

When the Cathedrals Were White

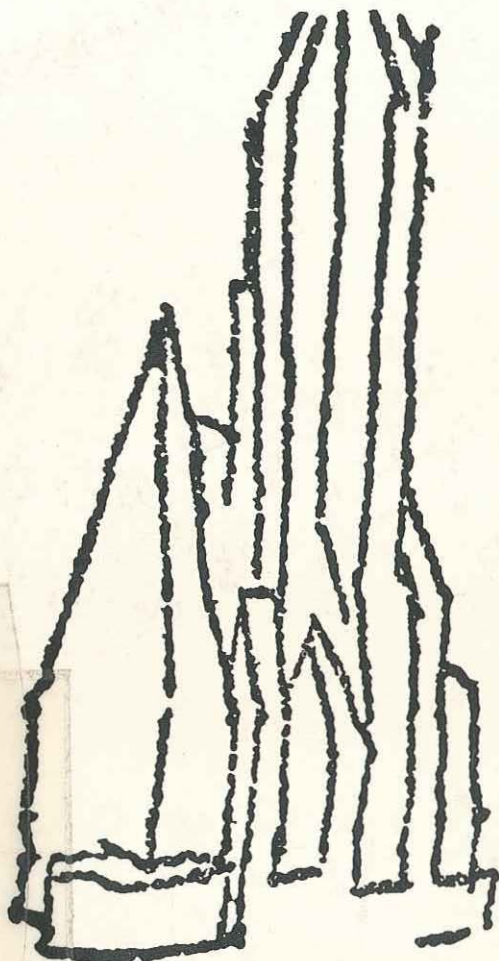
Le Corbusier

Drawings by the author

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When the Cathedrals Were White

Le Corbusier

In his brilliant and incisive style, Le Corbusier examines the architecture and people of New York. He loves the people but finds the architecture haphazard and in need of planning. Through provocative prose and revealing drawings, he proposes a new, beautiful, vertical New York.



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When the Cathedrals Were White

For nearly sixty years Le Corbusier, along with Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius, has been in the forefront of modern architecture. In this book the distinguished architect focuses on American architecture, its ugliness and charm.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH:

QUAND LES CATHÉDRALES ÉTAIENT BLANCHES

BY FRANCIS E. HYSLOP, JR.



When the Cathedrals Were White
Le Corbusier

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TO MY MOTHER,
woman of courage and faith

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**WHEN THE CATHEDRALS
WERE WHITE**

INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN TRANSLATION

The American Army, arrived in Europe, found its lands, its peoples, its cities, and its fields ravaged by four years of war, emptied and robbed, in ruins, covered with dirt and eaten with rust; found broken windows and nerves on edge, exhausted bodies and tenacious morale. American aviators had bombed everything, blowing up bridges, stations, railroads, factories, ports. There was no wax for the floors, no paint for rooms and houses, no soap to wash with. In the Paris subway, the only means of transportation for five million persons, faces were green from privations. And in Paris (it was only known afterward) the Germans had executed seventy-five thousand men and women, after having tortured them.

On the day of liberation a portion of the armies of the USA and of Leclerc's army passed through Boulogne-sur-Seine, the suburb of Paris in which I was living. A terrible hour to live

through, feelings in tumult and tears in our eyes. A spectacle: those men, boys from the United States on magisterial machines, twenty-year-old boys who had just beaten the enemy. Near them, Leclerc's soldiers who had come from Lake Chad, having crossed the Sahara; tomorrow, in a single bound, they would move on to Berchtesgaden; engraved on their faces they bore the tradition of two thousand martial years. The women of the suburb, like those in all of Paris, had dressed in their prettiest in anticipation of the liberation. They were adorned with smiles and joy. The women of Paris had been extraordinary: without dressmaking materials, without means of maintaining their customary elegance, they managed the trick of being desirable; without hats, they had invented ways of turning their hair into gold, bronze, or ebony helmets, a warlike coiffure which made them luminous and magnificent. Feminine centaurs on bicycles cutting through the fog of Paris in the springtime or in the dog days, legs, hair, faces, breasts whipped by the wind, indifferent but disturbing, they passed under the noses of the sinister-purposed, drearily colored "green mustard" soldiers. . . .

They climbed up the American tanks; they kissed the Americans, leaving lipstick on dusty cheeks; they sat down beside the crews and drivers. Alas, they were taken for whores!

The children, naturally, were on the guns, on the turrets, on the knees of soldiers. Many asked for cigarettes. Some of them were greedy. The soldiers called the French beggars! For four years they had had only two or three packs a month, which is more tormenting than not smoking at all. If the authorities had had the courage, they would have simply cut off tobacco. After two months of annoyance everyone would have been free of that nagging desire.

O Americans, soldiers of the United States suddenly landed on morally and physically exhausted countries, on countries where all goods had become ersatz, controlled by nearly worthless ration points, in physical misery and shabbily dressed, to you, accustomed to unheard-of abundance and frightening waste,

Europe—the great country of your fathers—seemed dirty, cut to pieces. Mad with joy, Europe welcomed you; you thought her indecent!

In the United States your cities are strong and rich. New York is the home of some god of modern life; a perhaps still nameless god. Your towns are painted with white and with intense colors; they have no confining walls: the lawns extend from house to house like a luxurious carpet under well-kept trees.

You were astonished, you were shocked: "Is this Paris, is this Europe?"

Coming from the south on the same day of liberation, Leclerc's tanks, moving in a direction opposite to that of De Gaulle's procession, went up the Champs Elysées, on the heels of the enemy. On the sides of the tanks supplied to our army, in large, freshly painted white letters, were names of French provinces (France was being liberated by the minute!!!): Brittany, Provence, Flanders; names of the great of France: Verginctorix, Bayard, Joan of Arc, Lafayette; names of French qualities: courage, valor, fidelity. . . .

On the occasion of this hasty passage before the Arch of Triumph, and for the sake of dignifying the taking over of this magnificent machinery of war by sans-culottes, you were right, leaders, in thus affirming essential values. And you were right in organizing the march past the arch of triumphs, where the tomb of the unknown soldier is placed. The tomb is immaterial architecture except for a flame and a dedication on the level of the ground. A monument reaching the scale without any possible measure of the ordeal endured. When, in this book, the white cathedrals are called up as witnesses on the side of modern times, this monument takes an unrivaled place; it reveals the spirit. Who imagined it? Who suggested it? I do not know; it is not known; I believe that no one (or very nearly) yet knows.

American friends, among those of you who have spent some time in France there are some who have entered more deeply into French existence. You have knocked at certain doors and

found plain men who, through forty years of effort, or thirty, or twenty, have brought spirit into the world, have made the buds of the present mutation bloom: the artists, the great artists who, in the millennial humus of Paris, have caused the germination of the great metamorphosis which can make radiant tomorrows.

Some of you went to these men as fervent friends. But others were autograph hunters.

The authorities (yours and ours), feeling how necessary it was that we know each other, exchanged smiles and gestures of courtesy. American students were enrolled in France and French students in America. Intellectual exchanges. Who controlled them? God or the Devil? Life or the Academy? I know American students of painting and architecture placed in the big schools who said to me: "We went through that once and that is enough!" The time they spent in other parts of the city, fortunately, will bear fruit.

Academy—Life, that is the question! That remains the question in the USA as in France, as in the whole world.

Life creates and destroys; it gives birth to the temples of India and also to the creeping tropical plants which will loosen stone from stone in the work men have failed to guard.

Life has made New York, "a vertical city." And with joy we have saluted this city of life.

The skyscrapers are high. Here height is an automatic result of mechanical calculation, of the financial balance sheet, and of publicity. Between the ground and the top of the skyscraper spirit was not called in, but only number. You must look at the top, seek the intention, see what the spiritual reality of the enterprise is. The top is the cork of the bottle that architecture and architects have fashioned with care. As examples I see three of them before me, against the sky. One reproduces the Château of Blois in Touraine; another was inspired by the Sainte Chapelle; the third has the slate, roof, and chimneys of Fontainebleau. Ugh, ugh! Take care that that spirit, misusing height,

money, and publicity, does not lay claim to the leadership of the spiritual destinies of the USA!

