CLEMENCEAU'S FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Georges Clemenceau has been an historical enigma for some time. That he will remain so to some extent is beyond question. The nature of the man as well as the peculiar intellectual situation which occurred at the beginning of the Twentieth Century will leave much of his life shrouded in the mysteries surrounding all men who are deeply perplexed and pessimistic about the future.

Clemenceau became increasingly aware of an irrational side to his makeup during the time when he was historically significant. This paper is written with a view toward delving into the irrational, emotional side of this man who attempted to deny the validity of any reality except a material one. The fiction of Georges Clemenceau exposes some part of what H. Stuart Hughes termed "the unconscious" or Erich Heller, "the interior." As Nineteenth-Century thinkers sought new definitions for the out-worn or unfashionable Christian values of earlier centuries, so Clemenceau struggled with his unanchored soul. His fiction is a reflection of that struggle and this thesis is a study of that fiction.

CHAPTER 1

METTRE EN SCENE

Charles Péguy's famous epigram, "tout commence en mystique et finit en politique," was made with certain universal political generalities in mind which fit his personal beliefs. Yet, this statement is perhaps the best single description of the French Belle Epoque period. Peguy, leaning on the individualist-romantic tradition of French political thought, was describing politics as a functional expression of man's moral growth. Nothing could progress in the political sphere until man set about to better himself morally. Although Péguy's statement was directed specifically toward the Third Republic, it can further be taken as a commentary on the disillusionment Péguy felt toward the decadence evidenced in France's political and moral thinking of the day.

Another social philosopher whose orientation was strikingly similar to this theme of Péguy's was the redoubtable political scrapper, Georges Clemenceau. The two are seldom compared since their careers and personalities clashed so much. Yet, Clemenceau, the wry cynical

activist, and Péguy, before his conversion to Catholicism in 1908, the urbane generalizing theorists shared many principles. Most notably, they rested their thinking on France's most typifying and fundamental political tradition; individualism. Both men grounded their political credo in the individual Frenchman. Both were disillusioned by the corruption and immorality in Pre-World War I France. Clemenceau and the early Péguy shared a faith in man's rationalism as the key to his self-progress. At first, neither looked to heaven for inspiration, despite the seeming "spiritualism" of Péguy's thought and the strong Christian ethic lacing his writing. This ethic was to blossom into support for the Church later in Péguy's life, but his faith remained a curious mixture of a strong, highly personalized morality and a pragmatic advocation of the social value a popular religion could proffer. Clemenceau's ethic, while remaining atheistic, was also very strong and very personalized. Both were ardent foes of autocracy whether it be represented by a Bonaparte or a Boulanger. Péguy and Clemenceau had both been bitterly opposed to the reign of Louis Napoleon which had preceded their era in French History. Autocracy was a form of moral decay to them in a sense, since politics was so central to everything else in the country. Clemenceau, whose father had been persecuted after the Orsini attempt

on Louis Napoleon's life, was particularly outspoken against the Bonapartists. These latter remained a surprisingly resilient faction even after the collapse of the regime in the Franco-Prussian War. Both were nationalists ready to die for France. Péguy himself was killed on the Marne in 1914. Clemenceau terrified his aides by being oblivious to gunfire when touring trenches as Prime Minister during the war. In character they shared strong natures, resolute moral fibre and self-confidence.

But if Clemenceau and Péguy can be strikingly compared, they can be as strikingly contrasted. Indeed, few historians have compared them at all. Clemenceau was a pessimistic and cynical infighter who could be extremely opportunistic at times.[1] Péguy was less compromising, more aloof from politics and yet more hopeful of its results. Clemenceau's political writing, his speeches, and his private conversations all reflect a sharp criticism

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1. It would appear that this opportunism was at least a partial motive behind Clemenceau's participation in the Dreyfus Affair. But perhaps his most flagrant demonstration that he was not so far above the political corruption with which he was so constantly at war was his role in the Panama Scandal. Here it seems unbelievable that he could have remained ignorant of the obvious bribery which surrounded his dealings with the directors of the Panama Company. See Geoffrey Bruun, Clemenceau (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943), p. 48. For Clemenceau's side of the affair, see Jean Martet, Georges Clemenceau, trans. Milton Waldman (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1930), p. 123.

of politics and politicians, equally reflective of a skeptically predisposed nature. Péguy could be equally critical, yet one always suspects that Péguy was merely pointing out the worst in man while looking for the best. Clemenceau believed that man, especially the Frenchman of the 1890's and early 1900's was corrupt and decadent. Péguy saw the individual as basically good but misled by politics. The political devouring of the spiritual basis for moral growth was an everpresent danger as long as man needed government. This danger was most forcibly demonstrated by the autocrat; a Charles Maurras, a Boulanger, or a Napoleon III. In autocracies the moral growth of the individual was sacrificed to the petty ambition and pride of one tyrant.

But to Péguy, Clemenceau might have been just such a danger. Clemenceau's nature was autocratic, his manner authoritative, his pride forceful. His passion to dominate others was only restrained by a peculiar aversion to actively seeking leadership. His pride and ego thus became their own halters, since he was determined to have his cake and eat it too. His two ministries had to be forced upon him and, bored with the first, he glibly threw it away.[2] It seemed his recalcitrant nature was often spiteful and

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2. Clemenceau himself hinted at this. (See Henry Mayers Hyndman, Clemenceau, The Man and His Time (New York: F. A. Stokes, 1919), p. 261. Nevertheless, his first ministry lasted three years, a much better-than-average record compared to others.

self destructive in its overwhelming need to personalize issues and win them on such a basis. In this case, his opponent was foreign minister Delcassé whom he attacked at the expense of France's national security. This action demonstrated Clemenceau's irresponsibility to the chamber, which promptly turned him out of office. A resolute pursuer of power and influence, he was equally resolute in avoiding a formalization of his power.

And, though an outspoken critic of the corruption and opportunism pervading French politics at this time, Clemenceau was opportunistic himself. To Péguy the political spectrum was a drafting board for inspiring human endeavors. To Clemenceau it was a battleground where hopefully, man could manage to control his self-destructive nature long enough to evolve himself into a higher being. Both men believed in a democracy which would give the individual ultimate latitude in bettering himself. Yet to Clemenceau, as to the Italian thinker, Pareto, democracy meant rule by an oligarchic elite of individuals (like himself) who would assure the apparent state of free choice and mass control while denying it in reality. It seemed that everywhere the moral hopes for man's self-progress came into conflict with the practical realities of politics Péguy was uncompromising and critical to the point of exiling himself from active politicking. Clemenceau not only involved himself but seemed to thrive on opposition and conflict,

even sacrificing to the fray the very ideals to which he ascribed. As David Thomson puts it, French individualism has always been tempered by a self-centered rationalism that has ever threatened to destroy that very individualism.[3] So Clemenceau, the individualist extreme, would sacrifice his countrymen's self determination to his own ego. Frenchmen have repeatedly been tempted in like fashion to dictate freedom to themselves. Péguy would not force his views on the French; they must come to him as to an altar, in a state of supplicative self-denial. Clemenceau, on the other hand, could and did dictate and then postpone or regress against his ideals if the temporary maintenance of order and obedience was at stake. Clemenceau's only novel, Les Plus Forts, (The Strongest), had concern for the working classes as one of its major themes. Yet Clemenceau was twice minister of Labor and suppressed strikes during both terms which he felt threatened France's welfare, (miners and postal workers). The socialist leader, Jean Jaurès, had a field day criticizing Clemenceau for these actions.

This then, was the paradoxical nature of the man who led France to victory in World War I and who was the most powerful French leader for years prior to the Great

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3. David Thomson, Democracy in France Since 1870 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 126

War. Georges Clemenceau's biographers are many and some are very able.[4] But when attempting to define the man and his program they all suffer from the same doubts and questions as did his contemporaries. Clemenceau made sure that no one saw more of him than he wanted to reveal. And he revealed very little. At times, he seemed devoted to France and the problems which an industrializing, militarizing Europe posed for her. Often he seemed to aim at improvement of all Europe, all of man. Often he seemed devoted only to himself.

What was the man's motivation? This is the stumbling block in the minds of all historians concerned with Clemenceau. To Bruun and Samuel Applebaum he acted from a concious social philosophy built around a mixture of Social Darwinism, Enlightenment rationalism and positivism. To Williams he was a nationalist first and last and to Hyndman, a socialist first and nationalist second.

Clemenceau puzzled those authors even as he mystified all those around him. He held himself aloof always, revealing only that which was necessary to get what he

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4. Geoffrey Bruun remains the best to this day. Martet has the most interesting personal insights. A good short history of "The Tiger's" connection with the Third Republic can be found in J. Hampden Jackson, Clemenceau and the Third Republic (New York: Collier Books, 1962). Wythe Williams eulogizes Clemenceau in The Tiger of France (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1949). Hyndman, the English socialist, is a war enthusiast.

wanted. Clemenceau was single-handedly responsible for destroying nine ministries during his stormy career. He was devoted to the idea of personal freedom but was quick to squash it in his own wartime ministry. Apparent self-contradictions such as these have baffled historians into ignoring Clemenceau or treating him simplistically. Yet who can ignore the man who was probably more responsible than any other individual Frenchman for an allied victory in 1918? And how can one cast as a stereotype the complex man who held such sway over all of European politics for so long?

Throughout his career, but principally in the years between the Panama Scandal and the Dreyfus Affair when he was formally out of politics, Clemenceau wrote some fiction. Basically, this work comprises two plays, a novel, and some short stories. The better of his biographers had recourse to these writings as sources of insight into the confusing ambitions of the man. But all of them have failed to make full use of those vital personal documents. They have been looking for a consistent social philosophy in his writing with which to define a consistent thread in his political actions. Neither exists. The social commentary and political over-thought in this fiction is just as self-contradictory and muddled as the author's practical political record. But the literary efforts are of immense value in understanding Clemenceau for other reasons. In them he

unconsciously revealed himself as he never did in public life.

Clemenceau had a socio-political philosophy as much as any of us has, but really no more, and most of it he devised after the fact. That philosophy had about as much influence on his day-to-day behavior as any such personal philosophy does. The value of Clemenceau's fiction (outside of its aesthetic qualities) lies in its clues to his personality, not his intellect. Despite his boast that his thinking never changed from his twenties on, it did; and it was not even well-defined until his later post-political years. He was a man who pondered life and one who wrote about it. But his actions can be more readily discerned as stemming from emotion rather than from reason.

Clemenceau accepted life on his terms alone, but his terms were not a set of intellectually derived values. They were a collection of emotional needs, desires. In his culminating life's commentary, Au Soir de la Pensée, which he considered his final word, he was rather critical of emotion,[5] viewing it as more primitive than reason and more apt to lead to error. Yet his own life was full of

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5. Clemenceau, Au Soir de la Pensée, trans. Charles Miner Thompson and John Herald, Jr., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), Vol. I, p. 261 and pps. 297-298, Vol. II, p. 111.

error and repeatedly casts him as a man of action, often without thought.

To understand Clemenceau one must look not at what he said or did, but what he was. The world of French politics in his time was made for a man of extraordinary self-assurance and conceit. Will power, strength, and ability with the dueling foils or pistols served to put these attributes into play.[6] Clemenceau never planned his career. He stumbled into politics, and found it a natural backdrop against which his personality could develop. It was a jungle in which a tiger could prowl. His involvement in politics was at times motivated by very high morals. Yet, his program, his philosophy, his ideals were largely based upon a strong sense of conventional propriety.

Clemenceau felt that, as a politician, he <u>should</u> have some ideals, some high morals. His instinct, based on emotional needs, usually prevailed over his reason.

In his social philosophy Clemenceau presented himself as a thinking man. Most biographers have taken this image too seriously. It conflicts with his public image and the two together form a confusing picture. But the emotional Clemenceau was a set of consistent motives with

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6. Clemenceau fought several duels and received satisfaction in all of them. None of them was to the death. He was an excellent shot and experts considered him to have been one of the best left-handed duelists of the day.

clearly predictable resultant actions. This emotional man emerges from the pages of his fiction. Before analyzing his literary works, however, it is desirable to look briefly at the major events of his life. Such a biographical sketch will help to make clear how the rational image fails the emotional man, and why Clemenceau's historical portrait remains blurred and confused.

CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHY

Georges Eugene Benjamin Clemenceau was born on September 28, 1841, in the Vendée where his family had been living for centuries. The family had always been well-to-do, and though the men had nearly all been doctors, none had practiced much. The Vendée had always been one of the most conservative departments, a land of church-minded, independent, peasant folk. The Clemenceaus stood out in sharp contrast to their neighbors because of their radical thinking. Clemenceau's father refused to have Georges baptized, isolating him from the community in his infancy.

In his postwar conversations with Jean Martet, Clemenceau reveals that he inherited many of his ideas from his father, who in turn received them from Victor Hugo and Michelet.[1] His father was a romantic revolutionary, who idealized the old heroes of the Revolution, particularly Robespierre. The practicality of revolutionary ideology mattered little, since it was all romanticized in the minds of Clemenceau's father and the boy.

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1. Martet, p. 294.

