.

How comes it that, on the plea of promoting the 'fusion of minds of the East and the West,' the messengers from Asia—the Tagores, the Okakuras, Gandhi himself—find themselves in agreement with all the most destructive elements in European doctrines? It is clear that they know where the breaches are, and are seeking for the lines of least spiritual resistance in order to find their way into the dissociated body of the West. This passage from Kokuzo bears clear witness to this; we see in it how the Eastern nationalists, formed, moreover, in our own universities, make use of the ways of approach offered by what Amanda Cooromaswamy calls 'the religion of modern

Europe,' the *religion of idealistic individualism*: 'Our mission,' he says, 'does not consist merely in returning to our own ancient ideal, but also in feeling and reviving the dormant life of the former unity of Asia. The sorry problems of Western society urge us to seek in Indian religion and in Chinese ethics for a higher solution. *The tendencies of Europe, as shown in German philosophy and Russian mysticism, are turning toward the East, and help us in investigating the more subtle and more noble aspects of human life, which will carry these nations themselves nearer the stars in the night of their material surrender.*'

German philosophy, Russian mysticism, these are the roads chosen, reconnoitred in advance; idealism, the mask that these Oriental nationalists borrow, in order the better to allure us, the better to make themselves understood. They are working with our own ideas in order to turn them against us. They use grand words taken from our liberal vocabulary in order to lay claim to things which we have created and which are absolutely foreign to them. As Chesterton says: 'I sympathize with people who demand simple things and ask for their temple, their land, their money; but when they become pedantic and demand things that come out of a European textbook, I call it impudence.'

But these spiritual notions are in fact aimed at the annihilation of the West. Amanda Cooromaswamy, in the *Dance of Giva*, quotes the 'remarkable words' of Viscount Borio: 'Equality in peace can never be attained until it is built up on the ruins of the vanished Western States.' One of the founders of the Oriental League of Tokyo, M. Ikuta Choko, to whom Japan is indebted for a translation of Nietzsche, wrote some time ago: 'Western civilization, sunk in materialism . . .

is on the eve of shipwreck. Our League will have no *raison d'être* unless it undertakes to renew the life of humanity. *Our task is once again to Orientalize the world.*' And in the manifesto of the League we read: 'Peace and happiness will not be assured to men until Asia conquers the whites—not driven to it by hate, but merely by the thought of bringing them back to justice, to true civilization, which is spiritual and not material.'

But the hatred is not far away, and I will quote these words of Count Okuma, the creator of a Japanese association with the object of drawing India into the orbit of Japanese imperialism. 'By marching on the West,' he says, 'against the Balkans, France, and Italy, the greater part of the world may be brought under our sway. The tyranny of the Anglo-Saxons at the Peace Conference filled gods and men with rage.' Asiatic intellectuals like Kawakami content themselves with announcing 'the coming day that will give to Asia, in the matter of civilization, a superiority that will throw Europe into the shade.'

A very definite political realism is, in fact, hidden under this idealist propaganda. They are working for the formation of a Greater Asia by a Sino-Japanese alliance. 'Russo-Japanese friendship,' wrote a Japanese statesman, Viscount Goto, a few months ago, 'is the key of this alliance; it will harmonize the civilizations of the East and West. A Russo-Sino-Japanese *entente* will establish peace in the Pacific on the basis of liberty and equality.' The Russo-Japanese agreement was signed on January 20, 1925. As M. Maurice Muret rightly observes in his book, *The Twilight of the White Nations*, only necessity could have forced a nation as devoted as Japan to her monarchical and aristocratic institutions to expose herself to the dan-

gers of an alliance with the Soviets. For that matter, it was under the pressure of hard necessity that Japan took that step. She was afraid of isolation. Abandoned by England, her ally in the war, cut off from the United States, who closed the door against her by the Immigration Act,—which has justly been called the greatest possible international error, the most pregnant with terrible consequences that has been committed since the Peace,—Japan had to look for friends elsewhere. The alliance with the Soviets saved her from isolation, under particularly favorable conditions, if the diplomatic activity shown by Russia in Central Asia and the Far East is remembered. Thus Japan, who Westernized herself against her will, is thrown back on Asia; Russia, cut off from Europe, is also thrown back on Asia. At the two extremities of this mysterious world, a colossal reservoir of human beings, two nations more advanced in the path of technical progress look to each other and plan to conquer it.

