70-23,549

MACKENZIE, Martha Lauderdale, 1929-
FÉLICITÉ DE LAMENNAIS: PORTRAIT OF A ROMANTIC
HERO. [Portions of Text in French].

Rice University, Ph.D., 1969
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan
RICE UNIVERSITY

Félicité de Lamennais: Portrait of a Romantic Hero

by

Martha Lauderdale Mackenzie

A THESISSubmitted
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Director's signature:

[Signature]

Houston, Texas

May 1969
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ......................................................................................... 1

Chapter One:
  From St. Malo to Père Lachaise .................................................... 2

Chapter Two:
  Sense and Sensibility ................................................................. 27

Chapter Three:
  The Prophet .................................................................................. 64

Chapter Four:
  The Extremist .............................................................................. 103

Chapter Five:
  The Outsider ............................................................................... 124

Chapter Six:
  The Rebel .................................................................................... 158

Conclusion ........................................................................................ 175

Footnotes .......................................................................................... 179

Bibliography .................................................................................... 198
INTRODUCTION

One of the most widely read authors of the early Romantic period was Felicité de Lamennais. That his influence was considerable is clear to those who have studied in any depth the literature of the day. While his name and a few short quotations are usually included in anthologies and manuals on the nineteenth century, few students of French literature would be able to answer the question: why was Lamennais such an appealing figure for his contemporaries? Our study began as an attempt to answer that question within a literary context.

It is our hope that after examining the evidence, the reader will agree that, in all probability, much of Lamennais' immense popularity and influence was due not just to what he wrote, but to what he was — an almost unbelievable incarnation of the Romantic hero. In French literature of the early nineteenth century the Romantic hero took various forms, some nobler and more attractive than others. Lamennais could not, of course, be like all of them, all of the time, in all ways; but with most of them he had something in common, much of the time. Although on occasion, parallels will be drawn between Lamennais and other real or literary figures of his day, our intention is not to compare him systematically with anyone, but rather to present his personality in such a way that the reader will be able to make his own comparisons. Even less is this an attempt to evaluate Lamennais' philosophical and religious thought, or to pass moral judgment on his character: for the former we are unqualified; for the latter, unworthy.

To the casual reader, authors like Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Vigny or Musset may seem to be incarnations of the Romantic hero, while in point of fact, each of these authors possessed only some of the characteristics of this model type. Lamennais, however, embodied almost every trait of the Romantic personality and, in our opinion, he alone among this group can be accurately described as an incarnation of the Romantic hero.
CHAPTER ONE
FROM ST. MALO TO PÈRE LACHAISE

Sur le bord de la mer, au fond des forêts,
je me nourrissais de ces vaines pensées, et
ignorant l'usage de la vie, je l'endormais, en
berçant dans la vague mon âme fatiguée d'elle-même.¹

Hugues-Félicité Robert de La Mennais was born on June 19, 1782 at St. Malo, a stone’s throw from the house where Chateaubriand had been born only fourteen years before. Christian Maréchal has investigated the family history more fully than any one in his two books, both published in 1913, La Famille de Lamennais and La Jeunesse de Lamennais. Maréchal is inclined to offer lengthy and very personal interpretations of the facts, but his books are invaluable nonetheless because of the documents they make available. When no other references are given, his books contain the evidence for the biographical information given in this chapter.

Féli, as he was known to his family, was the fourth son in a family of five brothers and one sister, but only one brother, Jean-Marie (1780-1860) played an important role in his life.²

Two months after the birth of Félicité his father, the head of a prosperous firm of merchants and shipowners, was appointed Sub-delegate, that is, the local representative for St. Malo and district of the Intendant of Brittany. For the notable services he subsequently rendered in this position and the sacrifices he made for the public good, the Intendant proposed that he be raised from the third estate to one more noble. It is said that he was the last man to be ennobled before the Revolution. There were, however, many delays in registering his title because of the Intendant's request that M. de la Mennais be excused from paying the customary registration fee, on the reasonable ground that he had already given substantial amounts of money for the public good. The end result was that his title was never formally registered, a happenstance that was to serve him well later.

With the Revolution, M. de La Mennais' office as Sub-delegate came to an end and he decided to become a loyal citizen of the new
France and devote himself to his business interests. Despite the faithful service he had rendered to the crown, M. de La Mennais' political, religious and economic attitudes, at this point in history, were basically those of the majority of the "grande bourgeoisie" of Brittany. He was a disciple of Turgot and the physiocrats who believed in free trade, private enterprise, local initiative and local responsibility. Besides the fact that these liberal economic principles were in accord with his business interests, the former Sub-delegate sincerely believed that the needs of the people would be best served if they were put into effect.

Félix's father was very proud of the high standard of morality, the sense of patriotism and honor which prevailed in St. Malo, in contrast to the decadence he had observed in other places, Spain for instance, and he valued the Church primarily as the bulwark of that morality. Thinking ahead to what will be the son's attitude toward the Church, it seems worth noting that his father before him was inclined to view religion as something useful in a social and civic sense. Marechal summed it up this way:

M. de La Mennais aime son évêque - Mgr. Cortois de Pressigny - et son curé - le vénérable abbé Le Saoult qui proscrira la Révolution; il les estime infiniment. N'allons pas voir en lui cependant un catholique très rigide: à cette époque, autant qu'on en peut juger, chrétien à la mode de la haute bourgeoisie du dix-huitième siècle finissant, il professe l'indifférence dogmatique et, dans la pratique, il doit se montrer assez tiède. Un bon évêque, un bon curé sont pour lui, comme pour son père des Saudrais, et pour la plupart de leurs contemporains, des modèles de vertu, des apôtres de charité; ils sont les maîtres et les témoins de la morale. Et c'est pourquoi nous verrons les deux frères embrasser sans hésitation, quand la Révolution s'ouvrira, le schisme constitutionnel.4

M. de La Mennais' experience under the "ancien Régime" had convinced him of the virtual impossibility of securing under that system
the reforms he considered to be in the public interest and in harmony with the changing times. His own effort to abolish mendicant monastic orders is a good example. This prepared him to welcome the Revolution, and like so many others, he hoped and expected that the new government would be more efficient, more reasonable, and more just.

After the Revolution, M. de La Mennais left public office but his brother and partner in the family business, Denys-François Robert des Saudrais (hereafter called des Saudrais) became what we might call a town councillor. The archives of the commune of St. Malo make it possible to trace his support of the new Regime, including its ecclesiastical measures. The expediency of such a course of action is obvious. There is, however, every reason to believe that des Saudrais' adhesion to revolutionary principles was, in the beginning at least, completely sincere. He regarded his office as a providential opportunity to put into practice the theories of his favorite 18th-century philosophers.

The general course of events in France during the years between the Revolution and the Consulate are too well known to bear repeating here. It does seem worth mentioning, however, that the Terror in St. Malo was particularly severe. Jean-Baptiste Le Carpentier, the local representative of the Committee of Public Safety, arrived there on December 15, 1793, and for the next eight months the prisons were crowded and the guillotine constantly in use. Before he left, Le Carpentier extorted large sums of money from the rich merchants of St. Malo by threatening them with the guillotine as an alternative. M. de La Mennais and his brother managed to preserve their heads by sacrificing their fortunes but the family business was left in ruins. Moreover, Mme. des Saudrais died in 1794; her death was said to have been caused by the emotional stress she endured under the Terror. This was a real loss to the motherless Féli as this excellent woman was doubly his aunt, being both the wife of his uncle and his mother's sister.
It is not surprising that such misfortunes made this family see the Revolution in a different light. When they saw a new tyranny being installed under the mask of revolutionary liberty they were forced to revise their ideas about the relation between freedom and order, and about the Church. There is not sufficient data to follow in detail the defection, no doubt gradual, of this family from Jacobinism. We are not, however, surprised to learn that upon the advent of Napoleon, Féli's grandfather hastened to put a bust of the First Consul on his mantelpiece, nor that the re-establishment of the Church of France in 1802 was warmly approved by the La Mennais, as by many other bourgeois families. After so many years of chaos and terror it was natural that they should welcome any government which promised to restore order and peace to the political and religious life of the nation.

On revenait à la croyance par horreur du système terroriste...et par dessus tout, la lassitude de la guerre, cet immense désir de paix et de repos qui fera accueillir comme un soulagement le coup d'État de Bonaparte.⁵

These then are the events that formed the background for the first twenty years of Féli's life. His mother's premature death when he was only five, his father's preoccupation with administrative and business problems and his own intractable and hypersensitive nature all combined to deprive him of any regular discipline or education during his most formative years. His childhood, in both its interior and exterior aspects, was remarkably similar to that of his great contemporary and countryman, François-René de Chateaubriand. This is how Maréchal describes the child who was the father of the man.

...dans ce corps grêle et d'une taille au-dessous de la moyenne, vit une âme passionnée, ardente, et qui l'agite d'une vivacité fébrile. Dès l'enfance il se montre tel qu'il sera jusqu'à sa mort, à la fois docile aux influences insensiblement acceptées du milieu, et fantasque. Il s'emporte en des colères inouïes, les yeux gris lancent des éclairs, les lèvres
minces se serrent, et, dans le visage ovale et maigre, les pommettes un peu saillantes se couvrent d'une pâleur livide; souvent la scène s'achève par un évanouissement...

A cette enfance emportée et impatiente du frein, toute direction sentie est un joug, une insupportable oppression. Ses malices, ses saillies et ses jeux mettent en émoi ses camarades; et, pour le faire tenir tranquille, son maître n'a d'autre ressource que de lui pendre à la ceinture un poids de tourne-broche... À la campagne il grimpe aux arbres comme un écureuil, il nage jusqu'à l'épuisement, et si l'occasion s'en présente, le petit indiscipliné détache une barque et part en mer...

Mais ce rebelle est un docile aux influences qui s'insinuent sans contraindre sa volonté: naturellement tendre, il obéit aux suggestions de Mme. des Saudrais et de ceux qui l'entourent, et son coeur, déjà méconnu, pense-t-il, va chercher au pied des autels l'amour de la Vierge mère qui lui pardonne et qui l'entend.  

At the age of ten, Féli's education was almost non-existent. His loving and patient nurse, la Villemain, to whom his mother had confided him on her death bed, had succeeded in teaching him to read but the tutor subsequently engaged by his father could do nothing at all with him. Jean-Marie, only two years older than Féli, but more advanced in every way, then tried his hand at teaching his little brother and met with an equal lack of success.

Before continuing the account of his education, such as it was, it seems appropriate to mention that Mennaisian literature contains a variety of anecdotes about Lamennais' childhood. Unfortunately most of this information is not reliable and Lamennais himself seldom spoke about events in his early life. Two of the most interesting of these possibly apocryphal stories are told in an early biography by Ange Blaize, Lamennais' nephew, who said he had them directly from
his uncle.

The first story tells about a non-juring priest who came to say Mass in the attic of the La Mennais home. This event supposedly took place in 1793, on the eve of Le Charpentier's arrival. Clandestine religious services were quite common during this period and, in *La Vie de Henri Brulard*, Stendhal has mentioned how often such priests came to his father's house to celebrate Mass, his family being devoutly Catholic and anti-republican. Even if the story is true, it does not prove as some have thought it does, that Félix was brought up not only as a Catholic but to despise the Revolution. In spite of the family's initial approval of the Constitutional Church they must have had friends among the non-juring clergy, and allowing or even inviting them to say Mass in their home was quite possibly a simple act of friendship without any political implications.

The other and most often repeated story concerns the time when Lamennais, at the tender age of eight, was walking with his nurse on the ramparts of St. Malo while a heavy sea was raging below. There were other people watching with them and after a while the child exclaimed, "Ils regardent ce que je regarde, mais ils ne voient ce que je vois." Blaize says that in later years whenever his uncle recalled this incident he shuddered at the thought that a child so young should have had such a conceived notion.7

Whether or not the story is true we shall never know, but it certainly could have been, for a part of Lamennais' destiny, or his cross, was that throughout his life he looked at the same world others were looking at but saw what they did not see. This sense of isolation is part of the burden of genius which he described many years later in the preface to his last work, a translation of the *Divine Comedy*.

Ce n'est pas gratuitement que le génie est accordé à l'homme, et, si l'on savait ce qu'il faut le payer, qui se sentirait l'âme assez forte pour accepter ce don formidable, et ne dirait
plutôt comme le Christ: "Transeat a me."

This same ability tormented A. de Vigny, who for a time, was an admirer of Lamennais. In his Poèmes antiques et modernes, the powerful but lonely Moses, to whom God had revealed the secrets of heaven, cried out in sorrow and weariness, "Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre." Everything indicates that during this period of his life, Lamennais associated himself with Dante, who, while he managed to retain a precarious footing on the right side of the boundary which separates orthodoxy from heresy, had some very strong words to say about corruption in Rome; the above lines written about the great Florentine could also be applied to Lamennais as he, at least subconsciously, perhaps, intended they should be.

Before Lamennais could write any books, however, it was essential that he read some and that was not easily accomplished. All previous efforts having been in vain, Féli's uncle des Saudrais, who had no children of his own, finally took on the job of educating his self-willed, solitary, undisciplined, passionate, turbulent, tender, affectionate, intuitive, intelligent, ignorant, utterly contradictory nephew.

Félicité was ten and a half years old when he went with him to La Chênaie, a place which throughout his life he was to consider as closer to heaven than any other spot on earth. This country house near Dinan, which on their maternal grandfather's death became the property of Jean-Marie and Félicité, was to be famous throughout France thirty years later as the home and headquarters of the whole movement Lamennais inspired and led.

Des Saudrais, though similar in many respects to Féli's father, was of a more literary and philosophical cast of mind.

C'était un homme instruit et spirituel,
joignant à une érudition assez vaste un
goût sûr et un grand charme de parole. Sa
correspondance offre des pages ravissantes de bonhomie et de gaite gauloise. Il se plaisait à traduire les Odes d'Horace... Les qualités de coeur surpassaient chez M. Robert des Saudrais celles de l'esprit. Il était bon, indulgent, dévoué et capable de pousser son affection pour les siens jusqu'au plus complet désintéressement. 8

Des Saudrais' thinking had been very much influenced by that of the "philosophes" in general and of Rousseau in particular, and Féli must have seemed like an ideal subject on which to test the validity of the educational methods proposed in Emile. Whatever may be thought of that method as a general rule, or even of its long range effect on Lamennais, it did suit the need of the moment and worked as no other before it had. Delighted by the methods of his new teacher the boy became an avid, if undisciplined, reader and student.

The library at La Chênaie was divided into two parts with a locked partition marking the boundary between permitted and forbidden reading material. In the best tradition of the "précepteur-providence" des Saudrais discussed at length with little Féli those fascinating books he was too young to read: later, under the guise of punishment, he would lock the child in the library, confident that his natural curiosity would drive him over the barrier. It did, and in the ensuing years Féli read widely in all kinds of literature and taught himself English, Spanish, German, Latin, Italian, Greek and later even Hebrew.

Jean-Marie also spent a great deal of time at La Chênaie during these years. All evidence indicates that he was the only person in the family who at that time had a solid and orthodox religious faith. He also had an enormous fund of good common sense, a stable nervous system, and a religious vocation which manifested itself quite early and in which he never faltered.

As was previously mentioned, historical events plus bitter personal experiences made "Tonton", as the family called him, turn from
the eighteenth-century philosophers and return to Montaigne and Horace and eventually to orthodoxy. In so renouncing liberalism he followed the example of many others who became apostles of the reaction, La Harpe, Chateaubriand, Bonald and de Maistre to name a few. Between 1798 and 1802 des Sourdais, with the help of his nephews, composed a treatise entitled Les Philosophes condemning the destructive scepticism of the eighteenth century and defending the faith. There also exists in manuscript a refutation of Volney’s sceptical work Leçons d’histoire, published in 1799, which Féli appears to have helped Jean compose.9 Thus it seems that by the turn of the century Féli had been brought to the point where he was favorably disposed to Christianity although not yet a practicing Catholic. Sainte-Beuve, with whom he was fairly intimate thirty years later, describes his state of mind at that period in the following way.

Le christianisme était devenu pour le bouillant jeune homme une opinion très probable qu’il défendait dans le monde, qu’il produisait en conversation, mais qui ne gouvernait plus son coeur ni sa vie.10

From this point until 1814 Féli’s brother Jean-Marie was the principal influence in his life. At La Chênaie the two brothers studied together and then for a time taught — Jean, theology; Féli, mathematics — in a church school that had been founded in St. Malo in 1802. Jean, who was certainly aware of his brother’s great gifts and the services he could render to the cause of a religious renaissance in France, had long worked, hoped and prayed for his complete conversion. This was finally realized, and it was shortly after Jean-Marie’s ordination in 1804 that Féli made his first confession and Holy Communion.

There has been considerable discussion as to whether or not this was really the first time Lamennais received Communion and there are those who have doubted the genuineness or the completeness of this conversion. It seems more reasonable, however, to agree with Vidler who says:
We know little about this conversion apart from its consequences... All we can say is that after his conversion Féli gave himself to the ardent and persevering cultivation of a devout life, and if he was not during the next thirty years a converted Christian it is not easy to see what conversion can mean.  

Although neither Féli nor Jean-Marie received a formal theological education, the abbé Boutard affirms that, at the time of Lamennais' first ordination (1809) his knowledge of ecclesiastical sciences was more extensive than that of the majority of young priests who emerge from seminaries in the twentieth century, to say nothing of the nineteenth. Following Gallican tradition, the brothers read the standard works, those of Bossuet, Fénelon, Malebranche and Nicole. But they were unusual in going back to original sources, the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and even the Scholastics who at that time were in disfavor and seldom studied. In later years Lamennais would surely remember that all the Scholastic theologians as well as many of the influential seventeenth-century moral theologians agreed that the individual conscience was primary. In our own day the influential French theologian Yves Congar, in his book Vrai et fausse reforme dans l'Eglise has summed up the traditional Catholic position on conscience in this way:

...étant bien marqué que la conscience erronée n'est pas toujours innocente, la théologie reconnaît de façon unanime qu'on est obligé de la suivre. Aller contre sa conscience serait péché.

This principle was never forgotten by Lamennais and in later years, when he found himself in open rebellion first, against the discipline, and then against the teaching of the Church, he constantly justified his position by saying that he could not do otherwise without violating his conscience. During those laborious but relatively tranquil years at La Chênaie, neither of the brothers could have foreseen such
a future.

The first fruits of their exhaustive studies and constant conversations about how to renew the French Church are contained in two books: Réflexions sur l'état de l'Eglise en France pendant le XVIIIème siècle, et sur sa situation actuelle (1809) and Tradition de l'Eglise sur l'institution des évêques (1814). For the sake of convenience, the former will be referred to as Réflexions and the latter as Tradition.

Réflexions is primarily a manifesto addressed to the clergy. It was designed to expose the evils from which the Church was suffering, to indicate the means by which they could be corrected and to arouse in the clergy a high sense of their mission to carry out the necessary reforms. It was also aimed at proving to Napoleon, in whose good faith the La Mennais family still appeared to believe, that he had nothing to lose and everything to gain by encouraging a vigorous revival of Catholicism.

Réflexions was published in the latter part of June, 1809, but bore the date 1808, the year of its composition. The substitution of this earlier date may well have been a measure of prudence, since the political situation had changed considerably during that year. On May 17, 1809, Napoleon "reunited" the Papal States to the French Empire; on June 10 the tricolor waved over Rome; on June 11 Napoleon and his accomplices were excommunicated; on July 5 the Quirinal was forcibly entered, Pius VII arrested and taken to Savona where he was kept prisoner until 1812. With these events in mind, a single quotation, innocent enough at the time it was written, will be sufficient to show how inopportune, even dangerous, was the appearance of Lamennais' book at that precise moment.

Le chrétien eut à gémir sur l'horrible
attentat commis contre le chef de l'Eglise,
l'immortel Pie VII. Arrêté dans sa capitale,
abreuvé d'outrages et d'opprobres, traîné
de prisons en prisons comme un vil criminel,
ce vénérable pontif, qui plus d'une fois
excita le respect et l'admiration de ses bourreaux mêmes, soutint avec un noble courage, jusqu'au dernier moment, la gloire de la tiare et la dignité de son caractère, et couronna la vie d'un saint par la mort d'un martyr. Grâces soient rendues au gouvernement qui, par des honneurs expiatoires a réparé ce monstrueux scandale, et justifié la France, aux yeux de l'Europe et de la postérité, d'un forfait dont elle ne fut point complice! 13

Needless to say, the first edition was confiscated by the imperial police. Republished in 1814, after the fall of Napoleon, its success and influence were largely confined to ecclesiastical circles. Its chief interest today is that it contains in embryonic form many of the ideas Lamennais was to develop later and should have warned any close observer that despite his sometimes real, sometimes only superficial agreement on many points with such writers as Bonald, Chateaubriand or de Maistre, he was really of a different breed. Although this book does not qualify as his first masterpiece, it is, as Spuller said, Lamennais' true point of departure "auquel il faut remonter si l'on veut se faire une juste et complete idée de son extraordinaire influence sur la conduite de l'Eglise de France depuis bientôt un siecle." 14

In this same year (1809), encouraged by his brother and pushed by circumstances, Féli took his first steps toward the priesthood. He received the tonsure on March 16, and minor orders on December 23, both in Rennes; he also published a translation of Le Guide spirituel ou le Miroir des Ames religieuses, a sixteenth-century work of piety by Louis de Blois. It is well to remember that Lamennais, in addition to polemical and apologetic writings, published several devotional works; the most famous and widely circulated was his translation of The Imitation of Christ which in later, leaner years was an important source of income for him. These contributions to devotional literature
give testimony to the fact that the mennaisian movement, as Vidler noted stood for "an exalted standard of devotion as well as for intellectual enterprise and ecclesiastical reform." ¹⁵

By this time both brothers were aware of the threat to the Church which Napoleon's despotism represented. They also realized that the struggle between the Emperor and the Holy See would hinge on the institution of bishops since, of all the weapons used by the Papacy during the Middle Ages to subdue intractable rulers, the only effective one left was the refusal of institution to nominees of civil governments.

Lamennais' loyalty to Gallican principles had been undermined even before this date; the realization that the cardinals, bishops and clergy of the French Church would have surrendered to the Emperor's will to dominate the Church, had it not been for the superhuman steadfastness of the imprisoned, solitary, sick and aged Vicar of Christ, accounts for his complete conversion to ultramontanism. The need to create a system to justify his faith led to the publication in August, 1814, of Tradition, an ambitious three volume historical vindication of the ultramontane position. A quotation from this work will illustrate his approach.

The history of the church and its discipline is only a chaos of contradictions, a formless accumulation of incoherent facts, an obscure labyrinth in which the greatest scholars soon get lost if they have not from the outset seized with a firm hand the torch which should light their way in the darkness, that is to say, if they have not understood, or have understood only imperfectly, the general principles of the government of the church. These principles provide the key to all difficulties, and are the best commentary on the monuments of the past, because being neither arbitrary nor variable they must always be and have in fact always been the basis of ecclesiastical administration in its progressive developments and in the necessary changes which it has had to undergo as the centuries have passed. Put these great maxims at the head of
history, and everything becomes clear, everything falls into place: the facts, hitherto scattered and unconnected, arrange themselves around this common centre in an order as simple as it is magnificent; knotty details which baffle an unimaginative criticism, and the apparent contradictions which distress it, vanish; and in the majestic concert of diverse events, of conflicts, of triumphs, and sometimes of terrible catastrophes, one recognizes the work of God which advances gloriously across the ages...16

In this passage we can see how Lamennais here as elsewhere takes the point which is for the moment occupying his attention and makes it the center of his intellectual universe. That Church government is important to an understanding of history no one would question; but surely it is an over-simplification to see in it the unique master-key to unlock the doors to all problems, or the complete revelation of God's work in history. Lamennais, however was not troubled by doubts, and if Napoleon was wrong the Pope must be right, and if so, completely right.

By the time the book was published the crisis (Pope versus Emperor) which had caused it to be conceived was past, and so was the trend toward ultramontanism which had been in the main a reaction against Napoleon. The bishops, like the rest of the émigrés, returned having learned nothing, as Gallican as before. Lamennais, however, could not forget the Napoleonic experience for he was convinced that he had seen in Napoleon the first-born of a new race of temporal rulers. The days of the Christian prince were, he feared, over.

The next few years were unsettled ones. For a time, Félix, in order to supplement the family income, pamphleteered in Paris. He wrote against the University, that "monstrous edifice" as he called it, for the right of the Church to found new schools and colleges, against having a clergy salaried by the state and hence always dependent on it, for the restoration of endowments, in particular that
portion of church property that had become public property at the time of the Revolution. All were unpopular causes.

During the "Hundred Days" Lamennais went into exile in England where he met the abbé Carron whose influence and guidance replaced that of his absent brother. It was largely due to Carron's influence that Lamennais was finally ordained on March 9, 1816, four months after his return to France.

The newly ordained priest's first major assault on the minds of his contemporaries was published in 1817 with the not very appealing title of *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, Vol. 1. The first edition was exhausted in two months and within the year 13,000 copies had been sold. Lamennais was hailed as another Pascal or Bossuet. Despite its astonishing popularity, or perhaps because of it, the first volume of the *Essai* was largely misunderstood by friend and foe alike. The royalist periodicals praised both style and content and curiously failed to notice how tenuous Lamennais' royalism was, while the liberals, taking the book for yet another attempt to revive the "ancien régime" with its temporal interests, overlooked the fact that in drawing a clear distinction between the exercise of legitimate authority and coercion, Lamennais wanted order for the sake of liberty.

During the years between 1814 and 1820 Lamennais, because of his increasingly incisive and provocative journalism, alienated many of his original friends and prepared a number of real or potential enemies in both the Gallican and liberal camps, in the University and on the government Board of Censors. This background of animosity contributed heavily to the violent reactions with which the second volume of the *Essai* was received. It was this volume which Lamennais considered to be the most important of the four because it contained "a new system of defending Christianity against all the unbelievers and heretics." Lamennais was one of the few churchmen of his time willing to admit that Descartes was dead, and that some new method of defending
the faith was needed. He contended that the Cartesian method of doubt carried to its logical conclusion led right back to Montaigne's universal scepticism, leaving man with no logical reason for believing anything at all. From this he deduced that a ground of certitude must exist elsewhere than in the reason of the individual, since universal doubt is impossible to men who are invincibly persuaded of thousands of truths. Lamennais concluded that this certitude, grounded in the general reason of the human race, is an act of faith which neither has nor needs a rational demonstration. Volume II is primarily devoted to setting forth this theory of certitude based on common consent, "sensus communis," to use the Latin term he often preferred.

The third and fourth volumes were published in 1823. They occasioned much less comment than the first, which met with almost universal approval in Catholic circles, or the second, which set off a violent war of pamphlets and bitter, protracted controversy concerning the relative merits of Cartesian philosophy and the philosophy of common consent.

Lamennais made his first trip to Rome in 1824; whether it was to seek papal approbation or simply to remove himself from the center of such an acrimonious debate, no one knows. Ten years and many bitter disappointments later Lamennais described his first impression of the Eternal City in this way.

On a dit de Rome que c'était la patrie de ceux qui n'en avaient pas. Nous ne concevons pas qu'elle puisse être pour personne une patrie, selon le sens ordinaire de ce mot. Ce n'est pas qu'elle n'ait quelque chose d'extraordinairement attachant, quoique d'abord on le sente peu, et même aucunement. Ce que vous y éprouvez, les premiers jours, c'est une sorte d'ennui profond, de tristesse vague et pesante. A chaque pas, le pied foule des ruines et remue les cendres, maintenant confondues, des hommes de toutes races et de toutes contrées qui, durant trente siècles,
ont, vainqueurs ou vaincus, maîtres ou esclaves, habités cette terre de grandeur et de désolation. Vous reconnaissiez encore, dans cet amas confus de débris, les traces des peuples divers et des divers âges, et de tout cela s'élève je ne sais quelle vapeur de tombeau qui calme, et endort, et berce l'âme dans les rêves du dernier sommeil. On peut venir là pour y mourir, mais non pour y vivre; car de la vie, à peine y a-t-il une ombre.\(^22\)

As is always the case when something is written in retrospect, it is impossible to know how much is the original impression and how much the expression of later sentiments subconsciously superimposed on the framework of the past. We may be sure, however that this first trip to Rome was pleasanter than the second one.

In Rome Lamennais made some influential friends among the clergy, friends who recognized his genius and became zealous defenders of his doctrines. These were the exceptions, however, because everything in this passionate, impatient, zealous, disinterested, forward-looking, intellectually vital Frenchman was diametrically opposed to prevailing attitudes in the papal court and inevitably aroused mutually adverse sentiments. Yet Lamennais was encouraged by the way Leo XII received him and allowed him to expound his ideas. The Pope's personal regard for Lamennais did not blind him to the potential danger of such a passionate nature. He reputedly said to one of his cardinals:

> Ce Français est un homme distingué; c'est un écrivain; il a du talent, de l'instruction; je lui crois de la bonne foi; mais, c'est un de ces amants de la perfection, qui, si on les laissait faire, bouleverseraient le monde.\(^23\)

The Pope was apparently a good judge of human nature because he classed Lamennais as an"'esaltato', un homme qu'il faut conduire avec la main dans le coeur."\(^24\) At the end of September, 1824, Lamennais returned to Paris satisfied that he had, if not the Pope's formal approbation,
at least his confidence and good will.

The death of Louis XVIII in that very month marked a turning point in the policies and in the fortunes of the restored Bourbons and in those of Lamennais. The repressive measures subsequently taken by the government of Charles X were all that was needed to bring into a state of actuality all that was potentially liberal in the political thought of Lamennais.

His revised opinions soon appeared in a new book entitled De la religion considérée dans ses rapports avec l'ordre politique et civil (hereafter called De la religion); it was published in two parts; the first, in May 1825, and the second in February 1826. The first part presents an analysis of the problem, the second proposes a solution. In it Lamennais went so far as to call the government of Charles X "atheistic", and while not yet an advocate of the complete separation of church and state, he was ineluctably being led in that direction, as the following quotation shows.

La vraie dignité, la force véritable des évêques comme des prêtres, dépend aujourd'hui de leur éloignement des affaires politiques; il leur suffit de celles de l'Eglise. L'avenir de la religion est assuré; elle ne périra point, ses fondaments sont inébranlables. Séparez-la donc de ce qui tombe. Pourquoi mêler ce qui ne saurait s'allier?25

The book ends with a somewhat gloomy if realistic assessment of the future of Christendom and the fate in store for those who would devote themselves to the renaissance of a Christian society.

Si l'ordre doit vivre, ce ne sera pas de nos jours. Donc ceux qui demandent l'ordre, ne le demandent pas pour eux;...ils n'ont rien à espérer, rien à recueillir que l'injure, la calomnie et la persecution. On ne change point en quelques années l'esprit des peuples, c'est l'oeuvre du temps; et jusqu'à ce que cet esprit ait changé, il est impossible que la société chrétienne renaissa. Elle est le fruit, non de la violence, mais de la conviction; sa base est la foi, et non pas l'épée.26
Unfortunately this new book in defense of the ultramontane position appeared in the midst of the state of wild alarm caused throughout France by the publication of Montlosier's *Mémoire à consulter sur un système religieux et politique, tendant à renverser la religion, la société et le trône*. This inflammatory work alleged that the chief parties to conspiracy suggested by this title were the "Congrégation"\(^{27}\), the Jesuits, the "partiprêtre" and the ultramontanes. Lamennais' book added fuel to the fire; both Gallicans and liberals united in denouncing it. As a result Lamennais was charged in civil court with having attacked the King and incited the people to disobey the laws of the realm. Defended by the famous lawyer, Berryer, he came out of the affair rather well, although he was condemned to a fine of thirty francs with costs, and to the suppression of his book.

Since the opposition of the Gallicans was to play an increasingly large part in Lamennais' fate, an anecdote concerning one of the most disinterested and noble representatives of that group may be of interest. Msgr. de Quelan, the archbishop of Paris, made the following declaration from the pulpit of Notre-Dame:

> Non seulement Jésus-Christ était Fils de Dieu, mais encore il était de très bonne maison du côté de sa mère et il y a d'excellentes raisons de voir en lui l'héritier légitime du trône de Judée.\(^{28}\)

This confusion of religious and "légitimiste" sentiments seems almost comical today. But to Lamennais, who was growing ever more desperate about the monarchical regime in France, such comments must have seemed anything but humorous.

His next book, *Des Progrès de la révolution et de la guerre contre l'Eglise (Des Progrès)*, was published in February, 1829. "Brochure que le temps n'a pas flétrie, qui a l'imortelle et effrayante fraîcheur des vampires;...", is the strange description of this book given by Barbey d'Aurevilly.\(^{29}\)
It was written against the background of the complicated politico-ecclesiastical moves of the government and inspired in part by the success of Belgian Catholics in uniting with liberals in order to achieve the freedom of their country. In this new manifesto he stated that the time had come for the Church in France to demand the same liberties that Belgian Catholics were demanding from a persecuting government, i.e., liberty of education, of the press and of conscience. Lamennais was as hostile as ever to both liberalism and Gallicanism, which to his mind represented the principles of anarchy and despotism respectively. He was trying however, to convince the individual liberal or Gallican of good will that ultramontane Christianity alone was able to secure and maintain that freedom combined with order which both truly sought. Although this book appeared to indicate a Christian retreat from politics, it was in effect preparing the ground for a new political initiative — the liberal Catholic initiative — which Lamennais and his fellow mennaisians were soon to take.

When the Revolution of July made it abundantly clear that the past could not be revived, Lamennais and the group of gifted young men he had gathered around him began what must surely be one of the most disinterested and audacious ventures in the history of journalism. The campaign of *L'Avenir* began on October 16, 1830 and ended on November 15, 1831. Its motto was "Dieu et la Liberté", said to be the very words of the motto Voltaire, a few days before his death, proposed to the children of Franklin; an imprudent choice perhaps. A detailed analysis of the program of *L'Avenir* would be a book in itself and for present purposes one can only say that it stood for those mennaisian principles already set forth. Its chief novelty lay in the fusion of two principles, ultramontanism in religion and liberalism in politics, which were considered at that time to be irreconcilable, much in the same way that democracy and communism are today.

His contemporaries were puzzled and sometimes angered by these rapid changes of opinion. Vigny, for instance, judged him very harshly
for abandoning the Bourbons, saying that Lamennais had had,

...sa petite église, et sa place comme une seconde papauté; mais il l'a crue braise, cette tiare, par la révolution de 1830; il s'est épouvanté de se voir rangé parmi les ruines, il a cru à propos de rajeunir son nom, et, après mille hésitations, celui qui avait dit "Dieu et l'autorité" a dit tout à coup "Dieu et la liberté" mais dans sa réforme incertaine, à demi saint-simonienne, il a été assez puni...31

Such an interpretation of Lamennais' motives in changing his political philosophy, based as it was on the assumption that he was a seeker after popularity and vainglory, seems ill-informed and unjust, but yet consistent with Vigny's own cult of honor.

We cannot hope in this study to resolve the controversy which to some extent still surrounds the changes in Lamennais' social, political and religious ideas; we can hope, however, that the analysis of his character in the ensuing chapters will cast some new light on his decision-making processes. For his part, Lamennais believed that consistency was the vice of petty minds and announced that he was resolved to follow the truth wherever it led and leave to others the problem of interpreting his actions.

In the beginning Lamennais' liberalism was simply a temporary expedient for an age of revolution; in time, it came to be a fundamental element in his faith as a Catholic, a good in itself.32

L'Avenir quickly won international fame but was forced to stop publication after only thirteen months. Although there were other contributing factors, it seems fair to say that it was primarily the opposition of the bishops which caused subscriptions to fall to the point where it was impossible for the paper to continue. It appears the mennaisians first intended to lay down their arms only temporarily and await a more propitious moment to resume the battle. Unfortunately, and for reasons that will be discussed later, Lamennais with his two
friends and principal collaborators, Montalambert and Lacordaire, decided to go to Rome. With mixed emotions they set out on their pilgrimage, anxious to throw themselves at the feet of the Holy Father and ask him to judge their cause, anxious for him to say before the whole world that they were right and the bishops were wrong.

