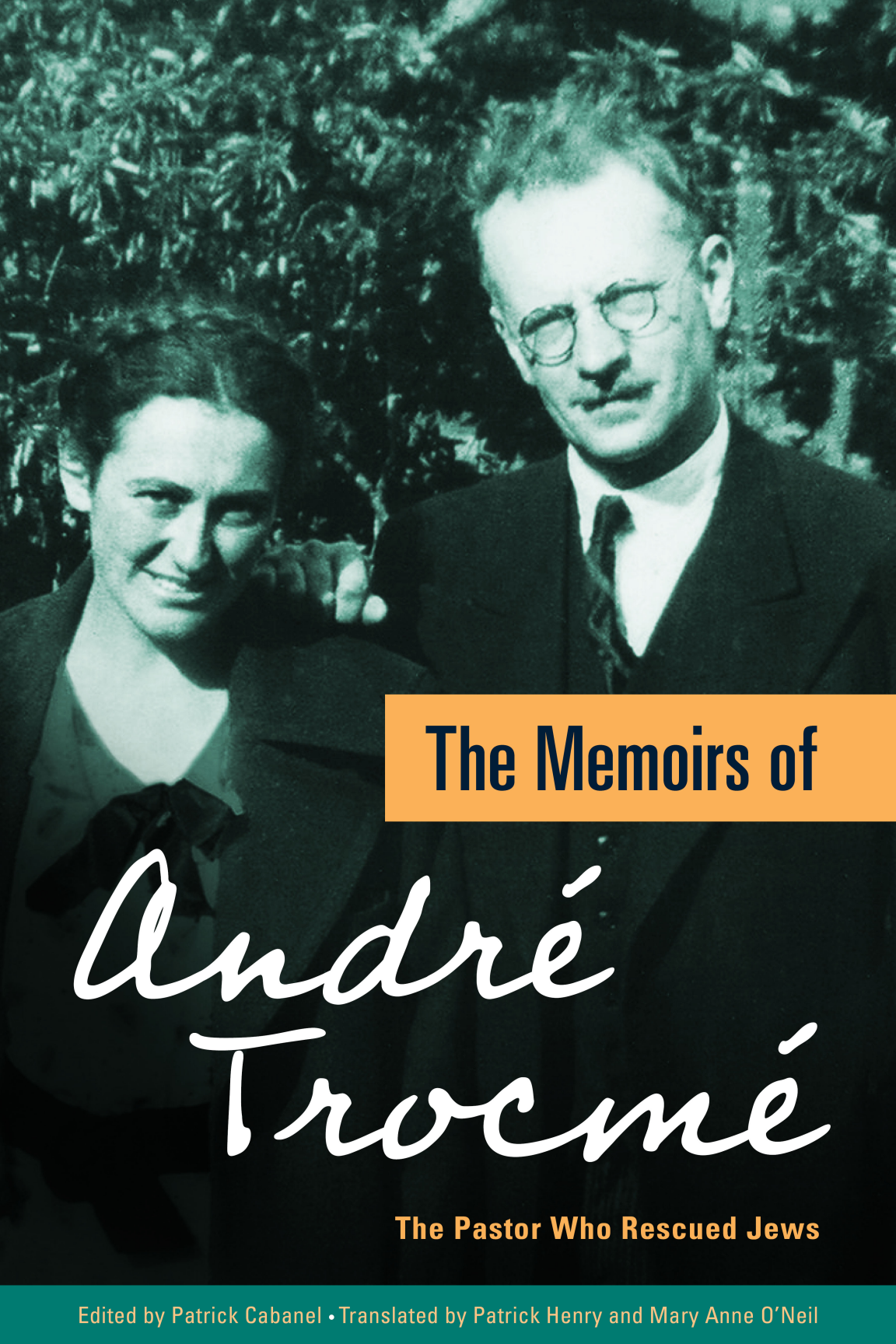

The Memoirs of André Trocmé

The Pastor Who Rescued Jews

Edited by Patrick Cabanel • Translated by Patrick Henry and Mary Anne O'Neil

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Introduction

Patrick Cabanel

WE HAVE WAITED a long time for the publication of the memoirs of André Trocmé (1901–1971). I am delighted now to present them to the public. For the most part, they were written in 1955, but Trocmé worked on them again in 1962 and completed his work in 1967. They remain unfinished, however, since they only give us a continuous narrative up to the early 1950s.

It is important to point out that the original typed manuscript belongs to the Magda and André Trocmé archives in the Swarthmore College Peace Collection and that a photocopy of the original has been deposited in the archives of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Geneva. These copies have been fully accessible to scholars, who have used them and quoted from them over the years. But this text has never been accessible to the public at large, even though its existence was well known. Originally, the Trocmé children, Nelly and Jacques, did not envisage publishing the integral text before 2025. However, as the only surviving child, Nelly Trocmé Hewett authorized me to publish this annotated edition in French in 2020.

Trocmé was the pastor in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon (in the Haute-Loire region of France) from 1934 to 1950. The role this village's people played in the rescue of hundreds of Jewish children and adults in the 1940s has become one of the most beautiful pages in the history of France or, more generally, in the history of European Christians faced with the genocide of the Jews. Since the end of the 1970s, a wave of memorials – historiographical, editorial, and even cinematographic, musical, and political – has submerged the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the high-altitude plateau that surrounds it. Several dozen

people from the area have been designated "Righteous Among the Nations," with André and Magda among the first to be so named. It would take too long to establish the chronology and bibliography of the process that led to this international recognition of the village and the plateau, especially in Israel and the United States. The attention given to the area has not let up in forty years, and there are perhaps as many books and articles written about this exceptional history in English as there are in French.

Yet one text, this memoir, has been glaringly absent from the public record. We should consider it an important source because it was written very soon after the events, before anyone paid much attention to what had happened on the plateau. Furthermore, this text was composed by the principal actor, or at least one of the principal actors, in the events. In fact, excerpts from the memoirs have been circulating for a long time without the family's knowledge. These extracts, which dealt with the 1940s, provoked lively and heated debate some thirty years ago on the very soil where the events took place. The countryside has since returned to its natural serenity.

It appears that the major problem raised by the fragments circulated from André Trocmé's memoirs (roughly 18 percent of the text) is that they reduced a book and a life to a few years. These were certainly important years, but the memoirs in their entirety are at once much less than the portrait of a human community under Vichy rule (they are only the story of an individual) and much more, since we can consider them a formidable document regarding the history of French Protestantism (or even of France itself) during the first half of the twentieth century.

I would like to insist on this double perspective that views the memoirs as both larger and smaller than the story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. I have not concentrated on the psychological history of the man because, to do so, I would need an in-depth knowledge of psychology and psychiatry that I simply do not have. But such specialists will read the opening pages of these memoirs with great profit. Here we find the description of an upper-middle-class, industrialist Protestant family from the north of France (but also from Germany) and, above all, its irreparable heartbreak: the death of a mother witnessed by her ten-year-old son in a car accident caused by his father. An aged father, suddenly a widower, with many offspring. A timid child, the youngest, closed in on himself, insecure about his talent and shattered by a sense of guilt.

Taken as a whole, the memoirs depict the importance of the father ("Papa" is always written with a capital "P") and of a family sure of its place and prestige, a typical upper-middle-class family and probably a typical upper-middle-class Protestant family. Without a doubt, it would be difficult to find in the Trocmé family, beyond their obvious Puritanism, a very Calvinist sense of predestination, a form of pride that comes less from "class" than from "grace." André's entire destiny, despite his timidity, would be to become independent at the ideological and denominational levels. He became a socially aware pastor who took the side of the workers, not the bosses (which could be interpreted as a liberating rejection of his milieu), then a pacifist and a conscientious objector who opposed the patriotism affirmed by his family. Finally, he married a woman who was not Protestant (as did his brother Francis). The fact that Magda was a foreigner (Italian) whom he met in the United States was not a problem for a family that had a cosmopolitan side to it, since André's mother was German. His mother had, however, been the daughter of a pastor. Magda was not Protestant, in either sense of the word for a French Protestant of the time: by belief and practice on the one hand, or by her family origin on the other. The spouse of Pastor André Trocmé and daughter-in-law of Paul Trocmé, the president of the Committee of the Northern Christian Society, was not Protestant and never wanted to become Protestant. This love marriage was both a sign and a condition of a series of breaches that André and, later, the couple were capable of, breaches that risked both ecclesiastical and social solitude.

For the moment, I will skip over the period of World War I, a decisive time for André, to continue with the question of Protestantism. Readers for whom the name Trocmé evokes only the rescue of Jews in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon between 1940 and 1944 may be stunned by these memoirs. Certainly, these readers will know that Trocmé was a pastor, along with his colleague Édouard Theis. They may also know that Trocmé's and Theis's church was a major center of dissent in the local community and that from the pulpit the two men pronounced the famous June 23, 1940, declaration on resistance using the "weapons of the Spirit." But, to some degree, this is only superficial knowledge.

