

A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MODERN SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY: *A Survey of the Contributions of Gustave Le Bon to Social Psychology*

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1. GENERAL NATURE OF HIS METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Of the three chief psychological sociologists that France has produced—Tarde, Durkheim, and Le Bon, the latter is the most versatile, and yet by far the most superficial. In fact, the last may be regarded as a popularizer of the more striking ideas of the first two, especially of Tarde's views on imitation and Durkheim's notion of crowd-psychology. The range of his interests, however, is certainly remarkable. Trained originally as a physician, he gave up the practice of medicine, but has contributed several works on physiology and hygiene. Next he was employed by the French government as an archeologist and paleographer in the Orient. In recent years he has been editor of the *Bibliothèque de philosophie scientifique*. In addition to these activities he has occupied himself by producing a general work on social evolution in two volumes; studies of the chief historic civilizations; several contributions to mathematical chemistry and physics, among them a paper on intra-atomic energy which was published in a number of the leading scientific journals; a statistical study in physical anthropology; a work or two on education; and the some half-dozen books on social psychology which will form the basis of the present discussion.¹

Of course it is obvious that a man who ranges at will over a dozen fields of research, any one of which could only be partially traversed with thoroughness in a lifetime, is not likely to have excelled in any of them. This is certainly true

¹ For a list of Le Bon's contributions see the article on Le Bon in *La Grande Encyclopédie* for his earlier works, and the biographical note in the *New International Encyclopedia* for a list of his main works. Another list of his works is given in the French biographical annual *Qui Êtes-Vous?* His productivity is perhaps only exceeded by that of his fellow-countryman, Solomon Reinach, who can hardly boast an equal breadth of interests. The writer has attempted to summarize the contributions of Tarde to this subject in an article in the *Philosophical Review* for May, 1919, and of Durkheim in the *Political Science Quarterly* for June, 1920.

of Le Bon, whatever his mental powers may be. Professor G. E. Vincent has thus characterized him in a fairly accurate manner: "M. Le Bon may be described as an intellectual kodak fiend. His books are filled with snapshots at truth, interesting in themselves, but sadly unconnected and out of focus."² At the same time, Le Bon's works are all highly interesting, and many of his generalizations sound plausible. His arguments are bolstered up by copious citations of a pertinent nature. Le Bon is one of those writers who exploits his theories in his own works. In discussing crowd psychology, for example, he tells the reader that the sure and certain method to be successful in convincing an audience of the truth of an assertion is to affirm the matter repeatedly, and, at the same time, to be careful to avoid any attempt at thorough analysis or any reference to a possible exception to its applicability. Nothing is more characteristic of Le Bon's own procedure than this very method. Taking a few rather striking psychological postulates which have the virtue of modernity, novelty, and suggestiveness, he applies these conceptions to nearly every phase of contemporary life in general and to French social conditions in particular. These theses are repeated and reiterated without detailed analysis or candid statement of exceptions to their application, until even a wary reader is likely to be beguiled by the facile phraseology of the author. Aside from his brilliant but uncritical dogmatism and "cock-sureness," another characteristic of Le Bon's socio-psychological writings should be noted. That is what Herbert Spencer would call his "anti-patriotic bias" and his "class bias." At least up to the outbreak of the World War, Le Bon could see little good in what he alleged to be the characteristics of the modern Romance peoples. Their assumed tendency towards a crowd-psychological condition and their desire to suppress individuality and put into power the incompetent masses reveal little of promise from his viewpoint. The oft-asserted Anglo-Saxon initiative, energy, will-power, and individualism, attract him as strongly as the alleged French traits repel him.³

Again, Le Bon finds little to arouse his enthusiasm in the traits of the masses; from his viewpoint progress and civilization are almost exclusively the contribution of the intellectually *elite*. There can be no doubt that Le Bon's exaggerations are in part due to his generalizations from French conditions,

² G. E. Vincent, in review of Le Bon's *The Psychology of Peoples*, *American Journal of Sociology*, January, 1899, p. 555.

³ Probably Matthew Arnold would have found Le Bon rather comforting reading.

though even these he views in an extreme and exaggerated light. The relation of Le Bon's doctrines to his social environment is not of that subtle type which is likely to escape the attention of the reader, but is so prominent in all his works as to make them full of generalizations which are highly inaccurate and distorted when viewed as sociological propositions of general import. His fundamental doctrines—the idea of national character, the psychology of crowds and revolutions, his “anti-patriotic” and “class” bias, his continual scenting of impending calamities, and his bitter attacks upon socialism and syndicalism, are all directly and in large part traceable to his reactions to his French “milieu.” At the same time, no one can deny that Le Bon has pointed out tendencies, conditions, and psychological laws which had previously been overlooked or undeveloped, and, when his works are read with the understanding which allows the discounting of his exaggerations and prejudices, they constitute an important contribution to sociological literature. It seems probable that Le Bon's contributions to social and political theory can best be understood through an examination of his main works on social psychology, noting their general doctrines briefly and devoting special attention to their bearing upon social and political problems.

2. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Le Bon's first considerable work in the field of social psychology was the volume entitled, *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*.⁴ This work purports to be a summary of the main psychological generalizations reached in his earlier works upon social evolution and the history of the civilizations of Asia, Africa, and Europe.⁵ It consists mainly of what might be called psychological prolegomena to the study of history, though few historians or psychologists would agree to all of his generalizations. His main theme is the nature and importance of national character, or “the soul of a race,” in the explanation of history and modern social problems.⁶

This all-important “racial soul” is the sum total of the moral and intellectual characteristics that lie at the foundation

⁴ Paris, 1895, English translation, N. Y., 1898, reviewed by Professor Vincent, *Amer. Jour. Soc.*, January, 1899, pp. 554-6. Cf. also Bristol, *Social Adaptation*, pp. 133-138.

⁵ *The Psychology of Peoples*, p. 230.

⁶ Le Bon's notions of social evolution and of the contrasting characteristics of the French and Anglo-Saxon peoples are but a holdover of the doctrines of the “Romanticists,” given a modern dress through a dash of psychology.

of the civilization of a race and determine the course of its evolution. The soul of the race finds objective expression in the totality of the type of civilization which distinguishes the particular race. "The moral and intellectual characteristics, whose association forms the soul of a people, represent the synthesis of its entire past, the inheritance of all its ancestors, the motives of its conduct."⁷ In the formation of the racial soul the influence of the dead is preponderant. The racial soul is primarily unconscious; it underlies the rational phases of national thought and is, on that account, much more dominating in its influence. It is over this field of unconscious motives of conduct that the influence of the dead is particularly potent. "A people is guided far more by its dead than by its living members. It is by its dead, and by its dead alone, that a race is founded. Century after century our departed ancestors have fashioned our ideas and sentiments, and in consequence all the motives of our conduct."⁸ These psychological characteristics which go to make up the soul of a race are composed of a relatively few fundamental ideas which are very permanent in character and are changed only very slowly, except through the effect of racial inter-mixture. Only the more superficial and secondary characteristics of a race are modifiable with any degree of rapidity.⁹

Le Bon contends that these races may be classified psychologically as well as anatomically. There are primitive races, or "those in which no trace of culture is met with," made up of peoples like the Fuegians; inferior races composed mainly of negroes; average races represented by the Mongolians; and superior races mainly exemplified by the Indo-European peoples.¹⁰ The higher the race the more highly differentiated it is psychologically and the more superior minds it contains.¹¹ Though there may be a vast difference in the intelligence of

⁷ Op. cit., pp. 5-6, 63-64.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 11, 15-16, 51ff. Le Bon admits that it is practically impossible to find a pure race at the present time in the sense of anatomical purity, and states that what he refers to are "historical races"—a product of psychological rather than physical evolution. An historic race is produced when two or more not too dissimilar peoples are brought together in fairly equal numbers and subjected to the same environmental conditions for a very long period of time. The apparent confusion which might arise from identifying the soul of a race with national character he explains by taking the ground that nations are normally subdivisions of some well-defined historical race and thus partake of the general characteristics of the race of which they form a part.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 17ff, 154ff, 167ff.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 25ff. Cf. Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Chap. I.

¹¹ *Psychology of Peoples*, pp. 39ff, 232.

the different individuals that go to make up a superior race, nevertheless the race is practically uniform in those fundamental psychological factors which determine its character.¹² This explains why it is that national character and not intelligence is the dominant factor in social evolution—why the English can hold in subjection the millions of India who equal or surpass the English in pure intelligence.¹³ Even the most superior races cannot change the fundamental elements of their civilization with any facility. Cross-breeding of racial stocks is the only agency which will effect a rapid and fundamental change in national character. Social and physical environment have little strength as compared to heredity and inheritance.¹⁴ “The history of civilizations is thus composed of slow adaptations, of slight successive transformations. If these latter appear to us to be sudden and considerable, it is because, as in geology, we suppress the intermediate phases and only consider the extreme phases.”¹⁵ According to Le Bon’s view, therefore, history is nothing more than a product of racial character:

History in its main lines may be regarded as the mere statement of the results engendered by the psychological constitution of races. It is determined by this constitution, just as the respiratory organs of fish are determined by their aquatic life. In the absence of a preliminary knowledge of the mental constitution of a people, its history appears a chaos of events governed by hazard. On the contrary, when we are acquainted with the soul of a people, its life is seen to be the regular and inevitable consequence of its psychological characteristics. In all the manifestations of the life of a people, we always find the unchangeable soul of the race weaving itself its own destiny.

