

Chapter Eighteen

CIVILIZING IN EARNEST: SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLING

La République a fondé des écoles,
Aussi maint'nant le peuple sait compter,
L'peupl' ne veut plus qu'on lui donn'un obole,
Il veut son compt' et non la charité.

—MONTÉHUS

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

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

It is my purpose in this chapter to sketch the development of schooling in this particular context, to suggest how it fits the changes indicated above, and to show that its success was an integral part of a total process. It was only when what the schools taught made sense that they became important to those they had to teach. It was only when what the schools said became relevant to recently created needs and demands that people listened to them; and listening, also heeded the rest of their offerings. People went to school not because school was offered or imposed, but because it was useful. The world had to change before this came about.

The schools that priests or laymen ran for the poorer classes before the last quarter of the nineteenth century tended, in the nature of things, to put first things first. First things were those the masters thought important: the ability to gabble the catechism or a part of the Latin service. The teaching of even elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic was rare before the Revolution, reflected the prefect of Yonne in 1810, and teachers were little interested in "broad public education, I mean the sort concerning the greatest number of people."¹ In any case, a great many teachers taught whatever they taught with limited competence. Until 1816, no title or proof of competence was required from a teacher. And though in the cities and larger towns this could be remedied, popular schooling suffered. It went on suffering on this score for quite some time, under the rod of men like the dominie of the secondary school of Noyers (Yonne), whose schoolroom was so ill-swept and so full of spiders "that one could hardly make out Citizen Colibeau through the spiderwebs, especially when he gave his lesson as he habitually did in nightcap, dressing gown, and sabots."²

The schoolroom or schoolhouse tended to be ramshackle. At Moulle (Pas-de-Calais) a whole wall collapsed in 1828 during a friendly scuffle between teacher and pupils. In 1850 the school at Sauvat (Cantal) was an abandoned bakehouse whose roof was separated from the walls, so that the snow got in. Throughout the 1870's we hear of ceilings crumbling, floors collapsing, paneless windows—sometimes no windows at all, the chimney providing the only ventilation. Living and teaching quarters were hard to tell apart; in Eure-et-Loir teachers or their wives did their household chores, prepared meals, and baked bread during class, and some also slept in the classroom on a folding bed. Perhaps just as well, since otherwise the schoolroom might have been even more poorly equipped: quite a few lacked tables; some until the 1880's had neither seats nor stove. Body heat helped, and we find one mayor (in 1837) asserting that the children's breath ensured a reasonable temperature. Dark, humid, crowded, unventilated, unfurnished, unlit, unheated or smelly and smoky when a fire or stove was lit, drafty, unwelcoming, and ugly, such was the great majority of schools right through the end of the 1870's. Most had no yard, let alone a latrine. In 1864 a school inspector, reporting on the lack of cesspools or other sanitary facilities, noted that some schools did provide a fenced-in area in a corner of the backyard. The manure amassed there was removed from time to time and used as fertilizer—"the beginning of progress, . . . unknown a dozen years ago."³

At Nouvion-en-Thiérache (Aisne) there were "no maps, no blackboards, no tables or desks" in the 1850's. Each pupil had a wooden plank that he placed on his knees for writing; the master sharpened the students' quills, and when he was called away to sing in the church, his sister kept the class in order while she cleaned her salad.⁴ This was not unusual, and informality of this sort must have interrupted many a dreary lesson. If the schoolroom was

in the village hall, the community's records were likely to be kept in a corner cupboard, with adults filing in at any time to verify a document or to seek the teacher out for other functions; and it was not unknown for a wedding celebration to be held there, even sometimes during class.⁵

The teacher himself was another problem. In the first half of the nineteenth century, he could well have been a retired soldier, a rural constable, the local barber, innkeeper, or grocer, or simply a half-educated peasant's son. Seven of the 15 teachers in Rennes in 1815 were ex-convicts. Balzac's figure of the village teacher, Fourchon, who ended as a poacher, part-cordwainer, part-beggar, and fulltime drunk, was evidently an acceptable stereotype under the July Monarchy. In any case, most teachers worked at another job, ranging from farming their own land or someone else's, weaving (in Eure-et-Loir one kept his loom in the schoolroom), mending shoes, and digging graves to serving as the village choirmaster or village registrar. Even in 1872, when teachers had moved up in the world from their low condition of the 1830's, we find what must have been most if not all of the 395 public teachers of Eure-et-Loir doing something else on the side: 359 acted as registrars, 273 as choirmasters or church organists, and 14 as sextons, beadles, or bellringers; two were janitors and sweepers, one a gravedigger, and ten tobacconists; two ran the local telegraph office, and 36 sold insurance.⁶

Teaching was a trade like any other, and a man or lad would hire himself out—sometimes at the fair, like the "mercenaries" who "taught what they didn't know" from Hautes-Alpes to Ardèche into the 1850's. They wore one quill stuck in their hats if they taught how to read, two if they also taught arithmetic, three if their mental equipment included Latin.* The peasants would put their heads together at the autumn fair to hire such a teacher, himself but a more learned peasant, for the winter. If they did not know him already, they gave him an informal examination at the inn, and during his stay they took turns in providing his bed and board, a place in the stable for classes, and light and ink for the children he taught. In the spring the teacher returned to his farm with a bright golden *louis*, 20 francs the richer.⁷

The moral worth of such teachers was often as shaky as their enlightenment. Physical and intellectual isolation permitted them to play strange tricks with their slender powers. In Yonne we hear of a village teacher being fired in 1853 because he used cabalistic formulas to heal the sick, touted toads as a cure for cancer, sold cheap brandy, and "excited his pupils to drink." Such schoolbooks as could be found were ancient. Authorities denounced them as Gothic, anachronistic, and absurd. They seem to have been all of these things. We hear of an alphabet book in Latin, of a work called *Christian Civility* printed in Gothic characters; of a life of Christ dating back to the fifteenth

* *Annuaire départemental pour les Hautes-Alpes*, 1844, quoted in Elie Reynier and Louise Abrial, *Les Ecoles normales primaires*, p. 72. In Ardèche they were known as Briançonnais or Matinaux because they came from the Dauphiné mountains, to the east. They are also mentioned in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*.

century "full of miracles, superstitions, and fear of devils"; of a text telling how the Virgin Mary spent her youth in the temple learning the psalter and the prayer book, as a good saint should. Once the basic essentials were learned, children practiced reading in old family papers, legal documents, marriage contracts. They learned to read old scripts, to know and remember the ways of the past, not very different from the world they lived in under Louis Philippe.⁸ This "vicious usage" began to disappear in the 1840's as more and more schools were equipped with standard texts.* But most of these texts were, in their own fashion, equally useless; and teaching standards continued to be sadly low.

One hears of village schools that imparted a good fund of knowledge, and of countrymen who knew how to read and actually did read. But these were the exceptions. Most country schools must have been more like the one at Selins (Cantal) in the 1840's, which was conducted by Sister Gandilhon, who could teach only prayers, the catechism, and the first two rules of arithmetic ("she had heard of a third, but never learned it"). In consequence, if poor men read, it was because they had taught themselves. And that came hard. When Martin Nadaud was elected to Parliament in 1849, he could not write a letter, though he had worked at educating himself for over a decade. Where French was not native to the region, some teachers were as ignorant of it as their charges; and others bent it to their needs in a special pidgin, as in Cerdagne, where the school idiom was a strange mixture of Latin, Catalan, and French. At Olette (Pyrénées-Orientales) in the 1840's, where the teacher did not know French but had Lhomond's Latin grammar by heart, those children who progressed beyond simple spelling read *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* and *Telemachus*. But, recalled a survivor, they read only in a manner of speaking: no one could read a book that was written in French for the simple reason that the teacher could not read it either.⁹

It takes real effort today to conceive such an educational system, one in which both teacher and taught were ignorant of the material they were dealing with, and in which the capacity to draw letters or pronounce them completely outweighed any capacity to comprehend. Letters, words, and sentences were formulas and spells. "No child understands what he reads," reported a school inspector from Var in 1864. And in Brittany the inspectors noted that, though the children read along with fair fluency, "no child can give account of what he has read or translate it into Breton; hence there is no proof that anything is understood." In such circumstances, Latin was no more difficult, no more incomprehensible than French, and many a bright village child "learned" Latin in this fashion and left school full of bits of scripture, canticles, and the catechism, "rattling along in Latin like a phonograph, without understanding a word of it," and capable of writing in four different hands, accomplishments most impressive to his illiterate parents.¹⁰

* Yet as late as 1879 a school inspector in Charollais found children using the Royaumont Bible as their only text (cited in Pierre Zind, *L'Enseignement religieux*, p. 134).

Most simply learned by rote. At Soignes (Vaucluse), school authorities reported in 1864 that up to 40 girls were admitted to school every year for a few months, just long enough to learn the catechism by hearing it repeated, so they could make their first communion. Thirteen years later at Privas (Ardèche), nearly half the children were enrolled for this purpose alone. From Louis XVI to Louis Napoleon, the words of one of Grégoire's correspondents continued to apply, though less and less: "Education in the countryside comes down to enabling pupils to help their pastors on Sundays and holidays to sing the praise of God in a language they don't understand."¹¹

No wonder in such circumstances that outside reading continued rare. In 1864 a survey tells us: "very little" (Vaucluse); "the local paper, a letter, the prayerbook" (Doubs); "no one thinks to read in the countryside" (Landes); "the taste for reading doesn't exist" (Lot-et-Garonne); the same in Basses-Pyrénées. As for writing, it was rarer still. "To write several pages, one needs a practiced hand," a Dordogne priest had written to Grégoire in 1791.¹² Two generations later few could trace even a few words. Children left school able to make their way painfully through thickets of letters, but only a handful had been taught to write. Writing was a stage of learning to which few aspired, the fewer since it called for higher fees.¹³

I have quoted the reports of school inspectors. They came into existence in 1833 as part of a law introduced by François Guizot, then Minister of Public Instruction. That law set the foundations of the people's schooling. It required every commune or group of neighboring communes to set up and maintain at least one elementary school; it reaffirmed the standards of competence for teaching that had been set by royal ordinance in 1816, and prohibited the operation of a school without an official certificate that such standards had been met; it decreed that each department should set up, alone or jointly with its neighbors, a normal school to train primary school teachers; and it produced quick results. In 1833 France had 31,420 schools attended by 1.2 million children; by 1847 the number of schools had doubled, and the number of pupils had increased almost threefold. In the same period the number of normal schools increased from 38 to 47. This last had its importance. We must realize that the mass of the teachers in the public elementary schools in the mid-1880's probably came out of these normal schools of the July Monarchy; and that, however slowly, their training and quality improved as a result.

We can see that Guizot's was an important measure. We must be careful not to overrate its effectiveness. The normal schools continued to provide only rudimentary training. The "schools," as we have seen, varied in grandeur and facilities—but varied mostly downward. They were (I speak of the countryside) still supplemented by the ad hoc establishments of religious teaching orders, like the *béates* of Haute-Loire and Ardèche, who could not teach their charges how to read, but were very effective babysitters and cordial hostesses for feminine gatherings where one embroidered, gossiped, and prayed. Beyond this, there were unofficial, or "clandestine," establishments, numerous into the

1850's, where some local man or woman gathered a group of paying students during the winter nights. In 1880 the school inspector of Vannes (Morbihan) reported on the clandestine school he had discovered, with more than 40 girls from three to thirteen crowded in a tiny room already filled by a wardrobe, bed, and chest. The woman who kept the school taught them "neither reading nor writing, and no word of French. Only the catechism and prayers in Breton, and songs in a Latin book for the bigger girls." In 1881 the béates still flourished in Velay and Vivarais, to the great indignation of the local authorities. Though they were officially suppressed in 1882, Ardouin-Dumazet found them still operating at the turn of the century and avowed that without the shelter they offered the women for their work and the children for their catechism, long winters would have been unbearably dreary.¹⁴

As for the public schools, official attendance figures are scarcely credible. For one thing, the claims made for the 1840's equal the more reliable figures that appeared in the 1860's. And for another, in drawing up statistics, no one gave any thought to girls. When not taught at home—scarcely a frequent case among the masses—girls were left to local hazard, which often meant no school. In 1867 a law was passed requiring every commune of 500 souls and over to have a girls school, but it provided certain outs, with the result that at the end of the 1870's half of the communes in France still lacked such facilities.¹⁵

Despite all these shortcomings, from 1833 onward the government, supported by a steadily growing vested interest, bent itself to advance and develop public education. Nationally, the conscripts affected by the law of 1833 showed a much smaller measure of illiteracy than their forebears. And in an illiterate department like Corrèze, the change was equally evident. The proportion of conscripts who knew the elements of reading rose from 14.3 percent in 1829 to 31.9 percent in 1855, 34.8 percent in 1860, 41 percent in 1865, 50 percent in 1868, and 62 percent in 1875.¹⁶ By 1863 only about one-fifth of the children between seven and thirteen received no instruction whatever. What we want to know is the kind of instruction that was given and who got it. The evidence suggests, and so does common sense, that urban areas had more schools than rural areas, that these schools were more regularly attended by more of the local children, and that the quality of the teaching in them was better. By 1876 nearly 800,000 of 4.5 million school-age children were still not registered in any school. Most of these belonged to rural communes; and many who were registered hardly ever attended class.¹⁷ This was the enduring problem.

The next great change came in the 1880's. It would have come earlier had the Minister of Education Victor Duruy had the chance to develop the plans he elaborated in 1867. But he did not, and most of his initiatives remained in the project stage.¹⁸ Hence the importance of the reforms introduced by Jules Ferry. In 1881 all fees and tuition charges in public elementary schools were

abolished. In 1882 enrollment in a public or private school was made compulsory. In 1883 every village or hamlet with more than 20 school-age children was required to maintain a public elementary school. In 1885 subsidies were allotted for the building and maintenance of schools and for the pay of teachers. In 1886 an elementary teaching program was instituted, along with elaborate provisions for inspection and control.

