NIETZSCHE AND PROUDHON

If some Carlyle or Emerson were alive today, and wanted to add new figures to the gallery of *Heroes* or *Representative Men*, one can imagine that he would hardly find any more noble, more powerful, and more meaningful in comparison than those of these two great dead who for some time have been soliciting in various ways the attention of the thinking public: the Frenchman Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the German Friedrich Nietzsche. And if it were necessary, in order to complete the analogy, to find subtitles that would allow the newcomers to be immediately qualified, these, we can believe, would come immediately to mind: Friedrich Nietzsche or *the Aristocrat*, Proudhon or *the Plebeian*.

A propitious occasion allows us to speak of this. At the beginning of this year, on the date of the centenary of Proudhon's birth, the good Proudhonian, Edouard Droz, published a substantial little book on his favorite author,[1] the fruit of several years of familiarity with the work. And, a few weeks ago, Daniel Halévy, without profession or affectation of Nietzscheism, gave us a *Life of Friedrich Nietzsche* more poignant than a novel.[2] We must love these two honest books, in which the life and the dominant tendencies of two great men are exactly reconstructed, in which the authors have not yielded to the piquant attraction of paradox, almost irresistible in a time that presents us, without laughter, a Proudhon, soldier of the Pope, or a Nietzsche for the use of the gossips.

Let us not, however, believe these two stories to be similar; they oppose each other, all things considered, like the two minds to which they are devoted. Edouard Droz has given us a limited but complete book on Proudhon, in which we find the essentials of the work along with the great traits of the character and the vicissitudes of the life. However foolhardy it may be to analyze Proudhon's books, the attempt is made all the same, and as well as it could be made; we have a guide to find our way among the meanders of the entire work. And here and there the author intervenes, says his word, corrects theses, approves or blames his hero, or rather tempers with critical restrictions a dull and continually underlying admiration. It is almost a manual as well as a story, a book by a teacher and a common man, written for students and common people, without any hint of literature, proposing only to make well known or at least to give a presentiment of the man and the work with which it treats.

It is not the same with Daniel Halévy. He has given us above all a book by a historian, psychologist and artist, in which we see very little of the work and in which, on the other hand, the character always appears in the foreground, in a tender and sad light. We should not look in this work for discussions on Nietzsche's romanticism or individualism,

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[1] Edouard Droz, professor at the Faculty of Letters of Besançon: ?.-/. Proudhon one vol., 3 fr. 50. — Librairie de Pages Libres.

[2] Daniel Halévy. — The Life of Frederick Nietzsche, one vol., 3 fr. so. Calmann-Lévy.

dialectical considerations on the superman or the will to power; treatises of this kind are not lacking, and more are always announced. No, but the formation of this character, the fundamental preoccupations of this spirit, the affinities and secret desires of this poor heart, the stages of this long martyrdom, shedding a decisive light on the genesis of the books, all this reconstituted thanks to a host of letters and documents unpublished for us — this is what has not yet been given to the French reader. Daniel Halévy tells the story of a soul, a sublime and lamentable soul, with admiration and pity. No comments: the story, sober and poignant, speaks enough. It is good that these two books, equally intelligent, are so different; they are in the image of the heroes who suggested them.

Here we will follow Daniel Halévy; we will draw parallels between two lives, two conceptions of existence. We must not forget, moreover, that Proudhon met, shortly after his death, a biographer and a psychologist worthy of him, if not by the nature of his sensitivity, which was on the contrary and admitted to being refractory, at least by the breadth and finesse of his understanding. This is, as we know, Sainte-Beuve himself, and Edouard Droz refers above all to the critic's beautiful book. Daniel Halévy — all things considered — did for Nietzsche what Sainte-Beuve so masterfully began for Proudhon. He could have put as an epigraph to his book this sentence from the great critic. “I know of nothing for the explanation of ideas and doctrines like the reality of the facts and the precise determination of the circumstances within which they were conceived.” The direction of a mind “depends on something other than a pure intellectual movement: it is felt by the state of the fibers and by a thousand secret springs, most of which escape us.”