They both shared that curious mixture of French thought which laced positivism, enlightenment rationalism to the extreme, with romantic idealism. Clemenceau never clearly resolved these two straints of thought, which were often at variance in the nineteenth century. Like Freud, Durkheim, Sorel or Péguy, Clemenceau's thinking was a constant dialectic. None of these others, however, played the role that he did in politics; none of these others had to define a practical political program. The contemporary thinkers which Dr. Clemenceau impressed upon his son were Darwin, Mill and Comte. The doctor was an atheist, a Social Darwinist and a positivist. Politically, he was a republican, and so outspoken in his community that he was arrested and barely averted exile after the Orsini attempt on the life of Napoleon III.[2]

Georges grew up, then, in this atmosphere of rugged individualism, of republicanism and atheism. The Clemenceaus were a shock to their neighbors but the well-to-do are seldom ostracized and the boy grew up with a pride which often rose to arrogance. One significant omission in most of Clemenceau's writing is mention of his mother.

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2. Some credence can be placed in the famous story that tells of how Clemenceau ran to his father's carriage as he was being taken to Marseilles for emigration and vowed revenge only to be told by his father that, "If you want to avenge me, Work!" See Martet, pps. 295-296 or J. Hampden Jackson, Clemenceau and the Third Republic (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 14.

He complimented her off-handedly occasionally, but the absence of feminine influences in the man seems marked.

So Georges, after some provincial schooling, at age nineteen trundled off to Paris to study medicine in the family tradition. And here began a crucial period, perhaps the crucial period in Clemenceau's life. It was during this time that he first became involved in politics. And, according to Clemenceau, it was the time when he formulated a life philosophy which never changed.[3] He came to Paris a republican, an atheist and a positivist in theory. But he also came with pride and arrogance.

Paris was the hub of all of Clemenceau's activity until his retirement. That city became the battleground between his intellectual leanings toward positivism, Social Darwinism, atheism and republicanism, and his personal qualities of will power, ego and strength. The reasons for this dialectic are to be found partially in the nature of the times and the city's atmosphere. Most biographers grasp these two tendencies in Clemenceau. But they assume that the personal qualities acted as motivation behind putting the intellectual ideals into effect. The fact is that the two sides were as often as not at variance; two poles, so to speak, within the man himself. Clemenceau was

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3. See Hyndman, p. 17.

capable of drawing sweeping intellectual analyses of the world and the human condition. Yet, though he lacked nothing in personal ability to materialize his dreams and schemes, he frequently destroyed those very ideals to which he ascribed.

Hence, he became a political enigma except for a few general beliefs by which he can be categorized. I am referring now to such vague national ideals as security for France, republicanism, revenge against Germany, etc. Clemenceau also ascribed to the Belleville Program most of which was put into effect by the end of the century. This program included among other propositions, the abolition of the Senate and elimination of the death penalty. Typically, Clemenceau became a Senator in his later years and, in his newspaper L'Aurore, screamed for Dreyfus' death at at the opening of L'Affaire. The reasons behind the collapse of his 1906 ministry are to be found in his persecution of Foreign Minister Delcassé at the expense of his most self-avowed rallying cry, National Security.[4]

He was a Radical-Socialist, and he did at least pay lip service to the Radical-Socialist platform. The Radical-Socialist grew out of and remained united with the Radical Party and together they formed the center and most

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4. For more specifics concerning Clemenceau's program, see Jackson, pps. 45-46, and Bruun, p. 36.

powerful party in France. They represented individual rights, the one against the masses, anti-clericalism, national security, and were Dreyfusards. Gambetta was one of the first Radicals. As a party, the Radicals became progressively more liberal in thinking down to Clemenceau's time. Yet this was never a party as twentieth century politicians would think of it. It had no control over its leading political figures and was torn by internal personal struggles. For example, Clemenceau, who was to become the leader and most powerful Radical, was responsible for ousting from politics another most powerful Radical, Jules Ferry, over the colonial issue.[5]

Yet, time and again his actions contradicted that program to the point that he appears either extraordinarily naive or extremely opportunistic. Some of the most glaring contradictions I refer to above. Other examples are his suppression of the strikers in his first term as Minister of Home Affairs, 1906, and his reluctance to nationalize the great industries when he became Prime Minister. These issues created a split between Radicals and Socialists which never healed. During the war, Clemenceau became a semi-dictator of France. True, France was in dire need of

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5. Clemenceau to Ferry, March 28, 1885, the day of Ferry's downfall: "The men I have before me are no longer ministers: they are men accused of high treason, and on them, if there is any principle of responsibility or of justice left, will fall without delay the hand of the law". Jackson, p. 52.

authority, yet the extremes to which Clemenceau went to assure himself of France's internal security do not seem justified by the circumstances.[6]

The intellectual Clemenceau always played second fiddle to the emotional Clemenceau. He had a "feel" for the world which dominated his ratiocination concerning it. Though he paid verbal tribute to a political program of sorts and a rationalistic philosophy, he placed trust for his direction in this "feel", a sort of emotional grasp of things around him. Now this "feel" was partly inherited from his family environment, along with his father's Jacobin Republicanism. Ideology and Positivism. But it was basically structured by the shaping of his personality in these early years, and Paris was a city which stimulated and nurtured a particular emotional side to Clemenceau.

What <u>was</u> the Paris of these years? Politics was a concern that was largely taken out of the hands of the individual Frenchman under Napoleon III's Empire. The first ten years of the Empire, 1850-1860, were autocratic. Those were good years for the affluent classes: financiers, wealthy aristocrats, industrialists. Yet, those groups

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6. A good account of this, although it is presented in <u>defense</u> of Clemenceau, can be found in Hyndman, pps. 289-321. These acts of Clemenceau shake the very core of his philosophy, individualism.

had no real power; that was reserved for one man. Politics, then, became a means of "getting things"--contracts, leases, subsidies. There were those who were allowed to verbalize against the authoritarian regime and call for a return to the old Republican virtues, yet, their power was negligible. By the time Clemenceau reached Paris in 1860, politics had become a tool in the hands of opportunists, bureaucrats and businessmen. Deal making with the contingent bribery and corruption was the order of the day. The blasé attitude toward government extended into social and cultural life. Madame Bovary and La Dame Aux Camillas depicted a new attitude toward women and sex. In what Roger Williams describes as an era of 'gaslight and shadow' the world of Toulouse Lautrec had its beginnings. Scandal and permissiveness were still discussed in hushed tones, yet, propriety held a thin veil over a new French personality, sultry, sophisticated and worldly-minded. But there was a rumble in the background which threw a scare into the self-satisfied veneer the affluent crust cast over society. From 1848 on, there arose a progressively radical and uncompromising cry of the workers. Labor had begun to organize and make demands.

In the novels of Flaubert and the sketches of Daumier, already, behind the sober-faced bourgeois empiricism, a faint grumbling of the irrational could be

heard--a grumbling that would explode in Vienna two decades hence. Some forty years before, in Dresden, Schopenhauer had composed his World as Will and Idea, which Nietzsche would soon modify into the "will to power." The unconscious would await discovery until the 1890's, but Clemenceau already sensed the lack of direction in his personal spiritual needs in a world without religion.

During the 1860's Louis Napoleon began to recognize the growing frustrations of the liberal intellectuals by liberalizing his Empire to some extent.[7] With the lifting of this ideological yoke, there arose a flock of political groups which would blossom into parties under the Third Republic. Clemenceau became associated as a student with a number of outspoken liberals, individuals who looked back to the ideals of the Jacobins and other Revolutionaries for inspiration rather than to the forward looking deterministic views of the new left. In the early sixties, Georges managed to get himself jailed for 73 days for agitating, an experience he frequently described as the worst of his life. "The Tiger" felt early in life a sharp aversion to cages.

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7. Louis did not liberalize in response to Labor's demands. Labor was not sufficiently organized at this time. Louis was more concerned with the disaffection of the intellectuals who were mostly liberals. For a good discussion of this see Roger Williams, The World of Napoleon III (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pps. 236-271.

But all groups remained frustrated with the French political machine and the Franco-Prussian fiasco of 1870-1871 served only to aggravate these frustrations. There was a hastening toward pessimism, a quickening toward cynicism, and Clemenceau was caught up in this feeling. Yet the pride and arrogance which he brought from the Vendée demanded that he should remain aloof from the understood acceptance of prevailing political opportunism.

The Third Republic was literally born in an aura of behind-the-scenes handshakes and backslapping. The constitutional framework was never defined as such but enacted by statute in a piecemeal fashion. It was a working compromise within which other compromises could be worked out behind a juridical facade. The Third was often pointedly referred to as 'Madame Slut' by the more candid politicians and rightist enemies who often conducted much of their state business in the Moulin Rouge or at the Jockey Club.

Georges himself avoided any kind of shady compromise. He would not admit to dependence on anyone or anything so he became dependent on the lifestyle he created for himself. Clemenceau could be as cynically opportunistic and compromising as most other politicians but his pride forced him to never admit it. The same pride disgusted him with hypocrisy and so he turned his aloofness into a philosophy by following his previous inclination

to individualism. This made him a natural for the Radicals who leaned heavily on Jacobin individualism for their ideology, and Clemenceau quickly fell in with them. And the Radicals were not the only group Clemenceau explored. For a while he visited the famous revolutionist Blanqui in his cell but found him an 'idealist' who only helped conservatives by providing them with a symbol of fear around which they could rally support.

Previous to the birth of the Third Republic, Georges had made several trips to America observing the aftermath of the Civil War for Le Temps. Here he met and married Mary Plummer and returned to the Vendee with his wife. This marriage was doomed from its inception. Clemenceau was too much the egotist, too hungry for power, and too concerned with himself ever to live happily with one woman. He would remain an admitted misogynist throughout his life; a flatterer and a dandy but incapable of sustained feeling for a woman. Jean Martet once accused Clemenceau of anti-femininity only to receive this reply: "My friend, it's strength that determines all of this world's conduct. Whether for better or worse, that's how it is: a woman hasn't the strength. She is led by whoever wants to take the trouble. Amongst us she's led by the priest...yes indeed, and I see no need to give the priest any additional strength".[8]

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8. Martet, p. 331.

With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, Clemenceau left his wife and hurried off to Paris. Upon the collapse of the Bonapartist regime and establishment of the Republic, Clemenceau applied for and received the Mayoralty of Montmartre, Paris' eighteenth arrondissement. This was thanks to his father's friend, the Republican, Etienne Arago, who had himself been appointed Mayor of Paris by Jean Gambetta. Here he worked on the War effort until defeat became inevitable. Then there occurred an event which impressed him for the rest of his life. After the surrender of France, Parisians felt embittered and hostile to the Versailles regime of Adolphe Thiers. The reasons for this hostility are to be found in the belief that Paris had been 'tricked' into surrender and that food and relief were slow in coming to the city. A suspension of the war moratorium on debts did not endear Thiers to the poorer Parisians and this act triggered the Commune. Perhaps more basic causes for the Commune can be found in the waning illusions and revolutionary spirit of the old romantic left. This was the last gasp of the 'esprit Blanqui.' In March of 1871, the district of Montmartre rose up against Versailles troops sent there to retrieve some cannon. Clemenceau with unbounding arrogance attempted to play a middle role between the government which had appointed him and the district with which he had to

live. Both sides turned on him, and in the ensuing calamity, he confronted something new in his career--a mob. He described the crowd which surrounded his office and the scene of bloodshed between workers and soldiers in this way:

> Suddenly a terrific noise broke out, and the mob which filled the courtyard burst into the street in the grip of some kind of frenzy. Amongst them were chasseurs, soldiers of the line, National Guards, women and children. All were shrieking like wild beasts without realizing what they were doing. I observed then that pathological phenomenon which might be called blood lust. A breath of madness seemed to have passed over this mob;...It was one of those extraordinary nervous outbursts so frequent in the Middle Ages, which still occur amongst masses of human beings under the stress of some primeval emotion.[9]

That was Clemenceau's first confrontation with a mass movement and it frightened him. From that time forth in his thinking, anything that would improve the lot of the masses would have to be done for them, not by them. This belief accorded well with the natural inclination of his ego to dominate and do for or to others before they tried to do anything themselves. This was also very much in the French revolutionary tradition.

Clemenceau worked his way back into politics and a stormtossed career of more than forty years culminated in his second ministry during World War I, in which he rallied his country to victory. Occasionally he retired

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9. Jackson, p. 32.

from the political arena to the writing table to become the theorist or observer, and he always found time to turn out a newspaper. But the man was an activist by nature. He could not experience life by theorizing and examining. Life had to find Clemenceau as he thrust himself into it. His social and political writings were the sober reflections of a quiescent observer. This was Clemenceau in an unnatural state, and his actions and writings both betray any trend of consistency in his theories. His fiction depicts the world from an emotional viewpoint, the same emotion with which the Tiger often acted without thinking.