On Sunday the city ceases to be anything, the streets being empty and the buildings deprived of their meaning (except for Rockefeller Center and several others in which there is architectural life). Sunday is an astonishing touchstone which, for twenty-four hours, can cause the collapse of this magnificent city which, in its essence, is still a Babel.

In contrast, in other places where life seeks nourishment, honky-tonks and juke box joints, in Harlem and on Broadway, laughing jazz rises to the attack. . . .

Men of the United States, you are Americans, and Americans are all the peoples of the world; and this world can be the new world crowning the New World.

Before the war, all the editors who considered the publication of Marguerite Tjader Harris's skillful and intelligent translation of *Quand Les Cathédrales Etaient Blanches* (published in part in issues of *Direction*, 1938, 1939), had insisted on dropping the first fifty pages, which have to do with France. Since then your armies have been among us and, naturally, the first fifty pages will remain in this new translation. Between the lines you will discover the premonitory symptoms of a defeat. There was a menace; there were deadly germs; there was the dangerous academic spirit.

In Paris, in this spring of '46, sap is circulating in hearts and heads. Do you think that such an ordeal has made such a country bow? A squaring of accounts is in process; there a debate about the reasons for living has opened. The long ordeal was an irresistible ferment: heads and hearts acquired energy in going through it and, since the core of the sickness has been struck down, there is a passionate will to climb up as high as possible.

In six years France has gone through a pathetic cycle. She is preparing herself to choose, to determine, to decide; but wavering steps may continue. We do not lightly enter such new paths!

When I was invited to come to the United States for the first time, by the Museum of Modern Art, I was considered the man of "the machine for living" and also as the man who had said: "The skyscrapers of New York are too small." It was held against me, I was treated a little coolly.

Ten years have passed. The misunderstanding is disappearing; understanding seems to be growing; our positions are becoming stabilized, as when the water has risen in one side of a lock: the levels are equal, the gates open, the ships pass through, ideas circulate.

The American potential which has sprung up in the course of the century, which has drawn an unimaginable profit from the two wars, is an event overflowing and exceeding the present limits of material and moral control, just as, at the other end of the world also, in the USSR, an equally powerful but different potential has begun a series of events whose repercussions are unpredictable. Thus far neither the one nor the other of these forces is clear-sighted; they are quite simply on the march, getting under way. And, on the march, they commit and will commit excesses, just as they bring and will bring all the reasons for hope and all the proofs of efficacy. Nevertheless they roll on, and through lack of adjustment, they cause paradoxical results, specific maladies, dangerous fevers.

Thus, for instance, the detestable gift of unlimited means of transporting people and ideas: mobility turned into a disease, a disease that might be called *m-o-b-i-l-i-t-i-s*,—*mobilitis*.

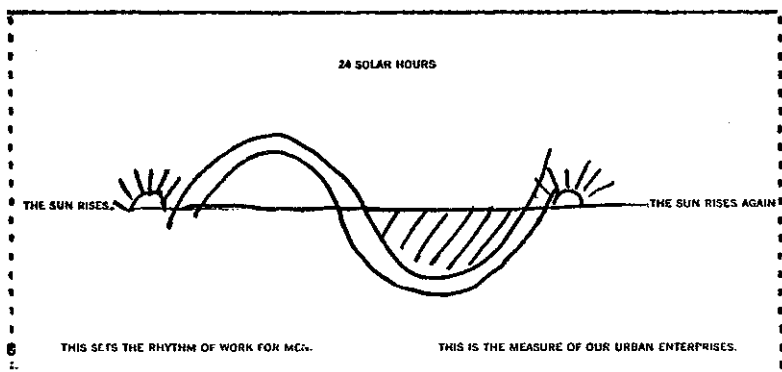
Everything rolls here; motors roar on water, on highways, on railroads, and in the air; men are on wheels; they have wheels under their bottoms and thus they transgress the law of nature—of human nature, which is eminently alternating and not continuous: footsteps, the beating of heart and arteries, the closing of eyelids, the breathing of the lungs and the formulation of speech, etc. . . . For the philosophic spectator, the end of the road quickly appears: as things are, the cycle of the actions of life is not carried out, or not fully, or with pain and loss, in the irre-

missible period of time of each day. That is the judge, that is the touchstone: daily life. And here is the verdict: incompleteness, dissatisfaction, injury written into the overcrowded solar day, recurring each day and impoverishing each day, and consequently into the whole life of men. The family torn apart, a kind of alcoholism, are among the elements in the vague outline which surrounds the unfolding of this drama.

How to live? The problem does not exist in countries that are unaware of it, but only for those who see clearly. And it is the binomial equation *individual-collectivity* which requires an effective, radiant harmony. The limits of freedom have to be determined, though fixing limits may seem necessarily to strike out freedom, which is not the case. The liberties of some, like the intangibility of certain principles, are becoming objects of discussion and examination. Indeed, the disorder is evident throughout American life in what in '35 I called "The Great Waste." The word waste could be associated with the French term *emptying*. Applied to social life, emptying is a disaster, a death march. At the present time, and especially in America, it appears in the form of four daily hours of slavery demanded of everyone in order to pay the costs of urban chaos.

Knowing how to live is the fundamental question before modern society, everywhere, in the whole world. An ingenuous question and one that could be considered childish. How to live? Do you know how, reader? Do you know how to live soundly, strongly, gaily, free of the hundred stupidities established by habit, custom, and urban disorganization?

If this book had to wait ten years for an American publisher, I should like to be able to congratulate myself about it, since on my return from the USA in 1936 I realized that it was necessary to invent a sign which might serve as a guide, as a Table of the Law. Then, in 1937, in the center of the Pavilion of the New Times at the International Exposition of Arts and Techniques, on a table dominated by the large open book which set forth the Charter of Athens of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture, I had this sign painted:



and had this statement inscribed: *This is the measure of our urban enterprises.*

If, in the course of the mutation of machine civilization, I have been able to contribute something, as a person with some rationality and intelligence, as a technician, as a thoughtful man, it will be this sign.

If I can be useful in some way to the United States now, it is in commending this sign to the meditation of those whose mission it is to see clearly and lead. I offer this sign as a measuring instrument which can give the right dimensions to the new centers of production developing from the reconversion of war industries: the substance of society, with all its rights and duties, is being taken up into our hands again. I know that here I am on the essential theme, the great modern theme: HABITATION, knowing how to live in a place. Habitation is life, knowing how to live! How to use the blessings of God: the sun and the spirit that He has given to men to enable them to achieve the joy of living on earth and to find again the Lost Paradise.

To whom am I speaking? *To whom it may concern.* Who is concerned . . . ? That is the usefulness of books: they go out and find those *who are concerned.* Someday, behind the Americans, the youth of the whole world will decide!

City planning (city planning and architecture are inseparable from one another, they make up a single phenomenon) is the social organizer par excellence.

About 1935 the work of the TVA was begun. In January of this year, '46, I went to see its effects. Man and nature, laws of nature and calculations which also express the laws of the world, human imagination in search of harmony . . . Neglect had unloosed catastrophic events in the valley. Things were going from bad to worse. Nature was taken by the hand and finally her anger was calmed; once again she became maternal. The cyclic flow of water brought about a wonderful regeneration; men found again abundance and the promise of joy. And also, in mastering nature, they felt pride in having created the great dams which are bearers of physical and spiritual splendor.

Ten years were enough to bring about the appeasement of hostile forces and the alliance of man and his setting.

I am writing these lines in New York where I arrived twenty hours after leaving Paris. Sometimes, from a great height, I saw a gigantic iceberg in the dark blue ocean, a witness of physical realities and a segment of a regular cycle.

Man, nature, cosmos, those are the given elements.

One day (a hundred years ago), man went from the immemorial speed of walking to the unlimited speeds of machines. Everything was called in question. The limits of control were torn away, extended to the point of disappearing. But the sun, imperturbable in its course, continued to mark the rhythm of our work. Today it accuses us of confusion, lack of foresight, neglect, heedlessness; misfortune and the worst kind of disproportion are the result.

In January of this year I came here in nineteen days, through storms, in an empty freighter, in order to carry out a small mission with Claudius.