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They are two solitary men, two men of thought rather than action; this observation dominates their existence. Nothing great is done in the world that has not been prepared at length in the secrecy of the inner life, in moving conversations with oneself, provided however that too prolonged a cloister does not stifle the meaning of life. This love of solitude is quite apparent in Nietzsche, who was pursued all his life by the need for what he himself called “modern anchoritism,” and whose whole life was an incessant pilgrimage, set in motion and guided by the seasons, from the middle valleys of Bohemia and the Jura or from the golden coast of Nice to the snowy peaks of the Engadine, far from the agitations of men. It may be surprising in Proudhon, who is usually represented as a public man, and who in fact was hardly so and in very restricted portions of his life; he also recognized that he was not made to be one. The plebeian Proudhon was a savage, at ease only with friends; Nietzsche, a more refined nature and better predisposed to suffering, had this pain of feeling alone within a mitigated solitude, a circle of friends. He had the total feeling of “incommunicability”... “the most terrible of all solitudes,” because it is solitude at its ultimate power, irremediable. We must therefore expect to see a hymn to solitude spring forth from these two mouths, in various forms. Nietzsche, while sometimes amusing himself, “with sad humor,” by wandering “here and there, alone like a rhinoceros,” spoke of solitude magnificently and lyrically, like a wise man and a poet. He notes the invigorating action of the high peaks: “If we do not give our souls firm and serene horizons, like those of the mountains and the woods, then our inner life will lose

all serenity. It will be scattered, insatiable, like that of the city man: he does not know happiness and cannot give it." The shepherds of the Engadine are "heroic and idyllic," like Greek heroes. "He is great who knows how to be the most solitary, the most hidden, the most distant." Proudhon, if he had liked the aristocratic and Ibsenian pride of this last sentence, would have applauded the first ones; they express his peasant sensitivity. This great moralist and great worker, relating everything to his dominant tendencies, sees in solitude the great mistress of stability, seriousness, depth which protects the two "most secret, most sacred functions of man," labor and love. Solitude strengthens them; urban prostitution breaks them down.

Let us not, however, seek reasons for this love of solitude that are too transcendent. These two solitary men were two sick people, forced to isolate themselves by an incessant struggle against illness. The life of Friedrich Nietzsche was a long martyrdom. Son of a pastor, who was already sick and who himself died mad, it was the care of his health that forced him to wander from inn to boarding house and from the sea to the mountains, after having had to abandon his professional work. On all the pages of Daniel Halévy's book, there are only struggles against insomnia, migraines, dizzy spells, fevers, until the horror of the final catastrophe, when this quivering intelligence entered death alive. Suffering, as happens to all well-born beings, purified his soul, opened it to gentleness, to pity, to serenity, and made a stoic and an ascetic of this enemy of asceticism.

> The terrible and almost incessant martyrdom of my life, — he wrote in 1880 to Malvida de Meysenburg, in an admirable letter that Daniel Halévy rightly calls a "spiritual testament," — makes me thirsty to die. I have suffered so much, I have renounced so many things that there is no ascetic, of any time whatsoever, to whose life I do not have the right to compare my life in this last year. I have acquired much, however. My soul has gained in purity, in sweetness, and I no longer need religion or art for that. (You will notice, I have some pride in it; it is in my state of complete abandonment that I have finally been able to discover my intimate sources of consolation.) I believe that I have done the work of my life, as can a man to whom no time is left. But I know that for many men I have poured a drop of good oil, that many men are oriented through me towards a higher, more serene and lucid life,

This drop of good oil is what he also calls the "Goethean look full of love and good will" that he casts on men; he achieved it, except at the end when the soul had already left its envelope, by a constant discipline of the bad suggestions that could come to it from his miserable body.

Proudhon's suffering was of another kind, less beautiful perhaps — since our delicate artistic eyes know how to find beauty in pain — more thankless, but still more significant of his humanity. Not that physical suffering was spared him. From his youth he was already, by his own admission, a "slender little blond boy," and towards the end he was frankly ill; but it was always the same marvelous domination of the spirit over matter. At the beginning of 1864, accumulating cold, catarrh and asthma, "choking, spitting, coughing and drooling," he found a way to write to a deaf friend "to console him for his infirmity and turn his thoughts towards the true end of man," which is to "realize on earth the reign of the spirit." This is only given to us, he adds, in mature age, "when the

passions begin to fall silent and the soul, more and more free, spreads its wings towards infinity."