One reason we forget what constituted Trocmé's profound pastoral identity is that his sermons were not recorded; he only made outlines of them. But these memoirs compensate in their own way for the absence of the sermons. They remind us that Trocmé was, from the beginning and

throughout his career, a *pastor* – a minister of the Holy Gospels, as was said in days past. He was a man whose vocation (in the elevated sense of the word, a life's choice) was to spread the gospel and try to live and take seriously everything in the Gospels that is disturbing and revolutionary (in the socialist sense and in the sense of Saint Francis of Assisi and others), especially the scandal of the cross.[1]

Young André grew up in a Protestant milieu suffused with practice and piety, with a father who conducted the family prayer services. This was an inherited faith, a mimetic faith. "A religion of forms," a "routine," wrote André after the fact. He went through what he calls "revivals" (*réveils*), using the typical Protestant word designating a personal conversion to Christ when one already considered oneself "Christian," what Americans call "born again." But he also experienced the phenomenon of collective outpourings when conversions occur by the dozens, or even by the thousands, as in the great historical revivals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Trocmé went from revival to revival. He made a list of them: the Young People's Christian Union in Saint Quentin, Plaisance, and Clamart; the Northern Group and the parish of Sin-le-Noble. At first, he was a follower; later he became a leader.[2] Throughout his life, he was nostalgic about the revivals, long after the initial dynamism had dissipated.

We learn a lot in these memoirs about the history of French Protestantism in the twentieth century, which remains poorly known even among its few specialists. If the settling of the Baptists in the north, the actions of the Brigade in the Drôme, and the somewhat charismatic figure of Henri Nick are all well known, it's not quite the same for the Northern Group, the generation of the "friends" (*copains*), the former students at the School of Theology in Paris who wanted to evangelize the proletarian milieus and who resembled both the Drôme Brigadiers and the worker priests. Some of the friends went into Pentecostalism, which was establishing itself in France at the time. Trocmé hosted Douglas Scott in his presbytery in Sin-le-Noble. He describes the first Pentecostal groups, the speaking in tongues, and the pre-Taizé atmosphere created in Charmes-sur-Rhône in Ardèche by his former theology classmate, Louis Dallière. Here we have some astonishing pages written by a man who is

1 In this regard, see André Trocmé, *Jesus Christ and the Nonviolent Revolution* (Plough, 2014).

2 He hoped to have a revival in Le Chambon but it never took place.

neither an opponent nor an outside observer, but rather a Christian who has himself undergone a rebirth experience, who "speaks the language" of this deeply believing milieu, and who, after reporting its excesses and failures, is fully capable of analyses that one would think were written by historians or sociologists of religion.

You will read a letter in this collection that was never published by Trocmé. Dated October 1943, when Trocmé was in hiding far from his family, it announces the founding of an order of "Servants," a men's group that would be recognized by the "small chain" around their neck. This type of third order was not some whim completely out of touch with the Reformed tradition. It was rather an echo of the third order tradition of the "Watchmen" (*Veilleurs*), made popular some twenty years earlier by Pastor Wilfred Monod, not to mention the nascent Taizé movement.

Another curious point, earlier and better known, is the young theologian's stay in New York for an additional year's study from 1925 to 1926 after completing his degree at the School of Theology in Paris. New York City is not only where he meets the love of his life, the beautiful Italian of Russian origin, Magda Grilli di Cortona, and encounters a typically American Protestant form of student internationalism, but also where he tutors the Rockefeller children (as Édouard Theis, his future co-pastor, had done just before him). The memoirs contain pages about a railroad and automobile cross-country vacation trip taken by this extraordinarily rich family. As in other moments, André is both an outsider and an insider, an often uncomfortable situation but one that allows for astute observation.

When he becomes the pastor of a rural parish, Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, Trocmé turns into an ethnologist of this milieu so foreign that he doubts it will ever appeal to him. He came from an urban world and only wished to leave the North to go to the Parisian suburbs. Here is how he describes the plateau, the peasants, and his village: "When, in the North, I pronounced the word 'God,' I brought a revolution, because, in the heart of slavery, of poverty, and of working in the mines, God appears as a liberator. But here, God is Nature, Destiny, the Unknowable One who, with chance shots, dispenses death, birth, sickness, health, sunshine, and frost. Faith consists in bowing before these arbitrary decrees. That's what religion is."

One would be mistaken to see in these analyses a lack of understanding or a sense of self-importance. Here two directly opposed

cultural universes confront each other, and the initial feeling of strangeness slowly gives way to friendship. "It was in Le Chambon, from 1934 to 1944, that Magda and I were truly happy," writes André. Magda confirms this view in her own memoirs.

To finish with what one might call "Le Chambon before it became Le Chambon" (before the 1940s), we should say a word about the 1937 founding of the École Nouvelle Cévenole, later known as Collège Cévenol.[3] The Collège became famous because it welcomed Jewish students and faculty during the war, but it had been created for the local population, and for the pastors who had many children[4] and great ambition for their scholarly success. Undoubtedly, the Collège was the most useful present the pastor gave his parish and the people of the plateau.

The memoirs give additional information on the history of Protestantism internationally. This international aspect is not surprising, not only because Trocmé had strong connections with the United States, especially after World War II, but because, since the end of the eighteenth century, the small French Protestant community had always kept abreast of theological developments, often introduced by missionaries coming from other countries. It also experienced the influence of various revivals, as well as the increasing critiques of religion emanating from German universities in the nineteenth century. Pentecostalism is an example of these international currents.

More intriguing for those familiar with the spiritual resistance in the different branches of European Protestantism during the years 1930 to 1940 is Trocmé's relation to the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. Barth, who dominated this period and years afterward as well, is almost completely absent from these memoirs. Trocmé did not remember, or did not find it useful to remember that, in early September 1937, he participated in the pastoral meeting organized around the works of Barth at the Saint-Jean-Chambre in Ardèche. When Barthianism appears in these memoirs, it is presented in a critical and perhaps false light, as it had been initially by the adherents to the social Christianity that Trocmé

3 The institution was first called the École Nouvelle Cévenole, the adjective *nouvelle* indicating its pedagogical ambition and linking it to the École des Roches, which was well known to the Trocmés, and to the École Beauvallon, founded at the same time in Dieulefit by the Protestant Marguerite Soubeyran. The name Collège Cévenol was adopted after the war.

4 Trocmé had four children and Theis had eight girls. The school was coed from its beginning.

inherited. In their eyes, Barthianism was a new form of Pietism that refused all Christian commitment to the community. Trocmé denounces the "barrenness of Barthian theology behind which many took refuge to avoid commitment," and reproaches it for defining conscientious objection as "an act of spiritual pride." Obviously, the pacifist Trocmé was hardly able to recognize himself in the famous letter that Barth wrote to the Czech theologian Josef Hromádka in September 1938, on the eve of the conference in Munich. Every Czech soldier who fights, wrote Barth, "will also do so for the church of Jesus Christ."

It is astonishing to see how two radically opposed theologies (that were also political stances) could come together a few years later to reach a common attitude of spiritual resistance and help the persecuted Jews. This enigma found its source in the universality of the Christian message and in the anti-Christian and anti-humanist hatred nourished by the Nazis and the challenge it presented to Christianity. There is, besides, an important link between the German Confessing Church with its Barthian stamp and the pacifist "nest" in Le Chambon. According to Trocmé's memoirs, it was in Le Chambon that Édouard Theis and an Austrian Jewish refugee named Hilde Hoefert, who also taught at the Collège Cévenol, translated Johan Maarten's German novella *Village on the Mountain* (1939), which deals with Christian resistance.

The question of conscientious objection also separated Trocmé from the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr[5] and led him to become one of the directors of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. This is one of the great contributions of the memoirs, a contribution to the history of Christian pacifism and conscientious objection, which was relatively unknown at the time and seriously divided not only Protestantism but French society more generally at the beginning of the 1930s. A handful of future pastors (whom their church refused to ordain) – Henri Roser, Philippe Vernier, Jacques Martin – went from the courtroom to military prisons, and Trocmé himself was almost prevented from becoming a pastor, while a virulent anti-pacifist patriotism surged in right-wing French Protestantism.

5 Reinhold Neibuhr (1892–1971), as Trocmé writes, converted to a "pragmatic neo-Calvinism, typically American, which allowed the church to tell young soldiers: individuals can conduct themselves morally, but societies cannot. You must choose the lesser of two evils: let Hitler do what he wants or wage war against Hitler. The lesser of the two evils is obviously to wage war against Hitler because Christians, as responsible citizens, must accept to dirty their hands."

The memoirs relate a decisive encounter between young André and a German soldier in the occupational army in the north of France during World War I. The soldier was living, as were others, in the Trocmé mansion in Saint-Quentin. The soldier offered André bread (which he at first rejected) before explaining that he was a Christian who refused to bear arms. This fellowship was Trocmé's initial encounter with Christian pacifism. His account of the rest of World War I and the German occupation in the north from 1914 to 1918 should hold the reader's attention: the sight of wounded German soldiers, the mistreatment of Russian prisoners of war, the evacuation of the population of Saint-Quentin into Belgium. All this marked André. Too young to be drafted, he nonetheless understood the meaning of total warfare, experiencing it as a civilian living between occupation and forced displacement. Although in September 1921 he agreed to do his military service, he refused the corporal stripes that were then forced upon him. Later, named to the army's Geodetic Service and sent to Morocco, where certain zones were not yet peaceful, he discreetly left his rifle and cartridges in the weapons closet in the barracks and told his lieutenant that he refused to kill. One easily understands his admiration for his friends Henri Roser, Philippe Vernier, and Jacques Martin, who refused to serve at all and spent long portions of the 1930s in prison.

