rue Val-de-Grâce
by Paul Erik Richard
PREFACE

Reluctantly I begin this narrative. Though I shall, within two months, enter my eightieth year, I still feel too young to reminisce about the details of my personal life. To live truly is to live by faith. How can one have any faith in the past? We do not ask a tree to return to its first shoot. To live one must continue to grow, and the future is still my goal.

To look back is also somewhat frightening. My life was made up of beautiful things and people: a loving mother, sisters, wives, companions and friends, as well as beloved children. There were many roads to travel, and all led to wonderful places, adventures, opportunities. But the severed parts of my life are painful to contemplate, and there are many regrets. Life is darkness as well as light, a glorious and dreadful gift.

There are really two reasons for writing this book. Forty years ago when I returned from Asia, Romain Rolland urged me to write about the great figures I had met and worked with there: Abdul Baha, Toyama, Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghose, and others. Several friends told me that it would be the most interesting of my books; maybe so, but for me the descent from the inner world of contemplative thought to the external world of facts and recollections
represents a real spiritual fall. One must not leave this world without having done what one was meant for and enjoyed doing, but it is also necessary to do things which one is reluctant to do out of respect for the wishes of others.

I always thought that we should leave this world as if holding in our hands a little offering, and as if to say "this is the best I could gather, the best I could do in this life." So, to fulfill my promise to Romain Rolland, and as an offering to those in the present or future who may care, I begin this story.

Paul Richard

New York, 1954
BOOK I: WITHOUT PASSPORT
The Road to Marsillargues
by Paul Erik Richard
CHAPTER I

DREAMS OF YOUTH AND ADVENTURES IN
THE FRENCH CAVALRY

At the site of an old Roman colony in South France there is a beautiful village called Marsillargues, the "field of Mars." One enters the village from a boulevard lined with chestnut trees, and I can still see the stone houses and the winding streets paved with cobblestones from the river Vidourle. And I remember the "Promenade," with its canopy of trees, under which the villagers used to stroll in their Sunday best, exchanging good natured gibes with much shouting and laughter.¹

During the summer months caravans of gypsies camped on the banks of the Vidourle, waiting for the festivities of the grape harvest - the "vendanges." The village is surrounded by vineyards, and nearby is the famous Chateau which belonged to Monsieur Fouquet, the minister of finance who disgraced himself during the reign of Louis XIV. You will not find my village on most maps, but it lies between Lunel (the city of the moon) and Aigues-Mortes, the medieval walled city where Saint Louis died on his return from the crusades. There, in the Tower of Constance, my great grandmother, Marie Durand, had been imprisoned with other
Huguenots and her appeal (Resist!) could still be seen on the stone, framed under a glass plate.

I was born too soon after my brother, so my parents called me "le petit tant-pis" (little too bad). But a few months later my older brother died and I then became the only brother of four girls.

Our house had been built by my grandfather, and I had my own room which my grandmother kept for me undisturbed even after I left home for military service. Sometimes my mother locked me in that room as a punishment, but I could easily escape into the branches of the linden tree outside my window. When I was born my grandfather had planted an elitiia tree in the garden; fifty years later it had grown taller than all the surrounding trees. Also in the garden was a "puits à roues," powered by a horse with blinkers over the eyes, turning in an endless circle. There were many kinds of trees in the garden which produced an abundance of figs, nuts, and peaches; also many varieties of grapes, pomegranates, jujubes, azeroles, buis, verbenas, and other fragrant herbs.

Not far from there, by the sea, lay the swamps of the Camargue. In this area there were bulls and herds of wild horses, called "manades." Sometimes the local villagers would collect the bulls for a relatively harmless and good-natured bullfight; my family disapproved of these performances and I was forbidden to attend them. I learned
to ride on a white horse from the Camargue; his name was "Conscrit" and he was a gift from my grandfather. How pleased I was to gallop with him in that wild place, and how kind he was (after throwing me and running away) to stop at the call of his name and wait for me to mount up again.

How different my paternal grandmother was from the one who kept my room for me. I can still see her standing in front of her husband in exasperation and saying sharply: "You martyrize me!" while he, an old peace loving veteran of the Crimean War, sat sunning his bad leg. "Not I, but your bad temper, martyrizes you," he would reply cheerfully.

This grandmother had been converted during a religious revival and so, of course, all the other members of her family had to follow her example. It seemed that my father had no alternative but to become a pastor. He inherited the forceful eloquence and strong will of his mother, as well as her low boiling point.

I forget who said that "God, since he could not attend to all the needs of men, created mothers." My mother was the angel and saint of the family, but I find it hard to speak of her. I remember only her patience, sweetness, and wisdom. She was "all to all," giving herself to everyone until the sad day when we lost her. I was then fifteen. If she had any shortcoming, perhaps it was having too much
ambition for her only son; I don't remember learning to read, but my father told me that at three I was already taking dictation. She was also very indulgent. Sometimes when we were walking together and passed a little girl I would say: "Mummy, may I kiss the fillette?" As she nodded with a smile I would run straight to the little girl and return quite happy.

Another angel of my childhood was my "nounou" who nursed me in my first days. Having lost her own child she transferred her motherly feelings to me. Our relationship lasted not only through my childhood but for many years afterwards. Every year she sent the traditional ham after she butchered her hog, and after twenty years she was still writing to me in the most affectionate manner: "Your Nanny for life."

My father's ministry was in the church of Alès, the center of Huguenot tradition. I can still see his pale and luminous face as he preached from the stone pulpit of this ancient church. Although I could not follow the meaning of his sermons the solemnity of it filled me with a sense of awe. Once, however, I remember my father commenting on the well-known text: "Madeleine, why do you weep?" With great feeling he repeated the question, and suddenly I became alarmed. Madeleine was the name of my youngest sister, and
she was sitting beside me, so I tried to console her. After that we both had the impulse to embrace each other at the end of every service.

At about this time I had a true religious experience, but it did not take place in church. I was coming home from school and suddenly stopped in the middle of a public square which I can still see vividly. What stopped me was that I was seeing my own body through some kind of magic telescope as a universe full of beings. Each of these beings was also a universe in itself, and so on *ad infinitum*. But at the same time, I was seeing myself as an infinitesimal part of a vast being which was itself part of a still greater being, and this also from magnitude to magnitude without end.

There was another event which I should mention because it reveals something about my character: It was during a children's festival, and we were taken to a comic show, the title of which was "Un Mari dans du Coton." But the prospect of entering a dark theatre to see some make-believe performance filled me with horror; I could not go in. Was it because of the Puritan atmosphere in which I was bred? I am inclined to think it was something else. Imagination is the master faculty in man: it should not be used to create illusions, but to discern truth in the visible as well as the invisible world.
By the time I was seven years of age my family had moved to Marseille and I was enrolled at the Lycée. My mother had started me in the English language and I liked to read Sanford and Merton. But in school I was forced to study German, and English was forgotten.

My strongest interest was in science, particularly geology, and I visited the Palais de Longchamp almost every day. This marvellous museum full of fossils was for me more living than anything I was exposed to in church or at school. The big rooms with their glass cabinets and illustrated walls told the whole history of life from the first trilobite to the last pre-human primate. I would stare in stupefaction at the incredible bones of the dinosaur, and then the beautiful spiral of an ammonite would carry my thoughts millions of years into the past, and the enormity of that distance in time was both overwhelming and at the same time liberating from the narrow circuit of my daily life.

All my allowance was spent for books on geology, and I can still recite the entire list of sediments in the earth's crust. I used to bring my own fossil treasures to the museum to identify them, and the sight of a small boy spending hours in this painstaking way must have impressed the curators of the museum, for they invited me into the
back rooms which are closed to the public, where the real work goes on. There I was permitted to choose duplicate specimens to add to my own precious little collection. So the truant came home with armloads of stones; for me they were the heirlooms of life on earth and I spent my evenings classifying and labeling them. My collection was kept (in perfect order) in my closet, and although my parents did not disturb the closet they were very disturbed with my behavior and I was frequently punished and disgraced at home and in school.

I also liked collecting stamps, especially the ones from exotic faraway countries. Often I visited the harbor with a friend to see the big ships bound for China and other countries of the Far East. We dreamed of visiting some unknown island like Robinson Crusoe: not shipwrecked, but on a craft of our own design. To discipline myself for the hardships of the voyage I sometimes left my room at night and perched in the branches of the huge magnolia tree until dawn, pretending to be on watch.

Sometimes I would climb the hill overlooking the city. At the summit stands Notre-Dame de la Garde, full of crutches, ex-votos and other relics in devoted recognition of the many miracles accomplished there by the good Mother. The day would soon come when I lost my own mother; no longer
would I bring her flowers from the market every Thursday. With her death the brightest star in my life seemed to go out ...

After my mother's death my father went to Holland as pastor of the Walloon church founded by French exiles during the religious wars. (Queen Wilhelmina was herself a member of this church.) I was sent to the Lycée at Montpellier not far from my grandmother's house, and had some good times there during vacations. Some nights my cousin and I would quietly take horses from the stable and ride off to a distant village to visit two charming young ladies who were part of a wandering theatrical troupe.

At the Lycée my troubles with academic authorities began again because I was at that time more interested in modern poetry than in classics. I memorized the lesson, but one day my teacher discovered that I didn't have the slightest idea of what the lines meant. At this point the persecution began and continued day after day. To make matters worse, I learned that we would have the same teacher again the following year, in preparation for the Baccalaureat examination. This prospect was so horrible that I decided then and there to spend my summer vacation learning Greek and Latin.
The examiner was a dreaded Latin teacher, but that was my good luck. Besides correcting my classics version he had to fill in for the geography teacher who was absent that day, and he asked me to name all the rivers in Russia. Of course I knew only one or two, but he reassured me, saying "I see that you do not know them any better than I do, but you have done an excellent version and that is sufficient for me."

The following year I had to prepare for the Baccalaureat examination in philosophy, and I boarded in the home of a private tutor. As usual, I spent too much time riding horses and reading irrelevant books. One of these "irrelevant" books was written by Prince Kropotkin and was entitled The Conquest of Bread. It moved me to the bottom of my heart, and led to the formation of the first Labor Party in the province, which I helped to organize with some professors and fellow students. At the end of the year things had developed so well that the Party asked me if I would be interested in becoming a delegate to the Parliament, but to my regret and their surprise I had to tell them that I was only seventeen.

These activities unfortunately contributed nothing to my academic preparation. The day of reckoning came when I was asked to expound on the theme that "the end justifies
the means." I tried to develop the idea that means are ends in themselves and that the ends are only means to further developments, but my examiner, the celebrated Dr. Dauriac, was not impressed. I could not provide citations for anything I said, and his only comment was: "One does not invent philosophy."

Disgusted with my failure in philosophy, I decided to volunteer early for my military obligation in order to be able to choose freely my branch of service. Not surprisingly, I chose to serve in the cavalry and spent four years in North Africa assigned to the 4th Regiment of Spahis in Tunis. I felt so much at home in this Arab atmosphere that I began to wonder whether I did not have some Moorish ancestry. They had occupied the south of France as well as Spain for centuries and the "Arab type" was not uncommon in our family. Living amongst them I quickly began to speak their language and even to read and write Arabic. We were continually on the move from one camp to another: Sfax, Kairouan, Gabès, Gafsa, Tebessa, and the island of Djerba, the garden of the Hesperides. Finally, there was Tatahouine in the desert frontier of the Touareg.

My first month of service was spent unlearning everything I knew about riding. Army equitation is not a sport or a pastime, but a hard discipline. First we had to
learn to ride without saddle or stirrups; then a long period of scientific training of the horse, after which man and horse became a single unit. Eventually I became a cavalry instructor and remember with joy our cavalcades on the plain of Gafsa, an early stone age site, still covered with roughly cut flints. I was detailed to make a map of the territory, and spent my days surveying this area.

From Gabès to Zarzis one must cross an absolutely flat terrain made up of dried up salt lakes which form watery mirages on the horizon. Once, while I was in charge of a convoy, a storm came up and the Arabs in my group refused to proceed further. I rode off alone in a deluge of wind and rain and at the end of the day found myself in the midst of a wooded area without any visible paths. So I let my horse free to meander through the fallen trees illuminated by lightning bolts, and with a sure instinct he finally led me to the camp which was my destination.

Another time I was dispatched with two guards to deliver the payroll to Bir El-Amur, a distant post famous for its deep wells and pure cool water (unlike most of the Arab wells in which it was not uncommon to find even a dead camel). In the middle of our journey we almost ran into an ambush; several unsavory looking fellows came out of the bushes and began to follow us. One of my spahis fell back
to talk to them while the others continued. Presently he caught up with us at a gallop. "I told them the regiment was coming up behind us," he said with a smile.

I recall another incident in which I was in charge of a wood cutting detail. We had to live outside the camp in a small tent, and we were supposed to receive supplies every other day. But several days of heavy rain interrupted the delivery, and the only thing we could do was to try to keep our canvas dry. Fair weather returned, and brought with it a shepherd and his flock. To my surprise one of the men invited him to share our dwindling provisions, and then disappeared during the meal. After the shepherd had left, my man reappeared with a triumphant look on his face and a heavy sack over his shoulder. When I discovered that the sack contained a beheaded sheep I reprimanded him for the theft, but he shrugged it off with the explanation that "This shepherd had more sheep than he could eat himself and we had none, so it was fair that we should take one."

We went to Kairouan, one of the holy cities, for the general cavalry drill. There I visited the "Mosque of the Swords" which was named for some ancient prophecies inscribed on a collection of swords. Among the marabouts living in the mosque was a Frenchman who had converted to Islam. When Tunisia was conquered by France this man's
patriotism had impelled him to write a prophecy of his own on one of the swords, which read: "Two great snakes will converge on the city, and the city will open its doors before them." And when some time later two French columns arrived at the gates of Kairouan, they found them wide open, and took the city without bloodshed.

Often the horses developed back sores as a result of the chafing of the saddles during our long marches. The soldiers who were responsible were then ordered to proceed on foot, the worst punishment for a cavalryman. At the first sign of such a sore on my horse, I simply applied tobacco ashes from my pipe and the wound disappeared overnight. His name was Elysée, and we were great friends. I didn't have to lead him by the bridle; he followed me wherever I went. He also had a peculiar way of whinnying when I pulled his ear, and when this happened in formation the whole squadron could hardly repress their laughter.

My detachment sometimes had to travel at night and the monotonous gait of the horses made it hard to keep from falling asleep. But at the first sign of a fall, one was wide awake again. I had a good comrade, a Frenchman like myself, who usually rode with me and we would sing songs and even improvise operas together. My friend came from an aristocratic family and claimed that many of his ancestors
had died in duels. One day he asked me to rescind an order I had given, saying that if I did not it would be the end of our friendship. "End our friendship?" I exclaimed. "Let's take our swords and settle it that way." Unfortunately he took me seriously, so at dusk we had to sneak out of the camp with our swords. Stripped to the waist we began to fight. I felt the tip of his sabre just missing my ribs, and then he was hit. "You are wounded," I said, and he replied, "No, let us go on." But after a few seconds he said, "I cannot see; I have blood in my eyes." I dropped my sword and took my friend in my arms. It turned out to be only a small cut just above the eye, so after we got the bleeding stopped we went back to camp and had a good dinner in the canteen.

At Sfax, our regimental headquarters, life was somewhat tedious so we spent a good part of our free time in gambling. My friend's pride, however, was still smarting from the wound I had given him and he was determined to get even. This time he wanted a formal encounter with all the paraphernalia that goes with it. I could not refuse his demand, but in order to obtain official permission we had to exchange ceremonial slaps in front of witnesses.