But what was peculiar to Proudhon, who was in fact a plebeian, was the material difficulties that he had to fight all his life, the terrible problem of earning a daily living, which overwhelmed him until his last days, when he still worked four or five hours, "as much to keep himself busy as because he had to." Nietzsche did not know this suffering, or barely. The small pension of three thousand francs that the University of Basel provided for its former professor was strictly enough, but finally enough for this bachelor, and poverty was not bitter to him. He was soaring high up, towards the peaks. Proudhon struggled all his life in the swamps of poverty, Proudhon married, father of three daughters, dragging his unpaid debts, too proud to accept the seven thousand francs a year from the *Nain Jaune*, and preferring to have recourse to his friends; Proudhon, an outlaw, working like a convict, while his wife, "overwhelmed by migraines and joint pains, worked like a fury," Proudhon was relentlessly pursued by the need to earn a living. He was proud of it, moreover, and we know in what terms he spoke of the joy he felt in having in his hands a trade, an instrument of liberty, but we can guess the obscure dramas of this struggle without beauty. From how many wounds has this sensitivity of a child, a young man, an adult, a grown man not bled? At seventeen, returning from college laden with prizes, — won in what working conditions! — he dined on bread and water, because his parents had just lost in a lawsuit the field on which they lived. A little later, in 1840, arriving in Paris as a pensioner of the Suard pension, obliged with 1,500 francs to feed himself and help his family, he confessed his distress to Bergmann, in terms that make one shudder. "I read, write, study; I am oppressed, dismayed, withered. *Sometimes I look at the Seine as I pass over the bridges; at other times I think of becoming a thief*. The feeling of my misery is such that, if tomorrow I became rich, the nightmare that pursues me would not leave me for two years."

And twenty years later, in exile following the publication of *Justice*, — needless to say that of his twenty-five francs as representative of the people he kept nothing, and that he left his mandate poorer if possible than he had entered it — to his brother Charles who asked him for money he could only send kind words. "When one considers," he wrote on this subject, "that for more than forty years (I am fifty-one now), my life has passed in a continuity of such miseries, one should not be surprised if there is sometimes bitterness under my pen." But these kind words, he gave them to him: "Remember, as I do, that life being a fight, the wisest thing is to make this fight our happiness." Admirable words, indomitable revolt of the spirit against the hungry belly. What can we say finally about this frightening confession, which sums up all the others, and which appeared in the first dedication to Bergmann of the *Creation of the Order:* "*All that I know, I owe to despair;* fortune taking away from me the means of acquiring it, I wanted, one day, from the scraps picked up during my short studies, to create a science for myself all by myself." Has ever a more dramatic and accusatory word been uttered?

Sainte-Beuve takes the text of these last words to admonish the amiable graduate of the École Normale Supérieure, spoiled by life and books, who could smile at the scientific shortcomings of the "autodidact" Proudhon. This trait of understanding does not surprise

the great critic, but there are perhaps more general conclusions to be drawn from it. One could say — and it has been said — that in the painful circumstances of his life Proudhon had imbibed feelings of hatred and envy, and that this is the basis of all demagogy. One could turn against him the words he himself said: democracy is envy, and cast suspicion on his entire social philosophy, as being the reflection of excessive and too personal living conditions. We must be clear. Proudhon, like any strong soul, was ignorant of hatred towards people; "he maintained," says Edouard Droz, "cordial relations with several of his rich comrades." But if one claims to forbid the thinker any reflection on the conditions of life that are made for him and the experiences that he may witness, however cruel these experiences and these conditions of life may be, one must say: stop there! Thought is only worth as much as the concrete facts that provoke it and nourish it, and if the conditions that give rise to it are abnormal, one must attack society itself, not the thinker who denounces them. Let us not, therefore, blame the plebeian Proudhon for having wanted to write the "Philosophy of Misery;" let us rather admire that he wrote it and lived it with such indomitable firmness and such beautiful courage. When a man, in the midst of such terrible trials, succeeds in retaining, despite some inevitable "bitterness" and outbursts — Proudhon was not a saint — cheerfulness, good humor, and that spiritualism of which we have read admirable formulas above, we can say that this man is of a superior caliber. In fact, Nietzsche in the face of physical suffering, Proudhon in the face of suffering and misery combined, were, with diverse philosophies, fine types of Stoics.

And by one of the effects of that "law of irony" that we are beginning to discover, these two Stoics, these two sick people who managed by a miracle of strength of soul to conquer their destiny, were both in love with what is denied them: bodily vigor, physical strength spent, if necessary, in fierce combat; they are the last two prophets of war. Both grant it the same and supreme virtue, that of maintaining, among peoples corrupted by "modernity" and the refinements of the "Apollonian spirit," among nations degraded by Malthusianism and the sordid egoism of *homo economicus*, what may remain of the feeling of honor, of passion for disinterestedness, devotion and sacrifice. "To the cannon, to the cannon, I need war, *ich brauche den Krieg!*" cries the unfortunate Nietzsche, and what could only be a metaphor for him, he makes a reality for the nations who want to live.

> In order to prevent the spirit of speculation from debasing the spirit of the State, there is only one means, and that is war and more war. In the exaltation it procures, it becomes clear to men that the State was not established to protect selfish individuals against the demon of war; quite the contrary: love of country, devotion to princes help it to arouse a moral impulse that is the sign of a much higher destiny. It will therefore not be considered bad that I sing here the paean of war.

