2

Sensibility and history: how to reconstitute the emotional life of the past

Sensibility and history – a new subject: I know of no book that deals with it. I do not even know whether the many problems which it involves have anywhere been set forth. And yet, please forgive a poor historian for uttering the artist's cry, and yet what a fine subject it is! So many people go around despairing at every turn – there is, they say, nothing left to discover, or so it seems, in regions that have been too well explored. All they need do is plunge into the darkness where psychology wrestles with history – they would soon get back their appetite for discovery. Not very long ago I was reading an account of an academic conference. A 'historian' presented to the learned company the conclusions of an essay he had just written on one of those hopeless cases of anecdotal history. What is the true import of Mary Stuart's famous 'Casket Letters'? And what explanation should be produced in order to deal 'scientifically' with that famous *fait divers*, the marriage of the queen of Scotland to her husband's murderer? The man in question explained that one might for the sake of facility and for want of anything better have recourse to psychology to clear up the mystery. He also spoke of 'intuitive imagination' – it could be used, he said, as a way of arriving at the truth when we are dealing with individual cases. But it is very disappointing, for when all is said and done Stendhal's Napoleon is not the same as Taine's, whose is not the same as . . ., etc. – I shall not go on. But he went on to say that there is in any case one field that is completely closed to psychology. A field in which it has no business. It is that of impersonal history, the history of institutions and the history of ideas; where institutions or ideas are concerned within a given society throughout a definite period, 'intuitive imagination' has no role to play. If I had had any doubt as to the possible value of examining the relations between sensibility and history, what I read would have dispelled them there and then. I should like to try to say why.

But first we must say something about definitions. *Sensibilité* (sensibility, sensitivity) is a fairly ancient word. It appeared in language at least as early

as the beginning of the fourteenth century; the adjective *sensible* (sensible, sensitive) had preceded it by a short interval, as is often the case. During the course of its existence, moreover, as often happens, *sensibilité* has taken on various meanings. Some of these are narrow, some are broad, and they can to a certain extent be situated in time. Thus in the seventeenth century the word appears above all to refer to a certain responsiveness of the human being to impressions of a moral nature – there is at that time frequent mention of *sensibilité* to the truth, to goodness, to pleasure, etc. In the eighteenth century the word refers to a particular way of experiencing human feelings – feelings of pity, sadness, etc. And at that time specialists in synonyms concentrated on setting the quality *sensible* against the quality *tendre* (passionate, emotional, affectionate). For instance, the Abbé Girard writes in his exquisite work, *Synonymes français*:

> *sensibilité* depends more on sensation, *tendresse* on sentiment. The latter is more directly related to the movements of the heart reaching out towards other objects; it is active. The former has a closer connection with the impressions objects make on the heart; it is passive . . . The heat of the blood moves us to *tendresse*; the sensitivity of our organs is the main element in *sensibilité*. Young men are more *tendre* than old men; old men are more *sensible* than young men . . .[1]

But the word has other meanings. There are semi-scientific and semi-philosophical meanings which the culture that is handed out in our schools is tending gradually to uphold. '*Sensibilité*', Littré began by saying, 'is a property of certain parts of the nervous system by means of which men and animals receive impressions either from external objects or from within themselves.' Without launching into any attempt to make a totally illusory personal definition and without referring to any ancient outdated psychology of the properties of the human mind (there were three, as is well-known – intelligence, sensibility and will), we would say that for us *sensibilité* implies, and will throughout the course of the present study imply, the emotional life of man and all its manifestations ('la vie affective et ses manifestations').

Whereupon I am now ready for the objection: 'Well then, what is your subject "Sensibility and History" concerned with? Just take an example. At the very basis of the emotional life of man, that is, of sensibility as defined by you, are *the emotions* which are the most strictly personal things that exist.' Let us consider this objection. But first I must warn my readers that in all that follows I shall be referring to the excellent eighth volume of the *Encyclopédie française, La vie mentale*, in which leading experts in psychological research in our country have for the first time presented us, as the fruit of an unusually bold and felicitous effort, with an overall picture of the mental development of man from one end of his life's span to the other, from the very day of his conception to the day of his death, and I shall refer more particularly to the original article on the emotions, signed by Dr Wallon

himself. A historian in search of enlightenment can scarcely read anything better.