On December 30, 1831, the three "pilgrims of God and Liberty" arrived in Rome, where Gregory XVI now occupied the Chair of Peter. He did not welcome them with open arms. In fact, several months passed before the Pope received them at all and even then, the audience was very unsatisfactory. In due time it was suggested that they return to France, there to await the decision of the theologians and the Holy Father. Lamennais, however, stubbornly refused to give up until the following summer when he and Montalembert finally left Rome, still without a decision. Lacordaire had already gone. It was in Munich on August 30, 1832, that they received the encyclical Mirari Vos, which, although it did not mention l'Avenir by name, condemned most of the principles it stood for — liberty of conscience, freedom of the press, separation of church and state, and associations between Catholics and people of other religions.

Lamennais and his colleagues unhesitatingly signed an act of submission in Paris on September 10. They resolved to keep silent as a matter of ecclesiastical discipline, but in private regarded the encyclical as an act of diplomacy without any dogmatic character, as the statement of the Pope as a temporal prince not as definition of dogma by the head of the church. In October of that year Lamennais retired to La Chênaie with a few select pupils; there he directed their studies, worked on his Essai d'un système de philosophie catholique, and meditated. The following year he wrote his apocalyptic and most famous work, Les Paroles d'un Croyant. Through the good offices of Sainte-Beuve this book, which made Lamennais' break with Rome inevitable, was published on April 30, 1834. According to Le Hir, it was "le plus grand succès de librairie de l'époque." On June 24, 1834, this book,
as well as its author's system of philosophy based on "sensus communis" was condemned in the encyclical Singulari Nos. Lamennais affected indifference to the "personal opinion of Mauro Capellari". He believed he had won freedom of speech and action for Catholics in the temporal order, and apparently had at that time no intention of leaving the Church. His friends and followers, however, could not take so light a view of the situation, and in the end the Singulari Nos dispersed the mennaisian school. Eventually all the protagonists in this great drama submitted to the second encyclical and Lamennais was left alone.

In the spring of 1836 he left La Chênaie and returned to Paris, this time for good. It was about this time that he changed his name from La Mennais to Lamennais saying "Je me fais peuple." In a way he did just that, since the rest of his active life was devoted to being the defender, the teacher, the brother and the voice of the common man.

C'est ma conviction profonde qu'aujourd'hui le peuple, le vrai peuple, ignorant, déguenillé, vivant chaque jour du travail de chaque jour, est encore la portion la plus saine de la société, celle où l'on trouve le plus de bon sens, le plus de justice, le plus d'humanité. D'autres le craignent; moi, j'espère en lui. Ce n'est pas que je le crois parfait, il s'en faut; il lui manque beaucoup de choses et beaucoup d'autres sont à réformer dans ses idées, ses habitudes, ses moeurs. Mais le fond en vaut mieux, ille fois mieux que celui des classes qui se disent supérieures. Ses vices, on les lui donne, ses vertus n'appartiennent qu'à lui.35

Even a brief account of his activities and a partial list of his publications during the next years show that he did not falter in his tireless efforts to serve humanity. For him, humanity had replaced the Church, or rather, had become his Church.

In 1837, Lamennais published Le Livre du peuple, in which he instructed the people in regard to their rights and duties. Boutard calls it a "socialist catechism". Some of the people read it and
many conservatives did too, the latter with displeasure. Nor were they reassured by his *L'Esclavage moderne* (1839) in which the former abbé demanded universal suffrage and exhorted the hungry victims of injustice to cast off their chains. In yet another ferocious attack on the government of Louis-Philippe, *Le Pays et le gouvernement*, he finally went too far. Lamennais' reward for being such an outspoken member of the loyal opposition was a year's stay in prison. It has been said that his friend and countryman, Chateaubriand, present at the trial, sobbed audibly when Lamennais was condemned. He entered prison in January 1841, and remained there until the following January; during that year he wrote *Une voix de prison*. After being released from Sainte-Pélagie he was able to finish the only long work he produced during these later years, his three volume *Esquisse d'une philosophie*. This was the same book he had started many years before with the title *Essai d'une philosophie catholique*. The original manuscript was thought by Maréchal to be lost but has since been found and prepared for publication by Yves Le Hir. The portion devoted to esthetics is the only one considered to be of general interest and has been published separately under the title *De l'art et du beau*. The fourth volume of the *Esquisse* (1846) is an attempt at a general philosophy of science which adopts a principle of divinely animated evolution. That same year he also published a translation of the Gospels, with a commentary; it was promptly put on the Index.

After the Revolution of 1848, Lamennais, along with Lamartine, was elected "député" from the Seine; he continued to serve in this capacity until the coup-d'état of Louis-Napoleon, in December 1851. In addition to his duties as a representative of the people, Lamennais published a newspaper, *Le Peuple constituant*. Founded soon after the Revolution of 1848, the paper was short-lived. On July 11, 1848 its publication ceased because of a new set of regulations established by the government. The lead article of the last issue, black-bordered
and 400,000 copies strong ended with these words, "Il faut aujourd'hui
de l'or pour jouir de droit de parler. Nous ne sommes pas assez riches.
Silence au pauvre." 36

Disheartened by the coming of a new Bonaparte, this quixotic
defender of the oppressed, of God and of liberty, retired once again,
this time for good.

He was buried on Ash Wednesday of 1854, in a common grave as he
had requested.
CHAPTER TWO

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Ce qu'on voit, ce qu'on prévoit, tout est sujet de larmes...\textsuperscript{1}

Ideally, the Romantic hero should appear on the scene with his entire past life shrouded in mystery. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the circumstances surrounding the birth of Lamennais are well established; unfortunate, but not fatal to the present thesis, since our hero quickly overcame this initial disadvantage. From earliest childhood his truly romantic nature was revealed.

What cruel irony that his parents chose the name Félicité for a child destined to know more of sorrow than of joy. Like René, Lamennais found his torment within himself. His is the figure of a melancholic -- melancholy by temperament, melancholy by preference, and made more so by a certain morbid pleasure in suffering. He was sensitive to a degree unsurpassed by any fictional hero of his age. Boutard, in his excellent but incompletely documented biography of Lamennais, synthesized the information of contemporary biographers to form this portrait of "le solitaire de La Chênaie" as a child.

Il avait le front élevé et large, le visage ovale et maigre, les pommettes un peu saillantes, les yeux gris, les lèvres minces, les membres grêles. D'une vivacité singulière et comme fébrile, symptôme d'un tempérament excessivement nerveux, il fut sujet, dès son enfance à des accès de colère qui se terminaient souvent par des évanouissements... Concentré en lui-même, d'allures étranges et même un peu sauvages, il semblait ne se plaire que dans l'isolement...n'obéissant qu'aux caprices de son humeur inquiète il se refusait à toute contrainte, et s'échappait fréquemment de la maison paternelle pour courir sur la grève ou égarait au hasard les rêves précoces de sa fertile imagination.\textsuperscript{2}

How many traits of the Romantic hero are already visible here!: violent emotions, egocentricity, love of solitude, rebellion against
authority, a powerful imagination and even the broad high forehead so often considered at that time to be a sign of genius.

In later life Lamennais mentioned frequently and with nostalgia the landscapes of his youth. Never did he speak so often of the past as while he was in prison; then his memory apparently functioned like that of Proust and removed him from a present he found so difficult to endure. On July 12, 1841, he wrote to Baron de Vitrolles:

Quelquefois, quand je n'ai pas dormi pendant la nuit, je m'assoupis vers une heure ou deux. Alors, toujours, toujours, les scènes de ma première enfance se représentent à moi, mais si vives, que rien n'y manque, que rien ne m'échappe, que je ne les voyais pas, ne les sentais pas autrement, il y a cinquante ans.3

Above all the poor prisoner longed for and caressed in his mind the rocks and pines, the flowers and fields of his beloved Brittany.

Oh! qui me rendra ma vallée natale, et mes rochers, et les grands pins semés sur leurs pentes, et les prés verdoyants où, dans une eau limpide cachée sous l'herbe en fleurs, mes pieds se mouillaient à la fonte des neiges.4

In general, however, he did not remember his childhood as a happy time and in his correspondence often said such things as, "Vous avez raison de dire qu'il y a beaucoup de tristesse dans mon âme; cela est né avec moi." Later in the same letter he again mentions this innate sadness, referring to it as "cette tristesse que mon coeur boit, pour ainsi dire, comme l'éponge s'imbibe d'eau."5 Lamennais' letters bear ample witness to the fact that this sadness, which he himself declared to be congenital, was one of the most basic and constant elements in his nature.

One is reminded of those pages in Mémoires d'outre-tombe in which Chateaubriand evoked the melancholy atmosphere of Combourg, in whose vast, feudal salon mother and children alike sat silent and terrified like statues until the lord of that dark castle, by retiring
for the night, restored them once again to life. If it is true, as many believe, that the more painful the experience the more difficult it is to verbalize, Lamennais' silence about family life may reveal a more profound wound than Chateaubriand's words, especially when we remember that the unfortunate Féli was denied even the consolation of a mother's tender care.

Perhaps the best indication that Féli's childhood was, in some respects at least, a time of trauma, lies in the fact that his reminiscences include no happy scenes of family life. And when he did break his almost complete silence on this subject it was to complain that "L'ennui naquit en famille, une soirée d'hiver." It became clear enough somewhat later in life that Féli was indeed "un jeune homme entêté de chimères," as le Père Souel called René, but the remark just quoted shows that even as a child he suffered from that "ennui" which was such an integral part of the "mal du siècle." Like so many other Romantic heroes he did not feel at home on this earth. "Je ne me suis jamais bien senti en ce monde," he wrote to his friend Benoît d'Azy in 1819,

...j'en ai toujours désiré un autre; et quand je détournais mes regards du seul où nous devions espérer la paix, mon imagination jeune encore en créait de fantastiques, et ce m'était un grand charme dans ma solitude.

Sur le bord de la mer, au fond des forêts, je me nourrissais de ces vaines pensées, et ignorant de l'usage de la vie, je l'endormais en berçant dans le vague, mon âme fatiguée d'elle-même.  

It is well to remember that such passages were not written with the purpose of establishing or maintaining a public image; for the thought that his correspondence might one day be published must have been far from his mind at that early date. When in 1853 it was suggested that he write his memoirs, Lamennais refused. Some of his fellow Romantics
were more generous with scholars yet unborn -- or perhaps simply more confident that succeeding generations would find it just as interesting to search their vast and suffering souls as they had themselves. In this respect as in many others Lamennais was more hero than writer and he chose to descend into the tomb leaving posterity to judge him by his life, his books and his correspondence. The reasons he gives for not writing his memoirs reveal much about his character,

Il aurait fallu pendant des années m'occuper de moi-même, y penser, en parler sans cesse. Or, s'il est quelque chose qui me répugne invinciblement, c'est cela.

En outre, contraint de dire la vérité sur les autres, cette vérité n'eut pas été constamment favorable à tous.

He went on to say that it would have been necessary to show some in a bad light, and that was repugnant to him. Not that he blames those who felt obliged to bequeath to the living the strict truth about the dead. That was part of the history of society: but neither did he wish to follow their example.

Lorsqu'il s'agit de blesser, les morts pour moi sont toujours vivants; ils me semblent même avoir droit à plus de respect, à plus de ménagements, car, attaqués, ils ne sauraient se défendre. J'ai donc renoncé à écrire des mémoires.

Such sentiments do him honor, especially since he was at that time in need of money and there is no reason at all to question their sincerity. One may suspect, however, that there was another reason, which he perhaps did not wish to admit, even to himself: he refused to write his memoirs for the same reason that he refused to return to La Chênaie, because either would have resurrected the past, a past too painful to be willingly lived again. In any case, his aversion to thinking and writing about himself was not as invincible as he would
have liked to believe. For, as a Romantic, it was impossible for him not to be self-conscious and the personal element is sometimes very strong even in what was written for publication, while his correspondence is rich indeed in references to his "moi."

In this chapter Lamennais will often be quoted since he is himself the principal witness to his excessive sensibility. Who can fail to suspect that he was speaking from personal experience when he warned Montalembert against that "secrète inclination à retenir nos douleurs, à nous cramponner à ce qui nous tourmente." Such an inclination was, he continued:

...mauvaise en soi, car elle a son principe dans l'orgueil. L'énergie et la durée de leurs sentiments élèvent les hommes à leur propre yeux et semblent justifier la préférence intérieure qu'ils s'accordent sur les autres.9

This tendency to take pride in the intensity of one's sentiments and to believe oneself superior to others because of them, is one of the principal elements in the personality of the Romantic hero. Of course, Lamennais did not say, "I am proud, I am more sensitive than other men, I am therefore superior." At least he seldom said such things directly and there is a good reason for that; Lamennais was trying for most of his life to be a Christian. He tended, therefore, to view and describe himself in terms that were acceptable to his own self-image and his sometimes distorted, frequently exaggerated and always personal conception of what a Christian should be. Verluys, in his study of Lamennais' character, seems insufficiently aware of this and tends to take everything Lamennais said about himself at face value. This in no way is meant to imply that he was consciously insincere, but rather that his effort to make a thoroughly Romantic nature fit into a traditional Christian mold was an inhibiting factor which sometimes made it difficult for him to evaluate his thoughts and feelings properly. Let us give a single example of the way this inhibiting factor worked.
Like any other Romantic hero Lamennais was conscious of being isolated from his fellow men, of being a person apart. Since the only way to be different from the average man, within a moral context, is to better or to be worse, Lamennais had to choose. At one point in his early life, Lamennais saw himself as an ungrateful pig, a vile person whose repeated offenses against a kind, forgiving Father set him on a pinnacle of wickedness. Nor did he hesitate to voice these sentiments:

Mon Dieu!...Le prodige de votre évangile ne quitta qu'une fois la maison de son père, n'offensa ce bon père qu'une fois; après s'être assis au festin de réconciliation, il ne retourna point partager avec les pourrereaux leur nourriture immonde: à moi seul [the under-scoring is his] était réservé ce comble de l'avilissement et d'ingratitude.10

He probably felt free to express this self-loathing because such exaggerated breast-beating has so often, some might say mistakenly, been considered an expression of Christian humility. That there might be a certain element of pride in viewing oneself as the greatest sinner since the Fall did not, apparently, occur to him.

Later, when Lamennais began to think of himself as a prophet, his attitude changed. He continued to protest that he himself was nothing, but surely even prophets are not necessarily preserved from self-deception; for whenever a man insists, as Lamennais did, that his cause is the cause of Truth itself, which he is battling single-handedly to preserve, one doubts that he really considers himself to be worthless. By some strange process of assimilation Lamennais and his cause became one; its greatness became his greatness, and then, instead of being worse than all other men he became better than all other men. Not that Lamennais said any such thing, he did not and would, in fact, have denied having a thought so lacking in humility. Many passages could be cited, however, which reveal this sense of identity with his cause, but perhaps the closing lines of his first
public letter to the Archbishop of Paris are an especially good example
considering the moment when they were written, the reason for their
composition, and the personage to whom they were directed.

Early in 1829 Lamennais' book Des progrès de la Révolution,
demanding an end to the traditional alliance between altar and throne,
appeared in the bookstores; an estimated six thousand copies were sold
in two weeks' time. 11 Like most other Gallicans, Monseigneur de Quélen
considered many of Lamennais' theories dangerous not only to the mon-
archy but to religion. He therefore felt that it was his duty as bishop
to warn the faithful against this "génie aventureux, dominé par l'esprit
de système"... "triste et dangereuse tentation des plus beaux talents." 12
Lamennais was not pleased to hear himself described in a pastoral letter
as a presumptuous person, one inclined to "ériger en dogmes ses propres
opinions." The abbé Boutard seems to feel that the archbishop was en-
couraged to take this action by many persons whose motives were less
pure than his own, and that such a tactic was rather unfair since it
gave Lamennais only two alternatives: "de subir en silence un affront
public, ou d'entrer personnellement en lutte avec un évêque." 13 Need-
less to say, he chose the latter and announced in the Quotidienne that
his answer to the Bishop's charges would be forthcoming. The entire
brochure is worth quoting as a fine example of his polemic style, but
the last lines more than any others prove that by this time Lamennais
was not wholly lacking in self-confidence.

Jetez les yeux autour de vous, et voyez,
Monseigneur, qui défend aujourd'hui le
gallicanisme: des ennemis de l'Eglise,
qui conspirent publiquement sa ruine et
celle de la religion chrétienne; des sec-
taires retranchés de la communion catholique;
de cauteleux adulateurs du pouvoir, qui le
poussent à sa perte, pour attirer sur eux,
en le flattant, ses regards et ses faveurs;
un petit nombre de vieillards respectables
sans doute, mais qui ne vivent que de quel-
ques souvenirs d'école: tout le reste,
qu'est-ce que c'est? et y a-t-il des paroles pour peindre cette ignorance et cette bassesse, ce dégoûtant mélange de bêtise et de morgue, de naïsserie stupide et de sotte confiance, de petites intrigues, et d'impuissance absolue d'esprit? Monseigneur, votre place n'est pas là: ne descendez point dans cette boue; croyez-moi, elle vous tacheroit. Prenez, il en est temps encore, des pensées plus élevées; regardez l'avenir, et méritez, cela vous est facile, sa reconnaissance et ses hommages. C'est le vœu que je forme de tout mon cœur en terminant cette lettre, où vous reconnaître, je l'espère les sentiments de respect avec lesquels j'ai l'honneur d'être,

Monseigneur,
Votre très humble
et obéissant serviteur,

F. de La Mennais

The Bishop, no doubt, had some difficulty in recognizing the respectful sentiments of his humble servant, hidden as they were by the magisterial tone of F. de La Mennais. On whichever side of the controversy one's sympathies lie the mere fact that Lamennais could and did, not only defend himself, but publicly point out the path of duty to his religious superior shows that his opinion of himself had oscillated wildly from the most abject humility to what most would call confidence, pride or even arrogance.

Thus we observe that while Lamennais could on occasion say openly, "I am a miserable creature," he could not, except in a more roundabout way, say "I am unique and wonderful." Because of his conscience, he could not say in the style of a Hugo, "Ego Lamennais." Biographers have had very different views about the nature and proportions of his pride, as have theologians. Almost all of these views seem defensible, and none of them is in conflict with this thesis; for a hero destroyed slowly by the subtle, insinuating, disguised pride of the neurotic is just as Romantic as one brought low by the over-weening pride of a Lucifer.
The question of pride is, in any event, of secondary importance in these prefatory remarks whose primary purpose is to warn the reader that the complexities of Lamennais' mind make it unwise to interpret what he says literally. It is hoped that this warning will make the following discussion of his sensitivities more comprehensible.

All men are sensitive to some degree, but the Romantic hero is hypersensitive. This does not necessarily mean that he is always in a state of nervous exaltation and excitement but rather that his emotional responses are more immediate, more spontaneous and especially more exaggerated than those of a vulgar\textsuperscript{15} man. He is more sensitive to love, more easily aroused by beauty, more capable of experiencing deeper feelings of all kinds than other men. The average man stays near the center of the emotional keyboard while the superior man runs the entire gamut and usually stays at one extreme or the other. He does this both by necessity and by choice; by necessity, because he is incapable of changing this finer nature which was given him, and by choice, because he would not if he could. Lamennais fits this pattern.

A Romantic hero is, in his purest state at times of crisis, and no crisis in Lamennais' crisis-filled life was greater than that of his vocation. The years when the future prophet-priest was confused about his place in the world were for him years of turmoil and torment, of despair and exaltation.

By March 1809, Lamennais had finished his translation of the \textit{Speculum religiosorum}, a sixteenth century ascetic work by Louis de Blois. At that time it was also his custom to read each day from the \textit{Imitation of Christ} and one has little difficulty imagining the state of mind such a mystical literary diet was likely to produce in a soul whose excessive sensitivity obliged him to lay aside his copy of \textit{Paul et Virginie} after having read only eight or ten pages because "l'\'\'\'\'emotion devient trop vive."\textsuperscript{16} On the sixteenth of March of that same year, Féli took his first step toward the priesthood and on the following day
wrote to his friend the abbé Bruté. It is a letter which reveals several interesting aspects of his character.

O Jésus! Jésus crucifié, je veux n'aimer, ne connaître que vous désormais. Je veux m'attacher à votre croix, y mettre toutes mes pensées, mes affections, mes désirs... Croix sainte, croix adorable, croix divine, soyez à jamais mon partage, ma joie, ma consolation, mon espérance... je ne veux que la croix seule, la croix de Jésus, et encore la croix; je vivrai sur le calvaire en esprit d'amour, de pénitence, de renoncement et de sacrifice absolu. O quelle vie! quelle douce, quelle heureuse vie!
C'est le ravissement de mon cœur d'être crucifié avec Jésus, par les souffrances, les outrages, les persécutions, et tout ce qui peut le plus crucifier mon orgueil et ma chair... je veux m'abreuver à longs traits des saintes dôles de l'humiliation! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Encore une fois la croix, la croix et rien que la croix! 17

Some of these expressions are of course conventional ones; nevertheless, it seems clear that in this moment of exaltation Lamennais' religious sensitivities brought him little joy or consolation, unless one believes, as he seemed inclined to, that a morbid and almost voluptuous pleasure in suffering is preferable to dryness of soul. One can say that this letter is something of a prolongation of the young ordinand's prayers of preparation, that at such a moment intense emotion was natural, that Bruté’s own mysticism was perhaps contagious, that he was reflecting the sentiments of Thomas à Kempis and Louis de Blois and, still, one is distressed by the mental state it reveals. At least most people are. However, Victor Giraud, a Breton physician and a biographer of Lamennais admires the sentiments expressed in this letter which is, in his opinion, worthy of Bossuet. 18

Unstable at best, it is not surprising that Lamennais' emotions in times of stress should oscillate from one extreme to the other.
Thus the mystical effusion just quoted can be fully appreciated only by comparing it to another letter, also to Bruté, written only a month before.

Hélas, cher Bruté, c'est la misère toute vive que votre pauvre ami. Quand je réfléchis sur ma vie passée, sur cette vie toute de crimes que les austérités les plus rigoureuses ne seraient pas suffisantes pour explier, et qu'après cela je viens à considérer mon état présent, cette tièdeur, cette mollesse, ce poids des sens qui me lasse et qui m'abat, cet amour-propre qui ne se sacrifie jamais qu'à demi et qui renaît sous le couteau même, j'entre dans une frayeur qui n'a que trop de fondement, et je me demande si c'est donc à un malheureux tel que moi de pénétrer dans le sanctuaire, et si je ne devrais pas bien plutôt me tenir prostré au bas du temple, comme ce pécheur de l'ancienne loi, moins pécheur que moi.
Une chose toutefois me rassure un peu: j'obéis à des conseils que je dois respecter, et ce n'est une raison d'espérer de la miséricorde du bon Dieu les secours qui me sont nécessaires, et sur lesquels je compterai bien plus encore, si vous daignez les lui demander pour moi.19

Lamennais went through many periods of severe depression in the course of his life, but none was blacker than that which immediately followed his ordination. One of the advisers referred to in the letter just quoted was the abbé Teyssseyre. Far from being distressed by poor Félix's state of mind, this good man considered it a sign of election; shortly before the fateful day he wrote to congratulate the future priest on his state of near despair.

J'adore, cher ami, les dessins de la miséricorde du Seigneur sur votre âme ...vous allez à l'ordination comme une victime au sacrifice. Le saint autel est dépouillé pour vous de tous ses ornements, le calice envirant a perdu ses délices, et vous embrassez et suivez
la croix toute nue...qu'avez-vous donc fait au Père céleste pour qu'il daigne vous traiter ainsi, comme son fils bien-aimé? ... Hélas! pauvres âmes imparfaites que nous sommes, nous avons célébré notre première messe sur le mont Thabor: pour vous sera donné de la célébrer sur le Calvaire.

Eyewitness accounts make it clear that the celebration of his first Mass was, in fact, an agony for Lamennais. He broke out in a cold sweat, his face became pale and tinged with green. Years later "le maître", as his disciples often called him, told de Salinis that while saying that first Mass he distinctly heard an interior voice saying to him: "Je t'appelle à porter ma croix, rien que ma croix, ne l'oublie pas."

In some confused way Lamennais must have realized that anyone with his extremely independent and impetuous nature was not suited to the ecclesiastical state, which would explain both his hesitation before the ordination and his premonition of misfortunes yet to come. There is, it would seem, enough suffering inherent in the human condition to make a saint of any one who bears it with patience, and even Christ did not look for crosses but only bore that one which was laid upon Him. Such moderation was, however, alien to Lamennais' character and once he had decided to sacrifice himself, nothing less than total self-immolation satisfied his idea of spiritual perfection. Therefore, because he abhorred discipline, regimentation and authority he decided to become not just a priest but a Jesuit. "Ce qui me plaît dans le parti pour lequel je m'étais décidé," he wrote to Jean-Marie, "c'est qu'il finirait tout, et qu'après l'avoir pris je ne vois pas quels sacrifices il resterait encore à faire." This Romantic disdain for half measures, this all or nothing attitude is part of the inner fatality of the Romantic hero since it inevitably, if left unchecked, leads to disaster. On this occasion, at least, Féli, thanks to the wise advice of his brother, did not act on that impulse to make the ultimate sacrifice and be done with it.
He discovered, not to his surprise, that being a simple priest was quite hard enough. Faith itself was not so much a gift as a cross.

...[la foi] n'est point une opinion, mais la vérité même de Dieu; elle n'est point raisonnement, mais obéissance, et sans cela, où serait le mérite de croire? Le mérite est de se soumettre à une autorité plus haute et de courber cette fière raison sous un joug qu'elle ne porte jamais sans murmurer.23

If faith alone was a difficult yoke to bear, no wonder than that Féli wrote his brother three months after his ordination, bewailing his fate and saying, "Je suis et ne puis qu'être désormais extraordinairement malheureux... il y a des destins inévitables."24 And when anyone had the temerity to suggest to the hypersensitive and despondent Lamennais that he should force himself to be cheerful, he lashed out at them for foolishly believing he could, by an act of the will, change his fate.

_Gaudete_, le conseil est sage; que n'est-il enfin aussi facile à suivre qu'à donner! Eh! qui est-ce qui refuserait la joie si elle lui était offerte? Est-ce par goût qu'on est malade et qu'on souffre? Portez-vous bien! Excellent avis à un homme qui se meurt! et pourtant voilà tout ce que savent faire les médecins. Oh! que j'aimerais bien mieux qu'on me dit comme le sauvage à son fils: _souffre et tais-toi_. Au moins, j'entends ce langage; il est dur, mais il est vrai, il me rappelle à la condition humaine...25

He then went on to say that his only desire was to spend the rest of his life in solitude: "Toute liaison et même toute communication avec les hommes m'est à charge; je voudrais pouvoir rompre avec moi-même...." Since Lamennais was too intelligent not to recognize that his emotional state was abnormal, he went on with the self-analysis hoping, perhaps, that his brother would find a way to help.

_Dis-moi sincèrement ce que tu penses de moi. Je ne me connais plus. Depuis quelques mois, je tombe dans un état d'affaissement incompréhensible. Rien ne me remue, rien ne m'intéresse, tout_
me dégoûte. Si je suis assis, il me faut faire un effort presque inouï pour me lever. La pensée me fatigue. Je ne sais sur quoi porter un reste de sensibilité qui s'éteint; des désirs, je n'en ai plus. J'ai usé la vie; c'est de tous les états le plus pénible, et de toutes les maladies la plus douloureuse, comme la plus irrémédiable.26

We can only imagine what kind of advice was forthcoming since very few of Jean-Marie's letters to his brother have been published. Some, in fact, believe they have been deliberately destroyed. In any event, his counselor's admonitions, however, sound and logical, were weaker than Lamennais' intimate conviction that he had lost forever the opportunity to live according to his own character and taste and he replied protesting:

La vie est trop pesante pour moi.
J'ai beau me dire à cet égard ce qu'on souhaite, ce qui peut-être est raisonnable au fond; le sentiment l'emporte, il m'écrase. Quelle terrible pensée que celle d'avoir réduit un être humain en cet état.27

At that moment his suffering was so acute that he doubtless would have considered suicide like Chatterton, had his religious scruples not precluded such a solution. Even so, the complete self-forgetfulness he longed for was equivalent to a death wish.

...tout ce qu'il me reste à faire est de m'arranger de mon mieux, et s'il se peut, de m'endormir au pied du poteau où on a rivé ma chaîne, heureux si je puis obtenir qu'on ne vienne point sous mille prétextes fatigants troubler mon sommeil.28

On January 4, 1817 he wrote, "Je regarde que tous mes malheurs, de conséquence en conséquence, viennent de ce que mes parents, bien contre mon gré, m'ont forcé d'apprendre à lire."29 But if the original
cause of his misfortune was having learned to read, there was also a more immediate one. "Chacun doit décider pour soi," he lamented, "je l'ai appris trop tard, mais je ne l'en sais que mieux." Convinced that he had lost forever the opportunity to live according to his own character and his own tastes, Lamennais was very displeased with those who had encouraged him to be ordained. The desire to blame another for our mistakes is a common defect, a natural inclination of men. Reason, however, and a certain sense of justice prevents the emotionally healthy person from distorting reality unduly. Lamennais, however, was not emotionally healthy; it was not reason, but emotion, that determined his reaction to the situation in which he found himself. He reproached himself for having allowed others to make a decision for him, when in fact he had begged them to do so. He seemed to have forgotten completely his original gratitude to the abbé Carron, whose "main charitable" had rescued him from the depths of the abyss into which he had fallen, and put an end to his "éternelles irrésolutions." 31

The resentment he felt towards those responsible for his tragedy was largely unjust but nonetheless understandable. It is obvious however, that Lamennais' almost complete lack of self-confidence during that period of his life made it unlikely that he would have made, or wanted to make, any independent decisions. He wanted someone to direct him; at least that is what he told his brother.

J'ai besoin de quelqu'un qui me dirige, qui me soutienne, qui me relève; de quelqu'un qui me connaissance et à qui je puisse dire absolument tout. A cela peut-être est attaché mon salut. 32

Lamennais' lack of self-esteem influenced his relationships with both God and man. In spite of frequent complaints about spiritual aridity he seemed certain that he truly loved both God and his friends. He
was not at all sure, however, that they loved him. Such feelings of insecurity were not unnatural when one considers that he believed himself to be:

...un être bien inutile, bien méprisable et bien malheureux.
...dépourvu de raison et de caractère. Le jour pour le jour et le laisser aller de l'enfance avec sa mobile vivacité et son imagination dominante...33

How could God love him, he wondered, when, alone at La Chênaie, instead of praying or dedicating his time to devotional reading or performing penitential acts, he could only watch for the mail and observe the falling leaves.

J'attends tous les deux jours mon courrier avec une impatience que je me reproche. Une feuille légère, aussi fugitive que le temps dont elle nous apporte les nouvelles, obtient toute notre attention, occupe toutes nos facultés tandis que nous avons là, près de nous dans les auteurs qu'inspira l'esprit de Dieu, des messagers de l'éternité qui demandent audience et ne l'obtiennent pas. Quand je viens à considérer en moi-même ce prodige d'aveuglement, et que je songe de combien de distractions, de misères, de faiblesses et de chutes horribles le corps nous est une occasion toujours présente, je commence à entrer dans le désir de l'apôtre: quis me liberabit a corpore mortis hujus? Heureux ceux en qui la force de la grâce a complètement assujetti cette puissance rebelle.34

Not only did his many sins (one suspects they were not so grave as he imagined) make him feel unworthy of God's friendship, but he also brought this same feeling of unworthiness to his human relationships. "Je l'ai dit bien des fois" he wrote Benoît d'Azy, "et
je le sens chaque jour davantage, je suis étonné qu'on puisse m'aime."35

On the more superficial level of casual social relationships, his reaction was not much different. In the early days of his fame as a writer, Lamennais was sought out daily by many of the most important literary, political and religious figures of his time. Instead of interpreting this attention in a way that was flattering, the "new Pascal," as Lamartine called him, complained bitterly that people who cared nothing at all for him were coming to look at him as if he were "le singe de la foire." But how else could he interpret their interest when he was convinced he had none of those "qualités qui rendent les hommes, je ne dis pas aimables, mais supportables dan la société."?36

His need for companionship drew him toward men, but his fear of rejection was sometimes stronger than that need, and then he longed to escape their company entirely. During the years of anguished indecision which preceded his ordination, Lamennais had repeatedly heard a voice calling him to the desert.37

Je ne sais quel dégoût des hommes, je ne sais quel irrésistible penchant pour la solitude et la vie des champs m'entraîne avec une force inexprimable vers un genre d'existence qui ne doit pas être le mien.38

These words were written when he was newly ordained and living in Paris. He longed to return to La Chênaie but his spiritual advisors would not allow it at that time; they apparently agreed with Chactas who warned René: "Détie-toi de la solitude, les grandes passions sont solitaires, et les transporter au désert, c'est les rendre à leur empire."

During these early years Lamennais was almost constantly torn between what he felt were his sinful and selfish inclinations and his desire to live in conformity to the will of God. He had found no solution except to rely on the judgment of others, which, to his dismay,
was no solution at all. His reaction was violent, as we have observed, so violent that he was exempt from all desires save one — that his self should be dissolved.

Je n'aspire qu'à l'oubli dans tous les sens, et plutôt à Dieu que je pusse m'oublier moi-même... J'ai trente-quatre ans écoulés; j'ai vu la vie sous tous ses aspects, et ne saurais dorénavant être la dupe des illusions dont on essaierait de me bercer encore.\textsuperscript{39}

In fact, he was throughout his life usually the dupe of one illusion or another, as this letter itself proves, for he had at that point seen little of life, and less of people.

It is evident that the first period of Féli's adulthood, the one preceding and just following his ordination, was marked by irresolution and virtually complete dependence on the person who was for the moment dominant in his life, whether Jean-Marie, Carron, or Teyseyrre. From time to time Lamennais did enjoy brief periods of confidence and tranquillity; these were probably due to his temporary success in appropriating the healthier attitudes of those whose advice he sought. He realized at last his own dependence, when it was too late, and to avoid further advice he resolved to make his own decisions and to discard no more the matter of his ordination and subsequent misery, stating: "Tout ce qui me rappelle de près ou de loin me cause une émotion que je ne suis maitre de modérer."\textsuperscript{40} That show of independence was the beginning of the end of the old Lamennais. The paralyzing apathy which he felt at that point was a kind of death, an analogy he did not fail to note when protesting to Jean-Marie that it was a mistake to believe he could be in any way useful.

Je crains qu'on ne se trompe beaucoup sur l'utilité dont je puis être. Je suis propre à bien peu de chose, si à quelque chose. Mon âme est usée, je le sens tous les jours. Je me cherche et ne me trouve plus. Mais encore une fois qu'importe? Je ne m'oppose
à rien, je consens à tout; qu'on fasse du
cadavre ce qu'on voudra.41

When that "cadaver" came to life again, it was almost as if a new person had been born. The components of his personality were no doubt the same, but as he gained self-confidence very different aspects of that personality became dominant, and he then resembled a different sort of Romantic hero.

As Shroder noted in his excellent study, Icarus: The Image of the Artist in French Romanticism, "Romanticism presented the phenomenon of possessing two model types."

One was nothing more than the man of feeling of the eighteenth century - deepened, perhaps, by a greater sense of fatality and of impending doom, sick with the "mal du siècle" a "caedium vitae" more sinister and more incapacitating than the superficial melancholy of "sensiblerie." He was passive and submissive, with a singularly feminine nature. The ultimate desire of this passive type was the dissolution of his self...

The other model type, subject to the other impulse, was not without sensibility; but the emphasis was not on his delicacy and sensitivity. He was the enthusiast, the passionate and dominant man...His ultimate desire was to impose his personality on the world, to shape the world...42

During the years before Lamennais came to believe he was a prophet, his sensibility was that of the first type: passive, submissive, longing for solitude or death; with a sense of mission he became an enthusiastic activist, a Prometheus whose passionate desire was to impose his will on men and events. It is only natural that his emotional responses should have reflected this change in his self-image. These aspects of his personality will be discussed more fully in the chapter which deals with Lamennais as a prophet.

All people are influenced to some extent by the emotions attendant
on close personal relationships, and no one was more so than Lamennais. A few lines from one of his first letters to Benoît d'Azy show that his love for a friend could be as intense and troubled as his love of God:

Il y a deux heures que ma lettre qui partira demain est cachetée; j'en commence une seconde, car, ne pouvant te parler, je voudrais t'écrire sans cesse. Je lis et relis les tiennes: c'est mon seul plaisir, plaisir triste comme tous ceux que je peux goûter désormais, mais cependant plaisirs bien doux. Les larmes aussi ont leur joie. Mon frère, je suis las d'être toujours celui qui reste. Je les vois tous partir et me laisser.