The idea that institutions can remedy the defects of societies, that national progress is the consequence of the improvement of institutions and governments, and that social changes can be effected by decrees—this idea, I say, is still generally accepted. . . . The most continuous experience has been unsuccessful in shaking this grave delusion. . . . A nation does not choose its institutions at will any more than it chooses the color of its hair or its eyes. . . . Centuries are required to form a political system and centuries needed to change it. Institutions have no intrinsic virtue: in themselves they are neither good nor bad. Those which are good at any given moment for a given people may be harmful in the extreme for another nation. . . . To lose time in the manufacture of cut-and-dried constitutions is, in consequence, a puerile task, the useless labor of an ignorant rhetorician. . . . The conclusion to be drawn from what precedes is, that it is not in institutions that the means is to be sought of

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34, 46-47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 53ff, 56ff, 81ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

profoundly influencing the genius of the masses. . . . Peoples are governed by their character, and all the institutions which are not intimately modelled on that character merely represent a borrowed garment, a transitory disguise.¹⁶

The soul of a race is very visibly and strikingly manifested in its political institutions. Applying this idea to French conditions he finds that all the French parties, whatever their name, pursue the identical end of attempting to absorb the individual in the state and destroy individual initiative. In England and the United States, however, a different type of racial soul leads all parties to favor individual initiative at the expense of state-activity. All this goes to prove that, in reality, forms of government and political institutions in general count for very little in comparison to the psychological characteristics of a race. The great historical importance of the psychological characteristics of a race is well illustrated by the conspicuous success and expansion of Anglo-Saxon colonization and political forms in America and the equally apparent failure of the Spanish in this respect.¹⁷

Because of the very fact that cross-breeding is the only method by which it is possible rapidly to change the character of a nation, immigration on a large scale, with the consequent interbreeding, has a very important effect upon the destiny of a nation. Roman civilization perished more as a result of the peaceful amalgamation with barbarians than as a consequence of the subsequent military invasions. The same threatening conditions are now to be detected in the wholesale immigration into America, but thanks to Anglo-Saxon superiority the Americans may, if they act in time, exterminate these present barbarians as Marius did the Cimbri. If action is long delayed America must sooner or later meet the fate of the Roman Empire and disintegrate into many small and warring nations.¹⁸

Aside from the violent changes in national character which may result from wholesale racial intermixture, there may come about a more gradual modification, as a result of the infiltration of new ideas.¹⁹ A new idea always arises in the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130; *The Crowd*, pp. 97-101. Cf. Ward, *Pure Sociology*, pp. 184-193; 544-575; *Applied Sociology*, pp. 13-17.

¹⁷ *The Psychology of Peoples*, pp. 130ff. "This terrible decadence of the Latin race, left to itself, compared with the prosperity of the English race in a neighboring country, is one of the most sombre, the saddest, and, at the same time, the most instructive experiences that can be cited in support of the psychological laws that I have enunciated." *Ibid.*, p. 152. Le Bon's views are seriously compromised by the fact that he overlooks the historical elements in the situation.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167ff.

mind of an individual who attracts a few enthusiastic disciples who aid him in zealously affirming its truth without analysis or discussion. But this soon leads to a wider and wider discussion of the merits of the idea by the public. If it gains ground it is spread by contagion and imitation throughout the society, and in time the group becomes as obsessed with the new idea as its originator was in the beginning. But, even with successful ideas, this is a very slow process. An idea never becomes a national obsession until, after years of discussion, it has filtered down into the unconscious strata of national character. When the idea has thus become a matter of dogma or sentiment it has reached its full degree of effectiveness.²⁰ On account of the sentimental and dogmatic nature of religious beliefs, which renders them especially amenable to fanatic support, ideas of this type have been the most powerful of all factors in the past history of mankind. To a large degree they have tended to shape the other types of beliefs and institutions.²¹ In spite of the absurdities of past religious beliefs they have played an immense part in social control and in giving solidarity to society. There can be no doubt that the present tendency towards social dissolution is partially a result of the decay of the religious beliefs that society has outgrown, but which have not been supplanted by a new body of religious thought.²²

Only by an application of social psychology can one comprehend the relation of leadership to social progress. While practically every real and substantial advance in culture is the result of the services of the *élite* in any society, they usually do little more than to synthesize the latent possibilities and tendencies of the age. Again, the truly *élite* never bring about any sudden or startling changes; they affect civilization only gradually. The great dramatic changes in history are the work of fanatics.²³ "At the bidding of a Peter the Hermit millions of men hurled themselves against the East; the words of an hallucinated enthusiast such as Mahomet created a force capable of triumphing over the Greco-Roman world; an obscure monk like Luther bathed Europe in blood. The voice of a Galileo or a Newton will never have the least echo among the masses. The inventors of genius hasten the march of civilization. The fanatics and the hallucinated create history."

²⁰ Ibid., p. 169ff.

²¹ Ibid., p. 190ff.

²² Ibid., pp. 197-198.

²³ Ibid., p. 199ff.

As nations are built up by the formation of a national character, so they perish with its dissolution. As an organism decays when it no longer functions, so a nation disintegrates when it has lost its character. Le Bon finds at present many symptoms of decay among the Latin races of Europe, among which socialism, or the cult of state-worship, is the most menacing.²⁴

Stated with their bold dogmatism and unobscured by being buried beneath a mass of erudition of another sort, these propositions of Le Bon sound rather novel and startling, but they are by no means new. His idea of national character as a vital reality, his belief in the superiority of certain races, and even his faith in the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon or Germanic peoples is at the bottom identical with the doctrine preached in the works of Burke and the "Romanticists," of Freeman, Kemble, Green, and Stubbs in England and of Ranke, Waitz, Sybel, Droysen, and Treitschke in Germany. Further, his doctrine of the predominant importance of the ideas and beliefs of a people in their historic development is but an exaggerated statement of the conception of history as a socio-psychic process, stated by Lamprecht in Germany and now championed in America by Professor Robinson, and which seems likely to be one of the most fruitful lines of historical investigation for years to come.²⁵ This work on the "psychology of peoples" illustrates the main characteristic of Le Bon's sociological writings—an overworking of a very few important and perhaps not sufficiently emphasized principles of undoubted validity and significance.

3. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE CROWD

Le Bon's second excursion into the field of social psychology was embodied in his most popular and well-known work, *La psychologie des foules*.²⁶ The ideas of this work, combined with the theories expressed in his *Psychology of Peoples*, constitute all the really important socio-psychological conceptions developed by Le Bon. His other and later works are but the reiteration of familiar doctrines and an application of them in greater detail to specific, historic, social, economic, or educational problems. Le Bon introduces the reader to his second work by a reiteration of the main thesis of the earlier

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 211ff, 219ff.

²⁵ Lamprecht, *What is History?* chaps. i-ii; Cf. Robinson, *The New History*, chaps. i, iii, iv, viii. See also the article on "Psychology and History" in the *American Journal of Psychology*, October, 1919.

²⁶ Paris, 1895, translated *The Crowd*; London, 1896, reviewed by A. F. Bentley, *Amer. Jour. Soc.*, January, 1897, pp. 612-614.

book, namely, that the really significant historic changes are to be seen in the modification of human thought. "The only important changes whence the renewal of civilization results, affect ideas, conceptions, and beliefs. The memorable events of history are the visible effects of the invisible changes of human thought."²⁷ Few intelligent historians would disagree with this statement, however much they might dissent from some of Le Bon's exaggerated applications of the doctrine. The present era is a critical period, inasmuch as it is characterized by far-reaching transformations of human thought. The social, religious, and political beliefs upon which our civilization has rested are giving way before the growth of modern science and industry. The coming age seems destined to be the era of crowds, as a result of the growth of cities, the extension of the suffrage, and the improvement in communication. "The divine right of the masses is about to replace the divine right of kings." This prospect does not promise well for the future, for crowds are mainly given to violent action and are little adapted to producing careful and accurate thought. Civilizations have always been created by a small intellectual aristocracy, while the rule of crowds has ever characterized periods of decline and disintegration. There is no longer any hope of being able to overcome the rule of the masses. The popular movement has gone beyond the point where it might have been arrested. The only practicable method of meeting the inevitable tendency is for statesmen to acquire a knowledge of crowd psychology and thus be able to reduce the evil as much as possible through a scientific manipulation of the situation. Le Bon modestly suggests that it is the purpose of his treatise to make this much needed information available for the first time.²⁸

In defining what he means by a crowd, Le Bon makes it clear that he does not regard a crowd as a mere group of individuals assembled in physical contiguity, but rather such an organized aggregation that a collective mind is formed and the conscious individuality of the assembled persons is practically lost. Not only may some aggregations fail to constitute a crowd, but on the other hand a whole nation may, with proper facilities for communication and a proper degree of psychic stimulation, assume all the essential characteristics of a crowd.²⁹