And the question will be asked, no doubt, 'What is more strictly individual or more personal than an emotion? Indeed what is more strictly transient? Are not emotions a mere show or an instantaneous response to certain external stimuli? And do they not express modifications in our physical organs which, by definition, are incommunicable?' The emotional life of man is in fact (to employ Charles Blondel's formula) the thing that is 'most necessarily and inexorably subjective in us'.[2] So whatever is history doing getting caught up in so much individualism and psychological subjectivism? Do we really want it to analyse the physical causes of certain sudden feelings of fear, anger, joy or anguish in Peter the Great, Louis XIV or Napoleon? And when the historian has told us, 'Napoleon had a fit of rage' or 'a moment of intense pleasure', is his task not complete? Do we really expect him to descend into the physiological mysteries of the great man's inner being?

All these are specious arguments. In the first instance, because we must not mix things up, an *emotion* is certainly not the same thing as a mere *automatic* reaction of the organism to external stimuli. Taken as a show and response, the reactions that go with it and characterize it are not necessarily such as to speed up, sharpen, diversify and intensify the behaviour of the man who is subject to the emotion: quite the contrary.

In fact, Dr Wallon says quite rightly that the emotions constitute a new pattern of activity which must not be confused with mere automatic responses. And, first and foremost, they spring from other sources in our physical make-up. But that is not of much importance for us as historians, since we are not competent to prospect among such sources. A far more important point is this – the emotions, contrary to what is thought when they are confused with mere automatic responses to the external world, have a particular character which no man concerned with the social life of other men can any longer disregard.

Emotions are contagious. They imply relations between one man and another – group relations. They may well arise in the organic structure proper to a certain individual, and frequently on the occasion of an event affecting only that individual or at least affecting him with a particularly violent impact. But they are expressed in such a way, or, one might say, the form they take is so much the outcome of a whole series of experiences of group life, and of similar and simultaneous reactions to the impact of identical situations and repeated contacts; so much the fruit, one might prefer to say, of a fusion or of a distillation of various forms of sensibility, that they very quickly acquire the power to set in train in all those concerned, by means of a sort of imitative contagion, the emotional complex that corresponds to the event which happened to and was felt by a single individual.

And so, little by little, the emotions, by bringing together large numbers

of people acting sometimes as initiators and sometimes as followers, finally reached the stage where they constituted a system of inter-individual stimuli which took on a variety of forms according to situation and circumstance, thereby producing a wide variety of reactions and modes of sensibility in each person. This was especially so since the harmony thus established and the simultaneity of the emotional reactions thus guaranteed, proved to be of a kind that gave greater security or greater power to the group; *utility* thus soon *justified* the constitution of a veritable system of emotions. The emotions became a sort of *institution*. They were controlled in the same way as a ritual. Many of the ceremonies practised by primitive peoples are simulated situations with the obvious aim of arousing in all, by means of the same attitudes and gestures, one and the same emotion, welding them all together in a sort of superior individuality and preparing them all for the same action.

Let us stop here a moment. Surely all this cannot leave historians indifferent? True, in this respect we have mentioned those societies which we continue to call 'primitive' at the same time as we maintain that the word is absurd. We might perhaps say that such societies were still inarticulate. But let us not be too pompous here. Such inarticulate societies cover more time and space in the past of mankind than our literate societies of today. Such inarticulate societies have left much of their inarticulate statements in us. For nothing is ever lost if everything simply changes shape. And more important, what we have just said very briefly enables us to lay hold of something that is of far greater significance. We are enabled to witness in simple form the genesis of intellectual activity.

Intellectual activity presupposes social life. Its essential instruments (with language in the forefront) imply the existence of a human society in which they had necessarily to be worked out, the aim of such instruments being to make it possible to set up relationships between all those who participate in one and the same environment. But where is the initial ground for such inter-individual relations between the consciousness of men to be found if not in the sort of thing we have just described, which can be termed the emotional life? Are we not justified in thinking that the most specialized instrument of language, i.e. the articulate word, emerged and developed on the basis of the same organic and tonic activities as the emotions, when we see even today that disturbances in the tonic functions result at once in disturbances in elocution? But very soon, opposition grew up between the emotions and the things that expressed them. An incompatibility was revealed. For on the one hand it was quickly realized that as soon as the emotions occur they modify intellectual activity. And on the other hand it was also quickly realized that the best way to suppress an emotion was to portray its motives or object in precise terms, to produce an image of it or simply to undertake some calculation or meditation. Making a poem or a novel of one's sorrow has probably been a means of sentimental anaesthesia for a good many artists.