He is referring here to the death of Henry Mooreman, an English boy he had converted during his stay in that country and whom he had deeply loved. Lamennais' use of the word "tous" is just another reminder that the romantic writer tended, because of his subjectivity, to exaggerate. This is simply Lamennais' way of saying "Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé."

Est-ce que je ne serais que de ce monde? Toi, tu es de l'autre aussi. Ton âme est si belle. Mon frère, aime-moi cependant, aime-moi par pitié! Le bon Dieu t'en récompensera. Et si jamais tu cessais de m'aimer ne me le dis pas, cache-moi que tu ne m'aime plus, ce ne sera pas bien long. Mon frère, que ta lettre est bonne!... Ma tête par moments n'est plus à moi. Je la sens quelquefois qui se trouble. Mon frère, t'ai-je dit combien je t'aimais?43

The tone of this letter addressed to a person of the same sex may be offensive, or even misleading to the modern reader; but although Lamennais goes beyond what was customary even for that romantic age, effusiveness in the expression of one's sentiments was, at that time, quite normal. Moreover, as Duine commented:
Si l'on remarque dans quelques-unes des premières lettres un accent éperdu dans la tendresse, il n'est pas mauvais de se souvenir que l'épistolier est un malade et un romantique... 44

In this land of exile, friendship was for Lamennais one of his rare sources of joy; unfortunately, it also prevented him from seeing men and situations as they really were, sometimes, and caused him to make several serious errors of judgment. His decision to contribute to the Conservateur was such a mistake.

The Conservateur, a newspaper created in October 1818 by the "ultras", was put under the direction of de Villèle (whom Lamennais later called "un aigle de basse-cour") and Corbières. Their long-range aim was the restoration of the monarchy as it was before the Charter and their short-range aim, to topple the government of Décazes and his middle-of-the-road cabinet. Many eminent men collaborated in this venture, including Chateaubriand. In view of his recently acquired fame as an apologist, Lamennais was considered by friend and foe alike as the foremost figure in the French Church, and it was natural that the rightists should have desired to enlist such an illustrious recruit. What is neither natural nor logical is that he should have accepted. In spite of a certain superficial agreement, their aims were not his aims. His primary interest was establishing the kingdom of God, theirs in restoring the kingdom of the Bourbons. (We remember that in Stendhal's novels people are classified according to the papers to which they subscribe or read, how much more so then by the papers to which they contribute.) Why did Lamennais accept so compromising an offer? Apparently because he was asked to do so by his friend, Baron de Vitrolles. The Baron, somewhat naive politically himself, certainly wished Lamennais no harm; his loyal friendship until death is proof of that, but he harmed him none the less. This early association with the extreme right cast suspicion on Lamennais' sincerity in later years, and caused him to make more enemies than he might have done otherwise.
And so, for purely sentimental reasons, Lamennais compromised not only himself, but the cause of religion whose defender he was. Would that he had listened instead to the more prudent advice of Joseph de Maistre.

Si j'avais un conseil à vous donner, ce serait celui-ci avec votre permission: Ne laisser pas dissiper votre talent. Vous avez reçu de la nature un "boulet", n'en faites pas de la "dragée" qui ne pourrait tuer que des moineaux, tandis que nous avons des tigres en tête. On s'empressera d'attacher votre nom à une foule de sujets, ce qui est bien naturel; mais, croyez-moi, n'en faites rien. Recueillez vos forces et votre talent, et donnez-nous quelque chose de grand... But de Maistre was not a close friend, so real friendship prevailed, not reason. This sort of response on Lamennais’ part leads one to believe that Mlle. Hoiss was only half right when she said that his conduct could be explained by his ideas; she should have added that his ideas could only be explained by his emotions and sentiments.

Lamennais was sensitive to everything; the weather, the servants quarreling, a sentimental novel, but above all to the sufferings of his friends. "Mon bonheur sur la terre n'est pas en moi," he confessed, "il est en ceux qui me sont chers. Je ne voudrais point ne pas souffrir; mais quand mes amis souffrent, je n'ai pas de force pour me consoler." Only one thing was even dearer to him than his friends, and that was the mission he felt God had given him. When, in July of 1827, he lay near death, he told his brother Jean-Marie, who had just given him the last sacraments, "Je te lègue la plus belle chose du monde: la Vérité à défendre." When one considers what the future held for him, it seems almost a pity he did not die at that moment; however, the man who dies happily at the end of act two can scarcely be a romantic. His recovery fostered in him a feeling that God had spared him so that he might continue to defend his country and his Church.
Lamennais was well aware of his emotional instability and compared himself to "une frêle nacelle abandonnée sur l'Océan; les flots n'y entrent pas, mais ils l'emportent." Though aware of this weakness, he was unable to overcome it, and all his life he had to suffer the consequences of hasty and ill-advised words and decisions. It is also well to remember that some of the storms that tossed his fragile boat to and fro originated in that very boat; but amidst the storms of life he had a port, La Chênaie.

The time Lamennais spent at La Chênaie, writing, praying and directing the intellectual and spiritual life of that enthusiastic and noble group of young men who had dedicated their lives to helping him fulfill his mission, were the happiest and most tranquil years of his life. But even there, as one of his disciples recounted, "Le baromètre de son humeur était sujet à bien des variations et souvent, dans l'espace d'un jour, il descendait du beau fixe à tempête." He went on to say that sometimes the Maître's silence and sadness continued for several days "et alors tout notre petit Olympe était dans la gêne et dans l'émoi." Nevertheless, at La Chênaie, Lamennais was engaged in purposeful activity, and sheltered from the cruel realities of life. There he loved and was loved; there, he was allowed for a time to think that his great and noble dream was in the process of becoming a reality.

Louis de Villefosse, in his eloquent but undocumented defense of Lamennais, gives an account of the last Holy Week Lamennais spent in his beloved retreat. Villefosse quotes from the correspondence of Hippolyte de la Morvonnais, a young Breton poet, whose conversion Lamennais, in spite of his own mounting doubts, had prepared that very spring. It is a scene whose dramatic impact and emotional intensity is unexcelled in the Romantic theatre. It took place in that troubled interval between the Mirari Vos and the Singulari Nos.

Lamennais had chosen as the text for his Good Friday homily this verse: "Et vous aussi, vous serez scandalisés à cause de moi, car il est écrit: Je frapperai le pasteur et le troupeau sera dispersé."
On Easter Sunday morning he continued in this same vein, saying:

Je n'ai plus de raison, d'être auprès de vous. Je vous serais désormais un sujet de scandale, je vous détournerais, malgré moi et pour votre malheur du chemin que je vous ai tracé. Le pasteur a été frappé de cécité, comment pourrait-il conduire son troupeau? Dispersez-vous, mes amis, mes fils bien-aimés, mes yeux se ferment et mes chemins deviennent sombres, restez dans la lumière que je vous ai donnée, et laissez les morts ensevelir les morts.

At that point he fainted and had to be revived before he could finish the Mass. Then, for the last time, he distributed Holy Communion, gave his young followers the kiss of peace, and said in parting: "Quoi qu'il advienne, restez fidèles à Dieu, à son Eglise et à la liberté."

With that the gates to what Maurice du Guérin called "le petit paradis de La Chênaie" closed forever.\(^{56}\)

Lamennais had been brought to this point in part, at least, because it seemed impossible for him to weigh the practical problems involved in effecting the changes he regarded as both necessary and inevitable if the world was to be saved.

Le catholicisme était ma vie, parce qu'il est celle de l'humanité, je voulais le défendre, je voulais le soulever de l'abîme où il va enfonçant chaque jour; rien n'était plus facile.\(^{57}\)

And it would have been easy, if everyone had followed Lamennais' instructions, and if human nature had not been what it was, and is.

Excessive sensitivity is a sickness and Lamennais realized that. "Qui m'apprendrait à ne pas m'affecter, celui-là me guérirait," he said. But like most of his contemporaries he regarded this sensitivity as a sign of election, and did not really wish to be cured. "Cette guérison est impossible et je ne le regrette pas,"\(^{58}\) whatever the price, he was more than willing to pay it, because, for him, sentiment
was "l'unique source de tout ce qu'il ya de grand et de beau dans l'homme."\(^{59}\)

So he tried to accept patiently the insomnia, the pain, the fainting spells, the outbursts of anger which sometimes made his friends fear for his sanity, and all the other manifestations of his excessive sensitivity. He consoled himself in his tribulations by repeating "Dieu ne m'a pas fait chêne, il faut que je me contente d'être roseau."\(^{60}\)

Lamennais did make a distinction between sentiment and passion, at least in theory, and sincerely tried to avoid the latter. "J'évite," he wrote to Count de Senfft:

\[
\text{tant que je peux de me passioner,}
\text{je fais tous mes efforts pour voir}
\text{les choses telles qu'elles sont, car}
\text{j'aime la vérité par dessus tout, et}
\text{il n'y a qu'elle qui soit aimable.}
\text{Si, après cela, je me trompe, Dieu}
\text{me le pardonnera, je l'espère, du moins.}^{61}\]

One is permitted to hope that his confidence was not misplaced. One is also permitted to note that it was not always truth to which he assigned the first place. In a letter to Victor Cousin, written in 1825, some two and a half years before the one just cited, he wrote:

\[
\text{J'aime toutes les connaissances,}
\text{lorsque l'homme ne les tourne pas contre}
\text{lui-même; j'aime tous les efforts de l'esprit,}
\text{lorsqu'ils ont un but honorable, et qu'ils ne}
\text{tendent pas à renverser toute espèce d'ordre}
\text{sur la terre; car la science qui nuit est une}
\text{fausse science, et fût-elle véritable, la}
\text{vertu vaut encore mieux.}^{62}\]

While his violent emotions often led Lamennais to act without sufficient reflection, that does not mean he was lacking in intelligence. Many indeed, believed his genius was primarily cerebral, and he himself so admired intellect that he expended vast amounts of time and energy providing himself with a logical justification for his actions. Philip Spenser, writing in The Listener, described his decision-making processes this way.
His point of departure is always rêverie and invocation; the hypothesis is granted by an act of intuition, by a flash of insight. Reason, rhetoric, argument then come into play as tools— not of discovering the truth but of spreading it once it has been discovered. His attitude, despite all appearances to the contrary, is never rational. However cogent the process of argument, its point of departure is felt rather than worked out.63

Lamennais was insufficiently aware of this inner process, if he was aware of it at all. For once he had succeeded in formulating a logical system to justify whatever position he was currently holding, that position became for him the only one possible for a man of intelligence and integrity. To read through his correspondence with Montalembert is to find ample proof of that.

After the program of l’Avenir had been condemned by the Pope, even Montalembert, the most cherished of his disciples, fell a victim to this almost paranoid tendency. Despite the fact that he had a father’s affection for the young count, or perhaps because of it, “le Maître” could not bear to see his “cher enfant” persist in maintaining a position he himself had abandoned. He accused him of stubbornly refusing to change his mind when events had proven his former ideas to be false. What Charles should do was face facts, as he had done.

Mes idées d’ailleurs suivent les événements, et se modifient, sans qu’il m’en coûte, suivant les lumières qu’ils m’apportent, à cet égard, j’ai la raison la plus accommodante, parce qu’elle ne cherche que le vrai.64

Montalembert’s reason was not so accommodating. Of the three "pélerins de Dieu et de la liberté", only he, the youngest, had opposed the journey to Rome from the beginning, on the reasonable ground that they might well be condemned. When what he had feared came to pass, the young nobleman’s only concern was to salvage as much as possible of their
program; to do nothing which might give comfort to their enemies, within or without the Church, and to console and sustain in his hour of trial the man who had been for him a teacher, and friend and a father. His letters to Lamennais, especially those written in 1833 and 1834, were a monument to his loyalty, his affection and his patience.

Lamennais needed the affection of his friends desperately and frequently appealed to their sympathy when they did not write often enough. Thus, he reminded Montalembert of his advancing age and asked the young man to cultivate "des fois à l'autre les souvenirs de ma solitude, comme on cultive des fleurs sur une tombe aimée." In this same letter he assured Charles that one day he would realize that he (Lamennais) had been right all along and for Charles’ sake he hoped that moment of enlightenment would come "avant celui où les choses de la terre ne me seront plus rien." This was the kind of sentimental blackmail Lamennais had used in years past on his brother, the subconscious strategem of an intransigent man to bend others to his will. Montalembert refused, however, to vary from that position they had held in common such a short time before.

Charles feared, and rightly, that the broken-hearted and lonely Lamennais, betrayed by his emotions, might embark on a course of action that would not be in his own best interest, and never tired of trying to make him see the reality of the situation. Lamennais, irritated at finding opposition, albeit friendly, where before there had been only admiring acquiescence, lashed out at him. Charles, he said, was "plus conduit par des impressions qui changent que par des idées invariables," his religion had in it "quelque chose d'une superstition féminine." Such an accusation must have seemed ironic indeed when Montalembert remembered how Lamennais had described the ease with which his own ideas were altered by changing circumstances. Eventually, he said other things that were even less flattering. As far as his position was concerned, Lamennais told Charles, "les hommes intelligents ont tout compris," The ones who were not intelligent did not matter,
he said, and eventually, that criterion forced Lamennais to include
his protégé in the number of those whose opinions were no longer valuable.
"Je te plains, mon pauvre Charles," he wrote on December 28, 1834, "et
d'autant plus que je t'aime davantage. Quel dommage qu'avec le plus
excellent coeur tu aies si peu de tête." Montalembert had, on the
eighth of that month, sent Cardinal Pacca a formal, public act of sub-
mission to both encyclicals; Lamennais did not approve. But as soon
as he had vented his anger, Lamennais' very real affection reasserted
itself and he added:

Après tout, si ce que tu as cru
devoir faire te donne une paix
quelconque, du calme d'esprit,
de la tranquillité de conscience,
je m'en réjouis, car ce sont là
de grands biens, et assurément
tout ce qui pourra contribuer
à ton bonheur contribuera aussi
au mien.

The letter ended on this melancholy note:

J'ai perdu bien de l'amour,
répandu ça et là, non pas
goutte à goutte, mais à
pleine source, et cette
source n'est point épuisée
et avec quelque abondance
qu'elle coule, jamais elle
ne tarira. Dieu ne regrette
pas l'eau qui tombe des nuées
sur les sables arides. Nous
devons l'imiter en cela...quels
que puissent être les dissentiments
qui nous séparent à certains égards,
rien au monde n'altérera jamais
la vive, la tendre, l'immensé
affection que je t'ai vouée.

Those last words have a certain gloomy irony, not just because
of the comparison between Montalembert's heart and a desert, but because
in due time this friendship went the way of so many others. Lamennais'
last letter to Charles was a brief note dated July 11, 1834. Charles' last letter to him was written in September of 1836, while he and his bride were en route to Rome. According to his wife, Montalembert wrote a long letter to Lamennais from Switzerland, asking permission to negotiate his peace with the Holy Father. That letter, which has never been found, went unanswered.

Eugène Forgues (who edited Lamennais' correspondence with Montalembert) referring to this "pathetic" effort "tenté par le solitaire de La Chênaie, avec toutes les illusions de son coeur, pour conserver au moins, en dehors de toute communauté de croyance, celui qu'il appelait son 'Charles bien-aimé'", seems to see Lamennais as the injured party. A careful reading of these letters, however, makes it clear that what Lamennais was struggling to maintain was their old relationship with him leading and Charles following. He tried unceasingly to reestablish a "communauté de croyance" by convincing Montalembert that his new position had become the only valid one. Forgues' interpretation of events would, doubtless, have been more agreeable to the "solitaire de La Chênaie", who expressed these sentiments in regard to the abbé Gerbet, who had been his right hand.

\[ Il \textit{s'est éloigné de moi, je ne me suis point éloigné de lui...} \]
\[ Je n'ai jamais rompu aucun lien: beaucoup de liens rompus ont cependant laissé de profondes cicatrices dans mon âme. \]

That he really believed this proved once again how often emotion replaced reason in order that he might reshape reality a little closer to his heart's desire.

Many thought the way to bring Lamennais back to the faith was to reason with him, but those who knew him best realized that his problem was not intellectual. Thus we see Jean-Marie writing their old friend Mlle. de Lucinière and asking her to comfort him as best she could.
Le pauvre malade dont nous souhaitons si ardemment la guérison et le salut a été blessé au coeur, et c'est là, par conséquent, qu'il faut appliquer le remède. Tout discussion, bien loin de diminuer le mal, l'augmente, et n'a d'autre résultat que d'irriter son esprit. Voilà pourquoi je suis enchanté que vous lui écriviez de temps en temps...S'il se croyait abandonné de ceux auquels il est lui-même si sincèrement et si tendrement attaché; il tomberait dans l'état le plus déplorable, et il n'y aurait plus de ressources. 71

This letter shows with what delicacy and clairvoyance Jean-Marie, (the brother Félix believed had first misled and then abandoned him), tried to heal wounds which were destined to remain always open. The stigmata of Lamennais were his sensibilities. "Les peines de coeur" he lamented, "sont irrémédiables; nul point d'appui pour réagir sur elles.

On oppose des idées à d'autres idées, on lutte contre des forces hostiles; mais l'amour blessé, contre quoi luttera-t-il? 72

Verluys points out that Lamennais was able to maintain his friendship with some Catholics; that is true, but only with those who had never been his intellectual disciples. Verluys also says that Lamennais became more tolerant in later years. That also is true, but only to a certain point; he became more tolerant about dogmas and doctrines that were strictly religious, for the excellent reason that he no longer believed in them. He preached more tolerance to others because he was in need of that tolerance himself, but those principles which he still held, he held with all his old intransigence. This, Sainte-Beuve did not fail to note and to criticize. 73 One last story of how another friend "abandoned him", as he saw it, will illustrate this point.
Lamennais' nephew Ange Blaize, although a sincere Republican, felt it was his duty as a citizen to take the side of law and order during the bloody insurrection which followed the closing of the national workshops in June, 1848. Lamennais, horrified by his nephew's betrayal of the holy cause of humanity, broke with Ange and refused to see him ever again. 74

These few examples are not intended to prove that Lamennais was never the injured party, or that his hypersensitivity was always to blame in those cases where a friendship came to an end. In many instances, the truth was somewhere in the middle, where it so often is, and where our prophet, with his penchant for Romantic extremes, was least likely to look for it.

While no one was a more tender and loving friend than Lamennais, as long as he believed himself to be loved, one of the tragedies of his life was that an often misguided but highly developed sense of duty forced him into positions which eventually alienated him, almost without exception, from those who loved and understood him best.

In happier days, Lamennais had reproached himself for forming excessive attachments, fearing it might be somewhat idolatrous to so love human beings. Idolatrous or not, his love for individual human beings eventually caused him such pain that in 1835 he announced to Montalembert that, henceforth, he intended to love in general, and not in particular.

Il est temps que je mette à profit l'expérience d'un demi-siècle que j'ai acquise à leur [i.e. les hommes] égard. Je ne les hais point, mais je sais ce qu'ils valent, et, cessant de m'appuyer sur aucun d'eux en particulier, à un extrême petit nombre d'exceptions près, je reporte sur les peuples, je porte sur l'humanité, dont vous autres gens parfaits, ne vous souciez guère, l'inépuisable puissance
d'amour qui m'a été donnée.\textsuperscript{75}

At last he had found a way to love without being hurt or disappointed. In true Romantic fashion, he had found reality too harsh and retreated into the world of abstractions. His love was real, but "humanity" was only a concept, and there is no greater testimonial to Lamennais' need and capacity for love, than the fact that he squandered the riches of his heart on this abstraction for the remainder of his life.

That is not, however, as surprising as it first appears; Lamennais' first allegiance had always been to the creations of his mind. The humanitarianism of Lamennais' later years was, in great part, based on his misanthropy and the rather illogical conclusion that the whole is bound to be good, though the individual parts are bad. Genuinely moved by the suffering of the masses, he excused their every excess. This indulgent tolerance for the defects of the poor and oppressed was matched by the prophet's absolute intolerance of the sins of the rich and powerful. Time and bitter experiences had taught him little, and in old age his uncontrollable emotions prevented him from seeing people as they were, just as they had in his youth. His prejudices changed with time, his emotional reactions did not; and though he was often charitable, he was seldom just.

The disproportion between the world as Lamennais thought it should be, and the world as it really was, accounts for most of Lamennais' problems in his relations with people. From this distance how easy it is to say that he was too idealistic and too emotional. But when we remember how contemporary novelists like Balzac described the worlds of journalism and of the Church, the worlds in which Lamennais spent so many years, his misanthropy becomes more understandable, his bitterness seems more natural. He took everything seriously, including himself, and lacked that one quality which might have saved him, a sense of humor. But, whoever heard of a Romantic hero with a sense of humor?

Perhaps the best way to evaluate the role emotions and sensitivities
played in determining the course of Lamennais' life is to compare what he himself did with what he advised others to do, being careful to avoid occasions when his advice was colored by emotion. Here are a few examples,

To Monsieur de Nugent, on intellectual curiosity:

Occupons-nous d'abord d'aller au ciel.
Là tous nos doutes s'éclairciront;
...Vous avez des lumières peu communes;
mais votre esprit ne trouvera jamais
ici-bas tout ce qu'il cherche. Il y
a en toutes choses un degré d'obscurité
inséparable de notre condition présente. 76

To Jean Dessoliaire, a humble provincial tailor, a great admirer of Lamennais and the leader of a group of "lamennistès" in his village: on prudence and the dangers of excessive zeal, even in a good cause.

Soyez prudent, modérez votre zèle
et tâchez d'amortir les haines injustes à force de douceur. Vous avez besoin de votre état, et vous devez à votre famille. Réglez votre conduite là-dessus. Le zèle le plus pur, comme le plus ardent, est subordonné au devoir, et les premiers devoirs du père de famille sont envers les siens. 77

To Mme. Ligeret de Chazey, on denouncing evils without offering a solution. (Inspired by Les Paroles d'un Croyant, she had written a jeremiad on the sufferings of married women entitled, Paroles d'une femme, and wished Lamennais' opinion of her manuscript.)

Vous voulez, Madame, que je vous dise avec une pleine franchise mon avis sur le manuscrit que vous avez bien voulu me confier. J'y ai remarqué un talent réel, des réflexions délicates et vraies, de la sensibilité sans affection,...Quant au fond, il me semble qu'à côté du tableau que vous faites des souffrances de la femme dans le mariage, on pourrait en placer un autre
qui n'aurait pas moins de vérité,
le tableau des souffrances de l'homme;
et qu'en outre, n'indiquant pas les
changements que vous croiriez juste
et bon d'opérer dans les conditions
légales de la femme, votre ouvrage
sous ce rapport ne conclut pas, et
ne peut guère par conséquent qu'irriter
le sentiment du mal, sans joindre
l'espérance et la prévision du remède.78

These few examples, chosen from many possible ones, only emphasize
what was already obvious; that Lamennais was capable of making good and
logical judgments when he was not swayed by emotion.

At the age of twenty-nine, Lamennais predicted that he would
have neither rest nor peace while traveling through "ce marais infect
et fangeux qu'on appelle la vie."79 Physical pain was bearable, he
said,

"...mais les douleurs de l'âme;
mais les secrètes angoisses d'un
cœur malade, où les sentiments
les plus doux s'aigrissent et qui
n'a de force que pour se tourmenter
lui-même, voilà ce qui ne se peut
ailler avec la tranquillité que
nous admirons, et ce qui ne laisse
espérer d'autre paix que la paix
éternelle de la tombe."80

Fortunately, when the world seemed dark and when grief forced
him to cry out, "Les hommes ne sont bons nulle part,"81 one consolation
remained, his love of "notre bonne mère nature qui nous endort doucement
sur son sein."82 She was a good mother to Lamennais and seldom failed
him.

Although this love of nature was not enough to make Lamennais
what one would call happy, in the usual sense of the word, it did induce
in him a sort of tranquil melancholy, which was as close as he came on
this earth to that rest he so long and so ardently desired. One of his
loveliest expressions of this sentiment is a meditation on springtime,
in which he contrasts the joyous rebirth of nature with the state of his own soul. It was originally an entry in the private journal he kept during the time when he was preparing *Affaires de Rome* for publication. Its wistful tone is typical of Lamennais in his more tranquil moments, and the obvious biblical allusions are less a literary device than proof that he never ceased to think and write within a religious frame of reference.

Mon âme, pourquoi es-tu triste?
Est-ce que le soleil n'est pas beau? Est-ce que sa lumière n'est pas douce, à présent que l'on voit et les feuilles et les fleurs avec mille nuances éclorer sous ses rayons et la nature entière se ranimer d'une vie nouvelle? Quand les vents légers agitent l'air, on dirait le souffle des anges se jouant dans une mer de parfums. Tout ce qui respire a une voix pour bénir Celui qui prograde à tous ses largesses. Le petit oiseau chante ses louanges dans le buisson, l'insecte les bourdonne dans l'herbe. Mon âme, pourquoi es-tu triste, lorsqu'il n'est pas une seule créature qui ne se dilate dans la joie, dans la volupté d'être, qui ne se plonge et ne se perde dans l'amour?

Le soleil est beau, sa lumière est douce, le petit oiseau, l'insecte, la plante, la nature entière a retrouvé la vie et s'en imprègne et s'en abreuve; et je soupiré parce que le soleil ne s'est pas levé sur la région des âmes, parce qu'elle est demeurée obscure et froide. Lorsque des flots de lumière et des torrents de feu inondent un autre monde, le mien reste noir et glacé. L'hiver l'enveloppe de ses frimas comme d'un suaire éternel. Laissez pleurer ceux qui n'ont pas de printemps.
Any discussion of Lamennais' sensitivity would be incomplete without at least mentioning that his emotional reactions to religious stimuli were not at all the same as those of Chateaubriand; not because he was really less sensitive to incense, gothic architecture and plainsong, but because he had a different attitude toward religion. Both of these great champions of a Catholic renaissance defended the Church for very personal reasons, reasons which reveal a limited view of the value, nature and purpose of religion. Chateaubriand clung to his childhood faith because it satisfied his esthetic and emotional needs, while Lamennais, more sincere and less selfish, wanted the Church to take the lead in establishing a utopian society. In fact, it would not be unreal to say that almost from the beginning Lamennais' creed had been, "I believe in the social mission of the Church." This emphasis on the social relevance of religion is demonstrated by the fact that in the first volume of the Essai it is considered at much greater length than other aspects of the same subject. In the Garnier edition he devoted 113 pages to the "importance of religion with respect to society," 39 pages to the "importance of religion with respect to man," and 34 pages to the "importance of religion with respect to God." In time this passion for the regeneration of Western civilization took control of his emotional life to such an extent that many aspects of his sensitivity were sacrificed to it.

The primary purpose of this chapter has been to cast some light on the main aspects of Lamennais' sensibilities and to show how they affected his behavior in a few concrete cases. Since every aspect of the Romantic hero is inescapably influenced by his sensibilities it is hoped that this introduction to his often contradictory character will make the following chapters more comprehensible. The rest of the study will, we believe, testify to the validity of Beranger's judgment. "Avec du génie," he remarked, in reference to our hero,

on n'est pas le maître chez soi.
Il faudrait des cercles de fer pour
contenir dans la tonne une liqueur
aussi vêhemente, et Dieu sait que
notre pauvre ami n'est pas cérclé
de la sorte,86

His poor friend was certainly not "cérclé de la sorte," and in the fullness of time his passion for social reform -- inspired at least as much by sensibility as by sense -- led this defender of the Church, this sensitive friend, this lover of Brittany, to remain in Paris, to alienate his friends and to break with the Church.
CHAPTER THREE
THE PROPHET

On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
Robed in the sable garb of woe,
With haggard eyes the Poet stood;
(Loose his beard, and hoary hair
Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
And with a Master's hand, and Prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.

"The Bard" Thomas Gray

Lamennais was in a very real sense the most complete reincarnation
of Orpheus that the nineteenth century produced, since he was at once
poet, prophet and priest. Imagination made him a poet, intuition made
him a prophet, and the bishop made him a priest. For a time at least
he seemed to reconcile within himself all the immense and conflicting
needs, fears, aspirations and enthusiasms of his generation; a generation
which having witnessed the dissolution of an order that had seemed eternal,
was longing for certitude and impatient to build a new and better world.

It must have seemed providential indeed when the Lord raised
up a prophet in the midst of that chaos, a prophet who, by revealing
a sure and certain method of distinguishing truth from falsehood, offered
his anxious contemporaries direction for their energies and rest for
their souls. Together, he proclaimed, they would build the New Jeru-
salem and they would build it on a rock — the rock of Peter.

The proportions of this task did not seem as titanic to Lamennais'
contemporaries as they do to us for various reasons. For one, the legend
of Orpheus and his accomplishments as a religious leader, preserver of
tradition, legislator and poet had been revived by Ballanche in his
prose epic Orphée (the second of two volumes published under the title
Essais de palingénésie sociale). Thus the Orphic legend, the very
real example of Chateaubriand and later of Lamartine, as well as the
encouragement of groups such as the Saint-Simonians combined to strengthen
the Romantics' pretentions to a position of power in society. This
sense of mission persisted at least to some degree until the Second
Empire. By that time the pendulum had swung from excessive and unfounded
optimism to the other extreme. The second generation Romantics, born
in the early 1820's, convinced apparently that it was impossible to
save society, decided to concentrate their energies on saving art.

Lamennais, like the author of *Portraits Contemporains*, had looked
out at his contemporaries and had seen that they were "en les prenant
au mieux, de vastes âmes déployées à tous les vents, mais sans une
ancre quand elles s'arrêtent, sans boussole quand elles marchent."2
Lamennais' mission, as he saw it, was to provide them with that anchor
and that compass; thus the advice he gave Sainte-Beuve as an individual
was in reality addressed to a whole generation of sick souls.

Vous êtes à l'âge où l'on se décide;
plus tard on subit le joug de la destinée
qu'on s'est faite, on gémit dans le
tombeau qu'on s'est creusé, sans pouvoir
en soulever la pierre. Ce qui s'use
le plus vite en nous, c'est la volonté.
Sachez donc vouloir une fois, vouloir
fortement; fixez votre vie flottante,
et ne la laissez plus emporter à tous
les souffles comme le brin d'herbe
séchée.3

What Sainte-Beuve admired in Lamennais was not only his unreserved
adherence to a truth he believed to be sacred, universal and unchanging
but the way he had subordinated every natural inclination and directed
every faculty to the defense and propagation of this truth.4 That
is what made the famous critic see the pre-defection Lamennais as "l'homme
qui se distinguait entre tous ceux du siècle par un caractère singulier
d'autorité et de foi."5 Although Sainte-Beuve stopped short of calling
the priest he so admired a prophet, others did not.6

Since Rousseau, the Rational Man as a common ideal had been on
the decline, while the importance of extra-rational elements in the
human personality was emphasized in inverse proportion; thus the eventual emergence of the Romantic hero as a new model marked the complete albeit temporary victory of sensibility over reason.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his own thoroughly romantic temperament Lamennais recognized the desperate need to reconcile these two model types. He was aware of both the value and the limitations of sentiment and therefore realized that a richer soil had to be provided if the seeds of religious revival sown by Chateaubriand were to take root and in due time bear fruit.

Up to the time when he broke with Rome, most of Lamennais' work as an apologist, as a philosopher, as a political theorist and as a prophet had one great, common aim -- to bridge the abyss between two ages, to reintegrate the human personality by reconciling the Man of Reason and the Man of Sentiment. He longed to provide men with that internal and external balance between order and freedom without which there is no progress in either the material or the spiritual order. All these elements are subsumed in that great battle cry of his newspaper "Dieu et la Liberté."

The tenor of the times was optimism, and with good reason, for the titanic figure of Napoléon had proved that one man, if his enthusiasm was great enough and his will strong enough, could indeed change the world.

Romantics began to revive the use of the word "poet" not only for writers of verse but for men of imagination and creative ability in other fields as well. In the eyes of Balzac, Napoléon was a poet, as were Cuvier and Jacques Collin. Everywhere the idea that the poet, i.e. the creative genius, was destined by Providence to supplant the warrior-hero and the hereditary aristocrat as both model and leader was in the ascendency. Rousseau, for the moment at least, had prevailed over Descartes, and the once mighty "Cogito, ergo sum" had for the most part been replaced by the attitude Daniel Mornet aptly described with the phrase "I feel, therefore I am."
Lamennais seemed to realize from earliest childhood that he was not cast in the common mold. However, he had reached the age of twenty-six without having shown a real inclination for any career, and much less for that most painful and demanding of all occupations, the career of the professional "vates." The future prophet would perhaps have enjoyed an independent and studious life like that of his uncle des Saudrais, but the family fortune had been destroyed and Féli was obliged to earn his own living and contribute to the support of his father and uncle as well. At regular intervals throughout his life he bewailed this lack of financial independence which would have allowed him to cultivate his mind untroubled by material considerations.

There is a very curious and Pascalian element in the way Lamennais' sense of mission developed. One would logically assume that he wrote his apologetic works because he already felt a vocation to serve God in that particular way. Such an assumption appears to be valid only for the books and pamphlets written after the Essai. In its nascent stage at least, Lamennais' sense of mission seems to have been more the result of his literary efforts than the cause. Féli himself confessed that without the encouragement and assistance of Jean-Marie and others he would not have been able to write his early works. Even then however, there are clear indications that he was a prophet in the making.

At this point one might well ask, what is a prophet? According to Webster's dictionary, the first definition of a prophet is "one who speaks for another, especially for God, or a god." Or, even more to the point, what did the early Romantics think a prophet was? While nothing is really that simple it would not be far from the truth to say that to most of Lamennais' contemporaries the word "prophet" suggested both Biblical (Moses, Isaiah, John the Baptist) and classical (Apollo, Tiresias, Orpheus) images. Lamennais is here usually compared with prophets of the Old Testament since that is how he most often seemed to see himself.

In general the prophet is inclined to ignore the past in order
to concentrate his energies on the future; he tends also to make people uncomfortable by stating unpleasant truths. Thus Lamennais, although he was then a loyal monarchist, did not hesitate to point out in *Reflexions* that,

...le germe de corruption semé dans la société par la main des rois, se développe tôt ou tard avec une épouvantable énergie. Quand il n'existe plus rien de sacré pour le souverain, quand il se joue également du vice et de la vertu, de toutes les bienséances, le jour des révolutions est proche; il a lui-même brisé le sceptre dans ses propres mains, ou dans celles de ses successeurs.

Since this book was a blueprint for the reformation not only of the French Church but of society as well, Lamennais correctly surmised that some might question the right of a young cleric, not yet even an ordained priest, "de [s]’ériger en conseiller sur une semblable matière" and hastened to answer their anticipated objections. He began the presentation of his credentials with what must be one of the favorite words of prophets of all ages,"Alas!"

Hélas! C'est ma plus grande douleur d'avoir à parler lorsque tous se taisent. Je ne suis rien, je ne tiens à rien qu'à ma religion et à ma patrie; et si je me suis pressé d'élever en leur faveur une faible voix, c'est que nous sommes arrivés en ces temps déplorables où selon l'expression d'un saint pape, la foi réclame des soldats et appelle à sa défense tous ceux qui ont du zèle.

These few lines are especially interesting because they contain in embryonic form many of the attitudes which were destined to dominate the entire life of "le maître" as his disciples later called him. But it took time for his sense of mission to develop fully, and as late as 1814 Lamennais was still tempted by the thought of more secular pursuits.
Je serais moins embarrassé si je croyais pouvoir me livrer à un commerce quelconque; j'aurais ce me semble, mille moyens de réussir;...D'un autre côté, plus j'y pense, plus il me paraît évident que je manquerais à ce que Dieu demande de moi en abandonnant des travaux qui peuvent être utiles à l'Eglise, pour des occupations dont le seul but serait de gagner de l'argent.

Lamennais, who has been called "le prêtre malgré lui", was a very reluctant prophet in the beginning. So timid that he could neither preach nor sing a mass in public, he was forced to write, first by his spiritual director and later by his own conscience. "Je n'aime point à écrire," he wailed in April, 1817, as he was finishing the first volume of the Essai sur l'indifférence, "et je ne fais que cela."