When we arrived in Manhattan, pilgrims who had gone through years of grief, affliction, frustration, we experienced a frightful shock: the collision of people who cannot really bring

together the things they have lived through—ours, sad ones, theirs, extravagant abundance. Thus, the merchandise that we bring today cannot be taken from the stock of the miseries we have gone through; it can be only constructive discovery, clear, rational, representing our proposals for the future—the wise future of machine society in search of its welfare . . . lost but recoverable and discoverable before us, in the future, in an immediate tomorrow. Geography speaks, then: USA and USSR; at the geographic and historical heart: Paris, capital of a France fortunately well rooted in her own soil, the eye (on the map) of a united Europe. Today this third trip to New York gives me the impression and the certainty that the earth is round and continuous and things contiguous. A master unity will be established.

We French, then, who have had the cathedrals and Louis XIV, can admire the prodigious work, which is still in process of birth, accomplished by the people of America. Humbly I take off my hat. Night or day, at each step in New York—a fairy catastrophe—I find pretexts for reflection, for mental construction, for dreams of extraordinary, cheering, happy tomorrows near at hand. There is hope in the world. With full hands this country of the timid people gives us causes for hope.

I am one of a commission whose task is to find a permanent site for the United Nations in the neighborhood of New York. Harmony is the purpose of the United Nations. Harmony will be achieved by making organizational effectiveness (or efficiency) secure along with respect for the individual human being—more than that, by bringing the joy of living into being through wise city planning, a science which today is becoming a key, the key.

As yet no one knows surely whether or not such an affirmation is tenable, and still less whether or not it is the means by which the men of the second period of machine civilization, after having acted like gangsters and madmen, will set their house in order again.

LE CORBUSIER

New York, May 21, 1946.

PREFACE

This book also¹ will be full of tumult because the world today is full of tumult, because everything is unchained.

It is noon on a summer day; I am driving at full speed along the quays of the Left Bank toward the Eiffel Tower, under the ineffable blue sky of Paris. My eye fixes for a second a white point in the sky; the new tower of Chaillot. I slow down, I look, I plunge suddenly into the depths of time: Yes, the cathedrals were white, completely white, dazzling and young—and not black, dirty, old. The whole period was fresh and young.

1 "La Ville Radiense," published in 1935, has to do with the equipping of machine age civilization in the city and in the country. That book is the fruit of fifteen years of work; it is dense; it is like a cellar filled with every kind of food. I have been reproached for it. Even today I am unable to preside over a polite drawing room where etiquette is queen.

. . . And today, yes! today also is young, fresh, new. Today also the world is beginning again. . . .

I have just returned from the USA. Good! I am going to show through the USA, taken as an example, that the times are new, but that its living quarters are uninhabitable. The table has not been cleared after dinner; the remains of a banquet have been allowed to lie in disorder after the departure of the guests: cold sauces, picked bones, wine spots, crumbs, and dirty silver scattered about.

The cathedrals belong to France, and Manhattan is American. What a good opportunity to consider this fresh, twenty-year-old city against the background of one's awareness of the skyscrapers of God. This new place in the world, New York, examined by a heart full of the sap of the Middle Ages. Middle Ages? That is where we are today: the world to be put in order, to be put in order on piles of debris, as was done once before on the debris of antiquity, when the cathedrals were white.

Nevertheless, before opening the window on that landscape of time, I shall first have you breathe the exhausting atmosphere in which we are struggling. The pages about the USA will be, rather than a narrative, the considered reaction of a man lifted up by hope for times of strength and harmony. Today, finally, in the history of the world, the page turns.

Paris, June 1936.

P A R T O N E
A T M O S P H E R E S

1 GREATNESS OF THINGS

WHEN THE CATHEDRALS WERE WHITE

I should like to bring to an examination of conscience and to repentance those who, with all the ferocity of their hatred, of their fright, of their poverty of spirit, of their lack of vitality, concern themselves with a fatal stubbornness in the destruction and hindrance of whatever is most beautiful in this country—France—and in this period: the invention, the courage, and the creative genius occupied especially with questions of building—with those things in which reason and poetry co-exist, in which wisdom and enterprise join hands.

When the cathedrals were white, Europe had organized the crafts under the imperative impulse of a quite new, marvelous, and exceedingly daring technique the use of which led to unexpected systems of forms—in fact to forms whose spirit disdained the legacy of a thousand years of tradition, not hesitating to

thrust civilization toward an unknown adventure. An international language reigned wherever the white race was, favoring the exchange of ideas and the transfer of culture. An international style had spread from the West to the East and from the North to the South—a style which carried with it the passionate stream of spiritual delights: love of art, disinterestedness, joy of living in creating.

The cathedrals were white because they were new. The cities were new; they were constructed all at once, in an orderly way, regular, geometric, in accordance with plans. The freshly cut stone of France was dazzling in its whiteness, as the Acropolis in Athens had been white and dazzling, as the Pyramids of Egypt had gleamed with polished granite. Above all the cities and towns encircled by new walls, the skyscrapers of God dominated the countryside. They had made them as high as possible, extraordinarily high. It may seem a disproportion in the ensemble. Not at all, it was an act of optimism, a gesture of courage, a sign of pride, a proof of mastery! In addressing themselves to God, men did not sign their own abdication.

The new world was beginning. White, limpid, joyous, clean, clear, and without hesitations, the new world was opening up like a flower among the ruins. They left behind them all recognized ways of doing things; they turned their backs on all that. In a hundred years the marvel was accomplished and Europe was changed.

The cathedrals were white.

Let us bring to life in our imaginations this joyful spectacle. Let us stop a moment to read these lines and put clearly before our eyes the white cathedrals against the blue or gray background of the sky. We must get that image into our hearts. And then we shall be able to continue our reflections.

I wish to show only the great similarity between that past time and the present day. The cathedrals of our own time have

not yet been built. The cathedrals belong to other people—to the dead—they are black with grime and worn by centuries. Everything is blackened by soot and eaten away by wear and tear: institutions, education, cities, farms, our lives, our hearts, our thoughts. Nevertheless, everything is potentially new, fresh, in the process of birth. Eyes which are turned away from dead things already are looking forward. The wind is changing; the winter wind gives way to the wind of spring; the sky is still dark with clouds; they are being borne away.

Eyes that see, persons with knowledge, they must be allowed to construct the new world. When the first white cathedrals of the new world are standing, it will be seen and known that they are something true, that something has really begun. With what enthusiasm, what fervor, what relief, the about-face will be made! The proof will be there. Fearful, the world first wants proof.

The proof? The proof, in this country, is that the cathedrals were once white.

When the cathedrals were white, participation was unanimous, in everything. There were no pontificating coteries; the people, the country went ahead. The theater was in the cathedrals, set up on improvised stages in the middle of the nave; they told off the priests and the powerful: the people were grown up and masters of themselves, in the white church—inside and out. "The house of the people," where they discussed mysteries, morality, religion, civil affairs, or intrigues, was entirely white. It was the great expression of liberty of the liberated spirit. The art all around expressed the abundance of thoughts and characters—nature, grossness, eroticism, racy wit, the fear of the spirit in the face of the cosmos, massacres, assassinations, and wars, the pouring out of hearts before God, God Himself, Hermetic thought. As yet there was no Academy to govern everything. People were direct and raw, frank.

At the Court of Miracles—as today in Belleville or Grenelle—at the archbishop's palace or in the house of the prince, people

invented the new words of the language. They created a French tongue. The new words expressed a new society.

In the immense hubbub of the Middle Ages which falsely seems to us like a massacre in which blood never stopped flowing, human beings observed the Hermetic rules of Pythagoras; everywhere you could see the eager search for the laws of harmony. They had deliberately turned their backs on "the antique," on the stereotyped models of Byzantium; but they threw themselves passionately into the reconquest of the fatal axis of human destiny: harmony. The law of numbers was transmitted from mouth to mouth among initiates, after the exchange of secret signs.¹

The Tour Saint-Jacques in Paris is a gigantic rebus worked out on the basis of the cabala. What a profound source of study for anyone willing to risk it! By way of contrast, think of the stupidity of a "Grand Palais" of 1900 in which several Academicians had a chance to speak their message in enormous dimensions!!!

Paris had become the torch of the world. Society was forming, becoming organized, was establishing its broad decrees, liberating itself, building materially and spiritually. Universalism was carried far by the arts and thought, and especially by the active force of a nation which was on its way wholeheartedly, without backward glances, youthfully sustained by the daily creative effort.