The signing of the Russo-Japanese treaty caused particular rejoicing in Moscow. Chicherin declared to one of the staff of *Izvestia*: 'This treaty is the signal for an essential change-about in the Far East, and also in international politics.' And M. Stickloff announced in regard to it that a new era was beginning in the history of the world, an era that would be marked by the coming alliance of Japan, Russia, China, and Germany. There is an attempt to form a Germano-Asiatic bloc, but the action of the Soviets is the leaven of this Asiatic world that has evolved so marvelously in five years. The reason is that the Soviets, as seen from the East, look like an Asiatic reaction against European civilization. The East greets and loves the Soviets less for what they bring than for what they destroy. It sees in them the factor that

will humiliate and crush the masters under whose 'oppression' they have suffered so long.

Such are the facts, such is the reality that is hidden in the Bengalee poetry of a Tagore, the Tolstoian gospel of a Gandhi. When the propagandists of the 'Knowledge of the East' are working to revive Eastern culture and thought, to denounce the destructive spirit of the civilization of the West, they are furthering the plans of a political coalition that may give rise to a conflict more inhuman than all the others, and that would plunge the universe into the abyss once more. It is doubtless some such anticipation that intoxicates M. Romain Rolland when he writes: 'As an historian by trade, accustomed to watch the great tides of the mind ebb and flow, I describe this one that is rising in the depths of the East. It will not ebb till it has overflowed the banks of Europe.' (Preface to the *Young India*, by Gandhi.) And in another passage he adds: 'Asia will conquer us as Rome and Athens once conquered — by the *mind*.'

On the plea of welcoming 'the ample and calm metaphysic' of India, its conception of the universe, its wisdom of life, the breach through which an anarchy, no less barbarous than invasions, will flow, dissolving our institutions and our customs, is being opened and enlarged. The word so far, in idealistic language, is only of a sort of spiritual invasion ready to roll in on us from the high plateaux of Asia to 'regenerate' the races of the West, abandoned in the evening of their ill fate. We must not wait until the 'storms longed for' by some European deserters have destroyed our world, before denouncing those who have become the accomplices of this Asiaticism. We must first attack those who are propagating these ideas among us. It is in

the West that we must first look for the ideologists who, on the pretense of opening up to us the ideas of the East, are betraying civilization, and their own vocation. These are the real fosterers of the crisis in Western thought, and, to put it bluntly, in thought itself.

The spirits thou dost summon up,
Thou shalt not lose them evermore.

Ideas have their responsibilities no less than men have; and, as Barbey d'Aurevilly said: 'All philosophy passes into facts; the most lofty speculation has its feet in the practice of life; principles guide men, even the lowest of them, by a chain of logic on their necks.'

Among all the subversive forces that are undermining Europe, ideas too generate events, which follow closely after the body of ideas that covers them, this, indeed, opening up the way for them, increasing their fatal violence and multiplying their dangers. The object is to disarm mind and energy before the imminent march of events. We have seen the sources; we still have to discuss the main themes of the fallacious doctrines hiding under the mask of a vague Orientalism. For notwithstanding the strange motives that these doctrines find in the endless varieties of Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist metaphysics, where all and everything may be found, these pseudo-Asiatic ideas would certainly not exist if they were not in a way galvanized into life by contact with Western heresies, mainly of Germanic or Slav origin.