Just as Clemenceau the politician acted within a given practical context, Clemenceau the author wrote in a particular literary climate. By the 1880's the realism which Flaubert had fostered blossomed into naturalism. Under the aegis of Zola and Maupassant social issues became of great concern to the novelist and yet underneath this, especially in the later works of Maupassant, the psychology of the absurd was coming to fore. Revolution was giving ground to resignation. The doubts and questions raised by an earlier generation were coming to be accepted as unanswerable. After the war, the final absurdity, this movement would branch into the existentialist and analyst movements, but for now the artist and novelist were content to point out chaos and scandal in

the society which surrounded them with a shrug, as in the case of Maupassant, or with a little boy's smirk, as in the case of Henri Rousseau and other post-impressionists. As Shattuck aptly terms them, the 'banquet years' inspired a puckish mocking in the minds of artists for everything around them. They could not take France under the Third Republic any more seriously than most of the opportunistic legislators who scrambled over one another to get what they could at the expense of an anarchistic and unstable government. Relativity came into its own as a value for its own sake. Gauguin and Van Gogh were experimenting beyond time and space, Kant's final barriers against the collapse of metaphysics. Bergson and Proust were attacking the positivism of Comte while desperately trying to salvage the enlightenment tradition. Freud punched holes in the hitherto mechanistic sciences of sociology and psychology. Ambiguity was to be reckoned with, but humorously, for now.

Into this chaotic world of politics and art came a Clemenceau weaned on Comte and Darwin and leaning on the rational, classical tradition of French thinking for his ideals. However, his reactions to all he found were emotional. Reason failed to supply him with the assurance his immense ego needed to convince itself of justification for acts which might or might not be "ethical". He needed values. The traditional ones were under heavy attack, so

he leaned heavily on a prejudice about the world which his emotions supplied.

The next two chapters show just what Clemenceau's "prejudice" was made of, what kind of world he saw around him and what values he manufactured, all through examination of his work as a writer.

CHAPTER 3

WRITINGS

Non-Fiction

Clemenceau was in an unnatural state as a writer. He was primarily a man of action, not reflection. Paradoxically, it is for precisely this reason that he was most vulnerable to observation in this state. His defenses were down and his personality emerged. When he was involved in politics, his self-conscious evasion, calculation, and guardedness prevented a conclusive analysis of the man. But as a fiction writer he was most trustworthy, for here he was disclosing a simple 'feel' for things rather than a premeditated effect or a stilted and banal ratiocination. Insights into Clemenceau's emotive character are especially valuable since, despite his no-nonsense demeanor and self-proclaimed adulation of rationalism, he was after all a "romantic" in the French Revolutionary tradition.

Now Clemenceau wrote all of his life, mostly as a journalist. He either owned and published a paper or worked on one throughout his career.[1] Often journalism

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1. Some of these were: Le Temps, La Justice, L'Aurore, L'Homme libre and L'Homme en chaines.

was his only livelihood and it was through newspapers that he made two of his three triumphant returns to active political life after disastrous tumbles. The first of those tumbles came after the Commune when he was hated and derided by both the communards and the reactionary government. In fact, he was very nearly arrested and exiled. On this occasion he worked himself back into active political life on a crest of popularity earned as a hard-toiling doctor in Paris and by wounding his most severe critic, Major Poussargues. Next, the Panama Scandal in 1892-1893 revealed Clemenceau as a recipient of financial aid by one of the chief figures in the affair. He rode back into politics as a journalistic spokesman for the Dreyfusards. Zola's famous polemic, "J'Accuse", first appeared in Clemenceau's paper L'Aurore and he himself suggested the title. Finally, during World War I he worked his way into the Prime Minister's chair by eliminating all competition and arousing public support in his newspaper L'Homme en chaines. Characteristically, once in power he quickly stifled and closely censored all French newspapers.

His journalistic writing was blunt and direct but weighted down by a cluttered, heavy style. Wythe Williams, the American biographer of Clemenceau, had the best comment on this since he was a World War I journalist of whom Clemenceau was particularly fond. He recounted that Clemenceau would often feed him scoops in return for which

Williams would translate some of Clemenceau's speeches and dispatches into English. Williams described this as a particularly onerous task and said that Clemenceau himself admitted his awkward style and laughed to see the American suffer so for his scoops. Clemenceau wrote editorials as if he were debating, and, as a debater, he was never the eloquent fencer but a heavyweight body puncher.

In addition, he had published quite a number of semi-fictional works containing essays, editorials and travel articles.[2] These are books full of short observations on life and the universe. Many are political in nature but some go beyond politics and into general criticisms of mankind and the world. Clemenceau was stylistically at his best as a creator of these brief stories or vignettes. But they tell us little about Clemenceau himself. They lack emotion or 'feel.' Nor is there any more consistency here than is shown in his political life or his purely plitical abstracts or treatises. Finally, since many of the vignettes are contained in more than one book and the dating of most of them is confused, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint changes or any sense of maturing in

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2. E.g., La Mélée Sociale (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1919), Le Gran Pan (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1919), Figures de Vendée (Paris: Plon, 1930), Au Fil des Jours (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1900).

his opinions. Still, they do remain the best of his writing, artistically.

Aside from his journalism and these semi-fictional editorial vignettes, Clemenceau wrote some volumes that were more 'metaphysical'[3] in nature. They present an explicit and formal presentation of the 'Clemenceau philosophy'. Now this 'philosophy' laced all of Clemenceau's writings, and through it he put forth the rationalization for his political actions. This 'philosophy' is found in two works and significantly they are his first and last. This would seem to confirm Clemenceau's statement that his philosophy never changed.[4] However, it did mature and refine itself. The two works are De la Genération des Elements anatomiques, his doctoral thesis, and Au Soir de la Pensée, a massive summary of all his extra-political thought. The fundamental propositions in each work are the same. Lamarck, Comte and Mill were the main sources and the philosophy itself is a mixture of atheism, Spencerian survivalism, positivism and Revolutionary republicanism. Man is presented in a struggle with his fellow creatures for survival, the strongest always winning,[5] and held back from

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3. The word is used here in an informal contemporary sense. Clemenceau scorned "metaphysics" in the traditional metaphysical sense.

4. See footnote 3, chapter 2, p. 14.

5. Au Soir, Vol. II, pps. 444-445.

self-annihilation by a spark of altruism which to Clemenceau is the one redeeming virtue of an otherwise completely worthless and despicable breed. Man is basically emotional, but he is conquering his emotions (which lead him fearfully astray into self-delusions and dogma like Christianity)[6] by means of an expanding knowledge of himself and his universe.[7] In time he will come to recognize that existence is a chance occurrence in a bigger stream of things than himself.[8] On that day his ego will disappear[9] along with his need to subjugate his fellows, and he will devote himself to a more enlightened state.[10] All truth is relative but man can find happiness in his life by ascertaining and obtaining a temporary knowledge of things by which he can live within one lifetime. With acceptance of his insignificance man becomes humble and altruistic and breaks the trend of his natural tendencies to subjugate his fellow man.[11] Until then, he lives in a world of hate, stupidity and cruelty.

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6. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 480.
7. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 514.
8. Au Soir, Vol. I, ch. 1.
9. Au Soir, Vol. I, pps. 35-36.
10. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 524.
11. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 371.

Women, of course, are especially base because they are so weak.[12]

The elements of Fin de siècle pessimism are clearly demonstrated here: Schopenhauerian will, relativism, and a strong awareness of man's irrational emotional nature. To Clemenceau, man had to resolve the difficulties posed by this pessimism through imposition of a strong individual will. Clemenceau held a naive optimism in the Lamarckian evolutionary theory. Man would progress to a state of rationalistic reflection which could control his emotive side. But that this would soon occur was doubtful. The leaning Clemenceau had toward relativism (in seeming contradiction to some of his scientific views) dispelled ultimate optimism. Logically, it seems that man, by controlling himself, would only be "fooling" himself, and the better the job of fooling he did, the happier he would be. A spoiler of foolish notions, such as Clemenceau, could hardly find his own philosophy agreeable to his nature.

The relativism comes with shocking surprise to the reader of Clemenceau who has known him historically. For example, from a man who was presumably so strongly a democrat and a republican, this statement seems rather strange:

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12. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 444.

> ...Autocracy and democracy derive from totally opposite conceptions but generally resolve themselves into oligarchies which group themselves around a monarch or a thousand-headed Demos, and for which are substituted popular oligarchies with results that have not changed since the days of Aristophanes.
>
> I pass by the sick chatter of the so-called representative system better fitted for incoherent words than coherent action. I willingly risk the aphorism that parliaments are not fit to govern for reasons which practice has made sufficiently clear.[13]

Such statements disclose Clemenceau the realistic cynic behind the quasi-idealistic thinker, and reinforce the view that Clemenceau did not really take his public political philosophy too seriously as an ultimate guide to conduct. Witness further this statement given to Jean Martet which indicates that democracy and republicanism at present were mere words to Clemenceau rather than specific political structures to work for:

> What is there beside democracy--will you tell me that? Democracy is men--it is man. If man is foolish and stupid, obviously it's very embarrassing. But I don't see any remedy for it. The annoying and irremediable thing about it all is that, whether you have a Republic or a Monarchy, there will always be at the head of the state a Doumergue, a Descharel or a Charles IX, that is, there will be men, nothing but men.[14]

Clemenceau seemed to contradict himself by building the "strong" into a Kantian noumenon like Schopenhauerian

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13. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 462

14. Martet, p. 280.

'will' and altruism into a metaphysical morality.[15] The Radicals destroyed the Church in politics and education and Clemenceau derided the concept of God. Yet, like Péguy, he came to realize the spiritual vacuum that had been created in society. Like the Neo-Kantians, Clemenceau ended by manufacturing metaphysical replacements for God, in contradiction to the strictly positivist view. Another paradox was that for him the surrender of self was essential to moral progress.[16] Yet, Clemenceau was certainly one of the most egotistical and self-indulgent Frenchmen of the era.

Clemenceau's positivism itself was something other than a mere exaggeration of enlightenment empiricism. He had become increasingly dependent on the senses and scientific knowledge by the time he wrote Au Soir. "We depend on the world and the world does not depend on us."[17] Yet, whole sections are devoted to dreaming and imagination. This might be characterized as a positivistic approach to the unconscious or what Erich Heller termed "the interior." Like the early Freud, Clemenceau tried to empiricize the irrational, to define it out of existence.[18] But Clemenceau

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15. Au Soir, Vol. I, p. 167.

16. Au Soir, Vol. I, p. 166.

17. Au Soir, Vol. I, P. 242.

18. Au Soir, Vol. I, pps. 209, 235, 239, 243.

had a recognition of the unconscious that enlightenment thinkers lacked. It had to be dealt with and though he tried to deny it in himself, it exists both in his fiction and his actions. This philosophy evolves into a sort of "souless determinism." Man is alone and must devote himself by his will to a higher being.

Clemenceau was a critic, and a harsh one, of mankind but his criticism stemmed mostly from temperament, not reason. Often, Au Soir reads as though Clemenceau were trying to put forth a "philosophical apology" for his life. Suffice it to say for now that Clemenceau was not a formal philosopher and his work along these lines is not too terribly inconsistent and weak for an amateur. But to say that his political life was a constant, conscious application of this philosophy is to mistake the self-conscious would-be abstract rationalist with the emotional political romantic. It is the latter that will best explain the man historically.

In addition to this already long list of works, Clemenceau wrote some non-fiction of an historical and biographical nature. These include his several works on contemporary history in the Europe that he knew firsthand. These pieces are nationalistic and amazingly prophetic. For example, he repeatedly predicted another rise of Germany and another European War. This prophesy is

Illustrative of the dour and pessimistic tone of these books.[19] They are interesting political studies which suffer most from Clemenceau's greatest weakness in state affairs, a lack of economic understanding. There are also two biographies which are noteworthy because they give a picture of two personages who represented much of the ideal to Clemenceau. These two books are almost as useful as Clemenceau's fiction in describing his own character. Yet, they are restrained in this sense by the scope of the chronological or categorical milieu in which they are cast. The one, Démosthenes, describes events too distant from Clemenceau's present. The other, Claude Monet, the Water Lilies, concerns a man who was so oblivious to his social and political surroundings that the author's own feelings for his era and environment do not transcent Monet's values.

Démosthenes, written in 1926, is an idealistic eulogy of the ancient Athenian hero. Clemenceau felt a cord of affinity with the Athenian patriot who dared defy his townsmen to the point of his own death in an attempt to save them from themselves. Demosthenes was a self-assured individual, distraught with his countrymen's laziness and decadence.

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19. E.g., These include: American Reconstruction 1865-1870, trans. Margaret MacVeagh (New York: DeCapo Press, 1969), Grandeur et Misere d'une Victoire (Paris: Plon, 1930).

Clemenceau's identification with such a man and the situation in which he found himself was natural and is made strikingly clear in statements like this:

> Let a man nobly stake his best and finest self on a cause superior to all contingencies and the calculations of self-interest will vanish like fog before the gale. When the hero risks more than his life he gauges his chances with the laudity that his energy in the height of battle gives him.[20]

Clemenceau had this to say about Athens: "Life is beautiful by its songs but there needs to be some endeavour to sing."[21]

But what endeavour had Demosthenes? To save Athens? For what? Her republicanism, democracy, freedom of choice? Clemenceau refers to an old theme of his in apparent refutation of this idea: "Since the law of man is to change, all human affirmations should be left a free chance to evolve--monarchy, oligarchy and democracy are nought but phases of the law of the strongest about to be displaced."[22]

In private, Clemenceau seems to have favored a benevolent oligarchy consisting of "enlightened"individuals,

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20. Clemenceau, Démosthenes, trans. Charles Miner Thompson. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1926).