Once he entered the School of Theology in Paris, Trocmé became a lifelong Christian pacifist. He was close to Wilfred Monod, the great advocate of social Christianity, pacifism, and ecumenism. Immediately after World War I, he struggled to decide between two rising Christian pacifist networks: the Universal Alliance for International Friendship through Churches, spearheaded by Monod and Pastor Jules Jézéquel, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. A "desire for the absolute" led him to choose the latter. His second baptism into Christian pacifism came about when the Englishman Oliver Dryer, general secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, visited the School of Theology in Paris. This was Trocmé's other "vocation," which was fully espoused by Magda – perhaps even more so than by her husband! His full-time pastoral duties in Sin-le-Noble and Le Chambon left him little free time, but things changed in 1945 when he only served as a half-time pastor in Le Chambon. His other half-time commitment was as European Secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a function that became full-time in 1950 when he left Le Chambon and moved

into the vast, decrepit, bourgeois house that he rented in Versailles. This next-to-last stage in his life – he would once again assume a parish in Geneva in 1960, which is only sketched out in the final pages of the memoirs – offers us invaluable commentary on the hesitant recognition of Nazi culpability by postwar Germans and a moving passage about the camp named Dora and what an ex-member of the Hitler Youth heard and saw there.

Of course, the years 1940 to 1945, spent in Le Chambon, are prominent in the memoirs. Trocmé does not pretend to be writing a history. He simply records his memories, often in intimate fashion, undoubtedly to exorcize two accidental deaths that wounded him for life, that of his mother and of his oldest son. He forgets to record many important things as well, among them the famous declaration that he and Theis made in June 1940 on the "Weapons of the Spirit."

The present edition of the memoirs offers a document with gaps and excesses, subjective assertions, and verifiable truths. It is annotated because, not having been written for publication, the author did not prepare a formal manuscript. It was up to the historian to group facts and narration with equally valid personal reflections.

Just as André and Magda were extraordinarily united throughout their lives, they remain together in their autobiographical practices. After the death of her husband, Magda wrote and then recorded her memories on cassettes during the second half of the 1970s. They are as remarkably well written as those of her husband and appear in two volumes: *Souvenirs d'une jeunesse hors normes* (2017) and *Souvenirs d'une vie d'engagements* (2021).[6] These two volumes, like those written by André, tell of a bourgeois childhood, the lack of a mother, the encounter of a lifetime, and a shared life together. The writings of the two spouses do not, however, duplicate one another. It is a rather stunning exercise to read them one after the other, or in conjunction. It is one of the privileges of this story that it has had two quality writers to relate it.

Apart from that, I decided to insert into the body of the memoirs a few documents written by André Trocmé or concerning him, often never published before, that seem appropriate to read at the same time as the memoirs themselves.

6 Magda Trocmé, S*ouvenirs d'une jeunesse hors normes*, ed. Nicolas Bourguinat and Frédéric Rognon (Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2017); Magda Trocmé, *Souvenirs d'une vie d'engagements*, ed. Frédéric Rognon, Patrick Cabanel, and Nicolas Bourguinat (Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2021).

One can read these memoirs for the chapters that cover the 1940s in Le Chambon, and I suppose many readers will begin by doing so. One can also read them for their strictly pastoral and Protestant dimension. This volume is undoubtedly situated at the intersection of these two possible readings. We are dealing with a Protestant story (which is absurd at the statistical level since Protestants were not even 2 percent of the population) and at the same time a national story, even a universal one, whether we are talking about revival meetings in Christianity or spiritual resistance against totalitarianism. This coming together of a minority and the universal is not a first. The Calas Affair,[7] to cite but one example, offers a paradigmatic illustration, as does the Dreyfus Affair, with a Jewish and Judeo-Protestant echo.[8] Classifying the Cévennes as a World Heritage Site for Protestant resistance and the rescue of Jews could furnish another. Reading the memoirs from the angle of the role of minorities in world history will, perhaps, yield their greatest profit.

7 Jean Calas was a Protestant merchant living in Toulouse who was tried, tortured, and executed for the murder of his son on March 10, 1762. He had continuously proclaimed his innocence, even during horrific torture intended to make him confess. The Enlightenment French writer Voltaire intervened, and Louis XV had the decision overturned. As Jean Calas had always maintained, his son, Marc-Antoine, had committed suicide.

8 Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew, was wrongfully convicted of treason and condemned to life in prison. That decision divided the country from 1894 until it was rectified in 1906. Once again, a French writer, Émile Zola, led a campaign to have the decision overturned.

1

Childhood

LIKE ALL SMALL CHILDREN, I thought my childhood home was normal. To this day, I tend to judge houses and people by comparing them to the house and people of my life before 1914.

First, the huge house: eighteen rooms not counting the kitchen and utility rooms, including twelve bedrooms. It was so big for a small boy that I only got to know it gradually. The third floor, for example, remained mysterious until 1914. It was not a very cheery-looking house. Built by Papa around 1895 to provide for his large family (he had nine children with his first wife, Marie Walbaum), its address was 156 Boulevard Gambetta in Saint-Quentin, Aisne. Papa's business was prospering. Boulevard Gambetta was a wide street bordering Les Champs-Elysées, a long, dreary promenade. The trunks of the trees that lined it were green with moss. In the old days, they were painted up to eye level with tar to save the leaves from caterpillar infestations. When I think of my childhood, I can still see, through the tight grid of tree branches, a melancholy sunset stretching out above the houses, over there, "on the other side of Les Champs-Elysées." It seemed so far away.

Behind the house there was a walled garden, a rather poorly tended lawn with a locust tree covered with ivy at its center. Every time I travel and find myself in a dwelling situated between a garden and a public walkway, I feel at home.

My early childhood unspooled in the front bedroom on the second floor that connected to my parents' bathroom. On the wall, there was an advertisement for thread with the name "J. Thiriez Père et Fils."[1] I didn't understand what it meant until I learned to read.

1 The "Julien Thiriez Father and Son" business, founded in 1857, was one of the major textile firms in the north of France.

My mother, who died in an automobile accident when I was ten years old, did not leave me with any very tender or precise memories. I remember her as a stocky woman squeezed into a fitted corset, as was fashionable at the time, with her hair in a bun that came to a point and nose-clip eyeglasses. I know I loved to be close to her, but there were too many maids involved in our upbringing. I remember Mathilde, whom I called to wipe me, and Marie, whom my children knew, an excellent but easily startled creature who bathed me on Saturdays before putting me to bed (with eggnog and rice pudding, whose bland sweetness I still crave today). "There you go, clean as a new penny," she would say as she dried me.

Three memories of my mother stand out. In the first, I am in someone's arms, probably my mother's. The shutters are closed, but we can see through the slits. It's still daylight. I must be sad, because a voice is trying to comfort me by showing me a strange, jolting machine below. "Chug, chug, chug, chug," says the voice. The machine is my older brother Maurice's car. I think that the spectacle must have consoled me since I still remember it.

Here's another memory: I am standing in the bathroom in front of my mother. I am wearing my first real boy's suit made of velour. It has a turned-down white collar and a floppy, loosely tied scarf as a necktie. I have long blond curls that fall to my shoulders. The women on Les Champs-Elysées greatly admire my curls. "What beautiful hair," they say. But I am a big boy, gauche and timid, and their compliments bother and humiliate me. I have never lost this character trait. I experience the same feeling today when American women tell me, "I enjoyed your sermon so much."

One day when I was seriously ill with either measles or the flu (I was often sick and coughed a lot, as did my children later), my parents took me into their bedroom. I have kept a very sweet memory of this moment. The wallpaper had a rather somber, bronze color to it. Golden rain fell at a slant onto bouquets of flowers. In my feverish imagination, this gold covered me little by little, transforming me into a beautiful and happy being. This transfiguration must correspond to a profound yearning in me that later expressed itself in my religious sensibility.

Aside from these three precise memories, I only remember my mother as someone who was always there. I didn't need to think about her because she was part of the normal order of things. I wasn't a precocious child. I awakened slowly from the drowsiness of an overprotected childhood.

My mother was Papa's second wife. That's why my half-brothers and I called her *Mère* and not *Maman*. I wonder if this was not an error on Papa's part. I noticed quickly that all the children called their mother *Maman* except us. In the somewhat solemn atmosphere of our house in Saint-Quentin, the title *Mère* seemed normal to me. My mother was not the mother of my older brothers and sisters, who were much older than I was. Maurice, Louise, Albert, and Francis could have been my parents. I think that Mère tried hard not to show a preference for her own children, Pierre and me. Duty was the key to all attitudes on the Boulevard Gambetta. A duty that restricted the expression of feelings, dreams, and impulses. It seems to me that my own impulses washed away like water over smooth pebbles on a barren shore. The united front presented by my father, mother, and brothers drained me of resistance. But, as I said, I was timid and not the least bit assertive. Perhaps my memory is playing tricks on me.