Early the next morning, the weapons were produced along with surgeons and their array of shining instruments. My
friend was a skillful fencer and I was told that he had spent hours rehearsing a tricky pass for this occasion. (He later told me that he lost some of his confidence when, instinctively, I parried it.) We had four successive rounds, each resulting in superficial wounds to one or the other. Each round became more hazardous as we got more and more excited, but the witnesses (who were enjoying this unusual treat) allowed us to proceed. After twenty minutes of this the officer in charge decided it was time to stop, and we heard the Major remark that "they fought like lions." This was not the end of the matter, however. We had broken the military rule of mutual respect and were both demoted and sent to the doghouse for "behavior necessitating an encounter on the field."

It was the desire for adventure which had prompted me to enlist in the Army, but three years of this kind of life had turned the adventure into a monotonous routine. Gradually I began to feel a new spirit stirring in me, a different kind of need. Had the silent prayers of my mother finally been answered, or was it simply the weight of family tradition which now led me back to the waiting God of my father? Was it the desire to make peace with him, to make amends for my rebellious youth? Once I had told my father that if I had been born in a different country my true
religion would not have been Christianity but Islam or Buddhism, and he had dismissed me as a hopeless case of "tête brûlée." Whatever it was, I experienced it as a complete surrender of the heart, and I resolved to follow in the steps of my father and become a pastor.

My decision was an occasion for great rejoicing in my family, and there was a corresponding change in me. The duties which had previously been distasteful to me became enjoyable, and my habits of dissipation gave way to strict self-discipline. I began taking cold showers in all kinds of weather, and fasted every weekend. My off-duty hours were spent in religious contemplation, poetry writing, and preparations for my re-examination in philosophy (a prerequisite for entry into the seminary). When it was time for the examination I obtained leave to go to the University of Oran in Algeria. I had to rely on the efficacy of prayer as well as the good will of my examiners, and this strategy was apparently successful because they took my uniform into account when evaluating my deficiencies in chemistry.

My last year of service was spent in Tunis in a state of intense religious excitement. One night the tension was so great that I felt that I was on the verge of a breakdown, or perhaps some serious illness. At a certain point it seemed to me that such an illness might even be necessary
for my spiritual development. At that moment I felt a deep chill go down my spine, and the next morning I could not stand up. The last thing I remember after arriving at the military hospital on a stretcher was the doctor saying: "In such a state, already?" For the second time in my life I had been stricken with double pneumonia (the first bout occurred when I was less than a year old) and this time I drifted in and out of delirium for several days. I still remember clearly the visions which came to me during this period, since they were like symbolic previews of later events in my life.

In the first vision, I was among the naked and the dead, and I could see myself lying amidst a heap of human corpses representing one day's harvest in the world of man. Slow, sickening decay and the hopelessness of physical death: only this feeling was still alive in me.

In the next vision, the universe had vanished, but I still had a sense of my own form and I seemed to be ascending in this invisible space. I could also sense the presence of two invisible beings near me; one was somewhere behind and above me, while the other was closer to where my feet should have been. The first being was trying to teach me something that I had to know, but it was becoming harder and harder for me to grasp this special knowledge. The
being below me was playful, pleasant and distracting, but
the first one said: "Don't listen to him." Finally the
ascension stopped, and the greater being said to me, "Now,
you have only to call on the divine name: God..." and from
the depths of my being, with incredible force, came the
answer: No! Then the vision dissolved, and I found myself
back in this world again.

In my third vision, I had to face many ordeals. It
seemed that my presence had let loose incredible hostilities
and desires to destroy me. First, swordsmen rushed towards
me, but at the moment of impact their weapons fell into
pieces. Next, I had to pass between two high stone walls
which the powers of destruction would push down upon me, but
somehow the walls, instead of crushing me, formed a double
hedge of stones protecting me. Next, I was lying on my
back, pinned down by a feminine figure who was trying to
pour some kind of corrosive liquid on my face: but the
stream of acid was separating into two parts without hurting
me. Finally, it seemed that the whole world was at war, and
I was in a little glass cubicle moving slowly at some
distance above the ground. Behind me was a huge army which
was following my voice commands. Suddenly I saw another
huge army advancing against mine, and I said to myself with
deep compassion: "Poor devils, they will be crushed." Then my glass cubicle passed slowly over them, and they vanished.

In the fourth vision, I was in my maturity, sitting on a rock, and watching animals of every kind coming toward me. My right arm was extended, and from my fingers sparks were shooting out towards them. At first the progression was haphazard, but then the animals stopped to let the smallest ones pass first. Columns of ants marched before me, then swarms of bees and other insects, and then came the larger animals. My arm had to be extended for such a long time that I had to support it on a long staff. When all the animals had passed, human beings appeared. First there were pregnant women from many tribes and others holding little children in their arms to receive the luminous effluence. After the primitive tribes came the representatives of all the advanced nations, and finally, reluctant heads of states were forcibly brought before me in their carriages, drawn by horses which ignored the commands of their masters to stop until after the horses themselves had received their share of the divine spark. When it was all over, I could rest my arm at last, with my hands folded over my blissful heart.

In the last picture, I was very old, and wearing some sort of a flowing white robe. I was walking with a group of friends along an open road stretching to the horizon, and
here and there we passed through religious buildings representing the various traditional faiths. As we passed through each building the faithful departed and followed us in an ever increasing number, and there was no end to this march on the long road towards an invisible goal -- no end other than my own life.

There was a voice intruding on this reverie, and it was saying "Though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death, I will fear no evil ..." Opening my eyes, I saw the chaplain sitting by my bedside and reading the twenty-third Psalm. So, I found myself back in the real world of the French army, but for several days my soul was heavy with longing for the rich world of imagination which I had left.
1. In August of 1985 I visited the village where my father had spent his childhood and it was just as he described it. Nothing appeared to have changed in the course of a century, except that there was a new brick building housing the Village Office. Unfortunately the officials were not able to direct me to the house in which my father had grown up, and the pastor of the Protestant church was on vacation, so I had to settle for atmosphere.
Palais de Longchamp
by Paul Erik Richard
CHAPTER II

IN AND OUT OF THE MINISTRY

At the age of twenty-two I was discharged from the army and began my career as a seminarian at the University of Toulouse, in Montauban. In addition to studying Greek once more (for the New Testament) I had to struggle with Hebrew and the Old Testament. And instead of the boredom of military routine I was now caught up in the tedious details of exegesis, dialectic, the long and turgid history of Christianity, as well as other indoctrinations. There were only two academic subjects that really interested me at this time: the laboratory sciences, and neo-Kantian philosophy. In the area of religious studies, I seemed to be more interested in the history of Islam than in Christianity.

The young seminarians formed little residential groups called "turnes." These were comparable to fraternities sharing common chores and interests, and mine was called "la turne des sept." Unlike the other groups, we did not go in for pranks, hazing, and ceremonial initiations of the rookies, who were called "bizuts." Sometimes the seminarians, who were generally very pious, showed a darker
side. One day I discovered that several of them had used a cat for target practice, stoning it without pity until it died. Infuriated by their cruelty, I began to curse at them and told them it would be better to defile themselves in a brothel instead of killing a defenseless creature. For me, lack of respect for life has always been the worst sin. Not long after this I had a chance to strike a real blow for one of my little brothers. Late one evening, while returning from a seminar, I heard a commotion on the street and went to investigate. I found a crowd silently watching a man beating his little bear with a stick. The bear was crying like a child. Suddenly I found myself caning his master, and that ended the ordeal of the little bear, at least temporarily.

Fortunately, brutality is counter balanced in our species with the potential for what has been called by Schweitzer, Einstein, and others "cosmic consciousness." Of course I had never heard of this term at that time, but late one night I experienced the reality of it with several of my fellow seminarians. We had been talking with some villagers and were walking home when suddenly we heard someone singing, and we came upon a man whose like I had never seen. "I am nothing; I know nothing; I own nothing, and I am alone. But I am the happiest man in the whole world."
After saying this, he went on singing, and we listened to him for a long time. And then he left, leaving with us something of his irrepressible joy.

One evening after that we went to hear the Swiss pastor Tophel lecturing on the gospel of the inner life. "The Kingdom of God is within you," was his message, and it came from his own personal experience of relationship with an inner presence which could not be described as "Lord" or "master," but rather an intimate friend, guide, and companion. His testimony was so impressive that we could all feel the reality of this presence in us. I was watching our science professor sitting nearby and could not fail to notice that the same emotion was filling his eyes with tears. When I went out, the light within was radiating all around and I looked with wonder at the stones under my feet, for even they were strangely luminous.

Besides the geological trips with our science professor, we would sometimes take long trips on our bicycles. On one of these trips we visited one of those remarkable Protestant institutions for the insane called "les asiles de fous." Unlike the typical dark towers of dread which we call asylums, this one was without walls. Inside the cheerful courtyards with their flower gardens we found the inmates walking about freely, most of them looking
like happy children secure in their own home. Given the right circumstances, even the asylum can become an embodiment of the gospel of love.

Some other things happened during this period that left painful memories. One was the death of my grandmother, who had been living alone in the house where I was born. I frequently visited her, and I was proud to escort her at big family gatherings because she was always gracious and cheerful in my company. One day, however, I was summoned to her bedside as she was very ill, and for some reason I postponed visiting her. Then the news came that she was dead, and that the only person who was with her at the time was an old lady friend who faithfully spent all her evenings keeping her company and reading to her from the family Bible.

My thoughtlessness in the matter of my grandmother's death was a source of deep regret, but I was even more inept in matters of the heart. I spent my summer vacations at my father's house in Holland, along with my three sisters and the three children of my father's second wife. One of my sisters had a friend named Wilhelmina who visited us day after day, and at that time I was so unseasoned in these matters that I yielded meekly to the attraction that she felt for me. My only feeling at the time was that being
loved was a privilege for which one had to be thankful, rather than questioning it. So at the end of the summer I returned to the University, engaged in fact, but without much enthusiasm. A few months later I even tried to free myself, but everyone except my sister was opposed to the idea and I gave in, trusting as usual, to the wisdom of circumstances.

My last year at Montauban went well, except that I caught a mild case of typhoid fever at the seminary. I wrote my thesis while convalescing at the house which had been left empty after my grandmother's death. In this thesis I attempted to explain the phenomenon of Christ's resurrection in terms of the theory of monads developed by Leibnitz. When the time came for my oral defense, I found myself attired in academic regalia confronted by three professors similarly attired. The defense was public, and the audience consisted of former students and theologians who were interested in the announced topic.

One of the three examiners was the professor of philosophy with whom I had studied Kant, and he was of course very supportive of my argument. Another was a science professor who took a dim view of all monadic speculations, and he engaged the first professor in a lively debate. The third examiner was simply concerned with
biblical exegesis, and since he was satisfied with my choice of text the balance was tipped in my favor.

Soon after graduation I was married in Amsterdam. We started our honeymoon at Aix-la-Chapelle, since I wanted to see the tomb of Charlemagne, and from there we took a ship down the Rhine. But while visiting the showplaces of Germany, Switzerland and Austria, I was filled with an incredible sadness. Was it because of this good person at my side, whom I was not sure I loved, or was it the knowledge that the first part of my life was gone, and that I was facing an uncertain future?

My ministry began in the north of France, in the cheerless city of Lille. I was ordained by my father before an assembly of ministers in a ceremony which was called the "laying on of hands." After the ordination I delivered my first sermon, taken from the text of the prophet and entitled "I have not resisted the heavenly vision." In this fashion, I became, for the time being at least, a minister in the Christian church.

This was the time when the young ministers of Northern France (Babut, Goumelle, Wilfred Monod, and others) had started their social gospel movement. I embraced this movement with great enthusiasm, because it came directly from Christ's words: "Blessed be the poor, for theirs is
the Kingdom of Heaven." Consequently I began to neglect the good churchgoers in my congregation and to seek out the "sinners," that is, the people of the street. In the worst part of the city we started a club called the "Red Star," and the red star emblem was what the members wore on their caps. The membership consisted of unemployed youths, derelicts and former jailbirds of all kinds. To become members, they had to sign a five rule pledge: Not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to fight, and finally, to work for a living. Each newcomer was asked to tell his story and talk about his troubles and misdeeds with the other members. Often he would deny having any troubles or doing anything wrong, in which case someone would say: "You are too good to be with us, none of us is so pure." Then, trusting us, he would begin to talk freely.

One of my boys was a good worker but he was also short-tempered and very violent. Once I asked him "What is the hardest thing to do when you get angry? To throw your fist in the face of your opponent or to put your hand in your pocket"? Laughing, he replied: "To put my hand in my pocket, of course." Then, I continued, "What takes more courage, to do the hardest thing or the easiest thing"? "To do the hardest thing," he replied. "So," I concluded, "you are a coward, since you don't have the guts to choose the
hardest way." Sometime later this fellow came up to me, 
smiling, and said: "I have done the hardest thing you told 
me." I had forgotten our conversation, so he continued: 
"Another worker challenged me, and knowing my ways, was 
ready to defend himself. But when I started towards him I 
remembered what you said and put my hand in my pocket. He 
couldn't believe it, and since then we have been the best of 
pals."

Sometimes their interpretations of the pledge were 
rather surprising. I remember one pale faced youth without 
a job or family for whom I found an understanding employer. 
He did so well that after some time he had a little money 
saved up and I suggested to him that he invest it in a bank. 
His reaction was indignant: "You told us that interest 
obtained from an investment represents the unpaid labor of 
someone else: is that not a form of theft?"

For the other members of the club we created employment 
by opening a little shoe repair shop and we also had a 
pushcart from which they could sell bundles of firewood. I 
learned more from my club members than they could possibly 
learn from me, but there was a hidden cost attached to this 
education. As long as my disreputable friends remained in 
the club everything went very well, but when they began to 
come into my church to hear my sermons the regular
churchgoers were shocked. I was accused of caring more for the wolves than for the sheep, and it was true. My sermons were based on social gospel themes, and when I preached that those in good health have no need of physicians, or that what is exalted in the eyes of man is an abomination before God, it sometimes happened that a wealthy patron of the church stood up and walked out. I began to think that the true spirit of Christ was not to be found in the churches, and that they were more like the empty sepulchre before which Mary Magdalene cried: "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have put Him."

Outside my church much work remained to be done. In the streets were many homeless children whom we found sleeping in vans and begging scraps from house to house. We established a shelter for them under the care of the eldest sister of a family of orphans. Some of them had never slept in a bed and refused to sleep under sheets, while others had trouble adjusting to regular meals, but I also remember one who was so pleased to find a friendly shelter that he tried to repay me with a few pennies, representing everything he had.

One night I was asked to visit a flophouse where tramps could sleep for a nominal fee. I was led through a corridor littered with drunks to a little room where the proprietor
lay dying on his bed. He begged me to take care of his two sons, aged twelve and thirteen. I could hardly distinguish their faces through weeks of accumulated dirt, but we took them in. One of them proved to be exceptionally talented and his teacher coaxed me to keep him in school; eventually he became a professor at the University of Prague but unfortunately was killed during the first World War.