We may observe that the adoption of these policies coincided with the vast expenditures of the Freycinet Plan. The millions that were spent on building roads were matched by vast sums for schools: 17,320 schools had to be built, 5,428 enlarged, 8,381 repaired. A school fund set up in 1878 dispensed 311 million francs in subsidies, 231 million more in loans in the space of seven years. Meanwhile, the budget for public instruction rose from 53,640,714 francs in 1878 to 133,671,671 in 1885, enough to set money flowing through the country and to convince the undecided of the virtues of the new policies.¹⁹

In certain parts of France the educators had their work cut out for them. South of the line that marked off the best and worst areas in primary education, a diagonal running from Saint-Malo to Geneva, 16 departments, representing a population of 6.5 million souls, showed a higher than 20 percent rate of illiteracy among conscripts in 1881; nine of these ranged between 26.1 percent (Corrèze) and 41.3 percent (Morbihan).²⁰ Even these figures underrated the degree of illiteracy by several percentage points. They did not include males who were not conscripts. They did not include women, who had a much higher rate of illiteracy than men. And they did not discriminate between urban and rural areas to show that even in the most backward regions—Lower Brittany, the center from Cher to Dordogne and Ardèche, the Pyrenees—rural areas were consistently worse off. In this same year, 1881, teachers in Lot reported that in their communes seven persons in ten were illiterate, and that only one of the three who could read could also write, and then "very badly." By the turn of the century conscript literacy in Finistère was not far below the national average. But when the 1901 draft board examined a group at Châteaulin, it found about one in three of the men from Pleyben, Châteauneuf, Huelgoat, and Carhaix to be illiterate.²¹

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

It is because figures and statistics tend to be misleading that an impressionist account may come closer to the truth. School inspectors of the 1870's plainly appreciated the point in expressing a certain skepticism about the lists of

literate and illiterate children that they themselves passed on. "Reality has nothing to do with administrative figures or statistics," complained Félix Pécaut in 1879.²² The number of those who could not read or write belied the official claims. Passing remarks give us some useful clues. Jean-Paul Giret in his study on popular education in Eure-et-Loir observes that to say people knew how to read or write does not mean that they could in fact do it, but says only that they had been taught to do it. A teacher in Vosges remarked on the enormous difference between being able to sign one's name and being able to read, let alone write (1889). In 1871 the General Council of Haute-Loire found occasion to point out that most of the people statistically listed as able to read and write were completely illiterate. A year later, a local official confirmed that school attendance often resulted only in the ability to scrawl a questionable signature and to spell out the shop signs (1872). And the reports to that effect are endless. Many conscripts have attended school but have retained nothing from it (Allier, 1864). They learn how to sign their names and think they know everything (Charente-Inférieure, 1861). In any case, the lads who had left school at twelve would return for a winter's cramming before they faced the draft board, to give them a minimum appearance of literacy (Cantal, 1880). Conversely, other men claimed illiteracy in order to escape service, and lists of illiterates in Ariège in 1865 included a fair measure of seminarians, students, and teachers.²³ The statistics clearly must be taken with more than a few grains of salt.

One reason for the slow progress in eliminating illiteracy, strangely ignored by even the best accounts of education in France, was the fact that so many adults—and consequently children—did not speak French. As we have seen, in 1863 by official tally (as reproduced in the Appendix, pp. 498–501, below) some 7.5 million people, a fifth of the population, did not know the language.²⁴ And as we have also seen, even that figure is questionable. The actual number was probably much larger, particularly if one includes those whose notions of the language were extremely vague.

The greatest problem faced by the public schools in the 8,381 non-French-speaking communes, and in a good few of the other 29,129 where French was said to be in general use, was how to teach the language to children who never or hardly ever heard it. The oft-repeated claim that they were learning their mother tongue could hardly have rung true to those whose mothers did not understand a word of it. "The children [of Lauragais] don't have to learn simply how to read and write," commented M. F. Pariset in 1867. "They have to learn how to do so in French, that is, in another language than the one they know." The result was that, for a lot of them, the instruction received in school "leaves no more trace than Latin leaves on most of those who graduate from secondary school. The child . . . returns to patois when he gets home. French is for him an erudite language, which he forgets quickly,

never speaking it."²⁵ Officially, the problem was faced by denying its existence and forcing even those who could scarcely master a few words to proclaim, as in a catechism, that what *should* be true was true and what they *knew* to be true was not: "(1) We call mother tongue the tongue that is spoken by our parents, and in particular by our mothers; spoken also by our fellow citizens and by the persons who inhabit the same *pays* as us. (2) Our mother tongue is French." So read an army examination manual in 1875. Unofficially, the schools continued to struggle to make the slogan true. Teaching French, "our beautiful and noble mother tongue," asserted Ferdinand Buisson, the leading light of Republican education in the 1880's, "is the chief work of the elementary school—a labor of patriotic character." The labor proved long and hard.²⁶

The printed forms school inspectors used in the 1870's in making their rounds included a section headed "Need to teach exclusively in French. Regulations to be reviewed in *pays* where Basque, Breton, Flemish, German patois, etc., are spoken." The section was put to use, and one may assume that the rules were reviewed with some frequency at least for some decades. Yet the results were patchy. "We have been teaching French regularly for 30 years in nearly every commune of the Empire," exclaimed a schoolteacher of Châteauneuf-du-Rhône, a village near Montélimar, in 1861. Yet what were the results? "Look at the difficulty with which young peasants manage to mumble a few words of French!" The situation in Vaucluse was no different: "They leave rural schools with scarcely a notion of French." And how could one ask more of them, especially when "only high society habitually speaks French"? In Dordogne reports of 1875 tell us that French was studied "without much result," and young people read without understanding. In Basses-Pyrénées the French language was known by only a few, and children could hardly cope with a language they never heard. When the two young heroes of Bruno's *Tour de France* (1877) stop at a rural hostelry south of Valence, they cannot communicate with the nice old landlady or any of the other patrons, who speak only patois—that is, the Franco-Provençal dialect of the Drôme. Little Julien asks his older brother, "Why is it all the people of this *pays* do not speak French?" "It is because they have not all been to school," André answers. "But in a number of years it will be different, and everywhere in France people will know how to speak the language of the fatherland." Symbolically, at this point the landlady's children come home from school. *They* can speak French: Julien and André are no longer isolated.²⁷

Here was the promise of great change to come. And Bruno's scene is confirmed from all quarters. By 1875 in the schools of Hérault French "tends to replace the patois idiom." By 1878 in the Cévennes "all the youths today know how to speak French." And by 1873 in Tarn-et-Garonne "even the country people want their children to know how to read, write, and do sums."²⁸ Unfortunately, what they wanted was not that easily accomplished. The fact

that classes were taught in a foreign language played its part in maintaining a high rate of illiteracy, making it that much harder to assimilate courses that were strange twice over. It helps explain complaints about how, for all the number of schools, there were so few graduates who could read and write. It also explains why priests continued to preach and teach the catechism in the only language most of their parishioners really understood.²⁹ Even where acquaintance with French was spreading, the children affected remained a minority for many years. Only in the 1880's at the earliest, more likely by the turn of the century, could one expect the efforts of the 1860's and 1870's to have produced a majority of adults familiar with the national tongue.

"In the villages, anyone who tried to speak French wouldn't escape the jeers of his neighbors," explained an educator in Loire in 1864. "He would be turned to ridicule."³⁰ This and other kinds of pressure have to be taken into consideration. Regard for the majority or simply for one's elders, the presence of non-French-speaking relatives in a family or a congregation, kept local speech in use. Jacques Duclos was born in 1896. His parents knew French (the date is right for that), but did not use it at home, perhaps because his grandmother did not understand it. The little boy only learned French at school.

So the transition was bound to be slow. Until a large enough segment of the population had been reached to shift the balance in favor of French, the pressures of environment, that is, of general practice, worked to protect and enforce the use of local speech, and schoolmasters felt that they were fighting lonely battles. Even when parents began to want their children schooled, the war was not won: the "teaching of French makes no progress, . . . everyone speaks Gascon" (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1873); "teaching is everywhere in French but everywhere outside school one speaks patois" (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1877); "pupils express themselves badly in writing. . . . It's difficult in a *pays* where patois is spoken constantly" (Puy-de-Dôme, 1877); "it is necessary to teach French to students" (Vaucluse, 1883). The best one could say of Corrèze in 1893 was that "everyone speaks and understands French well enough, but the usual language is still patois." Yet here, by the end of the century, the balance had swung to the side of French; witness the local priest who discontinued giving the sermon and the catechism in Limousin.³¹

But the effort that produced this result had to be made in the 1870's. Article 24 of the official regulations for public schools in the Basses-Pyrénées, published in 1874, "expressly" prohibited the use of patois in Béarnais schools where French had made progress and recommended "translation exercises and other methods" to make Basque children "acquire the usage of French."³² As late as 1876, a report emphasized that teachers in Basque schools who did not speak Basque had great difficulties, since none of the children could speak

* Vicomte Sérurier, "De l'instruction primaire . . . en Béarn," *Bulletin de la Société des Sciences . . . de Pau*, 1873-74, p. 230. Similarly, late in the century we hear the suggestion in Ariège that a good way to make sure children understood what they were taught was to "make them translate the French text into their local tongue" (Archives Nationales, F¹⁷10757, Ariège). Just as in secondary schools pupils translate Latin or Greek texts into French.

a word of French. By 1881, though both Basque and Béarnais children never spoke French except at school, the latter were at least beginning to "join in the general movement," whereas the Basques persisted in avoiding "the emancipating action of French genius." Many Pyreneans seem to have stubbornly resisted this "emancipation" from their local speech. From one end of the mountain chain to another, Basque, Béarnais, Catalan, Gascon, or other Oc dialects predominated, and teachers in the late 1880's found French the most difficult thing that they had to teach. In 1897 Paul Beulaygue, a schoolmaster in Ariège, pointed out that pedagogic works assumed children spoke French when the "truth is quite different. In the great majority of our rural schools, children come . . . knowing only a little French and hearing only patois spoken at home. This is and will long remain a general rule."³²

Perhaps Beulaygue generalized too much from his Ariège experience; but surely not too much where Brittany was concerned. Inspection reports of the 1870's bear witness to the slight effect schools had on regions where thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys at school could hardly understand the things they read or learned in French—"and the number of those who attend school as long as that is very limited," added one inspector. Rector Baudoin of Rennes, in his great report of 1880, spoke of the need to "Frenchify" the peninsula—especially the three departments of Lower Brittany—by the spread of schools, which alone could "truly unify the peninsula with the rest of France and complete the historical annexation always ready to dissolve." Ends set so high justified all means. Breton was hunted out of the schools. Children caught using it were systematically punished—put on dry bread and water or sent to clean out the school latrine. Rector Baudoin had cited as an example worth following the methods used to Germanize Alsace-Lorraine; in 1895 a Breton patriot from Saint-Brieuc compared the school policies of France unfavorably to those of the Germans.³³

A favorite punishment, inherited from the Jesuits (who had ironically used it to enforce Latin on their French-speaking charges), was the token of shame to be displayed by the child caught using his native tongue. The token varied. It could be a cardboard ticket (Dorres, Pyrénées-Orientales), a wooden plank (Err and Palau, Pyrénées-Orientales), a bar or a stick (Angoustrine, Pyrénées-Orientales), a peg (Cantal), a paper ribbon or metal object (Flanders), or a brick to be held out at arm's length (Corrèze). A child saddled with such a "symbol" kept it until he caught another child not speaking French, denounced him, and passed it on. The pupil left with the token at the end of the day received a punishment. In the country schools of Brittany the symbol of shame was a sabot. Morvan Lebesque, who attended those schools in the years after the First World War, remembered the punishment with bitterness, which suggests that Breton did not die lightly. Yet by 1895 our anonymous Breton patriot could decry "the systematic exclusion of the Breton language," which helped discredit it in the eyes of those speaking it, who saw it as a badge of ignorance and shame.³⁴

Our friend from Saint-Brieuc was both right and wrong. French was gaining ground. But not so much through persecution as through the peasants' growing appreciation of the usefulness of a less parochial language and of the skills learned in the schools. Universal military service both spread the use of French and made at least a smattering of it important to more people. The introduction and spread of kindergartens—*salles d'asile*—to relieve teachers of the care of three- and four-year-olds given into their charge familiarized very young children with authority figures who spoke French rather than the mother's language.³⁵

Most important of all, perhaps, more girls were being schooled, more girls and women learned French, more mothers could speak French to their children if they chose to do so. Women had willy-nilly perpetuated local speech. Girls had been left untaught at the village level much longer than in bourgs and towns, a fact that the available statistics hardly mirror at all. Only in 1867 were communes over 500 souls required to provide a girls school (they had been required to provide schools for boys in 1833), and it took some time before the results of this law were felt. In any case, girls schools were generally run by members of religious orders, and their standards remained quite low until the 1880's. Nor did the girls have the benefit of military service as a refresher course in French and "civilization." It follows that the school laws of the 1880's had the broadest impact on the literacy and schooling of girls, both of which had lagged far behind.³⁶ And that when the results came to be felt in the 1890's, the women's cultural role in the family would suddenly change and, with it, attitudes to schooling and to the use of French.

There was another great problem that had to be mastered before French could truly be made the national language: the teacher's own poor knowledge of the language that he had to teach. "Most teachers don't know French," complained a report of 1803 in Ardèche. Half a century later things had hardly improved. A special summer refresher course for teachers held in 1839 at Privas reported great success: when it ended those who began with 60 to 80 mistakes in a page of dictation made only 25 to 40 errors when the exercise was repeated.³⁷ Through the 1840's and 1850's many teachers still found it difficult to spell or to form a proper sentence.*

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

* Consider this note penned by the teacher at Saint-Brancher (Yonne): "Je vous observeré que je sui infirme de la main goche, qui motte totalement la fagulté de men servir. Je sui attaqué de leul goche par une galle qui le couvre, qui motte la fagulté de voier. Dotre cotté je sui apsent desprit enpartie par mon grand âge qui me donne une timidité insupportable, surtout lorce que japeroit des gendarmes." (Quoted in H. Forestier, "Perrette décoiffée," *Annales de Bourgogne*, 1955, p. 182.)

of the way they spoke. This was in 1836. By 1875, some 40 years later, the normal school had moved from Salers to Aurillac, but "the study of French [was] still the greatest problem because of the patois." Two years later the director took further stock, to find that "for most of our students French is almost a foreign language." In Gard the inspector reported from Nîmes in 1872: "The use of patois, the students' backgrounds, and the relatively brief time they spend at [normal] school make teaching in the French style pretty difficult." At the normal school in Mende (Lozère) in 1872 the student teachers were weak in French, "primarily because of insufficient knowledge on admission." A decade later every student in school still spoke the Lozère patois at home. French "comes down to purely grammatical exercises."³⁸