And so evolving civilizations were able to take part in that long-drawn-out drama, the gradual suppression of emotional activity through intellectual

activity; having in the first instance been the only elements capable of bringing about that unity of attitude and consciousness among individuals, on the basis of which intellectual commerce and its first tools were able to develop, the emotions then came into conflict with the same new instruments of communication which they alone had made it possible to create, and as intellectual operations evolved in social environments where all social relations between men were increasingly finely regulated by means of *institutions* and *technique*, the tendency grew stronger to look upon the emotions as a disturbance, as something dangerous, troublesome and ugly, at least, one might say, as something that ought not to appear naked. A gentleman is not proud. If he were proud of anything at all it would be of the fact that he always kept his composure and never betrayed his emotions. True, our societies do not consist only of gentlemen.

Will it be said that this sketch, which, I repeat, is in the main taken from Henri Wallon's fine article in volume VIII of the *Encyclopédie française*, is of little use to the historian? It all depends on what we mean by history. I nevertheless believe that it is of some value. And that it helps us not only to understand the attitude of the men of the past a little better, but perhaps to define a method of research, and that is our aim.

The Waning of the Middle Ages is a book which, one is tempted to say, has not had all the success it deserved in France. I wish to make a point of saying once more that it is a fine book. Nevertheless, we may ask whether there may not be certain deep-seated reasons for its relative lack of success.

I open the first chapter which bears the title 'The violent tenor of life'. The author shows us the sovereign power of the emotions at the close of the Middle Ages, their explosive violence, capable of bringing the most rational and best-prepared plans to nought. 'We can scarcely form any idea of the exaggerated nature of the emotions in mediaeval times', he writes. And he denounces the way in which in most cases the sheer need for vengeance is transposed into the feeling of justice which was so strong in the age. He shows how this feeling reaches maximum tension between two extremities – the law of retaliation, so deeply rooted in the pagan, and the religious horror of sin, the gift of Christianity; but for those violent and impulsive men, sin was for the most part another way of labelling the actions of one's enemies. As men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (especially the nineteenth century perhaps), endeavouring to establish penalties with lucidity and care and to administer them with caution and moderation, using a pipette one might say, we are shown the men of the late Middle Ages, who know only one categorical and harsh choice, that between death and grace. And it is grace that is frequently incomprehensible – hasty, sudden, total and undeserved, if grace can ever be undeserved . . . Huizinga concludes that life 'was too violent and so contrasting that it had the mixed smell of blood and roses'.

Well, all this is quite well and even quite attractively put, but, nevertheless, it leaves a certain disquiet in the reader. Is it in fact sound work? I mean can

the question be answered as he has put it? Can we really talk, in this respect, of a particular and distinct period in the emotional history of humanity? Are these sudden about-turns, these sudden returns from hate to clemency, from the most savage cruelty to the most touching pity, truly the sign of a disorder that was particular to a certain period, the sign of the end of the Middle Ages, of the waning or the autumn of the Middle Ages, in contrast, I imagine, to the dawning of the Middle Ages, the spring of the Middle Ages or perhaps, on the other hand, the dawning of modern times?

I doubt this a little as far as the beginning of the Middle Ages is concerned. A little reading of Gregory of Tours would soon throw light on the discussion . . . and I doubt it a little as far as the beginning of modern times is concerned. What is the real difference between the periods in question? Some years ago on a lecture tour I made to Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel where I spoke on the origins of the French Reformation, I proposed the following subject to my audience as food for meditation. When Jean Calvin emphatically insists in his theology on his view that the granting of grace to God's elect is a completely gratuitous and unconditional gift, when he thus testifies to the invincible revulsion he felt, and which he often expressly states, for the double-entry book-keeping operations involved in good works and sin, carried out in the offices of the Divinity by an army of incorruptible accountants and leading to a final balance sheet, is he not quite spontaneously giving way, he, the same man who so often compares his God to a king, is he not giving way to that feeling of the French people of his time who, when they saw the king pass through the countryside, on his constant journeys through the realm which began on the day of his anointing and finished on the day of his transfer to St Denis, dropped their tools and ran at top speed, some to kiss his stirrups, some the corner of his coat and some at least his horse's flanks? It was the king's justice that passed by in majesty, the Lord's lieutenant on earth who, like the Lord himself, can do anything and stands above all laws. A nod, and heads rolled. Another gesture and a man was spared. No middle path. No grading. No middle way. Grace or death.