Words that one would think were taken from *War and Peace;* it is the same breath, the same lyricism, and we know that the current adversaries of rationalism and "democratic" degeneration unite in the same admiration and salute as precursors Frederick Nietzsche and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. In the latter, something more must be noted, a new verse that enriches the hymn, suggested by the dominant concerns of the philosopher: the parallelism, taken up by the author of the *Reflections on Violence*, between war and labor,

between the virtues of the producer and those of the warrior. This addition made, as well as the substitution of “workers' companies, true armies of the Revolution,” for the armies of the past and that — perhaps — of “class narrowness” for "national narrowness" in order to “simplify and concentrate,” it is probable that Proudhon would have signed without hesitation this note from the author of *The Will to Power:* “the maintenance of the military state is the last means left to us, either for the maintenance of the great traditions, or for the institution of the superior type of man, the *strong* type.”

Morally, the analogies are no less. In these two philosophers of force, one can expect to find the same sympathies and the same antipathies. They both have classical taste, noble virile modesty, and consequently hatred of what it has been agreed to call romanticism: a bland or silly sentimentality, a debauchery of imagination, an immodest display of personal adventures or feelings. Both love the seventeenth century, its “clean, exact and free” style, as Nietzsche says in French — and this perfectly defines Proudhon's style. Both, on the other hand, abhor Rousseau, and, with the romanticism of which he is the father, Christian pessimism, feminism, rationalist democracy, art for art's sake, and all the other vices of the modern spirit that betray a weakening of the species. Philosophically, for very similar though different reasons, they have the same hatred of Christianity or rather of a transcendent spiritualism, of a “cloudy idealism,” whether Christian or Platonic, which detaches ideas from the realities that support them. They are both anti-mystics, *earthlings*. “The mind, a product of the brain, to consider it as supernatural! To deify, what madness!” exclaims Nietzsche, and it could be Proudhon. We remember the hymn that Zarathustra sings

> My brothers, *remain faithful to the earth, with all the strength of your love!* Let your prodigal love and your knowledge go in the direction of the earth. Do not let your virtue fly away from earthly things and beat its wings against eternal walls... Like me, bring back to the Earth the virtue that goes astray. — Yes, to the flesh and to life, so that it gives its meaning to the earth, *a human meaning*.

In these magnificent words, which Daniel Halévy says are the most beautiful, the most religious that naturalist thought has ever inspired, replace the equivocal word "flesh" with the fuller one "work"; substitute or add to the physiological considerations, the only ones on which Nietzsche insists, psychological and economic considerations, and you have all of Proudhon. For both of them, the idea is not primordial; it is the last term of a physiological process, says one; it comes from action, says the other, and he adds that it returns to action. The analogy would go even further, and we would show it if this were the opportunity to show it, but we must limit ourselves. Finally, add the same disdain for official science, which was so unintelligent and so hostile to both of them. Will anyone think after this of opposing the intransigent moralism of the author of *Justice* to the alleged “immoralism” of that of *Beyond Good and Evil*, as if this immoralism were not a frenetic moralism, exasperated by the flatness of current moralities! Nothing will affirm better the twin kinship of these two spirits than these two admirable formulas, two of the most beautiful that have ever pierced like lightning the night of our weak and shameful

humanity: “Man is a being who is made to overcome himself.” — “To labor is to devote oneself and to die.”

Finally, these two slayers of weakness, these two fiery lovers of strength appreciated and desired what is most delicate, most tender in existence: friendship. Love spoiled neither of them; they refused to treat as equals the creature who, according to them, should be woman, or to treat their minds with feelings that would have weakened it. Nietzsche was wounded by the only sentimental adventure that we know of him, his stormy, tyrannical and too intellectual passion for Mile Lou Salomé; and as for Proudhon, to call love the feeling that led him, at the age of forty, to marry the honest lace-making worker Euphrasie Piéjeard, “without education, but of severe morals, of an upright mind, of a loving heart,” would make the readers of M. Paul Bourget smile. “You understand well enough what my passions are,” wrote the great moralist to Bergmann. However, the few lines quoted by Edouard Droz show to what extent Proudhon, and especially the young Proudhon, knew how to cherish and respect the young girl: “What a memory for a man's heart that has reached the end of its season to have been in its green youth the guardian, the companion, the participant in the virginity of a young girl. The century has taken pity on these true pleasures!”

But it was above all friendship that these virile souls knew how to taste. The savage Proudhon was loved, “and he passionately loved friendship and his friends.” Friendship, that is truly a feeling of equals, which can only be experienced between men, and not between the sexes. “Do you believe then,” he wrote somewhere, “that a woman, a mistress, a wife is *a friend?”* And what a perspective on this heart so rough at first, — what a reversal also of our modern ideas on medicine! — are these lines written in 1854, by a patient suffering from cholera. “When the disease held me annihilated on my pallet, I said to my friends who looked after me: ‘Hold my hand in both of yours, it gives me life, it heals my body through friendship.’”