First of all, this anti-Western propaganda may be recognized by the fact that it takes advantage of the disorder in Europe, of the state of lassitude that follows great upheavals, in order to keep up in us the idea of our deterioration and decline. Europe, which has now hardly any other education than

the ruin of her memory, is only too ready to yield to the baleful wail of this historic fatalism to which Hindu pessimism adds the progressive mirage of cycles of thousands of years. To-day, Europe feels only as a burden on her will and her soul all those former civilizations which the erudition of the nineteenth century evoked from the past of humanity, but which she cannot harmonize in her mind. Hence this need of novelty that torments her. She worships change only because she feels bowed beneath the weight of weariness of the whole universe. At the time that she needs to expend all her energies in the defense of the eternal principles that are the foundation of civilization, the mass of her historical memories overwhelms her and prevents her from reacting in the direction of preservation and life.

Does Europe still hold the 'secret of civilization'? She asks herself the question, and doubt seizes her as she meditates despairingly on the zenith and decay of vanished races. Revolutions and reconstructions have confirmed her in the weakening belief that there is always something perpetually in course of surrender; and already she is consoling herself with the thought that the 'slaughter of one is the nourishment of another in this movement of natural cannibalism that varies so little from century to century.' And in face of this Asiatic menace with which we are dealing, are there not people who say to themselves, like the aged Renan: 'There is no doubt that these peoples will bring new ideas to humanity. This will not be accomplished without great disturbance in the general sequence of events. But the Barbarians also somewhat disturbed society in the fourth century, and there is no doubt that humanity is indebted to them for much'? That is the point of view of Sirius, the mental debacle of human-

ity ready to surrender. As Chesterton says: 'The man who is fighting for his country is never haunted by the refrain of vanished empires.' And history teaches us other things besides skepticism; it shows us that the only man to perish is he who neglects the conditions of all life and all liberty, the permanent rules of safety and the means of defense. History also brings into evidence what has been rightly called the *law of the rampart*.

Another theme from these doctrines of dissolution which they are trying to acclimatize among us under cover of Asiaticism is that of the materialism of Western civilization. We hear of the 'disanimation' of Europe, to which our enslavement to material power of necessity inclines us, and we are offered Buddhism or Hinduism as a counterpoise that will save us from being drawn into the abyss. Before the gloomy spectacle of Europe as we see it to-day, no one could dream of bringing forward in her favor the homicidal benefits of her puny mastery over matter; and when we desire to defend the West against its detractors, it is not our aim to apologize for its defects, its excesses, its surrenders, but to restore the essential principles, the true traditions of our civilization, that may save it and the human race with it. We have need to find ourselves again and not to lose ourselves. If, as an aid to this necessary recovery, we expect nothing from Asia, it is because the pseudo-Orientalism of its defenders is most often only an exotic form of the return to nature, of the 'Rousseauism' that, with progressive intentions, has led to a general retrogression. It is the same distrust of civilization, the same hatred of society and of law. Rabindranath Tagore denounces the misdeeds of Western machinery and technique in the same tone in which Rousseau condemned the corruption of Athens, the deca-

dence of Rome, the humanism of the Renaissance, in order to exalt the Scythians, the Early Persians, and the Germans of Tacitus. We find in the Asiatic propagandists and the Genevese philosopher the same wild declamations against the progress of industry, which is condemned, not for its excesses, but for itself, in the name of virtue and primitive simplicity. And this vague 'naturism' that exploits the discontent of the modern soul, in order to rouse all human propensities against the defects of our organization, clothes itself in a spurious theosophism that is as foreign to Hindu metaphysics as to ancient Chinese ethics.

This is the teaching, for example, of the last books of Maurice Maeterlinck. Everyone knows his famous contrast between what he calls the Western and the Eastern lobes of the human brain: 'The one,' says the author of the *Unknown Guest*, 'produces here reason, science, and consciousness; the other secretes yonder intuition, religion, and subconsciousness. The one reflects only the infinite and the unknowable; the other is interested only in what it can limit, what it can hope to understand. They represent, in an image that may be illusory, the struggle between the material and the moral ideals of humanity. They have more than once tried to penetrate each other, to mingle, to work in harmony; but the Western lobe, at least over the most active part of our globe, has up to the present paralyzed and almost destroyed the efforts of the other. We owe to it, not only our extraordinary progress in all the material sciences, but also catastrophes such as we are experiencing to-day, which, unless we take care, will not be the last or the worst. It is time,' Maeterlinck concludes, 'to rouse the paralyzed Oriental lobe.' And thereupon he elaborates for our use a sort of occult syncretism that is