The birth of my first son in June of 1901 was an ecstatic experience. When I went to the Town Hall to register the event the next morning, I felt intoxicated. At the age of fifteen I had dreamed about having a son, but it could not compare with the actual event. During the next seven years five more children were born, but only the first two (Jacques and Hélène) were born in Lille. Claire, René and André were born in Holland, in the houses of their grandparents.²

As a minister I had to baptise children in the church, but I did not really believe in the necessity of such a ritual for the soul of a child and therefore did not wish our children to be baptised.³

We spent our summers in Holland or in a small town in the Ardennes called Esneux. Here, at the age of three, my son Jacques joined me as a fossil hunter. Later he studied geology and visited volcanoes in many lands.⁴
Meanwhile, the situation in my church at Lille became increasingly difficult. An influential faction in the church was violently opposed to my version of Christianity; they said I was disturbing their souls. And they were right; I was still a Christian, but in the same way that Christ was a Jew. It was not a question of finding another church, for in good conscience I could not remain in the ministry. So, one day I submitted my letter of resignation, and this part of my life was over.

The only thing that I missed after leaving the church was the opportunity to write and deliver my sermons. These sermons were elaborately written, and they followed a sequence like the chapters of a book. But it was not the real book that I had to write, so eventually all these chapters were lost.

At that time I was still a member of the Masonic Order, in the mistaken belief that some worthwhile secret knowledge would be vouchsafed to me. There again I was disappointed, so I withdrew just before reaching the final thirty-second degree.
1. To Wilhelmina Van Oostven, in 1900.

2. In a letter dated 27 October 1984, René corrects his father on this point; he too was born in Lille.

3. Hélène was never baptised, but the other children were baptised several years later in Holland after the marital separation of their parents.

4. Jacques also owned a pyrethrum plantation in Kenya and survived a Mau Mau assassination attempt in the 1950s.
CHAPTER III

DEVIL'S ISLAND and KING BEHANZIN

But now I had to make some plans for the future. I decided that the best opportunity would be in law, so I returned to the University of Lille with the intention of getting a degree in that field. Soon after I entered law school a group of ex-convicts from the penal colony in French Guiana approached me with the request that I visit the area and report the atrocious conditions there. I accepted this proposal at once, since it was exactly in my line of social work. The Colonial Office approved the mission, so right after Christmas in 1905 I left for South America. We had a beautiful Christmas tree at home, and when I left my son Jacques gave me one of the paper ornaments to carry with me; for years I kept this little token of a child's love.

Landing in Cayenne, I was received by the Governor and General Prosecutor who briefed me and assured me of their cooperation. Everything went smoothly until I awakened in the middle of the night to discover an enormous tarantula in
a corner of the mosquito netting. During my brief stay in Cayenne I also had the opportunity to see a performance of "cassicor," the native term derived from the French "casse corps" which literally means "body break." This word is well chosen, for it describes a frantic sort of native dance which finally ends in exhaustion in the small hours of the morning.

The next day I was taken by ferry to the penal colony. Actually, it consisted of several different settlements; some of the camps were along the Maroni river which separates French from Dutch Guiana, while others were on the ocean coast to the west, and in the neighboring Salvation Islands. It was there that the first settlers of the colony took refuge after an unfortunate stay on the coast where several hundred of them died of fever. Guiana is not fit for colonization; it has been said that the man who cultivates the earth there is digging his own grave. Every year France sent thousands of new convicts, yet the population never increased; that is why they called it "the dry guillotine."

At the main settlement located at Saint-Laurent du Maroni I was provided with a house, a horse and two servants. One had killed his brother-in-law in a brawl, and the other his neighbor in a fit of jealousy. Both proved
quite reliable. The Director General, who lived here with his family, told me simply: "Nothing in the hand, nothing in the pockets, and you can see anything you want." So I passed the word that I would visit each of the barracks in rotation, listening to the stories of the men and hearing their complaints. Several of them, of course, claimed to be innocent, but only one appeared to be the victim of an error, and with the help of the penal authorities I was eventually able to obtain a pardon for him.

What made life for these convicts so hopeless was the fact that any sentence over seven years had to be matched by equal time spent in the colony after completion of the sentence. As a result of this double time system the ex-convicts had to remain in the area and eke out a living as best they could. These "libérés" lived in shacks and caught butterflies for sale to collectors, and the luckier ones got odd jobs working for the Director.

One morning, one of my servants peevishly came to report that my shoes had been stolen during the night. I told him: "Go to the first group of idle libérés you see and tell them that I will do my best to help them but I cannot do anything without my shoes. The man who took them must return them at once, and nothing bad will happen to him." After a few hours a miserable looking fellow came to
me and confessed to the theft. "Where are they, then?" I demanded. "I have sold them." "Sold them! For how much?" "For one franc." "One franc, for my beautiful shoes? Shame on you. Here, take this franc and buy them back at once." The shoes were returned to me, and the next day I recommended him to the Director for a little job, to save him from the sad dilemma of stealing or starving.

I enjoyed riding the horse which had been loaned to me, and one day I rode through a path in the jungle to visit a camp at Kourou. This trip was full of strange happenings. Once, at a turn in the path, we were confronted by an enormous buffalo. Further on, we were trailed by a puma and this made my horse panicky and nearly unmanageable. Arriving at the camp, I was glad to spend the night there. The convict assigned to me was a courteous gentleman who brought a bouquet of flowers; I cannot imagine where he found them since I had not seen any near the camp. His specialty was robbing banks, but he did not go in for armed robbery. Instead, he found ways to enter the bank after hours from a nearby basement, and he stole only a predetermined amount of bank notes. "I was only taking back a small amount of what the bank had stolen from others," he explained. I gave him a cigar, the first he had had in many
years. When I left in the morning he said: "I will keep this cigar until next Christmas and smoke it in your honor."

On my return through the jungle, I ran into two escaped convicts. Earlier I had been warned that such encounters were extremely dangerous, especially if one is alone and unarmed. But they seemed to be more frightened of me than I was of them. I asked them about their life in the jungle, but their dejected mien spoke for them. Hopeless was their plight; the best thing that could happen to them was to be captured by guards from the nearest camp. To supplement their meager wages, the guards served as bounty hunters on Sundays.

Of course plans for escape were common among prisoners, even though most of these attempts were doomed to failure. Some succeeded in crossing the Maroni river into Dutch Guiana, only to fall into the hands of Negroes who were eager to bring them back for a reward. Those who tried their luck in the forest, like the two I met, were in for the most maddening hardships, the worst being the swarms of mosquitos. (One group of fugitives was found standing up to their necks in a swamp to escape being eaten alive.) Still, there were stories about the convicts who crossed the ocean to Venezuela or some other country by boat, either bought or stolen. 2 Once a group even captured the government ferry
boat, and escaped in full view of the stupefied guards, with a full blast salute from the ship's horn!

The worst camp in this area was the one for incorrigibles known as the "camp of the dead" as no convict could survive there for more than a few months. During a short visit there I met a desperado who was the terror of the camp, and also a young boy with blue eyes whose presence had created a state of feud among several of the older men. The desperado explained to me that: "Here we have deep and ferocious loves. Why do they send us these young boys if they do not expect us to corrupt them?" That was a dreadful example of what so-called "civilized" penal systems produce; all punishments founded on the principle of revenge only multiply the crimes. How happy was the blue-eyed boy when, before leaving that infernal place, I managed to arrange his transfer to another camp.

On an inspection tour I accompanied the District Director to the Salvation Islands. The most important one is l'Ile Royale where there was a modern facility for the prisoners who had made repeated attempts to escape. Ironically the climate there is quite healthy and the Commandant invited me to play a game of croquet on the terrace of his house, below which we had a magnificent view
of the sea. I could almost imagine myself back in France, enjoying the comforts of some country estate.

Near l'Ile Royale lies l'Ile Saint Joseph, and we briefly visited the hospital on this island. While there I met a male nurse who had been a famous apache in Paris and the lover of Casque d'Or. ³

Our next stop was the infamous Devil's Island, where I was shown the hut which had been occupied by Captain Dreyfus. ⁴ As a souvenir the Director gave me the pliers and hammer which the unfortunate Captain had used in his woodworking hobby. The crossing between Royal Island to Devil's Island is quite perilous, since the currents are very strong and the waters are infested with sharks waiting for their daily ration of dead convicts who are unceremoniously dumped at sea. (A few years after my visit I heard that the Director who had escorted me met the same horrible fate when his boat capsized.)

Towards the end of my stay in Guiana I visited a camp in the Silver Mountains on the border of Brazil. Traveling on an antique sailboat, I enjoyed the complete silence and the experience of sleeping on the bridge, under the stars.

While staying at the Silver Mountains the Commandant invited me to participate in a hunt, since some kind of wild animal had been observed in the vicinity of the camp. I was
not a hunter, as I had always hated killing animals and never carried a firearm, even in the jungle. However, the Commandant tempted me with a cane gun. Intrigued with this device, I aimed it at a small bird perched in a tree and pulled the trigger. To my dismay, the bird fell from the tree. I did not want to touch it, but I did have it stuffed as a sad remembrance of my sin.

On the return trip, the boat captain became very upset when he discovered that according to his calculations we had already sailed past the mouth of the Maroni river. If he was right, this meant that we would be at sea for forty days before the trade winds would bring us back to St. Laurent. I was rather pleased at this prospect, but the Director General who was sailing with me was greatly relieved when, an hour later, the captain returned with new calculations showing that we were not far from our goal.

Before leaving this area I visited a village on the banks of the Maroni river. The Negroes there were the descendants of slaves who had escaped from the plantations in French, Dutch and British Guiana. The chief of the village was very friendly and invited me to participate in the "Saut du Maroni": a hair-raising ride in canoes down the rapids which end in a series of waterfalls. With consummate skill the two men steering my canoe zigzagged through the
labyrinth of rocks, but before reaching the falls they cautioned me to keep absolute silence because "the god of the falls forbids anyone to speak."

Great was the feeling of being alive when we emerged from the river's turbulence. But then, the Chief took me aside and showed me a tree on which two machete marks had been hacked. He pointed to them and said with great apprehension: "It is an enemy who did it. He wants me to die. What shall I do?" I tried to reassure him with the thought that only if he believed in it would he die, but he remained unconvinced.

The return trip to France was very interesting, since it included stops at Santa Lucia, Trinidad and the French West Indies. This gave me an opportunity to compare the effects of British and French colonial rule. Trinidad, a former British colony, was a first class city, filled with life and luxury. But I struck up a conversation with an Indian coolie in the street, and he told me about the plight of thousands of his fellow workers under the hard rule of indentured labor. It was another form of slavery, but without a slave-master to look after things. Suddenly I saw the difference between the English and the French colonial systems. The British system was harsh, but it was based on successful realism. The French system, on the other hand,
was pseudo-humanitarian since it promoted all former slaves into full-fledged citizens without any transition, thereby ruining all the plantations in the colonies.

The practical result of this French policy could be seen in Martinique. The birthplace of the Empress Josephine, and formerly one of the most prized and prosperous French possessions, it had become a city of shacks. In Fort-de-France, capital of the former colony, I stayed at a wretched hotel (the only one in town) and was kept awake most of the night by noisy Negro electors arguing the merits of their respective candidates. Outside the hotel, a family of little black pigs was rooting about freely.

The next day I toured the surrounding countryside. Little or no cultivation was to be seen, but there was an abundance of snakes. At one time there were no snakes in Martinique, and rats thrived on the sugar cane. To kill the rats, it seemed logical to import snakes. But instead of harmless snakes, the French made the absurd error of bringing pit vipers, one of the most deadly serpents to be found anywhere. The vipers took care of the rats, but as their numbers increased so did the alarm of the French, who then decided to import the mongoose to kill them. The mongoose were very efficient in doing so, but they also
enjoyed eating chickens. The result: snakes and mongoose in abundance, while chickens had become rare!

At a little hillside house I was introduced to Behanzin, the former chief of the African kingdom of Dahomey, now in exile. He shared the house with two of his wives and one of his sons named Quanila. This son had left St. Pierre de la Martinique just two days before the eruption of the Mont Pelé volcano which destroyed the whole city and many of its inhabitants, including Quanila's fiancée. According to the story, which Quanila translated for me, King Behanzin's rule was challenged by a rival named Tofou. When the French came they made a great show of friendship, so the King thought they had come to assist him against his rival and sent them presents and provisions. He also accepted their invitation to visit one of the French ships, but as soon as he was on board he discovered that he was not a guest but a prisoner. The two wives and one son were permitted to join him, carrying with them two little boxes of gold and jewelry. On this they were able to provide for themselves in the place of exile for a couple of years, after which they lived on a dole from the local Chief of Police.

As soon as I returned to France I published this sad story in a newspaper article, detailing the shameful manner
in which our country had abducted a head of state and destroyed his country. As a result of this article and the public response, the French Government agreed to provide Behanzin with an annual pension and to relocate him in a more suitable country. In Blida, North Africa, a nice house was built for him and he died there a few months later. Since he had asked me to look after his son Quanila, I went to Blida and found the young prince destitute; no provision had been made for him in the government pension. He returned with me to France and I wrote a second article about his plight. As a result some funds were donated for his education, and eventually he completed his studies in law. With the help of Raymond Poincaré, Quanila finally became a lawyer in the Court of Appeals in Paris. This was not easy, since his birth in the colonies made it difficult for him to obtain French citizenship.

Although I was able to help King Behanzin and his family, my report on conditions at the penal colony had no immediate effect. The only concession I could obtain was the distribution of a liter of coffee to each prisoner in the morning, before their long hours of hard work in the burning sun. Until then, there was nothing until midday's meager fare. Later I heard that they were thankful for even this small improvement in their lives. Eventually another
Protestant mission was sent to Guiana, under the direction of an officer of the Salvation Army, but it would take almost fifty years from the time of my visit before this terrible and shameful chapter in French history came to a close. 5
1. We call it "break dancing" today, but apparently it is not new.

2. The case of Papillon is the most famous, but my father never mentioned him.

3. A Parisian "personality" with flaming red hair.

4. The Jewish officer who was falsely accused and whose case was exposed by Emile Zola.

CHAPTER IV

MIRA, AUROBINDO, and ABDUL BABA

At Lille I returned to law school and became involved in local politics, as well as giving lectures on the need for radical change in our penal system. After two years I completed my studies in law and decided to move my family to Paris. Before leaving Lille I made sure my little band of hoodlums and orphans were well provided for. A suitable house came up on the market, and I bought it for them without any idea where the money would come from to pay for it. However, on the day before full payment was due, a huge contribution for the Protestant charities in the city came through, and my organization received a share just sufficient to cover the purchase price of the house.

I also rented a house for my own family in le Vésinet, near Paris. The children had the third floor all to themselves, and could make as much noise as they wished. There was also a large garden, and for the time being at least my family life flowed peacefully.

The fly in the ointment, if I can call it that, was my growing interest in esoteric, mystical and occult subjects. It began with my friendship with a physician and his wife
who had developed gifts of clairvoyance, through whom I met Charles Richet, founder of the Society for Metapsychic Research. One day I received an invitation from Max Théon, who had at one time been associated with Madame Blavatsky, to visit him in Tlemcen, North Africa. He had a circle of followers in Paris, including the woman who was to become a few years later, my second wife. Despite the mysterious tone of his letter, or perhaps because of it, I decided to accept the invitation. Leaving my family secure in le Vésinet, I boarded a ship for Tlemcen. There, in an Arabian style house on a hillside, I met the "Master," as he was called. Certainly he looked the part, with his long hair, Jewish skull cap and monastic robe.