Le Bon proceeds to enumerate the main psychic traits which, in general, characterize crowds. A crowd possesses a col-

²⁷ *The Crowd*, 8th edition, London, 1913, pp. 13-14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27.

lective mind and a psychic unity which alters the normal emotion, thoughts, and conduct of the individual to a considerable degree. The crowd mind is not the average mind of its members, but is rather a complex of new traits which arise from the combination. The subconscious mind plays the predominant part in the psychic activity of crowds, and, as the subconscious is mainly charged with highly emotional qualities, with the archaic social inheritance of the race, and with the more common and instinctive content of the mind, these very qualities are brought to the front in the mental operations of crowds. In a crowd, therefore, the individual members are assimilated to a common mediocrity and the crowd is never capable of engaging in activities requiring a high degree of intellectual effort.³⁰ These new psychic traits which arise in the individual, as a result of his participation in a crowd, are brought about by several factors. In a crowd an individual feels a sense of invincible power quite absent in his normal isolated state. His susceptibility to suggestion is very greatly increased, and, as a result of this, the sentiments of a crowd are ultra-contagious. The net result of these factors is that in a crowd the individual behaves in a sort of half-conscious and hypnotic manner. "We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will." At the same time, however, the action of a crowd under certain conditions may not be of an inferior sort. Owing to its tendency to act swiftly in response to a vigorous suggestion it may perform an heroic act if the suggestion it receives is of the type to promote such activity.³¹ After thus analyzing the general psychic characteristics of crowds, Le Bon practically exhausts the list of qualifying adjectives in enumerating the special psychic traits of crowds. He finds that they are impulsive, mobile, irritable, suggestible, credulous, ingenuous, prone to exaggeration, intolerant, dictatorial, conservative, capable of entertaining contradictory ideas, of inferior reasoning powers, possessed of an abnormally sensitive imagination, religiously tenacious of a conviction, and likely to hold fundamental convictions with great firmness,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-32.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-38.

while exchanging superficial opinions with amazing alacrity.³²

Le Bon's chapter on "The Leaders of Crowds and Their Means of Persuasion" is of interest as bearing upon his later discussion of the methods of modern political leaders. He finds that the leaders of crowds are almost uniformly rhetoricians or agitators obsessed by an idea, rather than careful thinkers, and that they tend to be very despotic in their methods of control. The successful leader gets the crowd to accept his belief by constant, dogmatic and repeated affirmation of his conviction without any attempt at reasoned analysis. Once an idea is accepted by a crowd it spreads with great rapidity by contagion and imitation. Leaders of crowds maintain their control by their prestige, which is either acquired by wealth or position or is a gift of nature. Napoleon possessed the quality of natural prestige to such a degree that it was sufficient to make an emperor out of his obscure and mediocre nephew nearly half a century after his glory had passed.³³

Le Bon then proceeds to apply his theory of crowd leadership to an explanation of the method of persuasion of electoral crowds. In the first place, the candidate must possess sufficient prestige, as a result of ability, reputation, or wealth, so as to be able to force himself upon the electorate without any question or discussion of his lack of merit. Next, he should vigorously affirm, without attempting to prove, that his opponent is a scoundrel, having been guilty of several crimes. Then, he should flatter the electorate without any limit, making wide use of sonorous phrases condemning the wealthy and powerful and praising the virtues of the masses. While a candidate's written platform should be rather vague and moderate, he may make the most extravagant verbal promises, for the electorate always forgets them after the election. The voter forms no independent opinions, but has them forced upon him ready-made by the party leaders and orators. The guidance of the masses is a vital factor in modern civilization, for there is no longer any hope of destroying the doctrine of the sovereignty of the masses which has now become well-nigh a religious dogma. Even if it were possible to restrict the suffrage to the intellectual aristocracy there would be no reason to expect any decided improvement, since, by the laws of the psychology of peoples and crowds, assembled individuals tend to be ruled by their emotions and not by their intellectual faculties, and the emotional traits of the most erudite

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 38-88, 160-174.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-159.

do not differ materially from those of the average individual. "In a crowd men always tend to the same level, and, on general questions, a vote recorded by forty academicians is no better than that of forty water-carriers."³⁴

Parliamentary assemblies are another example of modern political phenomena which can only be explained by an application of the laws of social psychology. The whole system rests on the erroneous assumption that a large number of individuals are more likely to arrive at an accurate solution of a public problem than a small group. Parliamentary assemblies normally manifest most of the characteristics of a crowd. "The general characteristics of crowds are to be met with in parliamentary assemblies: intellectual simplicity, irritability, suggestibility, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and the preponderating influence of a few leaders." Perhaps the most significant special characteristic in their procedure is their almost invariable tendency to attempt to solve the complicated problems of public policy by a few simple formulas and by direct legislation. On questions of local or personal interest legislators have fixed and unalterable opinions. On general questions of policy and procedure, however, they are open to the suggestion of leaders, and if these leaders happen to be of about equal power but represent different opinions, the legislature will be conspicuous for its indecision and inconsistency, as it will vary in its response to the powerful sources of suggestion. The leaders enjoy their power as a result of their prestige or ability to arouse enthusiasm, and not on account of the logic or profundity of their arguments. Most great parliamentary leaders have been vigorous men possessed of the gift of florid oratory, but with relatively little breadth of mind or intellectual capacity.³⁵ While the action of a parliamentary assembly is normally on a little higher plane than that of the ordinary crowd, in times of excitement it degenerates into a mob, as in the case of the assemblies of the French Revolution. The sole salvation of parliamentary government lies in the fact that the laws are usually drafted by specialists and experts, and legislators merely vote for laws rather than frame them.³⁶ In spite of these shortcomings Le Bon concludes that, after all, parliamentary government is the best which has yet been devised. Its chief evils, in addition to the presence of the crowd psychological situation, are two—financial waste, resulting from the fear legislators have

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-212.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-226.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-231.

of opposing financial bills lest they lose their influence and their local appropriations, and the restriction of individual liberty, due to the worship of state-activity and the faith in the efficacy of the state to solve all social and economic problems. Le Bon finds that an excessive trust in the state is a symptom of national decline and thus ends this work in the same vein as the conclusion of the *Psychology of Peoples*, namely, that the Latin peoples who put their trust in the state are beginning their period of final decay.³⁷

There is little that needs to be added in the way of comment on Le Bon's doctrines regarding the psychic traits of crowds. His general observations are in the main correct, but are highly colored and overworked. His treatment is doubtless inadequate, as he is guilty of the same faults that he finds in legislators, namely, of trying to solve a complex problem by a few simple phrases and formulas. As Professor C. H. Cooley very well says on this point:

The psychology of crowds has been treated at length by Sighele, Le Bon, and other authors who, having made a specialty of the man in the throng, are perhaps somewhat inclined to exaggerate the degree in which he departs from ordinary personality. The crowd mind is not, as is sometimes said, a quite different thing from that of the individual (unless by the individual is meant the higher self), but is merely a collective mind of a low order which stimulates and unifies the cruder impulses of its members.³⁸

4. SOCIALISM IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

Le Bon applies the fundamental doctrines of the *Psychology of Peoples* and the *Crowd* to an interpretation of socialism in the third of his volumes on the psychology of modern social tendencies.³⁹ From the standpoint of social psychology there is very little indeed in this work which had not been suggested in the earlier volumes. The text opens in a strain strikingly similar to the doctrines expressed at the outset in *The Crowd*. A nation is controlled by a few fundamental ideas, the changes in which alone can effect any serious alteration in a civilization. Institutions are the effect and not the cause of the psychic traits of a nation. We are now in the midst of a

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 231-239. He strangely ignores the development of Socialism in Germany. The development of state-socialism in England since 1905 has been subsequent to the publication of Le Bon's work on crowd psychology.

³⁸ *Social Organization*, pp. 149-150. Le Bon's whole treatment of social psychology should be tempered by a reading of pages 61-205 of this work.