Neither students nor teachers read enough to be familiar with, let alone teach, French literature. In Basses-Pyrénées we hear that cultivated people knew French (1874). But what kind of French? A year later the normal school at Lescar reported having problems with the language because "even the cultivated who speak it don't speak it very well, and that's all the students have heard when they have heard it." In Dordogne in the same year, 1875, examiners for the teaching diploma were warned to make sure that every teacher "*knows at least how to write his language correctly.*" (To be certain the point got across, the warning was underlined.) In the Landes in 1876 student teachers and their mentors had mastered the language only shakily. "Many masters read no better than their students," and in explaining a reading both sides offered plain absurdities. At the Avignon normal school, also in 1876, "the master himself knows French badly." At Perpignan in 1878 student teachers read and understood French badly; they were used to Catalan and only great efforts could "familiarize them with French." Much the same thing in Puy-de-Dôme in 1877: "Detestable local accent," and patois hindering everyone. The reports of 1881 carry similar criticisms. The teachers don't do very well in French because they have been insufficiently prepared to handle it (Lot-et-Garonne). The teachers are insecure in their use of French; they lack solid training in using it on their own account (Basses-Pyrénées). Even many of the normal school teachers are local men who have never left the department; they retain the local accent and habits, and pass them on to their students (Aveyron).³⁹

In short, with few exceptions teachers were merely peasant lads who hoped to improve their condition or wanted to escape military service. Only in extraordinary circumstances would a man who expected to inherit property have wasted his time on something that until the 1880's brought little profit or prestige. The reports amassed in the government's survey of the state of primary instruction in 1864 show that student teachers came from the "working class" and from families of small farmers chiefly interested in getting an exemption from military service for their sons (Dordogne, Eure, Savoy); that they were recruited from the poor families of the countryside (Lot-et-Garonne); that they had the defective pronunciation and habits of the peas-

ants (Calvados). A motion of the governing board of the normal school of Montpellier encapsulates the problem in blunt terms: "Whereas the department's . . . wealth offers young men of intelligence and a little money careers much more profitable than that of elementary teaching and which they in fact prefer; whereas the students of the normal school are recruited only among the poor inhabitants of the mountain areas in the department's north and west . . ." Even as late as 1881 we hear that recruitment came easily in the poorer regions; but that in wealthy ones, where families had few children, only those who were useless in the fields were sent to normal schools. Many must have gone off with the greatest reluctance to what we could generously describe as miserable holes, far worse than barracks. "A sorry, mean, and shabby dump materially and morally" was how one report described the normal school at Parthenay (Deux-Sèvres) in 1882. "Intellectually nonexistent, depressing on all counts, it forms or deforms poor young peasants to become poor old teachers."⁴⁰

Also, we may add, acolytes of the priest. "Elementary education properly understood . . . is the fraternal union of presbytery and school," pronounced Rector Denain at an awards ceremony in 1862. Just how fraternal, the readers of Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet* could learn. "The teacher is no more than a mnemotechnical auxiliary of the priest," complained Félix Pécaut, less melliflously than the rector. Yet by then things had improved since the day when the teacher's first duty was to assist the priest, sing all the offices, sweep the church once a week, dust and polish the ornaments, see that the bells were rung and the clock was wound, and finally keep school and instruct the children according to the true faith. But inspectors in the day of Marshal MacMahon still checked to make sure that "teachers show themselves useful auxiliaries of the priests." The peasants greatly appreciated teachers when it came to practical matters such as surveying land and measuring properties, remembered a beginner of those days; but their subjection to the priests was horrid. One need not wonder at the consistent devotion of teachers after the 16th of May to a Republic that emancipated them from their humiliating bondage.⁴¹ One need not wonder either that it should take something of a revolution—in training and consequently in outlook—for the village school-teacher to blossom into the dynamic missionary illustrated in our books.*

But before teachers could take on the role of missionaries, they had to learn to live the part. Too many teachers "dress like peasants, think like peasants. They are peasants who have a slightly different trade." They mixed with the villagers, went off to fairs with them; there was no distance here and certainly no respect. "One has a lot of trouble to make them give up such habits." The 1880's saw a campaign to turn these browbeaten peasants into models of the

* André Burguière describes a revealing scene that took place at Plozévet (Finistère) in 1910. The local priest attempted to speak at a political meeting, was interrupted, and called on the teacher to clear the room. "Monsieur le curé," answered the teacher, "I am neither your servant nor a policeman!" (*Bretons de Plozévet*, p. 285.) Not long before he had been a bit of both.

new enlightened style. Above all, they were not to go around "dressed in smocks, caps, and sabots, keeping their heads covered in class like their students . . . as uncivilized as the populations in whose midst they live."⁴² In their persons and in their actions teachers were expected to maintain standards that would reflect their elevated functions and their representative role.

Though pay improved somewhat, such standards were difficult to maintain. Beginning teachers earned 700 francs a year in 1881, 800 ten years later, and 900 between 1897 and 1905, when the starting salary was raised to 1,100 francs. The highest pay doubled in the same period. By the turn of the century, after withholdings for pensions and other things, country teachers at last earned as much as a miner and more than a Paris laundress or a textile worker.⁴³ But they had to "dress suitably," and to keep up at least outwardly a style of living that went with their position as *fonctionnaires d'Etat* (1889) and aspiring notables. That they were willing and able to make the attempt was due to the training inculcated by the reformed normal schools.

A monograph on the normal school of Puy-de-Dôme shows how impoverished the curriculum of such schools was until late in the century. Only a handful of subjects was offered: religious instruction; grammar, a cat's cradle of formal rules far removed from everyday speech; writing, that is, calligraphy; drawing; music, a course in which the future teacher learned plainchant for the masses he would have to help serve, then got some instrumental training because most teachers sang badly; horticulture, a subject offered primarily in aid of the teacher's own garden; and arithmetic and land-surveying, the only practical skills most teachers truly mastered, recognizing, as did villagers and schoolchildren, that they related to practical needs. Only the 1880's saw innovations—an enrichment of the teaching of French, the introduction of history and geography, an attempt to relate dusty formalities to living experience. The whole character of the normal school changed. Students formed clubs, went in for hiking and mountain climbing. "The school is no longer the sinister establishment that it used to be; . . . it lives, it acts."⁴⁴ Doubtless we would think it stiff and stilted. But the tone had clearly changed, and the new teachers trained at Clermont or Mende—as in Péguy's Orléans—would indeed be the conquering army that Charles Péguy has sung.

They already enjoyed a basis for prestige in their literacy and command of French, a knowledge that they shared with very few others.* This put them if not quite in the class of notables—not while their subjection to the priest

* And for concrete advantages and rewards that went with this, which the mother of an apprentice teacher voices in Simin Palay's play, "La Reyente mancade" (quoted in Gaston Guillaume, *Le Théâtre Gascon*, Paris, 1941, pp. 124-28). "Ue reyente!," says the mother:

"Mes, sàbes pas quin ey beroy, per u paysa,
D'abé ue reyente à case! Ue reyente! . . .
Ue hilhe qui sap de tout, e qui n'a pas
Besougn, ta bibe, de trima coume nous autes,
Pous camps, per la parquie, au darrè dou bestia,
Ha lou hariat dous porcs, afena, hemeya."

endured—at least in a position of influence. The teachers were recorders and scribes, very often secretaries to the mayor and municipal council. In many places the village councilmen conducted their business in the local tongue, leaving it to the teacher to keep the minutes in French. As *secrétaire de mairie*, the teacher prepared the documents required of the mayor, and often wrote all his letters as well. Many mayors, many municipal councilmen, were illiterate or as good as. Throughout the July Monarchy and the Second Empire the odd remark surfaces in some documents to say that most mayors “hardly know how to write,” that lacking schooling they did not understand the forms they were to sign, that municipal councils and mayors were “practically illiterate.” In a department where a third of the mayors were completely ignorant of the French language and five-sixths of the fonctionnaires could not write it, reasoned the prefect of Bas-Rhin in 1853, the teacher was indispensable. Such conditions still prevailed much later in isolated areas, so that in the Pyrenees in 1896 “most of our mayors can hardly read or write” (quite natural for men who had grown up unschooled around mid-century). They could not read, did not know what the official regulations were, and left everything to their secretaries.⁴⁵

As early as 1865 the teachers' growing influence rated an official warning. Teachers were running the affairs of negligent, often illiterate mayors. They had become legal advisers to the villagers; lent farmers money, wrote their letters, and surveyed their fields; had “become occult powers.” Their prestige was great, their status in the community almost “sacerdotal.” Most alarming of all, warned the sub-prefect of Joigny (Yonne), teachers were even beginning to go into politics.⁴⁶ Hardly the browbeaten figure that Flaubert etched.

Such forebodings became serious fact when village teachers, trained to greater competence and new self-respect, became the licensed representatives of the Republic. By the 1890's they not only ran the administration in almost all the communes, but also in some instances worked as correspondents for the local newspapers, earning a useful increment in salary and prestige. A theme that recurs frequently in political accounts is the observation that the local schoolteacher “had turned the commune round politically by his influence on the young.” The teacher was the municipal lamppost, the *bec de gaz municipal*, a half-friendly but suggestive nickname.⁴⁷ The political influence attributed to him was probably a reflection of shifts that we have seen to have had more complex roots. But even if exaggerated, such reports attest to the growing role of the man whose light, however dim, glowed strongly on his parish.

This could not have happened as long as schools remained irrelevant to a great many people; and this they did into the last quarter of the century. Most peasants wanted their children to work and contribute to the family

budget. If they sent them to school at all, it was usually for the sole purpose of getting them past their first communion, a crucial rite of passage. Once that was accomplished, the child was withdrawn. Parents send their children to school for a few winter months before their communion, grumbled a Breton teacher in 1861, and that short time was almost exclusively devoted to learning the catechism, an awkward business since the children could not read. For this reason communions were made as early as possible, between the ages of ten and twelve. As a result school enrollments of children past that age diminished sharply, and children soon forgot the little they had learned, mostly by rote, lapsing once again into a “state of complete ignorance.”⁴⁸

In any case the country school provided little stimulus to learning for its pupils, not even the challenge of exposure to more motivated students. Parents in comfortable circumstances who were willing and able to keep their children in school for a time preferred to send them to the bourg or to a boarding school. More important, the offspring of wealthier parents, aware that schooling would play a part in their later activities, assimilated more and retained more of what they learned. The parents took more interest in their work.⁴⁹ Thus the children of the poor had access to poorer schools, less time to attend them, and far less reason to make the most of such opportunity than their better-off mates.*

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

* But little attention has been paid to the institution of *caméristat*, in which a teacher or a poor family of the bourg took in boarders from outlying farms and hamlets. Around 1880 Pierre Besson's mother placed him *chez la Tinoune*, who lodged him (his mother supplied the bed), provided soup, and cooked whatever he brought to eat. For these accommodations Tinoune received 1.5 francs a month, plus a pound of butter and a cartful of firewood a year. There were 20 *caméristes* of both sexes at Tinoune's. (*Un Pâtre du Cantal*, p. 6.) See also Archives Départementales, Cantal 931 (299), 1903; and IT 533, 1895.

considering that they might have had to cover three to five miles on foot each way or use a boat to get there. In the Lannion district of Côtes-du-Nord where, in 1877, one child in three was not enrolled in a school though nearly every parish had one, the figures show that distance from isolated farms and hamlets made a significant difference, with the loneliest cantons averaging only half the enrollment of the others.⁵⁰

Nor was the problem by any means a rare one. In many mountain communes less than a tenth of the population lived in the parish center. In Vendée, too, where in 1881 one-third of the twenty-year-olds could not spell out a word, the population was widely scattered. Only 224 of the inhabitants of a commune like Saint-Hilaire-de-Talmont lived in the bourg; the remaining 2,515 were spread over 83 km. La Garnache, with a population of 3,617, had three large villages (as well as many farms and hamlets), each 8 km from the bourg, where fewer than 500 people lived. Reports from Brittany ring with desperation. No one could understand who had not been there to see the conditions and terrain, an official reported in 1880. He selected as an example the commune of Lanouée, which was spread over 22,500 acres divided by a great forest. The bourg had 250 inhabitants; more than 3,200 other people were dotted about in solitary farms.⁵¹ Here, as elsewhere, schools set up in the bourgs served a tiny minority, leaving the vast dispersed majority illiterate and untouched. The roads were impossible from November to March, which was just the season when most children would be free to attend them.

This problem would cause much ado into the 1880's, when better local roads began to help the situation, and the school-building program provided even hamlets with schools of their own. Yet the pressures exerted by landowners and difficult communications were minor obstacles compared to those raised by indifference and poverty. Poor, isolated departments maintained expectably low attendance rates. In 1867, when the national average was 69.1 percent, Corrèze had a rate of 40.7 percent, and Haute-Vienne's was 39.2 percent. In 1876, against a national average of 73.6 percent, the Limousin departments sent 60.3 percent and 55 percent of the school-age children to their schools. In Perche attendance in 1888 was lower than in the rest of Eure-et-Loir. The Breton departments made a still worse showing. A general report of 1880 shows that more than a third of the children in the 6-13 age group did not go to school:

Department	No. attending	No. not attending
Morbihan	40,842	31,434
Ille-et-Vilaine	59,309	30,810
Loire Inférieure	58,016	27,044
Côtes-du-Nord	60,421	30,000
Finistère	44,084	49,234

The proportion attending must have been far lower than two-thirds in rural areas—even if one provides for some undue optimism in the figures.⁵² “The

parish school we have suffices for the poor,” reported a Cantal mayor in 1839, because, as he explained, their children left it at the earliest possible age to work. Once they had gone to work, learning was out of the question: they were at their tasks “by candlelight in winter, and in summer from one twilight to the other.” There was no time or energy for anything else. In the Nive valley of the Pyrenees an officer found little trace of school enrollment in 1844. “The land is so poor that its people cannot make any sacrifice. The children guard the cattle in the mountains, while the parents work without a stop.” These statements might as easily have been made a quarter century later, when many a country child still attended school—as they say in Franche-Comté—behind a cow’s arse.⁵³

Where there were mills, as in Ardèche or Franche-Comté, for instance, children could find work at the tender age of eight or nine. By 1867 only a “very few” children under eight were still working 15-17 hours a day in the mills of Privas or Annonay, but there were plenty of children aged eight to twelve who continued to do so.* The ones who interest us, however, mostly stayed close to home where they were needed to guard birds and cattle. Age was no object, provided they could trot. In Rouergue and Lauragais all children were clearly put to work at the age of six or seven throughout the 1860's, and boys as soon as they were strong enough were put to plowing or leading the plowing team—heavy work that stunted their growth, as draft boards commented. In 1875 we have a police report from Seissane (Gers) concerning a seven-year-old girl who set a rick on fire while guarding turkeys. As late as 1899 at Billy (Meuse) children were still being put to work at around the age of eight. Unfortunately, said the teacher, those who should have enforced attendance were the very persons interested in hiring them. Another teacher, at Sainte-Alauzie (Lot), put the blame more squarely on parents, complaining about how easily they sacrificed their children’s schooling to the gains they could make from their work. The simple fact is that the sacrifice was easy because it was scarcely a sacrifice. The gains were important because the children’s contribution, however skimpy, was crucial to the budget of households on the brink of misery. Small wonder that the Socialist *Egalité* should oppose compulsory schooling, which threatened to “force the poor man’s child into school” and to “wrest from the working family a resource it cannot spare.” Sauce for the rural as for the urban poor. More so, indeed, for country parents who depended on their children’s services to meet the family’s immediate needs.⁵⁴