My room was unheated, despite the fact that it was winter. That night I dreamt that I was trying to defend my children from a lion, and that he paralyzed my hand with one slap of his paw. The next morning I told Mrs. Théon about this dream which suggested to me that I was going to lose my children. "That is quite probable," she answered quietly, and I felt a shudder running down my spine. She was right, for I had set foot on a path that was to take me far away from everything that was dear to me.

For the next forty days I tried to understand the teachings of this "Master." Actually, I did not learn
anything special, except some kabalistic interpretations of the scriptures. For example, the first word in the Bible in Hebrew is "Breshit," which is translated "In the beginning." Breshit can be reduced to "B" (the second letter of the alphabet) and "Resh" (meaning the head) which translates into "duality, the fountainhead of everything." So the first word in the Bible emphasizes the complementarity of opposites, just like the Chinese word "Tao." This Chinese word is made up of two signs, one of which also means "the head" and the other means "departing." Together, they translate as "the way."

These arcane pursuits and the long hours of meditation in my freezing room were made bearable by the atmosphere of life and meaning which surrounded Mrs. Théon. Although she spoke little she struck me as a really spiritual person with great gifts of intuition. I never saw her again, but I heard later that she disappeared under mysterious circumstances while staying in a small town on the Northern coast of France. She simply walked, deliberately or not, right out into the ocean.

When I got back to France I discovered that my wife, who was expecting the birth of our fifth child, had gone to Holland with the other children. I went to see her after the birth of our son André, and she promised to come back
home as soon as she could. She did not come back, however, and in fact I did not see her again for seventeen years. Keeping her in Holland was initially a ruse on the part of her family to force me back to the fold, but after eight months I wrote her that if she wanted to stay in her father's house rather than live with me, I would have to accept her decision and follow my own path. But when the divorce papers arrived, I had a change of heart, because of the children. Divorce was to me an abomination; nothing like this had ever happened in our family, and I could not believe it could happen to me. My letter of reconciliation never reached my wife, however, and I have reason to believe it was intercepted by her family. So the divorce took place and my children could not live with me except during their vacations. It was the lowest point in my life, and there was nothing left for me but faith that their destiny was in the hands of a higher power. (And now, fifty years later, I must say that they were always in good hands.)

At the same time that this chapter in my life was coming to a close, a new one was opening. I left Max Théon's circle, but I took with me Mira Morrisset who would eventually become my second wife. At the time of my divorce she had already divorced her husband and we were occupying two separate apartments in the same building. I was now an
attorney in the Court of Appeals\(^1\) in Paris, with all the privileges and restrictions of that office. A defender of widows and orphans, without any compensation other than the unspoken fee, without which, of course, nothing is done; prohibited from advertising my services except in the most subtle and devious ways; enjoined from showing any familiarity with the lower auxiliaries of the law such as huissiers, policemen and all the rest. In short, a very respectable form of poverty!

Our new circle of friends included Georges Picard, who had painted the murals at the Hotel de Ville and the Petit Palais, as well as John Hollenberg, the Danish painter and writer, who was then director of an avant-garde studio known as La Palette. One evening we had a strange experience: we had invited a talented young writer to join us but he failed to appear. Later in the evening, as I was opening the door for one of the departing guests, a frightened cat came in from outside and suddenly jumped into my arms. The experience was uncanny and disturbing to everyone present. The next morning, when I opened the newspaper, the name of our young friend appeared in a headline; he had been murdered that very night.

It is to Mira that I owe, among other things, my modest success as a writer. My daily columns in the newspaper were
only crumbs as far as she was concerned; she wanted the bread in the oven. So, I began my first book, entitled *The Living Ether*. It was highly colored by the theosophical and spiritualist ideas which were popular at the time, and it tended to confuse objective and subjective realities. The book had some appeal to groups who knew little of philosophy and still less of science, but for me it was simply a stepping stone to my second book entitled *Les Dieux*. I wrote this book during a long holiday with Mira in a beautiful place near Fountainbleau. In this book I tried to work out some of the problems I had been struggling with as a Christian minister. The personal God of the Church seemed to me a supreme despot and enemy of the human race — a God not of life but of death. But this Promethean figure had a symmetric counterpart, and this is the Divine Presence within us. The book ends with a discourse by this invisible teacher of men.

After this, other books followed year after year due to the untiring encouragement and practical assistance offered by Mira. Philosophy was taking increasing precedence over the Law in my life, and my thoughts were also turning from Europe to Asia. The first opportunity to go to India came one morning in 1910, during a flood of the river Seine. I was looking at one of the bridges in Paris, covered with
water right up to the Zouave carved on the pillar. One of my colleagues at the Court of Appeals was also watching this spectacle, and then casually he asked: "Would you like to take my place as a candidate for the election in Pondicherry? "I've been offered a better opportunity elsewhere." I accepted without a second thought and began preparations for the trip. Meanwhile, Mira took care of moving our belongings from the apartment to another house on the rue Val-de-Grâce, which was to become our home for the next seven years.

Before reaching Bombay, I had a dream about receiving a telegram from Pondicherry telling me that all plans for the election had changed. When I arrived in that city a telegram was waiting for me, and the message was exactly what I had seen in the dream. Thus, the practical justification for my coming to India had vanished, but the real reason was about to become manifest. I continued my journey south to Pondicherry as if nothing had happened to change my plans. As soon as I arrived, I asked several people if they could direct me to a wise man, as that was what I had come to find. All of them laughed at the idea of finding a wise man in Pondicherry, but a few days later, two men visited my lodgings in great secrecy and said: "A wise man has come from the North. He is hiding in an Indian
home. We have told him about you and he wishes to meet you." So they brought me to the hideout of Aurobindo Ghose, and we began a friendship which would last twelve years.

Although Aurobindo did not say much about his personal life, I learned about his history from others. As a boy he had been sent to England to study and he had an outstanding record. His ambition was to become a civil servant in India, but he failed to qualify (of all things!) in horsemanship. Back in India, he was appointed by the Gavkar of Baroda as his personal secretary. Later, he became the head of the college in this highly progressive state. He could have spent his career in this quiet capacity, but his national pride was enflamed by the humiliations of British rule. Aurobindo joined the national Congress Party in his native province of Bengal; after the death of Tillac, its first leader, he assumed a position of leadership. One of his brothers was convicted of bomb throwing and sent to a penal colony in the Andaman Islands, and Aurobindo was also sent to prison on a charge of sedition.

While in jail, Aurobindo experienced a religious awakening. During his trial, he told me, he saw the Lord Krishna in the face of his judge; Krishna was also on the face of his jailer and his fellow prisoners. To vanquish the British, it was clear that supernatural power was
needed. So, the English scholar turned to yoga in his Indian jail cell, in preparation for his future role as a spiritual leader. When he had completed his prison term, the British government, unwilling to set him free, prepared to try him on additional charges. At this point Aurobindo made his escape. His first refuge was with friends in Chandernagor, a French settlement near Calcutta. Feeling unsafe there, he proceeded as a fugitive to Pondicherry.

Before leaving India I went to Adyar (near Madras) which had become the Mecca of the theosophists. There I was introduced to Annie Besant and her protégé Krishnamurti, whom I still remember as a twelve year old boy playing tennis. The voyage back to Europe was marked by the beautiful display of Haley's comet rising in full splendor above the ocean, and then life in Paris began again with Mira in our new home.

We spent the summer of 1910 at Cluses, a small alpine resort, with my son Jacques and daughter Hélène. The following summer I brought two of my sons and their friends back to my grandmother's house and it came to life again, just as it had been when my mother was living. Then my father died in Switzerland, in the same place where two years earlier his younger son (my half-brother) was drowned in the lake of Thun. When I arrived, I found my father
lying on a high couch in an empty room, and I felt sad because we were such strangers to one another, and because he still did not look as if he had found peace. The funeral was conducted by Pastor Tophel, the same minister who had so deeply inspired us when I was a seminary student. The title of his sermon was, appropriately, "Moses, my servant, is dead."

There was in Paris at this time an interesting Jewish lady, Madame Simon, who brought together a group of individuals representing different religions and sects in order to promote dialogue and unity among the various faiths. One day she asked me to write a book on the theme that all religions are really one; that they have the same roots and the same objectives. I replied that it would be possible to show certain elements of affinity in various religions by comparing their scriptures, but that it would also be possible to write a second book showing their fundamental differences. A committee was formed and a general plan for completion of the work was outlined, but after a few meetings I realized that books cannot be written by committees. Finally, it was decided that I should write the book in collaboration with Charles de Fontenay. The result, after a few months of concentrated effort, was a selection of some two thousand passages from the sacred
texts of the major religions. In retrospect, the most significant finding in our work was the convergence of the various religions on the concept of God. After careful analysis, it seemed to us that the concept of God could be reduced to a set of seven basic postulates:

1) God is within man.
2) God is present in all living things.
3) God is present in all things, since all things are, in a sense, living.
4) God is something that nothing else can be.
5) What God is, cannot be completely expressed in human terms, i.e., in words.
6) We can know God only if we know ourselves.
7) We must become God in order to know God.

What is striking is that these postulates seem to be shared by all the various and conflicting belief systems: pantheism, which is the positive form of atheism; polytheism, which is the negative form of monism; and finally transcendentalism which is the common basis of all forms of monotheism, whether dualistic, pluralistic, or absolute.

This book was eventually translated by Aurobindo Ghose into English and published in serial form in his magazine in India. I was still corresponding with him and discussing
his plight in my circle of friends, and one day my brother-in-law, who was in charge of a section of the colonial office, told me that he had received a letter from the British government requesting execution of an order of extradition against Aurobindo who was still a fugitive in Pondicherry. My brother-in-law of course knew about my close association with Aurobindo, and when I asked him what he had done with the order of extradition requested by the Foreign Minister, he winked at me and said, "I left it lying in my drawer." Later I heard that the British authorities in India were baffled by the silence of the French in response to their request.

The link with the East was growing daily for Mira and me, through many new contacts. One of our constant visitors was Alexandra David Neel, who was studying the Tibetan language at the Musée Guimet in preparation for her eventful trips to Lhassa. Then, in 1912, the current leader of the B'hai faith was the house guest of my legal colleague Hyppolyte Dreyfus Barney.

My first meeting with Abdul Baha occurred in the hallway outside the auditorium where he had been lecturing. He embraced me and said: "What are you doing here?" to which I replied: "Waiting." I began to spend all my evenings with him and one of his Persian disciples, and he
told me the story of his'life. He had spent forty years in prison, at Acca, and the story of his long confinement is well known. When the Turkish government decided to execute him after the death of his father, he received an offer of escape. Instead of accepting this way out, he replied: "The Bab did not escape. Baha Ulla did not escape. And Abdul Baha will not escape." Fortunately, the revolt of the young Turks saved him. The prosecutor who had contrived Abdul's execution was himself hanged, and Abdul Baha went free. Thus began his mission of good will and religious unity in Europe and America. In Paris, he lectured almost every day. I can still see him pacing back and forth, exclaiming: "I am tired of those who call themselves Christians; I am tired of those who call themselves Mohammedans; and I am tired of those who call themselves B'hai. The sun of divine knowledge is one and its rays are the common light of all sects." Sometimes he asked me to speak, over the strenuous objection of his disciples: "Why do you allow Monsieur Richard to speak? He has already told us that he is not a B'hai." "Well," retorted Abdul, "if he is not a B'hai, then I am not a B'hai either." One day, as I was leaving, he stopped me in his doorway and opened his tunic, exposing his chest. "I have many wounds here," he said, "and all of them came from the followers of B'hai."
On another occasion, he confided to me his vision of a war between Austria and Serbia, and added in a prophetic tone: "It is Serbia which will win." In 1912, such an event was incredible; but two years later, it happened just as he had predicted.

Unfortunately Abdul Baha's great vision was also associated with the dreary creed of Islamic tradition which sees God as unattainable perfection hovering over the dust of human life like a sun rising over the sands of the desert. To this he added a belief in avatars, or human incarnations of the Supreme God, and he of course was one of its manifestations.

My life with Mira during this period was one of harmony on every level of work, thoughts and feelings. She was, at this time, undergoing an intense mystic and spiritual development. Every morning, before sunrise, was devoted to meditation. During the day she took care of household affairs, and in the evenings before retiring, she wrote in her diary. The pages in her diary, which she did not keep secret from me, read like an uninterrupted oblation to her God. Her concept of God at that time combined her sense of an inner Presence with an external deity derived from our Judeo-Christian tradition. However, she also used her powers of vision and imagination to wander off into a world
of doubtful forms and fictitious beings. As she had been taught by her former "Master," she enlisted the support of friendly spirits and fought with fire against "the hostile one." I did my best to discourage this misuse of her gifts and tried to impress upon her a sense of good will towards every living being, visible or invisible, recognizing no enemy in this or any other world. One result of this dialogue between us was that we both became vegetarians after hearing a lecture by a physician who was the director of a sanatorium in southern France. His reasons were purely medical and based on anatomical comparisons between man and other primates, but they reinforced the feelings we already had which were based on aesthetic and philosophical considerations.

The excitement of world events was a counterpoint to my domestic tranquility. I was greatly impressed by the successful revolution led by Sun Yat Sen against colonial rule in China; so carried away by the titanic accomplishment of this small doctor, in fact, that finally my editor at l'Aurore had to ask me to change the subject of my column. On the local level, my friend Maurice Faure, who became Minister of Public Education in Briand's cabinet, wanted to offer me a job. After Briand's cabinet fell and there was no possibility of that, Maurice kept urging me to
run again for election in the Drome. However, after the experience in Pondicherry I had no further interest in a political campaign, so one of my colleagues became the candidate instead. Eventually he became the Governor General of Indochina, which made me wonder about the kind of career I might have had. But I have no regrets, since I remained true to my ideals. Of course it was not only my ideals, but also my faults, which on many occasions barred the avenue of worldly success. Rather than ascending the ladder, it seems that I had to descend it to the lowest depths before reaching the light.

My second trip to India took place in 1914, this time with Mira at my side. Every morning, on the deck of the ship, she unfolded her little writing table and took down my thoughts just as they came. On this voyage I had a strange and terrible dream. In this dream I was with a small group of intimate friends, and suddenly the one who was closest to me changed into a frightful and destructive monster. It must have been a premonition, and I remembered it several years later when Aurobindo told me: "There is a wolf in me. But I do not want to get rid of him. He could be useful some day."

Stopping at Colombo, Ceylon, we visited a Buddhist monk named Angarika Dharmapala whom we had heard about from
Alexandra David Neel. He was one of the founders of the Mahabodhi Society, the goal of which was to purify Buddhism of all its historical accretions and distortions, and to return the faith to the original teachings of the Buddha. Many years later I would meet him again, in Calcutta.

From Columbo we crossed to the mainland and made our way directly to Pondicherry. I have a more vivid impression of it from this second visit: stately stone houses in the colonial style with interior courtyards and gardens, a town square in front of the palace, and broad avenues following the seashore. In fact, the whole town reminded me of a pretty shell on the beach from which all life had been sucked out by the neighboring city of Madras. In Pondicherry the only important export was peanuts, mountains of which could be seen on the streets, swarming with rats. Many impoverished residents of European or mixed stock prided themselves on being pensioners. They lived on the dole but they would not dream of carrying their own parcels in public and they rode grandly in bicycle rickshaws powered by emaciated coolies.

We found Aurobindo now living in a spacious house, but in seclusion, with several young men serving as his link with the outside world. An agent of the British secret police was stationed permanently at his door, and his job
was to interview and take down the names of all new
visitors. (The same type of police spy began settling in at
my door, but I managed to get rid of them in one way or
another, in one instance ruining a good umbrella.)