³⁹ *La psychologie du socialisme*, Paris, 1898; translated *The Psychology of Socialism*, N. Y., 1899, and reviewed at great length and with a large amount of psychological acumen by George H. Mead, *Amer. Jour. Soc.*, November, 1899, pp. 404-412.

critical period in history in which these basic ideas are in the process of modification.⁴⁰ Le Bon states that no one has yet analyzed socialism from the psychological standpoint and he volunteers to supply the lacking treatment. He finds plenty of causes for the recent growth of socialism: "The demoralization of the upper strata of society, the unequal and often very inequitable partition of wealth, the increasing irritation of the masses, requirements always greater than enjoyments, the waning of old hierarchies and old faiths—there are in all these circumstances plenty of reasons for discontent which go to justify the rapid extension of Socialism."⁴¹

Socialism, properly to be comprehended, must be viewed under four different headings; it is a political doctrine, an economic theory, a philosophic conception, and a belief. Its greatest strength, however, lies in its power as a belief.⁴² Its importance as a belief arises from the fact that it appeals to the emotions rather than to reason, being in fact a new variety of religious appeal. It is a somewhat inferior type of religious ideal, however, for it does not appeal to the higher attributes of man's nature. Its power in this field grows out of the fact that it came at an opportune moment when the old religious beliefs were in a state of disintegration and before the new faith of the future had been developed.⁴³ But, aside from its primary appeal to the material elements of man's nature, socialism has a more fundamental weakness as a religious belief, in that it can give no promise of a future life and must make good its promises here on earth. This, however, it can never do, since its ideal is in fundamental conflict with those basic laws of psychology, economics, and political science which are beyond the control of man. Therefore, owing to the fact that it cannot realize its ideal, socialism will inevitably be discredited and begin to decline from the moment it has come into power in any country. The only good that socialism can effect as a religious belief is to act as a dissolving force which will clear away the wreck of the old religious beliefs and make way for the newer and sounder faiths that must characterize the future of humanity.⁴⁴ Reduced to their most fundamental terms all the varieties of socialism may be regarded as the cult of state-worship maintained by supporters of the obsession that civilizations are made and altered by institutions and governments. They all

⁴⁰ *The Psychology of Socialism*, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii, 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴³ *Ibid.* Introduction, pp. ix-xii, and pp. 85-103.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

advocate the doctrine of "collectivism"—collective ownership of wealth and collective control of industry, a complete absorption of all social activities by the state and the consequent suppression of all individual initiative and liberty, leading to the complete dictatorship of the state. In reality, the whole movement is in large part a futile protest against the inequalities of ability which have always existed and inevitably will continue to exist as long as humanity remains.⁴⁵

All this Le Bon holds to be but the logical expression of the fundamental psychological traits of the Latin peoples, who, whatever their form of government, invariably favor the exaggerated rôle of the state and the suppression of individual liberty. They have not recovered from their old delusion that society can be revolutionized by decrees and constitutions.⁴⁶ The Latin mind has been prepared for this view for centuries and its present institutions are admirably designed to perpetuate it. This general attitude is favored by the Latin system of state education, with its mechanical drill in dead languages, its uniformity, and its lack of adaptability to individual variations and initiative; by its political institutions and doctrines which always laud the cult of state activity; and, finally, by its religion based on coercive and inflexible dogmas.⁴⁷ A proof of the assertion that socialism is essentially an expression of the Latin racial character is to be derived from the experience of the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic peoples in regard to socialism. In none of these countries has socialism assumed the revolutionary and doctrinaire form that it has maintained in the Latin countries. In Germany extreme socialism has gained a very slight foothold. It has there tended to become an opportunist movement under the form of social democracy or parliamentary socialism, in spite of the relatively ideal institutional adaptability of Germany to the socialistic regime.⁴⁸ In England and America socialism has not flourished among the native population because it is opposed to the national character, which favors individual liberty and private enterprise. In America, however, there is developing a great army of socialists composed of recruits "from the ever increasing flood of immigrants of foreign blood, without resources, without energy, and without adaptability to the conditions of existence in their new country." The only solution Le Bon can see for this difficult problem in

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-36, and Book III, particularly pp. 140-148.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-166.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-110. In this generalization of Le Bon there are serious historical errors in matters of detail.

America is for the native Americans to arise and exterminate this undesirable multitude.⁴⁹

Taken apart from all specific aspects socialism may be regarded in its most fundamental and general sense as the attempt on the part of the unadapted in modern civilization—"the unutilizable superfluity"—to make a place for themselves, and, if successful, to seize for themselves all the fruits of our modern civilized life to which they have not contributed a whit. The most dangerous aspect of the situation is the fact that we not only have at present a vast number of these unadapted individuals, but that our society is so constituted that it is increasing this number at an alarming rate. It will be the main social problem of the future, to which task socialism is obviously unequal, to care for these unadapted.⁵⁰

Le Bon thus arrives at the conclusion that the advent of the socialistic régime would not bring the millenium in its wake, but its result "will be hell, a terrible hell!"⁵¹ Nevertheless, socialism must be tried out in some country in order to convince the modern world of its absurdities. At the same time, it is the duty of every patriotic citizen to prevent the experiment from taking place in his own country. The *élite* in modern society must oppose the leaders of the socialistic movement by making use of the fundamental principles of crowd leadership—affirmation, repetition, contagion, and prestige. The task would not be difficult if there were sufficient desire and will power manifested by able citizens. Especially urgent is the necessity for the reform of the Latin system of education. If the *élite* do not rally to their duty the present inhabitants of the Latin countries may make proper preparations "to give place to more vigorous peoples, and disappear from the face of the earth."⁵²

Le Bon's treatment of socialism, like his analysis of national and crowd psychology, suffers from an oversimplification of the factors involved from serious indifference to historical facts, and from an exaggeration of many of the undoubted defects which exist in the socialistic program. Many of his criticisms of the psychology of the movement rest upon a substantial amount of truth, but his account of the historic factors involved in the origin of socialism is lamentably weak,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-125. Perhaps Le Bon will regard the present attempt to deport members of the Communist Party in America as a diluted substitute for his solution of the problem of socialism in this country.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 358-383.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 411-414.

and the economic, political, and philosophic analysis suffers from the excessive emphasis upon the psychological factors and from his extremely evident bias against state-activity and proletarian democracy. Le Bon's defense of individualism and his attack upon state-socialism in all of his works constitute the most frantic and dogmatic psychological defense of *laissez-faire* which has yet appeared.

5. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLITICS AND OF FRENCH POLITICAL TENDENCIES

After abandoning the field of social psychology for a decade, during which time he devoted himself to a study of physics and produced his volume on *The Evolution of Matter*, Le Bon resumed his earlier studies in his *La Psychologie politique et la défense sociale*.⁵³ This is essentially a study of the general tendencies of modern French political life, and hence has a limited bearing upon the general problems of political psychology. Indeed, it is unreliable even as a study of French conditions unless the reader is aware of Le Bon's decided "anti-patriotic" and "class" bias, which was clearly in evidence in his earlier works. Again, it should be borne in mind that Le Bon is constantly on the alert for instances which will confirm his preliminary assumptions and does not confine himself to a purely objective study of actual tendencies and conditions. There is a distressingly small amount of new theoretical material in this volume, and Le Bon excuses his repetition of his earlier dogmas on the ground that repetition is the most powerful agent to produce conviction as to the truth of an argument.⁵⁴ Le Bon justifies the need of such a work as he had written by stating that while a knowledge of political psychology is absolutely essential to a successful statesman, the present available information on this subject exists in nothing but a few over-simplified formulae which are derived from experience and tradition.⁵⁵ He asserts that Machiavelli's *Prince* is the only real treatise on political psychology that has yet appeared, and, as this is somewhat out of date, he generously applies himself the task of supplying this serious gap in human knowledge.⁵⁶

⁵³ Paris, 1910, reviewed by Prof. Vincent, in the *Amer. Jour. Soc.*, Sept., 1910, pp. 267-269.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., pp. 11-12.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁶ This naive oversight or omission, ignoring as it does the previous and much more valuable works of such writers as Bagehot, Tarde, Durkheim, Ratzenhofer, Simmel, Ross and Giddings in the field of political psychology, is not a high testimonial to the knowledge of the literature of the subject possessed by either Le Bon or his adviser, Ribot.

The work opens with a reiteration of the familiar dogmas that civilization is the product of national character and not of institutions; that it is futile to attempt to remodel society by transforming institutions; that government has great powers for destruction but very feeble ability in constructive work; that the place of reason in the psychic traits of society is very small; and, finally, that in France there is in reality only one political party, the sole aim of which is to increase the scope of state activity. Aside from these premises that are basic in all his works, Le Bon expands another conception which was suggested in his *Psychology of Socialism*, to the effect that the former rule of kings and laws is now being replaced by the domination of economic forces.⁵⁷ This doctrine is important in his theorizing, for he finds that most of the dangerous tendencies in modern political life, both despotic and anarchical, are the result of economic causes operating upon or through national character.