The cathedrals were white, thought was clear, spirit was alive, the spectacle clean.

1 Books did not yet exist. These rules of harmony are complicated, delicate. To understand the reason in them you have to have a spirit of some sensibility. Speak of them openly? That would be to put them in danger of errors of fact and of understanding; after three generations they would have become grotesque and the works constructed in accordance with their law would have been caricatures. They must be absolutely exact. From the time books came into being these rules could be set down between two pages and exist intact, accurate and pure. When books became one of the most precious instruments of knowledge, the secret of the rules of harmony no longer had any justification.

From the twenty-fifth to the twenty-eighth of July 1934, the League of Nations, through its International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, organized in Venice, in a room of the Ducal Palace, an International Conference on Contemporary Arts and Reality, Art and the State.

France had several delegates—(how did it happen that I was one of them?). I jumped, and how! when a thoughtless painter, wishing to make clear what art was, and in what way our period (the modern period) was bankrupt because it is reluctant to buy framed pictures and to use sculpture for its houses, ended his talk by this illuminating remark: "Wearied by their precise civilization, Americans come to France to enjoy the charm of a bandy-legged table!"

Say such a thing—along with a thousand others—over an apéritif at the Deux-Magots: but don't come thus before an international meeting to express the spirit of France!

It is true that this group was composed of historians of art—of past art, but the League of Nations was seeking a line of procedure to illuminate the march of contemporary society. . . .

Supremacy of the "bandy-legged table"! Gentlemen, are we mad? There is no point in going to Venice to turn the Ducal Palace into a padded cell!

I intervened and made Venice a witness—a city which, because of its foundation of water, represents the most formal machinery, the most exact functioning, the most incontrovertible truth—a city which in its unity, unique in the world, still is (because of its foundation of water) a complete and integral image of the harmonized and hierarchic actions of a society.

I am well aware that after the magnificent functioning machine had been fully established "artists" came to Venice. But everything had already been organized, rooted in the place, made by the collaboration of everyone.

Renaissance artists, from that time on, give us the measure of rootlessness. They place themselves above things; they are not so fundamental as those things. Now they are the ones who have

been drawn to our attention and who have been imposed upon us in the schools by our instructors. With them life stops; often there results a fair of vanities—a sect setting itself up over society.

But those of us who live intensely in the present moment of modern times, have broken through the boundaries of such limited and poverty-stricken curiosity. We have extended our sympathy to all the world and to all times. We have rediscovered life and the axis of all human marvels and agonies. We are far from the theatrical stage which tries to place events of qualitative interest above and outside of human labors. We plunge into daily realities, are face to face with consciousness itself.

We appeal to the reality of the things which make up the life of the world and of each individual person.

We carry out the transmutation of qualitative virtues within the whole active mass, virtues that, through several decadent centuries, a sect believed it could appropriate for itself, and most especially and frightfully, in the past fifty years.

Our task requires the participation of everyone, in an orderly way, and not topsy-turvily; hierarchically, and not denatured by artificial doctrines. If Venice, even today, is an intact proof of a collective life, we in France can set up before our eyes the image of the time when the cathedrals were white.

Life bursts forth everywhere, outside the studios where art is "made," outside of the small circles where it is talked about, outside of the writings in which the spirit of quality is isolated, localized, and disintegrated.

There is no crisis in life.

There is a crisis only in a corporation: that of the makers of art.

The plastic artists of the world are everywhere in the midst of an intense, multiple, unlimited production. Every day, every hour, the Earth sees splendors surging up which are truths and present-day beauty. Ephemeral perhaps! Tomorrow, new truths and new beauties bloom. The day after tomorrow, etc. . . .

Thus life is replenished, full. Life is beautiful! We do not have—do we?—any intention or claim to fix the destiny of the eternal *things of the future*? Everything, at every hour, is only the work of the present moment.

The present moment is creative, creating with an unheard-of intensity.

A great epoch has begun.

A new epoch.

Already manifest in innumerable individual and collective works, forming part of the totality of contemporary production; surging from studios, mills, factories, from the minds of engineers, of artists—objects, laws, projects, thoughts—machine civilization breaks forth.

New times!

It was in every way similar, once, seven centuries ago, when a new world was being born, when the cathedrals were white!

2 DECADENCE OF THE SPIRIT

NEWSPAPERS

One morning at the end of the winter, when I woke up with the painful taste of the pettiness of which life seems to be made, I had a splendid revelation of the felicities of our days, stuffed to the breaking point with stimulating facts. Page after page of my paper burst with life; from headline to headline the arches of imagination made a clear route toward the synthesis of modern conquests. This summary of the news, I tell myself, is an admirable song of hope. Each day brings its harvest. We are unfortunate if we do not see it or know it; we are blind if each morning we fail to discover the promise of new times.

Bent over our narrow labors, subjected like the damned to the rule of money, we no longer know how to see or feel: the world opens up, and every morning brings a new account of it to us, the epic song of the present day. Poetry, heroism, conquest occur every day and everywhere and in everything. The

sublime hammers on the hours. The telegraph has put the palpitation of the world into our hands.

This Monday paper (usually stale since it is made up of "bottom-drawer material") has, today, forty-eight articles under headlines.

There are many who read three papers a day—morning, noon, evening—another way of telling one's beads of unconsciousness in the bus, the subway, or at the family table. It comes in one ear and goes out the other; quite plainly that wearies the retina and predisposes one to sleep. The hours pass, the days pass, life passes. Events are all around us, we do not enter into them.

Nevertheless, the song of hope is published every day.

MONEY

The stadium of the Parc des Princes in Paris is just outside my window. On Sunday I endure the noises, cries, whistles, and shouts of forty thousand spectators. There is a scoreboard at the south end of the stadium. On its vast, dark surface white letters are put up, the initials of the teams, and the score. The scoreboard is the crown of a stadium.

There was a clock at the corner of the scoreboard; it is an indispensable instrument during a game; the clock keeps time for the players and for the spectators, it controls the nerves of the crowd, it is connected with the destiny of the players, minute after minute.

For three days now, the clock has been at 12:30. Because of present-day carelessness the management has not found the fifteen francs necessary to repair the stadium clock. Today, when the management has taken in half a million francs, the clock is not working. Negligence, slackness.

The clock has not been fixed.

The clock isn't there any more! Today it was covered by a poster advertising milk chocolate; two-fifths of the scoreboard proclaim the virtues of a particular shoe polish. Two-fifths of the scoreboard, the crown of the stadium, remain usable. The crown of the stadium has been sold in order to make money. The crown, the part that dominates the stadium. Its dignity, its standing, its morality have been sold to make a few francs. And that in the face of forty thousand paying spectators. In the face of foreign visitors who come here to participate in decisive international jousts, in which France raises its banner beside those of rival countries. A dirty sort of spirit, slovenliness, baseness. France was thoroughly trounced by Holland; the sporting papers call it "the catastrophe of last Sunday." The sporting papers say that a moral crisis is involved; they are well aware of it, in everything. They carry a headline in large type: "A French team without spirit and without a leader." The numbers on the scoreboard were so dirty that I could scarcely read them with my opera glasses. A poor kind of maintenance.

France lost to Switzerland, to Italy, to Spain.

The scoreboard has been sold and in addition the whole stadium is covered with advertisements for apéritifs, oils, or licorice.

I see again the stadiums of American universities. In the USA the welfare of major sports is in the hands of university students. The honor of sport is upheld among all the universities. The whole country takes part in it with an unimaginable fervor. Sixty thousand, a hundred thousand spectators participate at these remarkable jousts, in which everything is conducted

with propriety, style, enthusiasm, in gigantic concrete bowls, uncluttered and clean. Love, and a feeling of responsibility. This will give us, a little later in the book, an opportunity to note a trait of character of the country.

The scoreboard sold to shoe polishes! It is a stench in our nostrils, the result of a great illusion which came from America a long time ago during the period of mad "prosperity": make money, make *big* money! In France books entitled *How to Make Money* were published by travelers who were dazzled by their trip to the country of dollars. America was about to crash. But the example took hold: we are still sucking the last drops of the blood of our country.