But this friendship remained healthy and normal; Nietzsche pushed it, and he was aware of it, to the point of pathology. He romantically modeled it on the image of love; it was preparing himself for all the suffering.

> Friendship, he said, determines absolutely the same crises as love, but in a purer atmosphere. First a mutual attraction determined by common convictions; admiration, mutual glorification; then, on the one hand, distrust, and, on the other hand, doubts about the excellence of the friend and his ideas; the certainty that a rupture is inevitable and that yet it will be painful... In friendship, there are all these sufferings, and others still, impossible to say.

How can we be surprised, after this, at the frenzied nature of his relations with Wagner, where earthly enmity ended up rising to the rank of a “stellar friendship?” How can we be surprised at the feeling of “incommunicability” of which Nietzsche complained even among his friends?

> We inhabit different worlds, we no longer speak the same language! Like a stranger, like an outcast, I wander among them: not a word, not a glance reaches me. I am silent — because no one understands my words — ah! I can say it, they have never understood me!

> Perfect friendship is possible only *inter pares*.... Ah! the rapid madness of those hours when the solitary believes he has found a friend, and embraces him and holds him in his arms: it is a gift from heaven, an inestimable gift. An hour later, he rejects him with disgust, he rejects himself with disgust, as soiled, diminished, sick of his own society. A *profound* man needs friends, unless a God is born to him: And I have neither God nor friend!

When he wrote these desperate lines, Nietzsche was on the verge of falling into the abyss; but are not all these sufferings enclosed in the romantic conception of friendship that he expressed twelve years earlier, and which he doubtless held from his frail organism irremediably doomed to misfortune?

No matter, here are many points in common. The same love of studious solitude and victorious over physical evil, same existence of ascetics and obstinate stoics, same taste for force and war completing and proving moral force, same hatred of decay and decadence in all its forms, same male predilection for friendship... here are replicas that balance each other harmoniously.

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However, this Nietzsche who strives for virile feelings, but who experiences and alters them with the passion, finesse and nervousness of a woman, we can sense that he is not of the same race as this Proudhon, a being of strength, roundness, and despite everything of health, in whom nothing is affected, effeminate and morbid. They are not of the same race, in fact, and their disharmony dates back a long way. Look at Friedrich Nietzsche, son of a loyalist pastor, solitary and sick; a precociously serious, silent and pious child, gently rocked by the traditional beliefs whose ceremonies enchant him; receiving, in the cloister of Pforta, an ascetic education, entirely literary and romantic, which can only exalt his nascent predispositions; sensitive, an artist, musician and poet to the point of neurosis, to the point of experiencing very early on the lyrical and imperious need to create, to the point of having to abandon musical compositions that precipitated him into exhausting crises; scrupulous in fulfilling his professional task, but considering it as time stolen from thought, a specialist, but energetically refusing to lock himself in his specialty, a philosopher more than a philologist; always restless, even in fullness, never knowing, despite rare childish gaiety, the divine oblivion that we call happiness; very proud moreover, but with a pride of race, relating all his high virtues to the heritage of the counts of Nietzki... this is indeed the type of an aristocrat of blood and culture.

Let us now follow Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, son of a cooper and a cook; of a father who toiled hard and of a mother who "kneaded, did the laundry, ironed, cooked, milked the cow, went to the fields to get her grass, knitted for five people, mended the linen," — Proudhon insists on these details — ; grandson of a peasant, of that Tournési who did not hesitate to knock out the gamekeeper of a lord, an exploit of which Proudhon was more proud than if he had descended from the crusaders; by turns cellar boy, cowherd who rolled with delight in the *turquie*, laborer, and, in between, going to school without a hat and in clogs, learning his lessons from the books of his comrades; a typographer at the end of his studies, a companion of the Tour de France and proudly showing off an immaculate

worker's booklet, a conscientious clerk in a boathouse and never afraid until the last day to take on material tasks; neglected or careless of his appearance, unhappy in front of his books where he lacks his atmosphere and his horizons, speaking patois, willingly becoming again "a companion, a stroller, a lazy person, fond of running and *gossiping*, a lover of coffee, cabaret and great joy," relieving himself of his abstract and devious antinomies with passionate invectives, outbursts of voice or thunderous apostrophes... Do we feel that we are in the presence of another type; that we are here very close to the ground, that we remain attached to it, and that the spirit only tears itself away to rise in magnificent rockets, but to immediately return to take root there?