21. Démosthenes, p. 27.

22. Démosthenes, p. 109. Note also the sections in Au Soir on the forms of government. Vol. II, pps. 395-404.

such as himself, who could oversee the delicate balance between man's anarchic maturation and the need for political stability. Hopefully, at some point in time, the Nation would become aware of its inevitable struggle toward altruism. Clemenceau could play Demosthenes to France's Athens even at the expense of his republican ideals as a sort of caretaker until the day of enlightenment. An example of the type of individual that Clemenceau would consider "enlightened" is found in his second biography published three years later, Claude Monet, the Water Lilies.

Monet was Clemenceau's closest friend and perhaps his only one in all his lifetime.[23] Monet was uncorrupted by society and politics enough for Clemenceau to trust him and they shared many scientific and artistic beliefs.

> We mean to live in society, while preserving as much as possible of our personality from constraint--which implies a group of contrary qualities associated in a variety of ways...We are still in the first stages of its solution, and the main progress we have made is in no longer sending a man to the gallows for a "yes" or "no" all timed according to the opinion of the greatest number.[24]

And as for Monet: "What does Monet's life teach? Something for art but especially something for humanity

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23. Wythe Williams, The Tiger of France (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), p. 254 and Martet, p. 203.

24. Clemenceau, Claude Monet, the Water Lilies Garden City, New York: Doubleday Doran and Co., 1930) pps. 5 and 6.

since all art reduces itself, as knowledge itself does, to expressions of sensitivity."[25]

Monet symbolized society's altruistic, creative side to Clemenceau. An artist with a soul, a man at peace with himself and the world which is the embodiment of mankind's highest aim.[26] Monet caught the constant relativity of things and the universe in his scientific style, and yet he presented it with the drama and emotion necessary to strike a response in man.[27] He is presenting verifiable observable "proof" of the relative nature of things by capturing light and movement on his canvas. The emotional aesthetic response within us represents the highest form of evidence man has to be convinced of this relativity. Thus, like Clemenceau, he represents neither the irrational nor the rational, but an attempt to make a systematic and scientific, and, therefore, reasonable formulation of what is, in fact, "unconscious." This was the boast of Sigmund Freud's self-styled "psychoanalysis," which was to end in making "conscious" what had been "unconscious" in the mentally ill or neurotic person.

These two friends, though they shared opinions in science and art, were opposites in personality. Monet was

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25. Claude Monet, The Water Lilies, p. 9.

26. Claude Monet, The Water Lilies, p. 77.

27. Claude Monet, The Water Lilies, pps. 73-74 and pps. 163-164.

retiring, contemplative and artistic. Clemenceau was tirelessly active, arrogant and practical. The two fulfilled needs in each other. Clemenceau badly needed someone to trust. His relations with women were the frivolous sparrings of a dandy. Men were all competitors, and Clemenceau felt superior to most of them. Monet was honest and dependably unresisting to Clemenceau's domineering nature yet he could be admired for the talents he had which Clemenceau lacked; vision and artistic talent. To Monet Clemenceau was a refreshing respite from the abstract world. He needed the perpetual advice-giving and bossing which Clemenceau handed out to all around him. Clemenceau said of some correspondence with Monet which he came across after Monet's death: "I don't know what they contain: friendship and scolding probably. That's what my life's been made up of. I can't like anyone without scolding him."[28]

Fiction--Introduction

Clemenceau wrote fiction during two periods of his life. Both periods were quite similar in several respects. During both, as far as he could foresee, his active political life was at an end. The first began in 1893 after the Panama Scandal and began to end in 1897 with the opening

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28. Martet, p. 216.

of the Dreyfus Affair. During this period he produced his one novel and most of his short stories and a play, Le Voile du Bonheur. The second period came after he resigned the Premiership in 1920. In this period, which lasted until he turned to non-fiction in the mid-20's, Clemenceau wrote a few stories which appeared with some old ones in Aux Ambuscades de la Vie and another play, Le départ pour Cythère, which has since been lost.

Now Clemenceau thrived on action. He was uneasy and irritable when he was not active. Another very pertinent factor to consider here is Clemenceau's health. He was in good shape until his death but he did suffer from two physical handicaps which may have strongly affected his mental health. First, he had diabetes before the discovery of insulin which is now considered a cause of chronic ill humor.[29] Second, he had a skin disease on his hands which necessitated the constant wearing of gloves. This could easily have been a source of never ending irritability to a man who so loved to fish and hunt. When thrown into circumstances barring him from politics, he retired to his writing desk or his newspaper. This, however, could never fill the emptiness left by vacating a spot at the hub of political activity.

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29. Williams, p. 285

Just how reserved and aloof Clemenceau felt he had to be is indicated by this statement to Jean Martet:

> But if you ever want to take up politics as a career, Martet, and want to get anywhere don't worry yourself with questions of liking. Keep yourself always in readiness to break with your friends. Otherwise you will be lost, lost. You will never be able to carry through what you have decided to do. In politics it is your friends who hold you back.[30]

But it was in the periods of inactivity that his unbounding self confidence and will power flagged and he became uncertain and introspective. He was off his guard when he felt alone, bitter and resentful.

Clemenceau was not a great writer. Some of his short stories are excellent but his novel, Les Plus Forts, the plays and most of the stories are merely interesting at best. One glaring weakness was in his handling of his characters. They are sketchy and nebulous. We cannot examine their makeup to find that of Clemenceau. Even though he had enduring doubts about his strength and ability while he was writing creatively, Clemenceau did not reach the point of deep, introspective self-analysis and examination. This is reflected in his fictional character who are not personalities but personifications of some aspect of man. So we cannot look here for Clemenceau. Rather we must look at the world that Clemenceau creates in his works.

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30. Martet, p. 78

As in his life and his non-fiction, this world was filled with socio-politico inconsistencies which compiled themselves into as nebulous a whole as was his life, it would appear, from reading what most historians have written of him.

But there is another world presented here that is consistent and complete in the sense that motivation, action and thought interrelate with each other in a discernible pattern of arrangement. It is the emotional world of feeling, not thought. This world comes to light through his fiction, especially since those periods of rejection and self doubt brought forth the overriding emotion governing Clemenceau's personality--fear, and most particularly, fear of the implications of late-nineteenth century thought. Perhaps a brief summary of his fictional, taken as a whole, may make this point clearer, and, therefore, give deeper understanding to the otherwise seemingly ambiguous Clemenceau.

Summary of Fiction

The first work of fiction produced by Clemenceau was his one novel in 1898, Les Plus Forts. The book was a miserable flop and Clemenceau's attempts as a novelist ended abruptly. However, after the Great War all of Clemenceau's works had a renewed popularity. Les Plus Forts was translated and published in English in 1919. Clemenceau took

his novel seriously as indicated by the sincere sombre tone. There emerges a dramatic presentation of some of the major Clemenceau ideals.

The book concerns a young aristocrat, Henri de Pumaufray, who leaves his country estate in Poitou to go to the Paris of the second Empire, where he ruins himself. He returns to his country home and falls in love with Claire, the wife of Dominique Harlé, a manufacturer acquaintance of Henri's. They have an affair, but Claire dies giving birth to their daughter, Claudia. Henri devotes himself to his illegitimate daughter as a protective 'uncle' but he comes more and more into conflict with Harlé who determines to marry the girl into politically and socially powerful circles. To accomplish this, Harlé enlists the sid of Madame de Fourchamps, a Parisian social climber and manipulator. As Henri points out, a struggle develops between these characters for Claudia's future: "You have to choose between vulgar pleasures which are only appearances, and the true happiness, the human happiness which comes from a life nobly spent."[31]

Meanwhile, another struggle builds between Harlé and his mistreated workers who become increasingly violent as the conditions in Harlé's plant become less bearable. The

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31. Clemenceau, Les Plus Forts (The Strongest) (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1920), p. 54.

book climaxes when Henri's efforts to save Claudia from a pleasure filled but banal existence fail and she pledges herself to an empty marriage with a young politician. Fourchamps manages to snag Harlé for herself. Henri, desperate, exposes Claudia's true birth to Harlé who has just received the news that his plant is under attack by the workers. There is a violent confrontation but Henri (also a staunch defender of the workers) has only words for weapons and they fall empty on Harlé's unconcerned ears. Yet Henri does not despair that Claudia will never come to her senses and awaits the day that the entire world, as symbolized by Claudia, will come to a better understanding of itself and change its values to a less materialistic bent.

The story itself is interesting and fairly entertaining but suffers from several glaring weaknesses. Foremost among these is its style. Clemenceau is not as awkward and cumbersome here as in many of his other works, but he still barely ambles along. His dialogue, when he injects his simple and direct debating style is lively and informative, yet this is at the expense of having his characters seem like didactic robots, mere mouthpieces in a dialogue rather than real characters with motivation and personality. Les Plus Forts has been aptly described as a roman à thèse (novel with a thesis). Clemenceau brings

forth the old rational principles here again: evolution, rule of the strongest, and anticlericalism. In addition, the novel suffers some because of the lack of substance in its principals. Whenever they do speak, it is in long, drawn out speeches, often quite emotional and tear-filled.

However, an undercurrent of something less self-consciously composed and more complex emits from this straightforward and melodramatic story. A vibrant personal feel for the world subtly seeps from beneath the stilted and awkward style. For example, Labor is personified in the manner of the ancient "gods" of the Romans and the Greeks. No longer is it treated as a political force to be contended with or a social class to be dealt with as in Clemenceau's non-fiction; ever hovering in the background it is a growing, smoldering force. When Labor does appear as an individual face (e.g., Jean Quété, the shop foreman), it is one to whom Clemenceau is sympathetic. Yet, when Labor organizes, and strikes, it is a dangerous threat to Clemenceau. Henri's cries of protest turn to panic as he predicts the upsurge of workers all over the nation. Here, Clemenceau reveals that his failure to help Labor politically is due to personal fear.

Clemenceau did not understand Labor, and despite his personal work as a doctor for the unwashed, he could not overcome a deep-seated distrust of them. He was an

individual too proud for any group affiliations and organized Labor presented him with a mob. His arrogance planted a wall between him and Labor, despite his altruistic philosophy. This is one example of the value his fiction has. By revealing Clemenceau's personal reactions, it can give the lie to, or help us understand, his public and philosophical ones.

In 1898 also, with the opening of the Dreyfus Affair, there appeared a series of sketches on Jewish life, Au Pied du Sinai. Here legend and fiction were intermixed to form a laudation on the Jewish race. Clemenceau eulogized the Jewish resiliency, energy and will to survive. He also criticized some of their "legendary" faults, notably their overconcern with money. Considering the circumstances under which the book was written, and its use as a propaganda vehicle in the Dreyfus Affair, it has little value as a means of understanding Clemenceau, except possibly to underscore his opportunism and hypocrisy. He was known to hold different opinions of Jews on other occasions. In describing the 1919 Peace Conference he said this to Martet: "There is one fellow in there...I wonder what became of him. I mean Orlando...A chap who was a great deal more cunning was Sonnino. A Jew...."[32] And: "He's a Jew but

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32. Martet, pps. 186-187

he's a good Jew. There are some good Jews."[33] And Clemenceau said this about Kletz: "The only Jew I have ever met who knows nothing about finance."[34]

The next year Clemenceau tried his hand as a playwright. He wrote a play that was performed in 1901, Le Voile du bonheur. It ran two nights and folded. It's plot concerns a blind Chinese, Tchang-I, who lives in a cloud of serenity surrounded by devoted friends, a loving wife and a dutiful son. A Western physician offers Tchang-I the opportunity to regain his sight with a drug but cautions him that if the drug is administered improperly, he will be permanently blinded. Without telling anyone, Tchang-I takes the drug only to discover that his best friend is having an affair with his wife and stealing his manufacturing ideas, while his son is wild and irresponsible. He makes himself permanently blind by overdosing and persuades himself that what he saw was a Western magically-induced dream, thus continuing to live happily.

This play has confused most of Clemenceau's biographers since he seemed to be advocating resignation and blinding oneself to problems. Rather, Clemenceau was expressing the desires of man to escape the misery of the world. Clemenceau's growing sense of the world of the

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33. Martet, p. 207

34. Jackson, p. 136.

interior was certainly apparent in this piece. Tchang-I destroyed his new-found powers of empirical observation because he did not like what he saw. He was able to create a more serene world with his imagination. Clemenceau at once defined the interior world as illusory and as very powerful with this bit of drama. He was doubting the truth of the non-empirical world, but not its existence nor its strength.

The rest of Clemenceau's fiction is his short stories and it is anyone's guess as to when some of these were written. Suffice it to say that many were written in this period but most appeared in the second period of writing in Aux Ambuscades de la Vie (1920). They are easily his best fiction and some of his best writing. They are tight, well-constructed stories in a naturalist vein and a few of them could stand up to anything Maupassant or Zola wrote. There are character studies, short tales and stories told through dialogue. They will be referred to and summarized later as is necessary to illustrate a point.