This major assault on the minds of his contemporaries was the young Breton's first literary effort following the terrible crisis of his ordination. There is a certain passionate, personal quality about it that is seldom found in apologetic works and which can only be explained within a biographical context, since much of his zeal is traceable to his own spiritual malaise. That modern mind which he was most anxious to convince was his own. In his introductory remarks to volume two of the Essai he said;

Il faut pousser l'homme jusqu'au néant, pour l'épouvanter de lui-même; il faut lui faire voir qu'il ne saurait se prouver sa propre existence, comme il veut qu'on lui prouve l'existence de Dieu; il faut désespérer toutes ses croyances même les plus invincibles, et placer sa raison aux abois dans l'alternative ou de vivre de la foi ou d'expirer dans le vide.

This was the alternative his own reason had been given; he had chosen faith and hoped he could persuade others to do the same.
Lamennais insisted that without the abbé Teysseyre's constant prodding he would have abandoned his work many times. Yet, with a faint but unmistakable accent of pride, Féli assured Jean-Marie that if it were good, and it is rather clear that he thought it was, his book would take the place of an entire library. He also announced with apparent satisfaction that his second volume would contain almost all of Pascal's arguments in favor of the Christian position, but that they would compose less than half of his book. When Féli compared himself to Pascal ("Il a laissé la raison par terre.") it was the latter who suffered (...moi, je la relève.").

Some of the old self-pity and bitterness was still evident at this point but the act of creating had been therapeutic and almost in spite of himself Lamennais' confidence was increasing and he was beginning to feel useful. "Du moins," he continued in the same letter, "ne suis-je dupe de ce que je fais. C'est quelque chose; et après tout, la Providence peut tirer d'un mauvais livre d'utilles effets."

Nine months later he was still complaining. The insistence of abbé Duval Lebris, director of the famous "Congrégation", that the Essai was a masterpiece that put its author "tout bonnement à la tête des écrivains du siècle" did not really please him. It was an exaggeration which pleased him less than the "franchise éclairée" of Monsieur Genoude, director of the Gazette de France, who had promised to help him correct some stylistic errors.

Je ne sens guère en ce moment que ce qui manque à ce pauvre livre que peut-être ai-je eu tort de publier. Tous les moments de plaisir qu'il m'a procurés, mis bout à bout, ne rempliraient pas deux heures; et que de fatigues, que d'ennuis, que de dégoûts. Quelle perte irreparable de repos dans le passé comme dans l'avenir.
Even at that moment when it seemed to many that the new prophet was on the threshold of a brilliant career, one which would bring him honor and gratitude in this world and an imperishable crown in the next, Lamennais was able to foretell the troubles to come. Once he had put his finger between the wheels, the arm, the body, and eventually the whole man were to be crushed.

Whether or not the Essai has permanent interest is a matter of opinion, but there is no doubt that it was the talk of the town when it first appeared. Its audience was certainly much wider than that which any similar book could hope to have today. A hardened sceptic was said to find this somewhat ponderous apologetic work so fascinating he could not put it down, and a soldier of Napoléon's Old Guard was seen reading it in his café. Young men of letters were delighted with it. In a letter to a friend, Lamartine exclaimed joyously that he had at last found something really wonderful to read. "C'est magnifique," he wrote, "pensé comme M. de Maistre, écrit comme Rousseau, fort, vrai, élevé pittoresque, concluant, neuf, enfin tout."  

Although an outward show of Catholicism was an integral part of the Restoration scene and there was no lack of chaplains and confessors at court, many doubted there was any more substance behind this pious facade than at Napoléon's court. "All these great altar-servers hardly ever approach the altar," said Paul-Louis Courier, the pamphleteer, and added maliciously, "I should like very much to know the name of M. de Chateaubriand's confessor." Lamennais, on the contrary, was known to be an austere and sincere Christian who practiced what he preached.

About this time the new defender of the faith was offered a position at the "Grande-Aumônerie", where the bishops of France were made; he declined. He also refused the title of "chanoine honoraire" which the Bishop of Rennes wished to confer upon him. Lamennais declared motive in refusing these honors, which so many ecclesiastics
would happily have prolonged their stay in purgatory to obtain, was his desire for rest and for obscurity. In view of the fact that neither his actions nor his words in the years that followed were those of a man earnestly seeking rest and obscurity, one is permitted to suspect that he had another, unavowed and unavowable reason; namely the fear that any association with the hierarchy might compromise his independence of action. In any event, his refusal of these honors is yet another proof of that complete disinterestedness which was a constant mark of his character; for while Lamennais' concern for advancing his ideas sometimes reached the point of monomania, he gave no indication ever of personal ambition. But despite his natural uprightness of character, Lamennais was human and surely the praise that came pouring in from every part of France, and even from abroad, impressed him more than he would have liked to believe, because that was the last time he had to be driven to write a book.

There are three necessary attributes of a prophetic mission: the recipient is divinely inspired, the task to be performed is divinely sanctioned, and it is obligatory. Certainly as far as Lamennais himself was concerned these conditions were fulfilled. He says again and again, "Ce n'est sûrement pas mon goût que j'ai écouté..." and "je n'écris pas pour plaire aux hommes, peu m'importe ce qu'ils peuvent penser et dire de moi." This is an attitude he maintained until the end of his life and his going to prison in 1840 was, as he himself said, only a continuation of the work he had undertaken so many years before. "Ce n'est pas, he wrote in January of that year, "d'aujourd'hui que je le sais, ni d'aujourd'hui que je l'ai senti qu'il n'était rien sur la terre de plus doux et de plus désirable que de souffrir pour Dieu et pour l'humanité."22

In a moment of depression Lamennais reverted to obscurantism (Maréchal would say to Rousseauism) and wrote to Bruté in February of 1817 lamenting the indifference which reigned supreme and was sure
to destroy the whole human race. He did not see how his lone effort could possibly reverse a trend that was so far gone because,

...le meilleur (livre) n'a jamais fait autant de bien que le plus mauvais fait de mal..., Depuis que mon mauvais sort m'a fait auteur, je me suis vingt fois appliqué le mot de ce Romain: 'Utinam nescirem litteras!' et je m'en tiens là, dussiez-vous me traiter d'obscurant.23

This emotional outburst serves as an example of how Lamennais was able to say things he did not mean at all while remaining honest with himself. Not only did Lamennais study all his life but he was convinced that, given the conditions of the nineteenth century, nothing was more essential to the success of the Church's mission of social regeneration than an educated clergy: if anyone protested that the shortage of priests was so great that they had no time to study he replied that such an objection was as foolish as saying that there were so few doctors that henceforth it would be necessary to dispense with the study of medicine. His zeal never led him to believe that quality could be sacrificed to quantity, even temporarily.

If the figures cited by Le Guillou are accurate in regard to the circulation of anti-religious eighteenth century literature during those years, one can understand that even a prophet would at times despair.24 How feeble his one book must have seemed against such a flood of impiety.

Since Lamennais, in his Essai uses the word "indifférence" in a way that is seldom understood nowadays, a short explanation of what he meant by religious indifference seems in order.

Lamennais was not referring to that subjective attitude of unconcern about doctrines which are passively accepted, but to that intellectual position which states that what man or a culture holds as true has no influence on either public or private morality; in other words, that doctrine itself makes no difference and has no bearing on
the destiny of men or of nations. Thus, given this definition, it is conceivable that a man might be passionately attached to the theory of indifferentism which Lamennais considered to be the most dangerous of all possible intellectual positions.

What Lamennais called "indifference" was, by its consequences, closely akin to scepticism as either attitude logically precludes not only progress, but change itself by destroying any reason for action. As G.K. Chesterton said some years later, in 1903, applying this same principle to conditions in the United Kingdom:

...ours is only an age of conservation because it is an age of complete unbelief
...The net result of all our political suggestions, Collectivism, Tolstoyanism, Neo-Feudalism, Communism, Anarchy, Scientific Bureaucracy...the plain fruit of all of them is that the Monarchy and the House of Lords will remain. The net result of all the new religions will be that the Church of England will not (for heaven knows how long) be disestablished. It was Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Cunningham, Grahame, Bernard Shaw and Auberon Herbert, who between them, with bowed gigantic backs, bore up the throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury.25

With this in mind it is only logical that Lamennais, the prophet of progress, believed the first and most essential step in his campaign was to attack this indifference which was the mother of inertia.

Although he changed his opinion in later years, Lamennais, at the time he was writing the Essai, definitely preferred Bonald, "un chêne vigoureux", to Chateaubriand, whom he compared to "certains abrisseaux qui ne se nourrissent que par des feuilles."26 Lamennais himself pointed out some of the similarities in his ideas and those of the author of the Recherches philosophiques sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales, saying he saw in Bonald "la preuve de cette Providence qui veille sur les peuples, et donne, quand il le faut, à certains hommes
la haute mission d'annoncer les vérités devenues nécessaires et de défendre contre l'orgueil et les erreurs de l'homme la cause de Dieu."

Neither Christian humility nor literary convention would allow Lamennais to publicly include himself in that group of the elect, but it would seem that he did so in his heart.

By May, 1819, the feeling that he had been given a mission like the prophets of old had crystallized and he looked back with some regret on the tranquil existence that might otherwise have been his.

J'éprouvais un vrai bonheur de me savoir inconnu; je me trouvais comme plus à l'aise dans la vie. Seul, au milieu de mes forêts, mon imagination les peuplait d'êtres fantastiques; elle animait cet arbre et sauvage nature, et se créait un monde à son gré. Heureux temps! Pour jamais j'ai quitté ce sentier que Virgile me faisait aimer, et après lequel je soupirer encore..."

But those tranquil days were gone forever because he had been chosen to look out at the confused jumble of history and behind the seeming chaos of mysterious, universal forces perceive the order and meaning of God's creation. "La providence a eu d'autres desseins," he continued, "et maintenant je ne dois plus que fermer les yeux, et marcher dans la route si différente qu'elle ouvre devant moi." These words point to the second attribute of a prophetic mission.

Only two months later the prophet wrote to his favorite friend deploring his fate once again and bewailing the burden of such a high mission.

Il faut que mon âme souffre pour produire; je ne saurais rien faire quand j'ai le cœur content: *ingemiscit et parturit.* C'est ce qui me console dans mes travaux; naturellement ils m'inspirent une profonde répugnance; aucun goût ne me porte à écrire; mais il y a quelque chose d'étranger à moi qui m'y force.
This is the same thought, the same sense of mission that moved Victor Hugo to write more poetically:

Je sens que par devoir j'écris toutes ces choses
Qui semblent, sur le fauve et tremblant parchemin,
Naître sinistrement de l'ombre de ma main.31

And just as Victor Hugo felt the "souffle énorme" which had lifted up Elias and a voice in the night saying "Va!" so did Lamennais.

While the sentiments in Lamennais' letter to Benoît d'Azy are in general prophetic commonplaces, there is one somewhat troubling exception; it is the line that says "C'est ce qui me console dans mes travaux." If the order had been reversed and he had said that is what consoles me in my suffering, what a difference it would have made. One cannot keep from wondering to what extent Lamennais' conception of the value of suffering was influenced by de Maistre's theory of sacrifice. In any event, from that time forward the idea that he had been chosen never left Lamennais. No one concurred more enthusiastically than he in the judgment of Lamartine who in his Réponse à Némésis cried "Shame! on the poet who can sing while Rome burns" and of Victor Hugo, who, being a prophet himself, had received a direct communication from Zion and was thus able to announce with great authority in Les Rayons et les Ombres:

Dieu le veut, dans les temps contraires,
Chacun travaille et que chacun sert.
Malheur à qui dit à ses frères:
Je retourne dans le désert!

Although Lamennais was fated to end his life more like Vigny's Moses, a suffering, isolated genius, the role he really had in mind for himself was that of Hugo's Moses, a leader sent by God to guide a grateful people out of bondage and into the promised land of faith and freedom. What Zumthor says in reference to Hugo is, mutatis mutandis, also true of Lamennais.

Ce qu'il partage certes, avec son siècle...
c'est le désir...de découvrir les lois du
What distinguished Lamennais was his conviction that he had discovered those laws and that their application would automatically assure progress.

In order to put Lamennais' prophetic mission in proper historical perspective a few words on progress seem in order. The idea of progress as we now understand it did not become a dominant idea in our civilization until the eighteenth century when man's unbounded and unfounded faith in reason deceived him into thinking he was on the verge of solving all those problems which had beset mankind since the beginning of recorded time. Today, in America at least, the general public is inclined to think of progress in material, and especially technological terms. But perhaps the common man has always tended to think of progress in material terms. Nevertheless progress was a nobler, if more chimeric concept in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when so many thinkers agreed that a new age of justice and enlightenment was just around the corner.33 Christopher Dawson noted however that this faith in progress was not so manifest among historians and anthropologists who were in close contact with a concrete body of facts as among political theorists and revolutionaries. In reference to the nineteenth century revolutionary political and socialist reformers, Dawson observed:

...all...had an almost apocalyptic belief in the possibility of a complete transformation of human society - an abrupt passage from darkness to light. Such a process is too sudden and catastrophic to be progressive, in fact what is known as the belief in Progress would often be more correctly described as the belief in human perfectibility.34
As a Christian, Lamennais was obliged to believe that men, by cooperating with God's grace, could become better, but he was equally obliged not to believe that man could become perfect. Without rejecting the doctrine of original sin a belief in human perfectibility can be reconciled with Christian orthodoxy only within a millennial context. The influence of millennial ideas on Lamennais will be discussed in conjunction with his apocalyptic work *Les Paroles d'un croyant*, but for the moment we are still talking about progress.

Although as we have noted, the belief in progress based on faith in human reason and material improvements is relatively new, the concept of progress, in a moral sense, goes back to the Old Testament. God sent prophets to the children of Israel, not because his message had changed but because it was being ignored and needed to be reiterated, or because it was no longer properly understood, and needed to be re-formulated. The pure reality of God took on a human formulation through its intermediary, the prophet, whose function it was to express it in a way his contemporaries would be able to understand. Although scripture makes it clear that man is not destined to have a full understanding on this earth, it does indicate God's plan to illuminate mankind progressively and in proportion to his increasing ability to comprehend truth. Thus Christ, after having taught his disciples during three years still said to them: I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. 35 To a certain extent this statement could be applied to Lamennais himself. The fact that many of his insights and suggestions have now been accepted and acted upon suggests that like the prophets of all ages he was preaching unpopular truths to a generation not yet ready to hear them, and which therefore preferred to stone the prophet.

In the early stages of his life Lamennais still had great faith in the ability of men to effect those reforms he believed necessary to the material and moral progress of humanity. But we shall see that, as he progressively lost faith in man's ability and willingness
to transform the world, Lamennais turned more and more to millennial ideas. His faith in linear progress was a great source of energy for Lamennais, as it had been for the Western world in general since the Renaissance. It is important to remember that such a faith, based on the principle of perfectibility, is dependent on the Platonic-Christian tradition for its existence. Unless there is some absolute toward which one can strive, some eternal image of what a man and what society should be like, the whole idea of progress becomes an absurdity.

No one was more convinced of this than the author of the Essai, who insisted that everything — morals, literature, laws, constitutions, the prosperity or poverty of states, the rise or fall of civilizations — depended on doctrine. He felt it was his God-given mission to save society by eliminating religious indifference and restoring right principles. Others might have a palliative, but he had a cure, a certain cure, if people would only listen. In 1820 he wrote to the abbé Bruté declaring with unwarranted optimism, that despite "les préjugés d'école" and his Gallican enemies, "Les hommes de bonne foi reviennent; quelques-uns se sont rétractés publiquement. On ne tardera pas à comprendre que la Religion ne peut plus être complètement défendue, parfaitement prouvée que par la méthode que j'ai suivie..."36 While we do not wish to take sides in the seemingly eternal discussion of Lamennais' "pride" in the theological sense, the use of the words "completely" and "perfectly" in the above quotation do seem to indicate something other than complete humility.

With so intransigent a doctrine, so sensitive a nature and so poetic an imagination, it is not surprising that Lamennais fell increasingly under the spell of an antithesis.37 In his mind the world was divided into two camps, the powers of light and the powers of darkness, and those who were not with him were against him. Of course he had biblical precedent for such an attitude; had not the Lord Himself said, "He who is not with me is against me."
The prophet, in this respect like the mystic, has a very personal relationship with God that sets him apart from other men. The prophet's faithfulness to his mission leads him unavoidably to opposition and suffering, perhaps even to death, and so demands a heroic love for the Master he serves. Thus we see that it was Lamennais' love of Christ which often kept him from being too discouraged in the face of the blindness of the ruling classes. He wrote to Countess de Senffrt in 1826:

Un grand combat est engagé. Nul n'en saurait prévoir les suites, mais ce qui me fortifie, ce qui me console, c'est que la vérité triomphera. On tue les hommes, on ne la tue pas; et il est doux d'être tué pour elle. Malheur à qui la combat et à qui la trahit! Le monde s'en va, les rois chancelent, les trônes vides ne tiennent plus à rien: eh bien! Je m'attache à ce qui reste, à ce qui restera toujours, à ce qu'on ne vaincra jamais, à la croix de Jésus de Nazareth.

It is impossible not to compare this passage with its counterpart in Les Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe where Chateaubriand, who shared Lamennais' apocalyptic vision of a world in ruins, pictures his own dramatic descent into the grave.

...on dirait que l'ancien monde finit et que le nouveau commence. Je vois les reflets d'une aurore dont je ne verrai pas se lever le soleil. Il ne me reste qu'à m'asseoir au bord de ma fosse, après quoi je descendrai hardiment, le Crucifix à la main, dans l'éternité.

Lamennais' call was similar to that of many Old Testament prophets; like them, he was convinced that he had perceived a new reality and part of this newly perceived reality was his mission. The personality of the prophet is by no means obliterated by his vocation but reveals itself both in his manner of responding and in his way of expressing prophecy. When God called Isaiah he was willing and confident, but Jeremiah, like Lamennais, was at first hesitant and timid. When Isaiah and Amos, who were contemporaries, censured the ladies of high society in Samaria and in Jerusalem, Isaiah did it with elegance like the aristocrat he was. While Amos, the shepherd, chose a less than elegant
metaphor and called these same high-born ladies "cows," we should not be surprised then that the fact that Lamennais, the prophet, was also "un enfant du siècle" influenced both the way he responded to his call emotionally and the literary form in which he expressed his prophecies.

Sainte-Beuve, perhaps because he lacked the necessary historical perspective, was mistaken when he said Lamennais "à aucune époque, n'a trempé dans le siècle récent." On the contrary, the century marked not only his literary style but his world view. What truly distinguished Lamennais was his ability to perceive intuitively the long range consequences of new ideas. Long before Marshall McLuhan, he was concerned about the influence of mass media, which in his day meant the press. He was not only aware of its power but was determined to use that power to spread the Gospel. For Lamennais publishing his newspaper, l'Avenir, was not simply a courageous journalistic enterprise, it was a clever and effective apostolate.

Unfortunately, Lamennais and his co-workers on l'Avenir sometimes had more zeal than prudence, as the following excerpt from an editorial written by our prophet immediately after the destruction of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois shows.

...ce délibre que vous ne concevez pas, que vous ne savez comment nommer, a un nom pourtant, c'est ce royalisme qui se qualifie pur, ce royalisme gallican qui, dans toute la création ne connaît qu'un droit, celui de la souveraineté à ses yeux inadmissible; qui adore premièrement le roi, et ensuite Dieu à condition qu'il sera fidèlement soumis au roi, et qui naguère vendait à celui-ci avec vos libertés religieuses, l'avenir de votre foi...Leur triomphe serait parmi nous la ruine du catholicisme...Catholiques, songez à vos descendants: ils ne vous demanderont pas compte de la monarchie, mais de la religion que votre devoir est de leur transmettre pure comme vous l'avez reçue. Il y a quelque chose de plus précieux que la royauté, c'est la foi: il y a quelque chose de plus grand qu'un Bourbon, c'est Dieu.
This article was written before Lamennais had been fully informed about the circumstances surrounding this unfortunate incident and according to Boutard he later regretted having written it. That may be true but the fact remains that he did not publish a retraction and from that point in time gallicans and royalists redoubled their efforts to silence what they considered to be such a dangerous voice from the left.

Many of the younger members of the clergy, however, responded to the ideas of the newspaper with enthusiasm. Some wrote offering to renounce their modest government sinecures immediately and trust the charity of their parishioners to provide them with a living in order to obtain "cette noble indépendance qui, dans des siècles plus heureux, fit la gloire et la force du clergé catholique." By urging the separation of Church and State, Lamennais scandalized many pious Catholics who felt that he was playing into the hands of radicals who, like Stendhal, felt that priests should not be paid by the government as if they were civil servants. The extent of Lamennais' influence on this group is further emphasized by the fact that of all those artists and political theorists who were liberally oriented only Lamennais seemed to be considered really dangerous. The bishops were scandalized at the impropriety of hearing the nature and limits of their authority discussed in a public forum and convinced that the established order was being threatened. How could they have felt otherwise when their usually docile young priests regarded this latter-day Savonarola with a respect approaching veneration. "Honneur à M. de La Mennais qui est là comme un phare, pour nous éclairer dans la tempête!" wrote a group of young priests from the diocese of Toulouse. "Qu'il continue d'être par ses lumières, le docteur de l'Eglise, jusqu'à ce qu'il en devienne le protecteur par son mérite auprès de Dieu." After publication of L'Avenir had been suspended and the three pilgrims of God and liberty were on the road to Rome, Montalembert received a very interesting letter from Victor Hugo,
Soyez sûr que votre voyage à Rome y laissera une trace profonde. Ne vous inquiétez pas du présent, hommes de religion et de liberté, hommes d'intelligence et de foi, qui avez l'avenir.

C'est un grand spectacle, même pour nous autres quasi païens que votre pèlerinage à Rome, l'abbé de La Mennais devant Grégoire XVI, les deux papes en présence, le pape des cardinaux et le pape élu de Dieu, qui a sur le front la tiare éblouissante du génie, le pape temporel et le pape spirituel. Ce que je dis là est peut-être peu romain, mais je vous jure, fort catholique.

Moquez-vous de ces ineptes ambassadeurs, qui représentent la force brutale près de la puissance spirituelle dégénérée. Ces obstacles ne sont rien. Mettez-les sous vos pieds.

Lamennais, at least, would probably have enjoyed following those instructions considering the kind of reception he received in Rome. In any event that was the kind of language he liked to hear for it revealed how widely heard had been his appeal.

Lamennais was completely disgusted by the petty politics, the personal ambition and the worldly vanity which he saw all around him in the Eternal City. Prophets are seldom distinguished by either patience or prudence and under such difficult circumstances it is no wonder that Lamennais too frequently allowed the anger and indignation in his heart to creep into his conversation. Perhaps to protect him from the consequences of such indiscretions his friend, Father Ventura, suggested that Lamennais take a much needed rest from the Roman climate and retire to Frascati, a simple country home owned by the Théatine fathers. There at Frascati, still waiting for the Pope's decision, Lamennais began what was to be his last work as a really orthodox Catholic. This work, Des Maux de l'Eglise et de la société, et des moyens d'y remédier, was never finished and is included in his Complete Works in the volume with Affaires de Rome.
There in the solitude of the Roman countryside, Lamennais surveyed the contemporary scene with the eyes of a prophet and set out to describe "la grande guerre que se livrent ici-bas le bien et le mal, l'ordre et le désordre, la lumière et les ténèbres..." He then exhorted his readers in the most vigorous terms not to remain idle while the very future of society was being decided.

Die n'a point mis l'homme sur cette terre pour s'y reposer comme dans la patrie, ou pour s'engourdir quelques jours dans un indolent sommeil. Le temps n'est pas une brise légère qui en passant caresse et rafraîchisse son front, mais un vent qui tour-a-tour le brûle et le glace, une tempête qui emporte rapidement sa frêle barque, sous un ciel nébuleux à travers les rochers. Il faut qu'il violente sa nature et plie sa volonté à l'ordre immuable qui la froisse et la brise incessamment. Le devoir, le sévère devoir s'assied près de son berceau, se lève avec lui quand il en sort, et l'accompagne jusqu'à la tombe.

Then he offered his own services, insignificant as they might be, remembering that many centuries before, God had deigned to choose a humble shepherd as his prophet. "Non, notre langue ne sera pas muette" he proclaimed, "lorsqu'il y a une parole de mort qui parcourt la terre et la dévaste..." Lamennais urged everyone who loved eternal things to join him in this holy war against the forces of evil because "le trimophe que l'homme doit chercher, ce n'est pas le sien, mais celui de sa cause. La nôtre est celle du catholicisme, celle de l'Eglise, inséparable en soi de la cause de la société."

The book had as its epigraph part of a verse from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, "Instaurare omnia in Christo." In the introduction, Lamennais recalled the history of the children of Israel and God's dealings with them. He seemed to have the whole of Hebrew history spread out before his mind's eye and the condemnations of a long succession of prophets ringing in his ears. Remembering, no doubt, how
often he himself had been criticized for presuming to tell the princes
of the Church, and even the Vicar of Christ, what God wanted them to
do, Lamennais hastened to remind his readers that when the Lord wished
to instigate radical reforms, he seldom chose "un homme armé de puis-
sance ou revêtu d'autorité." God frequently preferred to use more ob-
scure instruments, said Lamennais; did he not seek out the unlettered
Amos watching his sheep on a mountainside and call him, saying "Go
and prophesy to my people Israel."

In the introduction, Lamennais mentions three prophets by name:
Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos. Of the three, Lamennais seemed to associate
himself most closely with Amos. Amos, like his contemporary Hosea,
might well be called a prophet of social justice. His message to the
people of Israel, seven hundred years before Christ, is strikingly
similar to that of Lamennais. Amos cried out, woe to those "who turn
judgment to wormwood," and cast justice to the ground! And he threatened
Israel with imminent destruction because the Lord was weary of forgiving
a sinful people who thwarted justice by accepting bribes and trampled
on the poor and needy. Yaweh, he added, was displeased by their
ritual worship and sterile sacrifices because what He wanted was not
a hypocritical concern with externals but to rule man's heart. Do not
offer me holocausts, said the Lord, through Amos his prophet, "but let
justice surge like water, and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Amos did not expect the Israelites to be grateful to the prophet
whom God had sent because, "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate and
they abhor him that speaketh the truth." But the lot of the prophet
was ever thus and, like Amos, Lamennais was prepared in advance to suffer
for his cause. Thus toward the end of the introductory chapter of
Des Maux etc, he says:

En traitant un sujet qui se lie à tant
d'intérêts divers, à tout ce que le coeur
humain renferme de plus irritable, nous
savons qu'il est impossible de ne pas cho-
quer beaucoup de passions, aigrir beaucoup
d'esprits éveiller beaucoup de haines...
Nous le savons, et tous ceux qui, de siècle en siècle depuis six mille ans, se sont résolus en eux-mêmes de dire la vérité, la dure, l’imexorable vérité, l’ont su comme nous, ils n’ont pas vu là une raison de se taire. La crainte des hommes n’a point apposé sur leurs lèvres son ignoble sceau: elle ne l’apposera point non plus sur les nôtres. Tranquilles, parce que nous ne sentons en nous qu’un grand, un immense amour de Dieu et de nos frères, nous abandonnons à la Providence cette parole qui fait effort pour s’échapper de notre sein.51

Lamennais went on to say that even if his words fell on deaf ears he would still have done his duty but that the final result was in the hands of God. He hoped, of course, that the reforms he sincerely believed to be essential to the preservation of the Church and humanity would be effected, but even if "elle [sa parole] ne doit produire aucun des fruits que nous désirons si ardemment, qu’il soit béni encore! Elle aura du moins monté vers le ciel comme une prière."52

Since an analysis of the contents of Lamennais’ prophetic writings is outside the scope of this study a single example from this book will serve to indicate how accurate his predictions sometimes were. The third chapter of Des Maux etc. deals with the condition of the Church in Spain and Portugal. In it, Lamennais recalled the past glory of the Peninsula and compared it with the decadence, superstition, ignorance and oppression which had become prevalent. He stressed the fact that no such purely arbitrary regime, "sans lois fondamentales, sans finances, sans police, sans administration, sans justice" could endure. "Dieu lui-même," he protested, "ne pourrait opérer un pareil miracle, à moins de changer la nature de l’homme. Il y a aura donc une révolution;..." Then he went on to describe the ideological nature of what was destined to be one of the most disastrous civil wars in the history of Christendom, a war which was not to take place for a hundred years.

...et cette révolution se fera, non seulement contre le trône, mais encore contre l’autel.
qui s'est rendu solidaire du trône,

On éprouve un profond sentiment de terreur, lorsqu'on vient à se représenter tout ce qu'entraînera de calamités et de crimes cette inévitable catastrophe. La pensée se détoure d'Épouvante : ce qu'elle a vu, ce qu'elle a entendu dans cette nuit de tempête est inexplicable : le bruit des temples qui croulent, la lueur rouge de l'incendie, les pas rapides et sourds d'à ceux qui poursuivent, le sang, le blasphème, les sanglots, les cris : on dirait un de ces rêves qui pressent la poitrine comme le genou de Satan.

If the Spanish clergy had listened to Lamennais and instituted the reforms he advocated perhaps there would not have been a million dead in Spain in those dreadful years between 1936 and 1939. The Bible depicts the mission of the prophet as hard, with very few external consolations. Jeremiah, for instance, suffered great mental anguish when he realized his mission. Tortured by the fact that his enemies persecuted him in spite of his righteousness he set the problem before God asking: "Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" This same problem was troubling St. Thomas of Canterbury when he asked "Why is it that in Rome it is always Barrabas who is released and Christ who is put to death?" 53

Lamennais stood within this great tradition when he insisted that from the moment the hierarchy became a temporal power, all those who had taken the Gospel seriously, tried to practice it with simplicity and worked zealously to inspire this evangelical attitude in others had been the victims of clerical hate, "haine implacable, qui, pendant des siècles, a couvert l'Europe de bûchers."

La hiérarchie ne demande pas mieux qu'on prêche au peuple les maximes du Christ, qu'on soulage individuellement ses misères, et même alle l'ordonne:
mais elle ne souffre pas qu'on lui rappelle à elle-même ses maximes, ni qu'on pousse le peuple à sortir de l'état qui est la source de tous ses maux. Elle a besoin de son abaissement pour être grande temporellement, de sa passive docilité pour être puissante, de sa pauvreté pour être riche, de ses douleurs et de sa faim et de sa soif, et de sa nudité pour vivre sous la pourpre dans l'abondance et dans les délices. Peuple, obéis aux maîtres que Dieu t'a donnés, courbe-toi sous leur main, laisse-toi dépouiller, frapper, meurtrir, empoisonner, tuer car tu seras ainsi semblable à Jesus-Christ. Ce sont là les vraies joies de ses disciples et c'est à ce signe qu'on les reconnaît, Heureux ceux qui souffrent, heureux ceux qui pleurent.


Au feu l'hérésiarque!

The priests he was referring to were not the humble parish priests who in general did share the poverty of their flocks, but the members of the hierarchy. Although these lines were written when Lamennais was well along the path to heresy, the bitter indignation they reveal ante-dates his break with Rome and is well within the tradition of biblical prophecy. In the eighth century B.C., Hosea lashed out at the Hebrew Establishment in a similar way. There was no fidelity, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land; false swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery had caused the land to mourn and the very beasts and birds
to perish. This was, he said, largely the fault of the leaders, the clergy and the king.

The Hebrew prophets frequently prefaced their revelations and admonitions with the formula "Thus saith the Lord." While Lamennais was never so presumptuous as to do that, he did begin his apocalyptic book, *Les Paroles d'un croyant*, a work which he told the archbishop was political and not religious in nature, with the words "Au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint-Esprit."

Before discussing its prophetic nature let us go back and examine the circumstances under which this unique book was written and published. In October, 1832, Lamennais returned to La Chênaie. He had been to Rome and like du Bellay three hundred years before, he did not like what he found there.

...J'ai vu là, le plus infâme cloaque qui ait jamais souillé des regards humains; L'égoïème gigantesque des Tarquins serait trop étroit pour donner passage à tant d'impudiques. Là, nul autre Dieu que l'intérêt; on y vendrait les peuples, on y vendrait le genre humain, on y vendrait les trois personnes de la Sainte Trinité, l'une après l'autre, ou toutes ensemble, pour un coin de terre ou pour quelques piastres.55

Lamennais' messianic tendencies had been strengthened by contact with what he chose to call "la Rome politique" as distinct from "la Rome spirituelle." Yves Le Hir, in the introduction to his critical edition of *Les Paroles d'un croyant*, has made an excellent selection of quotations from Lamennais' correspondence during those crucial months, which illustrate his steadily increasing conviction that a cataclysm was imminent and inevitable. He believed the whole contemporary world was like the Jerusalem about which Christ had said "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."56 Such sentiments were not new to him; as early as 1826 Lamennais was writing his friends that "La société ressemble à la mer au commencement
d'une violente tempête..." and asking, "La société renaîtra-t-elle? Je l'ignore, mais je sais qu'elle ne peut renaître qu'après un boule-
versement complet et universel."57 In those early days he often men-
tioned the possibility that humanity might indeed perish, but as time
went by and the messianic element in his perspective grew stronger,
that dark alternative ceased to exist. On December 15, 1832, he wrote
to the countess de Senfft:

Vous dites bien vrai, tout s'en va, est-il
donc tant à regretter? C'est de la boue qui
coule dans un égout, pas autre chose...Voudriez-vous que la Providence eût laissé plus longtemps,
au milieu des nations, ces immenses amas, ces
montagnes d'ordures, dont la putréfaction, in-
fectant l'atmosphère, aurait fini par tuer le
genre humain? Et la voilà qui balaie cette
fange, comme on balaie les rues la veille d'un
jour de fête...Non relinquam vos orphanos, veniam
ad vos. Ne craignons rien; nous reverrons le
Christ, le Christ qui prend pitié des pauvres,
des faibles, des misérables et qui brise le glaive
de leurs oppresseurs.58

Le Hir in the part of his introduction entitled "Eschatologie
et Messianisme" analyses the possible influence on Lamennais of mil-
lennary ideas that were in the air at that time. He also points out the
strong messianic element in Les Soirées de St. Petersburg. There is
then a discussion of the influence of de Maistre on Lamennais' thinking
in general and on the messianic element in Les Paroles in particular.
Though Les Soirées was published in 1821, twelve years before the com-
position of Les Paroles, nonetheless, since the messianic elements in
de Maistre's work are similar either to those of the Old Testament prophets
or to those which were in "the air" and thus available to all, this
aspect of de Maistre's influence seems, in our opinion, less than proved.

Although there are some indications that Lamennais may have begun
work on Les Paroles as early as Christmas-time 1832, the only available
documentary proofs fix the time of this composition between the months
of February and July of 1833. 59 A letter to the Count de Beaufort
on March 25 of that year shows that while Lamennais' thinking was perhaps not yet really heretical it had certainly reached the outer boundaries of orthodoxy,

Croyez-moi, il ne s'agit plus d'ultramontanisme ni de gallicanisme; la hiérarchie s'est mise hors de cause; il s'agit d'une transformation analogue à celle qui eut lieu il y a dix-huit siècles; le pressentiment en est partout, et je ne saurais assez bénir la Providence d'avoir envoyé Grégoire XVI pour hâter le moment de la régénération nécessaire: il est venu apposer un sceau éternel sur l'époque qui finit en lui, S'il fait nuit sur la terre, c'est que ceci est la fin d'un de ces "jours de Dieu" dont parle l'Écriture. Mais quand, après avoir achevé son cours, le soleil se cache, c'est pour reparaitre. Tournez-vous vers l'Orient et vous verrez déjà l'aube blanchir...Je prête l'oreille aux voix célestes qui prophétisent sur la Montagne, aux pauvres pasteurs et la paix et la délivrance. Pendant qu'elles entonnaient autrefois, sur le monde ranimé, le cantique de l'avenir, qu'est-ce qui se murmurait dans la Synagogue? Nous le savons. Mais je sais aussi que nous devons laisser Dieu accomplir son oeuvre, attendre avec patience les moments qu'il a marqués.