SAINT FRONT OF PERIGUEUX

The old church, Saint-Étienne de la Cité, has not been "renovated" or "restored" by the services of the Office of Historic Monuments. That care was reserved for the Church of Saint Front. Both are decisive manifestations of great architecture in the Romanesque-Byzantine style. (Let us note in passing that they did not trouble themselves about nationalist scruples when they sent an abbot to Venice to get the measurements of St. Mark's in order to attempt "to do as much" "here at home." And St. Mark's itself was inspired by the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople. Thought had no frontiers or national boundaries.)

Saint-Étienne, left in its destitution, is admirable and dis-

turbing; Saint Front, violated by restorers, is henceforth lost.

I believe in the *skin* of things, as in that of women.

At Saint Front they have scraped everything, retouched, remade, inch by inch. They have falsified everything: liars, forgers. By what right? Tragic confusion! I know perfectly well that their intentions were good. Alas, alas!

Peril of restorations. Why have they not occupied themselves instead with making new cathedrals, I mean: by looking forward in spirit in place of looking backward so obstinately and weakly, valuing and considering only things that have been lived through.

In Saint Front, on the altars of the church and the stalls of the porch, plaster Gods and Saints reveal a terrible decadence.

The God that you recognize so clearly in traveling through the Near East or North Africa, the man-God that you find there in the midst of crowds: violent, passionate, active (as indeed his Word proclaims him to be in every verse), Jesus, they have made into a bleating pastry.

And they sell God in mass-produced replicas, in all sizes, at all prices, cheaply, so that He may be put on shelves, among the trashy domestic knick-knacks. Idolatry encouraged in order to bring in a few pennies.

To bring in a few pennies, they have falsified the highest ideas.

BORDEAUX STATION

I was on my way to Pessac, a suburb of Bordeaux, to attempt to unravel the dreadful intrigue which, for six years, immobilized and tried to reduce to nothing the generous and passionate undertaking of Henry Frugès.

"I want to show my country"—he had decided—"that a new period of architecture has come and that with bold methods and a fresh ethical attitude it is possible to create dwellings which will bring joy to their users and which answer the needs of a new consciousness." Fifty-one houses have been constructed at Pessac, in re-enforced concrete, with methods so new . . . that opinion has been worked up about it.

First the contractors in the region, upset in their routines; then the architects, who were quite furious. They stirred up opinion; opinion can be stirred up to an inconceivable degree. All this would never have happened if Pessac had been built on the outskirts of Paris, for Parisians do not allow themselves to be led by the nose so easily. In short, at the Mayor's office, at the Prefect's office, and at the Water Company they refused to let the village have any water! That lasted for six years. Two ministers intervened energetically: first M. A. de Monzie, then M. Loucheur. They made a trip to Pessac. But a village mayor is stronger than two ministers. And then came ridicule, and written statements, libels and serious reports with the conclusion: "that the particular character of this architecture made living in the village impossible and that the residents had all gone away."

The village was empty, all right; it had been for six years because there was no water. M. Frugès had been martyred. But his work, praised everywhere abroad, was analyzed in reviews and daily papers and served as a point of departure for vast enterprises carried through outside of France. The Municipal Council

of Paris sent investigating committees to Germany to gather information while weeds grew up in Pessac.

I was in the Bordeaux station, then, late in the afternoon of a summer day. The station is disgusting. Not an employee on the crowded platform. An official with gilded insignia does not know when the Paris train will arrive. At the office of the station-master they are evasive, no one knows exactly. General uproar, offensive filthiness; the floor is black, broken up, the immense windows are black. At 9:00 P.M. the express stops at platform No. 4 completely cluttered up with boxes of vegetables, fish, fruit, hats, screeching fowl, returned empty bags . . . (I noted down these details on the spot).

. . . In the city, the paving is coming apart. On the Gironde, the new re-enforced concrete docks are decorated with false pilasters. The preceding year, coming from Buenos Aires, I had disembarked from the *Lutétia* in the midst of an inexpressible confusion. A thousand passengers with all their baggage to pass through the customs. We have come from far away, we are being awaited impatiently, hearts are excited. Imagine! Admittance is forbidden to those who have come to meet us. My mother and my wife are outside, in the rain (Bordeaux rain) in December; the customs inspection takes place in a miserable new shed where confusion reigns. A sad spectacle for those returning from Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, where vast installations take care of this very thing: a thousand, two thousand travelers or emigrants emptied all at once out of the sides of a large ship. At the office of the French Line in Paris, where I talked to one of the officials about my idea of having "air conditioning" on steamships passing from winter to summer in two weeks after having gone through the two equatorial tropics, I was told: "Remember, sir, that none of our engineers has ever made a sea trip! . . ."

Further in, on the Gironde, on both sides of the estuary, the two orphan pylons of the traveling platform bridge have been standing for twenty years (perhaps much longer). The

bridge meant to connect the two banks has never been put up. Politics! Yes, it seems that the matter of the bridge is to be voted on. Until there is a new vote, then, there is nothing to do but climb the obstructed banks to the century-old bridge; trucks, cars, and pedestrians add up stupid and expensive miles in going from the left bank docks to the right bank docks—through the heart of the port of Bordeaux, a great city of France which had its white cathedral and which had Colbert and Louis XIV.

Such is the nature of the spirit which exists, today, in many important places of France.

CONDITIONED AIR

My great friend Gustave Lyon died last Sunday at the age of seventy-nine, in full vigor. His corpse was already enclosed in the coffin covered with black cloth, and four candles were burning. His sister said to me: "Now that he has gone, perhaps the value of the great work to which he consecrated his life will be recognized."

With Pleyel Hall—and in spite of the defects of such an ambitious first attempt—he had put the Academy out of architecture. From that time on, no auditorium in the world was planned in accordance with the scheme of the official schools; all of them had to refer to that acoustical and orthophonic lesson.

In that auditorium Gustave Lyon had provided "regulated air" for three thousand auditors. The first accomplishment of the kind in Europe. His studies in providing pure air, which began

a long time ago, were independent of the experiments which were made also in the USA. For our Palace of the League of Nations of 1927, we had applied the same method and had combined it with an invention of my own going back to 1916: "neutralizing walls." These walls make it possible to cancel out the cooling effects of the large glazed surfaces characteristic of the new architecture. In 1929, on my return from Moscow, I had established definitively the theory of the "neutralizing wall" and had combined it, in our Centrosoyus Palace (standing today not far from the Kremlin), with the "regulated air" of Gustave Lyon. The combination was called "conditioned air." My friend came to our workshop to see the drawings and models before they were sent to Moscow. "It's an idea of genius," he said, "which transforms all the traditions of the house and of work in residential or business buildings, in studios or factories." Timorous Moscow stuck to current practices and rejected our "conditioned air"; behind our immense sheets of glass they installed radiators, as is customary.

We were looking for an opportunity. It came; the shelter of the Salvation Army, the "City of Refuge." Six hundred poor creatures, men and women, live there. They were given the free and ineffable joy of full light and the sun. A sheet of glass more than one thousand square yards in size lights the rooms from floor to ceiling, and from wall to wall. The director of the shelter told us last week that the joy thus dispensed helped his organization along marvelously, immensely. The sheet of glass was hermetic, since warmed and cleaned air circulated abundantly inside, regulated by the heating plant and the blowers.

The building stood in the sinister Chevaleret quarter. The president of the Republic was to open it in December. In the memory of man it had never been so cold as it was at that moment. Sarcastic comments began to appear in the papers: "What a catastrophe," they predicted, "behind that window which . . . and that . . ." We went ahead, we opened. It was splendid. The ceremonies took place in the midst of the cold spell in a perfect

interior temperature. Two thousand persons are witnesses to it. The manager, Albin Peyron, a virilely optimistic man who has won over the heart of Paris and made of his "army" a liked and respected troop, the manager breathed more easily. It worked!

The City of Paris breathed less easily. The public services were suffocating! What, a vast hermetically sealed building, without openings? That cannot be allowed! The building service of Police Headquarters sent out its architect. He submitted a report to the effect that the system used was irreproachable for the purpose of supplying pure air to guests of doubtful cleanliness. The report gathered dust and for two years the City of Refuge functioned perfectly.

Difficulties did not develop except at the height of the summer, during heat waves.

The small sum of money allotted to the construction had made possible only the functioning of the winter system. The system for the summer (the cooling of the air) remained to be constructed. No new funds! It was necessary to wait.