My memories of visiting Germany are very different. Could it be that, finding herself back home with her German family in an atmosphere much less tense than that of Saint-Quentin, my mother relaxed? There was my charming little grandmother, and my funny aunt Louisa, whom we called "Aunt Lou." I remember our departures, very late, very drowsy, from the Saint-Quentin train station. Maternal warmth reigned in the second-class carriage. We woke up several times in Belgium to the sonorous calls of the customs officers and the foreign railway workers. I remember the enormous train station in Cologne, the cathedral with its twin towers, and the magnificent river glimpsed through the arches of the famous bridge. Then there was the German countryside with neat houses, the hills along the Weser River, and the hearty noise of the train wheels on the bridges and between the embankments.

There was the poetry of Petzen, a city in Lower Saxony not far from Hanover, with its old presbytery and its Romanesque church; the odors of the parlor (coffee, rye bread, ham, and the tobacco from *Grossvater*'s long pipe); the rustic joys of the *grosse Diele* (a barn with a brick floor adjoining the house); the comfort of *Kaffee trinken*; the enormous, sugared cakes (the *Zuckerkuchen* was so large you needed a baker's oven to cook it). All that left me with a memory less staid and less artificial than that of Saint-Quentin and Saint-Gobain,[2] where I spent most of my childhood.

2 The Trocmé family had a summer home in Saint-Gobain, twenty miles from Saint-Quentin.

I recall my grandmother, still pretty under her black lace headdress; my grandfather, silent and huge in his wing chair, who every evening chased *der Bösewicht* (the demon) from my body and my soul by laying his enormous hands on my head; Aunt Lou, who sent me off to look for eggs on Easter Day along the footpath that led to the forest, eggs hidden by *der Osterhase* (the Easter Bunny); the coachman who let me ride in the front seat of my grandfather's carriage with him; the women from the village, in red skirts and black bodices, with their curious headdresses adorned with pearls under which they swept up their blond hair. All this formed an idyllic tableau in my mind that Saint-Gobain never succeeded in creating.

Why? I think I understand. A vaguely romantic heritage, which found no expression in the lucid and critical atmosphere of the Trocmé family, lay dormant in my soul. Later, when my grandfather died (in 1907, I think), I returned to Germany. The rustic carriage with the shaky glass windows that smelled like manure did not come to get us at the station. But I found my grandmother in a small apartment in Bückeburg, and I visited all the aunts (there were seven of them). I slept in large bedrooms furnished with wooden beds and enormous white, puffy, down quilts. Their windows opened onto orchards. I shot marbles with kids in short leather pants. I offered my hand to Uncle Heinrich and to Pastor Sprenger, a tall, thin man with an energetic profile, strapped into a tailored morning coat. I exchanged, as he did, a sonorous *Guten Abend* (good evening) with the peasants in the village. It was the Empire. It was order, respect, work, cleanliness, whereas Saint-Quentin was the Republic, the mocking mask of the factory workers, sneaking a look at the "rich kids" that we were, from behind the curtains of their hovels. At Saint-Gobain, the sputtering automobile already separated us irreversibly from the wheelbarrow pushers going to their gardens.

On a spring day, one of my cousins – Thea Sprenger, I think, a tall girl with black hair and dark eyes – opened her window and clapped her hands when she saw an apple tree filled with flowers right up against the house. "*Wie entzückend!*" (How charming!), she cried out, and all her family exclaimed along with her. Why would the "How charming!" of my French family before the apple trees in bloom in the valley of Saint-Gobain never evoke the same echo in my heart? I don't know. Perhaps the shade cast by the death of my mother in 1911 was so penetrating that our hearts were no longer able to leap as naively as those of my German

cousins. Perhaps it was simply what I said earlier: I was an enthusiastic child. I was happy around other enthusiastic people, as I still am today.

The death of my mother was an unbelievably sudden and brutal tragedy. One Sunday in June 1911, Papa decided that we would go spend the day at Saint-Gobain because the weather was so beautiful. We were used to these "departures for Saint-Gobain." Our car, a "limousine," had a closed space behind.[3] The roof came forward above the front seats. To get out, the driver and his front-seat companion detached a small, low door made of oilcloth. The children and any luggage went in the back. Since the luggage and blankets fit so tightly around us, I had the impression that I was planted like a small tree: my legs were the roots, my arms the branches, and my head a piece of fruit.

But on that Sunday, we were not planted. Saint-Gobain was only twenty miles from Saint-Quentin, so we were going to return that same evening. I can still see the car, parked next to the sidewalk, leaning decidedly toward the house, because the pavement bulged noticeably. Right after passing the train station, Papa branched off to the right to avoid the monotony of the Route de La Père that we always took. He wanted to take us for a ride. Later, why did this decision, which led to the catastrophe, always appear to me as a "moral error" on Papa's part? I don't know, but even today when I don't take the direct route, I am assailed with scruples as if I were threatened with misfortune. It is true that, thirty-three years later, Magda and I also contributed to an irreparable tragedy because we did not return home as quickly as possible. So be it.

The road chosen by Papa was narrow, dusty, and poorly maintained. Under the Origny railroad bridge, Papa noticed that his horn wasn't working. He was going at a moderate speed, when a small, open car passed him. Papa was very proud of his powerful car, and he couldn't bear this humiliation. He took off after the other car with the intention of passing it. Pierre, Annette, and I were behind, very shaken and frightened by the bumpy ride. The car in front of us was casting clouds of dust into our faces which made it impossible to see the road clearly. I saw Mère, half up in her seat, touch Papa's hand and cry out: "Paul, Paul, we are going to have an accident!" These were her last words. Papa was driving on the far left to pass the car. Through the dust, I suddenly saw a pile of stones intended for

3 A "limousine" was an enclosed automobile with an open driver's seat. It was supposedly called a limousine because the driver's roof resembled the cloak-hood worn by the shepherds in the region of France called Limousin.

roadwork. Our left wheel hit it. We were going very fast. An indescribable chaos ensued. There was a dreadful noise of twisted metal and broken wood. Then silence interspersed with the frightened cries of children. I found myself outside, standing, and unharmed but trembling from shock. Papa was walking like someone in great pain, holding his broken right wrist in his left hand. Mère was not there. Papa began calling for her and looking for her. She was lying on the roadway twenty yards behind us and no longer appeared to be alive. She had rolled in the dust and was lying on the road facing the sky with a trickle of blood coming from the corner of her mouth. Peasants arrived and carried her to the embankment. The car we were pursuing had turned around and left for town in search of help. An ambulance came to get Mère. We followed in a taxi. Torrents of childish love, bursts of trusting prayers arose indistinctly from my heart toward my mother and God, but my deepest instincts told me it was all over. As soon as I saw her on the road, I understood that there are ruthless events one cannot fight against, decisive moments that no one, not even God, can undo. One cannot go back in time. The minutes and hours flow mercilessly, and we learn that those who were once part of our lives belong to a past that will never bring them back.

Mère lay dying for three days. The first night, Pierre and I, who were staying in the room next to hers, heard the noisy breathing of the dying. Then I was placed in a different room. A surgeon came from Paris and operated right in her room. The operation failed.

On the third day, Papa appeared in the hallway like a ghost, holding his broken wrist. "My children, your *Maman* is no longer with us." He was sobbing. I had never seen him cry. I hugged him with all my strength and said to him: "Papa, promise me you will never own another car." That, I remember clearly. Apparently, I also said: "Why are you crying, since Mère is in heaven?" but I don't remember having said it.

A "funeral chapel" was set up in the study, now draped in black. It was a big funeral because Papa was well-known in Saint-Quentin. All my brothers and sisters came to comfort Papa. The next morning in the dining room, Papa wanted to worship as we normally did. But once again he was in deep despair. "I killed her, I killed her," he cried out, sobbing uncontrollably. Robert, the youngest of my half-brothers, was holding him. Anyone who knew Papa and his incredible fortitude will understand to what extent this spectacle impacted me. Papa, on whom everyone counted, on whom everything rested, was a broken and repentant man.

He nonetheless recovered quickly. Papa was always very sure of himself. I don't know whether it was in his temperament or whether he had constructed, by sheer will, an impenetrable rampart around himself which gave him his incredible authority. He taught us that if we do our duty, we will never be mistaken, and we saw him as a man who never made mistakes. Very quickly, a few months after the accident, as soon as his broken wrist permitted, he bought another car and got back behind the wheel. He drove until he was ninety-two or ninety-three and always drove fast. When, having become drivers ourselves, my brothers and I objected to his fast driving, he responded without hesitating: "Be quiet. I know what I am doing. I have never had an accident!" We were silent, stunned. You didn't argue with Papa.

Since then, I have often reflected on his self-assured answer. I think he didn't know he was lying. Now that I have known a grief comparable to his, I know that there are unthinkable memories, horrors that you cannot evoke without fear of losing your mind. You must banish the very thought of having been responsible for them, even indirectly. Papa, responsible for Mère's death, was only able to maintain his sanity by eliminating the memory of the accident. I am not reproaching him in the least. I am grateful to him for having quickly reestablished his incredible moral strength and for having been able to assume once again his role as an unshakeable rock upon which we, his children, constructed everything.