not only a danger to the Christian faith, but that threatens the dissolution of the reason in its most fundamental aspects, that gives rise to fears, in a not very remote future, of disorders in the 'religious consciousness' of which the Gnostic and Neo-Platonic aberrations at the beginning of our era offer only a feeble notion. And Europe in fact was in a very similar state when a similar dogma came to it from Alexandria. Everywhere remedies were sought in ecstasy, in cosmogonic reveries, in theurgy, and in the illuminism of false prophets.

In truth, the so-called Oriental doctrines which have been propounded to us in recent years are only a sort of pseudo-mystical syncretism, worked out by a professor of the history of religions, a runaway Sanskrit scholar, a German philosopher, and spread by theosophists and pacifists in the pay of newly established nations. When stated thus, the famous dilemma, 'East and West,' betrays its origin immediately.

But there are methods of Orientalizing us more specious, doctrines more circuitous, less open ways, than those of the theosophists or occultists. The poison of the East, in the form most easily assimilated, insinuates itself very subtly by attacks aimed at the very notion of *personality*, at autonomy, at the spiritual and moral identity of the human composite, at that substantial reality which makes us master of our actions and independent with regard to the things of sense.

This dissolution of the human personality is the feature that strikes us in the most recent manifestations of our young literary men—the disciples of Marcel Proust and André Gide, for example; it is the sign that marks this influence and this new literary acquisition. All the characters drawn by our young authors are recognizable by the

fact that they are no longer 'centred,' and have a strange resemblance to each other that is well adapted to distinguish them from all the human types that have hitherto appeared in French literature. There is about them something loose, something like a refusal to take form, to be formed, to straighten out, to make unity of their discords. There is no effort to concentrate on any point in their sensibility, but an entirely material sincerity in which the mind no longer plays a part. Not only have their intelligence and their will no distinct aim, but it seems that the subject himself is looking for an indiscoverable 'ego,' as if the end of modern individualism, after having made itself the centre of everything in order to live the selfish life of the passions and the senses, must finally result in a total dilution, a complete reabsorption into the original confusion of things. It might also be said that these new characters, which have issued from the dissociations of a morbid psychology, are not even in search of an identity, in which they seem no longer to believe, and that they tend by instinct to escape from the grip of the world in order to slip away from themselves. It is the lassitude of a generation that was bruised too soon by life, and that has no discipline of heart or mind to defend it against that feeling of powerlessness to which so many disappointments have made it prone.

But it is here that Asiaticism lies in wait for us. For what affinity has Asia with us? What feeling can she satisfy, in so far as we are capable of receiving her untranslatable message, unless it be a certain taste for self-defeat, a need, as it were, for self-destruction. The *annihilation of the personality* — that is what, rightly or wrongly, we are seeking and finding in approaching her soul; for it begins by breaking up all our ways of being and thinking, by de-

priving us in advance of the very qualities that would shelter us from its infection, by plunging us into a sort of diffused knowledge, which, just because of the amount it claims to comprehend and embrace, must first of all give up the attempt to define itself. It seems that we can advance in knowledge of Asia only on condition that at the outset we divest ourselves of this desire for definition, for precision, for separation, that is native to the Western mind in its full vigor; and whatever its teachings may at bottom be, such is undoubtedly the clearest result of Asiatic influence.

The radical and essential opposition between the East and the West lies in the different idea that each has of man and his relation to the universe. Here in the West, man has desired *to be*; he has not consented to lose himself in things, or subscribed to the notion that the human personality is nothing but a mere dependence of nature playing with the illusion of living forms and confounding all life in an immense equivocation. It is this resistance that characterizes the man of the West. Distinction, choice — these are the mark of his thought, formulated once for all in the great ages in the classic maxim of Anaxagoras: 'At the beginning all things were confused; intelligence came and put each thing in its place.' It is from the vision of this order, the intellectual hierarchies that it forms, from the idea of resemblances and differences, that there springs by a process at once rational and natural the general movement, and in particular that development of the human personality which right from the beginning is so striking in the history of the West.