As previously mentioned, Clemenceau wrote another play, Le départ pour Cythère, which this author could not find. According to Martet,[35] it was a one-act comedy, very melancholic and an attack on the institution of marriage

35. Martet, p. 190.

as being stifling to love. It was written in the second period also and was never performed.

This then was the fiction of Clemenceau. Like his non-fiction, it contains no consistent socio-political philosophy or program. But something of the inner Clemenceau comes through, something one can use to understand him and in so understanding him, understand why he did what he did historically.

CHAPTER 4

CLEMENCEAU'S FEARS

Georges Clemenceau has always been an elusive historical figure. Unlike a Charlemagne or a Napoleon, he never seemed to have a grand scheme or a bold vision in mind. At times this "bad boy of the chamber" seemed a perfectly obnoxious brat as he toppled ministry after ministry with no apparent public motive. And once in power as Prime Minister of France, he lacked aims, program and direction with the exception of World War I when he found a goal in victory.

Clemenceau's stand on specific issues was ever tenuous to the point that he often appears opportunistic and hypocritical. Yet, he could stake everything on a throw of the political dice and retain perfect composure. He approached politics as most men would a game or a sport. It was a competitive testing ground for his enormous ego. He had notions and ambitions but they were inextricably intermeshed with his personality. Clemenceau was a man governed by personal hopes and fears, some of them petty and some of them quite profound. Like Hemingway, he had

a personal code that extended into public life. Clemenceau had a code, a sort of personal "spiritual" approach to life. He used it as ultimate judge over himself and others. He had philosophical and scientific theories, but if they ever got in the way of this quasi-spiritual, instinctive approach, they were quickly forgotten. It was the drama of politics that enraptured Clemenceau, the ups and downs, the cutthroat infighting and the constant activity. A man as realistic and cynical as Clemenceau could not anchor himself in this active type of life with abstract philosophical notions or political theories. Clemenceau was a fighter and a destroyer, not a builder. The cause he fought for most often was gratification of his own personal code. He was a formidable enemy and a harsh and terrible critic but the person of whom he was most demanding was himself.

He was a fighter, an activist; but for what cause? Like Demosthenes or Henri de Puymaufray, his fictional hero, his reasons for fighting were not worth his efforts. But still he had to act. "When a man asks himself what is meant by action he proves that he isn't a man of action. Action is a lack of balance. In order to act you must be somewhat insane. A reasonable sensible man is satisfied thinking...."[1] This was the confession of a man without

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1. Martet, p. 75.

ideals. Complete admission of "the strongest" or "altruism" as metaphysical absolutes was prevented by his positivistic-relativistic bent. He had nothing to depend upon but himself and to accept the irrational as a part of himself was to accept irrational actions. Clemenceau's ego would not admit to irrational actions and yet his career was full of them. If his world was one without traditional values to lean on, it was his fault as much as anyone's. For Clemenceau had been one of the all-too-eager Republicans that destroyed the Church and the upper classes in the late nineteenth century French society. Like many men of this century, his new-found individualism was at once a hopeful and a terrifying thing. The dangers of mediocrity and corruption in a materialistic, talent-oriented society were all too apparent to Clemenceau.

Clemenceau's "thinking", i.e., his program and his philosophy, came as afterthoughts and in moments of relaxation. Most of his historical influence was accomplished by the man in action. Such a man, temporarily void of a broad scheme of things can act on one basis only--instinct-- an instinct governed by his personal code. This code embodied the "spiritual" side of Clemenceau that his republican-positivist background tried to stifle.

Clemenceau's code and his instincts can be found in several places with some hard looking. They were nowhere

set down in their entirety. But perhaps the best place to look for them is in the one area where the man describes the world in dramatic emotional terms. His vignettes and his biographies are good for this purpose, but so also is his fiction.

Clemenceau's world was a troubled one. Man was corrupt, weak, stupid and hypocritical. He collected himself into ruthless mobs or overbearing oligarchies and enslaved his fellow. Hope lay not in God or an afterlife but in man's own future; in the time, however distant, when man would evolve into an altruistic being. But what of the present--how was one to survive here and now without becoming either a slave himself or part of the ruling segment of society? This was the riddle of life to Clemenceau. As a public official he was concerned with the future of all mankind and particularly that of his countrymen. Yet, his actions and thought were dictated by his own personal struggle with life. How could he, the politician and statesman, retain his independence and self respect while being pressured everyday by different elements in society who would try to sway him in one direction or another? How could he do something for man without doing a lot for a few specific men? How could Clemenceau satisfy his immense ego that he was a special being, "cleaner", than his fellows? Clemenceau had ideals which were discussed

in previous chapters, but he was too much the realist, too much the practical politician to pay them much heed in every-day affairs. He needed something more personal and more relative to live by. This something was fabricated from the world in which Clemenceau found himself and his personal remedy for the moral dangers in his own existence on this planet.

This best place to begin is with this troubled world of Clemenceau. This was a world run by combinations of "les plus forts"--the strongest--oligarchic elites who temporarily collected enough power in one place to have sway over all activity in that place, be it social, political or economic. In Les Plus Forts attaining this power was the central concern of all characters with the exceptions, Harlé's wife, Claire, Henri's friend, Deschars, and Henri de Puymaufray, the hero.

The reader will recall that in Les Plus Forts, Henri had returned from a debauched existence in a corrupt Paris to a leisurely existence on his country estate in Bretagne. Here he had met and wooed Claire Harlé, the wife of an industrialist acquaintance. Claire died giving birth to Claudia, Henri's illegitimate daughter. As Claudia grew older, she was torn between affection for her "uncle" Henri and duty toward her insensitive "father" Harlé. Henri wished to see her marry for love, and Harlé wished to further his own prestige and power by marrying her to someone

with both of these, Etienne Montperrier, a young and banal deputy. Henri was visited by a young friend just returning from travels in the East, Deschars. Now Deschars was Henri's choice for Claudia's hand, mostly because he lacked this desire for power and money. Yet, he also lacked both substitute goals and the will to resist a combination of the strongest. Hence, to Clemenceau, he represented much that was wrong with France following the Franco-Prussian War.

> The generation that followed the War of 1870 was a generation of observers. Discouraged from action by the defeat of their elders, our young men devoted themselves to contemplation. They wrote, sang, some of them even thought. But the mainspring of their will never was wound up to the striking point, because it lacked a sufficient concentration of energy. Those that presumptuously assumed the power to act had neither foresight nor method and only added to the confusion.
>
> Deschars was one of his generation...Montperrier seemed to have an advantage over him for he had chosen to take part in something which for good or ill, useful or not, was concerned with the supposed evolution of the future. If Deschars had had a great human object in view he could perhaps have carried Claudia off without argument...[2]

But what "human object" would be worth pursuing? Did not Deschars represent exactly that side of Clemenceau which doubted all around him? Montperrier symbolized the mediocrity and materialism, the banalities and corruption of modern French society. Clemenceau could not accept the trend toward these ends, yet he could neither deny nor

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2. Les Plus Forts, p. 224

arrest that trend. But Clemenceau was no quitter. Far from resigning himself to Deschars' retiring pose, he struck out in every direction with the rabid energy of frustration. Clemenceau justified his external actions with the internal code. This code also answered any doubts he had about continuing the struggle of existence even as it directed his political actions.

For his own era, Clemenceau believed the power of "the strongest" was based on economics. "The strongest" ruled over capital and production, a reign that extended itself into the socio-political sphere until all cultural activity was guaged by monetary standards. A good definition of this all-encompassing fact of life and the resiliency of such a nature of things was laid out by Henri to Claudia.

> What you call the 'world' is simply a union of the strongest...And when you're done with brute force, money is the power which includes everything...the past is breaking up and new groups are forming; but they are groups of the strongest-as always, to-day the strongest are the richest, first of all that's the brutal fact.[3]

Any concern"the strongest" might have for the weak was similar to that of a man for his animals--affection proportional to service of the animal.[4] Thus, charity and

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3. Les Plus Forts, p. 79.

4. Clemenceau, Aux Ambuscades de la Vie, "The Bullfinch and the Maker of Wooden Shoes" (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Page and Co., 1920), p. 174.

welfare were predicated on self-interest. Baron Oppert, an ally of Fourchamps, and Harlé described the manner in which "the strongest" satisfied and deluded "Labor" into a state of composure. Factory towns with schools and hospitals were built for them which enslave them to their masters.[5] Clemenceau, himself, spoke out in the early pages of Les Plus Forts:

> There is an art of using the words 'devotion' and 'sacrifice' so that they call up emotions quite distinct from those that they should connote. What is more banal than the exhortation to be charitable?--and what action is more rare than disinterested help, given without hope of heavenly recompense or worldly praise? Organized charity of church or state, subjecting each and all to the prevailing formula, becomes an excuse for ferocious egotism, freed from all restraint.[6]

Here Clemenceau recognized the tendencies of those who want "to do for others" to become egotistical and self-righteous martinets. Recalling that Clemenceau feared the desire of the masses to act for themselves, he obviously was neither socialist nor communist. That statement rejected the twentieth-century notion of "liberal." Other than the conservative posture, there has been no other program put forth in the last two hundred years for governing society. And yet, Clemenceau was no conservative (see page 64), for the conservative side was that of "the strongest." One recognizes that there was the same absence of a consistent

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5. Les Plus Forts, p. 255.

6. Les Plus Forts, p. 35.

political philosophy evident in his fiction just as there was in his other writing. He could not stand by the side and allow the continuance of the dictatorship of money and position that Spengler termed "Caesarist." He was caught in the individualist society that Tocqueville had warned against in Democracy In America and Burckhardt in Form and Freedom. Yet Clemenceau would not permit government to lead the way out of the quandary. The dangers of totalitarianism were too great. France must remain free above all.

"The good," those who acted from disinterested, altruistic motives were also "the weak" since by definition they were averse to combining with others to present their case. Henri summed it up in this manner; "You have to swim with the current. If you go against it, you are assured of defeat on earth with a doubtful triumph beyond the grave as consolation."[7]

When dissatisfaction with "the strongest" spread, there was a gathering of new forces which combined to unseat the current elite and install themselves. This was the role "Labor" played all through Les Plus Forts, and, to Clemenceau, it was every bit as despicable as the role of "the strongest" themselves. Henri treated his own workers quite equitably and was sympathetic to their situation.

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7. Les Plus Forts, p. 80

But, as their complaints became increasingly organized and demanding, he changed his pleas for understanding to words of warning. It soon became too late for a peaceable settlement. Violence and destruction broke out and the old battlelines between the established elite and a new gathering of force were redrawn. Labor came to recognize the inevitability of such a struggle through the voice of Jean Quété, Harlé's shop-foreman.

> ...To hear M. Harlé speak you would think he was St. Vincent de Paul. Is he a manufacturer of paper because he wants to make money, or because he wants to give it away. If it's to give away why does he keep as much as he can for himself? If it's to make money why is he always telling us about his favours? The only time he is really sincere is when he says, 'I am the strongest.' All right, let him be--until the time when strength will be on our side.[8]

Clemenceau had no more sympathy with these would-be new bosses than he had with the old ones. Labor was just another mob. The mob of the 1870 Commune lived again through the background of thunder and darkness created by the stream of telegrams pouring into Paris from Harlé's countryside factory town. Each cable was another brushstroke creating a canvas of impending doom and the ominous crackling of violence. For once, the action in Clemenceau's fiction was more dramatic than the dialogue. As the fierceness of the strike mounted, so did the confrontation between Henri and Harlé for Claudia's future. In the climax

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8. Les Plus Forts, p. 112.

of both conflicts Harlé persevered, but both problems remained only temporarily resolved. Anything, any force, be it big business, the state, or labor that took on the trappings of "the strongest" was a threat to Clemenceau. He could be as vigorous against strikers as against big business.[9]

The combination that concerned Clemenceau most during his own lifetime, however, was that of business and nobility, because this was the one with which he had most often to contend. Harlé, in Les Plus Forts, was the perfect example of the new businessman--aggressive, domineering, selfish and insensitive to the feelings of those around him. He appropriately pledged marriage with Contesse de Fourchamps, the debauched and aging aristocrat, fully aware that this pact represented a class union.

> He often said that the aristocracy of wealth ought not to refuse its support to the ungilded nobility. One possessed the present hour, the other was the ornament of centuries of history. They should walk together in broad daylight united under the Holy Father...first they had to push back the Revolution...Harlé was the man to hold back the mob. His workers never made a false step...through him the upper classes could win back their hold.[10]

In Aux Ambuscades, the story, "Aunt Rosalie's Inheritance", concerns a Vendeean personage, Rosalie, who

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9. See Chapter 2, p. 16.

10. Les Plus Forts, p. 61.

has no wealth of her own but has some very prominent relations. She persuades the townspeople that she will one day have control of the family's wealth and receives their constant adoration in return. With her maid, Victorine, she mentally makes wills for her imaginary riches. The town comes to believe she really is rich and upon her death, they march to her house to find a will. To preserve Rosalie's good name, Victorine burns all the papers disclosing the true situation, but unhappily she starts a fire and burns herself as well. The town believes Victorine to be an agent of Rosalie's wealthy relatives who want the "money" back and they throw her in an obscure grave. Rosalie they bury with religious fervor in a big grave.