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

* Elie Reynier, *Histoire de Privas*, 3: 172-73. The situation was no different in Meurthe-et-Moselle in 1888. At Croismare, where a local glassworks hired ten-year-olds, that was the age when boys left school. At Baslieux the possibility of working meant that some children never set foot in school, and others left it as soon as they had made their first communion. At Moutiers in the many families where both parents worked in the local textile mills, the children stayed home “to take care of the house.” (Serge Bonnet et al., “La Vie ouvrière vue par les instituteurs . . .,” *Mouvement social*, 1965, pp. 88-89.)

all, is not their enrollment as such, but their attendance.* This varied with the region and its ways, but tended generally to be restricted to the winter months. As actual or potential workers, children were free for school only when there was no work. In the Limousin they did not say that a child had been in school for three years but that he had three winters in school. He entered it in December, after the chestnuts had been gathered and the migrants he had helped replace had returned home, and left in late March or early April when the migrants set off again. Similarly, in Côte-d'Or and the Jura, which had more elementary schools for their outlying villages and hamlets than most departments, children usually had to work much of the year, and attended class for only a few months in the winter, forgetting in the interval whatever they had learned. The only ones who benefited from schooling were the sons of those with sufficient means to do without their help. In the Doubs, on the other hand, winter is hard and long. This kept the children in school longer, and they picked up more. Yet even children who did not help their parents left school in March or April. In Lozère children attended school four months a year at most. After Easter, only infants were left; schools were either closed down or turned into day nurseries (1877). In Manche parents were happy to leave children in school during the years when they would only get underfoot around the house, but wanted to withdraw them as soon as they were able-bodied, precisely when they would be at their most teachable (1892). Alain Corbin concludes that child labor disappeared only slowly, between the 1870's and the late 1880's. By the end of the century, at any rate, inspectors could note a greater regularity in school attendance in the winter. Continued complaints of irregularity now referred to the rest of the year. Grumbles were bitter, but standards had been raised.⁵⁵

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

* As usual, one must be wary of figures provided by the Ministry of Public Instruction. Checking these against the *Annuaire du Bureau des Longitudes*, Sanford Kanter concludes that in 1864, of 4,277,724 children between seven and thirteen years of age, 1,666,440 did not attend school ("Defeat 1871," p. 122).

fields, and sheep were tended in separate flocks based on sex and age, there were greater demands on the services of children than in neighboring Nièvre, where such practices were not followed. As a result, the absentee rate among school-age children in Nièvre was about 22 percent, compared with a rate of 30 percent in Cher and 45 percent in Indre.⁵⁶

In Vendée, where agriculture had made great strides, children were in great demand to pull out weeds, which the humid climate treated with special favor. In Loire job opportunities had a marked effect on the school attendance of the two sexes. Thousands of boys went into the factories and mills of Loire as soon as they had made their first communion, but girls had no hope of finding work before they were fourteen or so. As a result, in 1878 only six in ten school-age boys attended school, against almost eight in nine girls. Within a single department like Saône-et-Loire there were significant differences between the Mâcon region, whose vineyards called for no child labor and whose dense population had put schools within relatively easy reach; the Autun region, mountainous, harsh, less densely populated, where peasants could not afford to hire workers and used their own children instead; Charolles, a thinly populated pastureland, where children grazed the fat, white cattle in summer and found the roads to school too long in lonely winter; and the low-lying plains of Louhans, easily inundated, full of meres and ponds, where the high rate of fever cut further into school attendance.⁵⁷

Such regional differences may explain how Ardouin-Dumazet, crossing the Millevaches plateau at the turn of the century, could still find the cattle being tended from April to November by boys of ten to twelve, "fairly wild in manner," despite the school laws that had been in operation for nearly 20 years. Was the need of the parents still greater than the promises that the schools held out? Had their perceptions not yet awakened to new possibilities? Or were they merely waiting for pastures to be enclosed by wire or wood, so they could hand the small shepherds over to the mercies of the schools?⁵⁸

After the 1880's the striking regional inequalities mirrored in school attendance tended to recede. Laws played their part in this. So did improvements that facilitated access to school or made the economic and physical effort of attendance seem worthwhile. In Sarthe, where inequalities between the schools of the eastern and western parts of the department had been very great, Paul Bois has found that "after 1885-1890 these regional inequalities in popular instruction practically disappear."⁵⁹ Another step in cultural homogenization was being taken.

It had been helped along by the law of 1881, which made schooling free. Free schooling for the poor, or some of the poor, had long been a fact. Church schools, at least in theory, had always opened their doors to those who could not pay. The First Republic had set a quota by which a quarter of the children could be admitted free; the Guizot law, like the ordinance of 1816, had re-

affirmed that practice. By 1837 one pupil in three attended public elementary schools free of charge. Victor Duruy, the great reformer, supported the principle of free schooling for all. His education law of 1867 gave municipal councils the option of eliminating all tuition fees by the use of local taxes. Results on the national plane were striking: the proportion of free students in the school population, 38 percent in 1861, rose to 54 percent in 1872, and to 57 percent in 1877. Seen from this angle, the law of 1881 was the logical conclusion of a long process.⁶⁰

However, the process of free schooling did not move forward as smoothly as these developments may suggest. National figures once again provide only a general view. In Eure-et-Loir the proportion of free students in 1862 was 26 percent, in 1878, 36 percent, well below the national average of 38 percent and 57 percent at those dates. In Gers the percentage of free students almost doubled in ten years, rising from 26 percent in 1861 to 46 percent in 1872, but still remained below the national average. On the other hand, by 1872 68 percent of the schoolchildren in Hérault and a full 86 percent in Lozère were free students.⁶¹ Clearly the course municipal councils chose to follow varied greatly. As we have seen, the people of some means generally chose to send their sons to school in town. At Oulins (Eure-et-Loir) "indifference or misery of most," reported the teacher in 1873, who was left with such students because it was "easy for the better-off to send their children to good neighboring schools"—presumably at Anet, or even Dreux or Mantes not too far away. Similarly, in Finistère, those who could afford to do so preferred to send their children to Quimper, Morlaix, Quimperlé, or Pont-Croix. It is not so surprising, after all, to find notables reluctant to subsidize schools that their children did not need, and that might produce French-speaking competitors for their offspring among the lower orders.⁶²

The authority to exempt students from school fees rested with municipal officials, and this gave rise to abuse. In Cantal, where school inspection reports reflect the rising numbers of free pupils, a mayor in 1852 certified three-quarters of the school's students as needy. Many local mayors played favorites in deciding who was to be certified as indigent. In 1853 one man was found to have listed his own grandson and the son of his deputy, boys who came from the two richest families in the commune. In 1859, and again in 1862, official circulars invited prefects to hold local magistrates to the letter of the law.⁶³

Some schools themselves—especially those that were run by nuns—violated at least the spirit of the law by making a distinction between paying pupils and indigents admitted as free students; and not only in their treatment but in the quality of their education. In Loire-Inférieure many church schools in 1875 had separate classes for poor children and neglected them. There and elsewhere the indigent schoolchild was made to feel his inferiority. There were quite a few such children in the school at Dammartin-en-Serve in 1875, but it

was painful to be admitted on that basis. "It was then practically a disgrace," remembered a teacher who had had to endure the pain himself. The poor did not want to send their children to school, explained the parish doctor of Pouldergat (Finistère) in 1852, because they were badly clothed. In any case they had to find bread and firewood. This last suggests that gratuity was only a partial answer when need was very great.⁶⁴

We hear of a large Périgord village, with a quota of 20 scholarships, whose school in mid-century was attended by only three paying and three non-paying pupils. It was not enough to admit the needy free. In 1884 Georges Clemenceau met a peasant in a field with his son, and asked him why the child was not in school. "Will you give him a private income?" the peasant answered. The child who went to school had to bring a log for the fire, or a few sous instead. He had to provide his own ink, pen, and paper for writing—and though a slate could be used, the results were less than satisfactory. "A great number of children admitted to schools free get no benefit because they cannot acquire the indispensable books and class materials," read a report of 1875. "The well-off send their children away to school," reported a teacher from Tarn in the 1860's. "The poor don't send them to the elementary schools, because it costs 18–24 francs a year plus books, paper, etc., which can raise the cost to 30 francs." So, even if tuition was free, the child attending school, a useless mouth around the household board, was an expense. The "inexplicable inertia," the "indifference" that perplexed and annoyed apostles of the school, was in good part due to poverty—a lack of cash so great that, as a pastor in the Pyrenees explained in 1861, "even if the school fees were only 50 cents, they would still be a painful subject of anxiety and concern for the farmer." We must conclude, with a correspondent from Gironde, that "it is not enough for schooling to be free; the child's work must bring in some revenue to cover his keep or simply because the family needs it."⁶⁵

But the same report held out the hope of change: "The remedy to this state of things lies in public opinion. Even the most ignorant portion of the masses begins to understand that instruction is useful to all [and not just to their betters]. Country people know now that reading, writing, and arithmetic are means of rising in the world."⁶⁶ Let us say at least that they began to know it. Free education had been gratuitous, that is, seemingly useless, to the children of the poor because it did not serve any needs that their parents could discern.* The remitting of fees did not prove a critical factor in rural school attendance. There is no good evidence that the poor children who were admitted as free students attended school more diligently as a result; indeed, often they attended less regularly than the paying students. The crux of school attendance lay in the social practice: when going to school was the thing to

* In the patois of Picardy *biblotoux* (bookish) describes a person engaged in a useless task (A. Morel, "Le Pouvoir au village: en Picardie," *Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations*, 1975, p. 166).

do, all would do it. It also lay in the dawning comprehension, related to changing circumstances, that instruction was useful. With this realization, even lack of means would not deter many from sending their children to school.⁶⁷

We have arrived at the fundamental cause of that "indifference" to book learning that Philippe Ariès, like Destutt de Tracy before him, finds indigenous to the countryside. The urban poor had occasion to use the skills picked up in parish schools and to observe the opportunities of improving their position with that learning. In the countryside, such skills brought little profit, their absence small disadvantage, and there were fewer chinks in the armor of misery through which curiosity or enterprise could find escape. The *Statistique* of Vendée, regretting in 1844 that the department's inhabitants "showed little inclination for the study of sciences and polite literature, or for the culture of fine arts," sounds ridiculous until it shows that it understands why this was not surprising: "Far from the sources of inspiration and taste, they were rarely in a position to know their value or [to find] any object of emulation."⁶⁸ Objects of emulation were scarce in the countryside, sources of inspiration even scarcer.

School was perceived as useless and what it taught had little relation to local life and needs. The teacher taught the metric system when *toises*, *cordes*, and *pouces* were in current use; counted money in francs when prices were in *louis* and *écus*. French was of little use when everyone spoke patois and official announcements were made by a public crier in the local speech. Anyway, the school did not teach *French*, but arid rules of grammar. In short, school had no practical application. It was a luxury at best, a form of more or less conspicuous consumption. Corbin has pointed out the significant role that all this played in the lack of interest displayed by parents and children.⁶⁹ When Martin Nadaud's father wanted to send him to school, neighbors and relatives argued that for a country child school learning was useless, enabling him merely to make a few letters and carry books at mass. Teachers and school inspectors failed to persuade the peasants that reading and writing had any value in themselves. And parents found their reticence justified by the slight difference in the situation of those who attended school and of those who did not. When Ferdinand Buisson linked poor school attendance to a lack of concern for the moral benefits that children could derive, he was in the great (abstract) tradition. Yet show people a practical benefit that they could understand, and the problem would shrink to manageable proportions. Rural inhabitants, explained a village mayor, were "only very vaguely conscious of an intellectual or moral culture that has no immediate or tangible relation to pecuniary profit." That seemed to make sense. Before a man could want his child to go to school, he would have to abandon "the gross material interests" that were all he understood. Not so. It was when the school mobilized those interests that men began to care.⁷⁰

In darkest Finistère, while the other local councils squirmed uncomfortably before the requirements imposed by Guizot's education law of 1833, the council of Audierne alone voiced a positive response. Since most children in the little port "belong to families of sailors and soldiers, and are destined, like their fathers, to defend the fatherland [on] sea or land, where they can expect no advancement if they lack basic instruction and cannot read, write, or reckon sums," the council decided that "a school appears necessary."⁷¹ Not all municipalities enjoyed such enlightened majorities and many, we have seen, placed the personal interests of men who could fend for their children's schooling above the training of potential competitors or social rebels. But the connection between practical interest and school, when it became apparent, was a potent force.*

A number of individuals had overcome the disadvantage of illiteracy by self-education. Others, faced with the need to keep accounts, devised private systems of notation. By their nature, such records were not likely to survive; but we do know about a Loire mariner who, around 1830, kept track of his expenses by drawing the objects of his outlays or figures of little men accompanied by ciphers to show francs and sous. Clearly, mariners were involved in trade and in commercial transactions long before the peasants of the isolated countryside had reason to engage in such activities. Yet by the 1870's even sharecroppers in Brittany were being pressed to keep accounts. Manuscripts of the accounts maintained by two illiterate sharecroppers in Finistère have survived to show the new need for records. Each man separately seems to have devised a system of figurative notation to identify purchases (rope, horseshoe, horse collar), hired help (a man with a spade to dig up a field or an expensive sawyer), the number of horses or cattle sold, and coins (*sol*, *réal*, *écu*). These rough records, with their crude, ingenious shapes reminiscent of children's drawings, were preserved by offspring who went to school. The very treasuring of them as artifacts suggests the reasoning that led to that decision.⁷²

My point is that it needed personal experience to persuade people of the usefulness of education. Certain migrants had learned this, and we have seen how they and their children recognized at an early date "the value of instruction and the profit one can derive from it in the great centers." Through the second half of the century, school attendance in migrant Creuse was far better than in neighboring Haute-Vienne and Corrèze—higher by 7 percent and 12 percent, respectively, in 1876.⁷³ Another spur to schooling came from the military law of 1872, not only because it abolished the purchase of substitutes, but also because it provided advantages for men who could read and write and threatened illiterate conscripts with an additional year of service. The

* According to Armand Audiganne, of all the workers at Saint-Etienne the lace-and-braid workers were the best educated for the simple reason that they had to keep tabs on their daily output and transactions. As a result, they well appreciated the usefulness of writing and did not forget the skill as soon as they left school (*Les Populations ouvrières*, 2: 103).