The Asiatic hierarchy, on the other hand, seems to have a character of pure force, pure will, even of pure intellect, and at the same time an arbitrary character, either natural or

human. From the first, Oriental speculation plunged into the contemplation of the One identical with the All, and the limits of the human personality, and the opposition of the forces composing it, vanished, lost in the troubled waves of the nameless powers composing it. Turned fixedly inward, accustomed to establish a close and permanent correspondence between himself and the universe, the Asiatic becomes absorbed until the identity of his *ego* with the unattainable Being, an inhabitant of the abyss, is revealed to him. Thus he comes to regard his own life as a painful accident in the swarming of universal life. Existence seems to him an evil, and personality the radical evil, of which he must divest himself in order to reach the beatitude which he can find only in the hallucination of nothingness, in an illusory transcendentalism, if not in a radical agnosticism in which there is no longer any God, any soul, any external world—nothing but the torrent of things.

Whether it be the Upanishads or the Vedanta, which destroys the idea of the external world, the belief in the reality of the universe, or the Samkhya, which destroys the idea of God, or the Yoga, which abolishes the reason and even the use of thought, or Buddhism, which denies the existence of the soul, all Asiatic wisdom ends in the final dissolution of personality. The necessary consequence is the annihilation of human activity, and the paralyzing of the nerve of action which it regards only with disgust and a transcendent pity. Balance of thought and action, on the other hand, is the quality proper to the West; its authentic philosophy. Pessimism and distaste for effort are the distinctive marks of the Asiatic. But the kernel lies in 'depersonalization,' the aim and end of his effort, whether he seeks in it salvation, deliv-

erance from the whirlwind of continual reincarnations, the pain of successive rebirths, or whether he destroys the illusion of consciousness, or frees himself from the material, emotional, and intellectual ego in order to contemplate the divine soul. And all these doctrines in the end lead back to the pantheism from which they originated; all the efforts of the theosophists tend toward one end, which is that of all the mystical pantheists—the real identity of the subject and the object, of the individual soul and the universal soul, of man and God.

There is in Asia, as Chesterton says, 'a great evil spirit who is trying to melt everything in the same crucible, and who represents everything bathing in an immense pool.' There is nothing worse for the West than this method of thought, which aims at abolishing the lines of demarcation, both those of human personality and those of property. These Asiatic doctrines are all the more likely to destroy the West because it is no longer sure of its laws or of its institutions, and because it has a divided mind in a sick body.

Thus the Western man has no more pressing need than the need for fresh definitions. His difficulties are not entirely due to the circumstances that are bruising him. The struggle that shakes the City rages first of all in himself. And from what is he suffering? From his diverse thought, his different faiths, his unequal sciences, his individual moral systems, his different forms of education. He needs a systematizing truth whence to draw the soul of his actions. His fundamental and essential weakness lies in his mind, which is perpetually tossed hither and thither between his certainties and his guesses, his virtues and his cupidities. Without a doctrine, without a common spirit, without a philosophy which would give the same name to the same

things, and would understand the same ideas by the same signs, there is no remedy to be found in words that ruin States as they ruin individuals.

The younger generation in Europe know this. They are eager to discover the 'elements of the universal discipline to which they will deliberately give their adherence.' At the root of their agony, of this new *mal du siècle* from which they are suffering, can be felt a sort of great questioning of the foundations of all morals and of our whole spirit. They begin to dream: 'It is time to found a new church, to return to philosophy, to the cult of wisdom.' And it is these vague desires that this pseudo-Oriental metaphysic is trying to capture. It exploits the discontent of their mind and masks with the charm of poetry and mystery the savage appetites of racial rivalry.