Our house was in sight of Aurobindo's, and when we went
out on the terrace in the mornings we could see him pacing
back and forth on his veranda in deep concentration. In the
afternoons we would join him and sometimes remain until late
at night if he had no other visitors. He was still the same
quiet and thoughtful man I remembered from our first meeting
four years earlier, except that he could now speak French.
After a few days of this I began to tire of looking at the
scenery; feeling that something should be done to make our
stay productive, I said to him: "Shall we start a
magazine?" Without hesitating, and with a characteristic
movement of the head, he agreed.

For the title of the magazine we chose the word "Arya,"
the meaning of which really refers to the noblest
characteristics of all races. The word derives from the
Sanskrit root "ar," which designates growth, progress,
creation. In Latin the equivalent is aratum, and in Greek,
arete (virtue) and aristos (the noblest in man).

After securing the permit and the copyright for the
magazine, I looked around for a printer. I found a print
shop in Pondicherry, but no printers, except for two or three apprentices whom I had to train for the unaccustomed work of printing a magazine. Since we had decided to do it in both English and French editions, Aurobindo and I had the double task of writing and also translating one another's work. Meanwhile I also continued dictating to Mira my manuscript entitled *Le Pourquoi des Mondes*.

Aurobindo's contributions to the magazine included essays on "The Life Divine," "The Secret of the Vedas," "The Psychology of Social Development," "Human Unity," and others. He was genuinely surprised at the way these essays were taking form, both in terms of the new philosophic trend of his thought and also the "automatic" manner in which he had begun to write. "I have never written like that before," he confided to me.

My contributions included "The Eternal Wisdom," "The Origin" (which he translated under the title "The Wherefore of the Worlds"), and some of the two thousand passages from sacred texts which I had used in the earlier book co-authored with Charles de Fontenay.

Every Sunday, Aurobindo and his young attendants visited us in our home, sharing our vegetarian meal although they were not exclusively vegetarian themselves. After dinner we would sit until late on the terrace under the
beautiful southern constellation. One evening in late July
the Tamil poet Bharati was with us. Our conversation had
led us to the conclusion that the world had become so
hardened and its institutions so entrenched that no
spiritual renaissance was possible. It was as if the world
of the present had become a prison wall through which no
future could pass. What could possibly break through?
There was a long silence; then suddenly, Aurobindo and I
were both shaken by the same inspiration, and we exclaimed
almost in a single voice: "War is needed." And, a few days
later, World War I broke out, leading ultimately into a
world revolution which has not yet reached its term. As a
pacifist since childhood I condemned that war, but at the
same time something in me had heralded it, and I felt that I
could not remain away from it in the far off shelter of
India. In any case, the matter was settled by a special
order from the Minister of War. Since men of my age could
not be mobilized in the colonies, I was asked to return to
France.

So, after a few issues, the French edition of the Arya
had to be suspended. I transferred to Aurobindo the formal
ownership of the magazine, although Mira and I continued to
be listed as co-editors as long as the magazine survived.
The English edition was very successful, and what had been
for us a financial burden became an asset to Aurobindo during the next seven years. Aurobindo's vision was an extension of that of the ancient sages; it was probably the best summation of the old wisdom. The future, however, cannot long thrive on the past. No philosophy can illuminate the modern world unless it incorporates modern science as well.
1. His doctoral thesis in jurisprudence was entitled "L'Intervention Forcée," presented at the University of Paris on June 7, 1907.

2. Krishnamurti was groomed to become Annie Besant's successor as head of the Theosophical Society, but in 1929 he disbanded it.

3. Apparently Mira was practicing what is now popularly known as "astral flight."
CHAPTER V

MOBILIZED!

In September we left Pondicherry, but as we boarded the ship in Colombo Mira said with great feeling and assurance "We shall come back!" From that point on, all our thoughts turned towards Europe in the throes of war. Although I did not understand it at the time, many years later I remembered what Aurobindo had told me shortly after the outbreak of hostilities. "I saw the German eagle, fighting in a terrible storm between two mountains. And above the eagle were the dates 1914-1931." When, in 1931, the German eagle in its new Hitlerian form became powerfully rapacious again, I recalled Aurobindo's prophetic vision. But in 1914, as we were returning to France, I had a dream which concerned my own personal fate. In this dream I was standing in a long column of French soldiers for roll call, and a German officer was passing in front of us. Stopping in front of me, he looked at his roster, and said: "Your name is not on the list." So I knew that I would not have to participate in the mutual slaughter.

When we landed in France, we were greeted by a customs officer demanding to see our passports. We had never heard
of such a thing before; passports belonged to the period before the Napoleonic wars. Since that time people had been accustomed to traveling freely, without anyone's permission, all over the world. Only in Russia was this backward custom still in effect, as a screen against the entry of Jews, and we considered Russia barbaric in that respect. So I laughed at the official and said: "If I can't land in my own country without a passport, I will gladly go back where I came from." But then he laughed at me in return, and did not insist. Since then I have always felt indignant and humiliated whenever I had to apply for a passport. It seems that the whole world has lost its freedom, and that every man has become a prisoner in his own country.

After a few days rest in our house in Paris, I proceeded south to the military camp in Lunel, only three miles away from my boyhood town. The mission of this garrison was to train horses from Canada and Argentina to be used in supply convoys. Most of the poor animals had become unmanageable as a result of their terrible voyage, but some of them, when properly broken and trained, had the potential of becoming choice mounts. The Commandant of the camp put me in charge of selecting and training these animals. He was of Basque origin, and the officers as well as the men
were afraid of him, but for some reason we got along well together.

I enjoyed my assignment, but there were some mishaps as well. Fortunately they were not too serious. Once, while I was mounting my horse, somebody pricked him from behind, as a joke. The horse reared up, and I was flung off, landing on my head on the stone pavement. When I came to, I could not understand why there were so many men standing around me, nor why one of them was putting a military cap on my head. Another time I was galloping along the shoulder of the road from Marsillargues to Lunel. The road was lined with trees, and a branch struck me with great force just below my left eye. The wound was not too serious, but for a few days my face was completely out of shape.

Riding around the countryside, I began to attract the attention of some suspicious country people. One day I overheard two gossips discussing my case and wondering why I was not at the front. "He is too old, look at his gray beard," said one. "Yes, but look at his eyes," said the other, "they are those of a youth." The first one was right, since men in my age category were one of the last groups to go to the front, and yet one day we were ordered to go, as another detachment had not arrived as expected.
So I brought the news to Mira. She had been sick, and had come to my old family house in Marsillargues where she was being cared for by one of the nuns at the convent. While recovering from her illness, she had taken the habit of bicycling to the camp every morning and evening to see me. The morning of the day scheduled for our transfer to the front she sent me an inspiring letter that I will carry with me for life. Then, barely an hour before our scheduled departure, the small detachment that we were to replace arrived in our camp and our orders were changed.

After six months of military life I was sent up for a physical examination and my symptoms were diagnosed as endocarditis, a minor heart disorder. I was given a conditional medical discharge and ordered to report for another physical examination in Marseille two months later. This examination confirmed the original diagnosis, so I was free once more.

Back in Paris, we could see more of the tragic consequences of the war than in my camp in Lunel. Airplanes could now bomb cities, and "Big Bertha" was shelling the city streets. One of the large holes was near the studio of our friend Georges Picard with whom we still spent our evenings, as we had before the war. During the days I tried to make myself useful by helping one of our old friends, the
Mayor of the 16th arrondissement, in social welfare activities.

In terms of my personal life, there is something that I should perhaps keep secret but which at the same time ought to be said, because it reveals as much about Mira's character as it does about my own, and also about my life with her. I have already said that my union with Mira had liberated me from all dogmatism and rigid bourgeois orthodoxy. It was as if I had passed from the troubled world of social and moral conventions to a more simple and natural world, purified of falsity and conflict between flesh and spirit. Through the light and truth of her soul, I had come to trust the wisdom of Mother Life even when it is unacceptable by common standards.

Although Mira had no inhibitions or moral objections about the full exchange of love and creative forces between human beings, she believed that the animal mode of reproduction was only a transitional one and that until new ways of creating life became biologically possible her own motherhood would have to remain spiritual. My nature, however, was deeply patriarchal; I believed that one should never refuse to share with another human being the joy of creation and the duty of the living to the unborn, and I never concealed my thoughts on the matter. So, with her
full consent and even encouragement, I had a new child at that time, a daughter who was named Genevieve, and that child was not hers.
1. Paul Richard here implies that the father's role is to help children enter the world, but it is not necessarily his duty to look after them once they have entered it. While the moral foundation for this point of view may be questionable, the archetypal image of children waiting to be born can be found in Maurice Maeterlinck's play entitled The Blue Bird. New York: Dodd, Mead Publishers, 1941.
Bridge over the Seine
by Paul Erik Richard
CHAPTER VI

TAGORE, TOYAMA, AND OTHERS

We were not to remain in Paris much longer. One evening when I returned home I told Mira the news that the Suez Canal had been closed as a result of the German submarine warfare. Without any hesitation she replied: "That is the sign that we must go to Japan." But then her unexpected conclusion became so obvious that I immediately began preparations for the long voyage. After a stop in England, we would sail down the west coast of Africa and finally to Singapore before reaching Japan. Of course I had to apply for a passport, however much I felt violated by this indignity. In addition to the passports, we also acquired a travelling companion. Her name was Dorothy, and she was a follower of Abdul Baha. We agreed to take her along with us, so early in 1916 we left Paris on the Sussex which only a week later was sunk by a German submarine.

In London we had to wait for the arrival of our Japanese steamer, the Kamamaru, and then for the convoy to assemble with mine sweepers to clear the channel. Then we sailed for a week under complete blackout precautions. The
passengers spent their nights sitting in the salon, fully clothed; some even wore their overcoats with pockets stuffed full of valuables in the event that enemy torpedoes found their mark and we were forced to abandon ship. It was only after we reached Cape Verde that we could begin to enjoy the freedom and the safety of the sea.

At Durban we had a short stop and enjoyed the sight of Zulu dancers sporting buffalo horns and socks painted on their legs. Then another stop, Capetown, where we visited the botanical gardens and the zoo, as well as the country club. A civil engineer stationed in Malaya was our guide when we stopped at Singapore, and we made new friends during a brief stop over in Hong Kong. Mira's fluent command of English made everything easier for us, and she was always at the center of activities aboard ship. Then Shanghai, the Chinese city still in the grip of English and French colonialism; and finally, after two months of travel, we arrived in Japan.

Kobe, the city of green rooftops (which some have called the city of the dragon's scales) was our first stop. On the day of our arrival we were told that there was a big Buddhist festival in a place called Taimadera.¹ So Mira and Dorothy and I took a rickshaw for the trip over country roads. Despite superficial differences in the appearance of
the workers in the fields, I could almost imagine myself back in the countryside of southern France. Even the green frogs jumping out of the ditches reminded me of those in my grandmother's garden, and I began to wonder why I had gone so far to see familiar things in slightly different dress. The more contact I had with Japanese farmers, the more I felt that the common man, the common worker or tiller of the earth, is the same under every sky.

Although we could not find anyone with whom we could communicate at the festival, as it was growing dark a priest approached us and offered his help. We joined him for the evening prayers and meditations at a little Buddhist temple, and although the recitation was unintelligible to us, again I had the same feeling of being at home in a family, listening to the children in their evening oraison.

The following day the friendly priest offered to take us to visit a famous temple at Koyasan.² We spent a day there under the wing of a handsome young abbot who seemed especially friendly towards the two ladies. Then, when we were seated outside enjoying a rest, a young novice suddenly appeared and without a word of explanation began massaging my legs. I learned later that the temple of Koyasan does not follow the mainstream tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, but is instead devoted to magical practices and fire
worship. Buddhism, like other Eastern traditions, is extremely tolerant of diversity. A Japanese explained it to me in this way: "You Christians are either Protestant or Catholic, and therefore, profess only one half of your religion; we Japanese need at least two different creeds in order to realize that religion is only an external form, not to be confused with true faith which is secret and personal for us."

From Kobe we made our way to Tokyo, and took rooms with an English lady who was a self-appointed B'hai missionary. She introduced us to one of her aristocratic friends, whom I remember only as "the Honorable Mrs. so and so." But the story about her is amusing. When the Japanese authorities asked her for routine information about her background and circumstances, this lady replied indignantly: "Why should I answer all these questions?" "It is only a formality, the same for all foreigners," she was told. Exasperated, she replied: "But I am not a foreigner, I am British!"

A few weeks later, we rented the house of an English missionary who had gone back to his country on a leave of absence. We found ourselves immediately surrounded by students trying to improve their French or English. In no other country are young people so eager to learn. There is a street in Tokyo named Kandia which is lined with
bookshops; every day, in late afternoon, they are full of students. Most of them are too poor to buy books, but they are never too tired to stand there for hours, reading.

Our friend Dorothy was asked to teach in a school, and I was invited to speak informally in a class of university students about the philosophic concept of God. With Dorothy translating for me, I told about my struggle to get beyond the traditional creed in which I had been brought up. The only result of my quest had been an unbroken silence. Finally I had realized that the silence itself was God, because the essence of that which we seek is beyond words, and even beyond thought.

Hippolyte Dreyfus, my legal colleague in Paris, had asked me to visit an American friend, Samuel Fleisher, who was the publisher and editor of a daily newspaper called the Japan Advertiser. Once we had settled in, I paid a visit to Fleisher at his office. He seemed to be expecting me, and in the course of our meeting he asked me to write a series about the war, from my perspective. So I began to write about the causes of World War I, initiated by Germany, but which was really a European colonial contest for the domination of Asia. I knew of only one Frenchman who had not been swept away by the tide of mass hysteria and chauvinist hatred, and that was Romain Rolland. But while
he was enveloping the belligerents in the same love, I was determined to denounce them equally.

Fleisher took us for a long drive from Yokohama to Kamakura, one of the most beautiful spots on the coast where there is a great bronze Buddha through which one can climb to the top, like the Statue of Liberty. This place had an extraordinary effect on us: the pine trees looked as if they had been drawn by an artist instead of shaped by the wind, while the houses seemed to be growing out of the hills rather than built upon them, their roofs merging with the tree tops above in a gesture of benediction.

When I showed Fleisher the first in my series of articles, however, he seemed taken aback, and I realized that my pill might be too bitter for his quasi-official newspaper. So, by mutual agreement, we let the matter drop, but the twelve articles appeared nevertheless, in a different form.

It came about in a curious way. Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet who had been knighted by the British crown, came to Japan for a visit and was staying in Yokohama. He was accompanied by two Englishmen, a Mr. Pierson and Mr. Andrews, who had been missionaries and who were now teachers in his school at Shantiniketan. We had not met each other in India, but we had heard about each other, and in Yokohama
we became friends. At that time he was preparing for a lecture tour in America, so I gave him the twelve articles to forward to my friend Hollenberg in Denmark, since there was no censorship of mail in America. But instead of sending the articles to Denmark, Tagore gave them to James Pond, his manager in New York. Pond liked the series, and told Tagore that he would publish them in book form if Tagore would write the introduction. Tagore kindly agreed, and the book was published under the title To The Nations.

All this took place without my knowledge, and I was quite surprised when Rabindranath came back to Tokyo and handed me a copy of the book. When Samuel Fleisher saw it, he was somewhat upset and angry with himself for being so hesitant, and then he went ahead with the whole series in his own newspaper as originally planned. If an American book publisher could risk it, so could he.