But why should there be any question of grace rather than death? Might it be that after a close study of the facts and merits of the case some doubt still existed? Not at all. It is our form of justice that weighs the facts again and again, hesitates, feels its way and gauges carefully. And what of the justice of the sixteenth century? *All* or *Nothing*. And when justice has pronounced *All* or *Nothing* the king can intervene. To narrow down and gauge the decision? Not at all. The king freely distributes not his justice but his mercy. It may fall upon an unworthy person. The same is true of charity, that great virtue of the Christian world. There is no problem here. The people do not raise questions about it any more than the king. They are just as content with the gift of grace if it falls on a criminal as if it falls on someone truly to be pitied. Just as they are equally prepared to give charity to a rascal as to a good man. What counts is something quite separate from attenuating

circumstances and the balance of the books. What counts is *Pity* as such. The *gift* which is a *pure gift*. Grace which is *pure grace*.

Let us conjure up a typical story of the time. The guilty man is on his knees, blindfold, with his head on the block . . . The executioner is already raising his terrible naked sword. And suddenly there are shouts as a rider gallops into the square waving a piece of paper, 'Grace! Grace!' It is the right word. For the king gives his grace; he does not take account of merit. Just like Jean Calvin's God. Just like the man of sudden changes and sudden about-turns, the black and white man which Huizinga assures us was *par excellence* man in the late Middle Ages and who may well prove to be eternal man. For the truth is that Huizinga could probably have made everything clear in a word (and his book would have gained much in clarity) if he had straight away established the fact that there is ambivalence in all human feeling. To make this quite clear we might say that all human feeling is at one and the same time itself and its opposite, that the opposite poles of our emotional states are always joined together in a fundamental kinship. Circumstances, the various ways in which we present our situation to ourselves and certain personal attitudes may well show in individual cases at precise moments that one of these extremities fairly generally has the upper hand over the other; hate over love; the need to feel pity over the instinct for cruelty, etc. But these contrasting states remain inseparable from one another and the one cannot show itself without the other stirring, to some extent, in its latent state. Whence those oscillations and sudden changes which defy logic, sudden conversions, etc. The life of human groups throughout a given period could not, any more than the emotional life of men taken singly, be rendered by means of a simple juxtaposition of plain colours. It is a product both of opposing tendencies which naturally interpenetrate one another and of appetites which may go various ways depending on their object.

So, having started with this view of things, having started with the general and the human, in order to reach down to what is particular and circumstantial, we are no longer tempted to clothe 'the life of the Middle Ages', to take up Huizinga's expression once more, in any special sort of 'violence' and see it as something particular, original and distinctive. All this has no particular bearing on the life of the Middle Ages. Or rather the problem is out of context. It has been badly posed.

Given this universal, 'human' fact, the ambivalence of human feeling, are there any grounds for distinguishing periods in the history of human societies in which currents were reversed particularly frequently and with particular violence? Is there any reason to think that at certain periods in history tendencies towards one pattern predominated in frequency and violence over tendencies towards the opposite pattern – more cruelty than pity, more hate than love? Generally speaking, is there any reason, either, to think that there are in history periods of predominantly intellectual life succeeding periods of particularly highly developed emotional life? Why and how? These are

the real questions to ask. The ones that Huizinga did not ask out of fear of confusion, having failed to make that return to the origins, which may to some of our readers have appeared fussy and boring, though I think that they may now be able to see the reason for it and understand.

The truth is that any attempt to reconstitute the emotional life of a given period is a task that is at one and the same time extremely attractive and frightfully difficult. But so what? The historian has no right to desert.

He has no right to desert, because if he fails to undertake the task (even though he may not complete it) he is an accomplice in such statements as those I recalled at the beginning. Far too many historians still say that we can 'make use of psychology' to interpret the facts provided by valid documents concerning the character, actions and the life of some important man, one of those men 'who make history'. And what are we to understand by the word 'psychology'? That type of rather pompous sagacity which is based on old proverbs, faded literary recollections and acquired or inherited wisdom, which serves as a guide to our contemporaries in their daily relations with their fellow men?