Lamennais apparently expressed these same sentiments in a letter to Montalembert. Such a letter is not found in Lamennais' published correspondence with his young disciple; however, the reply, in which Montalembert deplores such a comparison of the Church with the Synagogue proves the letter did exist. As far as a third revelation is concerned, objected Charles, "...que peut-il nous venir de plus grand que le Fils de Dieu?" 60

In view of the papal condemnation of l'Avenir, and the subsequent promise given by all the mennaisians to cease publicly promoting a program which was disapproved of by the vast majority of the hierarchy, it is not surprising that Lamennais prepared Les Paroles d'un Croyant in secret. He mentioned the work in progress only to his most intimate
friends and even then in terms the forced casualness of which was calculated to disguise the true nature of the book. On May 16, 1833 he wrote Montalembert, who was planning to visit him the following month, that he had begun a little book similar to Mickiewicz’s Pèlerins polonais, which Montalembert had just translated into French. Lamennais asked that there be no mention of the projected work, adding that Montalembert would see it during his visit. Perhaps to allay the fears of his young friend, Lamennais added, "ton avis m’encouragera à poursuivre ou m’en détournera."

But of those friends who were privileged to read or hear all or part of Les Paroles, not Montalembert, not Jean-Marie, not a single one thought it should be made public. At no time in his life did Lamennais make a more unilateral decision than when he decided to publish this book that Lamartine called "L’Evangile de l’insurrection." What a change from that young "Malouin" who was unable to decide upon his vocation, who considered himself a child to be led and compared himself with the sinner who was worthy only to remain in the back of the temple beating his breast!

It is quite possible that at the time he was writing Les Paroles Lamennais had no definite plan to publish them. Everything indicates that he was at that time still anxious to avoid an open break with Rome. Alone at La Chênaie, the inactivity to which he was condemned by his promise to remain silent weighed heavily upon him, and his solitude was troubled by the spectre of Czar Nicholas, the "Nero of Poland," as he called him, which pursued and exhausted him. In time he came to believe that to remain silent was to betray his mission. This he said many times and in many places but nowhere more unequivocally than in a letter to his brother-in-law, Ange Blaise, written on April 27, 1834. In it he gives the following reasons for deciding to publish Les Paroles d’un Croyant:
Lamennais’ conviction that his was a duty divinely imposed and divinely inspired never completely disappeared. In 1837, after his break with the Church, he could still write to his old friend Marion and say:

Il y a en moi une puissance qui me pousse; j'ai une tâche à remplir, sans cela, sans l'invincible sentiment d'un devoir qui m'est imposé, je serais incapable d'écrire une ligne. Il y a en moi comme une voix qui me parle toujours; qu'elle se taise, rendu à moi-même, à moi seul, il ne me restera plus que le silence.

This then was his frame of mind when he handed his manuscript over to Sainte-Beuve and asked him to arrange that it be published as soon as possible.

While his friends did not consider the moment propitious for the publication of *Les Paroles*, that does not necessarily mean they personally disapproved of it or even disagreed with it, as the following excerpt from Río’s *Epilogue de l'Art Chrétien* shows.

Malgré la discrétion que l'auteur avait apportée dans le choix de ses chapitres, il était difficile qu'une certaine inquiétude ne se mêlât pas à l'enthousiasme que cette lecture excitaît dans nos âmes. Mais ce dernier sentiment dominait tellement tous les autres, que la critique était impossible. Même plus tard, quand l'œuvre fut complètement achevée, il y eut des lecteurs, non moins orthodoxes que nous, qui furent tentés de la mettre au-dessus du livre de *Job*, et de l'Apocalypse de saint Jean.
Although Lamennais would no doubt be horrified by the way modern labor unions have at times misused their tremendous power, he insisted on the right of the laboring class to protect its interests by forming associations. Indeed, for him, this was more than a right, it was a duty imposed by God who willed that his kingdom should come on earth as in heaven. In chapter XII (chapter XI in some editions) he taught the people, saying:

(12) Que vos résolutions soient lentes, mais fermes. Ne vous laissez aller ni à un premier ni à un second mouvement.

(13) Mais si l'on a commis contre vous quelque injustice, commencez par bannir tout sentiment de haine de votre coeur, et puis levant les mains et les yeux en haut, dites à votre Père qui est dans les cieux:

(14) O Père, vous êtes le protecteur de l'innocent et de l'opprimé; car c'est votre amour qui a créé le monde, et c'est votre justice qui le gouverne.

Vous voulez qu'elle règne sur la terre, et le méchant y oppose sa volonté mauvaise.

C'est pourquoi nous avons résolu de combattre le méchant.

O Père, donnez le conseil à notre esprit et la force à nos bras.

Quand vous aurez ainsi prié du fond de votre âme, combattiez et ne craignez rien.

Si d'abord la victoire paroit s'éloigner de vous, ce n'est qu'une épreuve, elle reviendra: car votre sang sera comme le sang d'Abel égorgé par Caïn, et votre mort comme celle des martyrs.

The most Romantic perhaps, and the most shocking, chapter is the thirteenth (the twelfth in some editions), in which Lamennais
C'était une nuit noire: un ciel sans astres pesait sur la terre, comme un couvercle de marbre noir sur un tombeau.

Et rien ne troublait le silence de cette nuit, si ce n'est un bruit étrange, comme d'un léger battement d'ailes, que de fois à autre on entendait au-dessus des campagnes et des cités.

Et alors les ténèbres s'épaississaient, et chacun sentait son âme se serrer et le frisson courir dans ses veines.

Et dans une salle tendue de noir et éclairée d'une lampe rougeâtre, sept hommes vêtus de pourpre et la tête ceinte d'une couronne étoient assis sur sept sièges de fer.

Et au milieu de la salle s'élevait un trône composé d'ossements, et au pied du trône, en guise d'escabeau, étoit un crucifix renversé, et devant le trône une table d'ébène et sur la table un vase plein de sang rouge et écumeux, et un crâne humain.

Et les sept hommes couronnés paraïssoient pensifs et tristes, et, du fond de son orbite creux, leur œil de temps en temps laissait échapper des étincelles d'un feu livide.

Et l'un d'eux s'étant levé s'approcha du trône en chancelant, et mit le pied sur le crucifix.

En ce moment, ses membres tremblèrent et il sembla près de défaillir. Les autres le regardoient immobiles; ils ne firent pas le moindre mouvement, mais je ne sais quoi passa sur leur front, et un sourire qui n'est pas de l'homme contracta leurs lèvres,

Et celui qui avait semblé près de défaillir, étendit la main, saisit le vase plein de sang, en versa dans le crâne, et le but,
Et cette boisson parut le fortifier.

Et dressant la tête, ce cri sortit de sa poitrine comme un sourde râlement:

Maudit soit le Christ qui a ramené sur la terre la liberté.

The monarchs then go on to discuss the ways and means of perpetuating a system of virtual slavery on which their power and privileges rested. Religion must be destroyed they said, and the people kept ignorant, isolated, divided, frightened and corrupted. Each king spoke in turn and to the seventh was reserved the distinction of solving their most crucial problem.

Alors le septième, ayant comme les autres bu dans le crâne humain, parla de la sorte, les pieds sur le Crucifix:

Plus de Christ; il y a guerre à mort, guerre éternelle entre lui et nous.


Et ils commanderont aux peuples, de la part du Christ, de nous être soumis en tout, quoi que nous fassions, quoi que nous ordonnions;

Et le peuple les croira, et il obéira par conscience, et notre pouvoir sera plus affermi qu'auparavant.

When Montalembert wrote suggesting he had gone too far and reminding him that the kings were still the legally constituted authorities, Lamennais was incensed.

Où as-tu pris que les monstres sur lesquels j'appelle l'indignation de tout ce qui porte un coeur d'homme soient les représentants de Dieu sur la terre, son image, ses ministres, les sacrés dépositaires de son autorité? Je
crois rêver quand j'entends de ces choses. 67

In chapter XIV (XIII in some editions) Lamennais with grim pleasure lifts the curtain on a dantesque "mise en scène" in which the seven kings have become seven shivering shadows consigned for all eternity to a humid, hibernial hell. The influence of Dante on Lamennais' portrait of hell in this chapter is rather obvious and was duly noted by Le Hir, while Sainte-Beuve did not fail to point out the similarity in the political philosophy of the kings and that of Machiavelli. To our knowledge no one thus far has commented on the parallel between this scene in Les Paroles where the kings of the earth meet to plan their war to the death against Christ and the human race, and the scene in Book II of Paradise Lost where the fallen angels convene to prepare a similar battle. Certainly Lamennais, who knew and admired Milton, could not have failed to appreciate the irony of those lines where the great Puritan poet lamented "... devil with devil damn'd / Firm concord holds, men only disagree / Of creatures rational." 68

It is necessary to remember that the violence, the bitterness and the spirit of revolt which marked the passages just quoted are the exception rather than the rule in this book; nevertheless, they are the passages which attracted the most attention.

Frayssinous called its author a madman, "et cependant un fou souvent sublime, et même touchant"; an important churchman called it the "Apocalypse de Satan"; Michaud commented "c'est 93 qui fait ses Pâques" and Saint-Marc Girardin saw in Lamennais a "Marat affublé en prophète." 69 Ballanche finished his article in La France catholique in these terms:

Vous avez mis le feu à la cité du présent, avant de vous être informé si la cité de l'avenir était prête à recevoir ses nouveaux habitants. Mais il vous sera beaucoup remis, parce que vous avez beaucoup aimé...
Sainte-Beuve was informed by the editor of *Les Paroles* that his shop was "toute en l'air" and that the type-setters were "soulevés et transportés" as they placed one letter after another. 70 This certainly is an indication that the book was well received by the humble worker for whom it had been written.

One of the most interesting commentaries was contained in a letter written to Benoit d'Azy. In it one of his friends described the emotional distress and intellectual confusion which he felt as a result of reading "ce livre fameux, virulent pamphlet, poème tout imprégné de charité évangélique, dans lequel se reflète, mieux peut-être que dans aucun autre ouvrage sorti de sa plume, l'âme si diversement passionnée de Lamennais." 71 This letter seems worth quoting at length as it typifies what was apparently the reaction of many persons of good will.

Cette lecture m'a ébloui, elle m'a en quelque sorte rempli de trouble et de terreur, jamais une lecture ne m'avait autant éprouvé. Comment en effet demeurer calme aux puissantes paroles d'un ministre des autels, du plus grand écrivain de notre clergé de France, qui vient avec la triple autorité de la religion, du Saint Ministère et du génie soulever toutes nos idées, nous dire comme l'archevêque de Rheims à Clovis: "Brûle ce que tu as adoré."

De deux choses l'une: ou M. de La Mennais veut aussi pousser à la destruction de l'ordre social, ou il n'est qu'un sublime instrument à travers lequel viennent passer les révélations de notre avenir; c'est à cette seconde pensée que je m'arrête pour fixer mon opinion sur lui et même dans ce cas je me demande si des années de méditation seraient suffisantes pour que l'on se déterminât à tracer de pareilles lignes. *Les Paroles d'un Croyant* auront, je le crains bien, un terrible retentissement; elles vont devenir le texte d'apologies et de censure égalemen dangereuses selon moi, pour la société et pour la religion. Je sais que les plus hautes autorités ecclésiastiques se prononcent déjà sans aucune retenue dans le blâme le plus amer; elles disent qu'il faudrait changer le titre pour celui-ci: *Apocalypse de Satan*. Je ne sais si mes
nerfs encore fortement remués par cette terrible lecture me font imaginer des fantômes qui doivent s'évanouir dès que le calme me sera rendu mais j'envisage cette publication comme un événement immense.
La Cour de Rome ne peut guère, je pense, avoir l'air d'ignorer et quel parti prendra-t-elle quand elle aura avoué en avoir connaissance. Ce que j'éprouve me fait sentir et comprendre une partie de ce qu'ont dû comprendre et sentir les hommes honnêtes à la venue de Jésus-Christ. On se demande si l'on n'est pas un assassin, un voleur, un mécréant, un monstre en défendant sa propriété, en voulant la conserver, en ayant du respect pour les chefs des nations, pour la législation établie, enfin pour tout ordre existant.
Il y a pourtant cette différence que quand le Christ est venu, il était annoncé, il faisait des miracles et je ne sache rien de tel de M. de La Mennais.72

Some individuals however were spared such confusion; one of them was Prince Metternich.73 As Boutard put it, "C'était merveille de voir comment les représentants d'un État hérétique tel que la Prusse, ou d'un État schismatique tel que la Russie, s'étaient enflammés tout à coup du plus beau zèle pour les intérêts de l'Église romaine."74

On May 16, 1834 Prince Metternich sent a lengthy memorandum to Count Lützow in Rome, in which he said:

Si cet homme atroce ne s'était pas depuis longtemps démasqué aux yeux de tout observateur impartial, le cas se trouverait réalisé aujourd'hui.

Even his best friends, wrote the Prince, could no longer defend him except by saying he had gone mad. Then he added:

Un prêtre qui abuse des livres saints pour corrompre le monde, qui feint l'inspiration et qui dispense du poison que lui-même doit reconnaître comme tel, est un être abject.

Then he expressed his confidence that the Pope's wisdom and good judgment would lead him to share the opinions just expressed and to deal with this "anarchist" in a suitable manner. Apparently fearing he had not made his opinion sufficiently clear, Metternich added this postscript.
...la mode de brûler les hérétiques et leurs œuvres est passée; il est permis de le regretter dans son application à ce cas spécial.  

Diametrically opposed to the attitude of Metternich was that of Maurice de Guérin. This young Breton poet had been privileged to spend several months at La Chênaie during the time when Lamennais was writing Les Paroles. The storm of criticism, controversy and persecution which followed in the wake of the Mirari Vos caused de Guérin intense and personal grief. Speaking of Lamennais he said: "...ils l'ont tué. Sais-tu que c'est un meurtre énorme que celui du génie, et d'un génie catholique armé pour la foi?" However, de Guérin's suffering was in part due to his sense of personal loss. His letter written on January 10, 1834, when the young poet's principal fear was that Lamennais, as was rumored, might escape to America as a missionary, is an eloquent testimonial to the priest's unfailing ability to inspire enthusiasm, affection and loyalty in his "children", as he often called his students. "Que deviendrons-nous sans lui," wailed the young poet, 

...nous, jeunes gens qu'il guidait vers la science et l'art, qu'il nourrissait de son lait, qu'il réchauffait contre son sein? Ma chère amie, je pleure et m'abandonne à la douleur comme un orphelin. Qui guidera mon âme comme il faisait? Qui m'enveloppera de la paix et de la solitude dont il m'avait couvert? Où sera mon asile? Où pourrai-je cacher ma tête nue? Où m'abriter, me reposer?  

Little did he know at that moment that Lamennais was, in a sense, going farther away than America, that the prophet in him was dying.

To the very end, Lamennais gave witness in both his personal and public life to the highest standards of Christian morality. Nevertheless, when he ceased to perform his priestly functions or even to profess the Catholic faith, his voice lost its authority. Many had hoped he would lead them into a promised land of faith, certitude, justice and brotherhood and such a hope is not lost without pain,
nor without some feeling of resentment toward the responsible party. When the publication of *Affaires de Rome* sealed Lamennais' break with Rome, his former admirer, Sainte-Beuve, in addition to criticisms of a more intellectual nature, had this to say:

Est-ce bien possible d'abîmer brusquement de la sorte, et cela vous était-il permis? Rien n'est pire, sachez-le bien, que de provoquer à la fois, les âmes et de les laisser là à l'improviste, en délogeant. Rien ne les jette autant dans ce scepticisme qui vous est encore si en horreur, quoique vous n'ayez plus que du vague à y opposer. Combien j'ai su d'âmes espérantes que vous teniez et portiez avec vous dans votre besace de pèlerin, et qui, le sac jeté à terre, sont demeurées gigantes le long des fossés! L'opinion et le bruit flatteur, et de nouvelles âmes plus fraîches comme il s'en prend toujours au génie, font beaucoup oublier sans doute et consolent: mais je vous dénonce cet oubli, dût mon cri paraître une plainte!77

Just or unjust this seemed to be the judgment of many of his contemporaries. In this chapter we have focused on those aspects of Lamennais' career which reveal him as exemplar of the Romantic figure of poet, prophet and priest. It may be debated how far Lamennais himself was fully conscious of playing such a role, but there can be no doubt of the importance of the prophetic strain in his life, both for good and for ill. He certainly believed that his work embodied not merely a personal expression of belief but a divinely inspired message. This conviction gave him a strength and confidence notably lacking in his younger days: it also led him towards intransigence. While he might not have seen himself as Hugo saw him, a spiritual pope in conflict with a temporal one, he did become unwilling to consider compromise with those who failed to heed his prophetic message. Ironically enough, it was his sense of mission that finally led him to break with the Church, and thereby to lose much of the influence had had acquired earlier.
His career as a prophet had been relatively short, but during those years he had planted many seeds and some at least took root. As he once wrote to his friend Father Ventura, "Je sais bien... que l'on ne me comprendra qu'après ma mort; mais il faut des victimes à toutes les grandes causes..."
CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXTREMIST

"...moi, homme ou diable, tout d'une pièce..."

Lamennais to Vitrolles
Nov. 4, 1845

It would be difficult to overemphasize Lamennais' natural inclination to classify everything - men, governments or philosophical systems - in a most categorical way. His system of classification was simple, having only two categories, and he was therefore seldom troubled or confused by the need to make subtle distinctions. Although Lamennais was not a theater-goer he did not escape the general contagion caused by the melodrama, the popular form of theater during the Romantic period. Because of its simplistic portrayal of human nature, the whole population, from the humblest worker to the loftiest thinker, Vigny, was inclined to view people as angels or villains living in a moral universe which was neatly divided into black and white with no shades of gray. In that simplified world there was no place for compromise and no room for the unpleasant truth that man must often choose between two evils.

Lamennais readily admitted that he did not like "les demi-partis" because, to his mind, they always had "plus d'inconvénients que d'avantages." While the second part of his statement may seem doubtful to many, the first part is unquestionable. He despised "les demi-partis." What he wanted was for men to be absolutely good, ideas absolutely true, and governments absolutely just. Those which did not meet these standards, and few could, were usually put into the absolutely wicked, absolutely false, absolutely tyrannical category. He could scarcely have done otherwise since such words as "perhaps," "sometimes," "partial," "contingent," etcetera, were simply not a part of his normal vocabulary.

In justice it must be admitted that, on rare occasions, Lamennais was aware of his fatal inclination to see everything as either black
or white. "Nous fumes en quelque sorte trop soldat, nous regardâmes
un peu trop les choses d'un seul côté," he noted wistfully in the
preface to Troisihènes Mélanges, in order to justify his new opinions.
Unfortunately the ideas which he submitted to judicial review were
always those which had already been abandoned, while his current en-
thusiasms were given free rein.

Just as certainly as Balthazar Claes, Lamennais was "à la
recherche de l'absolu." This absolutist cast of mind was reflected
in the way he thought, the way he acted, and the way he wrote. While
a detailed examination of how Lamennais' absolutism was reflected in
his writing would be a separate study, a few examples may serve to
illustrate how exaggeration, in one direction or another, influenced
every element, starting with the very words he chose.

One can observe in almost everything Lamennais wrote, from
personal letters to ecclesiastical history, a marked preference for
words like "every," "only," "always," "all," "perfect," "sublime,
"infinite," "eternal," "absolute," "final," "vile," "none," and "never." Positive superlatives were what he liked best, but negative superla-
tive were also acceptable. Both satisfied his need for absolute certi-
tude, a need so deeply felt and so constant that Faguet called it a
"la faculté maîtresse de l'esprit de Lamennais."2

When Lamennais was defending the Church, her priests were
described as models of evangelical charity and zeal. A very few
"scandalous exceptions" were all bad, the rest were all good. In
volume I of the Essai he describes with eloquence the many services
they had rendered to mankind.

Savez-vous ce que c'est qu'un prêtre,
vous qui, de son nom seul irréfutable
souffrir de mépris? Un prêtre est,
pour devoir, l'ami, la providence
vivante de tous les malheureux, le
consolateur des affligés, le défenseur
de quiconque est privé de défense,
l'appui de la veuve, le père de
l'orphelin, le réparateur de tous les désordres et de tous les maux qu'engendrent vos passions et vos funestes doctrines. Sa vie entière n'est qu'un long et héroïque dévouement au bonheur de ses semblables. Qui de vous consentirait à échanger, comme lui, les joies domestiques, toutes les jouissances, tous les biens que les hommes recherchent si avidement, contre des travaux obscurs, des devoirs pénibles, des fonctions dont l'exercice brise le coeur et rebute les sens, pour ne recueillir souvent d'autre fruit de tant de sacrifices que le dédain, l'ingratitude et l'insulte? Vous êtes encore plongés dans un profond sommeil, et déjà l'homme de charité, devançant l'aurore, a recommencé le cours de ses bienfaissantes œuvres. Il a soulagé le pauvre, visité le malade, essuyé les pleurs de l'infortunée ou fait couler ceux du repentir, instruit l'ignorant, fortifié le faible, affirmé dans la vertu des âmes troublées par les orages des passions. Après une journée toute remplie de pareils bienfaits, le soir arrive, mais non le repos. A l'heure où le plaisir vous appelle aux spectacles, aux fêtes, on accourt en grande hâte près du ministre sacré: un chrétien touche à ses derniers momens; il va mourir, et peut-être d'une maladie contagieuse: n'importe; le bon pasteur ne laissera point expirer sa brebis sans adoucir ses angoisses, sans l'environner des consolations de l'espérance et de la foi, sans prier à ses côtés le Dieu qui mourut pour elle, et qui lui donne, à cet instant même, dans le sacrement d'amour, un gage certain d'immortalité.

Voilà le prêtre, ...

In later years Lamennais came to see the priest in a different light and then he compensated for the excessive idealism of this portrait by going almost as far in the opposite direction.

While to many Romantic writers, antithesis was just a useful
literary device, to Lamennais it was more than that, it was the natural expression of his world view. For him the choice was always between one extreme and the other and thus the apparently irresistible antithesis imposed its form not only on his mind but also on the structure of his prose. The following passage from the preface to Troisièmes Mélanges shows how that process worked. In one long paragraph he outlined the contemporary situation of the Church in Europe, the two choices with which she had been presented, the choice she had made, and the reason for that choice.

...le catholicisme languit et tend à s'éteindre en Europe; les peuples s'en détachent, les rois ou l'attaquent d'une manière ouverte, ou le minent sourdement. Quel moyen de le ranimer, de lui rendre la vigueur que de jour en jour il semble perdre? Tel étoit le problème à résoudre, et il offrait deux solutions. Plein de foi dans les vérités qui constituent fondamentalement le christianisme, dans sa puissance morale, dans l'harmonie de son esprit intime avec les instincts les plus élevés de l'humanité, on pouvait, brisant les liens qui asservissent l'Eglise à l'Etat, l'affranchir de la dépendance qui entравe son action; l'associer au mouvement social qui prépare au monde des destinées nouvelles; à la liberté pour l'unir à l'ordre et redresser ses écarts; à la science pour la concilier, par une discussion sans entraves, avec le dogme éternel; au peuple pour verser sur ses immenses misères les flots inarissables de la charité divine. On pouvait, en un mot, s'élever au dessus de tous les intérêts terrestres, embrasser la croix nue, la croix de celui qui ne vivant que de son amour pour ses frères, leur apprît à se dévouer les uns pour les autres; la croix de Jésus fils de Dieu et fils de l'homme, et la planter à l'entrée des voies où le genre humain s'avance... On pouvait aussi resserrer l'ancienne alliance avec les pouvoirs absous, leur prêter secours contre les peuples et contre la liberté, afin d'obtenir d'eux une tolérance telle quelle; souder l'autel
au trône, s'appuyer sur la force, tourner
la croix vers le passé, la confier à la
garde des soldats chargés de contenir,
la baïonnette sur la poitrine, les nations
frémissantes. Rome a choisi ce dernier
parti, elle en avait le droit; et s'il
est en nous une conviction profonde, c'est
que, selon des vues au-dessus des siennes
mêmes, elle a été déterminée à ce choix par
la Providence.5

What a difference it might have made, not just in his life, but also
in his style, had Lamennais not been limited by his simplistic vision
of reality.

When dealing with abstract philosophical questions, Lamennais
usually insisted that the magical three of tradition prevail; in more
practical matters, however, he seemed to prefer the simpler division
into two parts. People, for instance, were good or bad. He did,
however, make some concession to subtlety by distinguishing individuals
within the groups; among the bad, the unparalleled wickedness of Czar
Nicholas "the Satan of the North,"6 set him well above his peers.

This is how Lamennais described him:

Il y avait en enfer un démon horrible,
né de l'accouplement de l'Orgueil et de
l'Impiété, et son nom était Le Meurtre,
Comme il répandait l'épouvante dans les
régions infernales, et qu'à son aspect,
Satan même ressentait une émotion étrange,
comme si le mal pur, essentiel, infini,
avait passé devant sa face, il le bannit
de son empire. Le monstre, exilé, prit
une forme humaine et se réfugia sur la
terre, on l'y nomme "Nicolas."6

Historians would no doubt agree that Nicholas was far from being the
ideal monarch, and in this portrait, despite its flamboyant exaggeration
he is more just than in some others. Consider, for instance, these
less than gentle words with which Lamennais described the archbishop
of Paris:
Un jour que l'orgueil s'ennuyait, il épousa l'ineptie; neuf mois après elle accoucha de Sam. [the bishop of Samosata, i.e., Mgr de Quélen] et le nourrit avec soin. Devenu grand, ses parents ne savaient qu'en faire. On leur dit, donnez-lui l'Eglise à conduire, cela l'amusera. Chose dite, chose faite, Depuis ce temps-là, les choses vont comme chacun voit."

Such was the disdain Lamennais evinced for the bishop in his private correspondence. While the two open letters to Mgr de Quélen are stylistically an improvement on the above citation, in essence they express the same attitude. De Quélen was in reality an excellent man, and a good priest, but he was also a Gallican. Since Lamennais was seldom able to accept the possibility of an honest difference of opinion between intelligent men, anyone who disagreed with him had to be a knave or a fool, perhaps both. Those who agreed with him were intelligent and good, for them his affection was without bounds.

Lamennais saw neither his friends nor his enemies clearly since he habitually magnified the faults of the latter and the qualities of the former. An interesting example of how this loyalty to friends influenced his literary judgment can be found in De l'Art et du beau, that part of his Philosophy which deals with esthetics. His friends Chateaubriand and Béranger were praised without restraint or restriction while out-of-favor contemporaries like Hugo, Musset and Lamartine, were passed over in silence. The reaction of Béranger does honor to both his respect for the truth and his sincere affection for Lamennais. Since it was clearly impossible to prevent his sentiments of friendship from vitiating his critical faculties he could only try to prevent his appearing too foolishly indulgent. In an affectionate and eminently sensible letter, Béranger reminded his "noble apostle" of the position he held, and urged him to qualify his praise "dans l'intérêt de la cause où vous avez pris un rôle si élevé,..." The famous "chansonnier"
even suggested the substance of the restrictive clause he felt should be included,

A des louanges aussi flatteuses ne conviendrait-il pas d'ajouter: il est fâcheux qu'en chantant pour le peuple, Béranger se soit d'abord laissé entraîner à la peinture de moeurs, que plus tard, sans doute, il eût voulu pouvoir corriger.³

While the post-defection period of Lamennais' life was in general characterized by short-term personal relationships, hardly worthy of being called friendships, his association with Béranger endured until the end of his life and was a genuine source of consolation during those last lonely years. The "chansonnier" must have been a very fine man for he inspired in Stendhal the same admiration and affection as in Lamennais.

The greater part of our hero's affection during those years went not to individuals, however, but to "le peuple." In theory, "le peuple" included all humanity, except for a few tyrants and those who were conspiring with them to oppress the suffering multitudes. Living in Paris, often in a working-class neighborhood, Lamennais witnessed daily scenes which would have aroused the sympathy of almost anyone. His private charities were said to be extensive, considering his resources, and he never tired of imploring his friends to cooperate in these efforts to alleviate whatever suffering he could. No small-scale efforts could satisfy him, however, and before long another book began to take shape in his mind. Impelled by his immense pity for the poor and miserable and a burning desire to help them, he decided to write Le Livre du Peuple, which Boutard calls "un catéchisme socialiste." It begins in this way,

En passant sur cette terre, comme nous y passions tous, pauvres voyageurs d'un jour, j'ai ouvert les yeux, et mes yeux ont vu des souffrances inouïes, des douleurs sans
nombre, Pâle, malade, défaillante, couverte de vêtements de deuil parsemés de taches de sang, l'humanité s'est levée devant moi, et je me suis demandé: Est-ce donc là l'homme? est-ce là lui tel que Dieu l'a fait? Et mon âme s'est émue profondément, et ce doute l'a remplie d'angoisse.

Side by side with the terrible poverty and helplessness of the many, he saw the immense wealth and power of the few, and this contrast filled his heart with indignation. Many had said that such inequities were the will of God, but that was an explanation Lamennais could not accept.

Mais bientôt j'ai compris que ces souffrances et ces douleurs ne viennent pas de Dieu, de qui tout bien émane et de qui rien n'émane que le bien; qu'elles sont l'œuvre de l'homme même, enseveli dans son ignorance et corrompu dans ses passions, et j'ai espéré, et j'ai eu foi dans l'avenir de la race humaine. Ses destinées changeront lorsqu'elle voudra qu'elles changent, et elle le voudra, sitôt qu'au sentiment de son mal se joindra la claire connaissance du remède qui le peut guérir.

Regarde, ô peuple, s'il n'est pas temps de justifier l'auteur des êtres, en te créant un sort plus conforme à sa justice, à sa bonté.

The fundamental idea of this work is that social evils are not necessary, but the result of selfishness and ignorance. Eliminate that selfishness and that ignorance and society will be perfect. All this is reminiscent of Rousseau's thesis that the people can be deceived but not corrupted, which may or may not be true in that far off realm where ideas dwell in Platonic and isolated splendor. It is however, hard to find much evidence that this simple and very idealistic solution was, or could ever be, more than a partial answer to the very complex problems of society. That, of course, was just what Lamennais was not interested in, partial answers, partial loyalty or partial
anything. So absolute and so blind was his love of the people that he excused their every excess on the grounds of ignorance and extenuating circumstances. What did not seem to occur to him was the possibility that the rich and powerful oppressors he despised might also have been caught in the web of circumstance. More sensible and more objective, Vigny in some chapters of Daphné and Hugo in some poems of Les Châtiments, expose the ugly and evil sides of the lower classes.

Whether one is thinking of individuals or of groups, it is impossible to understand Lamennais' human relationships without relating them to his ideas. The way he felt about the progeny of his soul determined in large part his reactions, and his intransigence in regard to anything or anyone can usually be traced to his determination to defend these cherished ideas. Let us make it clear at this point that we believe Lamennais was, like any bona fide romantic hero, a sick man. Though noble, generous and sincere, he was, nevertheless, the victim of highly organized delusions which, in spite of their emotional origin, were so quickly and thoroughly intellectualized that he was incapable of seeing them for what they were. Many failed to analyze his character in this way and therefore believed he could be influenced by logical arguments. Of course, he often could, but only when his emotions were not involved. We have already noted how the loyal and devoted Montalembert tried desperately to reason with Lamennais, hoping at least to delay the publication of Les Paroles, but to no avail.

Quite different was the attitude of Jean-Marie who perhaps knew his brother better than anyone else. The advice he gave their old friend Mlle. de Lucinière in a letter which we partially quoted in chapter III makes clear Jean-Marie's conviction that the way to reach Féli was through the heart, not through the head. He wisely suggested that she continue to correspond with his unfortunate brother, for:
S'il se croyait abandonné de ceux auquels il est lui-même si sincèrement et si tendrement attaché, il tomberait dans l'état le plus déplorable, et il n'y aurait plus de ressources.  

Sadly enough most of what Jean feared came to pass. Féli was increasingly convinced that he had been abandoned by those to whom he had been most tenderly attached. He had remained loyal to the sacred cause, or so he believed; they were the ones who had betrayed it. It would be nearer the truth, however, to say that they were not willing to be absolutists with him, that they were not Romantic heroes carried to unavoidable ruin by a relentless fate.

Had Lamennais been content to limit himself to purely theoretical speculation his life might have been quite different. But no, he went from one grandiose scheme to the next, always searching for the absolute solution to society's ills, almost always believing he was in possession of it. Most of his blue-prints for the salvation of mankind have already been discussed, but they bear reviewing since, taken as a whole, they are the most important manifestation of Lamennais' search for the absolute.

Throughout his life Lamennais' governing idea or ideal was the social regeneration of France, indeed of all Europe. In the beginning he was convinced this could be done only through a renaissance of Catholicism. It was clear to him, however, that some changes would have to be made within the Church before she could hope to accomplish this mission. In order to effect these changes he devised a many-sided strategy which began, essentially, with the publication of the Essai. Here was the new apologetics, the eternal truths presented in a new way designed to attract the attention, and command the intellectual respect of the rising generation. The most important single idea in the Essai was contained in the formal proclamation that man need no longer be paralysed by doubt; there was, he insisted, a way to know the truth. The philosophy of common consent, as it was
formulated in Book Two, provided the infallible rule of certitude. Having arrived at the absolute solution of that thorny but basic problem, the new Pascal began to draw conclusions from it. It was no abstract interest in philosophical or theological speculation which impelled him to write the Essai but the firm conviction that western civilization was threatened with complete dissolution unless prompt, vigorous, and organized action was taken. Just as he had hoped, quite a number of high-minded, intelligent young men were attracted by his call to take arms against the forces of evil.

His next step was to form an association of these young men, an association whose purpose would be to work toward that religious and cultural renaissance he had called for in the Essai: some have suggested that Lamennais saw himself as a nineteenth-century Ignatius of Loyola. He outlined his plan to the young abbés de Salinis and Gerbet, whose aid he hoped to enlist, and as he spoke the latter was filled with enthusiasm.

Puis, avec cette vivacité de conception qui était un des dons les plus extraordinaires de sa nature, il développa devant ses auditeurs un vaste programme d'études dans lequel il fit entrer la philosophie, la théologie, l'exégèse, l'histoire, la littérature, les sciences physiques et naturelles, les langues, vivantes, les langues mortes, et spécialement, parmi ces dernières, les langues orientales. C'était comme le plan d'une nouvelle encyclopédie, mais d'une encyclopédie catholique, par laquelle se trouverait effacé jusqu'au souvenir de la trop fameuse Encyclopédie du XVIIIe siècle. On devait faire appel à tous les jeunes hommes, ecclésiastiques ou laïques, ayant au cœur la noble ambition de consacrer leur vie à la défense de la vérité. Chacun d'eux, sous l'empire d'une règle large et facile, travaillerait, selon ses goûts et ses aptitudes, le fonds de doctrines commun à tous étant l'ultramontanisme et le système philosophique
du sens commun. 11

Although generally sympathetic, the more practical de Salinis was frightened by the vastness of the project, especially since Lamennais, ever impatient to see his ideas become realities immediately, did not seem to have weighed any of the practical difficulties involved. De Salinis was right. Romantic heroes do not even consider the existence of practical difficulties and Lamennais was quite carried away by his noble, if chimeric, vision of the future. "...c'est à elle [the Church] qu'il appartient de féconder le chaos, et de séparer une seconde fois la lumière des ténèbres."12 In order to accomplish this great work immediately the Church needed his help.

Two schools, one at La Chênaie for laymen, and another at Malestroît (about forty-five miles from La Chênaie) for seminarians and priests, were founded, and the constitution for a new religious order, the "Congrégation de St. Pierre," was drawn up. According to one of the students, their ambition "n'étatit pas de gouverner le monde, mais de le convertir."13 Most students of the subject have agreed that these establishments made a genuine contribution, directly or indirectly, to the intellectual vitality of French Catholicism. Vidler goes so far as to compare the influence of Lamennais to that of Newman at the height of his power and influence.

The School of La Chênaie flourished only from 1828 to 1833, but during those years it was as much a burning and a shining light in the Church of France as the tractarian school was in the Church of England when Newman was at the height of his power and influence.14

Anyone who examines Lamennais' educational theories and methods will find them interesting, ingenious, and, at least with the exceptional group gathered there, very effective. The purpose of discussing the project here is not, however, to consider whether or not the seeds planted by Lamennais bore fruit in due season. It is his dream which
concerns us, and that dream was to nurture within the bosom of the Church a race of intellectual giants, who would restore the lost unity of Christendom by showing there was no conflict between secular and religious knowledge. Needless to say, no two schools, no matter how inspired the teachers, no matter how brilliant and dedicated the students, would have been equal to such a grandiose plan. Thus Lamennais was to continue throughout his life, always searching for absolute solutions to the problems of humanity. To this end he founded *l'Avenir*, went to Rome, broke with Rome, and became a socialist. To paraphrase Blake, never did he cease from mental fight, never did his sword sleep in his hand, during all those years when he was struggling to build the New Jerusalem in his beloved France. As Boutard says, "Ce sont les plus belles utopies qui enfantent les plus grandes déceptions."\(^{15}\)

On occasion he was forced by circumstances to pause and consider how best to continue the battle. When such a pause was dictated by the need to revise his opinions, and not some external difficulty, Lamennais was miserable and his health itself suffered. For despite his periodic lapses into melancholia, Lamennais was essentially an activist. "Dieu l'a fait soldat," is the way his brother expressed it. That enthusiasm Mme. de Staël so admired in the Germans was certainly not lacking in this particular Frenchman.