If I owe to Mira the stimulation for my books, it is Tagore whom I must thank for my epigrammatic style. Tagore was of course a master of this paradoxical form, and he called these thoughts "stray birds." But in spite of the respect, affection, and gratitude that I felt towards him, I was often exasperated by his indifference to everything which did not gratify his need for beauty. The message of his sumptuous surroundings was "do not disturb the
landscape," but one day I could no longer bear it and I blew up. "How can you enjoy all this peaceful finery in a world at war and in agony?" I demanded. A week later, when he came to supper with us, I got my answer. "I have given a
great deal of thought to what you told me and I concede the
truth in it. But I cannot do otherwise; although I am not
very old, I am very tired."

His candor took me by surprise and I felt somewhat
guilty about lashing out at him, but some of his Indian
colleagues were less charitable in their assessment.
Sarodini NaJu, for example, described the poet as a
"professional beauty." He was, in fact, one of those
rarefied creatures whose entire lives have to be protected.
When, as a young man, his family wanted to send him to
England for his studies, he got no further than the port of
embarkation. There the inconvenience of it all was simply
too much for him, and he hastily returned home. He would
never walk in the streets for fear of seeing some ugly
sight, and he travelled in a private Pullman car in order to
avoid having to sit with disagreeable people. On one
occasion Mira and I shared his private coach to Nara, the
ancient Japanese capital. Arriving there in the evening, we
were surrounded by men bearing lanterns who seemed to be
accompanying us from the station to the center of the city,
Tagore was delighted, exclaiming: "How nice of them to have prepared such a welcome for me." And we too might have been taken in, but for the fact that our young companion on the trip, an artist named Tetsuo Harasawa, whispered in my ear, "There was a famous Japanese comedian on the same train, and it is the custom to light the way for famous actors to the theatre."

We then had dinner at the hotel and I was surprised to see Tagore order for himself a brochette of little birds. "How can you, a great poet, devour a plate of little birds?" I asked, but he made no attempt to explain.

There was indeed something "precious" about Tagore, in every sense of the term. He was not of this world, he was poetry in motion, and despite my disapproval he was to me an inspiration. "Gurudev," the divine teacher, is what those closest to him called him. But to me he was Rupadeva, the god of forms around whom nature seemed to sing and dance. Great men must not be measured by their shortcomings, and Tagore's greatness towered above his eccentricities.

When Tagore left for India, his companion Pierson decided to stay behind with us for awhile. During the summer he arranged a trip for us to a village not far from Lake Nojiri, where we stayed with Professor Okakura. A well-known artist and writer, he was at that time teaching
at the Imperial University. He was the author of The Book of Tea, which describes the inner meaning of the Japanese tea ceremony. His house was highly unusual, since it was built on a hill and there was a large swimming pool in the center of the house which was fed by a volcanic spring. This flow of sulphurous water was hot enough to warm the whole house in winter.

One of the visitors to the house was a Mr. Okishama who was related to the Imperial family. He had adopted the daughter of his brother, Prince Hsu, when she was ten years of age. Yoskosan was an extremely intense child, a little replica of her great-aunt, the dowager Empress. She called me in the correct Japanese way "Uncle" and I called her "Yushikosan," which means indomitable. She was raised by her adopted father in the samurai tradition; I was told that one day she had picked up a silver coin in the street, and as a punishment he slashed her hand with a sword, to impress upon her that no member of the nobility ever touches money. Many years later I heard that Yoskosan had been captured by the Chinese Kuomintang while fighting against them with the Japanese army. She was sentenced to death, but when she objected to the disgrace of public execution the Chinese obligingly beheaded her in her cell.
I was also introduced to one of the most formidable and at the same time misunderstood men in Japan; Mitsuru Toyama, head of the Black Dragon society. Although regarded in some quarters as a gangster or terrorist, his real goal was Asian unity and freedom, and a renaissance of spiritual values. His house was a sanctuary for political fugitives from all Asian countries, and the Japanese police had a "hands-off" policy towards him. Sun Yat Sen himself found refuge there during his fight against the Manchus, and later on Indian revolutionaries were also his guests.

At our first meeting in his home I expressed the hope that with his encouragement Japan would return Tsing-tao (which she had taken from Germany) to China as a gesture of good will not only to China but to all the enslaved peoples of Asia. He listened to this appeal gravely and silently, but from that moment we became friends. Our mutual friend Okawa gave me many details about his life. Once, not having enough funds for a friend in need, Toyama had approached a rich man for a loan. This gentleman dared not refuse the loan, but he took the precaution of asking Toyama for security. Toyama took out his knife and calmly carved off one of his own fingers. "That is your security," he replied. I could never look at that mangled hand without
feeling very small, and whenever I need a strong mental stimulus I need only to recall the face of Toyama.

When I was leaving Japan, Toyama visited me. It was the first time that he had entered a European home, he said. Then, taking my pen to write a Haiku poem for me, he said: "And it is also the first time that I have used a fountain pen."

When the war ended I was working on the editorial board of Okawa's new magazine The Asian Review. We put together a declaration of racial equality which was sent to Woodrow Wilson at the Peace Conference in Paris. President Wilson rejected this statement, and there were public protest meetings as a result. Up until that point my feeling had been that Japan should develop closer ties with the United States because of its liberal anticolonial policies, but Wilson's racist bias was making this impossible. Finally, I had to change my position and recommended Japanese withdrawal from the League of Nations, which was turning out to be an alliance of imperialist powers. Earlier I had urged Japan not to follow the example of the European colonial powers, the way to war and ruin, but to take the lead in establishing freedom and unity in Asia. That appeal, written in French, was translated into English and Japanese, and a copy of it had been presented to Prince
Hirohito (now Emperor) after his last examination. His professor had asked him to outline the ideas of Shogun Ideoshi about the role of Japan in Asia and after the Prince had answered the question satisfactorily, his professor said: "You will find the same ideas developed in this little book written by a Frenchman, and I am pleased to present it to you."

When the missionaries returned from England we had to give up the house we were occupying but Okawa offered us another one in Sandagaya in exchange for my work on the Asian Review. The cook was a real artist and prepared such elaborate meals that our table became famous among our circle of friends and we were warned that this style of life might become habit forming. As a penance, I agreed to go to the annual meeting of a Buddhist sect which worshipped a book. It was on a distant shore with an unobstructed view of Mount Fuji. And there for two hours every day, I had to sit with Okawa, Japanese style, repeating the Japanese phrase for "Salutation to the Sacred Book". At the end of each session the two worshippers kneeling next to me helped me to my feet, since my legs had gone completely numb.

Around this time Pierson submitted a long article to Fleisher which was very derogatory towards British rule in India. Fleisher did not want to risk publishing it in the
Japan Advertiser, especially after publishing my twelve articles. So Pierson decided to return to Tagore's school in India. He left some of his luggage with us, but he never came back. The British arrested him when he got to Shanghai. Nearly four years later he came to visit me in the Himalayas. That was the last I saw of him; soon after he "fell" from a train while visiting Europe and broke his back.

Another English friend of ours was James Cousins, a poet who was serving as head of Annie Besant's school in Madanapalle in India. He had come to Japan as a visiting professor of literature at Kayo University, and he came to see us frequently. He sent one of my manuscripts to his publisher (Ganesh) in Madras, and that was the beginning of a long and productive association. Cousins came to visit us in Oiwake for the summer vacation, and we took many long walks in the foothills of the nearby volcano. At the time I had started my book The Scourge of Christ, written in the epigrammatic style that I had borrowed from Tagore, and stressing the opposition between the teachings of Christ and the perverted meanings they have taken on in the Christian nations. As a theosophist, Cousins found in me a dialectic opponent, and in one of his books he wrote: "I thought I
would spend my vacation near one volcano, but I spent it with two."

What Cousins said about me was true, especially in my relations with Mira. There had been a long series of deep inner shocks and disturbances but now there were also visible signs of conflict. In one of my silent and destructive moods I refused a meal which (as she recalls in her published diary) she had prepared "with such great love." And when we returned to Tokyo, both of us came down with a violent attack of influenza, which was then a world wide epidemic. We were sick together, but like two strangers: distant and almost unaware of one another. It was a painful sign to both of us of our growing separation.

After recovering from this attack, we decided to visit a young American whom we had met at Fleisher's house. His name was Alcan Hirsch, and he was a chemist at the laboratory in Osaka. His assignment was to discover the secret of the German dyes that were much in demand for making kimono. All previous attempts had ended in failure, but on Christmas morning, our friend came to my room in a state of great excitement. "Last night I had a dream, and I saw the whole process for making the dye, in complete detail. Of course I won't tell anybody in Osaka about my dream, but I'm going straight to the plant to change the
set-up there." Three days later, he returned to report complete success. At the end of the winter Hirsch returned to the States, and we went back to Toyko to prepare for the trip to India. Before leaving, Hirsch presented me with a spectroscope, an instrument through which one can see the process of disintegration of radium. After your eyes are adjusted to total darkness, you can peer through a small lens into the atomic world, and it is like looking at a meteor shower against the night sky. If this little box could survive 15,000 years, the observer would still see the same scintillation, with a loss of only half the intensity. 9

The end of our visit to Japan was now approaching. We had enjoyed four eventful years, and now it seemed (especially to Mira) that the time had come for us to return to our work in India.

Our last months in Japan continued to be very busy for me. I was teaching a philosophy course at the French Institute in Tokyo, and writing articles for a Japanese magazine on the concept of democracy which I defined as a state of mind rather than a form of political organization.

Also, I had been introduced to the French Ambassador, Monsieur Pabst. He invited me to become a regular correspondent for the Journal des Débats published in Paris, and then I began to attend dinners at the Embassy. One
evening I was sitting next to a former Russian naval officer who was now, after the revolution, a refugee. During the revolution he and his fellow officers were thrown into the sea by the crew of his ship. When he regained consciousness (after nearly drowning) he found himself in a lifeboat surrounded by the same sailors who had thrown him overboard. They were weeping, and doing their best to resuscitate him! (Such are the extremes of the Russian soul, always a combination of opposites, struggling to reach harmony.) The French officers at the table then began lamenting the failure of the Allies to put down the new Soviet regime in Russia, and I summed up the irony of it by saying: "First Russia was defeated by Germany, then Germany was defeated by the Allies, and now the Allies by your Russia." The naval officer was quite shocked by this, but he did not reply.

Another opportunity opened up for me just before we left Japan, and had I accepted it my life might have taken a very different course. I was once more invited to dine at the French Embassy. The only other guests were two Japanese whom I did not know and who remained strangely silent while I conversed with our host. The Ambassador gave me no clue as to what was going on.

A few days later a Count who was connected with the Imperial family came to visit me. Although he was Japanese
he spoke perfect French. He told me that he had been instructed to extend an invitation to the Peer's Club, and I thanked him for the honor but explained that we were preparing to leave Japan. A few days later he returned, and this time he was even more insistent. Again I politely declined, as we were very busy and I could not see the point of making any new acquaintances. The Count's only response was "C'est dommage" in a tone of great regret. Later the mystery of all this was cleared up. I learned that the Empress had taken an interest in some of the things I had written, and that when a trip to France had been decided upon for the Prince, who was then a boy of sixteen, I was the person they had selected to accompany him as a companion and tutor. In that case, I would probably have exchanged my future work in India for a return (probably permanent) to Japan. That would have been certainly more rewarding in appearance, but not as fruitful in a deeper sense.
ENDNOTES

1. This place name cannot be identified.


3. In his famous pamphlet entitled "Par Dessus la Mêlée."

4. Tagore later renounced the title as a protest against England's refusal to grant home rule to his people.

5. About 100 miles northwest of Tokyo.

6. This place name remains unidentified.

7. The year was probably 1919.

8. From a paragraph in the text it would appear that Paul and Mira had separate rooms.

9. This device is still in our possession, and several generations of children as well as adults have been intrigued by the display. It consists of a small double cylinder with an optical lens at one end and what appears to be a phosphorous paint containing the radium at the other end. A recent test with a geiger counter revealed low level radiation with occasional surges.
CHAPTER VII

A NEW LIFE

Paul Richard's notes, which he dictated to his friend Consuelo Sides in 1954, end at this point. In 1920 he returned to Pondicherry with Mira. What happened next was probably too painful for him to record, but the problem is succinctly stated by one of Mira's biographers:

Mira was quite clear regarding her future: Pondicherry and spiritual collaboration with Sri Aurobindo to bring to life a new earth. But while Paul admitted that Sri Aurobindo was a unique personality and found in him one of the hero leaders of tomorrow, he could not wholly surrender to Sri Aurobindo. Thus he felt left out of the identity of spiritual consciousness between Mira and Sri Aurobindo. And when there were plans for establishing a spiritual brotherhood to usher in the Aurobindonian life divine, Paul was uneasy and skeptical.

Mira had a dream at this time which she reported to Aurobindo, and this is his version of her prophetic vision:

The Mother (Mira) and I were going somewhere. We saw Richard going down to a place from which rising was impossible. Then we found ourselves sitting in a carriage the driver of which was taking it up and down a hill a number of times. At last he stopped on the highest peak. Its significance was quite clear to us.
Since Paul could not become Aurobindo's disciple he had to leave Pondicherry. For Mira the parting was also painful, as recorded in her diary on June 22, 1920:

After granting me the joy which surpasses all expression, Thou hast sent me, O my beloved Lord, the struggle, the ordeal, and on this too I have smiled as on one of Thy precious messengers. Before I dreaded the conflict, for it hurt in me the love of harmony and peace. But now, O my God, I welcome it with gladness... 3

Following the break with Mira and Aurobindo, Paul entered complete solitude for two years in the Himalayas. It was in a remote village called Kotgarh, and his only companion during the period was a homeless Saluki hunting dog which showed up one evening at his cottage.

In 1922 his lonely vigil ended and he attended the Indian National Congress at Ahmedabad. There he became acquainted with Gandhi; on one occasion he told the Mahatma that in his opinion violence could not be prevented, it could only be postponed. Gandhi, according to my father, covered his eyes with his hands and shook his head, saying "I don't want to see that; I don't want to see that."

In 1922 he left India and returned to France by way of the Persian Gulf and the Syrian desert. Enroute he visited Kerachi, Bagdad, Haifa (Abdul Baha's tomb is located there), Jerusalem, Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland. The
return trip took two years, but what he told me about it is too fragmentary for publication.

After the separation from Mira my father resumed contact with his children. They had never understood why he had abandoned his family for the sake of an illusion. In a letter to me dated January 28, 1976 my half-sister Hélène recalled that:

Mira was unacceptable as far as we were concerned. Jacques and I spent a month holiday with them both, once, when I was about eight years old. I thought of her as an intruder and did not trust her. She was always veiled, like an actress on the stage; the veil was over the top and around her last chin. I don't think I ever saw her without them. She wore them even when we went for walks in the mountains. (We were staying in a place called Cluses near Chamonix.) She squinted and I felt I had to keep a clear distance between us. To my child's eyes she seemed 'phony'; I said 'Good morning' and 'good night' politely, and 'thank you' when needed, but would not accept any presents from her. There was certainly no 'adulation' here, but she made up for it later! I did not see her again. It must have been insufferable.

What was insufferable at this point in my father's life was his complete social isolation. He had abandoned two professions as well as his family and he had in turn been abandoned by his second wife. He had also lost his material if not also his spiritual ties to the East, and returned home empty handed, without any visible means of support. In fact, he was a man without a home, although he now travelled with a French passport. The solitude which he had
experienced in Tibet was but a foretaste of the unbearable loneliness which now enveloped him on the French Riviera, of all places. He had journeyed far in order to learn, and now the only message he had to offer was a self-lacerating lament.