Let us admit it: this lacks taste; this heavy insistence is without elegance, without tact. An aristocrat like Sainte-Beuve is not mistaken, and there is no doubt that he would have been approved by Nietzsche, who admired him. Too intelligent not to do justice to Proudhon's plebeian sense, he nevertheless insistently makes his reservations of refinement. "I will say my whole thought: there would be, in my opinion, something even higher: it is to feel less of one's origins, to know how to free oneself from them at a moment, not to depend on them so much. The characteristic of the highest intelligence is in a higher balance." Proudhon, according to Sainte-Beuve, heard too much "the cry of the entrails;" he "was too close to the nourishing earth... the blows of the paternal hammer resounded too close to his ear." For the critic, "the social philosopher is truly formed and complete only when, in his inner evolution, he has successively detached himself from all things of flesh and blood, from all the data of destiny and chance." This is indeed the ideal of the perfectly cultivated man, of the perfect critical ataraxia... And no doubt Sainte-Beuve is right; he is clearly right. But, if Proudhon had been this admirably balanced sage, he would have done nothing socially, like Sainte-Beuve. Let us not complain about this lack of balance. Who does? Proudhon was Proudhon. It is also to a lack of balance that we owe Friedrich Nietzsche. These two powerful natures were carried in opposite directions by the logic of their destiny.

Let us recall, moreover, these two portraits as we find them, one at the head of Daniel Halévy's book, the other by — Gustave Courbet — on the first page of Hubert Bourgin's or Maurice Harmel's brochure. Consider here this head sunk in the shoulders and supported on a stick, — this terrible stick with which the polemicist struck the ground while hammering out his response to Sainte-Beuve; look at these clear eyes, piercing like gimlets and pitiless behind the glasses, this broad and strong nose, aspiring to battle, this bushy beard, this lower part of the face "a little massive and quite in harmony with the strong mountainous nature of the Jura,"[3] this rare fine hair framing an admirable forehead: think of the words of Darimon: "the rough speech, the abrupt approach," of the even more disparaging words of Baudelaire, who calls him "boorish," with his heavy and awkward gait, and say if you do not see the Plebeian himself firmly anchored for the defense and ready for the assault.

And now, see Friedrich Nietzsche languidly leaning on his elbow, his gaze fixed and lost in the distance; "the eye of a fanatic, of a keen observer and of a visionary," says Mr.

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[3] The expression is from Charles Grün, quoted by Sainte-Beuve.

Schuré; see those prominent cheekbones, that strong moustache and that shaven chin which would give him the air of a Prussian officer, without that air of beyond and of unreality which casts a veil over that manly face; refer, to complete the impression, to what Mr. Schuré says who saw Nietzsche at Bayreuth. He found in him "a certain timid and haughty quality in his approach. The musical voice, the slow speech denoted his artistic organization; the cautious and meditative gait was that of a philosopher. Nothing is more deceptive than the apparent calm of his expression... This double character gave him something of the anxious and the disturbing, all the more so as he always seemed riveted on a single point." Is this not how one should speak of the last representative of an overly refined aristocracy, who is going to sink into madness?

These two very different types have in fact concerns that are out of all proportion. They each have their tyrannical idea, which they chew over in solitude, but this idea transports these brothers in arms hundreds of leagues from each other, to opposite summits. *Ist Veredlung moeglich:* Is ennoblement possible? asks Friedrich Nietzsche at every moment, and this aristocrat, this artist, shows himself attentive only to the interests of culture. "The next culture: his idea of social problems. *The imperative world of the beautiful and the sublime*... the only means of salvation against socialism:" he carries this idea within him all his life, and is constantly brought back to it by the course of problems that he envisages. Let us not delude ourselves about the meaning of the word "social problems." Nietzsche cares little for matter, what matters to him is form; he attaches only a slight interest to beings of flesh and blood, he gives all his thought and all his heart to art. "The time has come to be serious; — we believe that it is also the time of art." Religion has become a pharisaism; science, degenerated into a means of making a living, also exercises a barbarizing action, it is the triumph of the philistine; there remains, to regenerate our decrepit humanity, only art, great art, tragic art, Dionysian art. "The philosopher of the future? He must be the supreme judge of an aesthetic culture, the censor of all deviations." Wagner could have, should have been this regenerating prophet; he was so splendidly in the *Meistersingers* and in *Siegfried*. Alas! he sank into romanticism and Christian pessimism. But whatever the failings of men, the goal remains. Whether it is the very reason for life, or a halt between two battles, a "refreshing dream that descends upon us," art retains its eminent place; "its consolation has remained spread over man like a morning dew." How deeply Nietzsche was an artist can be seen from his attitude when he learns of the disasters of the Commune. He remained, says Mlle Nietzsche, for a long time weeping with Jacob Burckhardt. What was he weeping for? The death of men? No, the destruction of masterpieces.