Asiatic pantheism, transplanted to Berlin, assumes the guise of a warlike claim; Russian Communism, which is based fundamentally on the Tolstoian doctrine of nonresistance to evil, becomes everywhere a conquering Slavism; behind the Hindu chant the rhythm of rebellion and wrath may be heard. Because the problem is spiritual in the first place, we are apt to fail to see these harsh realities, or to be ready to give ear to false prophets who persuade us to a catastrophic conception of the universe. 'The great nations of the West are on the eve of ruin,' groans M. Romain Rolland.

'This talk of revenge and supremacy is all very fine. If these mad dogs persist in tearing each other to pieces, the heavy hand of fate will find means to separate them by beating them down, bruised and humiliated. . . . And fate is wise when nations are mad. Fate has taken the helm. Let him who can wrest it from her. . . .'

This fate has a name and a face. In order to overcome the dangers that threaten us, we must be able to name them. To put it briefly, they are Bolshevism and Asiaticism. The whole of civilization is reduced to defending itself against this dark barbarism which is so powerfully organized. But we have to choose between the most strict observance of the conditions of all life and liberty and the rapid eclipse of these two possessions. Civilization will live only in so far as we will it to live, and form of it a master idea, a governing idea, a fundamental idea. Are we resigned to perishing? 'If we are not, we must be prepared for a whole-hearted and universal service. No one without injustice or opprobrium can take refuge above the universal struggle. When everything is being spent and poured out, by what scandalous exception can the man of intellect only, the man of powerful intellect, hold himself aloof? How can that which can create so much moral force be loath to serve? It would be treason. No man of honor, no man with any care for the future, could choose such a course.'

THE SALVATION OF ANATOLE FRANCE¹

BY LOUIS ROUGIER

(Translated by Richard Aldington)

The scene is the Valley of Jehoshaphat on the day of the Last Judgment. In the foreground, the prisoners' dock; in the background, the Son in all His glory sits at the right hand of the Father. The stars fall on the earth like ripe figs, in order that a prediction in the Apocalypse may be fulfilled. Saint Peter, who has assumed the functions of Clerk of the Court, calls the guilty prisoners in alphabetical order. It is Anatole France's turn. He comes forward smiling, wearing a fur cap which he does not remove, with his book on Thais in his hand to keep him in countenance. The amiable Academician comes to the bar and delivers the following speech: —

ETERNAL, —

I am now to prove three points: (1) That you do not exist; (2) Supposing you do exist, that you are not amiable; (3) Supposing you do exist and are amiable, that a man should behave as if you did not exist.

First point: You do not exist.

What image can I form of you? I have not seen you, either in the burning bush of Moses, or on Mount Sinai among thunderbolts and the roar of thunder, or on Mount Tabor in the guise of Elijah in the dazzling confusion of ophthalmia. Tertullian pretends that you are material; the Eleatics that you are a well-polished and rounded sphere; the Alexandrians

that you are amorphous and limitless; my illustrated Bible that you are an old man with a snowy beard; the Cubists that you are a rhombohedron. Which am I to believe? Or are you all this at once, like the cloud Hamlet pointed out to Polonius on the terrace at Elsinor, which was like a camel, a weasel, and a whale? I cannot conceive of you from your works. They are paltry and decrepit. One lucky success occurs among innumerable failures. One efficient organism implies an enormous mass of spoiled matter. Thanks to original sin — *felix culpa!* — which allowed him to taste of the tree of knowledge, man through his industry has succeeded in palliating the errors and correcting the mistakes of your labor as a bad clock-maker and a bad mason. By means of glasses he rectifies the eye, that apparatus of which a celebrated physician has said that if it had been supplied him by an optician he would have refused to accept it. With drugs and potions he prolongs the existence of a weak body which is so badly constructed that he is in danger every moment of ceasing to breathe. After this, I cannot believe in you, merely from my respect for you. It seems to me that a world so badly arranged can only be the work of the Devil or of some clumsy demiurgus. In order to avoid blaspheming you, I prefer to keep you in the category of the ideal.

The notion of you is eminently con-

¹ From the *Calendar* (London literary quarterly), July