In discussing the subject of the psychology of laws and the effect of ill-advised legislation, Le Bon points out the fact that all real and valuable laws are nothing but the codification of customs previously recognized in judicial action. The rôle of law-making should, then, be confined to the codification of persistent and well-established customs.⁵⁸ The legislator who attempts to change the fundamental trends in social evolution does not differ fundamentally from Xerxes who whipped the sea as a punishment for the loss of his ships. These ill-advised laws, passed under the obsession that state-activity can remedy all social evils and maladjustments, not only fail to accomplish the intended results, but also create new evils which are often more menacing than those which the laws sought to correct.⁵⁹

In their fundamental reality, political activities have never been anything except a struggle between phantoms. History looked at from a broad viewpoint appears as a continuous effort on the part of the people to create and destroy phantoms. These phantoms are of three main classes. The most powerful type is to be seen in the great religious, philosophical, and political beliefs of history; the intermediate type is represented by the myths which grow up about alleged heroes like Ulysses, Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, Barbarossa, and Napoleon; and the lowest variety is manifested by the petty

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁸ "La coutume résulte des nécessités sociales, industrielles, économiques de chaque jour. La jurisprudence les fixe. La loi les sanctionne." Ibid., p. 45.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 50ff.

and transient phantoms that guide the ordinary beliefs and daily activities of the masses.⁶⁰ These phantoms gain power in proportion to the fear they create. The growing power of the working-classes has made them feared by the government, and, as a result, the government of France for twenty years has been solely in the interest of this class. Among the Latin peoples one of the most important transformations of phantoms in recent years has been that of the substitution of the phantom of the divine right of the state for the older phantom of the divine right of kings. This has made the present what may be called the era of functionaries.⁶¹

Le Bon applies his psychological analysis to what he regards as some of the more obvious present-day political "phantoms." He believes that the modern agitation for the cessation of war is a threatening sign. Wars are apparently not on the decrease and civilization seems powerless to remove their causes. Therefore, they may be regarded as necessities imposed by nature to secure national vigor and discipline.⁶² The important services of wars are overlooked by the "sentimental pacifists," since, in reality, wars are the main forces which create and give stability to national character, and they are the most powerful of stimulants in developing the moral life and industrial activities of a nation. The detrimental effects of an enforced peace are to be seen in the cultural stagnation and the famines in India during the period of artificial peace imposed by the British régime. Thus the ill-advised humanitarianism of pacifists is really a menace to the public welfare. In the place of political wars, there is an equally deadly, though bloodless contest going on in the economic strife between nations.⁶³

Again, the French system of education with its mechanical uniformity in the technique of instruction, its antiquated subject-matter, and the tyrannical state control of university instruction is contributing to the intellectual decay of France, when in reality it should be the fountain head of its intellectual life. While it is true, as Leibnitz maintained, that a proper system of education is able to transform a people in a century, it is equally true that a poorly designed and deadening system

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁶¹ "L'Etatisme a pour expression et soutien le fonctionnarisme." Ibid., pp. 69ff.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 84ff.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 91-102. This section of Le Bon's work should be compared with Nicolai's *Biology of War*; see also his own revised post-war views, section 9 below.

can bring about national degeneration in an equal period.⁶⁴

Le Bon next proceeds to investigate the question as to whether there is any scientific basis for the modern extension of political power among the masses. He decides, in agreement with Faguet, that this tendency is in direct opposition to the dictates of all intelligence and experience. Modern scientific and political development has tended to accentuate the differences in mentality between the *élite* and the masses. The refined methods of modern science and the exacting requirements of the conduct of modern large-scale industry call for the highest type of minds. On the other hand, the introduction of machinery into industry and the great extension of the principle of the division of labor have tended to reduce very greatly the necessity of high mentality on the part of the laborer. Yet, in spite of this, the tendency in political theory and practice of late has been towards giving greater political authority to the masses whose mental powers are continually on the decline.⁶⁵ Fortunately, however, the masses themselves have little initiative and their action depends upon the nature of the leadership which they receive. It is evident, thus, that to save society the *élite* must assume control of the leadership of the populace and check the evil influences of demagogues and revolutionists.⁶⁶ Prestige, affirmation, repetition, and contagion are the fundamental principles to be employed in the art of persuading the multitude, and the *élite* must make use of them if they hope to wrest the control of the masses from the dangerous leaders who now direct them.⁶⁷

Parliamentary government has even become unpopular in France. This has come about as a result of the indiscretion of the different parties in trying to outbid each other in promises to the masses in the hope of being successful in elections. Naturally they have been unable to fulfill these exaggerated promises, even by the most arbitrary and debasing use of the law-making power. As a result, they have stirred up bitter

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 103-117. Cf. Le Bon, *La Psychologie de l'éducation*, Paris, 1904. This view seems to contradict his theory of the stability of national character.

⁶⁵ "Tandis que les progrès scientifiques amenaient les élites de mentalité supérieure à diriger le mécanisme de la vie moderne, les progrès des idées politiques conféraient de plus en plus à des foules de mentalité inférieure le droit de gouverner et de se lever par l'intermédiaire de leurs représentants aux plus dangereuses fantaisies." *La Psychologie politique*, pp. 118ff.

⁶⁶ "C'est donc aux élites à s'adapter au gouvernement populaire et à endiguer et canaliser les fantaisies du nombre, comme l'ingénieur endigue et canalise la force d'un torrent." Ibid., p. 122.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 136. Pages 118-141 are mainly a summary of his previous doctrines regarding the psychology and leadership of crowds.

animosity against the very system of government they represent.⁶⁸

The mind of the working-class is essentially identical with the conventional mind of the crowd, but to these general characteristics are added the possession of certain special dogmas which are the result of their peculiar history, position and interests. The most prominent of these accessory beliefs in the mind of the workingman is the notion that wealth is created by labor and appropriated by the rich, and the consequent deduction that justice requires that the present class constitution and economic organization of society shall be overthrown and the laboring classes installed in their rightful position.⁶⁹ A new and particularly menacing development in the aspiration of the masses is to be found in the pretensions of syndicalism, which proposes to substitute for loyalty to and action by the state, loyalty to a particular industrial profession, and autonomy and self-government for this profession. They desire to substitute *l'égoïsme corporatif* for *l'intérêt générale du pays*.⁷⁰

Socialism and syndicalism are the two most dangerous tendencies in modern political life which have developed out of proletarian activity, and the French government, pressed by the pretensions and demands of these two movements, has tended steadily towards a popular despotism.⁷¹ Le Bon examines, criticizes and contrasts what he calls the "illusions" of socialism and syndicalism. His treatment of socialism is essentially a brief repetition of the doctrines advanced in his *Psychology of Socialism* and need not be repeated here. Syndicalism is one manifestation of the general modern tendency towards the association of similar interests. While essentially a revival of the ideas of the medieval guild, it has received its vital impulse from the new conditions in industry that have grown out of the Industrial Revolution.⁷² Though both socialism and syndicalism are a menace to civilization they are fundamentally opposed in principle. The former would augment the rôle of the state until its activities become all-embracing, while the latter would divide society into many au-

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 163-175. Le Bon seems serenely unconscious of the direct contradiction between this view and the statement in *The Crowd* that a political leader could safely make the most extravagant promises and successfully rely upon the electorate to forget them after the election.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 142-153.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 153-162. Durkheim is much more sympathetic with certain phrases of syndicalist doctrine.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 176-186.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 202ff.

onomous professional groups and dispense with the state, thus tending more towards anarchy than towards political absolutism. This fundamental divergence between the two movements, and the struggle which will be inevitable, may have the beneficial effect of preventing an extreme development of either tendency, but there will be the accompanying danger that society will be crushed between the opposing forces.⁷³

Le Bon next turns to a long discussion of the psychological blunders involved in the French colonial system and procedure,⁷⁴ and then analyzes the various forces in French society leading to social anarchy, enumerating the main symptoms which are indicative of such a tendency. He finds that there is a general trend towards social anarchy and an accompanying anarchic mentality; that there is an increase of crime and a spread of criminal tendencies; that the habit of assassinating rulers and statesmen is becoming common; that the persecution of religious orders is popular; that there is a dangerous enmity and struggle between the different classes in society; and finally that there is a threatening fatalistic attitude, even among the most learned, which inclines them to regard human powers as unable to conquer the tendencies in external events.⁷⁵

Le Bon devotes the last section of his work to a discussion of the chief steps which should be taken by society to save itself from the disintegration which threatens it as a result of the many anarchical and revolutionary tendencies that he has noted, in other words to an analysis of the "défense sociale." When a national mind disintegrates the people tend to revert in mental traits to the state of intellectual barbarism from which they were raised by the formation of a national character. This return to barbarism is being witnessed in France today. Society remains apathetic in spite of the assaults upon its integrity. As a matter of fact, however, the leaders in the defense of society need more enthusiasm than the leaders of the masses who are assaulting the foundations of society, for it is harder to convince people of truth than to get them to accept error.⁷⁶ But civilization cannot be maintained without

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 202-225.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 226-284.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 285-357. Le Bon evidently overlooks the fact that his own doctrine that events are the inevitable expression of national character which cannot be changed by legislation is of a decidedly fatalistic cast. He also seems unconscious of the fact that there is a contradiction between this position and his frequent assertion that there is a most powerful tendency in the direction of extensive state-activity.

⁷⁶ "L'erreur passionnée, les froides vérités n'enthousiasment pas." Ibid., pp. 360-362.

effort. The apathy of the French *bourgeoisie*, who must bear the brunt of the social defense, is an appalling contrast with the ardor of the revolutionary element. Besides renewing its vigor and enthusiasm the *bourgeoisie* must give up the ostentatious and insolent luxury which is the most potent force in stirring up the animosity of the working classes. The only real evidence of a rallying of the *bourgeoisie* to the defense of society is to be seen among its more humble members, such as the small shopkeepers who have banded together to carry on a collective and cooperative struggle.⁷⁷ To be effective the social defense must not only have able and enthusiastic leaders, but also some fundamental doctrines to guide them. The corner-stone of this program should be the ideal of national defense.⁷⁸ To this must be added the consideration "qu'un peuple ne peut vivre sans armée, sans hiérarchie, sans respect de l'autorité, sans discipline mentale." These ideals would suffice, but they must be supported by the *élite* who at present manifest an alarming degree of apathy, cynicism, and fatalism.⁷⁹

Le Bon's somewhat questionable premises and his "anti-patriotic" and "class" bias, which tend to make his conclusions rather suspicious, have already been referred to, and the detailed refutation of his specific charges against French society could be accomplished only by a detailed exposition of actual conditions. It would seem that his picture is scarcely accurate in general outline, and is even more highly distorted in matters of detail.⁸⁰

6. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF OPINIONS AND BELIEFS

Le Bon's next venture in his system of social psychology is entitled, *Les Opinions et les croyances, genèse, évolution*.⁸¹ From every logical standpoint this work should have been the starting point of his system, for it consists of an elaborate psychological defense of the main theses which have been the guiding principles in all his works. It seems that Le Bon has pursued the rather vicious circle of starting with some

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 363-366.