L'enthousiasme! Voilà en effet un trait constant du génie de Lamennais. Il l'avait apporté avec lui en naissant, et l'atmosphère de l'époque n'avait fait que développer... vrai romantique, peut-être le seul entièrement sincère d'eux tous, en tout cas celui d'entre eux qui fut le plus chrétien, et que cet état d'esprit fit passer le plus vite à la négation la plus violente.\(^{16}\)

Lamennais' motto was *quod facis, fac citius.* It was a motto he acted upon and believed in; his only problem was what to do. This very problem, the conflict between establishing a rationale for action and action itself, was dealt with by Balzac in *Beatrix* (1836)
and perhaps it is no accident that the locale is Lamennais' beloved Brittany. The novel is primarily concerned with the generation gap in the very noble but impoverished du Guênic family, whose coat of arms bears the single but imperative word, FAC. Balzac describes the pater familias as a sort of human dinosaur whose virtues are relics of another age, and explains the old baron's capacity for continual action by the fact that, having already acquired all the knowledge he considered necessary, he was seldom obliged to think,

...ses devoirs, il les avait appris avec la vie. Les Institutions, la Religion, pensaient pour lui. Il devait donc réserver son esprit, lui et les siens, pour agir, sans le dissiper sur aucune des choses jugées inutiles, mais dont s'occupaient les autres.

One might question at first the justice of comparing the erudite Lamennais with Balzac's hero, who, with the exception of his prayer book, had not read three volumes in his entire life. A closer examination, however, shows that the disparity is superficial and the agreement profound because, for Lamennais' study was never a dispassionate search for truth; it was rather a means of proving the truth he already held, it was itself a form of action. There seems every reason to agree with Viatte's conclusion that "...son érudition, qui est vaste, ne paraît pas l'avoir mis en garde contre les enthousiasmes faciles et les intraiséances irraisonnées." It was the force of this inner compulsion to act which made it impossible for Lamennais to remain for long in a state of indecision or doubt. Faith was as necessary to him as food and air, for a life without faith must be a life without action, and without action life seemed to him no better than a living death.

...l'homme n'est pas jété sur la terre quelques instants pour disputer; il y est pour connaître et pour agir, par conséquent pour croire; et malheur à qui le doute ouvre les portes du tombeau!
This passage which insists not on the intrinsic merit of faith, but upon the practical benefits to be derived from it, shows that Lamennais was in some sense a pragmatist. Like his contemporaries Chateaubriand, Hugo, and Lamartine, he wanted to see his vision of the good society become a reality. They, however, were realistic enough to make some concessions to practicality in order to promote their views. Even the more idealistic and intransigent Vigny realized that compromise was essential for political effectiveness, although most of the time, he himself was unwilling to make those compromises. Vigny realized there was a choice to be made, Lamennais did not. Given his sensitivity, his idealism, his lack of practical experience and his desire for concrete results, the meanest intelligence could have predicted the result of any sustained and effective contact with the political and social realities of his day. Since reality stubbornly refuses to conform to the vision of the absolute idealist, only two paths are open to him—escape or rebellion. At one time or another Lamennais tried both.

The longing to escape is a common trait in the Romantic hero, although in individual cases it takes different forms. Sometimes he loses himself in metaphysical speculation or endless scientific experiments; any kind of frenzied activity, or its opposite, endless and inconclusive introspection, can serve the purpose. In some cases the desire to escape either from himself or from the society, in which an unkind fate has placed him, is conscious and avowed; in others it is partially obscured or complicated by a more or less positive desire to find someone, something or someplace.

In Lamennais' life this desire to escape reappeared like a leit-motif whenever he felt depressed or discouraged. Again and again he bewailed his forced exile in "ce triste monde, si vil et si dégoûtant," where every day one saw "tant de trahisons, tant de bassesses, tant d'indignités," where "la douleur est de toute saison."
Often he looked toward the grave with longing. While in prison he wrote:

Ô mort, ô douce mort, que l'on est injuste envers toi, Fille de Dieu, mère des êtres, qui les enfantes à l'existence réelle, qui leur ouvres l'entrée de l'immense avenir qu'est-il pour eux de plus bienfaisant que ta puissance, de plus sacré que tes fonctions, de plus désirable que ta venue... ¹⁹

There is, he said "dans le sépulcre quelque chose qui attire l'homme."

But in spite of the tomb's attraction for him there is no evidence that Lamennais ever considered suicide as a possible solution, although suicide was so prevalent at the period among idealists that Vigny felt compelled to write his Chatterton.

His ceaseless mental activity was at times a thorn in his side, which caused him to cry out: "Ô le mal et doux chevet que l'ignorance..." ²⁰ How much more comfortable life would be, he sometimes thought, if only it were possible to escape from both the necessity of earning a living and his burdensome preoccupation with higher things.

Heureux celui qui vit de ses revenus, qui n'éprouve d'autre besoin que celui de digérer et de dormir, et savoure toute vérité dans le pâté de Reims, que nul n'oserait censurer en sa présence. ²¹

In other moments he thought of leaving France. At one time he wanted to go to the colonies as a missionary, ²² at another he thought with longing of "ces bons solitaires du Sennaar..., ces anges du désert, dont j'aimerais tant, quoique indigne, partager la solitude." ²³

These lines were written in the summer of 1809, but the desert and the mysterious East continued to have a privileged place in his imagination for many years. In 1823 he confided to his friend Bruté, "Quelquefois il me prend des désirs extrêmes de quitter la France et de m'en aller au loin chercher le repos dans quelque désert...," but
logic crept in, destroying his illusion, and he added, "Mais le travail n'est-il partout et la peine aussi. Nous portons en nous notre douleur... donc, le mieux est de porter sa croix où elle nous est donnée... 

Lamennais' travels did not serve to put the situation in France in a better perspective for him, rather they reinforced his obsession with the evils of despotism, which to his mind was solely responsible for the misery of the people. Toward the end of 1835, he wrote:

Je suis assez dégoûté de l'Europe, espèce de marais, peuplé de grenouilles, qui, après avoir bien coassé, contentes d'elles-mêmes, se laissent avaler une à une par le premier héron venu, et plus il en avale, plus elles le respectent et l'admirent. Jeune et riche, je m'en irais en Orient chercher un ciel plus doux et des hommes moins sots et moins vils.28

In Florence, in Bologna, in Ferrara, in Venice he had seen the same troubling sights, breathed the same stifling atmosphere of oppression until, taking a giant step backwards, he asked himself,

si la vie surchargée d'entraves et de souffrances chez les nations civilisées ne s'écoulerait pas plus heureuse au sein des forêts que parcourent, dans leur primitive liberté, les hommes que nous appelons sauvages.26

Having had more experience with the country than with the desert, our hero found it slightly more difficult to imagine the life of a village priest as an idyll. Thus when he was momentarily tempted by the thought of how sweet it would be to flee the corruption of civilization and preach the gospel of Jesus to the poor "que son nom seul console et ravit," Lamennais took care to specify the location of his parish.

J'ai toujours envié le bonheur d'un curé de village, dans les pays où le peuple est encore bon et simple; cette simplicité a un grand charme; ce n'est pas le défaut de lumières, c'est le
calme de l'esprit qui se repose dans
la vérité et dans l'innocence.\textsuperscript{27}

In 1841 Balzac was to dispose of this myth in his novel \textit{Le Curé de village}. This tendency to idealize the peasant, plus a genuine and passionate desire to improve his lot in life, explains, at least in part, Lamennais' short-lived and unlikely friendship with George Sand.

We have already noted that Lamennais often spoke of leaving France, of taking refuge in some far away haven where life was simpler and men were purer. There was, however, only one moment when his daydreams of escape seemed on the point of becoming a reality. Early in 1834, the deeply troubled author of the yet unpublished \textit{Paroles d'un Croyant}, decided to bury himself in some isolated Lebanese village.\textsuperscript{28} Thanks to Lamartine who had recently returned from his trip to the Orient, Lamennais was able to envisage in some detail what such a life would be like from a material standpoint, and the very preciseness of this information gave substance to what had been but a dream. The more this dream took on the shape and substance of reality the less he wanted to go.

The desire to escape was in itself probably all the escape this "patriot" really wanted. If a patriot is one who loves his country and wishes to serve her, no one can deny Lamennais that title. Whether or not he did in fact serve her, whether he loved her wisely or well are other questions which, interesting and important as they are, have no bearing on the purpose of this study. When Lamennais decided against this self-imposed exile he gave numerous reasons for having changed his mind, but the attentive reader will discern one underlying them all - he simply could not bear to leave France.

\ldots je veux y vivre et je veux y mourir;
l'air y a quelque chose qui soulage ma
poitrine si souvent oppressée, et qui n'est
Le passage suivant montre comment les sentiments de Lamennais influencent ses décisions. Il aime les défauts de son pays natal, selon lui, ces défauts sont transformés en vertus, et il est conscient qu'il est influencé par ses sentiments.

There is no reason to doubt that Lamennais' love for France as a whole was sincere and profound, but of all her provinces, with their cities and villages, mountains and plains, none was so dear to him as Brittany. He loved St. Malo from whose ramparts he had so often looked out at the ships and the sea; he loved the surrounding countryside; but most of all he loved La Chênaie. Knowing how her forests were a part of his very being, who can fail to appreciate what it must have cost him to abandon them. Years later, despite his poverty and stated intention never to return to La Chênaie, he refused his permission to sell her trees.

Quoique je ne doive jamais, selon toute apparence, revoir la Chênaie, j'y tiens toujours par mes souvenirs, et je n'ai pu me représenter ce joli coteau, si soigné par moi, dépouillé de sa parure, nu en partie, sans en éprouver une vive peine, Qu'est-ce qu'un peu d'argent près de cela? C'est ce que je me suis dit. J'erre encore en imagination sous ces arbres dans la sève desquels coule ma vieille vie. Eux partis, il me semble que je resterais seul en ce monde. D'autres les abattront je le sais bien, mais alors, je n'y serais plus. Je demande donc grâce pour ces pauvres arbres, Leur caducité ne ressemble que trop à la mienne, et ceux qui m'ont vu naître, je ne veux point les voir mourir.
At La Chênaie, Lamennais had spent the happiest days of his life, there was the tree under which he had thought to be buried, there was the chapel where he had so often said Mass. That small chapel which had once been a cause of joy was, ironically, one of the principal reasons why it seemed impossible to live at La Chênaie once the wrath of the local clergy had been thoroughly aroused. Neither by leaving his chapel closed nor by opening it could he avoid their wrath. Many of the clergy had long been hostile to Lamennais and his friends, and this hostility was increased by the publication of Les Paroles d'un Croyant, which alienated, or at least reduced to silence, even the most sympathetic among them. Lamennais' decision to publish this book was indeed, as Bourtard noted, "une de ces fatales impulsions qui furent le malheur de sa vie." It was his great act of rebellion. Montalembert had seen it coming and implored him to consider the consequences of such an action.

Au nom de tout ce qu'il y a de plus sacré,
aux nom des croyances qui vous restent encore,
aux nom enfin de ma tendre affection pour vous
et de la vôtre pour moi, ne cédez pas à cette
tentation terrible. Songez devant Dieu, qu'à
cinquante ans, vous allez tout à coup répudier
la gloire, la foi, les habitudes de votre vie
passée. Est-ce donc trop de deux ou trois
ans de méditations, de silence, avant de prendre
un tel parti?

Even this prudent advice to "look before you leap" was dismissed because it had become a point of honor to stand firm in the path he had chosen, or as he would have put it, in the path indicated by his conscience. In a way his individual rebellion was a miniature revolution, and by this time in his life Lamennais had lost most of his original aversion for revolutionary change. By now he was closer to agreeing with Victor Hugo, who believed that man's function in the world was progress, and that the vehicle for progress was revolution - "la grande révolte obéissante à Dieu." The author of Les Paroles
was indeed persuaded that his personal revolt was in obedience to the will of God, and the many efforts of his friends to effect a reconciliation between Rome and the priest who had such a short time before been her most eloquent defender met with his Promethean resistance.

Like Vigny in *Daphné*, like George Sand in *Reflexions sur Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, like most of his generation, Lamennais' inclination was to "diviniser la conscience." Once it had spoken, God had spoken and from that moment forward he refused to give any consideration at all to arguments against the position he had taken. Yet, what he, in complete sincerity, called his conscience seemed increasingly to resemble the real divinity of the Romantics — Sentiment. That is why he was on this occasion, as on so many others, inaccessible to reason; only sentiment could have prevailed over sentiment, and rebellion is also a form of escape.

Some might be inclined to view Lamennais' recurrent longing to escape, physically or metaphysically, as a negation of that absolutism we discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Such a position is defensible since to want everything and to want nothing are logical opposites. They would seem, however, to be psychological concomitants, two aspects of the same unfortunate and somewhat childish predisposition to extremes. Such, at least, appears to be the case with Lamennais and it is for that reason that they have been studied together. Although the absolutist-activist strain was dominant in Lamennais, it was perhaps the occasional emergence of the absolutist-escapist which provided some relief from emotional stress and, acting as a safety valve, helped him maintain that tenuous grasp on reality which separates the psychotic Romantic hero from the totally mad,
CHAPTER FIVE
THE OUTSIDER

"Si jamais en effet le héros romantique s'incarna dans un être de chair et d'os, ce fut en Lamennais."

August Viatte

Students of French literature have long recognized that there is a definite type or pattern to which the Romantic hero conforms. As with other patterns, individuals may conform with greater or lesser exactitude, whether in literature or in life. One of the points of departure for this study has been the analysis of Lamennais' conformity to the pattern of the Romantic hero, in his life as well as in his writings. In earlier chapters we have noted a number of instances where his words or actions seemed to exemplify particular aspects of the type: this chapter and the following one will be concerned with the pattern itself. It would be methodologically unsound to construct a norm for the Romantic hero based on Lamennais, and then to discover that indeed he fitted that norm. We considered it essential, therefore, to locate a pre-existent pattern made by a knowledgeable person with no thought of Lamennais in mind. Books on the Romantic period are not lacking and in them one can find many interesting analyses of individual Romantic heroes. To our surprise, however, none of the scholars or critics whose works were available to us had even attempted to present a clear, concise and complete list of the characteristics which distinguish the Romantic hero as a model type. Fortunately, this lacuna had already been noted by Professor Bourgeois who, after teaching courses on the Romantic period for a score of years, filled in the gap by providing his students with a list of those characteristics which is, in our opinion, both pertinent and complete. We shall use it as the yardstick against which our hero will be measured. Since the validity of this method depends on measuring Lamennais against the whole pattern, not just certain parts of it, every characteristic will be mentioned either in the text itself, or in a note.
Some have already been thoroughly discussed in earlier chapters, the others have been divided into two groups. The first group is comprised of somewhat disparate elements, most of which tend to show the Romantic hero as an outsider; they will be discussed one by one in this chapter. The second group includes those items which characterize the Romantic hero as a fated or fatal man, a victim of destiny, and a rebel; unlike the first group these elements form a cohesive unit and will be treated as such in the next and final chapter. "Ce sont des êtres singuliers," such is the most striking element of their personality. The dictionary definition of "singulier" is "Qui se distingue par quelque chose d'inusité, d'extraordinaire." At this point we can only hope that the preceding chapters have satisfied the reader that such a definition can be properly applied to Lamennais. Certainly his contemporaries, whether friends or enemies, did not consider Lamennais to be an ordinary type. Sainte-Beuve, before Lamennais' break with the Church, called him:

...celui des hommes de notre temps qui offre peut-être le plus magnifique exemple de cette union consubstantielle et sacrée de la volonté avec l'intelligence sous le sceau de la foi, celui dont l'esprit et la pratique, toute la pensée et toute la vie, se sont si docilement soumises, si ardemment employées aux conséquences efficaces de doctrines en apparence délaissées...2

It has been suggested that Sainte-Beuve was not really as wounded by Lamennais' apostasy as many of his comments, both public and private, would have us believe. Whether sincere or not, his bitterness and disappointment were expressed in very harsh terms; and he ranged Lamennais among the angels cast out of heaven by pride. Scandalized by Lamennais' newly-formed friendship with George Sand, Sainte-Beuve wrote this bitter denunciation, drawing a parallel between the two:

Ils sont l'un et l'autre, Lélia et Lamennais (il faut bien les marier
ainsi] les dieux à la mode, les rois
de la popularité; un beau jour le public,
les loges, le parterre, tout ce qu'il y a
de belles dames et de brutes énergiques,
se mettront à crier au beau milieu du
drame qui se joue et dont nous ferons
tous partie, au beau milieu de cette
tragico-comico-farce sociale qui est
Robert Macaire en grand, et les deux grands
acteurs à la mode se présenteront par
la main avec de profonds saluts, elle en
cheveux couronnés d'élegantes fleurs de
bruyères écloses sous l'aiguille de
Geneviève, lui en petite redingote
grisse seul débris de sa défroque de
curé, et ils salueront, la main sur
le coeur, cette foule hurlante et
délirante dont ils font le plaisir,
l'entretien, l'émotion et qui leur
crie 'bis, ter,' et: 'allez de plus
en plus fort!'...Oh! que je hais ces
rôles d'"agitateur," de "tragédien,
"gladiateur," comme vous voudrez les
appeler! Elle du moins, elle est
"cantatrice" et elle chante, c'est bien;
mais vous prêtez, mais vous sages, qu'êtes-vous devenu? C'est que vous n'étiez qu'un
artiste admirable, mais ambulant aussi;
cest que si vous avez l'avantage, comme
talent, de ne pas vieillir, vous avez
l'inconvénient comme esprit, de ne pas
mûrir.\(^3\)

Sainte-Beuve, in our opinion, misjudges Lamennais' motives but what
we wish to bring out is the fact that even when he was most hostile,
the critic did not deny that Lamennais was an extraordinary personality.
So the term "singulier," which is always such a compliment under
Stendhal's pen, can certainly be applied to our hero.

The young men who studied under his direction were extravagant
in their praise. One of them, Charles de Sainte-Foi, wrote that
Lamennais' attraction was like that of the sun:

Il semble que cet homme devait être pour
les catholiques en France, ce qu'est le soleil pour le monde dont notre terre fait partie, et que tous les esprits lumineux, marqués par Dieu de ce cachet particulier qui forme comme le signe de la distinction ou du génie, fussent finir par entrer dans la sphère de son attraction et graviter autour de lui comme autour de leur centre. Ceux qui croyaient d'abord avoir échappé à cette puissante influence, finissaient toujours par en sentir les atteintes et par succomber en chemin.\textsuperscript{4}

Both Eugène Boré\textsuperscript{5} and Maurice du Guérin\textsuperscript{6} said that the loss of Lamennais had left them "orphans," and Mgr Dupanloup, one of Lamennais' critics (later famous throughout France because he managed to reconcile Talleyrand with the Church "in articulo mortis"), was so concerned about Lamennais' appeal that he wrote to Cardinal de Rohan in Rome, warning him that "...tous le jeune clergé est perdu en France, si M. de La Mennais peut se dire approuvé à Rome.\textsuperscript{7}

To our knowledge only one person has ever said that Lamennais was ordinary and that was Barbey d'Aurevilly who, in \textit{Les Prophètes du passé}, said that because of his apostasy, God had visited upon Lamennais the most terrible of all punishments for a man of genius, that he had been "frappé de médiocrité." When Lamennais' \textit{Correspondance} was published even this single dissenting opinion was modified.

* * *

Ils se saient exceptionnels. Cette croyance et celle en l'unicité de leurs problèmes font d'eux des orgueilleux qui jugent qu'il n'y a jamais eu et qu'il n'y aura jamais plus quelqu'un comme eux-mêmes.

Since Lamennais was constantly being told how exceptional he was, he could scarcely have remained unaware of the fact that such was the general opinion and, as we have pointed out elsewhere, there are good reasons to suppose he concurred in it. There are, however, indications that he fell short of believing himself to be unique, since
he frequently implied that there had been on this earth others whose mission was similar, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Leonidas, Moses and Prometheus, to mention a few.

* * *

Ils sont supérieurs ou se croient supérieurs: eux seuls peuvent connaître des émotions, des bonheurs, des souffrances et être victimes de malheurs tels que ceux qui s'abattent sur eux. Les autres hommes sont des être communs, vulgaires.

Much of what has been said under the preceding heading applies to this one as well, since to the Romantics "exceptional" usually, but not always, meant superior not only among the Romantic hero of around 1830 like Julien Sorel, but as far in the century as Emma Bovary. There is in chapter II a description of Lamennais as a child which shows he was not ever what one would call a normal youngster. Since the Romantic generation had a rather clear idea of what a hero should be like, his physical appearance as well as his personality, it will be interesting to see how a few of Lamennais' contemporaries described him. Cardinal Wiseman tried to explain the secret of Lamennais' influence.

Il est difficile d'expliquer le secret de l'influence que Lamennais exerçait sur qui l'abordaient. Certes son aspect n'avait rien d'imposant: il était chétif, petit, d'attitude commune, sans autorité dans le regard, en un mot sans grâce extérieure. C'était donc dépourvue de tout prestige que sa langue, organe puissant, traduisait une merveilleuse succession de pensées à la fois claires, profondes et fortes.8

Since the Cardinal saw no authority in his "regard," it is interesting to note that it was not his tongue but his eyes which most impressed Turquety.

Je vis un vieillard d'une taille au-dessous de la moyenne, figure maigre et ridée, front
austère et jauni comme le front d'un trappiste,
Mais ce qui me frappa le plus, c'étaient ses
yeux qui luisaient comme des escarquelles.9

This mesmeric quality of the eyes was characteristic of Melmoth the
Wanderer, Reverend Maturin's satanic hero; Balzac possessed it to as
great a degree as Lamennais and he conferred it on his Vautrin,
Charles Sainte-Foi, who had spent more time in Lamennais' company than
the two men just quoted, described him in much the same way,

Il a la timidité et l'embarras d'un enfant;
il ne pourra ni parler, ni chanter en public;
il ne saura pas même se présenter. Si vous le
regardez, vous le gênez; si vous le louez, vous
l'embarrassez et le réduisez au silence, Que
faut-il donc faire avec lui? L'écouter, soulever
de temps en temps sa pensée par quelques-unes
de ces objections où l'esprit semble s'avouer
à demi vaincu et demander à son interlocuteur
le complément d'une pensée qu'il ne peut achever
seul.10

Lamennais would scarcely qualify as hero material nowadays since
a healthier, more athletic type is in vogue; but Chateaubriand and Napoléon
were short and, at that time, if a man had that high forehead which
announced genius, burning eyes and violent emotions there was no need
to be robust. In fact, it was better not to be; the Romantics, even
the herculean Dumas Père, admired the tubercular type.

Sainte-Foi's comment on how to bring out the best in Lamennais
as a conversationalist confirms what we have observed before - that
resistance and contradiction served to strengthen Lamennais in his
opinions. There is, of course, a difference between the friendly
opposition of ideas referred to by Sainte-Foi and the bitter antagonism
of enemies. Although Lamennais often seemed to thrive on that an-
tagonism, in the sense that his strength of body and will seemed to
increase in proportion to the obstacles to be surmounted, he also
complained about it. Many other writers openly admitted sharing
his opinions, he wailed, but he alone suffered from such constant
and bitter persecutions,

Chateaubriand, Lamartine et beaucoup d'autres
se sont expliqués aussi nettement que moi,
Pourquoi donc m'accuse-t-on seul? On a peur
contre tous, excepté contre moi,\textsuperscript{11}

Lamennais was romantic but he was not a fool and if he alone was per-
secuted he must have known that it was because he alone was considered
a serious threat to the established order, what is now so often called
the Establishment. He could have said, and in order to be really
truthful, should have said, "I alone am feared," But that would have
sounded egotistical.

Although he tried hard to avoid it, Lamennais, in our opinion,
was egotistical and did believe himself superior to his fellow men,
Even as a child he was convinced that he saw what others did not see.
(Chapter I). Particularly interesting in this regard is his estimate
of the value of sentiment, sentiment excessive to the point of ab-
normality. (Chapter II) He knew he was sick but he did not wish
to be cured. What true Romantic would have failed to agree that it
is preferable to suffer the torments of the damned rather than re-
nounce one's hypersensitivity, the proof of superiority, and live the
happy, mindless life of the mediocre man? Lamennais, himself, warned
the young Charles de Montalembert that the secret inclination to
prolong one's sufferings deliberately and then because of intensity
and duration of those sentiments to consider oneself superior to others,
was an evil inclination the source of which was pride. (Chapter II)
Surely it is safe to assume that Lamennais knew this by personal ex-
perience. His above reference to Jeremiah, Moses, etcetera proves it,

As for considering others to be common and vulgar, it seems
clear that he often did. While one cannot know what he truly thought
about the common man, if such exist, we do know what he thought about
his associates. From that one thing is very clear; no matter how
superior in one way or the other, whenever he (or she) ceased to agree
with Lamennais, his estimate of their intelligence changed.

*  
*  *

Ils ne sont jamais compris de ceux qui les entourent - que d'ailleurs ils ne cherchent point à comprendre.

There is a difference between really being misunderstood and simply believing oneself to be misunderstood. The extent to which Lamennais was actually misunderstood, by whom, and when, is a very complicated problem which involves philosophical questions, political situations and an intimate knowledge of the character of many other persons besides Lamennais. We leave this question, therefore, to others whose competence is wider in order to concentrate on Lamennais' attitude toward himself. Did he believe himself to be misunderstood? That is the really important question and the answer is a loud affirmative. It is, in fact, quite clear that throughout his life, Lamennais interpreted criticism or opposition to his ideas as proof that he had not been understood. When, in 1825, many formerly friendly toward him began to show signs of coolness, Lamennais was incensed. They could not understand his sudden shift in political loyalties; he could not understand why they could not understand. One of the few who did understand was Victor Hugo, who had good reason to feel sympathetic toward anyone who changed his political loyalties. Clearly delighted that Lamennais had taken a stand against the Villèle government and the Gallicans, the poet wrote a most flattering letter in which he congratulated the priest on this victory in hand-to-hand battle with those colossi.

...je vous remercie de votre belle réponse aux Gallicans, et comme ami et comme chrétien. C'est bien une vive joie pour moi que de vous voir ce jour sortir vainqueur de la lutte où vous prenez corps à corps ces colosses qui ne sont plus que des fantômes devant vous. Tous les chefs de partis sont bien peu de chose en présence du prêtre tel que vous le peignez, tel que vous le montrez; ...votre logique
But the battle which Hugo assured him was already won had in truth, only begun. Nevertheless, such kind words must have been very welcome at that moment and Lamennais hastened to write his sympathetic young friend an angry letter protesting against the blindness and injustice of those who insisted on misjudging his motives and misunderstanding his position.

Il n'y a guère que le bon Dieu qui, j'espère, ne me repousser pas, Et pourtant qu'ai-je fait? ai-je varié? Ce que j'ai dit aujourd'hui, ne l'ai-je pas dit toujours. Que les hommes en pensent ce qu'ils voudront, je ne leur sacrifierai ni la vérité ni ma conscience, et s'il y a une voix dans la tombe, on entendra sortir de la mienne les mêmes paroles.13

This letter shows clearly how he reacted to criticism from those he considered hostile to him and is a preview of the Lamennais of 1834.

Lamennais was convinced that any doubts about the purity of his motives could have been dispelled if only others could look into his secret heart and see what was written there.

...Catholique sincère et ne voyant en ce monde que les intérêts de la religion, qui me sont mille fois plus chers que la vie, je voudrais que mon âme fût transparente afin que chacun pût lire mes sentiments les plus secrets. On y verrait, avec un dévouement plein d'amour pour le Saint-Siège, un respect pour l'épiscopat et une soumission qui n'a d'autres bornes que celle due avant tout aux Pontifes romains,14

This letter addressed to the abbé de Mazenod was made public on April 29, 1831; the following November, Lamennais left on his fateful trip
to Rome. The outcome of that trip did little apparently to shake his faith in the validity of his own judgments, and after the publication of Paroles d'un Croyant in 1834, Lamennais seemed as convinced as ever that he was right, and equally certain that his actions would be misunderstood. His stated intention was "de rester soumis dans l'Eglise et libre en dehors de l'Eglise." He was by then convinced that the Judeo-Christian religious institution of his time was undergoing a transformation as radical as that which took place at the time of the Incarnation. While awaiting this "necessary transformation" one should, he said,

...demeurer uni à l'institution existante,...
c'est parce que je crois à la victoire de Dieu et par conséquent à la durée de la Société européenne que la Providence guide dans ses voies, c'est parce que je crois à une régénération plus ou moins prochaine que je me sens prêt à tout souffrir, à tout sacrifier pour y concourir. Voilà l'explication de mon livre, explication que bien peu de gens sans doute comprendront...\(^{15}\)

He was right about one thing, at least; few people did understand or accept that explanation.

Although Lamennais was often a tender and sympathetic friend, when a disagreement arose he made almost no effort to understand what motivated that person to disagree with him. To put oneself in another's place, to analyze a situation from another's point of view, requires a high degree of emotional and intellectual detachment, a degree of detachment which Lamennais never had when he was young and only rarely in later life.

* *

Ils sont solitaires et souffrent de leur solitude,
car tout homme a besoin de se sentir compris, de se
sentir compris, de se confier, d'aimer,
d'être aimé, de se dévouer. Leur isolement est presque absolu.

The reading of any biography of Lamennais brings out the fact that he was indeed a solitary person. He called himself an "exile" and in Les Paroles d'un Croyant described in poignant terms the sufferings of the solitary hero.

Il s'en allait errant sur la terre.
Que Dieu guide le pauvre exilé!
J'ai passé à travers les peuples, et ils m'ont regardé, et je les ai regardés, et nous ne nous sommes point reconnus.
L'exilé partout est seul.
Lorsque je voyois, au déclin du jour,
s'élever du creux d'un vallon la fumée de quelque chaumière, je me disois: Heureux celui qui retrouve, le soir, le foyer domestique, et s'y assied au milieu des siens! L'exilé partout est seul.
Où vont ces nuages que chasse la tempête?
Elle me chasse comme eux, et qu'importe où?
L'exilé partout est seul.

Ces arbres sont beaux, ces fleurs sont belles; mais ce ne sont point les fleurs ni les arbres de mon pays: ils ne me disent rien.
L'exilé partout est seul.

Ce ruisseau coule mollement dans la plaine;
mais son murmure n'est pas celui qu'entendit mon enfance: il ne rappelle à mon âme aucun souvenir. L'exilé partout est seul.

Ces chants sont doux, mais les tristesses et les joies qu'ils réveillent ne sont ni mes tristesses ni mes joies. L'exilé partout est seul.

On m'a demandé: Pourquoi pleurez-vous? et quand je l'ai dit, nul n'a pleuré; parce qu'on
ne me comprenoit point. L'exilé partout est seul.

J'ai vu des vieillards entourés d'enfants,
comme l'olivier de ses rejetons; mais aucun de
ces vieillards ne m'appeloit son fils, aucun de
ces enfants ne m'appeloit son frère. L'exilé
partout est seul.

J'ai vu des jeunes filles sourire, d'un
sourire aussi pur que la brise du matin, à
celui que leur amour s'était choisi pour époux;
mais pas une ne m'a souri. L'exilé partout est
seul.

J'ai vu des jeunes hommes, poitrine contre
poitrine, s'étreindre comme s'ils avoient voulu
de deux vies ne faire qu'une vie; mais pas un
ne m'a serré la main. L'exilé partout est seul.

Il n'y a d'amis, d'épouses, de père et de
frères que dans la patrie. L'exilé partout est
seul.

Pauvre exilé! cesse de gémir; tous sont
bannis comme toi: tous voient passer et
s'évanouir pères, frères, épouses, amis.

La patrie n'est point ici-bas: l'homme
vainement l'y cherche; ce qu'il prend pour elle
n'est qu'un gîte d'une nuit.

Il s'en va errant sur la terre. Que Dieu guide
le pauvre exilé! 16

In addition to passages like this one in his published works,
countless personal letters bear witness to Lamennais' intense longing
for union with another creature, or creatures. One of the most touch-
ing of these letters is to his brother. In April, 1814, Féli was in
Paris talking with the editors of Tradition; from there he wrote
imploring Jean-Marie to join him in order that they might found an
ecclesiastical journal. In his opinion, Jean should not feel badly
about abandoning his work at Sainte-Brièue because "Il y a partout
du bien à faire, et ici plus que nulle part." Then he proceeded to
the real question and asked, "Au fond, ne nous devons nous pas plus
mutuellement, que nous ne nous devons à qui que ce soit?" And
finally, the better to persuade him, he added, "J'ai besoin de quelqu'un
qui me connaisse et à qui je puisse dire absolument tout. A cela peut-être est attaché mon salut," Between July 18 and August 12 he wrote Jean seven more very long letters; in the last one he was overjoyed because Jean was coming to Paris, in fact for a visit, but Féli thought for good.

Je vais bien compter d’ici là les heures et les minutes, et prier le bon Dieu pour qu’il nous éclaire l’un et l’autre. Mon projet me plaît extrêmement. Passer nos jours ensemble, mettre en commun nos travaux, nos études, nos plaisirs, nos peines, toute notre destinée, Tu me connais, juge avec quelle vivacité mon cœur se précipite dans ces douces espérances... je te promets de nouveau de faire tout ce que tu voudras... 17

Letters like this made the abbé Boutard suggest that what Lamennais really wanted and needed was not a brother, not a friend, but a wife: since only with a woman could he have shared his life as completely as he wished to share it. Whether or not Lamennais was conscious of that need is impossible to say; what is certain, however, is that Lamennais, in later years when he had lost faith in men, came to believe that women were the hope of the world. And if women really were what he believed them to be, all women, all of the time, there would be more hope for the world.

Plus sûr que le raisonnement, un infaillible instinct la préserve des erreurs fatales auxquelles l’homme se laisse entraîner par l’orgueil de l’esprit et de la science. Tandis que, sondant toutes les voies, sa curiosité insatiable l’emporte, à travers je ne sais quel crépuscule trompeur, en des régions peuplées de fantômes; tandis que sa vanie et débile raison ébranle aveuglément les bases de l’ordre et de l’intelligence même; la femme, éclairée d’une lumière plus intime et plus immédiate, les défend contre lui, conserve dans l’humanité les croyances par lesquelles elle subsiste, les vérités nécessaires, les grandes lois de
la vie intellectuelle et morale. Elle en est, au milieu de la confusion des idées et des révolutions des systèmes, la gardienne pieuse et incorruptible. Souvent l'homme, à cause de cela même, l'accuse de faiblesse, de préjugé, de superstition, et il ne sait qu'au fond l'objet de sa superstition c'est Dieu, caché sous les symboles qui le révèlent obscurément, que son préjugé, c'est le vrai immuable embrassé par le cœur, que sa faiblesse, c'est la force innée, la puissance souveraine, de la Nature même, quoi qu'on ait fait pour la détourner de sa fin véritable, pour l'égarer hors de la règle par l'appât d'une fausse liberté, d'une indépendance qui ne serait que le plus dur, le plus plus dégradant esclavage, elle a repoussé avec dégoût les suggestions des tentateurs. Elle a voulu rester ce qu'Ormuzd [God] l'a faite, ce que l'humanité a de plus ravissant et de plus saint, la vierge, l'épouse, la mère, Et parce qu'elle a su résister aux conseils corrupteurs, ses destinées seront belles dans l'avenir qui s'approche. En inspirant de bonne heure à l'enfant les religieux sentiments qui doivent animer l'homme, l'esprit de sacrifice, de dévouement, d'amour, le courage contre soi, le mépris des choses matérielles, du corps et de ses convoités, c'est elle qui enfantera cet avenir que pressent un instinct mystérieux; il sera, lui aussi, le fruit de ses entrailles.18

Until the day he died, Lamennais never ceased to keep his lonely vigil, never stopped believing that angel voices were once again singing on the mountains while a new world was being born.