Stuffed out with some well-chosen quotations and impressive maxims and dressed up in the beautiful academic style, it is that sort of psychology which has won such admiration in the innumerable masterpieces of romantic history which for ten years have crowded out the windows of our bookshops, though it does seem that the horrible smell they make has finally turned their readers away. Psychology – let us just consider Bouvard or Pécuchet, strong in the experience gained from acquaintance with the milliners and shop girls of their district and using it as a basis to explain Agnès Sorel's feelings for Charles VII, or Louis XIV's for Madame de Montespan, in such a way that their relations and friends exclaimed: 'Oh, how true!' This sort of psychology is that of Abbé Velly's Childeric, who so amused our old master, Camille Jullian. Velly, in his *Histoire de France* (1775) says, 'Childeric was a prince who experienced great adventures. He was the most handsome man in his kingdom. He had wit and courage. Born with a passionate heart he gave himself up too much to love. That was the cause of his downfall.' Rubbish.

But on the other hand, the very subjects from which people claim to exclude all intuitive imagination, i.e. the history of ideas and the history of institutions, are precisely for the psychological historian excellent fields for research, reconstitutions and interpretation. They are his fields of investigation *par excellence*. For the historian cannot understand or make others understand the functioning of the institutions in a given period or the ideas of that period or any other unless he has that basic standpoint, which I for my part call the psychological standpoint, which implies the concern to link up all the conditions of existence of the men of any given period with the meanings the same men gave to their own ideas. For conditions colour ideas like everything else with a very distinct colour characteristic of the period and the society in question. Conditions of existence leave their own stamp on ideas,

just as they leave it on institutions and their functions. And for the historian ideas and institutions are never data coming from the Eternal, they are historical manifestations of the human genius at a certain period under the pressure of circumstances which can never recur.

Only let us have no illusions about it, the task is a very hard one, and the tools not easy to come by and difficult to handle. What are the most important ones?

First of all we have the linguists, or more precisely the philosophers, offering us their vocabularies and dictionaries, which are in fact so inadequate and still so incomplete and lacking in precision. What in fact can we get from a study of vocabulary? Not very much as far as sentiments are concerned. Sometimes it makes it possible to isolate and grasp certain conditions in the fundamental existence of the men who created the vocabulary in question. To take an example that is more than classical, it can enable us to make clear the agricultural element in words in a language such as Latin, where *rivalité* (rivalry) has taken its name from the argument between neighbours claiming the same irrigation channel, *rivus*; where the outstanding quality of a man, *egregius*, is compared to the excellence of the animal that is removed from the flock or herd, *e grege*, to be looked after separately; where the weak man, *imbecillus*, evokes the idea of a plant without support, *bacillus*; where the notion of joy, *laetitia*, remains tied up with the idea of fertilizer, *laetamen*. But as soon as we are dealing with a whole system of sentiments and their changing nuances, we can once again follow only individual and fragmentary developments. No study of vocabulary can enable us to reconstitute the overall evolution of a whole system of sentiments within a given society in a given period. All we have available are research monographs which, one might say, play the role of a geological cross-section through a great many lands, which one does not have time to prospect as a whole. And the outline section that can be drawn can serve as the basis for a hundred and one different suggestions. But it only has the value of a sample. It has no statistical value and cannot serve as the basis for a study of the whole.

A second thing we can turn to is iconography, that subject to which the ingenious and skilful work of Émile Mâle has, in France, attracted so much attention over the past half century. And there is no doubt that this is an important source.

We all know how, by means of iconography, É. Mâle has reconstituted what we might call the successive and frequently contrasting modes of religious feeling. We know how he was able to set the divine, rational and classical art, characterized in every way by complete serenity, of the Gothic thirteenth century against the pathetic, human, sentimental and sometimes sensual art, expressive and tortured as it was, of the flamboyant fifteenth century. We know how he was able to date exactly the appearance in plastic art of a certain nuance of expression which, set alongside others, enables us to reconstitute the successive chapters in the artistic history of religious

feeling in France from the twelfth to the beginning of the seventeenth century. And we should be careful not to detract from the very considerable value of this endeavour and the work to which it has given rise – I do not mean simply for the history of artistic expression but for History as such. Even so we must be cautious.