Perhaps it was the respect that lower classes afforded the rich and wellbred that irked Clemenceau more than the upper classes themselves. The small-mindedness of those outside of "the strongest" was often a subject of Clemenceau's fiction. He was discouraged in his attempts to deride the union of nobility and wealth by the deference which was shown this union by the peasant, small shop-owner or laborer in the social sphere if not in the economic. Perhaps Clemenceau's best story ever, which first appeared in Au fil des Jours, was "La Roulette."

This tale describes a gypsy who rides into a country town atop a cart with his child. He is treated with

suspicion during a stay which is cut short by his own sudden death, due, perhaps, to a heart attack. His child is sent to a workhouse and a farmer takes the donkey. The cart is stripped of everything useful. The gypsy's wife shows up some time later and reclaims the child. The donkey has since died, but when she tries to demand "la roulette," the cart, she is harried out of town. The sinister mood of the town towards this non-conforming element of society is vividly described by Clemenceau. He artistically depicts fear-filled eyes and hateful scowls as they respond as one to this threat against a materialistic sense of propriety.

The selfish concern for material things and the anti-individualism of man discouraged Clemenceau to the point that he often wondered whether man could ever salvage himself from a "souless" existence. Those small country people were the foundation of the Radical Party, Clemenceau's party. Yet he was dismayed by their self-interested views as he battled big business, the powerful state, or organized labor on their behalf. Like the protagonists of his writing, the rewards were not worth his efforts. He was alone, a single man against the mob. But he was never a quitter. If man lived to please other men, he would be led to suicide. If for nothing else, let man live for himself, for his own pride.[11]

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11. Au Soir de la Pensee, Vol. II, p. 149.

Thus Clemenceau fought the masses on one side and the wealthy bourgeois-nobility axis on the other. He feared men wherever they shared values and opinions on a class scale or in any self-interested action. But since, to him, the upper classes most threatened France's elan and security, it was toward them that he was most caustic. As early as 1867, he made clear his feelings toward the cluster of wealthy magnates and nobility constituting the powerful few that had been administering France for centuries.

> Good heavens, yes, these people are always charming. We know that beforehand; they have been charming for five or six thousand years. They have got the recipe for all the virtues, the secret of all the graces. Do they smile? Then it's delightful. Do they weep? How touching! Do they let you live? What exquisite kindness! Do they crush the life out of you? It's the misfortune of their situation. Very well I am going to tell you something: All these Emperors, Kings, Archdukes and Princes are grand, superb, generous and sublime: their princesses are anything you wish: but I hate them. I hate them with a merciless hatred as people used to hate in the old days of 1793 when the poor fool of a Louis XVI used to be called the execrable tyrant.[12]

Wherever "Labor" or the peasantry appeared in Clemenceau's fiction, individuals were painted sympathetically, while group portraits were scornful. The same was somewhat true of presentations of wealthier, more prominent members of society. Yet, here, as individuals, this class suffered much more from Clemenceau's pen. Time and again

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12. Jackson, pps. 22-23.

we see them characterized as debauched, ignorant, insensitive and unconcerned with anything aside from their own self-aggrandizement. There were examples in Harlé, Baron Oppert, the Contesse de Fourchamps and Montperrier in Les Plus Forts. There were the international elite in "A Hunting Story,"[13] and the travelers in "Giambole."[14] Listen to this description of a Baron who gives away money, the greater part of which goes to manufacture tablets proclaiming his own generosity:

> Totally uneducated, barely able to write his name, he was never troubled by any longings after learning. The Church answered for everything: he referred everything to the Church. This principle has the great advantage of dispensing one from any effort to think for oneself.[15]

And this of the Baron and his wife: "All they lacked in order to be loved was that they should first love a little."[16]

The bitterness and hatred for those people that came into Clemenceau's tone when describing them is unmistakable for anything other than an emotional reaction. Even the Chinese landed classes in Le Voile du Bonheur were depicted as decadent and debauched. The play's protagonist, Tchang-I preferred blindness to admitting the banality of

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13. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 23.

14. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 25.

15. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 8, p. 102.

16. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 8, p. 107.

the old traditional morality to which he clung in the face of a society that corrupted and degraded that morality.

There was one other partner in the union of "the strongest" which was particularly pernicious to Clemenceau: organized religion. As an atheist he viewed the Church as an active evil, not even just an unnecessary institution. Yet, despite his career-long preaching against the Church, Clemenceau feared the encroaching state more, even one that would do away with organized religion. Hence there occurred one of his many seeming contradictions. In 1903 he amazed his fellow Radicals by defending the Church against the attacks of the Combes Ministry. This compares to Péguy's conversion to Catholicism. In this case, he was afraid a state monopoly of education was in the offing. But here also one sees Clemenceau under the anxiety he felt toward anyone or anything becoming too powerful, too much in control. Such power and control he trusted only in his own hands.

Religion proffered two major dangers to Clemenceau. First, the Church adhered to an absolute--God. Clemenceau was a relativist and the claim to absolute knowledge always brought forth his criticism. In accord with his skeptical nature, he distrusted any institution or concept that claimed to have absolute certainty. But the Church with its widespread membership represented a particular threat

to him. To intensify his feelings, he was a doubtful, questioning person emotionally. His first reaction to any argument, both in public and private life, was to look for a hole or a weakness.

In "A Mad Thinker,"[17] an unfrocked priest devoted himself to discovering the purpose behind man's existence. He became so involved in this project that he was considered a mad recluse by his townsmen. To Clemenceau, the "madness" in the man's character is the foolhardiness of his attempts to discover the impossible--an absolute truth. This thinker wrote a book of "truth" which he put through tests only to reduce it page by page until it was nothing. As he lay dying, the local priest came to comfort him with words of God and the afterlife. This conversation followed:

> 'Then you yourself are sure are you?' asked the the dying man.
>
> 'Certainly,--I know with absolute certainty.'
>
> 'Reverend, I once spoke as you are speaking. Only ignorance is capable of such profound utterances. Grant to a dying man the privilege of delivering this lesson. I who have aspired to know, know that you know no more than I--even less--I dare affirm it. It is really not enough to justify taking up so much room in the sunshine.'[18]

Clemenceau's description of this character changed from disparagement to sympathy for one who had come to grips

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17. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 9.

18. Aux Ambuscades, p. 122.

with the fearful truth that there is no certainty in this world of any absolutes. Yet Clemenceau presented this state as one of calm serenity, almost sublimity in the character of the dying, unfrocked priest. He appeared infinitely wiser than the one giving him final absolution, and it is he, not the Churchman, who pronounced it. Much as Spengler found something not pessimistic but rather restful in the "awful truth" of relativism, so Clemenceau portrayed this mood.

Clemenceau frequently presented his metaphysical confrontation with the Church in his fiction. "A Descendant of Timon" and "Malus Vicimus" in Aux Ambuscades de la Vie both touch on the subject. The "faith" of Jews is particularly criticized by Clemenceau. He presents their attitude toward Jehovah and the Church as a very practicable, efficacious one. They can rationalize anything in their religious conscience and find ways of doing anything while keeping a toe in the door of the Church. In "Simon, Son of Simon"[19] a Jewish money-luster entered a lottery, pledging one-fifth of his winnings to Jehovah. He lost twice this way and then offered a share to Jesus and won. His faith was in conflict with empirical evidence but he resolved the problem by arguing that Jehovah "knew" that Simon would win and that he would still not give up one-fifth

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19. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 6.

of the take in gratitude (which Simon did not). Since Jesus did not "know" this, then he is less than divine and deserves nothing. Jews represent the worst kind of rationalization to Clemenceau--the hypocrisy of faith.

In "Gideon in His Grave"[20] and "At the Foot of the Cross"[21] the theme is repeated, as well as in Au Pied du Sinai.[22] Yet he defended Jews for their resiliency and independence and once again because of his emotional ties to the "outsider."

His own bitter feelings of isolation from church and community because of his atheism were evident in his attack on the Church for its social dangers--hypocrisy, false charity, corruption, decadence and its use as a tool of control by "the strongest." In all of his work, side remarks and stabs were directed toward the Church.

"A Descendant of Timon" concerns a cure and atheist who are life-long debating opponents within a small village. The atheist died first and willed that his wealth be used either to ostentatiously ornament the church in a vulgar style or, failing that, go to the freemasons. The cure is caught in a dilemma, whether to accept a mockery of the

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20. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 5.

21. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 7.

22. Clemenceau, Au Pied du Sinai, trans. A. V. Ende (New York: Bernard C. Richards and Co., 1922), Chapters 5 and 6--travel impressions of Gallicia and "Busk."

Church or to let his enemies grow stonger. He decided on the former and to his pleasant surprise the gaudy ornamentation attracts the local peasantry instead of driving them away. Wealth is always respected, even in the Church.

The most odious aspect of the church to Clemenceau was its league with the upper classes. To him it acted as a mouthpiece for the wealthy and the conservative. Christian ethic had been corrupted from the words of Jesus (whom Clemenceau personally admired) into platitudes which would soothe the woes of the commonfolk and take their minds from the miseries of this life to the promise of another. Morality had failed to evolve. "Even with the help of a religion based on charity, we should perhaps find some trouble in pretending that the present morality of Paris under spiritual authority of the Church is superior to that of pagan Rome."[23]

The descriptions of the church and clerical figures were devastating in Clemenceau's fiction. A tone of bitter disgust with the whole of organized religion pervaded his writing. Witness this conversation between the Chevalier de Vertprée and the Abbé who raise Henri de Puymaufray:

> 'Monsieur le Chevalier,' the abbe would say, 'there's only one thing to do. We will make our young Marquis a perfect God-fearing Christian--a man who will serve the Church and do his duty faithfully to those whom heaven has placed under those disturbers that flourish in our unhappy day, when heresy is no longer a crime.'

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23. Au Soir, Vol. I, p. 147.

> 'Your game is bad, my dear abbé, but you know what you are saying. Only while you take care of his soul, I have to insure the honour and pride of a race which, before God, owes fealty to the Throne and the Altar. You will form the spirit of the child: I his heart. So long as you won't fill his mind with the impious trash of science, I will take care of the rest.'[24]

Such a proposition was just the sort of poison which was ruining France to Clemenceau. The whippings Henri received from the abbe were felt by Clemenceau himself. Ironically, Henri's family secured some of its wealth from the church confiscations of the Revolution.

If Clemenceau was certain that religion offered false answers to man's doubts about the purpose of his existence, he offered none of his own in their stead. His relativism, his skeptical nature and the logical progression of his rational theories toward the admittance of a meaningless, "chance" existence led him to pessimism. His spiritual needs as such were frustrated in their search for an outlet. He had not the artistic talent that had "saved" his friend Monet from the conclusions of his own positivistic nature. Monet developed a metaphysics of color and image and escaped the reality of "the strongest" just as Schopenhauer's artists escaped the Will. Clemenceau's talent lay in politics and it was there that his ego made its stand <u>against</u> "the strongest," <u>against</u> resignation and <u>against</u> the pessimism seemingly inescapable in a world

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24. <u>Les Plus Forts</u>, p. 5.

without faith, without spirit, and without God. The political "esprit" he termed "solidarité." But it had its basis in the emotional spirit of each individual. This was the non-bourgeois" non-materialistic side of the French Revolution. "La Révolution" of barricades and feeling, not the one of land confiscations and political manipulation. Clemenceau cleared the air of absolutes and metaphysics, yet he did not leave a vacuum for man to wander in. Nor did he advocate blinding oneself to life's mysteries and concentrating on an Epicurean existence despite Le Voile du Bonheur. Tchang-I did not run away from a depressing world. He exerted a will so strong that he controlled his own reaction to it. He changed the judgments he made about what he saw.

Yet pessimism and doubt do pervade much of Clemenceau's work. There is no doubt that he was heavily depressed by the world surrounding him. For example, in "About Nests," children pull down birds' nests and then regret that they cannot put them back.

> But it is too late. Our first impulse is a death-dealing one. A sense of the uselessness of destruction is necessary to awaken pity in whatever has life...until the order of things changes, all that the weak can do is to cry out their protest, their vain appeal to universal justice, which, deaf, insensible and paralyzed, sits in mute contemplation of the disorder composing the order of the world.[25]

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25. Aux Ambuscades, pps. 186-187.

"Flower of the Wheat"[26] is little more than a narration of a beautiful village girl's aging into a disheveled, wrinkled, and disillusioned hag. Finally, there is the pretty story, "Jean Piot's Feast,"[27] which concerns a poverty-stricken village odd-jobber. He is treated discourteously until the day that rumors spread to the effect that he will soon be an heir. The villagers treat him generously in anticipation of an estate which turns out to be only five hundred francs. To assuage their disappointment, Jean uses the money to throw a feast for the town. Then in the three days following, he starves himself to death.