As for Pierre and me, we were young. Wounded more deeply than we thought, we went back to our games. I hear Papa's voice reproaching us one day: "My children, do you still remember your mother? You must always think about her." We didn't answer. How would I have been able to speak? I had discovered my mother the day I lost her. I had to grow up carrying in my heart a huge amount of never-expressed feeling, an unsatisfied desire for love that had been crushed and only blossomed very slowly as time went by, in the form of profound impulses, sad and religious.

After Mère's death, the house on Boulevard Gambetta became gloomier. My older half-sister, Louise, widow of Pastor Paul Dumas and mother of two children – Yvonne, a year older than me, and Étienne, six months younger than me – left her home on the Rue de L'Est to take charge of Papa's household. Louise spoke very little. She was distant, even from her own children, and had an aristocratic nature: intelligent, firm,

and lucid. She became very close to Papa, whom she greatly resembled. But under her direction, the house didn't acquire any demonstrable warmth. Did Louise find herself facing the same problem that Mère did? Did she want to avoid showing her own children more tenderness than she showed me and Pierre, who no longer had their mother? I remember our visits to Louise's home before Mère died. I didn't feel any freer there than I did on Boulevard Gambetta. Pierre, Yvonne, André, and Étienne formed, between 1911 and 1914, a quartet of three brothers and a sister under the direction of German governesses, whose attitudes and games marked my early adolescence and my years attending lycée, the public secondary school.

There were three successive governesses: Miss Winter, Miss Kalcher, and Miss Wiegand. Whereas Papa and Louise used the small living room called the Petit Salon, where we were only admitted very briefly between 1:00 and 1:30 in the afternoon or after dinner and before bedtime at nine "if we had all our homework done," the study was our world unto ourselves. An austere world: an immense, black, double-leafed table desk with six compartments where we stowed our books by raising the roll-top; a cupboard where each one of us had a shelf for books and a few personal treasures; a big, glass-doored bookcase, always locked, containing yellow paperback books "for adults"; a blackboard and Vidal de La Blache wall maps.

We did not go up to our rooms during the day. It was forbidden. Our days were regulated as if we were in a convent: up at 7:00, bell for breakfast at 7:30, school at 8:00, back at noon, two bells between which we washed our hands, lunch at 12:15, walk between 12:50 and 1:30. A quick recitation of our afternoon lessons, school from 2:00 to 4:00, back at 4:15, snack (bread, chocolate, and a glass of milk) in the garden until 5:00. Homework from 5:00 to 7:00, dinner at 7:00 (two bells), short visit to the living room from 7:45 to 8:00. Homework from 8:00 to 9:00. (When we got older, it was from 8:00 to 10:00.) There were exceptions on Thursday afternoons: walk until 4:00, then homework; and on Sunday afternoons: walk until 4:00, followed by free time. In fact, we only had two hours to ourselves each week: Sunday evenings from 5:00 to 7:00. The rule was the rule; there were no exceptions.

We were practically never invited out (except at Christmas to Aunt Marie's and on New Year's to Aunt Alice's). I remember two or three invitations to Gérard and Gilbert's and an afternoon spent with my friends,

the Gillets. Otherwise, I didn't know any other house but ours. The Trocmés were supposed to be sufficient unto themselves. There had been the de Saint-Affrique family of my sisters-in-law, but they had left Saint-Quentin. So, we had virtually no friends. Later, Papa explained to me that this isolation was part of his educational system: children were not capable of distinguishing between true and false or good and evil. It was therefore necessary to imprint on their nature ideas and habits that would last a lifetime. As a result, no primary school until the age of ten. After that, we could go to the lycée but without mixing with others. No casual strolling; a precisely timed return home by the most direct route, and homework. Walks were for health (we really racked up the miles!). I only kicked a soccer ball once, on the turf of Saint-Quentin stadium with my Gillet friends and their priest uncle, who was their tutor. I remember this as an inexpressible joy but a decidedly common one that was never repeated.

Everything that was outside of this strict framework imposed by Papa and reinforced by the German governesses, like going through the Grand-Place when the most direct route home from the lycée skirted the "Fontaine aux Grenouilles," going into a shop, or even strolling and looking into a display window, appeared sinful to me. When the Saint-Quentin fair, which lasted a month, built its gingerbread houses along the Grand-Place, the temptation was much greater. But I couldn't fall into temptation because I didn't have any money. It was only in Brussels at the age of seventeen that I had pocket money for the first time. However, one Thursday a year, we were given a very small amount of money to spend at the fair, following the guidance of the governess. I remember a boat costing nineteen sous that I wanted badly for months. It was red inside and white on the outside with four small, wooden sailors in the back stuck on benches. Since it was neither my birthday nor Christmas, the dream of owning this boat remained unsatisfied until the day when Marguerite, the wife of Maurice, took me to the Grand-Bazaar on Rue de la Sellerie (where I had never been before) and bought the boat for me. Marguerite was warm-hearted and had the brilliant idea of presenting "consolation gifts" to those invited to birthday parties who weren't celebrating their birthdays. In my hands, the four little sailors in the boat had many adventures on the high seas: shipwrecks, shark encounters, rescues, and battles with lead soldiers.

When my mother was alive, Christmas was an extraordinary feast inspired by German Christmases. We celebrated it in the Billiard Room,

the large room added to the house behind the Petit Salon. Aunt Walbaum had it built for my older brothers and gave them the gift of a billiard table when they were adolescents. Papa had never been very enthusiastic about this worldly game, and the billiard table was taken down when my brothers left. Papa didn't even want anyone to call this room the Billiard Room. He preferred that we call it the Game Room. But for our generation, which had never known billiards, it was always the Billiard Room anyway.

The Billiard Room, always empty and usually cold, became animated with warmth and life at Christmas time. The mystery for us was complete. We had the right to make "Christmas wishes" using catalogs from large department stores, Sears Roebuck–type catalogs that have disappeared from France now that we have become a poor country. On the days before Christmas, we were not allowed to run to the door to see what had arrived. Consigned to the study, we waited. We never saw anyone go into the Billiard Room. Preparations must have taken place when we were asleep.

On the evening of the 24th, we were allowed into the Petit Salon. A window, veiled by transparent blinds, separated the Petit Salon from the mysterious room. Through it, we watched the lighting of the candles, one at a time, on the Christmas tree.

We entered in a procession. The caroling, recitations, and reading of the Christmas story lasted too long for our taste. We had our eyes on the immense tables covered with tablecloths and presents that filled two sides of the room. Everyone was seated at the table according to age. When the ceremony ended, we found our place and sat down in contemplation. To tell the truth, I don't have a very precise memory of the presents I received, but, strangely, I remember exactly the presents Pierre received. He was two years older than I was and "very mature for his age." He got older boys' presents, whereas everyone persisted in giving me toys. "In two years, when you are as old as Pierre is now, you'll get the same presents," they told me. But that promise, two years later, was of course forgotten. As children with a good memory do, I counted my two years. When I entered the Billiard Room, my eyes locked on the promised object, and when we had finished singing the carols, I discovered that it was "not at my place."

Thus, Pierre got a Peugeot bicycle and I, as a consolation for waiting, a hoop. Pierre got a Kodak camera and I, the following summer, a square

box with a hole in it but without a lens. It had belonged to Francis when he was young. I used it once, but the photographs were so faint that I lost interest. When Pierre received a gold watch from his godfather (Henri from the École des Roches) – engraved gold, mind you – I got a silver chain with a whistle at the end "to hang a watch on in two years." I got my first watch when I began studying theology at the university. I was nineteen years old, and the watch was copper. When Pierre received a chemistry set, they promised me wonderful future gifts that I never got, and when we *both* got a real microscope, it was understood that its use was reserved for "the older" of us. Sometimes "the older" would let me look through the eyepiece so I could see the slides of diatom algae that he had prepared. My turn to use the microscope never came.

These small pedagogical errors had a significant effect on my future. As a sensitive and proud child, I reacted by deciding that "none of that stuff interested me." My mother was dead, and those charged with my education were taken in by my response. Neither music (Pierre took music) nor drawing (Pierre drew well) interested me.

I was considered rather dumb, and I took refuge in imaginative games that I shared with Étienne Dumas. We inherited a good number of lead soldiers that had belonged to my older brothers. One great day, Aunt Pauline, while she still lived in Saint-Quentin, gave us a giant model train, an extraordinary and marvelous mechanical object whose tracks covered almost the entire surface of the Billiard Room. We took the roof off one of the train cars and found tables and seats in a dining car. Étienne and I, left to ourselves in the Billiard Room during the week between Christmas and New Year's, transformed the tile floor into an imaginary country: streets, bridges, mountains, oceans, boat trains, soldiers, and battles. Lost in our games, we groaned when the governess pulled us away at mealtimes. Kneeling on our dark stockings (little boys had short pants, with stockings attached to a kind of stiff vest under a navy-blue sweater), we got holes in them so quickly that Papa had leather kneepads made for us that we strapped on above and below the knee. On these leather patches, propelling ourselves with our arms at top speed, we played among the toy soldiers, sailors, and villages.