> When I learned of the fires in Paris, he wrote to Gersdorff, I was completely destroyed for a few days, lost in tears and doubts: scientific, philosophical, artistic life appeared to me as an absurdity, since I saw a single day sufficing for the destruction of the most beautiful works of art; what am I saying? of entire periods of art.

And in 1878, in autobiographical notes, we read this:

> War: my deepest pain, the Louvre fire.

Let us now listen to Proudhon. He is twenty-nine years old, and he is a candidate for the Suard pension. Invited to present a curriculum vitae to the members of a conservative company, he ends it thus:

> Born and raised in the working class, still belonging to it, today and forever, by heart, genius and habits, and above all by the community of interests and wishes, the greatest joy of the candidate, if he were to win your votes, would be, do not doubt it, gentlemen, to have attracted in his person your just solicitude for this interesting portion of society, so well decorated with the name of *worker*, to have been judged worthy of being its first representative with you, and to be able henceforth to *work tirelessly, through philosophy and through science, with all the energy of his will and the power of his mind, for the complete emancipation of his brothers and comrades*.

This is Proudhon's "oath," to which he remained faithful all his life, and which filled his solitude. Let no one see a contradiction between this ideal and the isolation of the thinker, let no one say that a plebeian should have been what we call a man of action, as if serious writings were not acts and as if all agitations deserved this name! "He carried the people in his heart," said Edouard Droz; "but unlike his friend Beslay, born a bourgeois, he did not feel the need to frequent them, content to give them his thoughts and his whole life." His thoughts and his life, he certainly gave them to them, this fabulous man who was not virtuous and half-democrat, who blamed the Garnier brothers for sending his daughter a doll that was too beautiful, paid for a quart of Bordeaux wine that someone wanted to give him as a gift, had remorse for treating himself to a thirty-three-sous lunch, "thinking that not a quarter of the workers in the country earn three francs a day," and advocated poverty as the "rule of which it is up to the State to give citizens an example."

With such a temperament, it is not in art that all life will be held; art on the contrary, even great art, will be essentially subordinate, and will be all the greater the more it is subordinated to everything that surpasses it, to everything that is the end of which it is only the expression. Proudhon, by Sainte-Beuve's admission, had the makings of a true literary critic; his judgments on the subject often agree with those of Nietzsche; but he could not apply himself for long to exercises of this order, he would have had the feeling of wasting his time. Having almost promised the Garnier brothers — it is always Sainte-Beuve who tells us — a series of works on great writers, he did not take long to back out, and composed *War and Peace;* "the questions of pure right had seized him again." This is because, for this spirit, the only things that matter are morality, justice, right, property, credit, contracts, exchanges, the real relations of individuals and societies, and of *all* individuals. A Nietzsche calmly admits that he has "no political or social ambition," that he is not a *zoon politikon*. A Proudhon, even if he is solitary, even if he does not hesitate to rush several times against public opinion, cannot help but say that he would be happy "to have the favor of the masses," because he knows well that he works for them. Fundamental antithesis of two natures that had seemed neighbors, and of which we now see clearly that they stand out with the same vigor on different grounds. The antinomy will develop and widen in the consideration of means.

In minds of such hostile aspirations, the thought of humanity will not project the same image. Nietzsche, artist and poet, cannot bear the vision of a teeming crowd of pygmies, of a flat and discolored humanity, never crossed and transported by the air of the high peaks, poorly happy with a mediocre ideal without force and without warmth. The average life horrifies him. Doubtless one cannot eliminate it entirely; it suits the mass, the people who are the broad and solid base of the social pyramid: "One cannot get over it any more than one can contemplate a powerful and healthy vegetation." It is therefore necessary to strengthen it in its instincts, in its beliefs, in its vital illusions which are elements of its hereditary health; and because Christianity succeeds in this work, this great enemy of Christianity pays homage to Christianity. This people must be human, happy, content to work, to lead a mechanical and diminished existence. But let us not be mistaken: it is not out of love for the people that the father of Zarathustra wants a peaceful life for the people, it is for the exclusive preservation of culture. The problem, he said with Wagner at Triebschen, is to bring the masses to serve a culture that must remain foreign to them: one can also achieve this through patriotism and religion, in this consists all politics. One can also achieve this through work, precious because it mechanizes and diminishes men, and thus prepares the race of superhumans, hard men, complete men, strong men. If necessary, Nietzsche, one senses, does not shy away from extreme solutions, which satisfy his romantic taste. He sings with dark lyricism of slavery, "the blind mole of culture," "the vulture that bites the liver of the son of Prometheus, the artisan of culture." "The misery of men who live in pain must be made even more rigorous, so that a tiny number of Olympian men can create a world of art." Later he softens; he dreams for the great number only of mediocrity, the channeling of energy into instincts, beliefs accepted without examination, professions for which they will be prepared early by good, purely utilitarian professional schools. On these solid foundations will rise the cultivated elite, the double hierarchy of leaders and poets, creators of values. "A high culture can only be built on a vast terrain, on a healthy and strongly consolidated mediocrity."