Then there was a combined attack from the two Prefectures of Paris, that of the Police and that of the Seine. We explained; we resisted. We brought conclusive reports from Prof. Renaud, doctor at the St. Louis Hospital and a pediatric specialist, from Gustave Lyon, and from an engineer associated with the ventilation industry. It was attested that we were right practically and also theoretically. But the official notices became threatening and subject to prompt execution. The local police commissioner was asked to take repressive measures and to close the City of Refuge.

I was not willing to accept the disemboweling of our building, against all common sense. I was bound not to do so. The building was a landmark, a demonstration. Public opinion took up the debate. The Salvation Army Shelter, known in the whole world through the articles of professional journals, was the object of special visits by tourists. We resisted.

But we were defeated, forced to surrender by the new

manager of the "army." It was necessary to throw money out of the window (that is putting it exactly in this case) and open "false windows"—a term recognized as accurate even by those who demanded that genuine crime.

The Prefectures, in their summonses, said that our façades were not in accordance with the regulations. And, cynically, they did not mention that the new arrangements provided for the interior, three times per hour, the proper volume of pure air, cleaned and at the right temperature, in every part, however small.

I could go on indefinitely. The City of Paris defeated us. It repudiated the most decisive kind of progress: pure air for the lungs of the city dwellers. But on the thirty-three kilometers of the Paris fortifications it favored the construction of cheap buildings, justly celebrated today because no progressive kind of construction was used and because there are . . . so many things behind all that, and so much money involved, that, up to now, the press has been strangled with graft.

Except for a few well-studied sections it was possible to baptize this new belt of Paris, constructed during the Machine Age, as "the thirty-three kilometers of shame."

I have just come back from America. Since 1928, in that very powerful country, progressive initiatives have become realities, accepted practices for everyone, and rapid developments have made it possible to provide pure and conditioned air in the offices of skyscrapers, in the subways, in the tunnels under the Hudson, in the coaches of the trains, in planes where one may smoke, in small cottages for ordinary citizens. Everywhere! I read with a tourist's curiosity one of the innumerable enamel plates placed beside each window of the newest skyscraper: *Please do not open the windows so as not to disturb the proper functioning of the air conditioning.*

When the cathedrals were white, there were no regulations. The cathedrals were antiregulation.

The spirit of France is not rule-bound except in periods of

lethargy and ossification. Today, when a new world is surging up under the impulse of technical miracles, the officials of the City of Light apply regulations. And soon there will be no light in the City.

**NEVERTHELESS, THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL
RESERVES THE RIGHT . . .**

A director of the Beaux-Arts in France thought that, for the International Exposition of 1937, it would be a good thing to entrust the planning to the leaders in architecture who are recognized *urbi et orbi*; each one of these leaders would organize a section and would assign the necessary jobs to qualified persons. Thus the Exposition would have been a manifestation of the new times.

But he was defeated by a clever subterfuge.

Public competitions were set up, under the pretext of giving an opportunity to the "young." Classic method of choosing your own favorites behind a reassuring "anonymity." (The competition for the League of Nations Palace at Geneva was a notable example.)

A general manager of the International Exposition of 1937 created a name: *Art and Technique*, and justified it by a clear-sighted, constructive, and optimistic statement. But he was defeated.

In the course of these active preliminaries we had submitted our idea for 1937: *International Exposition of Housing*. Housing, we thought, is the key of the new machine age civilization,

a manifestation of the new consciousness. It caused a bit of excitement. A general director of the Beaux-Arts accepted our proposition and asked us to make it concrete.—“Give us enough ground to set up a ‘housing unit’; in a ‘unit’ all the problems can be made clear: city planning, industrialization of building construction, search for standards, application of new techniques—acoustics, heating, orientation, etc.;—plastic character, general esthetics, the ethic of the dwelling and of the city. A unit will accommodate four thousand people. For the sake of the Exposition, everything will be instructive, didactic. Visitors will see the various unfinished and successive stages of construction: a real lesson in architectural biology. Also, they will see furnished apartments and the community organizations which, some day, are to transform domestic economy by lightening its tasks. We shall put our enterprise under the aegis of the CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture, established at Sarraz in 1928 following the scandal about the architectural judgment of the designs for the League of Nations Palace at Geneva). In it the Congress will develop particularly the results of its work on ‘The Functional City,’ collective labors made by the national groups of eighteen countries, representing a unique documentation, a veritable treasure chest of all the researches made in the interest of improving cities.”

We were given the Kellermann bastion on the ring of fortifications of Napoleon III, south of Paris, east of and adjoining University City.

Everything had been discussed, granted, fixed, and adopted by the general director of the Beaux-Arts, the minister of Commerce, the prefect of the Seine, and after stormy debates, by the Municipal Council of Paris, then by the Government. The matter was settled between March and July, 1934.

The finished project to be installed on the allotted ground intended a renovation in the matter of housing, lots, and streets. Because of a clear feeling of the poetry of things, it preserved completely the Kellermann bastion, the sole and unique vestige

still remaining of the thirty-three kilometers of the military zone of the Second Empire which was forever destroyed by the Low Cost Housing Project of the City of Paris: a magnificent relic of architecture and of history.

After eighteen months, in September of 1935, M. Marzloff, director of the architectural services of the City of Paris, told me in the presence of two witnesses—Fernand Léger, delegate of the Modern Painters and Sculptors, and René Herbst, delegate of the Union of Modern Artists, two groups which we had brought into our enterprise: "Don't allow yourselves any illusions; you have irreconcilable enemies in the Municipal Council. Did not the president, M. Contenot, say publicly that you are anti-French and that you worked against France at the International Exposition of City Planning in Berlin [where we showed the "radiant city" with a manifesto on a red, white, and blue poster, signed by French artists known throughout the world, but independent of the Academies]? A phrase that the Municipal Council had inserted in the text of the law granting us the ground, the year before at Pentecost, was put there to prevent you from carrying through your project. . . ."

This is the tiny phrase: "*Nevertheless, the Municipal Council reserves the right eventually to demand the demolition of the buildings constructed on the Kellermann bastion, after the Exposition. . . .*"

For eighteen months the project had been studied, estimates made, the first steps taken for the participation of heavy industry, an international committee called together (CIRPAC, steering committee of the CIAM). For the City of Paris, M. Marzloff had asked us to submit all the details, the program, the methods, the financing, etc. . . ; the principal architects of the Exposition, MM. Letrosne & Greber, had said: "We are making your project ours."

The general director of the Beaux-Arts, the minister, the

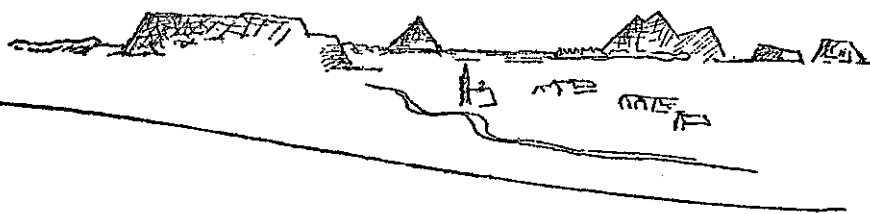
prefect, the Government, all that did not count any longer, after the insertion of the little phrase.

Thus the Kellermann bastion got rid of our presence and the Exposition of 1937 likewise.

The municipal administration began to demolish the bastion. That immense bank of earth, a true belvedere, has been razed. The walls of Napoleon III no longer exist. Today it is a formless wasteland "good for building operations," the last link of the thirty-three kilometers of the chain around Paris, in which business transactions satisfactory to many have taken place. Many people were made fools of by the little phrase.

A banana peel under the feet of courageous seekers, slipped there by people well versed in business intrigues. They threw the monkey wrench into the complex machinery of institutional life, including even that of the Government: an edifying sign.

(I shall be much criticized for this chapter and accused of being an ill-bred polemicist. Our disappointment, our broken hopes, the extensive collaboration of the best creative artists of all countries brought together by the Congress under the direction of the French Group—all that is nothing! What is more, they expect us to say thank you!)