school authorities made haste to refer to these facets of the law to persuade parents to send their children to school. In Isère a poster was even displayed in every schoolroom, and teachers were required to read and discuss it at least every two weeks, presumably arguing that the fulfillment of one patriotic duty could help lighten the burden of another.⁷⁴

But another army was growing, as important as the regular one—the body of public and private employees, access to which was opened by the school certificate, the certificate of elementary studies. The little school of Roger Thabault's Mazières put its graduates into the numerous jobs that opened up there (and elsewhere), with economic, social, and political development: the town's 15 civil servants in 1876 had become 25 in 1886, and there were seven railway employees as well. Ambition was encouraged by propaganda. "A good primary education allows one to secure a post in several state services," the student was told in a first-year civics text published in 1880. "The government servant has a secure position. That is why government posts are in great demand." They were. Given the chance, many peasants wanted to stop being peasants, to change to something else. In 1899, 40 former natives of the little village of Soye in Doubs, population 444, worked as functionaries elsewhere, and 14 inhabitants worked as domestics in town. The prefecture of Seine received 50,000 applications for 400 openings in its departments.⁷⁵

Other times had seen the growth of a state bureaucracy that triggered the expansion of education to fill the available posts. Such educational booms, however, had been restricted to relatively high social groups. Under the Third Republic the means for those too humble to have gotten their share of the educational pie were made available just when the ends (i.e., the jobs) emerged to reinforce and justify their use. Around the 1880's even rural laborers began to lend attention to the schools. As the number of jobs expanded and getting one became more than an idle dream, the education that would help secure such prestigious jobs became important. Even more so the certificate to which it led. Scattered encomiums to its practical uses appear in the late 1870's. By 1880 Pécaut could report that the school certificate "is slowly being accepted. Families realize that this small diploma can be of use for several kinds of jobs; hence they consent ever more frequently to leave their children in school for a longer time." Schools were still badly housed, still far from home, but children now were made to attend even when they lived six km away, because "the idea of the utility and the necessity of elementary schooling" had caught on so well.⁷⁶

The recognition of new possibilities and of the school as a key to their exploitation was in full evidence by the 1890's. By 1894 practically every child in a village of Lower Provence that had been almost totally illiterate a generation earlier was attending school, even those who lived one and a half hours' walk away. In the southwest the image of little boys doing their homework of an evening by the light of the dying embers became a reality. Municipal

councils voted rewards for teachers whose pupils won the coveted certificate. Families became avid for it; they celebrated when a child got one; too many failures could become issues raised at council meetings.⁷⁷ In a natural evolution, the school certificate, significant because of the material advantages it could help secure, became an end in itself.* "It is an honor to get it," wrote a little girl (and wrote it very badly: "être adémise s'est un honneur d'avoir son certificat d'étude"), about what popular parlance dubbed the "Santificat."⁷⁸ The passing of the examination became an eminent occasion, competing in importance with the first communion. Men who had taken it in the 1880's remembered the questions that they had to answer, had every detail of their examination day graven in their memories. To take one example among many, here is Charles Moureu, member of the Academy of Medicine and professor at the Collège de France, speaking at the graduation ceremony of his native village in the Pyrenees in 1911: "I could if I wanted to recite by heart the exact details of the problem that turned on the things Peter and Nicholas bought and sold."⁷⁹

There were of course more immediate gains: there would be no more need to go to the nearest town to consult a solicitor or a notary when one wanted to draw up a simple bill or promissory note, make out a receipt, settle an account in arrears, or merely write a letter, explained a thirteen-year-old schoolboy in the Aube. The literate man did not have to reveal his friendships, his secrets, his affairs to some third party. *And* he could better himself—in local politics, or teaching, or the army (whence he returned with a pension and decorations, achieving a position "that places him above the vulgar crowd").⁸⁰

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

* Honor and profit lay in scholarly accomplishment. This may be why horticulture courses seldom caught on: "Occupation manuelle nuisible au travail intellectuel," it made no contribution to passing exams. See C. Desprez, *Congrès pédagogique de 1880: Doléances et vœux des instituteurs* (Chartres, 1880), p. 48. Louis Chevalier remarks that the teaching of agriculture was also generally considered reactionary. Around 1900 and after, he claims, such courses were left largely to church schools; the secular schools made vague gestures toward competing with them but abandoned the field when the church schools closed (*Les Paysans*, p. 209). I am not certain this was so, but for all the attempts to teach "useful" topics, the school in fact concentrated on and glorified intellectual attainments, which were increasingly perceived as even more useful.

to the effects of schooling. Schools set out "to modify the habits of bodily hygiene and cleanliness, social and domestic manners, and the way of looking at things and judging them." Savage children were taught new manners: how to greet strangers, how to knock on doors, how to behave in decent company. "A bourgeois farts when his belly is empty; a Breton [peasant] burps when his belly is full," declared a proverb that seems to confuse urban and rural differences with race. Children were taught that propriety prohibited either manifestation; and also that cleanliness was an essential part of wisdom.⁸¹

The schools played a crucial role in forcing children to keep clean(er), but the teachers had to struggle mightily to that end.* Hair, nails, and ears were subject to regular review; the waterpump was pressed into frequent use; the state of clothes, like the standards of the child's behavior out of school, received critical attention and constant reproof. Study, ran the text of one exercise, "fills the mind, corrects false prejudices, helps us order speech and writing, teaches love of work and improves capacity for business and for jobs." What does study tell us? Among other things: cold baths are dangerous; the observance of festivals is a religious duty; labor abuses the body less than pleasure; justice protects the good and punishes the wicked; tobacco is a poison, a useless expenditure that destroys one's memory, and those who use it to excess live in a sort of dream, their eye dead, incapable of paying attention to anything, indifferent and selfish. And then there was the lesson of Jules and Julie, who are rich and therefore do not work at school; and who, having learned nothing, are embarrassed later by their ignorance, blushing with shame when people laugh at them for the mistakes they make when speaking. Only the schools could "change primitive conditions," declared Ardouin-Dumazet.⁸² The primitive conditions themselves were changing, and schools helped their charges to adapt to this.

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

* Mightily, and long! At Plözévet (Finistère), school inspectors never cease criticizing the grubbiness, long hair, and bad manners of students. In 1893 "les élèves sont malpropres. . . Une grande partie viennent en classe pieds nus et sans chaussures, les vêtements en désordre, la figure et les mains noires de crasse." In 1897 "l'éducation des élèves est complètement à faire quand ils arrivent en classe" (my italics). André Burguière, *Bretons de Plözévet*, p. 294.

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

The great problem of modern societies, or so François Guizot considered in his *Memoirs*, is the governance of minds. Guizot had done his best to make elementary education "a guarantee of order and social stability." In its first article, his law of 1833 defined the instruction it was intended to provide: the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic would furnish essential skills; the teaching of French and of the metric system would implant or increase the sense of unity under French nationhood; moral and religious instruction would serve social and spiritual needs.⁸³

What these social needs were is laid out clearly in various writings, both official and unofficial. "Instructing the people," explained an anonymous writer of 1861, "is to condition them to understand and appreciate the beneficence of the government." Eight years later, the inspecteur d'Académie of Montauban concurred: "The people must learn from education all the reasons they have for appreciating their condition." A first-year civics textbook set out to perform this task:

Society (summary): (1) French society is ruled by just laws, because it is a democratic society. (2) All the French are equal in their rights; but there are inequalities between us that stem from nature or from wealth. (3) These inequalities cannot disappear. (4) Man works to become rich; if he lacked this hope, work would cease and France would decline. It is therefore necessary that each of us should be able to keep the money he has earned.⁸⁴

The ideals of the educators were to be fulfilled at least in part.

Schools taught potent lessons of morality focused on duty, effort, and seriousness of purpose. Hard work and rectitude were bound to bring improvements, internal and external. You must be just and honest. The Roman Camillus refuses to take a town by treachery: the people of the town become the allies of Rome. Never forget that no end, however useful, can justify injustice. Progress is good, routine is bad. "Routine consists in refusing to make any improvement and in following the methods of our ancestors." Progress was new schools, fire companies, municipal bands. It was Monsieur Tardieu, mayor of Brive, who built a bridge that permitted people to sell their goods in the market on the other side of the river, and thus increased the prosperity of his town: "The Brivois perceived the possibilities of gain, and the more they worked, the richer they got." A Vosges village teacher's report of 1889 echoes what he taught and what his students learned: "The farmers are better educated and understand that they have to break with their routine, if they want to earn more. In 1870 they only did what they had seen their forebears doing."⁸⁵

"Believe in progress with a sincere and ardent faith. . . Never forget that

the history of all civilization is a perpetual glorification of work." Perhaps it is true that men are seldom so harmlessly employed as when their energies are bent on making money. "Work draws men together and prepares the reign of peace." "Work is the instrument of all progress." Francinet and his little friends are told the story of the sago tree, which feeds a man during a whole year in return for only a few hours' work, but in so doing, destroys his moral values. Conclusion: "Work is moralizing and instructive par excellence. But man only resigns himself to constant and regular labor under the pressure of need." One rises in the world by work, order, thrift: "Not all at once, of course. My father had nothing, I have something; my children, if they do like me, will double, triple what I leave behind. My grandchildren will be gentlemen. This is how one rises in the world." The speaker is the shoemaker Grégoire, hero of several little moral tales in a collection published by Ernest Lavissee in 1887. They warn against idleness, indolence, and thriftlessness, and make their point with lots of solid detail ("his charming wife brought a dowry of 5,000 francs; he had 3,000 . . ."), with useful explanations of things like bankruptcy law and fraud, and not least, with a profoundly realistic sense of values.⁸⁶

Such is the tale of Pierre, who, called to serve in the 1870 war, escapes death when a German bullet is deflected by two five-franc pieces sent him by his father and his brother as tokens of their affection. Decorated with the military medal, which the proud father frames and garnishes with flowers, Pierre "will go every year to draw the 100 francs to which his medal entitles him until his death, and place the money in the savings bank." Both family affection and heroism are expressed and rewarded not only in elevated feelings but in concrete terms: a thoroughly sensible view. No wonder that patriotism was advocated in similar terms. The fatherland was a source of funds for road repairs, subsidies, school scholarships, and police protection against thieves—"one great family of which we are all a part, and which we must defend always."⁸⁷

We come here to the greatest function of the modern school: to teach not so much useful skills as a new patriotism beyond the limits naturally acknowledged by its charges. The revolutionaries of 1789 had replaced old terms like schoolmaster, regent, and rector, with *instituteur*, because the teacher was intended to *institute* the nation. But the desired effect, that elusive unity of spirit, was recognized as lacking in the 1860's and 1870's as it had been four score years before.⁸⁸

School was a great socializing agent, wrote a village teacher from Gard in 1861. It had to teach children national and patriotic sentiments, explain what the state did for them and why it exacted taxes and military service, and show them their true interest in the fatherland. It seems that there was a great deal to do. The theme remained a constant preoccupation of eminent educators. Twenty years after this, student teachers "must above all be told . . . that their

first duty is to make [their charges] love and understand the fatherland." Another ten years, and the high aim is again repeated, that a "national pedagogy" might yet become the soul of popular education. The school is "an instrument of unity," an "answer to dangerous centrifugal tendencies," and of course the "keystone of national defense."⁸⁹

First, the national pedagogy. "The fatherland is not your village, your province, it is all of France. The fatherland is like a great family." This was not learned without some telescoping. "Your fatherland is you," wrote a thirteen-year-old schoolboy dutifully in 1878. "It is your family, it is your people [*les tiens*], in a word it is France, your country." "The fatherland is the *pays* where we are born," wrote another, "where our parents are born and our dearest thoughts lie; it is not only the *pays* we live in, but the region [*contrée*] we inhabit; our fatherland is France." The exercise was a sort of catechism designed to teach the child that it was his duty to defend the fatherland, to shed his blood or die for the commonweal ("When France is threatened, your duty is to take up arms and fly to her rescue"), to obey the government, to perform military service, to work, learn, pay taxes, and so on.⁹⁰

At the very start of school, children were taught that their first duty was to defend their country as soldiers. The army—and this was important, considering the past and enduring hostility to soldiers and soldiering—"is composed of our brothers or parents" or relatives. Commencement speeches recalled this sacred duty in ritual terms—our boys will defend the soil of the fatherland. The whole school program turned on expanding the theme. Gymnastics were meant "to develop in the child the idea of discipline, and prepare him . . . to be a good soldier and a good Frenchman." Children sang stirring songs like the "Flag of France," the "Lost Sentry," and "La Marseillaise." Compositions on the theme were ordered up, with title and content provided: "Letter of a Young Soldier to His Parents. He tells them that he has fought against the enemies of the fatherland, has been wounded . . . and is proud (as they must be too) that he has shed his blood for the fatherland." And teachers reported with satisfaction how they implanted the love of the fatherland by evoking "those memories that attach our hearts to the fatherland" from history, and then "develop[ed] this sentiment by showing France strong and powerful when united."⁹¹

There were no better instruments of indoctrination and patriotic conditioning than French history and geography, especially history, which "when properly taught [is] the only means of maintaining patriotism in the generations we are bringing up."* Could it be that other social forces were doing little to stir or inculcate it? Unfortunately, most teachers knew history badly,

* Archives Nationales, F179276 (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1877). The point was well taken. When in 1897 candidates for the *baccalauréat moderne* were asked to discuss the uses and purpose of history in education, 80 percent replied essentially that it was to exalt patriotism (Ch.-V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*, Paris, 1898, pp. 288-89).

geography still worse. When, around the 1870's, they taught French history—or began to teach it—they tended to string out reigns and dates, and seldom seem to have got further than the Middle Ages. History was ignored, and civics absent from the teaching program, complained Félix Pécaut in 1871. It was quite possible “to use French history to form French citizens, make the free fatherland be known and loved; but no elementary attempt of this sort has yet been made.” This was not surprising. “Teachers certificated in 1850–1868,” more than half those teaching in 1879, “have never studied French history and do not know it,” grumbled a school inspector in Vendée. And “teachers begin, it is still new and rare, to present the chief events of French history,” reported another in Haute-Saône.⁹² The job would be undertaken in textbooks like Lavissee's *First Year of French History*, a book thoroughly bent to show and to justify the rise of French patriotism and unity—refocused from the *petite patrie* to the larger one. Reading it, children were told, “you will learn what you owe your fathers and why your first duty is to love above all else your fatherland—that is, the land of your fathers.”⁹³