That all this would have horrified Proudhon can be fairly guessed from what we know of the essential tendencies of this bitter enemy of authoritarian hierarchies, enemy of that Saint-Simonism which, in spite of not insignificant differences, is not so far removed from the Nietzschean ideal. Doubtless, if we look carefully, we could discover an aristocratic Proudhon. We would delight in the fact that this enemy of God wanted religion for his daughters, declaring the woman who prays as "sublime" as the man on his knees is "ridiculous" — which is Renan. We could also note that Proudhon was extremely aristocratic with regard to women. He was not only so with regard to women; certain passages from his books or of his letters are harsh on democracy. "What is most backward, most retrograde, in any country, is the mass, it is what you call the democracy." And this passage from a letter from 1851 to Charles-Edmond, is it not pure Nietzsche: "Humanity, dear friend, is not these brutal masses always ready to cry: Long live the king! Long live the League! Humanity is that *elite* that constitutes the leaven of the centuries and makes all the dough rise"? We can triumph over these contradictions, on condition that we do not place them in the era when these lines were written, because we would understand too well. Let he who has never contradicted himself cast the first stone at Proudhon!

But one cannot fairly make too much of bouts of discouragement; scrutinizing his sensitivity and the thought of his whole life, Proudhon is a democrat. This ideal of social leveling, so repugnant to Nietzsche, as to every aristocrat, must be honestly said to be that of Proudhon, as of every true democrat. It is not by a game of wit that the polemicist wrote the "apotheosis of the middle class." A people of small landowners and workers, neither too poor nor too rich, enemies of the pauperism that degrades and of the luxury that softens; a people of workers, all working equally and exchanging on an equal footing the product of their work, all working freely without wishing to submit to any authority foreign to their work; a people of industrial producers who, because they produce seriously, conscientiously and intelligently, because they group their whole life around their labor, cannot bear the introduction from outside of a hierarchy into production, the subordination of industry to government, economics to politics, action to literature or idealism, in a word, profoundly convinced of the equality of functions; a society consequently where the usurped privileges of talent will no longer be worshipped: this is what justice means for Proudhon. It certainly does not stifle the expansion of genius; on the contrary, it desires it and calls for it; but let this genius not forget that it is what it is only thanks to the community, and let it be disinterested, like Proudhon. There will still be a hierarchy, or at least one can conceive that there could be one if the law of labor requires it; there could be an authority, restricted and reduced to the needs of production; but there will no longer be ranks or gaps deeply separating classes, and the subordination that a worker consents to in his work, he will resolve it in the social body in equality.

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Nietzsche, if he had read Proudhon, would doubtless have called this pure and simple barbarism. He would have seen in this system the reversal of the laws of life, and above all the stifling of culture. Perhaps he would have been mistaken. That there is in the deepening of the notion of labor, in the development of its demands, the basis of a new politics and a new culture; that there is to Nietzsche's question: *ist Veredlung môglich?* another answer than that of Nietzsche, is what Proudhon marvelously anticipated. — We cannot dream of showing it here.[4] However plausible the conclusions to which this research would lead may be, it is probable that they would not be accepted by the partisans of the old order and of traditional culture. The Artist and the Moralist, the Aristocrat and the Plebeian, the Hierarchist and the Anarchist are two types of sensibilities too different for one to hope for a true conciliation between them, except in that supra-sensible unity of intentions which is of no use for the conduct of the relative and of daily struggles. Can there be only one brain in a society? Can each individual, each cell of this society, on the contrary, become a brain? This is in the final analysis how the alternative between authority and democracy, between the old and the new culture, is posed. Each one, descending to the depths of his conscience, will make to this question, the most serious that arises among the serious questions of modern times, the answer that his enlightenment and his will suggest to him. It is the glory of these two superhumans,

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[4] See on this point our study on "the trial of democracy", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*.

Nietzsche and Proudhon, of these two enemy brothers so similar and so different, to have erected these two ideals on the threshold of the twentieth century.

GEORGES GUY-GRAND.

Georges Guy-Grand, "Nietzsche et Proudhon," *La Grande Revue* 14 no. 1 (10 Janvier 1910): 145-161.

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