After New Year's Day, inexorably, the governess closed the Billiard Room, which fell back into its glacial mystery until the following Christmas. By doing so, our educators acted wisely. The Billiard Room would have lost its charm, as would the model trains (which we weren't

allowed to set up elsewhere) if we had been able to use them all year long. By only opening them up for a dozen or so days a year, the adults created a world of dreams for us, a world of anticipation, and gave us the sense of sacrifice, austere duty, and renunciation. It's true, however, that their calculations probably didn't have such profound motives. For them, it was more a question of saving money on heating and not giving us any temptation to play when it was time for homework or lessons.

We had to go out into the garden between 4:15 and 5 p.m. whenever the weather permitted. Miss Wiegand sent us there with a resoundingly military "Get outside," which allowed for no discussion. It took only five minutes to consume the prescribed bread and chocolate. Then we were directed toward the gazebo, whose walls were made of a tight network of small glass diamonds. Many of the small panes were missing. We took great pleasure in "accidently" pushing out other panes and then using the end of a broomstick to knock away any shards still stuck in the putty.

The inside of the gazebo was a chaos of mismatched toys: children's wheelbarrows, deflated soccer balls, hoops, carts, garden hoses, shovels, and sprinklers. It was there that we got the materials we needed for our games. The garden itself was limited: a circular lawn with an ivy-covered locust tree at its center; a "grotto" in the back on the left; a simple entrance to a cellar whose door, surrounded by loose stones, frightened us somewhat. The "Petite Montagne" (small mountain) leaned against the wall of the garden and had a cement platform that we reached by mounting a short staircase. It lost a good deal of its mystery when Papa cut out half of it to build a garage for his car. There was also a dark path behind the kiosk, where the moss grew better than the grass. Our games consisted of unrelentingly going around the lawn while pushing a hoop with a wheelbarrow or a cart. The gravel on the pathways bounced under our steps. That was how we measured our speed. It was forbidden to get gravel on the lawn, in the flower beds, or on the tiled sidewalk in front of the house. If we did, the head of the governess, the cook, or our sister or father would pop out scoldingly from one of the windows of the house. The call from the adult calmed the yelling children, who moved toward another part of the garden where they could engage in less visible mischief.

Most of all, Étienne and I played war. When we read Caesar, we made a catapult from a stone and a piece of twisted string that we stuck between the sides of a wooden box. A cardboard tube set between two

wheels was our canon when we studied Napoleon, our voices furnishing the resounding booms of explosions. Gravel supplied our never exhausted munitions; the glass windows of the gazebo constituted all the vulnerable targets we could desire. Around 1912, we started to use paper planes and even a plane with a propeller that we wound up with a rubber band. Étienne and I filled the garden with our heady cries of victory. Elsewhere, the sound of real heavy artillery echoed our childish cries of "Charge!" This was the age of General Lyautey,[4] the Balkan conflict, and the Italo-Turkish War. We belonged to a breed of men and a social class whose privileged position had never been questioned.

One day, I made a frightening discovery. Above the wall, from atop the small mountain, we had already seen women without hats on the other side of the garden wall.[5] They passed by four times a day with their pointed buns, their curly hair (made so with a curling iron) that fell in front of their ears, their impertinent laughs, their camisoles, and their black shawls. They were the workers at Décaudin et Béguin,[6] the main competitors of Paul Trocmé et Fils. They obeyed the whistle call: eight a.m. to noon, two to seven p.m. We knew there was a similar troop of workers in Papa's factory. When they talked about these people in the Petit Salon, the adults referred to them as "the salt of the earth," except when they called them imbeciles or bird brains. It had never occurred to me that such people could have feelings, aspirations, and thoughts like ours. This was the real downside of the education that Papa gave us. It provided us with a keen sense of our honor, responsibility, and duties, but it formed us into the Trocmé clan, a separate people, different from the rest of humanity.

In short, we lived in the garden as if in a vacuum, but one day we discovered it was not airtight. Every autumn, a professional gardener came to put some order into the garden. He pruned the laurel trees and ivy and spaded the flower beds. He never came through the house but through the convenient iron door in the wall on the street side. Étienne and I, after reading Viollet-le-Duc's *Histoire d'une forteresse*, called this door "the

4 Louis Hubert Lyautey (1854–1934) was a French Army general and colonial administrator. After serving in Indochina and Madagascar, he became the first French Resident-General in Morocco from 1912 to 1925.

5 At that time, in the bourgeois world, it was unacceptable for women to go outside without a hat and gloves.

6 A pillow-lace factory which later combined with the Trocmé factory and other firms to form La Cotonnière de Saint-Quentin.

postern."[7] On this day, although we didn't know it, the gardener forgot to lock the postern. Our imaginary war was going full blast, probably so loud that one could hear it on the street. Suddenly, the postern opened. The creaking of the rusty hinges drew our attention. In the gateway stood what in 1912 we would have called a "pale hooligan," in a flat cap, short jacket, and bell-bottom pants, with a pallid face and a cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth. He looked at us for a long time silently, bitterly, sardonically. He took in the garden and the house and nodded. Our cries and gestures had frozen; our outbursts caught in our chests. For the first time, we understood that the Trocmé world was perhaps not the only "normal" world. Then the "pale hooligan" cast a pitying eye on us, sneered, and said, "Bunch of assholes." He left, closing the door behind him.

This event, which I never recounted to anyone until I became an adult, changed the entire course of my thinking. Henceforth, I was no longer able to play war with complete conviction or feel like the master of the world simply because I controlled a garden. I now knew that others heard, looked, and judged, and that all my life I would have to bear their scrutiny and compare my ideas with theirs. Being taken for a moron did me the greatest good.

As I write these lines now, I realize that, of the four who formed our generation, two – Étienne and Yvonne – have died. I will never be able to sit down with them and share these memories. The "pale hooligan," whose image I will take to the grave with me, was only seen by me and Étienne. Thus, he belongs entirely to the past. I can evoke him to sit here at my side, as a member of my family, one of the mysterious inhabitants of my brain that I can conjure up and put back to sleep as I wish. Go, "pale hooligan," rest until I call you back. You revealed to me the problem of class antagonism and I am truly grateful to you. You did a good deed without knowing it, with the help of an insult common to the world in which you lived. I had never heard these words before. I learned them from you and have often pronounced them silently in reference to myself and to all those "absurd people" who take no account of the other human beings around them.

The garden was the scene of many other games. It offered a sneaky way of communicating with the "outside world" and of playing with it that we never would have dared do in the street. I was afraid of the street. I was tall, fat, and awkward, and had a terrible fear of being mocked because

7 A secondary door or entrance in the stone wall of a castle or fortress.

my fat thighs stuck out of my short pants and my over-long arms came out of my narrow sleeves. In the street, I would have liked to be a turtle that, from under its shell, could watch others with its tiny, observant eyes. The garden wall was the shell I wanted. The "Petite Montagne" put us six feet higher than the passersby; the drooping branches of the hazelnut trees allowed us to see without being seen.

Our play with the "outside world" began with a few simple games like throwing moss on the brims of hats. I can still feel the freshness of the moss under my nails. It was hit or miss. We wondered what the hats' wearers would say when they got home.

Once Pierre "pulled off" a master stroke on a woman's hat. We smothered our triumphant laughter in our throats. At four p.m. we were brought back down to earth when we had to appear before the "Petit Salon" tribunal: the drawing teacher from the girls' lycée, Yvonne's school, had given Yvonne a letter of complaint. A short young man with glasses, whom she had seen clearly through the branches, had deliberately soiled her brand-new, beautiful hat. Papa and Louise couldn't understand the humorous aspect of our games. We lowered our heads pitifully and exchanged sideway glances. Pierre kept the nickname "short young man with glasses." When no one was watching us, our games with the "outside world" continued until the German occupation [of World War I].

I'll skip over the stories of old wallets that only contained phony bills placed under the feet of passersby, or the biography of Aristopompe Beauclair, the inventor of mechanical marvels, whose great, imaginary achievements we documented on a small play typewriter to disseminate on the street. I will simply relate the story about the fishing line. Étienne and I (especially Étienne, who had much patience) had a great interest in fishing in the canal. But it was now under German occupation. Confined to the narrow city limits by barbed-wire barriers, we no longer went to Saint-Gobain. Our parents encouraged us to find some innocent entertainment, and we had fishing gear. We quickly grew weary of fish. We wanted to catch people. A solid fishing line used to catch pike, with a cork attached, passed over a branch of the hazelnut tree. We put bait at the end of it: an old harmonica, a wallet, a worthless toy, and we let it hang at a man's height. Then we waited. This game taught us a lot about human behavior. There was "the woman who saw nothing." Dignified, she avoided the object as she passed, without even looking to find out what it might be. Then there was "the little, old, distrustful man," who stopped

on the spot, examined the object knowingly, looked up at the string, saw the red cork, saluted us, and went off laughing. Above all, there was "the naive person." Ah yes! He was our favorite victim. He approached the harmonica with admiration, his mouth opened as if to play it, and he looked around to make sure no one could see him. Then he reached out his hand to take the present that came to him from the heavens. But before he was able to grab it, we pulled in the line with loud sneers: Haha! Haha! Hehee! Hehee! He blushed from ear to ear and ran away.