Is there no hope in Clemenceau's eyes for a brighter world? Clemenceau was pessimistic, but not entirely a pessimist; cynical, but not entirely a cynic; depressed, but not without hope. In his fiction, Clemenceau presented resolutions as well as dilemmas, optimism as well as pessimism, and <u>la grandeur</u> as well as <u>la misère</u>.

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26. <u>Aux Ambuscades</u>, Chapter 18.

27. <u>Aux Ambuscades</u>, Chapter 19.

CHAPTER 5

RESOLUTIONS

Clemenceau can be viewed as a man with two contradictory sides to his thought. On the one hand, there was the intellectualizing rationalist with groundings in Schopenhauerian pessimism, relativism and positivism. This side was without metaphysical ideals, save for a grudging admission of a "will of the strongest" and the concept of a progressive morality based on the evolution of altruism.

But there was also the Clemenceau who sought something of this life above and beyond the grim satisfaction of knowing that, like the priest in "A Mad Thinker,"[1] he could at least be "sure of things." Most of what he found went against his empirical grounding. But, like most of the pessimists from the turn of the century down to the Lost Generation and the Thirties' writers, he discovered that the teachings of empiricism decidedly left something wanting life.

All of his life Clemenceau was a man of action. He thought and reacted on his feet. He pursued political objectives with the acumen and energy of the duelist or the

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1. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 9 (See Chapter 4).

hunter. He had neither the personality nor the inclination to apply a set political philosophy toward long range goals. The mixture of Comte, Mill and Darwin, that he penned in Au Soir, could give him something of teleology, but nothing of eschatology. Throughout his life he aimed for something besides even the altruism he alluded to. Clemenceau sought development of his ego to the fullest extremes and justified this development romantically. To his own eyes he was ever the individual, struggling against "the strongest." He filled his spiritual vacuum with romantic self-esteem and the grandiose self-righteousness of the Révolutionaries.

To be alone was to remain pure and proud, aloof from the mobs and masses. Clemenceau's extreme aloofness often made him bitter and sensitive. He saw himself as persecuted.

> Clemenceau: 'I don't know if you have ever noticed it, but I seem to have a talent for being deserted.'
>
> Martet: 'Men do not like being loyal. It makes them feel that they are losing their personalities.'
>
> Clemenceau: 'They express themselves better by betrayal.'[2]

Again, Clemenceau wrote of the Commune: "A funny business that: When I think of my life...I have always

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2. Martet, p. 109

been surrounded by a lot of people who would very much have liked to see me dead--and who wished for my destruction with a kind of mystic delirium."[3]

A sense of persecution so keen often leads to a feeling of martyrdom in a self-righteous and self-confident individual. Clemenceau's fictional heroes had this aura of sacrifice surrounding them. Henri in Les Plus Forts sacrificed pride and self-respect for the sake of Claudia, or, symbolically, for altruism. The gypsy woman in "La Roulette"[4] accepted suspicion and hatred in order to remain aloof from the corrupt and contemptible life of a small peasant village. Jean Piot gave all of his welth for the momentary pleasure of a feast in his village.[5] Sacrifice of some pleasure or possession was a means of atonement for the enormous guilt and responsibility involved in detachment. Paradoxically, to maintain one's independence one had to sacrifice that independence in a "surrendering of self." Clemenceau could justify his own enormous ego, and its command of others, by ascribing his actions toward this goal of altruism. Actually, goal and action were one and the same. Remaining aloof was painful in some way. But to remain aloof was the

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3. Martet, p. 189.

4. See Chapter 4, p. 63.

5. Aux Ambuscades, "Jean Piot's Feast" (see Chapter 4.)

only way to maintain independence from "the strongest" or society, and, consequently, to retain any self-respect. By surrendering "self" to the altruistic end, one received a new sense of "self," untarnished by society.

The individual in Clemenceau's fiction is always superior to the crowd, both intellectually and morally. Even Harlé, in Les Plus Forts, is presented as craftier, more dynamic and more courageous than his workers. The workers have higher motives but once they collectivize, they put themselves on Harlé's level and lose Clemenceau's sympathy. Apart from other considerations, Henri de Pumaufray is even more praiseworthy, because he is an individual against the combined efforts of Harlé, Fourchamps and Opert, who are actually representatives of another mob--the oligarchic "strongest." In his plays, social rules and rites are mocked and criticized. These are institutions of a collective opinion, and as such, they are stagnant and sterile. In Le Départ, "marriage rites" led to a stifling of love. In Le Voile, Tchang-I clings to an unreal sense of social values and is saved from a crushing disillusionment only by a supreme effort of the will.

Clemenceau's short stories are often centered around the struggle of an individual against mass opinion. "Schlome the Fighter," in Au Pied, was drafted by his neighbors in a town to represent them in a war, during

which they confiscated his belongings. When he returned rich and powerful, he made the whole town cower. In "Better Than Stealing" (Aux Ambuscades) Simon Grélu, a poacher, boldly flaunted the gameskeeper, oblivious to arrest. He made a mockery of the courts by paying his fines in illegally caught fish. He explained that allowing oneself to get caught is "better than stealing," implying that the individual should not only stand up to society but should do so openly and unashamedly. "The Gray Fox" (Aux Ambuscades) is a first-rate story about the vagabond, mankind's extreme individual. "...under the pretext that he is of no social utility, householders, underprefects, army corps commanders, and directors of the Bank of France all unite in imputing to him most of the evils from which they are supposed to protect us."[6]

In that story Claude, a door-to-door locksmith in a town, gives the name "gray fox" to the illusory vagabond who is presumed to be stealing chickens in great numbers in a provincial French town. Claude and a crowd of townspeople seize and beat up a tramp who happens to be in the neighborhood. During the fray the vagabond kicks open the basket that Claude carries on his job, and a hen pops out. A search of Claude's home discloses the missing chickens

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6. Aux Ambuscades, p. 137.

cooped up in his cellar. Because Claude is a respectable, employed townsman, however, no charges are made against him.

"The Treasure of St. Bartholemew" (Aux Ambuscades) concerns a village in the Creuse wherein lives "Little Nick," an ugly fool of immense strength. He is treated with superstition by the town, and works hard but contentedly for a meagre living. When his mother, who is presumed to be a witch, dies, a search of her house reveals a hoard of gold pieces. Nick, soaring in respectability, buries the treasure. For a time, he is showered with meals and beloved by the young women of the town. One, Phemie, finally gets him to disclose the hiding place of his treasure, only to find that it consists of gold-painted pasteboard. In a fury she pushes Nick off a cliff into a river, but he grabs her and they both drown. Individualism, even when it is outcast, ugly, sneaky and cunning always meets with Clemenceau's approval.

Baron Opert in Les Plus Forts plays an unwitting mouthpiece for many of Clemenceau's themes. "Action, in movement or thought comes from the individual, from the man who is different from his fellowman. The crowd is the resistance which he must overcome."[7]

The "romantic" individual meant little to Clemenceau without three other qualities which he also possessed in

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7. Les Plus Forts, p. 175.

great degree, namely; courage, a sense of morality and will. The individual will must not merely deign to independence, it must have the courage and determination to effect it. The will of "the strongest" met with the individualist's determined stand to remain pure and free. The individualist was strengthened in his struggle by a sense of self-righteousness. He feared nothing because he knew he was right, and he knew he was right because he stood alone.

All individualists in Clemenceau's fiction exhibit some measure of courage merely to walk apart from the crowd. But some characters, such as Harlé and Fourchamps, who use "the strongest" for their own ends in a crafty, underhanded manner, are less courageous because they are deficient in morality. By remaining within "the strongest," they sacrifice the ultimate morality of independence. Thus, Henri de Pumaufray, with stronger moral fibre, can threaten and intimidate Harlé at the end of Les Plus Forts in a physical confrontation. "Schlome the Fighter" (Aux Ambuscades) is one man against a town, yet his self-righteousness and his courage force everyone else to back down. The crowd possesses more money and power, but the brave and moral individual is feared, respected and hated despite his apparent weakness.

The individual, to survive, must not lack determination either. The highest quality ascribed to Jews over and over in Au Pied de Sinai was their resiliency. "How I Became Farsighted" was written in praise of a clever Jew who sold Clemenceau an un-needed pair of glasses through sheer will power. In Le Voile du Bonheur, Tchang-I, confronted with disaster by the restoration of his eyesight, blinded himself again and by force of will, blotted out from memory the sights he had witnessed. In Les Plus Forts Henri and his friend, Deschars, shared the attributes of individualism and courage but the friend lacked Henri's determination. Henri constantly tried to buck up his friend in the pursuit of Claudia. But Henri was forced to admit the inevitability of his friend's failure. Nanette, Henri's strong-minded maid was reintroduced into the plot at the point of Deschars' defeat to contrast the latter's lack of will. Henri, himself, could assure himself of ultimate success at the end of Les Plus Forts; such was the confidence his own will gave him. But he readily admitted to Claudia the lonely and unceasing struggle of the individual: "Day by day I have fought--for twenty years. I have been without skill, without persistence, unworthy of the obligation your mother put upon me. Often near defeat, alone against everyone, always resisting desperately this combination of the strongest.[8]

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8. Les Plus Forts, p. 55.

Thus, Clemenceau presented his ideal man: aloof, courageous and determined, a man displaying the strongest characteristics of Clemenceau himself. This model stemmed partly from Clemenceau's individualistic personality, his distrust of others and his physical skill and nerve. More importantly, it stemmed from the philosophical quandary in which he found himself by having carried an anti-metaphysical positivistic leaning to its extreme. But once a man was his own master alone and unafraid, what were his ambitions to be? What spurred him to act? And what of morality? Harlé was a determined courageous man and though allied with the strongest, he was not always on their side. Why was he "evil" and Henri "good?" Did not Clemenceau's relativism deny these notions? Again, one has to look for the answer in Clemenceau's emotional side.

To Clemenceau, emotion was the basis for action.[9] Passion, hate, fear, all could spur action, but Clemenceau's fiction concerned an emotion more basic than all of these--love. Despite his Lamarckian view that the sympathetic emotions evolved tardily in mankind's history, Clemenceau viewed the ideal as more fundamental to man's motivation than the real.[10] Hate and fear were emotions with widespread validity in fact while love in altruistic form was

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9. Au Soir, Vol. I, pps. 260-261 and pps. 297-298.

10. Au Soir, Vol. I, pps.200, 202, 206-209, 243, 316-319.

not widely practised. It was still an ideal, a spur to mankind and to Clemenceau, the highest ideal. Hate and fear were isolating emotions. Clemenceau readily utilized them in safeguarding his individualism. But love meant sacrificing the self, having such confidence in one's independence that one was not afraid to give it away. Clemenceau's enormous ego never permitted him ultimate surrender of self. He could only admire such sacrifice from afar. Altruism was as far from his own nature as it was from the rest of the world.

Clemenceau himself was a lonely person, too proud, too distrustful, and too incapable of expressing love to feel close to anyone. For Clemenceau, scolding was a form of intimacy, attacking a way of getting close. When he had made those around him vulnerable to his attacks, then he could trust them enough to feel warmly towards them. What is known of Clemenceau's love life? His marriage was a disaster. His wife was neither capable of standing up to his sarcastic, biting nature, nor was she patient enough to accept him as he was. Clemenceau's affairs with other women were never deep. He played the courtier, the dandy, but never the devoted lover. His friendships were all with men whom he could dominate, but who had some quality that he could admire, most notably a strong intellect.

So Clemenceau turned his frustrated love to all of mankind. But as with his women and his friends, he demanded

that man prove himself worthy of his affection. He saw too much of the bleak side in humanity to love it as it was. Thus his altruism was destined to go unrequited. But this did not fill him with pessimism. His fiction reflected disturbance with the world, but not despair.

Love could only stem from the individual. A group or class could not love. It could fear, hate, admire or arouse itself but it could not love. Love as expressed by the individual took three forms: love of self; love of one person for another; and the highest form, altruism, or love of mankind.

Harlé in Les Plus Forts is the best example of self-love. To Clemenceau, self-love or egoism preceded everything else in human evolution. Man's competitive instincts and will to survive were part of this. In Harlé this self-love was all-inclusive. Every move he made was calculated to further his own ends. He was insensitive to the feelings of his wife, his daughter, or his workers. He even used other members of "the strongest" for his personal aggrandizement. Still Harlé earned some measure of respect from Clemenceau by virtue of his individualism and determination. Any grouping of "the strongest" reflected a collective opinion and a mob courage. Harlé, when he spoke for himself, was superior to this. However, when he too reflected views of "the strongest," he was merely a

mouthpiece of a group and as such was contemptible. His self-love gave Harlé some modicum of independence, but when "the strongest" as a group were threatened, he was only the voice of a crowd.

Elsewhere in Clemenceau's fiction, similar egoists are to be found. As a rule, the villagers speak as one in the country stories, individual nobility and wealthy bourgeois are hard to distinguish, and one priest sounds like another. Occasionally, however, characters similar to Harlé are to be found, and some that are even more independent of alliances with class or group. Like Harlé, they are self-aggrandizers, yet they stand aloof. Little Nick in "The Treasure of St. Bartholemew" thought only for himself in fooling the town, but he was never a part of any group. The vagabonds and outcasts in Clemenceau's fiction are even more superior. They have no love for anyone but themselves, and yet they are admirable for their lack of hypocrisy and their free spirit. They lack notions of gain altogether, though they are only concerned with themselves. They do not, however, reach the second plateau of love.