* * *

Ils sont mélancoliques, d'une mélancolie presque morbide.

The single word "melancholy" is used to describe what are in fact two different states of mind. In one, rather pleasant feelings
of vague sadness float gently through the mental atmosphere; in the other, sentiments of morbid grief and despondency prevail and cause the unfortunate victim acute suffering. Most of his life Lamennais oscillated between frenzied activity and one or another of these two forms of melancholy. An expression of the more pleasant form is found in this letter of May 24, 1834 to Countess de Senfft in which Lamennais describes his solitary existence at La Chênaie,

On ne peut plus être séparé des hommes que je ne le suis depuis près de deux mois, Je ne vois qui que ce soit. La promenade, la lecture, le travail remplissent mes heures solitaires, et si quelquefois, souvent même, la tristesse les obscurcit, l'ennui de moins ne les appesantit jamais. Cette sorte d'existence monotone n'est pas sans douceur et sans attrait, on y sent comme quelque chose du tombeau; et puis, les grandes iniquités, les grandes turpitudes, les grandes lâchetés tourmentent moins à distance: on respire plus à l'aïse; le chant des oiseaux, le murmure des insectes, les bruits de vent dans le feuillage, la lune aperçue le soir à travers les branches des vieux chênes, le nuage même qui passe, tout cela apaise merveilleusement les troubles de l'âme.19

How different that tranquil sadness from the state of mind revealed in this letter to Bruté, written in 1815,

Je suis si faible que tout m'arrête, tout m'abat, tout me rejette dans je ne sais quelle mélancolique indolence qui détend les ressorts de l'âme, et néanmoins la fatigue et l'usage plus que l'action même. Voilà ma grande maladie.20

When Lamennais was in this very painful state it was almost always because he was uncertain about something. In 1811 he expressed these sentiments:

Je souffre toujours et même beaucoup, Je suis habituellement dans l'état que
les Anglais appellent deapondency, où
l'àme est sans ressort et comme accablée
d'elle-même, Peut-être se relèverait-elle
un peu si j'étais un peu plus éclairé sur
ma destinée, Cette pauvre âme languit et
s'épuise entre deux vocations incertaines
qui l'attirent et la repoussent tour à
tour, Il n'y a point de martyr comme
celui-là.  

Here, as in the previous letter written four years earlier, Lamennais
is tormented by the problem of his vocation. Although the particular
problem changed, the principle was the same throughout his life, since
indecision was for him the worst of all possible states - one to be
escaped from at any price. The price was sometimes very high,

*  

* * *

Ils sont méfiants, même de ceux qu'ils
aiment ou qui les aiment.

It would be false to say that Lamennais was by nature a sus-
picious person; the contrary would be closer to the truth. Lamennais
often gave people his complete trust in business as well as personal
matters, and not just to those he knew intimately but to persons he
had only recently met and knew only slightly. Because he was not
careful about where he placed his trust he was often disappointed,
and bitter experience instead of inspiring in him a prudent mistrust
of his own judgment, only convinced him that men were of little worth.
"Je sais ce qu'ils valent," he wrote to Montalembert, making it clear
that he did not think they were worth much. Had he been less trust-
ing in the beginning he would have been more trusting in the end,

In one way, however, Lamennais did not fit the pattern, that is
he did not distrust those he loved, at least not for long. It was
quite impossible for him to reconcile suspicion or mistrust with love;
and when he could not have complete faith in someone he could no longer love them. Nor was it possible for him to believe that anyone could love him without having complete confidence, not just in him as a person, but in his ideas. For some reason his many women friends were exempt from this rule; he in no way tried to change their orthodox religious faith and in general he was inclined to recognize their many efforts to draw him once more into the fold for what those efforts in fact were — signs of love. Few men were treated with such indulgence; we have already seen how his friendship with Montalembert was severed. Let us examine yet another case, that of his close associate and friend, Eckstein, who after its publication wrote a critique of Les Paroles d'un Croyant. It is not difficult to imagine what he said by analysing Lamennais' reaction.

Ce qui résulte évidemment de ce qu'il dit, sans qu'il l'exprime d'une manière formelle, c'est que mon livre a une tendance anti-sociale et qu'il doit être repoussé par toute conscience éclairée; en d'autres termes, que l'auteur est un fou ou un scélérat, et comme je ne suis pas assurément un scélérat aux yeux de M. d'Eckstein, reste dans toute sa pureté la première qualification... Une attaque directe et précise m'aurait fait beaucoup moins de mal. Cela ne m'empêche pas de rendre justice aux intentions, je le repète, personnellement très bienveillantes de l'auteur à mon égard, ainsi qu'aux nobles et généreux sentiments qui respi- rent dans une partie de son article. Je sens cela, et je le sens avec reconnaissance. Si je me plains du reste, c'est uniquement à cause de mon estime sincère et mon affection pour lui... 22

That esteem and affection could not endure indefinitely once a breach had been made, once Lamennais began to suspect that Eckstein was no longer his friend. Finally, in 1837, Lamennais brought their association to an end; in a very cold "lettre de rupture" he wrote:
Vous et moi, Monsieur, nous n'appartennons pas au même monde, nous n'avons ni la même manière de sentir, ni le même langage. Je m'en aperçois un peu tard. C'est ma faute, et ce n'est pas celle des nombreuses personnes dont j'aurais dû, il y a longtemps, écouter les sages avis.23

So we see that in the case of Lamennais his "méfiance" did not simply trouble his friendships but destroyed them.

*  *

*  *

Ils sont souvent cyniques.

Lamennais' cynicism was not the result of a reasoned evaluation of the weaknesses of human nature; it was rather an expression of his emotional response to the way men treated him, and "him" when speaking of Lamennais always includes his projects, his books and his ideas. Cynical remarks are particularly abundant in his private letters and it is from that garden that we have picked these flowers of mennaisian cynicism.

Je ne crois pas que M. de Couessin ait pu trouver dans la zone torride, la zone glaciaire et les zones tempérées une race d'hommes aussi vide d'esprit, de sens de zèle pour le bien, aussi complètement dégradée.24 (about the clergy)

Nous en avons une soixantaine à peu près de cette force. Ils vendraient l'Église, non pour trente, mais pour un denier, 25 (about the bishop of Saint-Brieuc in particular and French bishops in general)

Leblanc se moque de moi et de sa parole; les hommes sont tous sots ou fripons, il... C'est une des choses qui me dégoûtent du monde. 26 (about the editor of the Essai when this book was not published with the speed he desired)
Ce qui se perd, c'est la société, et pour elle, je doute qu'elle se retrouve. Tous les milliards qu'on vote ne seraient-ils pas, par hasard, destinés aux frais de son enterrement? Ce sera vraiment une belle cérémonie. M. de Villèle mènera le deuil:...

(about the government of M. de Villèle)

Je n'ai de courage à rien; le siècle est trop sot. Et puis, une nouvelle culbute me paraît tellement inévitable qu'il me paraît plus prudent de faire son paquet que de faire des livres. Je n'ai encore vu, Dieu merci, personne si ce n'est un lièvre, pour qui j'ai conservé beaucoup d'estime; car il s'en alla dès qu'il m'aperçut, sans chercher à entrer en conversation. C'est peut-être la plus raisonnable bête de tout le pays...

(discouragement with the political situation and general misanthropy)

S'il me prenait envie en ce moment de réimprimer le Symbole des Apôtres, il se trouverait renfermer dix ou douze hérésies pour le moins. Or, je ne voudrais pas causer cette mortification aux Apôtres.

(questioning the motives of those who questioned his orthodoxy)

Ce n'est guère la peine...[de faire appeler le médecin] pour apprendre d'eux qu'on est malade et que c'est ce qui fait qu'on ne se porte pas bien. Quand les médecins n'en savent pas plus que le malade, ce qui est le plus fréquent, il (sic) le paye de mots, et la science est sauve. [En tout cas on doit le plus souvent] faire le contraire de ce qu'ils ordonnent. On se trompera rarement avec cette méthode.

(on his faith in doctors)

Since the point we are trying to make is that Lamennais was frequently cynical, these brief citations are offered without comment
on the circumstances which provoked them; an understanding of those circumstances would neither add to nor detract from their cynicism.

*  

*  

*  

Ils sont égocentriques et égoïstes.

George Ross Ridge, in his book, The Hero in French Romantic Literature, divides romantic rebels into three groups whose unifying element is egotism.

Fundamentally the rebel is an egotist or an ego-maniac. He epitomizes individuality and his self-assertion inevitably results in his conflict with society. While he may be no more than a blind egocentric force, he most often rebels consciously against the laws of society and/or God. Indeed this is his nature - the assertion of self against an outside force.31

Was Lamennais egocentric? Was he an egotist? Many would say, no; of course not, did he not sacrifice everything that was dear to him in order to follow the dictates of his conscience, in order to do his duty? At first glance that would seem to be true, and Lamennais' constant reiteration that "On ne suit guère une pareille route à moins d'être soutenu par une pensée vraie ou fausse du devoir,"32 is proof that he saw himself in that favorable light. While it is undeniable that Lamennais did indeed follow where his conscience led him without counting the cost, that he did his duty as he saw it, that he never ceased struggling to fulfill his mission, one can still question whether that conscience, that duty, that mission were something apart from the man himself. Were they not rather a part of him, of his ego so that in sacrificing everything to them he was, quite unconsciously, sacrificing everything to his own ego? Whether that mission was imposed upon him by God, or whether he imposed it
upon himself is a question we are not qualified to answer, but it is hard to deny that, wherever it came from, it was in time so integrated with the rest of his personality that they were one.

This is why those who consider Lamennais as a person apart from his cause can believe that he was the most unselfish of men, while those who believe, as we do, that he and his cause were one, can say that he was as much an egotist as any other Romantic hero.

* * *

Ils ont de la pitié pour eux-mêmes et s'étonnent que la société n'en ait point,

In the case of Lamennais, self-pity sometimes went hand in hand with an almost masochistic pleasure in suffering. Whether he was suffering in mind or in body, and indeed the two often went together, his complaint usually followed the pattern revealed in this letter to Mme. Sainte-Luce.

* * *

Il m'est doux de penser que vous avez au moins trouvé la paix dans le sein d'une famille telle qu'est la vôtre, et où vous êtes comme enveloppée des plus tendres affections de la vie. Puissiez-vous jouir longtemps de ce bonheur! Pour moi, destiné au combat, je poursuis cette dure carrière, ignorant tout à fait quel sera le résultat de mes efforts, et tranquille cependant parce que je ne veux que ce que voudra la Providence...33

First, we have the "poor me" thesis. Often, as in this case, that sentiment is expressed indirectly by implied comparison between the conditions of his own existence and the happier state of his correspondent; next comes the antithesis, in which Lamennais states his conviction that God had destined him for such a life, and finally the synthesis
in which he declares that he is happy, or at least tranquil, in the belief that he is doing God's will. This fragment from a letter to Victor Hugo is more direct but follows the same general pattern.

Ce qui me peine le plus, est d'être séparé de mes amis. Il faut que je me redise de temps en temps que Dieu le veut, et il est vrai que ce mot répond à tout et console de tout... 34

In these two examples the masochistic element is much less strong than in others but this element in his personality has already been brought out in our discussion of Lamennais as a prophet.

This recurrent and sometimes almost stylized self-pity does not alter the fact that Lamennais really did suffer. The physical pain he bore with admirable patience, psychological pain he found most difficult. "J'ai semé mon amour et ma pensée sur toutes les routes," he cried out.

Les uns les ont foulés aux pieds, les autres en ont cueilli le fruit; et, à moi, pauvre voyageur, que reste-t-il? Pas une poignée de sarments pour reposer dessus. 35

Greater than his pity for himself was his pity for the people, or, since he considered himself to be one with them, perhaps the two cannot really be separated. The restrained liturgical style of this litany from Les Paroles d'un Croyant only heightens the underlying but urgent feeling of anguish as a tortured soul joined his own sufferings with those of all mankind and cried out, "Domine salva nos, perimus."

Seigneur, nous crions vers vous du fond de notre misère.
Comme les animaux qui manquent de pâture pour donner à leurs petits,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme la brebis à qui on enlève son agneau,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur.
Comme la gazelle sous la griffe du tigre,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme le taureau épuisé de fatigue et ensanglanté
par l'aiguillon,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme l'oiseau blessé que le chien poursuit,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme l'hirondelle tombée de lassitude en traversant
les mers, et se débattant sur la vague,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme des voyageurs égarés dans un désert brulant
et sans eau,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur.
...
Comme le père à qui on ravit le morceau de pain qu'il
portait à ses enfants affamés,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme le prisonnier que le puissant injuste
a jeté dans un cachot humide et ténébreux,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme l'esclave déchiré par le fouet du maître,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme le peuple d'Israël dans la terre de servitude,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur.
...
Comme toutes les nations de la terre avant qu'eût
lui l'aurore de la délivrance,
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur,
Comme le Christ sur la croix, lorsqu'il dit: Mon
Père, mon Père, pourquoi m'avez-vous délaissé?
Nous crions vers vous, Seigneur.

This litany was followed by a prayer in which Lamennais affirmed his
faith in the redemptive power of Christ who would come to save man-
kind once again, not from the "Prince of this World," since that
he had already done, but this time from the ministers of that dark
Prince who had transformed this world, meant by God to be man's in-
heritance, into his tomb. But, said the prophet, God will not allow
such a state to endure,

Encore trois jours, et le sceau sacrilège
sera brisé, et la pierre sera brisée, et
ceux qui dorment se réveilleront; et le
règne du Christ, qui est justice et charité,
et paix et joie dans l'Esprit saint,
commencera. Ainsi soit-il!36
Of course, Lamennais was astonished that society neither understood him nor sympathized with him. The reason for that astonishment, as he himself bitterly explained in *Affaires de Rome*, was his "simplicité d'âme."

Il y a une certaine simplicité d'âme qui empêche de comprendre beaucoup de choses, et principalement celles dont se compose le monde réel. Sans s'attendre à le trouver parfait, ce qui ne serait pas seulement de la simplicité, mais de la folie, on se figure qu'entre lui et le type idéal qu'on s'en est formé d'après les maximes spéculatives admises, il existe au moins quelque analogie. Rien de plus trompeur que cette pensée. Soigneusement inculquée au peuple, elle aide à le gouverner, et sous ce rapport elle peut quelquefois être un bien relatif. Elle est naturelle aussi aux esprits élevés et candides. L'expérience, il est vrai, les en désabuse, mais presque toujours trop tard. 37

A certain element of self-pity is clearly visible here, and considerable irony as well, since experience really taught him very little. Unlike Vigny's Chatterton, who was at least realistic enough to know that he was not made for the world of practical affairs, Lamennais even imagined himself to be a good business man; save for his friends, who time and time again came to his rescue, that illusion would have left him destitute. In later years Lamennais apparently accepted the fact that he was destined always to make mistakes due to his inability to see things and people as they really were, for he wrote to his friend Baron de Vitrolles saying that his "très naïve crédulité," the cause of so many errors in judgment, was "fort pardonnable, au reste, dans un enfant de soixante-six ans."

That childishness is yet another trait which serves to establish his identity as a romantic hero.

* * *

* * *
Ils sont adonnés à méditer sur des lieux communs: la destinée humaine, l'amour, la mort, la jeunesse, la vieillesse, l'amitié, etc., etc.

Lamennais spent a good deal of his life thinking and writing, so it is not surprising that he frequently abandoned the rarefied atmosphere of metaphysics and political philosophy to meditate on the commonplace. Sometimes, particularly in those books he wrote for the people, those meditations were put in story form, sometimes they were not; some were long, some were not. Here are a few samples,

On human destiny —
Notre enfer, notre purgatoire, notre ciel, c'est nous-même, selon l'état de l'âme duquel dépend radicalement celui du corps, et si bas que soit le point d'où elles partent, toutes âmes montent au ciel, toutes y arriveront avec plus ou moins de labeur, parce que Dieu les attire toutes à soi, que Dieu est amour, et que l'amour est plus fort que la mort.39 (Taken from his introduction to the Divine Comedy. By that time, Lamennais, like so many other romanticists, had ceased to believe in hell.)

On love —
Vous n'avez qu'un jour à passer sur la terre; faites en sorte de le passer en paix.

La paix est le fruit de l'amour; car pour vivre en paix il faut savoir supporter bien des choses.

Nul n'est parfait, tous ont leurs défauts; chaque homme pèse sur les autres, et l'amour seul rend ce poids léger.

Si vous ne pouvez supporter vos frères, comment vos frères vous supporteront-ils?

... L'amour est infatigable, il ne se lasse jamais, L'amour est inépuisable, il vit et renaît de lui-même; et plus il s'épance, plus il surabonde,

Qui s'aime plus que son frère n'est pas digne du Christ, mort pour ses frères, Avez-vous donné vos biens, donnez encore votre vie, et l'amour vous rendra tout.
Je vous dit en vérité, celui qui aime, son coeur est un paradis sur la terre, Il a Dieu en soi, car Dieu est amour.

L'amour repose au fond des âmes purs, comme une goutte de rosée dans le calice d'une fleur,
Oh! si vous saviez ce que c'est qu'aimer!

Vous dites que vous aimez, et beaucoup de vos frères manquent de pain pour soutenir leur vie, de vêtemens pour couvrir leurs membres nus, d'un toit pour s'abriter, d'une poignée de paille pour dormir dessus, tandis que vous avez toutes choses en abondance.

Vous dites que vous aimez, et il y a, en grand nombre, des malades qui languissent, privés de secours, sur leur pauvre couche; des malheureux qui pleurent sans que personne pleure avec eux; des petits enfans qui s'en vont, tout transis de froid, de porte en porte demander aux riches une miette de leur table, et qui ne l'obtiennent pas.

Vous dites que vous aimez vos frères; et que feriez-vous donc si vous les haïssiez?

Et moi je vous le dis, quiconque, le pouvant, ne soulage pas son frère qui souffre, est l'ennemi de son frère; et quiconque, le pouvant, ne nourrit pas son frère qui a faim, est son meurtrier.40

On friendship -
Certaines affections sont tellement enlacées à notre vie, elle la pénètrent tellement qu'elles ne font plus qu'un avec elle. C'est pourquoi le temps n'inquiète plus; on le voit fuir, on fuit avec lui, et on le sent dépouillé de cette puissance de séparation qui fait le tourment des faibles amitiés où l'on est encore deux.41

On death -
Nous nous en allons vers notre vraie patrie, vers la maison de notre père; mais à l'entrée, il y a un passage où deux ne sauraient marcher de front, et où l'on cesse un moment de se voir; c'est la tout. (From a letter of condolence. See also chapter IV.)

On the danger of materialism -
Jamais état ne fut fondé pour satisfaire aux
besoins physiques. L'accroissement des richesses, le progrès des jouissances ne créent entre les hommes aucun lien réel, et un bazar n'est pas une cité.\footnote{42}

On sacrificing the present to the future -
La prémonition est nécessaire, mais il ne faut pas que, dépassant les justes bornes, elle trouble le présenta et nous empêche de jouir de ce qu'il peut nous offrir de doux. N'en sevelissions pas le bien que nous donne la bonne Providence dans des inquiétudes peut-être vaines, et ne refusons pas de cueillir les quelques fleurs qu'elle fait éclore sur le bord du chemin où nous marchons, par le sot motif qu'il faudra plus tard traverser un pays âpre et stérile.\footnote{43}

On the value of suffering -
Aucun bien ne s'opère en ce monde qu'au prix de la souffrance, et heureux ceux qui souffrent pour la cause du peuple, pour la cause de l'humanité.\footnote{44}

*  

*  

Leur amour est toujours un amour passionné, et leur apporte toute sorte de souffrances,

One of his early biographers mentions that quite early in life, Lamennais was disappointed in love.

D'une nature très aimante, il vit un jour une de ces femmes frivoles qui se plaisent à faire naître des passions dans les cœurs innocents pour s'en vanter ensuite et peut-être pour s'en rire, Il s'éprit vite et tomba dans le plège, Ses aveux furent rejetés; la belle ne partagea ses sentiments; et profondément blessé, Lamennais, comme tous les amants malheureux, tomba dans une sorte de misanthropie dont sa famille eut beaucoup à souffrir. Son caractère
s'assombrit, il se promenait seul, dans
les chemins détournés, et passait des heures
à rêver au coin d'un champ sur ses amours
dédaignées et ses illusions perdues.45

Unfortunately nothing more is known about this incident but,
given Lamennais' extreme sensitivity and his penchant for generalizing
the particular, it is reasonable to assume that such a disillusioning
experience was bound to have far-reaching consequences, Sainte-Beuve
even implied that it was the event to which his conversion could be
traced.

Quant à ce qui touche le genre d'émotions
auquel dut échapper difficilement une âme
si ardente, et, ceux qui la connaissent
peuvent ajouter si tendre, je dirai seule-
ment que sous le voile épais de pudeur et
de silence qui recouvre aux yeux même de
ses plus proches ces années ensevelies, on
entreverrait de loin, en le voulant bien, de
grandes douleurs, comme quelque chose d'unique
et de profond; puis un malheur décisif qui
du même coup brisa cette âme, et la rejeta
dans la vive pratique chrétienne d'où elle
n'est plus sortie.46

Except for this one incident, women do not figure at all in
Lamennais' early life and even when he was in serious doubt about his
priestly vocation there is no indication that marriage was considered
as an alternative. His many feminine friendships were all formed
after his ordination and his correspondence is proof that Lamennais,
whatever his initial reaction, did not hate all women because one
had disappointed him. For a considerable number of them he was a
tender, compassionate and loyal friend and counsellor. Although
his most passionate expressions of affection are found in letters to
men, notably those to Henry Moorman and to Denis Benoît d'Azy, he showed
in his attitude toward, and treatment of, women a degree of patience
and tolerance not equalled in his relations with any man,
Although Lamennais took great and evident pleasure in the friendship of a relatively large number of women, of differing ages, backgrounds and interests, there is no indication that any of these women, save one, may have caused him to regret having taken orders. That one was Mme de Lacan, a beautiful young woman who, in July of 1818, was introduced to Lamennais by her reading of the Essai, which she described to her friend Denis Benoît (the same Denis Benoît who later became a close friend of Lamennais) in these glowing terms:

Ah! ce n'est point un sujet de lecture auquel on puisse faire succéder une occupation vulgaire. Elle porte au recueillement, à une noble méditation... Il [cet ouvrage] parle à mon cœur, j'y pense mille fois le jour... On y trouve tout: cette voix impérative qui met la foi au-dessus de la raison et hors de sa faible portée, cette logique victorieuse qui convainc l'esprit après avoir semblé le dédaigner, et cette puissance de l'âme qui touche et transporte. Combien de fois vos yeux, à le lire, se rempliront de nobles larmes!47

By August, the conversion was complete; she who had remained indifferent to the eloquence of Fénelon, had been unable to resist the "voix impérieuse" of a new Bossuet.

L'ouvrage dont je vous ai parlé a fait en moi une inconvenue révélation: il a développé toutes ces idées religieuses qui demeuraient obscures au fond de mon cœur... Je me sens comme renouvelée. Une lumière vive et constante me frappe; les agitations, qui quelquefois me dévoraient, se calment. Il y a dans mes pensées une tranquillité recueillie qui est, pour moi, une émotion tout inconnue.48

That very month she sought out the author of those noble words which had so powerfully moved her and beseeched him to guide her "dans
la route qu'il venait d'ouvrir devant elle," Lamennais accepted and their correspondance began. That same month Mme, de Lacan, who had been separated from her husband for some years, was widowed, M. de Lamennais a été mon soutien dans ces quinze jours d'angoisse," she wrote,

Comme il cherche à graduer cette lumière de la foi, sans vouloir éblouir tout à coup par son éclat!...Comme ses sentiments sont loin du rigorisme! Comme sa raison éclaire sa vertu! Et comme son cœur reste tendre, malgré la fermeté de son âme!

Her confidence, her gratitude, her admiration knew no bounds. Her exalted nature, not unlike that of her director, had been influenced by the pervasive Romanticism of the day, and it was not long before the priest felt obliged to chide his "dirigée." She was too easily troubled, he wrote, and, moreover, very mistaken in her exaggerated estimate of his qualities.

J'aurais, Madame, bien des chose à vous dire...Je veux seulement vous engager à considérer devant Dieu bien peu de chose vous trouble, et à en tirer cette conséquence, qu'il faut donc chercher à cette pauvre âme un appui inébranlable. Vous comptez trop sur l'homme, et sur tel homme en particulier, que votre imagination vous représente avec des perfections qu'il n'eut jamais. Quand vous le connaîtrez, vous ne verrez en lui qu'un composé de bien de misères. Oui, Madame, nous avons besoin de nous mieux connaître l'un et l'autre...Il me tarde que vous soyez désabusée de l'idée que vous vous faites d'un pauvre prêtre, très médiocre d'esprit, quoi que vous pensiez, et d'une santé fort infirme. Il y a un seul point sur lequel vous ne vous êtes d'abord trompée; c'est le véritable désir que j'aurais de vous être utile. Il est toujours le même et je ne sais pas ce qui peut vous faire craindre que j'aie changé, 50

In the letters which follow, one can observe Lamennais - the
priest, the spiritual director—alternate with Lamennais the man, the man whose heart, according to the abbé Boutard, was "fait pour l'amour." The quotations which follow were all taken from Alfred Rébelliau's article "Une Amitié féminine de Lamennais" in which the interested reader can find a very thought-provoking analysis of their relationship. Rébelliau did not indicate to whom we are indebted for the italicization of certain passages.

Oui, Madame, je vous suis à jamais dévoué, n'en doutez pas; et je crois entrevoir cela dans les vues de la Providence. Tous les jours je prie pour vous à l'autel; tous les jours je vous offre à Dieu avec ce que j'ai de plus cher au monde...Je vous quitte brusquement, parce que je suis surchargé d'occupations, mais croyez que ma pensée ne se détache pas de vous ainsi...Ménagez votre santé, Madame, elle est si chère à vos amis! Oh! faisons tout pour que cette amitié, si doucement commencée sur la terre, se prolonge et se consomme dans l'éternité.

Vous ne me devez aucune reconnaissance. Heureux de travailler à mon salut, en m'occupant du vôtre, je reçois plus que je ne donne, et cette obligation réelle est un nouveau lien qui m'attache encore plus étroitement à vous.

Je regarde dans l'avenir. Vous avez l'esprit trop droit pour ne pas me réduire enfin à ma juste valeur. Alors, que deviendra cet attachement auquel vous m'avez habitué, qui m'est si doux, que je partage avec tant de bonheur...que deviendra-t-il, s'il ne repose que sur des perfection imaginaires?

For some time they saw each other almost daily. They took long walks together, exchanged impressions of Lord Byron and René, discussed the second volume of the Essai, which was then in progress, and even went to visit the Père-Lachaise cemetery. All the while they continued to correspond. Now it was Lamennais' turn to be
grateful for all those delicate feminine attentions he had never experienced:

Que je suis touché des soins que vous voulez bien prendre pour nous rapprocher! Mon cœur les sent, et ce qu'il a senti une fois il ne l'oublie jamais. J'attendrai demain avec impatience, et jeudi de même. Pourquoi la rue Saint-Lazare (her résidence) et les Feuillantes (his residence) sont-elles tout ensemble si loin l'une de l'autre et si près?

Quoique je ne sente rien en moi, Madame, qui mérite une amitié d'un si grand prix que la vôtre, il me serait impossible d'en douter. J'ai foi dans mon bonheur : je ne saurais exprimer autrement cette confiance intime du cœur qui semble avoir existé toujours, et ne laisser pas la plus légère inquiétude de l'avenir. Voilà ce que j'éprouve en vous écoutant, en lisant vos lettres. Une seule chose me peine; ce sont les louanges que vous me donnez. Savez-vous pourquoi? Parce qu'elles ont un attrait que je ne trouve qu'en elles...

As the days and weeks passed, Mme de Lacan's enthusiasm for her "ange tutélaire" grew ever more ardent and exclusive. She dreamed of "une amitié sans partage" with that "créature sublime et angélique," sent by Providence, who was not only guiding her toward paradise, but bringing a new happiness to her life on earth as well. "Souvent," she said, "J'arrive chez lui l'âme triste, l'imagination malade... Quand je le quitte, tout est dissipé comme par enchantement."

But by this time Lamennais' growing affection for Denis Benoît d'Azay, whom he had, by an irony of fate, met through her, was diverting a portion of his attention and perhaps his affection from Mme de Lacan. When she complained to Lamennais about this suspected infidelity, her obvious jealousy only served to put him on guard, to make him remember, if indeed he had ever really forgotten it, that a priest can hardly be too circumspect in his relations with women,
At this point the crisis was over, and the danger, if there really had been any, which seems doubtful—both were too jealous of what the seventeenth century would have called their "gloire."

So what might have been, for two less noble persons, a passionate, forbidden love affair, became in time a tender and enduring friendship. Mme de Lacan remarried and as Mme Cottu, wife and mother, persevered in that faith which Lamennais had nurtured in her long after he himself had abandoned it. The real depth and quality of their affection can best be appreciated by reading the correspondence of their later years. By then the time of storms was past and their love, a love that was not unlike that of Mme Guyon and Fénelon, had survived and grown deeper. That lightning that had flashed across the horizon of their youth had turned into a bright and steady flame that warmed the hearts of these two might-have-been lovers who had, in spite of the separation, grown old together.

There is little doubt in our mind that the passionate love the Romantic heroes experience refers to heterosexual relationships like that of Hernani with Doña Sol or Antony with Adèle. Lamennais' chaste and relatively uneventful interlude with Mme de Lacan was as close as he ever came to that kind of love. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that because he did not have a wild and passionate love affair with a woman, that he therefore had no love affair at all. Indeed Lamennais' intense love for his friends, men and women, would no doubt have caused him even greater suffering than was the case, had they had a first claim on his affections. But he had heeded instead the words of the wise woman Diotima in the Symposium.

Every one of us, no matter what he does, is longing for the endless fame, the incomparable glory that is theirs, and the nobler he is, the greater his ambition, because he is in love with the eternal. ...those whose procreancy is of the body turn to woman as the object of their love, and raise a family, ...but those whose procreancy
is of the spirit rather than of the flesh — and they are not unknown, Socrates — conceive and bear the things of the spirit. And what are they? you ask. Wisdom and all her sister virtues; it is the office of the poet to beget them, and of every artist whom we may call creative.

Now, by far the most important kind of wisdom...is that which governs the ordering of society...52

Lamennais was in love with the eternal, and because of that no woman could have first place in his life or in his heart. He conceived and bore the things of the spirit and no Romantic hero loved a woman with greater passion than Lamennais loved these creations of his own mind, nor suffered more because of that love.
CHAPTER SIX

THE REBEL AND THE MAN OF FATE

...Berryer...lui saisit le bras: "Vous m'effrayez, mon ami!"..."Comment? demande Lamennais, que voulez-vous dire?" "Oui, vous m'effrayez. Je sens que je ne résiste plus à l'empire de votre raison: vous me dominez, mais ce qui m'épouvante c'est que rien ne vous domine,... Vous n'avez plus aucune autorité qui vous arrête!... Vous serez chef de secte."

A ces mots, Lamennais bondit, il mit la main sur son coeur, et avec une émotion profonde, inoubliable, disait Berryer, il s'écriait: Moi, chef de secte, moi, renier l'Eglise! Jamais, plutôt mourir."

E. Lecanuet, Vie de Berryer.

In the previous chapter we noted how closely Lamennais fits the pattern of the Romantic hero, a pattern which had been worked out with no thought of Lamennais in mind. There remain to be discussed certain parts of that pattern which, because of their importance and their inter-relationship, deserve separate treatment. It was suggested earlier that although Lamennais was one "fait pour l'amour," his deepest emotions were reserved not for persons but for ideals and principles: and in his case, as in others, love and hate were interwoven. When Othello fingered his sword and gazed down at the lifeless body of his beloved Desdemona he cried out in anguish, "Who can control his fate?" One might well ask the same question about Lamennais, who seemed destined by nature and circumstance to share the fate of Othello. When he took up his pen and deliberately set out to destroy that same papal authority which he had such a short time before cherished as the last great hope of mankind, Lamennais was performing essentially the same act as Othello in the murder of Desdemona, and for the same reason - disappointed love.

In the preface to Troisièmes Mélange, for example, there are numerous passages where the dialectician is less in evidence than the disappointed lover. With passionate eloquence the rebellious priest recalled those glorious days during the Middle Ages when Christ's
Vicars had defended the people against injustice and protected the human intellect in its battle against superstition. It had been, he explained sadly, his belief

...que ce glorieux passé pouvait renaître et que le christianisme appliqué au monde social par la Papauté, pouvait encore lui épargner une infinité de maux, en opérant enfin la magnifique alliance du principe d'ordre et du principe progressif, de la foi et de la liberté.

"Nous nous trompâmes," he added, half in sorrow and half in bitterness, "on nous en a, tout le monde le sait, assez solennellement averti, mais l'erreur peut-être était pardonnable." Personal contact with that past would, no doubt, have made it seem less glorious, but Lamennais here, as almost always, allowed his emotions to color reality. A tendency to idealize the Middle Ages was, however, one he had in common with his generation, and it was largely because of his overly idealistic picture of the papacy in an earlier period that contact with the realities of his own day turned his love and admiration to scorn and hatred.

While Lamennais may well reveal the hatred and need for vengeance that is typical of the Romantic hero, it should be noted that his hatred was seldom personal. It was largely reserved for institutions, governments and public figures who were more symbols than persons. This tendency is observable in his attacks on Czar Nicholas and the bishop of Paris, previously quoted, as well as in many others. Here are three additional samples:

The pope -

Un lâche et imbécile vieillard, poussé par des hommes infâmes...32...[sa] parole qui, autrefois, remuait le monde ne remuerait pas aujourd'hui une école de petits garçons.2

Louis-Philippe compared with Louis XI -

Sauf la différence des époques, je trouve
une très grande ressemblance entre ce
croi-bourgeois et le roi-citoyen: même
ruse, même atrocité féroce. L'un et
l'autre également prêts à tout sacrifier
à leur intérêt, sans être retenus par rien
de ce que les hommes appellent justice,
honneur, conscience; l'un et l'autre
egalement habiles à tromper, également
defiants, également lâches: ... s'ils
se rencontrent jamais dans l'autre monde,
je serais curieux de savoir lequel des
deux parviendra à fourber l'autre.3

The government of Louis-Philippe -

Toute la politique aujourd'hui se résume dans
les secrètes intrigues de quelques hommes
avides de pouvoir et d'argent. Du pays,
de ses besoins, de ses intérêts, personne ne
s'en occupe. La Chambre est plus vendue
qu'aucune autre Chambre ne l'avait encore
été jusqu'ici. On ne se figure pas en quel
état elle est tombée. La France pourrit sur
un fumier, tout s'use à vue d'œil; on meure
peu à peu. Nul cependant ne peut dire combien
de temps durera la dégoûtante agonie de ce
demi-cadavre étendu dans la boue dont il se
gorge et qui l'étouffe.4

...Savez-vous à quoi je pense? A m'en aller
finir mes jours loin de ce triste pays, qui
me devient de plus en plus insupportable.
Les infâmes misérables auxquelles il est livré
lui ont inoculé la gangrène aux quatre membres.5

As for his need to avenge himself, about that there can be
no doubt. His friend, Béranger, said that Lamennais did not know
how to forgive,6 and still more important is Lamennais' frank avowal
of the same thing. While Lamennais was still in prison he informed
the baron de Vitrolles that he intended, when once again at liberty,
to avenge himself on those who were responsible for his condemnation
and subsequent imprisonment. "Ce qui me console un peu, bien peu
pourtant, c'est que je ferai justice à mon tour, on peut y compter."7
But what he called justice, another might well have called vengeance:
much depends on the point of view, as noted in a famous phrase about
orthodoxy and heterodoxy.8
Thus the book *Amchaspand et Darvand* is a work of justice or of vengeance, depending on one's point of view. This portrait of Guizot is one of many in which, to quote Boutard "Chaque phrase, chaque mot... a été froidement calculé en vue, non seulement de blesser l'adversaire, mais de l'abattre et de le coucher dans la boue."9

Cet homme voulut toujours deux choses et ne voulut que cela: le pouvoir et ce qui suit le pouvoir. Pour le saisir et pour le garder, point de masque qu'il n'ait pris. Il a soutenu toutes les doctrines, flatté toutes les passions, systématisé tous les crimes politiques, s'aidant également de la brutalité haineuse et de la servilité, de la violence et de la courtoise, tantôt se bouffissant et se dressant comme un Satan burlesque, tantôt s'aplatis-sant sous la main de ceux qui récompensent, et rampant - leurs pieds, et leurs baisant et les léchant, et se léchant encore les lèvres après.10

Did the destructive power of hate contribute to Lamennais' sufferings? No doubt it did. Many hated him and much of what he stood for and their hatred and persecution caused Lamennais such acute suffering that even Jean-Marie was moved to say:

*Il y a des hommes qui semblent avoir reçu l'innombrable mission de pousser vers les abîmes cet homme qui, s'il avait été plus humble, comme il aurait dû l'être, pouvait empêcher tant d'autres d'y tomber.*

It is doubtful, however, that Lamennais was conscious of suffering due to the hate in his own heart since he sincerely believed that he hated only evil and to hate evil is good and good does not cause suffering. A more realistic point of view would be to recognize that most of Lamennais' ill health and consequent suffering was emotional in origin and that some of his most violent emotional responses were caused by hatred, not of individuals but of what can only be
called the human condition with all the imperfection that implies.