This is what he said to D.K. Roy, who went to Nice to meet him in 1927:

... Sri Aurobindo is the only man who has won through to this vision (of the Supermind) and, what is more, has got the power to translate it in life by ushering in a new era of the Supramental apocalypse... he and no one else has the key of the world to be, and my tragedy is that my love of self-will forced me to leave his aegis and choose the alternative of living a pointless life away from the one man whose society I rate over that of all the others put together. Do you wonder now why I should be constantly harping on suicide?

This quotation is so out of character for my father that it requires some reflection. On the one hand, Paul's intellect told him that religion without science was as barren as science without religion, and that Aurobindo had opted for the former. Furthermore, he knew that he could not become part of a religious cult, even to preserve his relationship with Aurobindo. His adulation of Aurobindo, expressed in the conversation with D.K. Roy, was a pathological grief reaction and certainly was not characteristic of their working relationship in which he had considered himself an equal partner. Furthermore, since the
relationship with Mira had always been based on the premise of mutual freedom, and since that relationship had already begun to crumble in Japan, he could hardly fault her for choosing to remain with Aurobindo.

Nevertheless, it was a devastating blow to his pride. The "wolf" in Aurobindo was that part of him which casually and callously accepted Mira's spiritual defection from her husband. But there was also something in my father which wanted to have its guts torn out. It was his way of hitting bottom, of tearing out the old self to make way for the new. Today we would call it a "mid-life crisis," but whatever we call it, such a process can only be experienced as a form of death and rebirth, if one is fortunate. Paul was one of those fortunate people, and so he came back from the dead.

A turning point during this period was marked by his meeting with Albert Schweitzer in 1928. In his notes my father referred to this event as a "blessing." Schweitzer had come to Paris to deliver a public lecture, and he was explaining how the phrase "reverence for life" first came to him. He was on the Ogooue River in Africa, threading his way through a herd of hippopotamus at sunset, when suddenly the words came to him in a flash of insight, and the gap between science and religion was gone forever.5
In the same way that Schweitzer had turned from a career in the ministry to study medicine, my father was about to return to his first love, science. Although it was too late for him to start a new career, he would find the means to make it a totally absorbing avocation for the rest of his life.

In 1929 Paul Richard came to the United States on a lecture tour. In preparation for this tour he brushed up on his English by reading the newspaper every day during the week-long passage from France. As a child he had enjoyed English lessons with his mother, and Mira had been fluent in English. Unfortunately, he insisted on pronouncing English phonetically, so much of what he said could not be understood. Nevertheless, his platform presence was attractive, particularly to women. On May 15, 1929, he married Linda (Ethel) Todd in Newark, New Jersey. Linda, as he called her, was a "society woman" and they had virtually nothing in common. The main function of this marriage seems to have been to help my father establish permanent residence in the United States. Another outcome of this marriage was the publication of his book *The Scourge of Christ* in an English edition by Alfred Knopf in 1929, since Linda had some connection with this publisher at the time.
My father was amused by what one of his sisters said on hearing that he had immigrated to this country: "He has gone to America? But why? He has done nothing wrong."

The answer to her question, of course, was that he was still searching, and Linda was not the answer. In 1931 he met the young woman who was to become my mother, and a new life began for him in America.

My mother was the eldest daughter of Swedish immigrants, and had grown up in Chicago. There were six children, and she had to miss her senior year in high school to take care of her youngest brother. She had been employed since the age of sixteen, and after coming to New York in her twenties she became secretary to the head of a major corporation. She held this position for more than thirty years, so she did alright for a girl without a high school diploma. The interruption of her formal education was a deep source of frustration, but she made up for it in a somewhat feverish pursuit of culture. She met Paul Richard at one of his lectures, and was spellbound by his charisma.

There was a thirty year age difference between them, so it began as a father/daughter relationship. Before long, however, it had turned into a love affair which would last (in one form or another) for the rest of Paul's life. Like
most enduring relationships, it changed in form, and endured even the separation which took place in 1953.

Throughout this relationship it was my mother who was the breadwinner in the family. "Mother life will provide" was my father's optimistic phrase, but in fact it was always a woman who provided. In fairness, I should point out that my father was approaching retirement age when he arrived in America. The problem was that he could not afford to retire, since he had never pursued any career long enough. This was long before the current sexual revolution which made house-fathers commonplace, and I was always aware that unlike others, my father did not work! He in turn felt frustrated by his lack of gainful employment, and did what he could to remedy the situation. During World War II he taught French at the LaCaze Academy of Languages in Washington, D.C. and after the war he had temporary employment as a translator for UNESCO. He also had brief stints of teaching at a prep school in New England and a Black college in the South.

While his attempts at employment were sporadic, his new avocation was totally engrossing. Instead of his childhood interest in fossils, this new passion was for mathematics and physics. It began with a manuscript on magic squares entitled "When Numbers Play." Then, sometime during the
1930s he went to visit Albert Einstein at his home in Princeton. His purpose for this visit was to find out why Einstein had abandoned his promising theory of "two sheets of space." "Because I could not find anything in nature corresponding to the demands of the theory" was the mathematician's reply. The matter did not end here, however. Many years later, the discovery of quasars indicated a need to reconsider Einstein's early formulation, and my father wrote an article about it which I submitted for publication in 1970 after his death. I was pleased when it was accepted, because it helped to validate him in my own mind. I had always admired his diligence and self-discipline, and when (as a teenager) I returned in the small hours of the morning to find him still up and writing in his study, it was like walking in on Merlin or Nostradamus. At the same time, I was always plagued by uncertainty. If his work was valid, then he was an unrecognized genius and there was something wrong with the scientific community. If, on the other hand, his work was unsound, why didn't anyone say so?

Of course I have many other questions about my father's life, but not all questions can be answered in one lifetime. Paul Richard was always searching for the truth, as my half brother René said, but that is what all of us are searching
for. Every generation shoulders the same burden and the same opportunity. Sometimes the truth comes to us in the form of a metaphor, if we are open to it.

There is a novel called *Paul et Virginie*, written by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in the 18th century. It is the story of a love affair, and my parents were very fond of it because they had the same names as the characters in the novel. Unfortunately, what begins as a love affair often ends in separation. My parents parted when I was seventeen, and my father resumed his travels, but on a more limited scale. For a time he was at Duke University, visiting J.B. Rhine's laboratory for parapsychology and giving his views on the aging process in a geriatrics seminar. While there he also became acquainted with Pitirim Sorokin, and this in turn led to a very positive influence on my career. Then he went on to Los Angeles to visit a mutual friend at the Jet Propulsion Lab at the California Institute of Technology. He was pleased with the attention that he received from the media, and often his letters included newspaper clippings about his activities.

Living apart does not always end a relationship. In fact, I think Paul appreciated Virginia more during those years of separation. He continued to write love letters to
her. In 1963, when he was eighty-nine, my mother took him back to her apartment in Brooklyn.

His last four years were good ones. Now he was surrounded by a new set of grandchildren, and I am happy that my children have some good memories of him. His mind was active until the very end, and when his body began to fail in his ninety-third year he professed astonishment: "I do not know what has happened to me!"

In 1967, a few weeks before his death, I finally received my Ph.D. It was as much a fulfillment of his dream as mine, and I remember his delight as he tried on my cap and gown. In the words of Goethe, "Age does not make us childish, as they say. It only finds us true children still."


5. When Schweitzer died in 1965, my father wrote a two-page eulogy in which he recalled the tremendous impact of this first meeting and a subsequent meeting with Schweitzer in 1949 in New York. Schweitzer was on a ship in the harbor; the warning bell had already sounded, and the visitors had left. My father boarded the ship anyway and sat down in the salon. After a few minutes Schweizer came up the stairs, smiling in recognition. "I felt that a friend was here, waiting for me," he said, and they spent the next fifteen
minutes sharing the happy memory of the first meeting in
Paris twenty years earlier.

6. The "Declaration of Intention" form is an intriguing
historical document in its own right. In applying for
citizenship, my father had to swear that he was not an
"anarchist," nor a "polygamist nor a believer in the
practice of polygamy."

7. This book, the second of his to be published in the U.S.
was very favorably reviewed by John H. Holmes:

"... With Paul Richard's book, The Scourge of Christ, we
enter a different world. Rabindranath Tagore has called
it 'a delightful book.' I would rather call it a
terrible book -- terrible with the terror with which
Jesus smote the Pharisees, publicans, hypocrites and
other conventional and respectable people of his day.
On the title page appears the text, '... and he made a
scourge of small cords.' What Paul Richard has done is
to write epigram after epigram out of the gospel story
of Jesus' struggle with his time and weave these
together as so many cords of a hissing whip with which
to lash the Christian complacency and smugness of our
time. This is a book of short sayings, pithy with
wisdom, bitter with irony and satire, often-time sublime
with the beauty that hurts even as it heals. Like an
acid it eats and burns, but cleanses away the poisons
that kill the soul. Paul Richard's work, written
through years of meditation in the Himalayas, is
inspired as are few books that we read this day. And it
reveals the betrayal of Christ by this Christian church
and civilization of ours more inexorably than any book
that we remember to have seen." New York Herald
Tribune, December 24, 1929.

8. Arthur Bunker took her with him from Lehman Brothers to
American Metal, where he became Chairman of the Board.

10. Most of my father's scientific (or quasi-scientific) work written during his residence in America remained unpublished. He made repeated attempts to engage in dialogue with physicists and mathematicians, writing numerous letters and frequently submitting manuscripts. Some specialists found his work interesting, while others found it puzzling or exasperating. Compared to the company of artists, writers, gurus and revolutionaries, the scientific community is a relatively closed one. My father lacked formal credentials and had no institutional base, and what he was doing bore little resemblance to any existing paradigm.

11. Professor Sorokin, a Russian exile who had been a major figure in the revolution, went on to become chairman of the sociology program at Harvard and is now acknowledged to be the greatest sociologist of the 20th century. See my "Introduction" to the new edition of his principal work entitled *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, New Brunswick, Transaction Press, 1985.
CHAPTER VIII

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Romain Rolland

Born in 1866 in Clamecy, his family moved to Paris in 1880. In 1898 he became involved in the polemic aroused by the Dreyfus affair and wrote a successful play about it called Les Loups (The Wolves). Following this, he wrote plays about the French revolution including Danton (1900) and Le Quatorze Juillet (1902).

In 1904 Rolland taught at the Sorbonne. During the years 1903-1911 he produced a series of biographies: Beethoven (1903), Michel-Ange (1906) and Tolstoi (1911). In 1912 he published Jean Christophe, a novel about the role of the artist in a decadent society. His Colas Brengnon (1914) on the other hand, is written in the ribald style of Francois Rabelais.

Rolland spent the war years in Switzerland, and wrote Au dessus de la Mêlée (Above the Battle) during this time. In 1919 he published Declaration d'Independence de l'Esprit, and then several other books on Gandhi's strategy of civil disobedience and Hindu thought. His novel L'Ame Enchantée
(The Enchanted Soul) was published in 1933, and another prominent figure of the French revolution served as the model for his play *Robespierre* (1939). His anti-fascist views were developed in a book entitled *Quinze Ans de Combat* (Fifteen Years of Struggle). His last two books are autobiographical: *Memoires*, and *Le Voyage Interieur*. He died on December 30, 1944.

10
"Le Bagne" (The Dry Guillotine)

"Le Bagne" was not a person; it was a penal colony. Yet, it had a personality, a reputation, and a career which spanned the period from 1852-1952. Unlike the death camps of Nazi Germany or the slave plantations in America, this atrocity was not directed against a racial or an ethnic group. On the contrary, France did this to her own people, specifically those outcasts who had been convicted of various crimes. "Le Bagne" was the shocking offspring of a criminal justice system which was itself criminal; a system of correction based on self-righteousness which had no room for compassion. As a result, it compounded rather than corrected crime.

In his perceptive study entitled The Wayward Puritans, Kai Erikson observes that society has a tendency to realize its own worst fears. It was France, the birthplace of Voltaire and Rousseau, and the "age of reason," which produced Devil's Island. There unreason had its revenge. In the administration of this colony we see officialdom at its worst; it was as if the bureaucratic personality had gone berserk. How could it be otherwise, since the objectives of the experiment were absurd? The colony was officially designed to achieve four objectives: 1) prevention of crime, 2) rehabilitation, 3) segregation of
offenders, and 4) colonization of the region. It succeeded in achieving the third objective, but as far as the other three objectives were concerned, it failed utterly. Even some of the administrators of the colony begged for its abolition. Yet, for a hundred years, the French government remained deaf and blind to the monstrous reality it had created in Guiana.

According to Charles Péan, the Salvation Army officer who led a mission to the settlement in 1928, Paul Richard was the first person to draw attention to the atrocity of Devil's Island:

At the beginning of the present century a disturbing report was published by Pastor Richard, which was followed by a tragic book from the pen of Liard-Courtois, the anarchist, who was on Devil's Island with Dreyfus, and in 1925 the public conscience was thoroughly aroused by the publication of Au Bagne by Albert Londres ... From the Protestant point of view there is no trace of any work in the colony before the mission carried out by Pastor Paul Richard from June 1904 to January 1905. The Society for the Welfare of Liberated Protestant Prisoners then assumed responsibility for supplying Guiana with Protestant chaplains. Thus pastors went out to Guiana from 1905 to 1925, but none since."

Charles Péan's Salvation Army mission lasted from 1928 until 1952, when the colony was officially terminated. His book is a powerful and moving account of the quarter century of occupation by his Army officers, whose mission it was to do not only spiritual comfort, but relief from the
material suffering of convicts and liberés alike, who were condemned to live in the colony without any real hope of repatriation even after completion of the "doublage."\textsuperscript{4}

During its 25 years of dedicated service, the Salvation Army created a hostel for liberés, a credit union, and employment opportunities including a banana plantation and a system for exporting exotic butterflies. Its officers also interceded with penal authorities on behalf of the prisoners and provided communication with family members. In addition, they publicized conditions in the French press, raised funds for repatriation, and did their best to end the crime of punishment that was French Guiana.

According to the "law of polarization" established by the late Pitirim Sorokin, human behavior under extreme stress tends to split into two opposite forms. Some persons become more saintly and altruistic, while others become more self-serving and callously sadistic.\textsuperscript{5} (Others go mad or commit suicide, like the prison doctor at Devil's Island, or the convicts who bought poison from the guard.) This principle is certainly illustrated in the behavior of the inmates at the penal colony. Forced to participate in their own destruction by the authorities, they were on occasion ordered to flog other prisoners or even guillotine them. Some were casual cut-throats before confinement, while
others became more predatory as a result of it. Still others became self-sacrificing protectors of their fellow-inmates. During World War I, many volunteered for service in the trenches and served their country with distinction. After the war, promises of amnesty were promptly forgotten, and they were shipped back to the penal colony!

During World War II, on the other hand, the Governor, the leading officials and the Catholic Bishop in the penal colony all sided with the Vichy government. After a volunteer army composed of libérés was recruited and sent to Brazzaville in French equatorial Africa, a scapegoat had to be found to appease the Vichy regime. So, the Captain of the Salvation Army and his family were ordered deported, and they wound up in a concentration camp.