In this stage, man developed love for something external. This was romantic love, a strong friendship or a strong attachment to some object or animal. In all cases, the person loving escaped himself, at least temporarily,

and transfers self-concern to someone else. While Clemenceau had respect for someone in this state, he was on shaky ground in describing it. His own experiences with this condition were decidedly lacking, and this was reflected in his writing. While he could admire this state, his characters evolved into it under hazy circumstances. Sometimes, as in the case of Henri de Puymaufray and his friend, Deschars, they fell in love out of disgust with self and boredom with life. Sometimes as in "The adventures of My Curé"[11] they loved out of a quiet desperation with the way of things; the hold that "the strongest" had on society and the ruthlessness with which men fight to dominate one another. That story also brought to fore Clemenceau's belief that the self-aggrandizing individual or class was a threat to this second level of love. In that story of an affair between a nun and a priest a scandalized church stifled love and rained tragedy upon two lovers. In Les Plus Forts, Harlé was the embodied obstacle to the love of Henri for both Harlé's wife and his own illegitimate daughter. Deschars was opposed by a union of the strongest: Opert, Fourchamps, Montperrier, and Harlé.

Marriage, clearly, is an attempt of two people to protect themselves, the strong man taking care of the weak woman and child.[12] Yet, marriage itself could be stifling

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11. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 12.

12. Aux Ambuscades, "Lovers in Florence," Chapter 23.

to love as in Le Départ pour Cythère. Or, as the Church teaches, part of "the strongest," marriage could be too demanding of lovers. In "A Happy Union"[13] a housewife and her husband shock their neighbors by constantly fighting. When she angrily gives him less than a lethal dose of poison to scare him, she is arrested and is tried for attempted murder. Her husband comes forward and lies to the court, telling them that it was all a joke. They sentence the wife to two years anyway, at the end of which time she returns home to a happy marriage.

To Clemenceau, society's and especially the Church's interference with any bond between man and woman was unnecessary and destructive. Discussing the question of whether the housewife and her husband should divorce, he said this of the Church: "Advice on this point is not lacking which is not surprising, since we have expressly entrusted to a corps of celibates the direction of domestic life."[14]

Friendships in Clemenceau are transitory unions, time-outs from the unceasing struggle for dominance or alliances in that struggle. In Les Plus Forts Harlé develops a friendship with Henri because Henri is no apparent threat to Harlé's climb to power. Deschars and Henri unite in the

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13. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 21.

14. Aux Ambuscades, p. 263.

struggle against "the strongest." Opert, Fourchamps, Montperrier and Harlé all join in an effort to become "the strongest." Jean Quété, Harlé's shop-foreman is friends with Henri when he speaks as an individual and it is to this friendship that Henri appeals when the workers become violent. His efforts fail the union for self-aggrandizement overwhelms him even as his love for Claudia, who is his illegitimate daughter, cannot stand up against "the strongest."

Henri himself is almost a symbol of man's struggle from self to altruism. For in the third highest stage of moral evolution man reaches a state of love for all men, a love doomed to frustration until the day of awakening in each individual. On that day man escapes his prison of selfishness and competition and learns to work and live for all mankind. Jean in "Jean Piot's Feast"[15] reaches this state when he gives all of his inheritance to an undeserving village for a celebration and then starves to death. But his is a naive, wasted altruism that Clemenceau would have disavowed. Jean is admired for his morality but not for his judgment. His efforts are pathetic, not tragic.

A Monet or a Demosthenes was more the kind of person that enraptured Clemenceau. And the attainment of this

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15. Aux Ambuscades, "Jean Piot's Feast," Chapter 19.

altruistic attitude turned out to be as much for the benefit of the donor as the recipient. Clemenceau reverted to the self, after all, when he revealed that the only life worth living was one in which a man can remove himself from egoism and selfishness only to return to self in another sense by leading a self-satisfying altruistic existence.

> If the ordinary man ever succeeds in rising--and the task will be difficult--above the puerile bait of reward and punishment, the nobler emotions which would then be his might, as happened in the case of the heroes of antiquity, raise him to the calm, perhaps even to the enthusiastic acceptance of that suffering which the fanaticism of dogmatised ignorance inflicts upon him.[16]

> To attain the fulness of well-ordered living we need the very best that is in us, inspired by an ideal and touched, as a wise man said, with a faint tinge of madness.[17]

Henri himself awakens to the fact that his struggle for Claudia is everyman's struggle. Even his own salvation is at stake. He is faced with apparent disaster at the end of Les Plus Forts. Another violent confrontation between Harlé and the workers is at hand; Claudia is lost to Montperrier; and his friend, Deschars, is heartbroken. But he is optimistic, since he has learned, through his own struggle, that altruism and freedom from self are the only path for mankind, and that someday man will change. To Harlé: "You have made me pity. Go on dragging out your

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16. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 289.

17. Au Soir, Vol. II, p. 295.

gilded miseries. I have found out what is the greatest thing in life. I have lived for love. Now I will live for forgiveness."[18] That forgiveness is begged from an indifferent and Godless universe for a man's "crime" of individual consciousness. To disavow that individual consciousness. To disavow that individual consciousness is equally sinful with the attestation of it. Clemenceau's crime, like Calderon's was that of being born.

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18. Les Plus Forts, p. 315.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

One of the best stories Clemenceau ever wrote appeared in 1919 under the title, "Mokouamba's Fetish."[1] It concerned a guileful Guianese who lived in Paris near Clemenceau. He related his past, in a conversation with Clemenceau, telling how he was converted by Anglican missionaries, who took him to England. There, he was set upon and converted by Catholic priests. Mokouamba developed a blase attitude toward the worldliness of both religions. He traveled to India, because he had heard that religion there was non-materialistic. Here Mokouamba sought out a Fakir for spiritual advice.

> The Fakir told me that the universe is but one huge agglomeration of fetishes. There are as many as there are creatures alive. Some are strong and some are weak. It is a great battle as to which shall come out on top. The wicked are those who work evil on others to get the upper hand. The good are those who use gentleness, persuasion, art. One had better be on the side of the good unless one is stronger than they...Well, then the Fakir affirmed that fetish and man are one and the same thing, for every man makes his fetish according to the strength of his interest in himself, and the will power he expends in satisfying it. That is

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1. Aux Ambuscades, Chapter 1.

> why I am not deceiving when I fortell a happy fortune for people. It but strengthens their fetish.[2]

Mokouamba went on to say that the only fetish he subscribed to was himself. In this regard, Mokouamba represented the relativist and egotist in Clemenceau. In many episodes of his political life there can be little question that he acted out of pure self-interest or self-indulgence. His role in the Panama Affair and the scuttling of his own first Ministry were but two examples. His positivistic and natural conceit were the sources for these actions.

But, criticizer though he might be of metaphysics and "spirit," Clemenceau suffered morally from the pessimism and opportunism deriving from this position. Was he merely to be "the strongest?" His ego and his conscience both rebelled against this idea. He filled his spiritless soul with "romantic" individualism. Clemenceau pictured himself on a plateau beckoning to a world of greedy materialists. In his moments of reflection, he suffered from a sense of frustration for all of mankind, including himself, as long as material gains were the only ones to be had.

Clemenceau sensed rather than intellectualized the need for ideals. Egotism might save one from the will of "the strongest" but it carried within itself a danger just

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2. Aux Ambuscades, pps. 13-14.

as deadly. Self-indulgence was not a morality in and of itself. An absolute external to this battle of wills was necessary. Clemenceau found it in altruism or escape from self and will at the same time.

This reintroduction of neo-Idealism was common among late-Nineteenth and early-Twentieth Century thinkers. Clemenceau shared company with Rickert, Dilthey, Croce, and Weber in this respect. Like them, Clemenceau felt the collision of scientism with the irrational. Testimony to the strength of Clemenceau's character was the equanimity with which he met this crisis.

One can hardly blame Clemenceau for inconsistencies. His positivistic position could hardly lead him to anything but confusion when it met the discoveries of Freud, Sorel and Durkheim head-on. The self-righteous pessimism of Schopenhauer was hardly anything one can like without indulging in that philosopher's smugness and equivocable ethics. It was to Clemenceau's credit that he assumed a higher moral position, one based on a metaphysics forced upon him rather than sought. Clemenceau, too, equivocated, but it was acts of selflessness which enoble him historically, not the grim inflexible tramp of a self-satisfied (and self-interested) voluntarist down the path of relativism espousing "I told you sos" and asserting "Well, that's the way of things."

Clemenceau was frustrated and enraged by the spectre of the debauched and depressed France before the War years. During the War his need for ideals was transvalued into the struggle for victory. When the War ended, he was once again without a France he could admire. "I am beginning to regret 1918. It was idiotic, mad, but there was something..a little...magnificent about it. The times we are now living in are base."[3]

Bruun points out how discontented Clemenceau became even as victory approached.[4] As he felt the departure of his political and moral raison dêtre, Clemenceau grew bitter and argumentative. Once again he was faced with aimlessness and relativism in his life. This time he would have no chance to translate his egotistical confusion into the political mayhem for which he was famous.[5] His own Ministry toppled this time.

During the War itself he had been a man possessed with gaining control of France. His scathing attacks on the previous Wartime Ministries landed him the job much to the regret of Poincaré. "You have made it impossible for

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3. Martet, p. 48.

4. Bruun, p. 165.

5. Hyndman, p. 80-81.

anyone else to form a government. Suppose you take on the job. Let us see what you can do."[6]

At the same time, Poincaré recognized Clemenceau's incredible strength and energy and realized that he would be a most able Prime Minister, if he was given some clearly definable goal, such as victory.

> I am always a little nervous, perhaps a little too nervous of Clemenceau's whims, his versatility and his fine contempt of everyone except himself. It is certainly not for mere ambition that he wants office. It is because he is convinced that he can save his country, and that he alone can do it. If ever the real moment comes, I shall call on him without hesitation. The more I think of the matter, the more I say to myself, 'so long as victory is possible, he is capable of upsetting everything.' A day will come perhaps, when I shall add, 'now that everything is lost, he alone is capable of saving everything.'[7]

Love for France was the one emotional attachment which could override Clemenceau's egotism. Throughout the Nineties and the early Twentieth Century, France disappointed him as worthy of his love. But a France devoted to victory, to crushing "le Boche," was a France close to his heart.

For the fact is, Clemenceau was incapable of living up to his own undefined moral philosophy. His ego was too strong to maintain a constant devotion toward altruistic

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6. Wythe Williams, p. 145. (Poincaré's invitation to Clemenceau to form a government, Nov. 13, 1917).

7. Wythe Williams, p. 120. (From Poincaré's diary).

goals, nor was he even capable of romantic love. These were part of a morality he could only adhere to from afar, but then, perhaps, philosophers need not be saints, after all.

Clemenceau's morality did have enough effect on his own life to make him vacillate between self-indulgence and the ill-defined concept of "solidarité." This concept became a byword for Clemenceau and the Radicals in Fin de siècle France. Its very nebulous nature made it a perfect slogan for the anti-metaphysical politics practiced by the Radicals. For Clemenceau, it amounted to a nationalistic and political translation of the moral concept of altruism. This ideal was vague enough for him to deny it as metaphysical. Yet it provided a goal upon which his spirit as well as his intellect could fix.

Since the Enlightenment, man's spiritual nature has been either ignored, stifled, or directed away from traditional and religious values toward nationalistic, scientific or communistic ones. If Clemenceau felt an emptiness in his soul, it was because he shared the feelings of an age which had not yet discovered the fallibility of secular creeds, that they too were based on faith.

Spengler had begun his lectures with an intimation that perceived reality was at least partially based on imposed rules and forms of the perceiver. This implied an emotional, and even irrational bias in the construction of

the phenomenal world. Freud, as he increasingly translated the mechanistic vocabulary of the empiricists into a language that could better cope with the unconscious, was at once redefining the perception of reality and casting doubt on the validity of science itself.

Clemenceau had not yet acknowledged his own doubts about science and the ambitions of positivism. But he did sense the emotional and irrational side in himself. His hastily constructed patchwork of metaphysical ideals and morality were the desperate groping of a man faced with defending the empty future of materialistic relativism. Clemenceau was not yet to the point of denying the absolute validity of scientific observation. He did recognize a never-ending search for ultimate truth, but that a scientific Truth did exist, and that man would become increasingly aware of it through observation, he never denied. The irrational, he refused to recognize.

It is ironic that in a man who remains so personally fascinating because of his enormous ego and dynamic character, his most admirable actions occurred at a time when he devoted dynamism and ego to a cause beyond self-indulgence. In the War Clemenceau's intellectual and emotional sides were one. He escaped his accursed individuality in the drive for victory. The personal risks he took when touring the front are less remarkable when one

considers that this was a man with the certainty of a philosopher become saint. Physical courage Clemenceau never lacked. He sought moral courage all of his life and finally found it during the two years which gave him a memory that France would never forget.

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