The day came when we lost our harmonica. Up the street, there was an army post of German Red Cross soldiers. They had spotted our games. One day one of them, pretending to pass by our fishing line without noticing it, suddenly grabbed it with a quick gesture. We jerked the cord as hard as we could but couldn't save our property. All four of us were soon hanging on to the cord, which was rubbing against the ledge of the wall. The German had called his comrades to the rescue. Without seeing each other, amid cries and laughter, we all began a pulling match. The cord broke! The Germans carried off the harmonica. We were slightly ashamed of playing with the Germans. For as long as their post remained on our street, we never again played "fishing for men."

Our three governesses were quite different from one another. I vaguely remember Miss Winter, a small young woman with a reddish complexion who wore gold-rimmed glasses. She was clumsy and one day dropped a tea tray at the door of the "Petit Salon." This event, which took place during the boring prewar period, sufficed to mark her: Miss Winter! Ah yes, that nice young girl who dropped . . . etc. Some people only leave behind memories of their blunders.

Miss Kalcher was the one we really loved. She was Silesian and loved to talk about her family's nobility. I can still see her Greek profile and her mass of ash-blond hair. She was intelligent and won over our entire family, except for my sister Louise. She knew how to laugh, nicknamed Papa "Vice-Papa," and expressed affectionate, filial sentiments toward him that were too intimate for Louise's taste. As a result, much to the great despair of the children who adored Miss Kalcher, Louise opposed her spending a second year on Boulevard Gambetta.

Yet Miss Kalcher knew how to win us over. She was a pedagogical genius. She had us call her "Mutter Akka." Akka was Akka de Kebnekaïse from Selma Lagerlöf's novel *Nils Holgersson*. Miss Kalcher had another book, a kind of German *Jungle Book*, in which animals speak. Miss

Kalcher read us this book in German. In Saint-Gobain during the summer vacations, she made this novel come alive for us. The boring walks in the forest, in single file on muddy paths under a swarm of mosquitoes, were replaced by adventurous and mysterious expeditions. We were equipped with hatchets, hammers, dishes, and a saucepan that we loaded onto our "German tank." It was forbidden to tell the adults what we were doing.

We were building a hut out of branches, stuffing moss into the cracks. Pierre and Yvonne were studying Greek, so the hut was named Hydropolis (Water City). It was situated in a marshy area deep in the forest; we had to jump over several ditches full of water to get there. We were convinced that our hut couldn't be found. Yvonne named the streams after rivers in Australia. Pierre built an oven with bricks. I insisted on planting a garden of field horsetails. At that time, I was going through the vegetal phase of my childhood. I tried hard, but with no success, to transplant small oak trees with two leaves growing from rotten acorns in our garden in Saint-Gobain.

When Hydropolis was ready, we invited the adults. The day, as might have been expected, turned into a disaster. The Trocmé family never appreciated what the children were doing. From their very first steps into the forest, cries and reproaches arose: It's too far! It's too hot! Above all, it was Rose, Francis's Russian wife, who complained. We had to jump over muddy streams and her shoes were paying the price. When we got there, there was no place to sit. "Is that it, your hut? You can't even stand up inside." In fact, a photograph, now lost, later revealed to me that my childish imagination had greatly exaggerated the splendors of Hydropolis. The semolina pudding, cooked the night before for our guests, had been nibbled by a field mouse whose two small rodent teeth had left their dainty marks on the surface. That was enough for the adults to declare that it was "disgusting," and they refused to "share their snack with rats."

When it was time for Easter vacation, we rushed into the forest to find Hydropolis. The bare woods of April held no more mysteries for us. We had a hard time finding the spot because the forest rangers had destroyed our hut, leaving only a small bundle of branches. We felt great sorrow and anger. Papa explained that we were actually lucky, and that it was against the law to cut down young trees in the forest. The rangers had certainly discovered our previous summer's toils but had turned a blind eye. Thus,

the veil of mystery and poetry that enveloped a summer of our childhood was torn asunder. The austerity of manmade laws and the total lack of imagination that characterized adults chilled our blood. I remember that one day, in the parlor of Saint-Gobain, I screamed at the rigid and skeptical assembly of adults. The Trocmé men never said a word or only talked about the scenery and the distance from one place to another. The women did all the talking (but about what?). I yelled out, "When I get older, I won't be like you. You don't play anymore because you are afraid to look ridiculous. I will continue to play my whole life." And I have kept my word. I've never learned to amuse myself like other adults and am still perfectly capable of getting down on the floor and playing with building blocks for as long as my solitary imagination enjoys it.

To finish the story of Miss Kalcher, I want to evoke a memory from our days in Saint-Quentin. She had discovered a bench placed against the house in the garden. We children had never thought of this bench as a place to sit because our father's orders were very precise – you went into the garden to run. The rest of the time we belonged in the study, where we worked, even during the long June evenings, until it was bedtime. Inexorably, bedtime was nine o'clock, even though sometimes it was still light outside. Miss Kalcher taught us the value of idleness. I never studied with as much pleasure as I did when she was with us. She sat in the middle of the bench, and we gathered around her. We were allowed to cuddle and, as the sun set, she told us stories from her inexhaustible stock. We could also interrupt her with our own stories. That's where I first experienced the comfort of a motherly lap. I remember one evening when I fell asleep on her lap while the others were telling jokes. I had missed the gentleness that emanates from a mother since my mother's death, but Miss Kalcher knew how to supply it. An adult voice woke me with a reproach to Miss Kalcher, something like "Come on, sit up straight. Don't sprawl over one another." I rose quickly, feeling guilty. This incident, along with several others, contributed to my fear of immoral contact with women. The fear protected me but also clouded my adolescent years and made me into a timid boy who blushed in front of women.

Miss Kalcher taught us to play "ghosts," a hide-and-seek game for big children. We did so in Saint-Gobain, at dusk, when the leaves in the orchard took on shades of brown as the summer sky darkened above us. One of us was the ghost and disappeared behind the bushes that protected the flower beds. The other children went looking for it. When one

of us passed near enough, the ghost jumped out and chased its victim, trying to grab it. We ran toward the house. We had to touch it, screaming "*Geist, Geist!*" (ghost, ghost) before we were grabbed. These mad dashes at nightfall left me with the memory of strong emotions – fantastic falls, exaltation in danger – that I can't forget. One day Miss Kalcher caught her neck on a wire that had been stretched between two apple trees for a clothesline. This accident left her with a scar for a long time, so the game was forbidden. We could simply have moved the wire elsewhere, but that kind of thing never happened in our house.

Miss Kalcher introduced us to scouting before it existed in France. I was ready to become a scout when the first troop was established in Saint-Quentin in 1913. There was going to be a scout camp in Pommery, an old-age home on a large estate. I asked permission to take part in it. The department store catalogs sold scout uniforms. I already imagined myself starting on a great adventure. But Papa was opposed, even though he probably didn't seriously investigate what scouting was. It was new. Scouts slept in a tent and risked catching a cold and being corrupted by vulgar comrades. Besides, we had a place in Saint-Gobain, and that was enough.

Every day in Saint-Quentin, between 12:45 and 1:30 p.m., we had to take walks with our governess. That's where my physical characteristics took shape. I had the muscular legs of a tireless walker, but my athletic prowess stopped at the waist. My arms have never been strong enough to lift me off the ground.

We had three walks: "The White Mill," "The Burnt Mill," and "Around the Canal." The "White Mill" was the shortest. Near the canal there were houses of painted brick. In winter, I liked seeing their colors through the branches of the poplar trees. The "Burnt Mill" was much longer and monotonous. On the right, the road dipped past an estate with big trees and then ascended between banks of clay soil adorned with a fringe of thick, green grass. It passed next to a brick chateau and descended toward the canal where, if there was time, we could watch a boat going through the lock. As the lock keeper manually cranked open the valves, the water churned against the hidden doors that were eaten away by green moss. A little dog barked at us. Very slowly, the boatman worked his hook. The horses, tensed in exertion, pulled the heavy barge, and set it in motion. After that, we had to hurry back to the city, shake the clay dirt from our shoes, grab our books, and run to the lycée that smelled of dirty aprons, chalk dust, and wet dogs.

I have painful memories of sleepy afternoon classes during which the teacher's voice rose and fell in my ear like the barking of a sad dog. My legs and butt, and especially my head, which had been buffeted by wind on our walk, tingled unpleasantly as the blood rushed back into them.

Thursday was reserved for the "Around the Canal" walk. This was a slow, monotonous walk along muddy canal banks pitted with puddles. We walked through the brush and in the fog next to the yellowish water of the endless canal, listening to the crows croaking in the trees. Once we were able to skate on a stagnant marsh at the canal's edge. We always had to go up the slope leading to the "Burnt Mill." We grabbed the governess's arm to be dragged home, where we knew the only reward we would receive on arrival was bread, chocolate, and homework, always homework.