In the first instance this is because we have to take account here of borrowed sources and of imitation of neighbouring art forms. We must in fact take far greater account of this than Émile Mâle did – if it is true, for instance, that something distorted the main viewpoint of his second volume from the very outset, something which he was later able to repair only partially; I refer to his relative neglect of Italian art and his misunderstanding of the powerful influence exerted by Italian art in the fourteenth century on French art in the development of that pathetic, realistic and human art which Mâle ascribes in its origins solely to the combined influence of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* of the pseudo-Bonaventura and of mystery plays.

Borrowed sources are a tremendous problem. For it is obviously not enough to say, 'Look, in this art observed in France, there is one whole portion which comes from Italy or Flanders' to render impossible all further discussion of the evolution of sentiment in French art at a given period. If something was borrowed then there was a need for it. If the French took hold of emotional themes developed by their Italian or Flemish neighbours at a given period, it is because these emotional themes moved them profoundly. And when they took hold of them they made them their own. Just as when borrowing a whole vocabulary from a neighbouring language they make the separate pieces of it their own. Just look at those curious, massive books which are at one and the same time both weighty and subtle, well-informed and tendentious, which Louis Reynaud once devoted to the problem of the cultural relations between medieval France and Germany. He reckoned to show that Germany had borrowed all the vocabulary of courtesy *en bloc* from France – words, and with them, the desire to create (and in the first instance to create artificially) the whole series of states of mind and emotion which corresponded to them. The foreign word, like the foreign artistic theme, is adopted because it fulfils a need. At least this is true for some of those who adopt it.

For here is the second difficulty. When reconstituting the nuances in the religious sentiment of the masses by means of pictorial material, Mâle talks far too readily about it as if it were a whole. Maybe it was a 'whole', but there are nuances to be observed, which begin to appear as soon as one takes a closer look at things. Here is an example. If there is one theme of pathos whose origin and evolution can be followed very closely by means of the pictorial material of the end of the Middle Ages, it is the theme of the suffering of Mary, the Passion of the Mother of God joined in the Passion of Christ, together with all its ensuing series of devotions to blood and wounds, at times on show before the eyes of the faithful to awaken the twofold instinct of pity and cruelty slumbering in the depths of each individual,

sometimes transfigured and brought onto a mystic plane through representations like that of the 'Fountain of Life' or the 'Mystic Press'. All this culminates in the group which includes Mary at the foot of the Cross, sometimes prostrate, half fainting, pitiful and tragic, sometime upright, in the attitude described in the *Stabat Mater*:

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lachrymosa
Dum pendebat filius.

(The sorrowful mother stood weeping by the cross while her son was hanging there.)

But right at the beginning of the sixteenth century, as early as 1529 in a book by a Catholic scholar, Jean de Hangest, writing polemically against the opponents of the cult of Mary, we read a protest against the views of certain people who, reacting against such representations of the Virgin of sorrow, are said to be falsely opposed to them on the following pretext: '*non super Filii passione doluit, aut lachrymata est*' ('it was not over her son's Passion that she was lamenting or weeping').

Is this a trifling matter? But the text came back to me not long ago when I was reading in Henri Bremond's *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, a passage concerning the passionate controversies to which this criticism of the *Stabat* gave rise in the seventeenth century. And even more so when reading what Marcel Bataillon, in his fine work on *Érasme et l'Espagne*, has to say about the success of this theme of the Virgin, prostrate and weeping at the foot of the Cross, in the highly emotional Spain of the end of the fifteenth century and about the protests which were aroused there as well through the introduction of a sort of realistic element of pain into the theme of pity. There was a conflict between two methods of two schools, between two conceptions of the pity that operated in inner religious experience. It is the eternal contrast expressed in Campanella's sonnet in which he turns from the image of the Crucifixion to plunge into the glorious contemplation of the Resurrection:

> What reason is there to show him everywhere painted and depicted in the midst of that torment which weighed on him so little in the face of the ensuing joy?
>
> Ah! Unfeeling men with your eyes always fixed on the earth, unworthy to see his celestial triumph, when will you lift up your eyes to something beyond the day of the cruel combat?

To which St Teresa's prayer makes an eternal reply, the magnificent cry of passionate womanhood:

> I love you more for your agony and death than for your resurrection. For I imagine that resurrected and returning to the

> azure spaces where you have your own universe and your own order you will have less need of your servant.