Devil's Island, like Dachau, is a monument to man's inhumanity to man. What has been written about it, starting with Paul Richard's report in 1905 and ending with Charles Pèan's final report, provide the foundation for a sociology of horror. And perhaps, also, a sociology of hope...
Behanzin (King of Dahomey)

Behanzin, the last king of Dahomey, was born in 1844 and succeeded his father in 1889. Shortly thereafter, a French force, under Commander Terrillon, landed at Kotonu and severe fighting followed in which the Amazons played a conspicuous part. In October 1890 a treaty was signed which gave France Porto Novo and Kotonu. In exchange, King Behanzin was given an annual pension of FF800.

Behanzin's slave-raiding expeditions led in 1892 to a new war with France. Behanzin attacked the French gunboat Topaze at Porto Novo. Subsequently, General A.A. Dodds was placed in command of a strike force of Europeans and Senegalese, and within two months had completely defeated the Dahomean army. On 17 November French troops entered Abomey, and Behanzin fled North after torching this town. Abandoned by his own people, Behanzin was apprehended in Ajego in 1894 and deported to Martinique. In 1906 he was transferred to Algeria, and he died on December 10 of that year.

The "sad story" which Behanzin told my father is offset by other reports. According to one source, "He distinguished himself, like others of his ancestors, for his cruelty; he used to slit the throats of his prisoners of
war, admitting that in a single day he killed 800 of them in this manner. 7

"The Mother" (Mira Richard)

Mira Alfassa was born on February 21, 1878, in Paris. Her father, Maurice, was a wealthy banker who came from Turkey. Her mother, Matilde Ismaloun, was Egyptian.

According to published accounts of her life, Mira showed signs of her introspective and mystical bent at the age of five. She also had a talent for music and painting, and began to play tennis at the age of eight. In general she preferred solitary pursuits to the company of other children, and between the ages of eleven and thirteen she began to have a series of psychic or spiritual experiences. At the age of thirteen she had a recurrent dream which gave her life its direction:

... every night as soon as I was in bed, it seemed to me that I came out of my body and rose straight up above the house, then above the town, very high. I saw myself then clad in a magnificent golden robe, longer than myself; and as I rose, that robe lengthened, spreading in a circle around me to form, as it were, an immense roof over the town. Then I would see coming out from all sides men, women, children, old men, sick men, unhappy men; they gathered under the outspread robe, imploring help, recounting their miseries, their sufferings, their pains. In reply, the robe, supple and living, stretched out to them individually, and as soon as they touched it, they were consoled or healed, and entered back into their body happier and stronger than they had ever been before coming out of it. Nothing appeared to me more beautiful,
nothing made me more happy; and all the activities of the day seemed to me dull and colourless, without real life, in comparison with this activity of the night which was for me the true life.

In 1897, at the age of nineteen, Mira married a painter, Henri Morisset, and came into contact with many of the leading artists of the time, including Monet, Renoir, Degas, Cezanne, Rodin, Roualt, Braque, Matisse and Picasso.

In 1902, Mira went to the town of Tlemcen in Algeria to receive instruction from the kabbalist Max Théon. While there she developed various psychic abilities such as astral flight while in a trance state. Apparently this activity put a strain on her marriage, and in 1904 she separated from her husband, leaving their young son, André, with him.

Among the group of seekers who began to meet at her house on rue Val-de-Grace (circa 1908) was Paul Richard, and by 1910 she had married him. Through him she was introduced to speculative philosophy, which provided the necessary balance to her inner spiritual quest, and in 1914 he also introduced her to Aurobindo Ghose.

This meeting had a profound impact on her, for in her diary she wrote: "Though there may be thousands of human beings plunged in deepest ignorance, the man we saw yesterday is here on earth and his presence alone is proof that the day will come when darkness will be turned into light."
Aurobindo was also greatly impressed by Mira and her husband Paul. In April of 1914 he wrote to Motilal Roy as follows:

He (Richard) and Madame Richard are rare examples of European yogins who have not been led away by Theosophical and other aberrations. I have been in material and spiritual correspondence with them for the last four years.

Arriving with Paul in Japan in 1916, Mira enjoyed the aesthetic component of Japanese life although she found the people in some ways spiritually deficient. On one occasion she was invited to speak in English to a group of women. In her "Talk to the Women of Japan" Mira clearly expressed her symbolic view of the meaning of motherhood:

True maternity begins with a conscious creation of a being, with the willed shaping of a soul coming to develop and utilize a new body. The true domain of women is spiritual.

In 1926 the Ashram at Pondicherry was officially established. Aurobindo retired from public life at this time; although he kept up his correspondence, he appeared before his followers only four times a year. Mira, Aurobindo's spiritual consort, would henceforth be known as "The Mother," the embodiment of the feminine principle. She was also the chief administrator of the community, attending to all aspects of life, including spiritual work, economic activities, sports and recreation, on a daily basis. Many foreigners as well as Indians came to visit the Ashram, and
some of these, including Margaret Wilson (Woodrow Wilson's daughter) stayed on.

By 1950, when Aurobindo died, the community had grown to include a population of 1,800. It provided employment in a variety of enterprises, including farming, construction work, textiles, metal work, and manufacture of paper; its print shop published works in thirteen languages. In 1952 the International Centre of Education was founded, offering education from kindergarten to University level based on Aurobindo's "free progress" method. Until 1958 the Mother taught French in this school, and in 1955 Prime Minister Nehru made two visits to the Centre.

In 1968, at the age of 90, "The Mother" initiated plans for a city in which men and women would be able to live according to the ideals of Aurobindo, to be called Auroville in his honor. The city is designed for a maximum of 50,000 residents, and the architectural plan is based on the model of a spiral nebula. Located five miles away from the Ashram, on the Bay of Bengal, Auroville is recognized by the Indian Government as an international city-state.

With the approval of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Ashram opened hundreds of Sri Aurobindo Action Centers throughout India in an effort to spread his plans for radical social reconstruction. By the time "The Mother"
died, on November 17, 1973 at the age of 95, the Sri Aurobindo Society, which she founded in 1960, had centers in 23 countries including 11 in the United States.\(^\text{12}\)

Indira Gandhi, who had visited "The Mother" in October 1969, offered the following eulogy:

The Mother was a dynamic, radiant personality with tremendous force of character and extraordinary spiritual attainments. Yet she never lost her sound practical vision which concerned itself with the running of the Ashram, the welfare of society, the founding and development of Auroville and any scheme which would promote the ideals expressed by Sri Aurobindo. She was young in spirit, modern in mind, but most expressive was her abiding faith in the spiritual greatness of India and the role which India could play in giving new light to mankind.\(^\text{13}\)

Most of what has been written about "The Mother" and her Ashram has a distinctly partisan flavor and in my opinion must be taken with many grains of salt. A somewhat contrasting impression is provided by Michael Murphy, founder of Esalen Institute in California. In 1956 he spent a year and a half at the Ashram, after having his first application rejected in 1952. He found the atmosphere cult-like, and westerners there seemed prone to psychotic break-downs and suicidal behavior. In fact, "The Mother," who was then a "formidable" woman in her late seventies, put Murphy in charge of the suicide prevention detail.\(^\text{14}\)
Aurobindo Ghose

Born in Calcutta of Indian parents in 1872, Aurobindo was sent to a French school at Darjeeling at the age of five and to England when he was seven. His father, a surgeon in the Civil Medical Service, was convinced of the inferiority of Indian culture and wanted his son to become a westerner in every respect. After completing his studies and winning high honors at Cambridge, Aurobindo returned to India and began a career in teaching and academic administration at Baroda College and the National College of Calcutta.

At this time he began to read classical Indian works, teaching himself Sanscrit and other languages in the process. As a result he became a passionate defender of "Mother India," and a militant opponent of British rule. In a letter to his nineteen year old wife Mrinalini in 1905, Aurobindo expressed his feelings thus: "What would a son do when a demon sitting on the breast of his mother is drinking her blood? Would he sit down content to take his meals, and go on enjoying himself in the company of his wife and children, or would he, rather, run to the rescue of his mother? I know I have the strength to uplift this fallen race..."15

In 1908, after a series of bombings, he was arrested on a charge of sedition and spent a year in the Alipore jail.
For several months he was in solitary confinement, and while there he experienced a profound change in outlook. As a result of intense concentration on the *Bhagavadgita*, Aurobindo's commitment to political activism was transformed into a belief in spiritual power based on personal transcendence through the discipline of yoga.

In 1910 Aurobindo settled in Pondicherry, a French colony, under the watchful eyes of the British secret police. In 1914 he founded the magazine *Arya* in collaboration with Paul Richard and later established an Ashram with the help of Mira Richard. In 1926 Aurobindo retired from public life and turned the administration of the Ashram over to Mira, who became known as "The Mother." He died in 1950.

Although his collected works fill twelve large volumes, the best known is *Savitri*, an epic poem of 24,000 lines dedicated to the spiritual transformation of the whole world. *The Life Divine* is his most important philosophical work, and his conception of the spiritual trend of evolution has been compared to the ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit theologian and paleontologist.¹⁶

**Abdul Baha**

The third leader of the Bahai sect, Abdul Baha was born in Shiraz, Persia, on May 23, 1844. When he was released
from prison by the Turks in 1908, he visited Egypt, Europe and America, and under his influence the Bahai faith spread beyond the Middle East. In 1912 he visited the United States and spoke to several university audiences. He foretold World War I with "uncanny detail," according to the New York Times, and supported the League of Nations after the war. At the time of his death in 1921 the Bahai sect numbered 14,000,000. After his death the leadership of the movement was assumed by Shoghi Effendi, his grandson.

In its social teachings, Bahai enjoins racial and religious equality as well as religious tolerance. It is also pacifistic, and favors redistribution of wealth and a world government inspired by the ideals of equality and justice. Accordingly, it advocates the use of an international language and the establishment of an international tribunal.  

Mitsuru Toyama

Born in 1854 in the city of Fukuoka, Toyama was 90 years of age when he died in 1944. The Japanese news agency Domei referred to him as a "most respected leader among Japanese patriots," but Hugh Byas, correspondent for the New York Times, called him "the greatest master of political bullies and cutthroats in Japan." As the head of the Black Dragon Society, Toyama was often referred to as Japan's
"unofficial emperor." The only sources I have been able to obtain are his obituaries in the New York Times, and the tone of these articles is colored by the bitterness of the war years.

Toyama, according to the Times, grew up as an assassin and was arrested for complicity in the three rebellions of the 1870's designed to force Japan into war with Korea. According to the Times, he went on to become one of the "chief authors" of the Japanese-Chinese war of 1894 and the Russo-Japanese war of 1904.

It is recorded that Toyama "... once spoke gently to a dog that had bitten him and bought it some cakes." In his relations with animals he may have practiced "reverence for life," but in his relations with people, his style was quite different. His organization called Genyosha was an association of thugs who specialized in intimidating cabinet ministers. In 1892 one of his lieutenants blew off Count Okuma's leg; Toyama politely visited him after the incident. Toyama's anti-Russian group threatened Prince Ito (the Prime Minister) with death if war was not declared on Russia. In 1930 Premier Hamaguchi was shot down, and after he died the following year the Japanese army entered Manchuria. In 1932 his Black Dragon Society assassinated Premier Inukai, Finance Minister Inouye, and Baron Takuma Dan. In 1936 four more
cabinet ministers were eliminated by his organization, but the court trial whitewashed the affair and called the murderers patriots.

Toyama's share of the loot of the wars of 1894 and 1904 included valuable mining concessions. At the time of the Chinese revolution, he was the leader of a gang of drug dealers, brothel keepers and smugglers which swarmed into China to take advantage of the turmoil.

Toyama was also credited by the Times with having helped Japan to forge an alliance with Nazi Germany and getting Premier Hideki Tojo into power; at least indirectly he was responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor. This, at any rate, is the substance of his obituary in the western press in 1944.\(^{18}\)

**Yokosan (Yoskosan)**

Although I have been unable to find any reference to this lady, her father was probably Kuang-hsu, 9th Emperor of the Ch'ing Dynasty. Born in 1875, he initiated an abortive reform movement in 1898 and was thereafter confined to his palace until his mysterious death in 1908; probably he was assassinated on the orders of the dowager Empress.\(^{19}\)
Rabindranath Tagore

Born into a wealthy and influential family in Calcutta in 1861, Tagore wrote his first poem at the age of eight and later became the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Tagore was the eleventh of fourteen children. When he was eleven years of age, his father Debendranath took him on a trip to the Himalayas, where he instructed him in Sanskrit, English, and Astronomy, and taught him the ancient Hindu scriptures. When he was 17, his brother Satyendranath took him on a trip to England. From this point on, the pattern of his life became clear. There were three major themes in this pattern: 1) a profound desire for freedom, both personal and national, 2) an abiding faith in India's contribution to the world of the spirit: past, present, and future, 3) a commitment to poetry and music as a way of life.

Tagore worked for India's independence from British rule not through political action, but through poetry and personal gesture; in 1919 he resigned the knighthood which he had received from the British crown. As overseer of his family's estates in East Bengal, he also worked hard for the betterment of tenant farmers and created an experimental
village called Shantiniketan which anticipated by many years the village development program of independent India.

Tagore traveled constantly -- to Japan, China, Europe, and the United States. In England, in 1912, he met William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound. Yeats wrote the introduction to his Bengali poems entitled *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) and for this, in 1913, Tagore received the Nobel prize.

In the United States, Tagore was enormously successful. At Harvard he delivered a series of lectures entitled "The Religion of Man and Sadhana," and his interest in social and political theory can be seen in his essays entitled "Toward Universal Man." One of his plays, entitled *The King of the Dark Chamber*, was produced on Broadway.

Tagore was an accomplished composer as well as writer, and his song entitled "Jana Gana Mana" became the Indian National anthem. Another of his compositions, "Amar Sonar Bangla," is now the national anthem of the Muslim nation of Bangladesh.

The school which Tagore established at Shantiniketan was based on the idea of free exchange between students of all countries, and emphasized common experience rather than submission to formal rules and restrictions. As such, it seems to have anticipated Mira's educational center in Pondicherry.
Tagore died on August 7, 1941, in Calcutta. Paul Richard was certainly one man who owed him a debt of gratitude, for it was Tagore who wrote the introduction to Paul's first book published in America, To The Nations.

Tagore's introduction to this book is too long to present in its entirety, so I have chosen the last page only:

... when I met Monsieur Richard in Japan, I became more reassured in my mind about the higher era of civilization than when I read about the big schemes which the politicians are formulating for ushering the age of peace into the world. It is not upon mere number or bulk that our salvation depends but upon the truth which can afford to look small. When gigantic forces of destruction were holding their orgies of fury I saw this solitary young Frenchman, unknown to fame, ... face beaming with the lights of the new dawn and his voice vibrating with the message of new life, and I felt sure that the great tomorrow has already come though not registered in the calendar of the statesman.


4. In his earlier book, Allison-Booth cites the example of a liberé who had to accumulate a sum of 2,000 francs for the return voyage without having a regular job. Without passports, no country would admit these ex-prisoners except Belgium, and there were no steamers from the settlement going to Belgium. W.E. Allison-Booth, *Devil's Island*, London, Putnam, 1931, p. 139.


6. Amazons were female captives who were drafted into the army. Each regiment had its own distinctive uniform, and they were utilized in close combat against enemy


17. See New York Times, 9/5, 1915; 12/16, 1918; 12/1, 1921.


THE SCOURGE OF CHRIST

By

Paul Richard

Translated from the French by
Linda Richard

Edited and Abridged by
Michel P. Richard