Just as the mother tongue was not the tongue of their mothers, so the fatherland was somewhere more (indeed, something else) than where their fathers rather obviously lived. A vast program of indoctrination was plainly called for to persuade people that the fatherland extended beyond its evident limits to something vast and intangible called France. Adults were too deeply rooted in their backwardness. But it was hard work to persuade even children, for all their malleability, without the panoply of material that became available only in the 1870's. Under the Second Empire, “children know no geography, see no maps, know nothing concerning their department or their fatherland” (Lot-et-Garonne). Children “were completely unaware of the existence of their department or of France” (Dordogne). “Notions of geography have become a general need” (Doubs).⁹⁴

Maps of France began to be supplied soon after the Franco-Prussian War, distributed by the state. First urban schools, then rural ones, were endowed with wall maps. By 1881 few classrooms, however small, appear to have lacked a map. Some, of course, served “only as ornaments.”⁹⁵ But they inculcated all with the image of the national hexagon, and served as a reminder that the eastern border should lie not on the Vosges but on the Rhine. They were also powerful symbols, not only of the asserted fatherland, but of the abstractions young minds had to get used to. How difficult this latter exercise remained is suggested by a circular of 1899 announcing the distribution of engravings of “views of different French regions that will lend concreteness to the idea of the fatherland.”⁹⁶

By the 1880's the determined assault against provincialism began to show results. “France ceased being a Kingdom and became a fatherland.” Little boys in country schools were fascinated by tales of past French glories. Preparing for the school certificate examination in his lost Cantal valley, Pierre

Besson bought the fat history text of the advanced course and spent the class breaks learning Napoleon's campaigns by heart. Going home in the evening the boys would shout snatches of Hugo or Déroulède to each other, and the valley would resound to the echoes of Waterloo.⁹⁷ The young Auvergnats were joining the rest of France, now that the once abstract notion was taking on concrete and epic forms.*

The stirring deeds of derring-do were themselves part of a transcendent theme. By 1884 Bruno's *Tour de France*, published in 1877, had gone through 108 printings, and by 1900 or so, sales exceeded eight million copies. Every child knew, read, and reread the story of the two Alsatian boys who left their home after their father's death to fulfill his wish that they should live as Frenchmen. With great simplicity the book managed to introduce its readers to almost all the regions of France, their ways, scenes, history, and people. It can still be read today with pleasure, and it still leaves the feeling of a charming world—not easy, but helpful and decent, where the right sentiments would get you by. A reading makes one wish to repeat Julien's and André's circuit, and forges strong links of sympathy for France and the people in it. The millions who pored over the book and its illustrations learned that French patriotism was a natural complement to their own: “France is a garden, the provinces are the flowers in it.” And while everyone the children meet along the ways sings the praise of his particular home, all agree that France includes them all: *Vive la patrie française!* Love of France is a leitmotif, becoming more insistent as the book draws on, and what this implies is made evident. Bayard “dies for his country”; Du Guesclin is represented as a French patriot fighting the English (when he fought mostly Bretons). When the two children tire, they remind each other that they want “to remain French at any cost.” And the last words of the book are “Duty and Fatherland!”⁹⁸

Though written in the wake of the war with Prussia, the *Tour de France* did not preach revenge. The children encounter no soldiers on their circuit, and there is no war talk among those they meet, only talk of escaping from war and rebuilding life. Alsace and Lorraine are mourned, but the grief of their loss is to be effaced by work, not fighting. Ernest Lavissee, who was younger than Bruno and still in his twenties in 1870, struck more pugnacious notes in his edifying tales and histories: it was the duty of sons to avenge their fathers; it was the duty of children to wreak revenge for past defeats. His books and others like them were also widely read. But it is my impression that the patriotism they advocated placed national integration first, re-

* Of course, there had been teachers in an earlier day who had infused their students with their own patriotic enthusiasm, but one suspects they may have been found more frequently in urban schools. At any rate, we know from Arsène Vermeuouze that he was so flushed with patriotism as a schoolboy at the Ecole Supérieure des Frères des Ecoles Chrétienues at Aurillac in the mid-1860's that he learned to play the trumpet simply so he could play “La Marseillaise” (*Croix du Cantal*, Aug. 11, 1895; July 30, 1903).

venge only second. It is difficult to discriminate; the themes are often mingled. But simply making military service acceptable was itself an immense task. The theme of a good citizen's duty to serve his country and to defend the fatherland, constantly recurring, can easily be taken for militarism, unless we remember that it sought to inculcate sentiments whose total absence endangered a modern state.⁹⁹

The problem of national integration went far beyond the army. Whole generations had to receive a basic training, quite simply to become amenable to being trained in radically new ways. All the efforts of the schools were none too great to civilize a citizenry—or even half of it: “well-taught children will make wise citizens. They will also make good soldiers.” Note the order. The four *essential* obligations of the citizen were to get an education when young, and later to make sure that his children got one; to carry out his military duty zealously and always be ready to defend the fatherland; to pay taxes regularly; and to vote and elect the most honest and capable candidates.¹⁰⁰ We have seen how much there was to do on every score, and it is well to view teachers and textbooks in that context.

Teachers taught or were expected to teach “not just for the love of art or science . . . but for the love of France”—a France whose creed had to be inculcated in all unbelievers. A Catholic God, particularist and only identified with the fatherland by revisionists after the turn of the century, was replaced by a secular God; the fatherland and its living symbols, the army and the flag. Catechism was replaced by civics lessons. Biblical history, proscribed in secular schools, was replaced by the sainted history of France. French became more than a possession of the educated: it became a patrimony in which all could share, with significant results for national cohesion, as the 1914 war would show.¹⁰¹

But the effects of school went further. In the first place, the literary or written language children learned in schools was as alien to the spoken tongue as spoken French itself was to their native dialect. In other words, schools began their work by propagating an artificial language, and this was true even for French-speakers.¹⁰² They did this largely through the discipline of dictations, “the instrument of a learned and universal language” beyond the local ken. As a result, many students learned to express themselves freely and easily in speech, but had difficulty when it came to writing or to expressing thought in an idiom close to that of the written word. We can glimpse this best in the surviving files of gendarmerie reports, which are often drawn up in a stilted administrative style and relate even simple events in an awkward and convoluted manner.

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

education created stupidity by setting up standards of communication that many found difficult to attain. “Our children cannot find, and indeed have no way to find, enough French words to express their thoughts,” reported a Cantal teacher. The result was a divorce between school learning, often acquired by rote, and assimilation, which helped slow down the progress of the schools. Memorization saved the trouble of “having to translate one's thoughts into correct French.” It also divorced word from reality. Many children “can spell, but syllables have no meaning for them; can read, but fail to understand what they read, or to recognize in writing some words they know but whose orthography is alien,” or to identify words learned in French with the objects around them. “You will learn it, this language of well-bred people, and you will speak it some day,” promised a prize-giver in Dordogne in 1897. The future tense used in such improbable circumstances suggests a possible reason why, by 1907, the number of illiterate conscripts seems to have been slightly higher than in the immediate past. The absolute banning of the native tongue, which had been helpful in teaching French as a second language, inhibited the learning of idiomatic French and impeded its full assimilation.¹⁰³

This is not to say that French did not make great strides forward. It did. But writing remained a socially privileged form of expression, and the French of the schools and of the dictations was an alienating as well as an integrative force. Perhaps that was what a school inspector meant when, looking back from 1897, he declared: “Ignorance used to precede school; today on the contrary it follows schooling.”¹⁰⁴

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

* In a lesson given in the second year (four- to seven-year-olds), for example, children learned to interpret road signs. They began with the one all knew as a cross, then were taught to recognize it as a sign helping a person to find his way, and further, as an indication of how much better roads were in their own day (“Il n'y avait pas de routes dans le temps . . .”). *Devoirs d'écoliers français*, pp. 356–60. This cross-as-signpost image, as Renée Balibar has shown (*Les Français fictifs*, Paris, 1974, p. 194), played an important role in the writing of Charles Péguy, who had undoubtedly been taught the lesson.

castles in Spain rose above local ruins, and golden calves bleated more loudly than the stabled ones. The very mythology of ambition was now illustrated by landscapes that education had suggested, more stirring than the humbler ones at hand and by this time no less familiar.¹⁰⁵ These are only aspects of the wide-ranging process of standardization that helped create and reinforce French unity, while contributing to the disintegration of rival allegiances.

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

In a great many homes, illiterate adults depended on small children to carry out what were becoming essential tasks—accounting, correspondence, taking notes, reading aloud pertinent documents or newspaper items. And new literacies at whatever level made new ideas accessible, especially to the young, to whom certain profound changes in the political climate of country districts were now attributed. In any case, the relationship between school and social claims was not ignored in their own time: “The Republic has founded schools,” sang Montéhus, the revolutionary chansonnier, “so that now the people have learned how to count. The people have had enough of the pauper’s mite; they want an accounting, and not charity!” More important, where, as in Brittany, a determined campaign taught new generations French, “children and parents form two worlds apart, so separated in spirit, so estranged by speech, that there is no more community of ideas and feelings, hence no intimacy. Often, as a matter of fact, any kind of relationship becomes impossible.”¹⁰⁶ This is both exaggerated and suggestive of a generation gap more easily discerned in modern societies than in traditional ones. But even granting the exaggeration, the corrosive effects of one sort of education on a society based on another kind are undeniable.

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

Chapter Nineteen

DIEU EST-IL FRANÇAIS?

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

—GEORGE SAND

IN THE MID-1870’s 35,387,703 of the 36,000,000 people in France were listed in the official census as Catholics. The rest declared themselves Protestants (something under 600,000), Jews (50,000), or freethinkers (80,000). The secular clergy of the Catholic church alone included 55,369 priests, one for every 639 inhabitants. Roman Catholicism remained, as it had been in 1801, “the religion of the majority of Frenchmen.”¹

Whatever else this meant, it meant that the Church was an integral part of life. It presided over all the major occasions in a person’s life—birth, marriage, death—and over the welfare of the community and the conduct of its members. It helped the crops increase and the cattle prosper. It healed, taught, and preserved from harm. Its pervasive power was apparent in the appropriation of godly terminology for more vulgar use: *kyrielle* (litany) for a long string of words or a tedious story; *gloria* for a confused noise of voices; *glose* for carping; *peromnia* or *faire des dominus* for hollow chatter; *brimborion* (from the breviary) for empty baubles or knickknacks. Most of the terms refer to uselessness or confusion, like *rapronobis* or *orapronobis*, used to describe something incongruous or stupid, or at any rate complicated, expressed in incomprehensible words taken from the most obvious place where the people would hear them—the language of the Church.²

Dialect imitations of vespers, hymns, or canticles were abundant. Even more so, jocular graces thanking God for the soup being poured and praying heaven that no more mouths should appear to consume what was not enough already. Such playful familiarities do not tell us much about people’s feelings, only that religious practices were part of everyday experience. They offered formulas that were repeated as charms and benedictions, even though their meaning was inevitably obscure. Witness this “Latin” grace pronounced after supper with no intention of levity:³

5. AN, BB 30 370 (Agen, July 1854, Jan. 1855, July 1859), BB 30 371 (Angers, Jan. 1866, July 1867), BB 30 390 (Rennes and Montpellier, 1867), BB 30 370 (Aix, Apr. 1867 and *passim*).

6. AN, BB 30 375 (Mar. 1868), quoted in Lovie, p. 449; AN, BB 30 373 (Besançon, Jan. 1866, Apr. 1868).

7. Cobb, *Police*, p. 99; AG, MR 1218 (Hérault); AD, Cantal IT 832 (June 1832); AG, MR 1269 (1839), MR 1228 (1840); AD, Ariège 5M3 (St-Girons, 1856, 1857); AG, MR 2283 (1859, 1860), MR 2275 (1860, Eure-et-Loir, Ille-et-Vilaine; 1877, Seine-Inf.); Hérault, p. 227.

8. AG, MR 1274 (Lozère, 1844; see another report from Mende in 1845 to the effect that these people looked on desertion as a glory); Pons, *Cerca*, 1960, p. 326; Lovie, p. 268. In Poitou, where in times of want people ate *garobe*, a bread made of black vetch grown for the pigeons' winter feed, some families in the early nineteenth century deliberately fed their sons on it so that they would grow up stunted and unfit for service (*Tradition*, p. 81).

9. Pérot, p. 44.

10. AG, MR 2261 (Basque country, 1873; Landes, 1874), MR 2267 (Ille-et-Vilaine, 1876), MR 2270 (Gers, 1876; Hte.-Garonne, 1876, 1877), MR 2275 (Sarthe, 1878); AD, Pys.-Ors. 3M1 163 (Sept. 1879); Pérot, pp. 10, 44; Sébillot, *Coutumes*, pp. 82-83. Interestingly, national conscription made for the nationalization of the magic practices designed to secure a good number. Thivot, p. 328, comments that "all these means, once particular to a given province, had gradually spread throughout the country, brought in most often in our department [Htes.-Alpes] by peddlers."

11. See the copious file in AD, Vosges 23 Z 13 (July 1913). Perhaps anti-militaristic propaganda drew less on the new internationalism than on the old distastes. See, for instance, Gaston Couté's song "Les Conscrits," in Brochon, *Chanson sociale*, pp. 97-100, which reflects the clear difference between the old, native anti-militarism and the new fin-de-siècle brand, which was, if anything, elitist and anti-populist.

12. Cénac-Moncaut, *Jérôme La Friche*, pp. 25-26; Garneret, p. 329; Père Toine in *Cahiers des amis de Jacquou*, 1939, p. 9.

13. AG, MR 1218 (Hérault, 1825), MR 1228 (Landes, 1843), MR 2277 (Rhône, 1859), MR 2281 (Allier, 1860), MR 2283 (Côtes-du-Nord, 1860), MR 2283 (Deux-Sèvres, 1862).

14. See AG, G⁸², throughout the Second Empire.

15. Hamerton, *Round My House*, pp. 91-99.

16. Durkheim, p. 259, for example, points out that the rate of military suicide, whose high incidence had attracted attention, declined from 630 per million in 1862 to 280 per million in 1890. Military mentality, like military society, was becoming part of the national way of life. On the changed relations between the common people and their new Republican army, see Michelle Perrot, 2: 633, 696-98.

17. Henry Leyret, *En plein faubourg: Moeurs ouvrières* (1895), pp. 87, 88; Esnault, *Imagination*, 101; Duchatellier, *Condition*, p. 6; Captain Fanet, *Les Fêtes régimentaires* (1895).

18. F. Brunot, 10: 965; Esnault, *Imagination*, p. 101; H. Serrant, *Le Service du recrutement de 1789 à nos jours* (1935), p. 80. Reynier, *Privas*, p. 183: "Les Ardéchois qui faisaient leur service militaire à Privas . . . n'apportaient ou n'apprenaient pas grande chose de neuf. Un rôle bien plus efficace a été joué par la guerre de 1914-18, qui les a sortis et envoyés dans le nord et le nord-est."