Our third governess, Miss Wiegand, who came after Miss Kalcher, had no luck with us whatsoever. She was stiff, thin, wore glasses, pursed her lips, and wore a green hat that looked like a cake mold. We took an immediate dislike to her. Yvonne called her "the police officer in petticoats." Pierre sketched her image on his notepads. Dozens of paper effigies of her were scattered everywhere, even in the toilets. We put camphor and pepper in the purse where she had to stick her pointy, red nose to retrieve her *Strich* notebook because she was near-sighted. She had brought with her from Germany a mathematically fair system for grading our work and our obedience. Any failing merited one *Strich* (small vertical line). Five *Striche* merited punishment. Ten *Striche* got you a visit to the Petit Salon where, with our strict Papa watching, you received a warning. But Miss Wiegand started to sneeze uncontrollably every time she plunged her nose into her purse, and we couldn't control our sniggering. We also set up a complicated arrangement of strings going from the door to objects on top of the bookcase in the study. It caused catastrophes whenever Miss Wiegand entered. One day she didn't show up. Everything was in disarray. Louise came down from her room and told us reproachfully that she had found Miss Wiegand in tears over her failures. Poor thing! My memories are so colored by my childish callousness that I can't manage to feel pity for her retrospectively. If I remember correctly, she didn't finish her time with us and was not replaced. The family authorities decided that we were old enough to take care of ourselves. I was thirteen years old.

Miss Kalcher visited us in Le Chambon before the war with her husband, Mr. von Wersebe. It was a disappointing visit. She was certainly intelligent but so imbued with a sense of German superiority that her

visit was upsetting. She was surprised that there were forests in France. She described Saint-Quentin as a sad, mean city whose narrow-minded inhabitants dressed in black and led boring lives. Some of what she said was true, but I didn't like hearing her say it. That's the kind of thing you prefer to discuss with family members, if you dare.

PAPA WAS THE INDISPUTABLE HEAD of the Trocmé clan. He was already fifty-six years old when I was born, so I only knew him with gray, and then white, hair. He lost his hair and teeth late in life and maintained his astonishing mental vigor well into old age. He was very thin and upright. Never did his shoulders or his back curve with age or from the many ordeals that assailed him. The only sign of physical weakness (which I inherited) was in his knees, which he could never straighten out completely. When he got old, he dragged his feet a bit when walking and often stumbled.

Papa was neither handsome nor terribly tall, yet he carried himself with an air of nobility that impressed everyone. No one addressed him with familiarity as an equal, whether in the city, at Saint-Gobain, at the synod, or in business matters. He was essentially a man one consulted, who always had the last word. Toward the end of his life, his authoritarianism became trying. He got angry easily and not always with good reason. But in the prime of life, which for him lasted up to his eightieth year, he rarely needed to raise his voice to impose his views. His desires were orders. Like all authoritarians, he didn't know that he was one. "My system," he loved to say, "is to insist on very few rules but to allow for no exceptions. Rules are made to be obeyed." I realize retrospectively that life in Saint-Quentin and Saint-Gobain consisted of one rule after another. But since we always obeyed these rules, they became unconscious and unquestioned habits for us children.

Papa had a high, glowing forehead. His admirably shaped head was more impressive than his face, shoulders, and body. He had sparse eyebrows. His small eyes, under their slightly puffy lids, were brown, intelligent-looking, and penetrating. They were a bit like the eyes of God, eyes which encompassed everything. A rather large moustache and a carefully trimmed white beard gave him the indisputably aristocratic air that we all knew.

We liked to caress Papa's extremely fine hair. That was the only familiarity he allowed. I could get on his lap when he sat in the big armchair of

the Petit Salon until I was twelve. He didn't speak and would gently pat us. These signs of tenderness didn't last long, and he never confided in us. Still, we got up from his lap reassured, feeling protected and encouraged by this affectionate contact with the rock of our family.

Papa loved to tell stories from the past, and we listened to them without tiring, even if they were repeated so many times that we knew them by heart. It would take too long for me to repeat them all, so I'll just note a couple.

There was the story of Trocmé-Bouton-d'or (Buttercup), who wore a royal-blue overcoat in the style of the First Empire and shuttled between Hargicourt and Saint-Quentin on market days by asking for rides in the carts of peasants who were better off than he was. One day he complained, in local Picardy dialect, of *"eun tiote benque dans min sole"* (a little something in my shoe). When he got to the Saint-Quentin town square, he took off his shoes and found a fork in one of them.

There was also the story of my grandfather, Eugène Trocmé, and his wedding in 1843 (Papa was born in 1845). These were my father, Paul Trocmé's, exact words:

> In the past, before the Revolution, when Protestants in the north of France wanted to marry, they had to go to Tournai in Belgium. In fact, in France, only Catholic priests could perform legally recognized marriages. If Protestants refused the blessing of a priest, they were considered to be living out of wedlock and their children were illegitimate.
>
> But King Louis XIV, who used Protestant Swiss and German soldiers, had given their chaplains permission to hold church services. Thus, in Tournai, there was the Church of the Gate, where Protestant families went to baptize their children and get married. That's why, André, the marriage records of your ancestors are in Tournai.[8]
>
> Your great grandparents married in Tournai. It took two days to get there from his village of Hargicourt. They left early in the morning in carts and stopped half-way through the trip at a hospitable Protestant farm near Saint-Armand-les-Eaux called 'Le Rosult.'
>
> This farm passed from father to son in a family of rich farmers, the Davaines. When my father, Eugène, reached twenty-five years of age, my grandfather, who was a weaver, the mayor of Hargicourt, and an important person in the village, said to him: "Eugène, you

8 Unfortunately, the Tournai library was destroyed by German fire in 1940.

have reached marrying age, and I don't see anyone around here who would be a suitable match for you. But I remember the Davaine family from Le Rosult, where we stayed a long time ago when I went to Tournai to marry your mother. We'll take the cart to Saint-Amand tomorrow to see if we can find a fiancée for you."

They left early the next morning and arrived in Le Rosult in the late afternoon. Like all the farms in the north of France, the buildings of Le Rosult were arranged around a large, square, paved courtyard with the manure pile at its center. You entered through an archway. The home was at the back of the courtyard.

In the old days, when strangers came to the door of a bourgeois home, if there were any young ladies in the greeting room, they were not allowed to remain in the presence of the men. They had to leave. The secret code in the Davaine household was "Young ladies, go sort the apples in the attic!" There were two girls of marrying age in the Davaine family and, while grandfather Trocmé and his son attached the horse to the hitch post, Grandmother Davaine clapped her hands and pronounced the magic words: "Young ladies, young ladies, go sort the apples in the attic!"

The girls got up. One of them disappeared rapidly. The other had sprained her ankle a few days earlier and dragged her feet. Or maybe she slowed down on purpose? In any case, at the very moment when Eugène and his father entered through one door, she disappeared through the other. But not so quickly that they didn't exchange glances. Bang! That was it. It's because of that glance, André, that I came into this world and that you did after me.

Papa was an excellent student at the Collège des Bons Enfans (later named the Lycée Henri-Martin) on whose benches all the Trocmés of Saint-Quentin were educated. He competed for the top prizes in math and sciences with a certain Édouard Branly, a professor's son. Later, when Branly became famous as one of the inventors of wireless telegraphy, Papa wrote to him recalling their youthful camaraderie. Branly never responded and Papa was offended.

My grandfather, having left Hargicourt, settled in Saint-Quentin as a fabric merchant on the Rue du Gouvernement. He bought woolens, hand-made by the inhabitants of villages, and sold them to Parisian retailers. His business prospered. Papa vaguely remembered his father

in the impressive National Guard uniform under King Louis-Philippe before the 1848 revolution! The Eugène Trocmés had four children: Paul, Alphonse, Alice, and much later, Pauline.

When he got good grades in composition, which happened often, Paul got a franc (a good amount for the time). If his grades dropped, they withdrew a sum from the kitty. But this rarely happened.

When Papa was about to finish his religious instruction, his stash contained an impressive sum, and he had plenty of ideas on how he would spend his money on materials in experimental chemistry. But his father took him aside:

"Paul, soon you will make your First Communion."

"Yes, Papa."

"You must have thought about showing your gratitude to your pastor, who went to so much trouble for you . . ."

"Er . . ."

"Have you noticed how shabby his cassock looks? Well, it's in bad shape."

"Ah?"

"Your mother and I were thinking that it would be appropriate for you to withdraw enough money from your funds to buy a new cassock for your pastor."

"OK, Papa."

My father's savings were all spent on that cassock. He told us this sad story when we complained about the rigor of his method of education.

The Trocmé family was the only well-to-do family in the church in Saint-Quentin, and they were very religious. A large oil painting in the living room on the Boulevard Gambetta revealed a distinguished Eugène Trocmé, majestic and sad. The war of 1870 completed the gradual ruin brought on by the invention of weaving machines. Eugène Trocmé believed in handmade fabrics and thought that cloth made on mechanical looms would never compete with them. He was sadly mistaken. His business declined; an associate swindled him. He was completely ruined and died at the age of sixty of heart disease, just before the war of 1870. His large property, Bellevue, to the east of Saint-Quentin, was barely saved. Grandmother Trocmé-Davaine continued to live there for a few years. Those were lean years. Papa served as head of the family for his mother, brother, two sisters, and his seven living children. They ended up subdividing the property.