The conclusion is, after all, that we must know how to make distinctions, how to weigh and assess. We must not make rash generalizations and must not imagine that faith constituted a whole at any given time. The more lively it is, I would say, the more personal it is, and the more diversified it is, too, and intransigent in the various forms it takes. Individual forms such as the specifically Franciscan adoration of the pathetic God and the prostrate Mother or that form of adoration which dwelt on the God of the Passion and the exaltation of his wounds must not be taken as the forms universally accepted by all the mystics of a period thirsting for inner Christianity.

These are adjustments which in no way detract from the value of a work such as Émile Mâle's, but which teach us, for our part, a lesson in that prudence which he sometimes lacked.

What other means are there? Literature. Not just through the records it provides, for which we are so indebted, of those shades of sensibility which separate periods from one another and more precisely, generations, but also through the study of the way in which it creates and then distributes among the masses certain forms of feeling whose importance should be accurately assessed. For the public of a medieval court epic is not exactly the same in number or in composition as that of a nineteenth century serialized novel or of a twentieth-century popular film. But since we are now on to sensibility and shades of sensibility why not turn straight to the two admirable volumes that have already appeared of André Monglond's *Préromantisme français* which build up the same exquisite subtlety, the same delicacy of thought and taste as Henri Bremond employed in writing the whole series of volumes of his *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux*? Why not go straight to that fine volume II which is entirely devoted to the 'master of all sensible souls', J.-J. Rousseau, and to those who paved the way for him, helped him and protected him?

All that is of inestimable value. Provided of course, I must say once again, that we apply the same critical prudence in handling literary texts as we have to in studying and using pictorial material. Provided we do not allow ourselves to be deceived as to the extent or real depth of the layers of feeling which the history of literature shows us to appear in succession, in accordance with a sort of implacable logic; in reality we must see that all they do is constantly hide and reveal one another.

Did the eighteenth century see the triumph of sensibility? I am sure it did. But again I return to my *Synonymes français* by Girard:

> *Tendresse* denotes an inclination. *Sensibilité* a weakness . . . *Sensibilité* makes us keep watch about us in our own personal interest. *Tendresse* induces us to act on behalf of others . . . The heart that is *sensible* will not be cruel for it could not strike others without wounding itself. The heart that is *tendre* is good

> because *tendresse* is active *sensibilité*. I admit that the heart that is *sensible* is not the enemy of humanity. But I feel that the heart that is *tendre* is humanity's friend.

And so, in a few lines (though the whole parallel covers four pages), we have a fine indictment, dated 1780, which could truly pass for a valid expression of French sentiment (I mean of the sentiment of the most cultivated and refined Frenchmen of the time), of that snivelling and effusive sort of sensibility which probably filled a whole part of the eighteenth century, but only a part, as we can see, and not without provoking certain non-violent reactions, which, for being non-violent, were all the more clear-sighted and less susceptible to illusion.

Let us now sum up. We have *documents on moral conduct*, i.e. the material provided both by legal archives and by anything that comes under the broad heading of casuistry; *artistic documents*, i.e. the material provided by the plastic arts, and the musical arts, correctly approached; and *literary documents*, with the reservations I have just outlined. No, we are not, after all, as ill-equipped as all that. And if in the first place we maintain and keep abreast of the results obtained by them; if we adopt the rule never to embark upon research that simply applies psychology to history and never to approach history by endeavouring to reconstitute psychological data without first getting to grips with the ultimate nature of the question (indeed it is little use flicking through those old books whose titles we retain in our memories simply because somebody mentioned them to us twenty, thirty or forty years ago when we were at school, when they were already in many cases out of date); if from the outset we lean firmly on the latest critical and positive achievements of our neighbours the psychologists, then we might, I feel, be able to undertake a whole series of studies none of which have yet been done, and as long as they have not been done *there will be no real history possible*. No history of love, just remember that. We have no history of death. We have no history of pity, or of cruelty. We have no history of joy. Thanks to Henri Berr's *Semaines de synthèse* we have had a rapid sketch of the history of fear. In itself it demonstrates the tremendous importance of such histories.

When I say that we have no history of love, no history of joy, you must realize that I am not asking for a study of love or of joy throughout all periods, ages and civilizations, I am indicating lines of research. And I am not doing so with isolated individuals in mind. Or pure physiologists. Or pure moralists. Or pure psychologists in the usually accepted sense of the word. Far from that. I am asking for a vast collective investigation to be opened on the fundamental sentiments of man and the forms they take. What surprises we may look forward to! I spoke of death. Just open volume IX of Henri Bremond's *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, which contains his study on *La vie chrétienne sous l'ancien régime* (1932). Open it at the chapter which bears the title 'L'art de mourir'. Not three hundred

years ago; what an abyss between the morals and sentiments of the men of that age and ours!