19. On events in the Midi, see especially Le Blond, pp. 73, 88, 132.

20. AN, F¹⁷9262, *Rapport sur les trois départements bretons*, Oct. 1880.

21. Voisin, p. 19; Ajalbert, *En Auvergne*, pp. 168-69; F. Brunot, 10: 983.

22. AG, MR 1282 (Puy-de-Dôme, 1827), MR 1300 (Hte.-Vienne, 1845); N. Sales in

Comparative Studies, 1968, p. 268. See Stendhal, 2: 479: "Those from poor areas change completely in six weeks. [They are simply amazed] at getting meat every day."

23. M. V. Parron, *Notice sur l'aptitude militaire en France suivie d'un essai de statistique militaire de la Haute-Loire* (Le Puy, 1868), p. 16. See also Taine, pp. 130, 191.

24. AG, G⁸177 (Blois, May 1871), G⁸179 (Le Mans, June 1872); Besson, p. 85.

25. Hubert Lyautey, "Du rôle social de l'officier dans le service universel," *RDM*, April 15, 1891; General Brécart, "Le Rôle social de l'officier," *Revue des jeunes*, July 1938; Eugène-Melchoir de Vogüé, *Remarques sur l'Exposition du Centenaire* (1889), (containing some of the ideas that inspired Lyautey); and Henri Rollet, *L'Action sociale des catholiques en France, 1871-1901* (1947), pp. 26, 328-29.

26. Gautier, *Siècle d'indigence*, pp. 144-46. Another change in life-style at the local level was commented on by an observer from the western fenlands. In a book describing the peculiar local practice among the rural young of couples' engaging in heavy public petting, Marcel Baudoin surmised that if this practice was beginning to decline, it was because the young men, "instruits par le service militaire, éprouvent désormais une sorte de fausse honte à se conduire comme leurs ancêtres" (*Le Maraichinage: Coutume du pays de Mont (Vendée)*, 1906, p. 117).

27. Guillaumin, *Panorama*, p. 21; General Lamoricière in *Moniteur universel*, Oct. 21, 1848, quoted by N. Sales, in *Comparative Studies*, 1968, p. 282; AN, BB 30 388 (Jan. 8, 1867); Ardouin-Dumazet, *Les Petites Industries rurales* (1912), pp. 16-17.

28. *La Réforme sociale*, 1909, p. 147; HE, instituteur of Soye (Doubs), 1899.

Chapter Eighteen

Epigraph. "La Victoire sociale" (1909).

1. AD, Yonne 3 T 1 (1810).

2. AD, Yonne 10 T 1 (Noyers, Aug. 1803).

3. AEP, 4 (Mar. 12, 1828); AD, Cantal IT 252 (1833, 1850, 1913), Eure-et-Loir, *Rapports d'inspection primaire*, 1837, IIT b 1; Giret, pp. 29, 34, 35, 38.

4. From Ernest Lavisse's speech at the opening of a new school at Nouvion, published in *Revue pédagogique*, July 15, 1891, pp. 1-9. See the same journal, Apr. 15, 1892, p. 327, for evidence that this was still the case in the late 1880's in the mountains of the south-east, around Puget-Théniers, where some schools had neither seats nor a stove.

5. AN, F¹⁷10757 (Commentry, Allier, 1861).

6. Balzac, *Les Paysans* (1844), chap. 3; Boudard; Singer, p. 18; Giret, p. 37.

7. Arnaud, p. 14.

8. AD, Yonne III M²²26 (Oct. 1853); Pierrard, p. 133, citing the letter of the rector of Lille to the prefect, Apr. 1829 (AD, Nord T 68/5); Ogès, *Instruction*, p. 81; Arnaud, pp. 15-20; primary inspector reports of 1836 and 1837 from the Dreux and Chartres areas, cited in Giret, pp. 42, 44; Cressot, p. 127.

9. Besson, p. 39; Jean-Louis Blanchon, *Palau de Cerdanya* (Palau, 1971), p. 37; Labrousse.

10. *Instruction primaire*, 1: 85; Tanneau, pp. 222-23; Gilland, p. 113; Borsendorff, p. 35. See also the school inspectors' reports of the 1870's cited by Zind, pp. 134-35.

11. *Instruction primaire*, 1: 97; AN, F¹⁷9253 (Privas, May 1877); Gazier, p. 119.

12. *Instruction primaire*, 1: 99, 127, 237, 247, 258, 366; priest quoted in *Annales de démographie historique*, 1971, p. 418.

13. Villemereux, *Rapport sur la situation de l'instruction primaire dans le département du Loiret* (Orleans, 1856), p. 23; AN, F¹⁷9265 (Hte.-Loire, July 1882).

14. AN, F¹⁷9265 (Hte.-Loire, Oct. 1881), F¹⁷9269 (Morbihan, Dec. 1880); Ardouin-Dumazet, 34: 125. See also Boudard; and Giret, p. 50. If one is to believe Robert Sabatier (p. 245), some béates were still alive and revered in Haute-Loire in the 1930's.

15. As a school inspector reported in 1871, "On n'est pas encore convaincu dans le Finistère de la nécessité de l'éducation des filles" (quoted in Burguière, p. 288).
16. Buisson, 1.2: 1317 (and *Rapports d'inspection générale*, 1881). Corrèze, declared the school inspection reports around 1860, was only "médiocrement civilisée."
17. See Ministère de l'Instruction publique, *Rapport à S. M. l'Empereur sur l'état de l'enseignement primaire pendant l'année 1863* (1865), especially pp. 89-92 (Victor Duruy's report); Ministère de l'Instruction publique, *Statistique de l'enseignement primaire, 1867-77* (1878); AN, F¹⁷9262 (Oct. 1880); and Augé-Laribé, *Politique*, p. 123.
18. Charles Portal, "L'Instruction primaire dans le Tarn au 19^e siècle," *Revue du département du Tarn*, 1906, pp. 1-23.
19. Marion, 6: 21-25, 225; Mayeur, *Débuts*, p. 61.
20. See Buisson, 2: 1317, article "Illettrés." See also Ministère de l'Instruction publique, *Résumés des états de situation de l'enseignement primaire, 1889-90* (1892), table 19bis; *Résumés, 1894-95* (1896), table 22 for percentage of brides able to sign their marriage certificate; *Résumés, 1888-89* (1890), tables 20bis and 21bis for married couples able to sign in 1886; *Résumés, 1885-86* (1887), table 22 for conscript literacy in 1885; and *Résumés, 1889-90* (1892), and *1894-95* (1896), tables 18bis and 20 for conscript literacy in 1889 and 1894, respectively. North of the line lay 32 departments with 13 million inhabitants and 740,846 schoolchildren (roughly 57,000 per million inhabitants). South of it were 54 departments with 18 million inhabitants and 375,931 schoolchildren (under 21,000 per million). See Charles Dupin, *Effets de l'enseignement populaire* (1826).
21. Pujos (Trespoux-Rassiels, 1881); AD, Finistère 4M (Châteaulin, Jan. 1901). See also Corbin, 3: 438.
22. AEP, 1 (insp. primaire, Bar-sur-Seine, Jan. 1873); Pécaut, *Etudes*, p. 23.
23. Giret, p. 69; AD, Vosges 11 T 17 (1889); Kanter, p. 116 (Hte.-Loire); Merley, pp. 246-47 (local official); *Instruction primaire*, 1: 475 (Allier); AN, F¹⁷10757 (Plassay, Charente-Inf.); Besson, pp. 9, 11 (Cantal); Darnaud, p. 19 (Ariège); Rocal, p. 310 (illiterate conscripts).
24. Compare these official statistics with AN, F¹⁷9271 (Basses-Pyrs., 1877). See also *Instruction primaire*, especially on Ardèche, Rhône, Ain, Loire, Hérault, Aude, and Gard.
25. Pariset, *Lauragais*, p. 39.
26. Bonaventure Berger et al., *Manuel d'examen pour le volontariat d'un an* (1875), p. 46; Buisson, 2: 1499. Compare Léaud and Glay, p. 153, quoting Octave Gréard, vice-rector of the Academy of Paris in 1882: "to teach French... is to strengthen national unity."
27. AN, F¹⁷9271 (Basses-Pyrs., 1877), F¹⁷10757 (Châteauneuf-du-Rhône, Drôme, 1861), *Instruction primaire* (Vaucluse); AN, F¹⁷9259 (Dordogne, 1875), F¹⁷9271 (Basses-Pyrs., 1874); G. Bruno, *Tour de France*, pp. 164-65.
28. AN, F¹⁷9262 (Hérault, 1875); Francus, *Vivarais*, p. 309; AN, F¹⁷9276 (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1873).
29. AG, MR 2154 (Hte.-Garonne, 1861); AN, F¹⁷9264 (Landes, 1875).
30. *Instruction primaire* (Loire).
31. AN, F¹⁷9276 (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1873, 1877), F¹⁷9271 (Puy-de-Dôme, 1877), F¹⁷9276 (Vaucluse, 1883); Longy, *Canton*, p. 47.
32. AN, F¹⁷9271 (Basses-Pyrs., 1876); *Rapports d'inspection générale*, 1881 (Basses-Pyrs.); Blanchon, *En Cerdagne*, p. 26; Beulaygue, pp. 4-5.
33. AN, F¹⁷9259 (insp. Côtes-du-Nord, arr. Guingamp, Sept. 1877), F¹⁷9262 (Oct. 1880); *Langue bretonne*, pp. 3, 5.
34. *Langue bretonne*, pp. 3, 5. On the *symbole*, see Blanchon, *En Cerdagne*, pp. 49, 58, 61, 62; Besson, p. 25; Coornaert, p. 304; Perrin and Bouet, pp. 122-23; Singer, p. 185; Lafont, p. 212, quoting Frédéric Mistral, *L'Aioli* (1894); Robert Sabatier, p. 243; and Duneton, p. 21 ("C'est arrivé à ma propre mère plusieurs fois entre 1908 et 1912").

35. AN, F¹⁷9262 (see also F¹⁷9259 for a very moving collection of letters about adult evening classes in Côtes-du-Nord); *Langue bretonne*, p. 6.
36. On the great backwardness of girls' schooling and its effect on local speech, see AN, F¹⁷9265, F¹⁷9262 (Hte.-Loire, Hérault, Brittany); and Giret, p. 26, quoting 1868 survey, manuscript no. 21 in Bibliothèque Municipale, Chartres. This was reflected in the availability of normal schools for men and women teachers. In 1869 there were 76 for men, and only 11 for women. By 1887 the gap had almost closed, with 90 schools for men, and 81 for women (Levasseur, 2: 495).
37. Buisson, 1: 105-6; Reynier and Abrial, pp. 8-9, 34.
38. AD, Cantal IT 848 (258), director's letters June 8, Oct. 25, 1836, Dec. 16, 1837; end-of-year reports, July 1875, May 19, 1877; AN, F¹⁷9261 (Gard), Ecole Normale Primaire de Nîmes, 1872, F¹⁷9267 (Lozère), Ecole Normale Primaire de Mende, 1872, 1881. In 1864, according to the rector, most *normaliens* of Bas-Rhin were "peasants foreign to our speech" (Dollinger, p. 428).
39. AN, F¹⁷9271 (Basses-Pyrs., 1874, 1875), F¹⁷9259 (Dordogne, 1875), F¹⁷9264, Ecole Primaire de Dax (Landes), 1876, F¹⁷9276, Ecole Normale Primaire d'Avignon (Vaucluse), 1876, F¹⁷9271, Ecole Normale Primaire de Perpignan, 1878, Puy-de-Dôme, 1877; *Rapports d'inspection générale*, 1881 (Lot-et-Garonne; Basses-Pyrs.; Aveyron).
40. Rouchon, 2: 36; *Instruction primaire, passim*; *Rapports d'inspection générale*, 1881 (Gers; Ariège; Htes.-Pyrs.); AN, F¹⁷9262 (Hérault, 1864), F¹⁷9275 (Deux-Sèvres, 1882).
41. H. Denain, *Discours de distribution des prix dans une commune rurale* (Chartres, 1862), p. 6; Félix Pécaut, *Le Temps*, Aug. 4, 1872; Pécaut, *Etudes*, p. 55. On teachers' condition, see AN, F¹⁷9271 (Puy-de-Dôme, 1877); Marcel Lachiver, *Documents d'histoire régionale* (1971), p. 35; Labourasse, p. 14; and Florent, p. 219. See also Clément Brun, p. 61 (peasants' appreciation of teacher's skills); and HE II, Lozère, 1888: Recoules, near Marvejols (teachers' devotion to Republic).
42. AN, F¹⁷9253 (Htes.-Alpes, 1882), F¹⁷9275 (Deux-Sèvres, 1882).
43. On teachers' pay, see Antoine Prost, pp. 143-44, 372, 380ff; Clément Brun, p. 57; Mignot, p. 45; Besson, p. 34; and Singer, p. 94. Serge Bonnet tells us that in Meurthe-et-Moselle at the turn of the century, teachers looked with some envy on the pay of other workers. In the village of Jouaville the teacher earned 1,200 francs a year, to which he added 100 francs for his *brévet complémentaire* and a further 125 francs for acting as secretary to the municipal council: a little under 4 francs a day. An unskilled factory worker made 3-4 francs a day, and in the bigger bourg of Joeuf 4-5 francs. A railroad worker earned 2.5 francs a day. A day laborer on a farm could expect 1.5 francs and his food. ("La vie ouvrière vue par les instituteurs en Meurthe-et-Moselle [1890-1900]," *Mouvement social*, 1965, p. 85.)
44. AD, Puy-de-Dôme F62, "Monographie de l'école normale," 1900 (manuscript).
45. AD, Yonne VII M¹² (Apr. 1836); AN, F¹⁶III Ardèche 11 (Apr. 1860); AD, Ariège 5M₃ (congratulatory addresses on the occasion of Napoleon III's marriage, Feb. 1853; sous-préf. St.-Girons, Apr. 1856); préf. Bas-Rhin, quoted in Dollinger, p. 427; AD, Pyrs.-Ors. 3M¹ 224 (comm. Bourg-Madame, Jan. 14, Jan. 30, 1896).
46. AD, Yonne III M¹²³⁴ (Joigny, Oct. 1865).
47. AD, Pyrs.-Ors. 3M¹ 224 (Bourg-Madame, Jan. 14, 1896), Pyrs.-Ors. 3M¹ 225 (Perthus, July 1897); Guichonnet, p. 48; Esnault, *Imagination*, p. 229. Other nicknames given to the teachers were "head-stuffer," *empeille-cabi* (Louis Bollé, *Histoire et folklore du Haut-Bugey*, Bellegarde, 1954, p. 106); and *rabat-joie* and *tape-la-gueille* (Doussinet, *Les Travaux*, p. 340).
48. AN, F¹⁷10757 (1861); Pécaut, *Quinze ans*, p. 199; HE 12.922 (inst. Vestric, Gard, 1878); Bastié, 2: 153; *Instruction primaire* (Académie d'Aix).
49. Malègue, *Guide l'étranger*, p. 163; AD, Cantal IT 993 (Velzic, about 1900).
50. Armengaud, *Populations*, pp. 328-29; AN, F¹⁷9277 (St.-Yrieix, Hte.-Vienne, 1872);

Ogès, *Instruction*, pp. 22-23; Chabirand, pp. 197-98; *Instruction primaire*, 1: 361, 418; AN, F¹⁷9276 (Vendée, 1881), F¹⁷9259 (Côtes-du-Nord, 1877).