Even in his own day there were some who recognized that Lamennais' anger and hatred were closely related to his passionate belief in Christianity and its message for the times, and that in turn this passion was largely responsible for his destiny. Lerminier, for example, wrote as follows in his review of Les Paroles d'un Croyant which appeared in "La Revue des Deux Mondes":

Il a été courageux, nouveau, grand, sublime
la seul prêtre de l'Europe; pape, il eût été
moins grand que prêtre breton,, la passion
qui l'anime le remplit de fureur contre les
hommes qui rendent inutile la passion du
Sauveur. Oh! que ce prêtre a souffert au
pied de la croix! C'est après avoir usé
ses genoux et rongé son coeur qu'il s'est
levé pour donner des accents de colère et
de vengeance à son amour des hommes et de
Dieu. Voilà comment il faut comprendre
Les Paroles d'un Croyant. Ce n'est pas
un livre de fantaisie littéraire, c'est
une oeuvre de fatalité. L'homme qui a
fait ces choses y était prédésiné, et
quand il les a faites, il se tient debout
au milieu des hommes dans sa douleur et
sa majesté.  

Lerminier spoke of our hero as "prédésiné" and Lamennais, too, often felt himself swept along by a current that he had not the will to resist. Again and again Lamennais referred to himself as a fragile boat tossed to and fro by a stormy sea over which he had no control. In 1818 he wrote to the future baroness Cottu:

Les plus petites choses me troublient et
m'agissent comme un enfant. Je ressemble
à une frêle nacelle abandonnée sur l'Océan;
les flots n'y entrent pas, mais ils l'em-
portent.  

This recurrent image is certainly not one which reflects any confidence that he could successfully "take arms against a sea of troubles," nor even the desire to do so, as this next quotation clearly shows,
La vue de ces champs qui se flétrissent, ces feuilles qui tombent, ce vent qui souffle ou qui murmure, n'apporte à mon esprit aucune pensée, à mon cœur aucun sentiment. Tout glisse sur un fond d'apathie stupide et amère. Cependant les jours passent, et les mois, et les années emportent la vie dans leur fuite rapide. Au milieu de ce vaste océan des âges, quoi de mieux à faire que de se coucher, comme Ulysse, au fond de sa petite nacelle, la laissant errer au gré des flots en attendant en paix le moment où ils se refermeront sur elle pour jamais.\(^{14}\)

This is quite a different Lamennais from the one who saw himself as a Jeremiah, a Spartacus, or a Prometheus but one that is equally important; perhaps even more important because this is the Lamennais that reappeared whenever he was in serious doubt about what to do next, and consequently whenever there was a crucial decision to be made. We have already seen how, when it was a question of his vocation, this inertia, this self-doubt, this feeling of complete helplessness led Lamennais to abide by the decision of others. One could say that he abandoned himself to an exterior fatality, not as a rudderless ship abandons itself to the sea, but as a captain renouncing his right to decide what shall be the ship's destination. In this he shows himself to be less strong than Vigny who wrote in his diary, "Je pense que la Destinée dirige une moitié de la vie de chaque homme et son caractère l'autre moitié." Once the ultimate questions were decided, Lamennais' energy returned and, despite recurrent but relatively mild attacks of depression, it was not until the condemnation of *Les Paroles d'un Croyant* caused him to question seriously the religious principles which had ruled his life, that he suffered an emotional crisis of equal magnitude. Was he a Catholic? Was he a priest? What did he really believe? Those were the questions he sought to answer, and as he turned them over in his mind, he wrote. This record of his thoughts as he discussed within himself the whole
religious question was appropriately entitled, *Discussions critiques.* He asked himself, who, in these sad times, can avoid being troubled? Truth is hidden from us by a veil, and like the sun during a tempest, it is shrouded in vapors. The restless heart searches vainly for faith,

...il trouve je ne sais quoi d'obscur et de vacillant qui augmente ses anxïétés, une sorte de nuage aux contours vagues, aux formes indécises, qui fuit dans le vide de l'âme, Les désirs errent au hasard comme l'amour, Tout est terne, aride, sans parfum, sans vie, Posez la main sur la poitrine de ces ombres qui passent, rien, n'y bat, La volonté languit tristement, faute d'un but qui l'attire, Être ne sait à quoi se prendre dans ce monde de fantômes,

And yet, he continued, God has not broken with creation for, if He had withdrawn his life-giving breath, the universe, fallen to a state worse than chaos, would have sunk back into that silent and somber abyss where being is dissolved into nothingness.

Quelque chose est; il y a donc quelque chose de vrai. Mais où trouver la vérité? Comment la reconnaître? Elle se joue dans les ténèbres de notre esprit, comme les rayons du soleil couchant dans les nuages qu'il colore de nuances infinies, qui se mêlent et changent perpétuellement, et s'affaiblissent, jusqu'à ce qu'elles se perdent dans une nuit profonde. Mais alors commencent à briller sur la voûte noire des cieux de nouveaux astres, Le firmament se peuple de globes étincelants qui, croisant leurs orbites dans ses vastes plaines, exécutent, comme une armée, leurs merveilleuses évolutions, Rien de pareil dans le monde moral, Le prêtre, sans inspiration, balbutie des paroles de la terre, froides, mortes, semblables aux creux retentissements d'un sépulcre. Le politique ment pour tromper le peuple et vivre de lui, Le
philosophe, en ce moment, rêve qu'il sait, et, le moment d'après, ne sait pas même s'il rêve. Dérision que tout cela, raillerie amère! Et puis comptez les larmes, les douleurs, les désespoirs, les crimes. Voulez-vous que je vous dise ce que c'est que le monde? Une ombre de ce qui n'est pas, un son qui ne vient de nulle part et qui n'a pas d'écho, un ricanement de Satan dans le vide.

0 Dieu! il y a des temps où la pensée tue l'homme, et l'un de ces temps est venu pour nous. C'est vraiment ici l'ère de la grande tentation. Lorsque le ciel est serein et la mer calme, le nautile déploie sa petite voile, allonge ses rames vivantes et l'on voit sa gracieuse nacelle voguer doucement sur les flots d'azur. Les vents commencent-ils à souffler, les vagues à s'élever, il replie ce faible appareil et se laisse aller au fond de l'abîme.15

These are the words not only of a great and tortured soul but of a poet who by his own admission lacked the will to resist his destiny.

A dramatic treatment of Lamennais' life would doubtless focus on his defiance of papal authority, on that moment in time when his rebellion was consummated and his fate sealed. Such dramatization would indeed heighten the tension, and the simplification might be necessary, for there is a limit to what could be included even in a Romantic play. Yet this would not do full justice to our hero, who unlike Hernani, lived not only a long but a very complicated life. Therefore, even a brief study of Lamennais as a rebel in the Romantic mold could not properly limit itself by concentration only on the one decisive moment which, however central it may have been, was neither the beginning nor the end of his rebellion.

Many of the specific words and deeds which illustrate Lamennais' rebellious nature have been noted in other chapters and it would be idle to amass further evidence for what is already obvious: he was as has always been known, a rebel. Instead, the aim of the following
discussion will be to depict the essential features of the rebel, as that type was exemplified by Lamennais, and to relate it to a few contemporary figures both real and fictional.

It is interesting to ask oneself what Stendhal would have done with a hero like Lamennais. The two writers had more in common than might be supposed; the same conflict between aristocratic tastes and liberal ideas, the same highly developed esthetic sensitivities, and the same sovereign disdain for the government of "Philippe Egalité." But, in order to make Lamennais into a satisfactory Stendhalian hero some radical changes would be necessary. If Julien Sorel, like Lamennais, had been offered a red hat, that enterprising young peasant would have accepted it eagerly and hurried off to the Eternal City. In due time he would have arranged to become Pope, called a general council and shouted "God and Liberty" from the chair of St. Peter. Provided that he had not encountered a Mathilde de la Mole or Louise de Rênal along the way, Julien could have successfully pursued such a course precisely because he did not believe in anything outside himself, least of all in the church he pretended to serve.

At no time, however, would Lamennais have been capable of this sort of hypocrisy, which is characteristic of the Stendhalian hero and common in Balzacian ones. Julien Sorel, Fabrice del Dongo, Rastignac, Vautrin and other literary rebels were experts in the fine art of deceit. Lamennais' rebellion was just as real and just as romantic as theirs but it took the opposite form. He fought not with cunning but with sincerity, not with lies, but with the truth - at least the truth as he saw it. To be a successful hypocrite one must have not only the stomach for it, but the mind for it, and Lamennais had neither. Almost completely without guile himself, Lamennais unfortunately lacked that lucidity of psychological analysis which characterized a Lucien Leuwen, a Julien Sorel or a Vautrin.

Stendhal, although he personally despised hypocrisy, insisted
that the sort of duplicity with which he endowed his heroes was essential if they were to survive in a society where mediocrity reigned and any superiority, once recognized, was certain to be punished. The exceptional individual's only option was to rebel while appearing to conform, hence the need for constant vigilance and iron self-discipline. Society, we remember, was only able to destroy Julien Sorel after he first allowed his sentiments and emotions to escape from the rule of reason. If one accepts as valid Stendhal's formula for survival, it is obvious that Lamennais was doomed from the very beginning.

In general, Balzac agreed with Stendhal's analysis and the young Eugène de Rastignac is a good example of a naive and essentially kind-hearted provincial who was forced by an evil society to become a realist and a hypocrite. Whatever their other differences, then, it seems reasonably clear that the two greatest novelists of the day agreed that it was impossible for the gifted individual to wage war on a corrupt and powerful society without resorting to hypocrisy. They may or may not have been right, but in any event such an attitude showed a willingness and inability to look reality in the face and in some way to come to terms with it. Such a willingness, or rather, such an ability was totally lacking in the more completely romantic Lamennais, whom Viatte called a "vrai romantique, peut-être le seul entièrement sincère d'eux tous."¹⁶

The fictional heroes mentioned thus far have been those who were in rebellion against society, against the established order. Lamennais too rebelled against that society in which the rising tide of materialism threatened to destroy every non-secular value, "un bazar n'est pas une cité," he warned. Any society which stood by idle and unthinking while the spiritual substance which had given it form and life was washed away deserved to perish and would. This he said many times and in many ways throughout his life, to Catholics and Socialists, to bishops and laymen, to the rich and to the poor.
To the poor and weak he said it gently, to the rich and powerful he said it in the threatening tones of a Savonarola. Nothing made him more furious than the selfishness of those in high places who were, to his mind, the very ones who should have been providing the less fortunate with a good example. This letter to his friend, Mme Clément, is a good example of the kind of irony Lamennais was capable of when he decided the high-born had fallen too low for anger and deserved only scorn.

La cour a été et est encore furieuse
du rejet de la dotation Nemours, En
apprenant le vote de la Chambre, la
reine s'évanouit, le roi pleura, c'était
une touchante désolation de famille,
Il est vrai que cette famille voit très
tranquillement mourir de faim des milliers
d'hommes, de femmes, d'enfants privés de
travail depuis plusieurs mois, et qui
au train des choses ne paraissent pas
devoir en retrouver de sitôt. Que voulez-
vous? Lorsqu'on n'a qu'une trêntaine
de millions à dépenser par an et qu'il
faut là-dessus doter fils et filles, qu'on
en est menacé au moins, il est bien
naturel de songer d'abord à sa propre
misère. D'ailleurs, n'a-t-il pas fallu
payer 400,000 francs à une danseuse de
l'Opéra entretenue par M. de Nemours
pour la décider à quitter Paris pendant
les noces du prince? Ainsi, pertes de
tous côtés, Ce serait à pendre si une
corde ne coûtait rien.17

In his own way, however and quite unconsciously, Lamennais was also egocentric, not because he wanted money or position but because he wanted to make the world conform to his idea of what it should be. He did not believe he was a rebel, he believed he was a fearless reformer, a champion of truth; but then most great revolutionaries have made war on society because they wanted to save it. While he wanted to be a reformer and believed he was one, he wanted even more to express
his own personality, to speak the truth as he saw it, whenever, wherever, however, and to whosoever he pleased. That perhaps is what Mme Cottu was referring to when she spoke of his "funeste témérité," any reasonable person knows, however, that institutions and societies are not reformed by shouting from the rooftops, so when someone is seen in that position one has the right to suspect that he is there either because he likes shouting or because he is not reasonable. Despite Lamennais' passionate desire to do good, the way in which he presented his criticisms and his reforms was very often calculated to arouse antagonism, fear and resistance, however valid the criticisms, however needed the reforms. One simply does not reform an institution like the Catholic Church, or any other institution for that matter, by publicly questioning both the good faith and the sanity of its highest officials, even if such charges are true. Such inflammatory tactics generate heat, not light; they set in motion the forces of revolution, not of reform. Anyone who sincerely wishes to change existing institutions, to build upon them instead of destroying them, must keep that goal in mind and speak his truths at times, in places, to persons and in such a way that they will be gradually accepted and acted upon. Reform is an unspectacular labor of love which requires patience, prudence, courage and constant self-denial. All this is evident to the meanest intelligence and must have been evident to Lamennais. Since he often behaved differently, one can only assume that our hero often preferred the undeniable but essentially selfish satisfaction of giving vent to his indignation, whatever the consequences, to the harder and more selfless pursuit of a long-range goal. Perhaps it would be more just not to say that he preferred that satisfaction but rather that he was unable to deny and contain those inner forces which were demanding it.

When the moment finally came for Lamennais to make his supreme act of self-assertion by rebelling against ecclesiastical authority,
he did so not for philosophical or theological reasons but for emotional and personal ones. Sainte-Beuve did not fail to point that out in his review of *Affaires de Rome*:

"...je n'ai pas ici à défendre Rome contre M. de Lamennais, ni à chicaner M. de Lamennais sur sa rupture avec Rome. Ce que je ne puis m'empêcher de relever, c'est ce qui tient à la logique même, à la série d'idées et de doctrines du grand écrivain, Or je trouve que, dans ses griefs contre Rome, il n'y a rien dont l'abbé de Lamennais, l'ancien, celui d'autrefois, celui même de l'Avenir pour nous en tenir là, n'eût eu de quoi se jouer si on lui en avait fait matière à objection,\(^\text{19}\)

In that very book Lamennais himself said much the same thing when describing his reaction to the Pope's "sévérité silencieuse."

Je me suis souvent étonné que le Pape, au lieu de déployer envers nous cette sévérité silencieuse dont il ne résultait qu'une vague et pénible incertitude, ne nous eût pas dit simplement: "Vous avez cru bien faire, mais vous vous êtes trompés. Placé à la tête de l'Eglise, j'en connais mieux que vous les besoins, les intérêts, et seul j'en suis juge. En désapprouvant la direction que vous avez donnée à vos efforts, je rends justice à vos intentions. Allez, et désormais, avant d'intervenir en des affaires aussi délicates, prenez conseil de ceux dont l'autorité doit être votre guide. Ce peu de paroles auraient tout fini. Jamais aucun de nous n'aurait songé à continuer l'action déjà suspendue,\(^\text{20}\)

It would scarcely be an oversimplification to say that Lamennais rebelled against papal authority because Gregory XVI had shown him none of that tenderness and patience which the Church regularly employed in its dealings with worldly powers. Paul Janet wrote:

Vaincu et humilié, Lamennais se laissa aller, par une réaction facile à comprendre, mais moins facile peut-être à excuser, à un acte
de révolte et de colère qui retentit
dans le monde entier.21

In a larger sense, however, the underlying reason for his rebellion, one that has already been discussed in the chapter on Lamennais as a seeker after the absolute, was his refusal, or his inability, to come to terms with reality.

The ideal Romantic hero, after Byron's influence was felt in France, rebelled against God. Was that true of Lamennais or was he, by rebelling against Church authority, acting in obedience to God? Those who have studied and written about him have by no means agreed on the answer to that question. Not being ourselves privy to the mind of God, nor for that matter to the mind of Lamennais, we can only hazard a judgment based on what Lamennais himself seemed to believe and feel. Since we have already cited many passages in which he affirmed his belief in his mission and his confidence that he was ever obedient to the will of God there is no need to insist on that. There is, however, in Des Maux de l'Eglise a seldom quoted passage which casts a very different light on this subject. The hierarchy, he warned, had not been faithful to God's will and because of its many transgressions, the Church was destined to suffer terribly and for many years to come.

Or, des dangers auxquels leurs erreurs la peuvent exposer, le plus grand est celui qui résulte pour elle d'une position telle qu'elle se trouve en discordance avec un état inévitable de la société, avec un état qu'elle ne saurait changer radicalement, et plus encore qui ne doit pas être changé radicalement. Alors, il y a lutte, une lutte terrible, entre les éléments mêmes de la nature humaine, et l'homme fuit Dieu, si on l'ose dire, pour ne pas cesser d'être homme. Il se détoure momentanément du chemin qui traverse le temple, lorsqu'on l'a fermé du côté vers lequel sa nature le force à se diriger. Il renversera le temple même, s'il n'a pas d'autre moyen de se frayer un passage; car
il faut qu'il advance.fût-ce sur des ruines, et
il n'est rien de si sacré qu'il épargne en
ces moments d'une sorte d'enthousiasme, de
possession inéarrable, où il entend, comme
au fond de l'avenir, une voix mystérieuse qui
l'appelle. Plus, au contraire, l'obstacle
qu'il rencontre est saint en soi, plus il
s'en indigné: il se rue sur lui avec une
fureur qu'excite le contraste entre cette
sainteté même et ce qu'il y a de divin aussi
dans la puissance interne par laquelle il se
sent dominé. Ce n'est pas impéité réfléchie,
voule; mais étonnement, angoisse, l'angoisse
horrible d'un être qui, ne pouvant comprendre
cette apparente opposition de Dieu à Dieu,
se trouble en lui-même, et brise l'autel
contre lequel il ne saurait appuyer avec
foi son coeur.

Although in the next paragraph, Lamennais attributes this inner
conflict to the masses, that hardly seems possible, since no masses
on record have had the time or the inclination to indulge in that
sort of metaphysical speculation. What this appears to be is a rather
clear case of Lamennais' projecting his own mounting anxieties and
tensions on the masses. Others may have a different interpretation,
but to us, this passage suggests that Lamennais, even before he left
Rome, was consciously or unconsciously, probably the latter, preparing
himself to rebel against God, God as he had previously conceived Him,
and that this rebellion was to be in the name of another God, the God
of the Romantics which was a confused jumble of sentiment, enthusiasm
and blind instinctual forces.

Could Lamennais have escaped his destiny? It is hard to see
how since, as Novalis said, "Character is destiny," And while the
circumstances in which our hero found himself were particularly un-
favorable, no circumstances are perfect and only perfection would
really have satisfied his heart.

The grief which Lamennais caused those who loved him is well
documented; as he himself observed on one occasion,

Elle [Mme Cottu] serait heureuse peut-être si elle ne m'avait jamais connue. Il y a en moi comme un fonds de douleur qui déborde sur tout ce qui m'environne. Est-il donc si difficile de passer sans nuire à travers cette vie? Je ne demanderais que cela; mais c'est trop encore. Il y a dans nos destinées quelque chose d'inexplicable...

Suffering was inevitable for the friends and members of his family who were forced to stand by helpless while, before their very eyes, a great and noble man assumed the figure of a Romantic hero; carried to his own ruin because, like Hernani, he could utter the fatal words: "Je suis une force qui va." Perhaps the one who suffered most was Jean-Marie de La Mennais. He had understood his brother's exalted nature from the beginning and known to what dangerous excesses it might lead him. By helping to direct those passions toward a constructive and noble end Jean-Marie had hoped to save him. Perhaps he did save him in a way because while Lamennais' life was tragic, it was not futile because others continued the work he had begun. It is doubtful, however, that the pious Jean-Marie could have imagined any fate worse than that of losing one's faith in Christ, of dying unreconciled to the Church. The very important role he had himself played in the drama of his brother's life must have made his anguish even greater, which is in keeping with the fact that the Romantic hero not only brings ruin upon himself but upon those who love him. What greater ruin can a man bring upon a brother who is a priest than the metaphysical anguish of feeling that the soul of a beloved brother may be damned for ever? It is told that shortly after the death of Lamennais, Jean-Marie returned to visit La Chênaie. He went to pray in that small chapel where they had so often prayed together and then started back toward the house; he paused and looked up at the window of his brother's room and then, overcome by grief he collapsed on
the grass, but not before he had cried out in an anguished voice, "Féli, Féli, où es-tu?"\textsuperscript{26}

If one wished to think of Lamennais' life as a Romantic drama that would be a good closing scene.
CONCLUSION

"The proper study of mankind is man."

Pope

No study, however detailed though it be, can fully reveal a human personality, and our study of Féliçité de Lamennais is no exception. None the less we are fortunate in this case, for we have available a wealth of information about him: most importantly, of course, his own voluminous and often very personal writings, but also a mass of contemporary correspondence and comment. We are doubly fortunate, for Lamennais was, as both friends and foes realized, no ordinary man: he was in fact, as we have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, the very type of the Romantic hero. His actions and his passions seemed as it were larger than life, for good or for ill, and a study of his career, his personality, his ideas, his reaction to his milieu would be inherently interesting. Such a study must suggest, though it may not answer, large and vital questions: notably the question of the interaction between literature, public life, private personality and historical circumstances. The man was himself, yet perhaps that particular self could have existed in its particular form only under the conditions of his own time and place.

There is another reason for finding interest in the study of Lamennais. Thogh he was indeed a child of his own time and place, he was prophet enough to foresee, and to attempt to answer, problems which are very much alive today. No doubt his solutions were not wholly successful, but we can learn from failure as well as from success, and a study of his career is fully relevant today. The world of Modern America is obviously not that of early nineteenth-century France, yet there are striking parallels. Both periods are characterized by unrest, political and religious, social and artistic, by a searching for new solutions to old problems and for something to
replace worthwhile values that have been lost or ignored. In both periods we see a younger generation, energetic, passionate and idealistic, yet often undisciplined, undirected and unrealistic. Perhaps it is not fanciful to see a parallel between a generation whose education has been largely permissive, and one deprived of formal studies by the closing of the schools during the Revolution. Certainly both generations were influenced deeply by the drama of their times, an influence not necessarily for good. During the Romantic period the whole population was affected by the popular melodrama, and tended to see men as wholly black or white, angels or devils, with no shading or compromise. Our own cinema and television fare may be less uniformly melodramatic, but it would be difficult to maintain that it suggests a true picture of how the world normally works, or encourages a balanced view of life. One might compare also the influence on the minds of a generation of the spectacle of Napoléon and the emergence in our times of the charismatic leader, more important for his personality than for his policies. Finally, to mention only the more striking likenesses between the two eras, art and literature were almost wholly "engagé."

Our purpose in calling attention to some of the parallels between Lamennais' period and our own was not to attempt a complete characterization of the two eras, but simply to suggest that there are enough likenesses to make this study a highly relevant one. There are of course significant differences as well; we shall note only two, connected with each other, and important for an understanding of Lamennais' influence on his contemporaries. First, his audience was relatively small as compared to the size of the literate— at least the technically literate— public today; and at the same time that audience was not called upon to cope with the overwhelming flood of information and argument which threatens to inundate the reader and viewer today. Second, and as a direct result, issues of the day
tended to be treated in greater depth, and the whole literate public to be involved more deeply in issues of importance. Politics, religion, history, philosophy and literature, were all related and all the concern of the same audience, so that a writer with Lamennais' passion and persuasive skills was able to exert a remarkable influence on or at least to awaken the minds and hearts of his generation. The figures of the sales of Lamennais' works, even apart from other evidence, demonstrate the extent of that influence; while the zeal of Metternich's minions in trying to counter it shows that his enemies too realized the power of his pen.

Lamennais, then, was a man important and interesting in himself, and one whose career is not without relevance in our own age when there are so many would-be reformers and prophets who seem to share Lamennais' defects if not always his virtues. We have argued that Lamennais can best be understood as the embodiment of the Romantic hero. Such a hero, indeed Romanticism itself, has both positive and negative aspects. A thesis-writer, happily, is not called upon to weigh, like Minos and Rhadamanthos, the souls of the departed; yet, one can not devote so much time to the study of Lamennais without reaching some judgments, however tentative and personal. We find in this epitome of his age much that is good. Among these positive qualities and beliefs are: one, an insistence on the value of the individual; two, a belief that some individuals are granted superior talents and are in consequence burdened with more responsibilities than other men; three, a concentration on substance rather than on form itself; four, an awareness of intuition as at least one avenue leading to truth; five, an understanding of the importance of sentiment in human nature, and finally and especially, a lively sense of the injustice of man to man and a burning desire to right these wrongs without delay. These are goods, but like other good things they may be carried to excess, and excess is one of the most characteristic marks of the Romantic hero.
Lamennais himself was nothing if not excessive, and this was at the root of his tragedy. His hopes were too high, and his discouragement when he failed to realize his hopes, too great. His aims were noble, but he could not find or was unwilling to adopt practical means of putting them into effect. Like other Romantics he failed to learn from the experience of the past that the improvement of man's lot, however desirable, is usually brought about slowly and as the result of certain compromises. Perhaps this was inevitable for one whose role was that of a prophet. Vidler concludes his fine study (p.275f.) with some reflections on the roles of prophet and priest, and suggests that Lamennais' work was important and necessary, even though a priesthood entrusted with the preservation of the Church as an institution could not have been expected to welcome his criticisms and innovations. What makes the career of Lamennais genuinely tragic is that his good qualities were so one-sided that he was slowly but surely drawn into conflict not with evil but with other things that are good. In true Romantic fashion, he could not understand that any less extreme position than his own, any middle ground or golden mean might be the position not of fools or knaves or cowards but of the truly wise and enlightened. The judgment of a critic as sympathetic as Ballanche is, we feel, just: Lamennais was willing to destroy the city of the present before knowing that the city of the future was ready to receive its new inhabitants. This is a grave criticism, and yet with Ballanche we may hope that much should be forgiven to one who loved well if not always wisely.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter One


2. For further information see Auguste Laveille, Jean-Marie de La Mennais, 2 vols., (Paris, Poussielgue, 1903); (hereinafter referred to as Laveille) also S. Ropartz, La Vie et les oeuvres de M. Jean-Marie Robert de La Mennais, (Paris, 1874), (hereinafter referred to as Ropartz)


13. Félicité de Lamennais, Oeuvres complètes, 12 vols., (Paris, Daubrée et Cailleux, 1836-1837), VI, pp.94-95. (hereinafter referred to as O.C.)

15. Vidler, p. 53.


19. de Courcy, p. 140.


22. O.C., XII, p. 89.


24. Ibid.


27. The "Congrégation" was an association, mostly of upper-class Catholics, founded by Père Bourdier-Delpuits to encourage them to a devout life and works of charity. It was often confused with another group, "les Chevaliers de la Foi," and was widely believed to exercise great and secret political power. See Vidler, p. 117 for a number of bibliographic references on both organizations.


31. From a letter of Sept. 17, 1833 to the prince of Bavaria, cited in

32. See *O.C.*, X, pp. 324-325.


34. Le Hir, p. 5.


FOOTNOTES

Chapter Two


10. Feugère, I, p.158.


15. It was Mme de Stael who coined the word "vulgarité" to describe the insensitivity and mediocrity of the common man.


20. Boutard, I, pp.120-121


25. This letter was written in March, 1810, at which time Vigny's "La Mort du loup" had not been published.


27. Blaize, I, p.313.


29. Ibid.


31. Blaize, I, p.218; also see Feugère, p.117.


33. Feugère, pp.141-142.

34. Blaize, I, p.70; also see Laveille, I, p.141.

35. Boutard, I, p.23.


38. Feugère, p.271.


40. Blaize, I, p.266.

41. Blaize, I, p.213.
43. Feugère, p. 279.
44. Duine, p. 78.
45. Boutard, I, p. 171. For a more complete analysis of this topic see C. Maréchal, _Lamennais au Drapeau Blanc_, (Paris, 1946),
46. J. de Maistre, _Oeuvres Complètes_, (Lyon, 1886), XIV, p. 235.
48. E. Forgues, _Correspondance inédite entre Lamennais et le baron de Vitrolles_, (Paris, Charpentier, 1886), p. 304. (hereinafter referred to as Vitrolles)
52. Boutard, I, p. 375.
55. Villefosse, p. 106.
56. We have been unable to locate the correspondence in question. In order to check the authenticity of this account,
57. Boutard, II, p. 35.
58. _Lamennais inconnu_, p. 35.
59. _Montalembert_, p. 96.
60. Vitrolles, p. 304.


64. Montalembert, p. 92.

65. Ibid., p. 277.

66. Ibid., p. 232.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., pp. 342-343.

69. Ibid., p. 345.


71. Boutard, II, p. 159.


73. Sainte-Beuve, I, p. 266.


75. Montalembert, p. 347.

76. Feugère, p. 282.

77. Boutard, III, pp. 392-393. Jean Dessoliare was a humbly provincial tailor, a great admirer of Lamennais and the leader of a group of "lamentistes" in his village. "Le seul et unique tailleur de M. Lamennais," as he proudly called himself, kept above his bed a lock of Lamennais' hair and a bit of cloth from an article of clothing he had made for "le maître," enclosed in glass like a relic. His letters to Lamennais were published in the "Revue rétrospective," May and June issues, 1897.

78. Boutard, III, p. 432.


81. Montalembert, p. 186.

82. Ibid., p. 267.

83. These jottings and notes were published in 1841 in a book entitled Discussions critiques et pensées diverses sur la religion et la philosophie. Another edition, which included additional material was published in 1856 by E.-D. Forgues with the title Mélanges philosophiques et politiques.

84. The first line of this passage is a literal translation of Psalm 42:5 which would have been very familiar to Lamennais as it was part of the daily liturgy.


86. Boutard, III, p. 201.
FOOTNOTES

Chapter Three

1. Published in Paris in 1833.

2. Sainte-Beuve, p. 199.

3. Quoted in Sainte-Beuve, p. 198. It is impossible to know whether the underscoring is Lamennais' or Sainte-Beuve's.


5. Ibid., p. 198.

6. Among others, Barbey d'Aurevilly in Les Prophètes du passé.

7. See Shroder's Chapter I, for a very interesting discussion of this question.


9. O.C., VI, p. 20.

10. O.C., VI, p. 88.

11. Blaize, I, p. 188.


15. See Maréchal, Dispute, p. 2; Boutard, I, p. 146; Duine, p. 66.

16. See Maréchal, Dispute, p. 15.


24. 2,741,400 volumes in the seven years from February 1817 to the end of December 1824. For a breakdown of titles see Le Guillon, p. 21.


29. Lamennais inconnu, p. 76.

30. Ibid.


35. John 16:12.


37. This predisposition was evident even in his reveries. Writing to Benoît d'Azy in 1819, Lamennais recalled a scene from his childhood. It was a calm, dark night and Félix, from his vantage point on the walls surrounding St. Malo gazed out at the sea, the ships and the coast. In his imagination the scene became "un grand combat entre le silence et les bruits les plus formidables, entre les ténèbres et la lumière..." Boutard, I, pp. 18-19.

38. Letter of 24 April.


42. Sainte-Beuve, I, p.207.

43. On 17 June 1848 in *Le Peuple Constituant* he carried this faith in journalism to ridiculous extremes ending his article with the words "Le Verbe incarné aujourd'hui c'est la presse."

44. On the 24th of February, 1831, a religious service was held in memory of the duke de Berri. This angered the anti-carlists who rose up and destroyed the church. Lamennais accused the carlists of using religion for their own selfish political ends since he believed they had deliberately provoked the popular uprising in order to discredit the opposition.


47. Ibid.


49. O.C., XII, p.200.

50. O.C., XII, p.201.

51. O.C., XII, p.203.

52. O.C., XII, p.204.


57. In a letter to count de Semfft, Jan. 28, 1826.

58. Forgues, II, p.263.

59. See Le Hir, pp.2-5.

60. See Le Hir, p.59.

62. Montalembert, p.130.


64. Ibid.

65. A. du B. de la Villerabel, Confidences de La Mennais; lettres inédites de 1821-1848, (Nantes, 1886), p.145. (hereinafter referred to as Confidences)


68. Here as elsewhere one may discern Milton's influence, although to date there is no full-scale study of Lamennais' indebtedness. It is interesting that Milton, like Lamennais, can hardly be considered orthodox.


73. For a complete discussion of the role played by Metternich see Derré's Metternich and Lamennais, (Paris, 1963).

74. Boutard, III, p.76.

75. Ibid.


77. O.C., XI, pp.59-60.

Footnotes

Chapter Four

3. o.c., pp.399-400.
5. O.C., X, ciii.
20. Feugère, p.312.
24. Feugère, p. 296; also see Horace, Odea, I.


26. O.C., XII, p. 115.

27. Feugère, p. 292.

28. For a full account see Maréchal's Lamennais et Lamartine.


32. Fongues, II.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter Five

1. These five items on Professor Bourgeois' list of characteristic elements in the personality of the Romantic hero will not be discussed:
Ils sont mystérieux: leur origine, leur état civil restent longtemps inconnus.

Ils sont la proie des sentiments les plus violents: ils suivent leurs impulsions,

Ils sont toujours guidés par les mouvements de leur coeur, jamais par ceux de la raison.

Ils n'ont aucun juste milieu; ils poussent tout jusqu'au point le plus extrême,

La mort (quelquefois le suicide) est la seule solution à leurs souffrances ou leurs problèmes; elle est nécessaire pour remplir leur destinée. Par la mort, ils sont enfin libérés.

- the first item, because it obviously does not apply to Lamennais, and the remaining four, because they have been discussed at length in previous chapters.

2. Sainte-Beuve, p.198.


6. de Guérin, p.257.


11. Feugère, p.221.
13. Feugère, p.221.
21. Feugère, pp.143-144.
22. Feugère, p.353.
27. Feugère, p.292.
29. Verluys, p.38.
30. Vitrolles, p.340; Cottu, p.322.
32. O.C., ed. 1844, VIII, p.35.


37. *O.C.*, XII, p. 89.


43. Feugère, p. 431.

44. Feugère, p. 428.


46. Sainte-Beuve, p. 211.

47. Rebelliau, p. 450.


50. Rebelliau, p. 454.

51. Boutard, I, p. 79.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter Six

1. O.C., X, LXIV and LXV.
18. Cottu, p. LXI.
20. O.C., XII, p. 34.
22. O.C., XII, pp. 194-195.
23. See particularly his correspondence with Montalembert during that crucial period.

25. See Derré's Chapter XII, "Condamnation et survivance du Mennaisisme."

26. An account of this scene, which took place on June 28, 1854, was given by abbé Léselenc as part of the eulogy at the funeral of Jean-Marie de La Mennais. It was quoted in Ropartz, p.476.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. WORKS BY LAMENNAIS


B. PUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE BY LAMENNAIS AND HIS ASSOCIATES


C. BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL WORKS
ON LAMENNAIS AND HIS ASSOCIATES


D. WORKS OF GENERAL CRITICISM
IN WHICH AN ENTIRE CHAPTER
IS DEVOTED TO LAMENNAIS


E. REVIEWS AND ARTICLES DEVOTED TO LAMENNAIS


F. WORKS OF GENERAL CRITICISM CONSULTED

1. Religion and Philosophy


2. History


Guizot, François P. *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps.* Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1860.


3. Literature