And now, to offer a final overall picture, let me once again mention the sketch with which I began, that of the role of emotional activity in the history of humanity compared to the role of intellectual activity, which I traced with the help of the information given in volume VIII of the *Encyclopédie française*. Let us recall that kind of curve which showed us the entire system of emotional activities held in check and increasingly repressed by the ever-growing mass, the ever-spreading system of intellectual activities which conquered, dominated, and increasingly pushed back the emotions to the very edge, one might say, to the outskirts of life, relegated to a secondary, contemptible role. All well and good. So on that basis, if we are one of those intemperate rationalists of the old school, whom we have all known (and whom we may all still recognize fairly easily just by looking within ourselves at certain moments), we can strike up a fine hymn of triumph to progress, reason and logic. But will you read with me the text which I used just now?

> And so, little by little the emotions, by bringing together large numbers of people sometimes acting as initiators and sometimes as followers, finally reached the stage where they constituted a system of inter-individual stimuli which took on a variety of forms according to situation and circumstance, thereby producing a wide variety of reactions and modes of sensibility in each person. This was especially so since the harmony thus established and the simultaneity of the emotional reactions thus guaranteed proved to be of a kind that gave greater security or greater power to the group; *utility* thus soon justified the constitution of a veritable system of emotions. The emotions became a sort of *institution*. They were controlled in the same way as a ritual. Many of the ceremonies practised by primitive peoples are simulated situations with obvious aim of arousing in all, by means of the same attitudes and gestures, one and the same emotion, welding them all together in a sort of superior individuality and preparing them all for the same action.

This passage applies perfectly to the great festivals of primitive societies, for instance to the Pilou of the Kanakas of New Caledonia, the description of which can be read in Maurice Leenhardt's very fine book, *Gens de la grande terre*, which does honour both to French learning and to humanity. The above passage does not need one single line changed in order to apply to all those tragic spectacles which go on before our very eyes and all those patient, obstinate, wise, instinctive efforts to lay hold of that emotional life within us which is always ready to inundate intellectual life and to carry out a sudden reversal of that evolution we were so proud of from emotion to thought, from emotional language to articulate language.

Sensibility in history, a good subject for eminent amateurs. . . . Quickly, let us get back to *real history* – is not that the feeling? To the circumstances surrounding the Pritchard affair. To the question of the Holy Places. To the listing of salt stores in 1563. That is history. The history which we should teach our children in the classroom and our students in the universities. But the history of hate, the history of fear, the history of cruelty, the history of love, for goodness' sake stop bothering us with that empty talk! But the subject of such empty talk, which has so little to do with humanity, will tomorrow have finally made our universe into a stinking pit of corpses.

Yes. Those who at the outset may have wondered what was the point of all the psychology summarized here might, I think, now conclude that the point of it all is history, the most ancient and most recent history, the history of primitive feelings already there, *in situ*, and the history of revived primitive feelings. It is our own history, too, of perpetual sentimental resurgences and resurrections. We have revivals of the cult of blood, red blood, in its most animal primitive aspects and the cult of the basic forces within us which reveals our lassitude, domestic animals that we are, crushed and beaten down by the frenzied noise and energy of the thousands of machines that obsess us. To compensate, we have the revival of a sort of cult of Mother Earth in whose lap it is so pleasant in the evenings to stretch our weary limbs as if we were her child. No less universal is the revival of a sort of cult of the fostering, healing sun – nudism and camping, frantic immersions in the air and water. We know the exaltation of primitive feelings, going together with a rude dislocation of aim and purpose and the exaltation of cruelty at the expense of love, animal behaviour at the expense of culture, but always animal behaviour that is circumscribed and felt to be superior to culture. Now I will end by asking whether sensibility in history does not merit an enquiry, a wide-ranging, massive, collective enquiry. And as for psychology, is it a sick person's fantasy to claim that it is the very basis of any real work to be done by historians?

Notes

1 Girard, *Synonymes français*, Paris, 1780, vol. 2, p. 38.
2 C. Blondel, *Introduction à la psychologie collective*, p. 92.