⁷⁸ "L'amour de la patrie forme le véritable ciment social capable de maintenir la puissance d'un peuple." Ibid., p. 370.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 371-372.

⁸⁰ Several short works tending to modify Le Bon's view of French society are Brownell's *French Traits*; Wendell's *France of Today*; Guérard's *French Civilization in the Nineteenth Century*; Dimnet's *France Herself Again*; and Bracq's *France under the Third Republic*.

⁸¹ Paris, 1911.

preconceived notions of social psychology,⁸² using these to develop a system of social psychology, and then ending by employing the works built upon these ideas to substantiate the psychological analysis. The main thesis of this work is his familiar doctrine that opinions and beliefs have an affective and mystic, rather than a rational, origin and foundation. After dealing with the psychology of opinions and beliefs in the mind of the individual, he turns in books six to eight to a consideration of the nature and effect of their emergence in society at large.

Under the caption of "collective opinions and beliefs" are passed in review his stock doctrines regarding the influence of racial character in the formation of opinions and beliefs; the importance of social environment, tradition, and custom in building opinions and beliefs; the peculiarities of opinions and beliefs as held by crowds; and the relation of the mind of the individual to the mind of the group, especially in crowds.⁸³

In the division of his work devoted to a consideration of the "propagation of beliefs and desires" he deals with the spreading of opinions and beliefs by affirmation, repetition, example, and prestige; the influence of mental contagion in spreading opinions and beliefs; the significance of fashion in this process; the importance of literature and the press in the propagation of opinions and beliefs; and the effect of currents of opinions and their explosion, as in the emotional outbursts at the time of Peter the Hermit, Joan of Arc, Mohammed, Luther, and Napoleon.⁸⁴

Finally, in discussing the subject of the "life of beliefs," Le Bon considers the intolerance and dogmatism of beliefs; the impotence of reason in the formation of beliefs; the maintenance of permanent beliefs by means of mental contagion and repeated suggestion; and the slow modification of beliefs, except by the contact of different cultures. He ends by maintaining that beliefs never die, but simply change their name according to the same principle as that of the transformation of energy and matter in physics.⁸⁵

7. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF REVOLUTIONS

Le Bon's reflections on the psychology of revolutions, which are more or less present in all his works, are brought together and expanded in the volume entitled *La Révolution française*

⁸² Drawn, as he says, from his previous studies, and said by Sighele and Tarde to have been mainly appropriated from their works.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 168-193.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 194-232.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 233-268.

et la psychologie des révolutions.⁸⁶ He introduces this work with a brief discussion of what he calls "the psychological revision of history." His thesis is that the seeming difficulties of historical interpretation vanish as soon as one recognizes that the irrational and often involuntary beliefs, and not the rational and intellectual factors, have been the dominating influences throughout history. "The solution of the historical difficulties which had so long been sought was thenceforth obvious. I arrived at the conclusion that besides the rational logic which conditions thought, and was formerly regarded as our sole guide, there exist very different forms of logic: affective logic, collective logic, and mystic logic, which usually overrule the reason and engender the generative impulses of our conduct."⁸⁷

In discussing the psychology of revolutions Le Bon first proceeds to classify and characterize them. A revolution is any sudden or apparently sudden transformation of beliefs, ideas, and doctrines. The real and enduring revolutions are those that transform the character of a people, but such transformations are normally so slow a process that the word evolution is more descriptive of them than the term revolution. The most important of all revolutions are the scientific. They alone are accomplished by rational factors and they are the only type which really advances civilization. Nevertheless, their gradual and undramatic character has caused their significance to be overlooked by the conventional type of historian. Political and religious revolutions, which, from their dramatic nature, attract the attention of historians, are not derived from rational influences, but from affective and mystic forces. This gives them their dynamic power, but also renders them likely to be violent, absurd, and futile. Religious revolutions are even more violent than political revolutions. In this type the participants cannot be disillusioned by the results, because the truth or falsity of their principles can only be demonstrated in another world. Religious revolutions also have the most important results of the two, for, while they do little or nothing to advance the intellectual factors of a civilization, they are the most influential medium in transforming the sentiments of a people. Religion, particularly when intensified during a revolution, gives a people a moral unity and cohesion which could be obtained in no other manner.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Paris, 1912. English translation by Bernard Miall, N. Y., 1913.

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-48.

Le Bon next analyzes the part that governments and the people play in revolutions. Governments are usually very feeble in opposing a revolution, giving way immediately and with little resistance. A wise and efficient government, however, may check a revolution by following a proper policy. The menacing Russian revolution after the Russo-Japanese War was thwarted by the action of the government in temporarily conciliating the discontented masses and then exterminating or exiling the fanatical leaders. Governments may at times attempt to produce a revolution by their own action, but they are rarely successful unless the national character is not yet sufficiently developed to render an effective resistance to the change of institutions, as was the case with the revolutionary reforms in Russia under Peter the Great. Yet, however profound may be the apparent change in the system of government, such a revolution rarely has a serious effect upon the mental characteristics of a nation. "To create a revolution is easy, but to change the soul of a people is difficult indeed."⁸⁹

The mental characteristics of a people play a prominent part in determining the nature of its revolutions. The more stable the mind and institutions of a nation in normal times the more violent are its revolutions, for such people are not adapted to making gradual non-revolutionary changes. A nation with a flexible, adaptable mind may not escape revolutions, but those which it experiences are usually slight and but the final stage in a long period of gradual changes. France is a good example of the former type of nation, England of the latter. Contrary to the belief of many historians, the people, strictly considered, never conceive or direct a revolution. They simply obey the dictates of leaders, though they give the aspect of violence to the movement. To be strictly accurate, the people must be differentiated when one attempts to describe the part played by masses in revolutions. The great body of peasants, tradesmen, and honest artisans, who form the solid and substantial element in the masses, take little part in the violence of revolutions. Those who are guilty of violence, under the guidance of obsessed leaders, are the "degenerates of alcoholism, and poverty, thieves, beggars, destitute 'casuals,' indifferent workers without employment—these constitute the dangerous bulk of the armies of insurrection."⁹⁰

Le Bon finds that there are several special varieties of mentality prevalent during revolutions. Each individual may have

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 49-59.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 60-74.

different traits of character made more prominent at various times owing to changes in the stimulation from the social environment. In revolutions the sentiments of hatred, fear, ambition, envy, variety and enthusiasm, which are normally more or less suppressed, are given full vent. One of the most prominent types of mentality developed by revolution is what Le Bon calls the "mystic mentality." This is characterized by the attribution of a mysterious power to superior beings or forces, which are incarnated in the form of "idols, fetiches, words, or formulae." It is at the bottom of all religious and most political beliefs and is especially important during revolutionary periods. Another influential type of mentality which is conspicuous in revolutions is the "Jacobin mentality." This is based upon the mystic mentality to which are added feeble reasoning powers and strong passions. The typical "revolutionary mentality" adds to the mystic and Jacobin traits chronic restlessness and discontent—the spirit of perpetual rebellion. Finally, there is the "criminal mentality" which characterizes the degenerate anti-social class which is normally restrained by the hand of the law. This type constitutes the majority of the savage and violent element in revolutionary mobs. When one considers that revolutions are conducted under the combined direction and impulse of mystic, Jacobin, revolutionary, and criminal mentalities he can be little surprised at their violent nature, their absurd direction, or their ephemeral results.⁹¹

Le Bon concludes his introductory and general treatment by a repetition of his overworked views regarding the psychology of peoples, crowds, assemblies, and leadership.⁹² In the second part of his treatise he applies these already venerable conceptions to an interpretation of the French Revolution. While this analysis is at times most brilliant and suggestive, his method of procedure is open to the most severe criticism. He apparently reached certain general conclusions regarding revolutions from a study of the French Revolution, and then applied these views to an interpretation of this very period. Of course, this gives a high degree of apparent plausibility and concrete substantiation to his theories, but quite fails to impress the critical reader. He concludes that the general result of the French Revolution, in France, at least, was to substitute the tyranny of the state for the oppression of the individual monarch.⁹³

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-101.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 102-120.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 286. For his general summary of the psychology of the French Revolution, see pp. 326-330.