51. For details on dispersed settlements, see Foville, *Enquête*, 2: 235; and AN, F¹⁷9276 (Vendée, 1872, 1876, 1881), F¹⁷9276 (Brittany, 1880). See also Derruau-Borniol, p. 48, on Creuse, whose 266 communes were divided into 6,000 hamlets. At Plozévet (Fin.) school attendance began to flourish only after the bourg had grown into an active center for its commune, its more numerous inhabitants providing the school with a larger and more regular clientele. Before 1875 school enrollment had varied between 85 and 139. In November 1891 we find 200 children enrolled and 164 actually attending. By February 1893, 194 were attending out of 252 enrolled. (See Burguière, pp. 276-77.)

52. Buisson, 1.2: 1650; AN, F¹⁷9263 (Indre, 1880); Lefournier, pp. 889-90; Corbin, 3: 438; Giret, p. 65; AN, F¹⁷9262 (Brittany, 1880).

53. AD, Cantal 970 (325) (Pléaux, Feb. 1839); AG, MR 1228 (Basses-Pyrs., 1844); Garneret, p. 327.

54. AN, F¹⁷10757 (Aveyron, 1861); Pariset, *Lauragais*, p. 39; AD, Gers M 2799 (gendarmes Scissane, Feb. 1875); HE II (Billy, 1899); Pujos (Ste.-Alauzie, 1881); *L'Egalité*, Mar. 26, 1882, quoted in Mona Ozouf, *L'École, l'église et la république* (1963), p. 89.

55. AG, MR 1198 (Auxonne, 1834; Pontarlier, 1835); *Instruction primaire*, 1: 119; AN, F¹⁷9267 (Lozère, 1877); Léon Dériès, *Rapport sur la situation de l'instruction primaire dans la Manche* (St.-Lô, 1892); Corbin, 2: 108-9; AD, Cantal IT 993 (St.-Flour, Feb. 1900?; Mauriac, Feb. 1900), IT 951 (insp. d'académie, 1902?). See also Giret, p. 57.

56. AG, MR 1198 (Doubs, 1835); J.-L. Roche, 2: 15; *Instruction primaire*, 1: 361; AN, BB 30 374 (Bourges, Jan. 1866).

57. AN, F¹⁷9276 (1876), F¹⁷9264 (1878).

58. Ardouin-Dumazet, 28: 196.

59. Van Gennep, *Manuel*, 1: 191; Bois, "Dans l'Ouest," p. 361.

60. Antoine Prost, pp. 94-95.

61. Giret, p. 37; AN, F¹⁷9277 (Hérault, Lozère, 1872).

62. AEP, 2; Tanneau, pp. 216-18; Ogès, *Instruction*, pp. 22-23.

63. AD, Cantal IT 322.

64. AN, F¹⁷9265 (Loire-Inf., Dec. 1875); Bougeatre, p. 172; Tanneau, pp. 216-18.

65. M. E. Decoux-Lagoutte, *Notes historiques sur la commune de Trélissac* (Périgueux, 1900), p. 91; Georges Wurmser, *La République de Clemenceau* (1961), p. 64; J.-L. Roche, 2: 11; AN, F¹⁷9265 (Loire-Inf., Dec. 1875), F¹⁷10757 (Garrevagues, Tarn; Rienbach, Ariège); Darnaud, p. 29; *Instruction primaire*, 1: 190.

66. *Instruction primaire*, 1: 190 and *passim*.

67. AN, F¹⁷9265 (Loire-Inf., Dec. 1875), F¹⁷9276 (Vaucluse, 1883).

68. Ariès in François, p. 926; Lovie, p. 342; Cavoleau, p. 864.

69. Thabault, *Mon village*, p. 85; Corbin, p. 458.

70. Buisson, 1: 730; AN, F¹⁷10757 (Rienbach, Ariège, 1861); Singer, p. 174.

71. Ogès, *Instruction*, p. 42.

72. Drouillet, 2: 183; MATP, manuscript 43.308 (1875), accounts from Ménez-Braz, near Concarneau; manuscript 43.309 (1878), accounts from Kerguido farm near Concarneau.

73. Buisson, 1: 615-16; Corbin, p. 438.

74. AN, F¹⁷9263 (Isère, 1876). See also F¹⁷9259 (Dordogne, 1875).

75. Thabault, *Mon village*, p. 140; Lavissee, *Première année d'instruction civique*, p. 8. See also Lavissee, *Année préparatoire*, pp. 116-19, stressing the regularity and security of such jobs. On this theme, see Servat, p. 135; AN, BB 30 373 (Besançon, Apr. 1866); the remarks of the survey of 1866, quoted in Lovie, pp. 289-90; *L'Aigle du Tarn*, Sept. 22, 1867, quoted in Armengaud, *Populations*, p. 297. On Soye and Seine, see HE (no number), Soye, 1899; and Méline, p. 199.

76. Pujos (Montat, Valroufié, Cézac, Pern); Buisson, 1.2: 1492; AN, F¹⁷9271 (Puy-de-Dôme, 1877); Pécaut, *Rapports*, p. 26; *Rapports d'inspection générale* (Dordogne). For an earlier period, compare Laurence Stone, "The Educational Revolution in England, 1560-1640," *Past and Present*, July 1964, p. 68; and Thabault, *Mon village*, p. 140.

77. D'Estienne de Saint-Jean, "Paysan métayer de la Basse-Provence," *Ouvriers des deux mondes* (1888), p. 189, and Foville, *Enquête*, 1: 231 (on Provençal peasants in 1862 and 1894); Passama, p. 122; teacher of Théméricourt (Seine-et-Oise), *Monographie de Théméricourt*, 1899, quoted in Marcel Lachiver, *Histoire de Meulan et de sa région* (Meulan, 1965), p. 331 (and p. 332 for Vigny, nearby); AD, Puy-de-Dôme M 04476 (Mont-Dore, June 1890).

78. B. B. Singer, "The Teacher as Notable in Brittany," unpub. manuscript, p. 13; Besson, p. 27.

79. Moureu, p. 18. See also Besson, p. 33.

80. *Devoirs*, pp. 185-86.

81. Alfred Giron, p. 6; *Instruction primaire*, 1: 537; AN, BB 30 370 (Aix, Jan., Feb. 1850); Ogès, *Instruction*, p. 143; AD, Hte.-Vienne 1Z 105 (Magnac-Laval, 1865); Pécaut, *Education*, p. 3; Coissac, p. 184; Guilcher, *Tradition*, p. 16; Boillot, *Français*, p. 93; Perrin and Bouet, p. 218; Blanchon, *En Cerdagne*, p. 27.

82. *Devoirs*, pp. 15, 25, 119; G. Bruno, *Francinet*, pp. 153-54; Ardouin-Dumazet, 34: 93. This last is a common note. See AD, Gers M 2278 (Aug. 6, 1889), for an official's awards speech: "Without the schools the people would regress to barbarism."

83. François Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps* (1971 ed.), p. 200. The law of June 28, 1833, may be found in Octave Gréard, *La Législation de l'instruction primaire depuis 1789 jusqu'à nos jours* (1874), vol. 1.

84. Anon., *Des besoins de l'instruction primaire dans une commune rurale* (1861), p. 5; AN, F¹⁷9376 (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1868-69); Lavissee, *Première année d'instruction civique*, pp. 46-47.

85. G. Bruno, *Francinet*, pp. 138-40; *Devoirs*, p. 193; Lavissee, *Petites histoires*, pp. 69-72; AD, Vosges 11 T 17 (Chermisey, 1889).

86. Deghilage, *Education*, pp. 36-38; G. Bruno, *Francinet*, pp. 60, 78-79; Lavissee, *Petites histoires*, p. 100. See also Jules Steeg, *Les Bienfaits du travail* (1893), p. 1; and Conférence faite à Ay, le 28 novembre, 1891, par A. E. André, Inspecteur de l'enseignement primaire à Reims, "L'Education morale et civique à l'école" (1892), especially p. 3.

87. Lavissee, *Petites histoires*, pp. 40, 65-68. Note that Lavissee himself was the worthy offspring of the owners of a shop called "Au petit bénéfice." All schools propagandized students on the virtues of savings. See *Devoirs*, p. 137 and *passim*: form letters and exercises spelling out the advantages of savings.

88. See Deutsch, p. 152; and Pécaut, *Études*, p. 149.

89. AN, F¹⁷10757 (Aumessas, 1861); Lavissee, "Enseignement," pp. 208-10; Pécaut, *Education*, pp. 22-23.

90. Lavissee, *Première année de l'instruction civique*, p. 108; *Devoirs*, pp. 128-30, 150. There could also be unexpected reactions. Asked about the duties of those who govern, one child answered that they "must carry out their functions wisely and not crush the people with taxes." The teacher intervened to explain that taxes were necessary and had to be paid for the country's honor and welfare.

91. See A. Armbruster, *Instruction civique* (1882), a sort of secular catechism for 7- to 9-year-olds, pp. 8, 10; AD, Gers M 2278, awards speech to the *écoles communales* of Masseube, Aug. 6, 1889; and Blanchon, *En Cerdagne*, pp. 25-26.

92. AN, F¹⁷9376 (Puy-de-Dôme, 1869), F¹⁷9264 (Loire, 1878); Pécaut, *Études*, pp. 278-80; Berger et al., *Manuel* (cited in note 26, above), p. 20; AN, F¹⁷9276 (Vendée, 1879); *Rapports d'inspection générale*, 1881, Hte.-Saône.

93. Lavissee, *Première année d'histoire de France*. See also Lavissee, "Enseignement."

94. *Instruction primaire*, 1: 125, 221, 247; *Rapports d'inspection générale*, 1881, Cher.
95. AN F¹⁷9276 (Tarn-et-Garonne, 1873, 1881), F¹⁷9252 (Allier, 1878?, 1880), F¹⁷9262 (Ille-et-Vilaine, 1880).
96. Deghilage, *Education*.
97. Buisson quoted in Ozouf and Ozouf, p. 7; Besson, pp. 31, 32.
98. See G. Bruno, *Tour de France*, pp. 162, 177, 193-94, 236-39, 247, 305, 308; and Dupuy, pp. 132, 136-45.
99. For an accepted but questionable view, see Isambert-Jamati, p. 122; and Alphonse Dupront in François, p. 1433. For a counterargument, see Dupuy, p. 147. On Lavissee, see his *Première année d'histoire de France*, p. 216.
100. Lavissee, *Petites histoires*, p. 89. Compare Ronald R. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 1965), p. 292: "What does widespread literacy do for a developing country? The man who has in childhood submitted to some process of disciplined and conscious learning is more likely to respond to further training."
101. Gustave Hervé quoted in O. Harmel, *La Bataille scolaire* (n.d.), pp. 18-19; Pécaut, *Education*, p. 21; Ozouf and Ozouf, p. 31.
102. Ariès in François, p. 951; C. Bally, p. 220; Thabault, *L'Enfant*, introduction.
103. AN, F¹⁷9259 (Côtes-du-Nord, 1880), F¹⁷9275 (Deux-Sèvres, 1881, canton Mazières); Pujos (Cremps); Beulaygue, pp. 5, 6; Ardouin-Dumazet, 14: 340; Isambert-Jamati, p. 166; F. Gourvil, *Quelques opinions sur les langues locales dans l'enseignement* (Morlaix, n.d.), especially pp. 11-16.
104. Léon Dériès, *Après quinze ans, 1882-1897* (Saint-Lô, 1897), p. 21.
105. See *Devoirs*, pp. 24-25, 48, for the growing familiarity with references and identities that could henceforth be used by press, politicians, and the like; and Duneton, p. 196, who remarks of migrants that they wanted to live among the people and in the landscape that had been held in their mind's eye since their schooldays.
106. V. Dupont, pp. 129-36; HE II (Ribennes, Lozère, 1888); Rougeron, *Département de l'Allier*, pp. 126-27; *Langue bretonne*, p. 7.

Chapter Nineteen

Epigraph. Father to son, in *Diable aux champs* (1855), 1865 ed., pp. 15-17.

1. Latreille and Rémond, 3: 423, 425, 427. School-attendance figures, pp. 436-37, provide another index of the preeminence of the Church. The first detailed elementary school statistics, for 1876-77, show 71,547 schools with 4,716,935 students, divided as follows: lay schools, 51,657, with 2,648, 562 students; church schools, 19,890, with 2,068,373 students. The great majority of the church schools were girls schools, most of the church schools for boys being situated in towns. But note that at that time 69,000 of all French schools were Catholic, completely dominated by religious authority.
2. See Esnault, *Imagination*, pp. 293-94.
3. *Barbizier*, 1950, pp. 388-91; Juge, p. 130.
4. Gorse, p. 43; J. Sabbatier, p. 213; Péguy, "Pierre," p. 1220.
5. Romieu, p. 271; Le Saux, p. 85; Bois, *Paysans* (1971 ed.), p. 307; Deffontaines, *Hommes et travaux*, pp. 87-88; Singer, p. 67; Labruno, p. 5.
6. Prieur de Sennely cited in Edecine, 2: 691; Péguy, "Pierre," p. 1220.
7. Bonnet and Santini, especially p. 144.
8. Hilaire, pp. 57-58.
9. AD, Yonne V 11-13 (1800-1828; containing many and repeated complaints and injunctions against the tendency of laymen to take over the functions of absent priests), AG, MR 1269 (Beauce, 1837). See also AD, Yonne III M¹ 47 (sous-préf. Sens, Nov. 1814).
10. Fernand Boulard, *Problèmes missionnaires*, 1: 145-47; Jeanton, *Légende*, pp. 15ff, 70; Hilaire, p. 60; J.-A. Delpon, 1: 212.
11. Derruau-Borniol, p. 55; Le Saux, pp. 30, 31; P. Labruno, *L'Emigration* (Aubusson,