GREATNESS IS IN THE INTENTION

In crossing the Franco-Belgian border, the train passes through the mining country. What is that, a mirage? Gigantic pyramids rising from the plains are silhouetted against the sky all the way to the horizon. I am speaking of my first trip, made long ago. My emotion was intense. These sublime monuments sunk into the blue depths, on the left, on the right of the train. They were simply the heaps of slag from the coal mines, piles of gray-black schist, wastes, which once enclosed veins of coal. Now, I understand, the tracks supported on the side of each

slope carry the cars to the top of the pyramid where they are dumped. The law of landslides fixes forever the destiny of the pyramids: an impeccable slope of forty-five degrees. And thus I am near Cairo, in the land of the Pharaohs.

No, not at all! My emotion, though still strong, is becoming dulled. My admiration dissolves. Those are not masterpieces, they are not works of art. They are simply schist wastes. And at once I measure the abyss which opens up between the aspect of a thing and the quality of spirit which has brought it into being. The intention is what touches the deepest recesses of our heart, the quality of the spirit brought to the creation of the work of art. Here there is nothing more than an industrial enterprise in which no elevated intention is involved. For good reason! And however fresh my understanding may be, however innocent my heart may be, well, I do not sense here the utterance of a man or of men. It is only a fact and a law of physics. The only emotion which remains is the rigor of that law. Without anything further.

But a debate begins inside me: suppose men had made that; purposefully, to raise our hearts by that intention?

The train has passed through the mining country and the pyramids no longer occupy my thoughts.

In the prologue of the account of this first trip to the USA, under the sign of the white cathedrals, I feel that everything that I shall say will be qualified by the degree and the quality of the intention which has established the skyscraper, set up cities thrusting into the sky, thrown highways across the country, built bridges over estuaries or rivers. Our heart calls to other hearts. That is the measure of our emotion, and magnitude can be depressing, and the schist pyramids can leave us contrite. Greatness is in the intention; and not in dimensions.

When the cathedrals were white, the whole universe was raised up by an immense faith in the energy, the future, and the harmonious creation of a civilization.

P A R T T W O

U . S . A .

PROLOGUE

About three years after the year 1000 the churches were renovated throughout the universe, especially in Italy and Gaul, though most of them were still beautiful enough not to require repairs. But the Christian peoples seemed to rival one another in magnificence, raising splendid churches in mutual emulation.

One would have said that the whole world, in a common accord, had shaken off the rags of its past in order to put on a white robe of churches.

CHRONICLE OF RAOUL GLABER,
BENEDICTINE MONK OF BURGUNDY WHO DIED IN 1050.

1 CITIES OF THE WORLD

INVESTIGATOR OF THE SITUATION

Already I have spoken to some hundred thousand people in the world and I have interested them all in a dream. My feet were on the ground, only my glance passed above tumults and confusions. I have become acquainted with cities by having visited, examined, and explored them. I have heard explanations, complaints, expressions of discouragement. Everywhere they told me: "There is no hope of improving things, you have to adapt yourself as best you can to the . . . evil."

What I have been able to say has been of a general character, of principles, doctrinaire if you wish. I have been able also to suggest the particular surgical operation which would set aside a decadent past and open the door to the new times.

My life, by its active adventurousness and by the nature of my character and origins, allows me to get close to ideas brought into relation with the steadiness of the general human

scheme, without the obstruction of a too marked regionalism. In the course of years, I have felt myself become more and more a man of everywhere with, nevertheless, one strong root: the Mediterranean, queen of forms under the play of light; I am dominated by the imperatives of harmony, beauty, plasticity. There is in my background a permanent fact: liberty of thought and lack of interest in material gains; freedom in thinking normally conducted above the level of passing events.

In this book, which will be only a declaration, but throughout which I hope to be able to evoke the movement of our violent times, I shall do my best to avoid the conceptions "France," "Germany," "America," "USSR," etc. . . . These conceptions may imply nobility, greatness, love: the love of what one knows, of what one may see and take hold of, of what one is, or better, of what one should be. Conceptions which are profoundly natural if they are the expression of the sense of family, within all the vast limits to which it is susceptible. But conceptions which become depraved and swallowed up in guns and bayonets from the moment that the frontier, which should be imponderable, or at least supple and mobile, becomes the line of demarcation, of separation, the point of divergence, the locale of conflicts, the cunning instrument, precise as a commutator, which infallibly sets off the explosion and assures wars. Natural and noble conceptions or perfidious conceptions covering a mass of sordid, cruel, private interests, manipulating hypocrisy in a frightful way. I feel that danger; I see in it the possibility of maintaining and increasing still more the buttresses of the egoistic "I," of vanity, of property conceived in a narrow and avaricious way, of patrimony artificially organized against the very precepts of nature; nature ends a life, an admirable activity, by death; and nothing is transmissible except the nobility of the fruit of work: thought. Everything else disappears: the immense attainment of an individual during his lifetime. Everything dissolves, everything has to be begun again by each individual person: struggle, effort within one's self, individual, passionate, and yet disinterested

conquest. That is the law of life: death. And that is beautiful, sublime, for there is no purpose in an egoistic hoarding of treasure. And here is the sad part of it: this noble path has been littered with bank notes. The stages have been marked by bank accounts. Money has piled up. And when the great hour comes—death: “corpse, carcase henceforth useless go to the family vault or to the crematory. The will, which saves everything, is in the safe-deposit box; money is transmissible.” I really believe that this is one of the most tragic weaknesses by which men have allowed themselves to be enslaved.

This egoism, extended from the individual case to the collective case, has set nation against nation, injured and paralyzed civilization, and it weakens our efforts today. Today more than ever, infinitely more, ridiculously more, thought is rigged out in a uniform whose belt is too tight. What existed formerly—in the time of “universal” civilizations, for there were no barriers—the law of the sun, the law of the flow of water and the law of undecipherable destinies, has become police record material: first of all, *nationality*. And according as interests are now hostile, now favorable, judgment is black or white. Thus are established the barriers hampering the natural movement of human works, which develop in accordance with unfathomable causes on the earthly sphere where everything is (and should be) continuous, contiguous, interpenetrating, extensible, “sympathetic” and not *antipathetic*.

Listen carefully, for example, to the “elevated” discussions organized on the occasion of the centenary celebrations for Goethe at Frankfurt by the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation, an agency of The League of Nations: the Englishman proclaims the name of Shakespeare; the Frenchman that of Rabelais or Balzac; the Italian replies with Dante and Michelangelo, the Spaniard with Cervantes. Though each one points to his own flag, in passing Goethe receives a considerable share of compliments (and sometimes these dithyrambs have a comic sound, the speaker making it clear that he understands

everything about the greatness of Goethe and that he has something of it himself). They are busy with bickerings and squabbles! But agreement exists about Mahomet, for he is of a country which does not yet have a delegation at this court of high culture; he does not belong to one of the nations "involved," he is outside of the "I's" and the "me's" which appear at every turn in the discussion.

When the cathedrals were white, above nationalities concerned with themselves, there was a common idea: Christendom was above everything else. Already, before constructing everywhere the naves of the new civilization, a common enthusiasm of spirit had brought together the peoples of modern times and had led them, through strange avatars, toward Jerusalem, where there was the seat of a universal thought: love.

So I should wish to be nothing more than one of those who seek to discern the "constructive" paths, to prepare "tomorrow"; who observe good with sympathy, evil coolly, and who, above all, allow themselves to be led toward something useful, guided by their nose—that subtle apparatus of scent that the gods have put as a promontory on our faces to enable us to use the forces accumulated by instinct—instinct being the individual "gift" that destiny has given us as well as the sum of innumerable conscious and unconscious experiences stored up by a vigilant spirit.

MOTIVE OF MY JOURNEY

The third day after my arrival in America, I was asked to make a statement from Radio City, to be broadcast over fifty stations in the USA. Radio City is a machine age temple installed in one of the skyscrapers of Rockefeller Center.