In the concluding portion of his treatise Le Bon discusses the after-effects of the French Revolution, particularly in regard to the development of democratic ideas. The Revolution produced a crop of idealizers and theorizers who have planned the complete democratization of society. The ideal of "equality," rather than the shibboleth of "liberty" and "fraternity," has received the greatest emphasis, and is at present the pivotal doctrine of socialism. Le Bon finds that there are two distinct varieties of democracy. One is that of an intellectual aristocracy under democratic forms; the other is the popular notion of democracy based upon the ideal of equality or, perhaps better, upon the hatred of superiority. This latter variety is in direct opposition to nature's principle of inequality, and has rarely received the support of great minds. Though the popular ideal of democracy is an illusion, it has great vogue because it is a belief. The Jacobin mentality has become general in Latin countries, as evidenced by the growth of anarchy, syndicalism, the hatred of superiority and restraint, and the incessant craving for the extension of state-activity. The distinctly new element in the modern situation is the struggle between capital and labor, which is an outgrowth of the Industrial Revolution. The vicissitudes, uncertainties, conflicts, and extension of duties in modern political life have compelled most states to develop an elaborate administrative system which constitutes the real government and threatens society with the tyranny of a caste of functionaries.⁹⁴

8. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE WORLD WAR

It could scarcely be expected that so important and interesting an event as the World War would fail to elicit from Le Bon a psychological explanation, and before the conflict was half over he brought forth his *Enseignements psychologiques de la guerre européenne*,⁹⁵ in which he set forth with great assurance a psychological interpretation of the causes and progress of the world conflict, based on his stock theories of social psychology. The only notable new element in this work is that the extreme laudation of Teutonic racial characteristics, which was so prominent in Le Bon's earlier works, has been replaced by a thorough-going acceptance of the view of the unique perversity of the Teuton, while his anti-patriotic bias against the French has disappeared in favor of a worship of

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 289-325.

⁹⁵ Paris, 1916, translated by E. Andrews as *The Psychology of the Great War*, N. Y., 1916.

French traits, as revealed by the war, which almost equals the adulation of Maurice Barrès. His main theoretical contention is that the war was primarily produced by psychological forces and that its genesis and course can be understood only by means of a psychological analysis. He stresses the importance of the affective, collective and mystic forces "forged in the dim realm of the unconscious," and holds that they have almost totally submerged the intellectual and rational factors and elements during the progress of the war. The conflict between psychic forces and tendencies in the world war is so deep-seated and comprehensive that it may produce a new psychological era in human development.

Le Bon views the war as a fundamental struggle between psychic forces, particularly those operating on an emotional and a sub-conscious level:

The present war is a contest between psychological forces. Irreconcilable ideals are grappling with one another. Individual liberty is drawn up against collective servitude, personal liberty against the tyranny of State Socialism, old habits of international integrity and respect for treaties against the supremacy of the cannon. . . . The present contest has more than one analogy with the religious wars of olden times. It is begotten of the same illusions and shows traces of the same incoherent frenzy and brutality. It is ruled exclusively by irrationality, for if reason had been able to dominate the aspirations of kings and nations, there would have been no war today. . . . Never in the course of the ages has there, perhaps, been a better opportunity of seeing how men's conduct is sometimes dominated by unconscious influences whose pressure is so great that no will can withstand them.⁹⁶

It is interesting and amusing to note that in this work the German people are represented as the exponents of state socialism and collectivism, while the French are pointed out as the champions of individual liberty and personal initiative—a complete reversal of the rôles assigned to these two nations in Le Bon's earlier works.

Le Bon's present anti-German bias appears most clearly in his analysis of the causes of the war, in which he places the burden primarily upon the Germans, whom he believes to be intoxicated with the delusion as to their superiority and their mission to rule the world:

The victory of the Teutonic theory of the absolutism of force would carry the nations back to the most distressful periods of their history, back to the eras of violence when the law of the strongest was the sole foundation of justice. . . . Like the Arabs of Mohammed's day, the Teutonic nations are deluded by a dream which

⁹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 18-20, 173.

makes them fancy that they are a superior race, destined first to conquer the world and then to regenerate it.⁹⁷

Le Bon is now disposed to contest vigorously this view of German superiority:

The German of our day is not by any means the transcendent creature whom the vanity of his historians has imagined him to be. He is the heir of the men whom Napoleon conquered at Jena with such ease, and he has nothing really superior about him except an exceedingly strict discipline and a meticulous organization which is well adapted to the needs of the present era.⁹⁸

Yet so deep-seated is this mystic German illusion as to the imminence of Teutonic world leadership that it will take more than one defeat to free the German mind of this national psychosis:

Whatever success Europe may win in the end over Germany's attempt at hegemony, there is no hope that it will be lasting, for the ideal of domination is one of those mystic beliefs whose duration is never brief. A nation which has been chosen by God to conquer and regenerate the world does not readily abandon such a mission, and Germany will not relinquish it until she has been defeated many times.⁹⁹

Holding that the influence of rational and intellectual factors over group action is almost wholly an illusion, Le Bon turns to analyze what he believes to be the really fundamental causative psychological elements in producing the Great War. He classifies these as affective, collective, race-psychological and mystic. The affective forces are the chief creator of race-hatreds:

Affective forces are among the great regulative forces of history. By the strength with which they clothe our ideas they lead us to look at things in different ways, according to the varying degrees of our sensibility. All nations possess an aggregate of inherited feelings, which are determinative of their mental orientation, which cause individuals of unlike ancestral equilibria to take different views of the same questions, and which occasion those inextinguishable race-hatreds that are among the chief causes of the European War.¹⁰⁰

Added to these racial antipathies are those forces which arise from the collective psychological influences which produce that crowd-psychological state to which Le Bon has devoted

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19. Le Bon apparently does not recall that a study of his own writings by Germans would have contributed materially to this inflation of the Teutonic national ego which he has described.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 468. For Le Bon's equally changed views on French national character, see pp. 21, 466ff.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

so much attention. This comes to the front in times of excitement like war and destroys all that rational self-control which may exist in normal periods:

In ordinary times the intellectual forces of a country's best elements easily predominate over its collective forces, but in great crises, such as wars, revolutions, and the like, this is not the case; for the collective forces, which are derived from individual influences, are then capable of becoming so powerful as to sweep whole countries into an irresistible whirlpool, and to cause the emergence of new manifestations of the national mentality.¹⁰¹

This war mentality is not only produced by contemporary agencies, but is also strongly reinforced by tradition and those cultural factors which Le Bon groups together as race-psychology or national mind. Any nation has its view of its neighbors shaped by the hatreds of past generations as well as by present differences. "It is no exaggeration to say that the fiercest fighting upon our fields of battle is due to the innumerable hosts of the dead more than to the living."¹⁰² But of all the non-rational factors determining group conduct today the most powerful are the mystic forces. Especially threatening is the mystic Teutonic obsession of world domination:

Generally speaking one may say that mysticism is characterized by a taste for mystery, love of the supernatural, contempt for experience, and a belief that superior powers intervene in mundane phenomena. . . . The mystic forces, which science long disdained or knew not, rank foremost among the motives which rule mankind. . . . Motives of mystic origin have always been the strongest of mankind's various incentives; for it is they which have created the illusions that quicken history, they under whose influence great empires have been destroyed and others founded, and they upon which even now rest the foundations of civilization. The modern world deems itself free from their sway, and yet humanity has never been more enslaved by them. . . . If Europe is today in conflagration, if the flower of our youth is dying on bloody battle-fields, and if countless families are left desolate, it is because one nation believes itself destined to regenerate the world, upon which it means to impose its own mystic chimera of universal domination.¹⁰³

After this preliminary theoretical analysis of the chief psychological factors involved in the war, Le Bon applies them to an explanation of the diplomatic negotiations which immediately preceded the war;¹⁰⁴ to the clarification of the methods and processes of modern warfare;¹⁰⁵ to the exposure of the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 37-40.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 177-279.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 283-361.

psychic basis of German terrorism;¹⁰⁶ and to a forecasting of the new problems which may grow out of the World War.¹⁰⁷ He holds that the terroristic methods of the Germans well demonstrate the slight influence which education has over character and collective emotion. Under the excitement of the collective-psychological state the ancestral barbarism breaks through the slight veneer of civilization. The unique nature of the German *Schrecklichkeit* Le Bon holds to be due to the fact that there was in Germany less restraint upon the primordial barbarism and that this barbarism was of a lower and more animal sort than in the rest of Europe. Hence it was but natural that the inevitable savagery of war would reveal itself most rapidly and most terribly in Germany.¹⁰⁸

Le Bon believes that the World War is likely to prove one of those great cultural crises which alone seem able to bring into existence a new psychological era:

It would seem that when nations reach a certain point in their history they cannot progress except under the influence of these great crises which are, perhaps, necessary for their release from the embrace of a past which clasp them too closely, and from habits and prejudices which have become too firmly established.¹⁰⁹

The European War marks the beginning of an era of upheaval in our manner of life, our feelings, and our thought. We have perhaps reached one of those historical periods in which, as at the time of the French Revolution, the ideals and principles of mankind are changed and a new aristocracy makes its appearance. The nations are being hurried towards a future which is not yet illumined by the faintest glimmer of light. Something they cannot foresee holds dominion over them, and political and moral ideas which they had considered incapable of change now seem destined to disappear. Theories and doctrines are vanishing one after the other, and no longer is the future assured, for the psychological forces which are locked in mortal combat are but beginning to work.¹¹⁰

9. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES PRODUCED BY THE WORLD WAR

In order to keep his social psychology thoroughly abreast of current historical developments Le Bon published a year before the Armistice a work on the psychological consequences of the World War, entitled *Premières conséquences de la*

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 365-407.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 411-462.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 381-398.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 463.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 23. Le Bon feels reasonably assured, however, that France will lose her dangerous illusions of the past and that the rest of the world will come to view Germany in her true light.

guerre: transformation mentale des peuples.¹¹¹ In the introduction to this work Le Bon reiterates the chief propositions set forth in his *Psychology of the Great War*, namely, that the war is one of the great cultural crises of history; that it was caused and is governed almost wholly by non-rational forces; that the most ominous of these forces is the mystic Teutonic conception of world-hegemony; that the war is the price which the world is paying for its past illusions; and that these illusions are now passing and a new cultural era is about to be entered.¹¹²

Le Bon contends that before the war the western world was as much dominated by illusions as ever before in its history. The only difference from earlier illusions was the fact that social and political illusions had replaced the religious. Among the more dangerous and fatal of the pre-war illusions were those of state socialism, and the pacifist illusion that individuals and states are controlled by rational factors and that wars could never take place again in so advanced a civilization as that of western Europe. The war has shown the reality of the complete sway of the emotional and the unconscious psychic factors and the potency of the mystic elements. These illusions not only existed before the war, but also continued for some time afterward. It was the German ignorance of crowd psychology which led them to commit such colossal blunders as the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the execution of Edith Cavell, and the Zeppelin raids on British cities. The war has also borne out the theory of the Romans, the Crusaders and Napoleon, that no great military success can exist unless the soldiers are caught up in some great mystic enthusiasm which gives them a superhuman power and endurance. Experience gained during the war has wiped away most of these older illusions and has left the world wiser if much sadder for the grim lesson.¹¹³

From these general observations on the psychological changes occasioned by the war Le Bon turns to an analysis of the more obvious mental and social transformations which have taken place among these European states which have been at war. He contends that French degeneracy before the war was so great and deplorable that it can be fully comprehended only by a comparison with the heroism revealed in France by the crisis of the war. Before the war France was divided into selfish and competing economic and social classes; a general strike against any war was threatened; state activity and

¹¹¹ Paris, 1917. No English translation has yet appeared.

¹¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-12.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-45.

state socialism had become a fetish; politics were paralyzed and corrupted by the inferior men drawn into the French parliamentary system. The war wrought a great transformation in French society. It brought to the front much abler leaders in politics; it improved the personality of men of indifferent capacity and gave a better moral fibre to the general body of the citizens; the common experiences of all classes and both sexes during the war produced an unprecedented social solidarity in France and secured a marked advancement in the status of women; a renaissance of religious interest was evident and a unique prevalence of religious toleration existed; and there was a search for a better and higher philosophy of life, but none could be found. Not only was there a great transformation within France itself, but also the position of France in the esteem of the world was greatly improved. The pro-Germanism which existed everywhere before the war melted away and France began to appear as the guardian of civilization.¹¹⁴

Germany appears to *Le Bon* to be the one nation that was not changed by the war in a psychological sense. The Germans seem to have retained the same illusion as to the superiority of the Teutonic race and its destiny to rule the world. Yet the Germans exhibited plenty of signs of degeneracy during the war if they had been willing to recognize them.¹¹⁵ In Austria-Hungary the most interesting feature of the war was the grotesque propaganda and the intense repression of speech and news which were necessary to hold so diverse a people together as a unified fighting force.¹¹⁶ Great Britain underwent a great transformation. Before the war she was isolated from the rest of Europe, was supreme on the seas, and had no fear of an attack. Hence Great Britain was more dominated by pacifism and less prepared for war than any of the major continental states. The facts of the war brought about a "terrible awakening" for the British people. They were slow in getting adjusted to the war situation and the military emergency because of their lack of preparation and because of the importance of precedent and tradition in English political life and theory. Great Britain is ruled more by her dead than other European states, and to get a new and adequate military organization she had to conquer not only the opposition of the living, but also the traditions established by the dead.¹¹⁷ Russia in 1914 was on the eve of a complete

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-140.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 141ff.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 196ff.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 211ff.

German conquest of its industry, commerce, education, administration and army. In fifty more years a Russian war with Germany would have been impossible, and even in 1914 the German penetration well-nigh paralyzed Russian military activities.¹¹⁸ The war also vitally affected the neutrals. The United States was kept out of the war by the prosperity produced through the sale of munitions, by the German propaganda, and by the inability to develop a coherent national policy on the subject of intervention. Japan not only derived great economic benefits from the war, but was also able to carry forward Japanese domination in China to an unprecedented degree. This Le Bon regards as a fact of nearly as great importance to the world as the war itself.¹¹⁹

Le Bon closes his last work with certain reflections upon the future of international relations. He contrasts the operation of the principles of law and force in human society and in history. He finds that the Latin peoples are the great champions of the reign of law, while the Teutonic peoples support the rule of force—the principle dominating the animal world. Force and anarchy have dominated international relations in the past because no common power has been found with sufficient strength to enforce international law. International law in the past has been weak and inadequately enforced, and its operation has been further handicapped by the fact that the Germans hold that in war all laws are abandoned.¹²⁰ Nor do economic losses seem adequate to prevent wars. It had been shown at great length before 1914 that wars were not good economic investments, even for conquerors, but rulers and people alike think not of the probable losses in present or future wars, but of the alleged gains in wars of the distant past, and in any war, however expensive to the nation at large, many individuals and classes become wealthy therefrom.¹²¹ The chief hope for the future pacific adjustment of international relations must rest upon that growing interdependence of nations which renders wars more repugnant and more costly. Yet one can hope for ultimate peace and disarmament only when false ideas have been dispelled, and for this task many repeated experiences of war will be necessary, especially to teach the Germans the folly and hopelessness of their dream of world domination.¹²² Les

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 222ff.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 254ff.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 268ff.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 296-301.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 302ff. Le Bon's immediate contact with the realities of war seems to have led him to modify radically his pre-war views as to the great social, moral and spiritual benefits of war.

expériences répétées finiront par enseigner aux peuples l'inutilité des guerres, mais nous n'en sommes pas encore là.¹²³

10. SUMMARY OF LE BON'S BASIC THEORIES ON SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Le Bon's salient doctrines may be summarized as follows: Every race possesses certain definite psychic traits built up by the slow accumulations of experience, and perpetuated by tradition. These psychic traits, rather than institutions, are the determining factors in civilization, the latter being simply an objective expression of the former. Among these psychic traits which constitute national character, or the soul of the race, the affective, mystic, and unconscious factors are the most powerful, quite overshadowing the conscious, rational and intellectual elements, though it is to the influence of the latter that progress is due. Without a coherent and unified group of psychic traits constituting the soul of the race, the civilization of that race cannot develop or be perpetuated. It is futile to attempt to change these fundamental psychic traits by a revolutionary or any other artificial transformation of institutions. Therefore, an excessive degree of state activity is worse than useless; law-making power should be confined to the codification of well-established and persistent customs; and government, in general, should be limited to that minimum of activity which is necessary to preserve order and secure the proper degree of mental discipline for the individual citizen. Both socialism and syndicalism are, thus, dangerous movements; the former wishing to procure excessive state activity, and the latter desiring to abolish the state altogether. Owing to such results of the Industrial Revolution as the growth of cities and the consequent concentration of population, the improvements in communication, and the extension of the suffrage, modern political life has tended to become dominated by crowds. The crowd is abnormal in its psychological characteristics, being highly emotional, exceptionally weak intellectually, and exceedingly susceptible to suggestion. It is easily guided, however, by leaders possessing prestige, who, to be successful, make use of those principles of affirmation, repetition, contagion, and imitation, whereby a crowd may be persuaded and convinced. Hence, it is highly essential that society shall assure the highest quality of leadership for crowds, and thus be able to direct their dynamic energy into activities which are conducive to the public welfare. If this is not done, and crowds are left to the exploita-

¹²³ Ibid., p. 312.

tion of shortsighted and selfish demagogues, they must continue to be a constant menace to the integrity, well-being and even the existence of modern society. The World War was produced by the domination of the mob or crowd mind, operating over national areas and submerging all rational factors and processes. In its most fundamental aspects the conflict was a psychological struggle between contending sets of national ideas and emotions. It constituted a great psychic upheaval and transformation, destined to bring in its wake a new psychological and cultural era. War can be eliminated only when society is brought under the control of that leadership of the real intellectual aristocracy which is needed to guide the crowd mind in times of peace. Only under such leadership can society be brought to understand the growing and vital interdependence of nations, international relations be brought under the control of legal forms and processes, and those false ideas regarding the biological and social benefits of war and the conquering mission of any nation be forever destroyed.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Le Bon has summarized his theories in a little volume entitled, *Aphorismes du temps présent*.