The temple is solemn, surfaced with somber marble, shining with clear mirrors mounted in stainless steel frames. Silence. Corridors and vast spaces; doors open automatically: they are the silent elevators unloading passengers. No windows anywhere. . . . Silent walls. "Conditioned" air throughout, pure, clean, at a constant temperature. Am I on the fifth floor or the fortieth? The broadcasting studios are large, impeccable; they close your mouth before you think of opening it. In each room spectators occupy an amphitheater which is outside of it, enclosed as if they were in a glass aquarium. They are free to speak; none of their chatter escapes the aquarium. What do they see? An orchestra, a singer; in this case, a gentleman with glasses who affably greets the charming Mrs. Claudine MacDonald. What do they hear? The slightest sound emitted, transmitted by a loud-speaker. The spectacle amuses them, since the amphitheater is full. The gentleman is seated at a table with a pitcher of ice water and paper cups. Everyone is at his post. The instruments, moving in their mysteriousness, and the technician in charge, are in another quite small aquarium. The clock is dictator. When I was finished, I was sent into the little aquarium where one may talk. It was then that an object attracted my attention; recognizing what it was, I pointed out to my companion, Fernand Léger, a straight red needle turning around a dial marked 1 to 60. They are seconds. The needle is obsessing; I said to Léger, "Notice the needle that goes around so fast: it marks the seconds and nothing else. The clock beside it marks the hours. Small matter! The

hours will return tomorrow. But the dial with the second hand is something cosmic, it is time itself, which never returns. That red needle is a material evidence of the movement of worlds."

In my radio speech I said: "With the simplicity of a professional who has dedicated his life to the study of the first cycle of the machine age, I bring into the domain of architecture and city planning propositions which call into service all the techniques of modern times, but whose final aim is to go beyond simple utility. The indispensable purpose is to give to the men of the machine age the joys of the heart and of health.

"Such a plan is neither European nor American. It is human and universal. It represents an urgent task. We must replace the brutality of the present, the misery and stupidity, by what I have called 'the essential joys.'

"A hundred years have been enough to make cities inhuman.

"Monday morning, when my ship stopped at Quarantine, I saw a fantastic, almost mystic city rising up in the mist. But the ship moves forward and the apparition is transformed into an image of incredible brutality and savagery. Here is certainly the most prominent manifestation of the power of modern times. This brutality and this savagery do not displease me. It is thus that great enterprises begin: by strength.

"In the evening, on the avenues of the city, I began to appreciate the people who, by a law of life which is their own, have been able to create a race: handsome men, very beautiful women.

"The world is undergoing one of the great metamorphoses of history. The collective and the individual collide instead of combining. Is a synthesis possible? Yes, in a program on a *human scale* and guided by *human wisdom*.

"This is architecture's hour. There can be no new architecture without a new city planning. New cities have always replaced old cities, by periods. But today it is possible for the city of modern times, the happy city, the radiant city, to be born.

"The architecture of the academies is superannuated. Architecture rejoins its destiny, which is *the setting in order of the present time*. Let's not talk any longer about styles, either modern or ancient; *the style is the event itself*. Machine age society will make itself manifest in its thought, in its instruments of production, and in its physical machinery: *houses and cities*, expressions of the aspirations of a modern consciousness. *That is where style is!*

"America, which is in a process of permanent evolution, which possesses infinite reserves of materials, which is animated by an energy potential unique in the world, is surely the country first able to bring to fulfillment, and with an exceptional perfection, this contemporary task.

"I believe within myself that the ideas that I bring here and that I present under the phrase 'radiant city,' will find in this country their natural ground. In coming to explain this first doctrine for equipping machine civilization, these constructive, optimistic and active theses, bold ones perhaps, but full of faith in the power of modern times, I am certain to secure the adhesion of those whose experience and personal judgment have led to the same hopes."

Rio de Janeiro, capital of Brazil, led the way. In 1936, I was asked, with Lucio Costa's enthusiastic group, to study anew the plans for the Education and Health Building and to make the first suggestions for the University City of Brazil. I brought the "sun-breaker" to the tropics, the building supported on posts, the wall of glass, the roof garden. . . . War came! . . . Liberation of Paris, 1944; then I learned what they had built in Rio, and in Recife, and in Pampulha. And that a skyscraper of the new type is now in existence, rational and smiling, fit to serve modern work.

NEW YORK, A VERTICAL CITY

New York is a vertical city, under the sign of the new times. It is a catastrophe with which a too hasty destiny has overwhelmed courageous and confident people, though a beautiful and worthy catastrophe. Nothing is lost. Faced with difficulties, New York falters. Still streaming with sweat from its exertions, wiping off its forehead, it sees what it has done and suddenly realizes: "Well, we didn't get it done properly. Let's start over again!" New York has such courage and enthusiasm that everything can be begun again, sent back to the building yard and made into something still greater, something mastered! These people are not on the point of going to sleep. In reality, the city is hardly more than twenty years old, that is the city which I am talking about, the city which is vertical and on the scale of the new times.

Morocco, which is contemporary with New York, is not under the sign of the new times. France established itself in the midst of a drowsy Moslem civilization. The evidences of brilliant moments sleep in the sun: in Fez, a superb city, and everywhere in the country, there are mosques, palaces of sultans and caliphs, markets still vibrating with life. They are a disillusioned race, but magnificent, noble, under the sign of dignity. France has been able to accomplish various things: she brought well-being, education, and above all loyalty and justice. Benefits which were somewhat imposed but which must be considered the indispensable signs of civilization. The army—an army of "professional" soldiers—was the authority. They furrowed the country with a magnificent network of roads of the French type. And cities were raised. Alas, they were behind the times, questions were unsolved. We always live under the burden of current ideas. While New York was rising into the air, London and the towns of Germany

were satisfied with the illusory idea of garden cities: a rural humanity, living idyllically in cottages, served daily by a purgatory of transportation systems. Every day they sank more deeply into the paradox. And New York also, and likewise Chicago, since that was the fashion, at the very moment when a vague feeling drove them to set up, straight and inflexible in the sky, the first landmarks of the new times. Thus France believed that she was doing the right thing: charming villages were set up for the admiration of the old and splendid Arab civilization, beneath the tutelary shadow of a modern army.

I believe that cities animated by the new spirit, ordered in an even grander way—ininitely grander—than those formerly erected by Louis XIV or Napoleon, constructed of steel and glass, standing erect beside the sea, or standing erect in the valleys or on the plateau at the foot of the Atlas Mountains, would have created among the Arabs an atmosphere of enthusiasm, of admiration, of respect, through the remarkable means at the disposal of architecture and city planning. In them the Arab would have found a teacher, a guide. No longer would he have raised his eyebrows in doubt. Both hands held out, abandoning from that moment all futile dissembling, he would have loved, admired, understood the new times, and respected France with all his conviction. Architecture and city planning can be great educators.

France wished to be charming. Its reputation is to be charming. Americans think that we are charming relations. They are not afraid of us, they are delighted by our company. When the cathedrals were white, the journeymen masons paid no attention to being charming. They had built and they were building structures of the greatest dignity in a burst of tension, energy, tenacity, and fidelity to a great idea. When they sculptured the porches or the capitals of Autun, of Moissac, of Vézelay or of Angoulême, the journeymen stonecutters were not concerned about being dainty. The harsh destiny of men struggling with the elements or the unfathomable unknown led their hearts and hands

toward robust, indeed tragic feelings. The times were strong. They were new times. They were building a world. And they were as much the less barbarous or primitive as the architecture was bold, a tangible sign of knowledge, of strength, of mastery in movement, increasing, in a process of becoming. Thus the leaderships are inscribed in the stone rising in the sky and in the power of the techniques. A unanimous feeling lifts up their enterprises: they believe.

For twenty years also, Buenos Aires, in an oppressive tumult, has been lifted up by the spirit of the times. When order is in control, that city will become one of the great places of the world.

And here are still other combinations: Moscow struggling with the dilemma of an inadequate technique and contradictory ideas; Barcelona, shaken by revolutionary eruptions, a city geographically dedicated to a new destiny. Rome, weighed down under an artificial *décor* by a resurrection (of dubious value) of its past, hesitates instead of speaking out with certitude. Finally Algiers, the capital of North Africa, a young colony which is inclined to courageous action, is held back by its city councilors and is uneasy about being the first to risk the adventure of the new times.

Where on the varied earth, in the whirlwind of innumerable conflicts, shall the young people of today go to breathe the air of the new times? There can be no doubt: a crust is scaling off of our stupefied societies. New skin! Spring! Renewal! The young are eager for a change of air. I feel myself young also; I have the desire, before dying, to share in something live and changing. I do not wish to be charming, but to be strong. I do not wish to be frozen, I do not wish to maintain things, but to act and create.

I cannot forget New York, a vertical city, now that I have had the happiness of seeing it there, raised up in the sky.