

1

The Mental Fortress

OUR DIFFICULTIES always stem from the belief that we alone remedy them. As long as our intellectual power (or inadequacy) does not play a role and our greater or lesser capacities are not actively involved, we feel that our endeavor is doomed to failure. Such is the deep-seated belief of mental man. We know its results all too well. But even if they *were* flawless within their own scope, they would still conceal a supreme flaw, which is to bring in only what is contained in our own intelligence or muscles—except when life or happenstance frustrates our plans. In other words, our mental existence is a closed system. Nothing gets into it but what we ourselves put in. This is the cornerstone of the Great Fortress. Its second inevitable trait is the mechanical rigor of its process: everything runs in a closed circuit according to the thought, plan, or muscle we set in motion, since nothing can come into the process except what we have concocted. And everything is measurable down to the least dyne, centidyne and millidyne we have expended: we get exactly what we bargained for—but that was already anticipated in the intelligence quotient put into play. That is, the system is perfectly and hermetically sealed down

to the last cranny. There is not a single crack, except, once again, when life happens to upset more or less opportunely our faultless measures. The third inevitable trait stemming from the other two is its impeccable thoroughness: nothing escapes its attention, and what does will soon be worked out, put into equation and "programed" to be fed back into the machine and further inflate the great expanding balloon. Everything is, of course, perfectly objective, since we all wear the same glasses; even our instruments scrupulously behave according to the results we want them to show. In short, the system operates rigorously and flawlessly according to specification. Like the sorcerer of old, we have traced a mental circle on the ground, stepped into it, and here we are.

But that just may prove to be a stupendous illusion.

In fact, the illusion is being shattered despite ourselves. What we take to be a dreadful disarray is a great array of new energies coming to pump fresh air into our lungs of mentalized earthlings. "New energies" . . . there is a phrase with a mystical ring to it which would undoubtedly draw dark frowns from the materialist. But let us admit it (before circumstances force us to do so with our nose to the ground), today's materialists are as outdated as yesterday's religionists; they are in a closed, stifling, predictable and obsolete system. Both are products of the mental circle, the obverse and reverse of the same coin, which is proving counterfeit. The real point lies not in god versus no-god, but in something else: the point is to step out of the circle and see how one breathes on the other side—one breathes very well on the other side, so well, in fact, that it is like breathing for the very first time ever.

Thus, we shall not effect the passage with our own strength; if such were the condition, no one could do it,

except spiritual athletes. But those athletes, filled with meditations and concentrations and asceticism, do not get out either, although they may seem to. They inflate their own spiritual ego (a kind worse than the other one, far more deceptive, because it is garbed in a grain of truth) and their illuminations are simply the luminous discharges of their own accumulated cloud. The logic of it is simple: one does not get out of the circle by the power of the circle, any more than the lotus rises above the mud by the power of the mud. A little bit of sun is needed. And because the ascetics and saints and founders of religions throughout the ages only reached the rarefied realms of the mental bubble, they created one church or another that amazingly resembled the closed system from which they originated, namely, a dogma, a set of rules, the Tables of the Law, a one and only prophet born in the blessed year 000, around whom revolved the beautiful story, forever fixed in the year 000, like the electrons around the nucleus, the stars around the Great Bear, and man around his navel. Or, if they did get out, it was only in spirit, leaving the earth and bodies to their habitual decay. Granted, each new hub was wiser, more luminous, worthy and virtuous than the preceding one, and it did help men, but it changed nothing in the mental circle, as we have seen, for thousands of years—because its light was only the other side of one and the same shadow, the white of the black, the good of evil, the virtue of a frightful misery that grips us all in the depths of our caves.

This implacable duality which assails the whole life of mental man—a life that is only the life of death—is obviously insoluble at the level of the Duality. One might as well fight the right hand with the left. Yet, that is exactly what the human mind has done, without much success, at all levels of its existence, offsetting its heaven with hell,

matter with spirit, individualism with collectivism, or any other isms that proliferate in this sorry system. But one does not get out by the decree of any ism pushed to its perfection: deprived of its heaven, our earth is a poor whirling machine; deprived of its matter, our heaven is a pale nebula filled with the silent medusas of the disembodied spirit; deprived of the individual, our societies are dreadful anthills; and deprived even of his "sins," the individual loses a focus of tension that helped him to grow. The fact is, no idea, however lofty it may seem, has the power to undo the Artifice—for the very good reason that the Artifice has its value and season. But it has also its season, like the winged seed tumbling over the prairies, until the day it finds its propitious ground and bursts open.

Indeed, we shall not get out through an idea but through an organic Fact.

Nature has always shown us that she knows perfectly well what she is doing. We think ourselves superior to her because we mentalize her, pigeonhole her, and have harnessed some of her secrets, but in so doing we are still under her law. If she was indeed able to evolve the iridescent tentacles of the actinia out of a pale protoplasm, so it could better seize its prey, and offer to our gaze this multicolored panorama of millions of different earthly species, we must believe that she had also good reasons to differentiate her human actinias, each seizing the prey he could in the polychromatic network of his thousands of thoughts, feelings and impulses. If this mental circle, this very dismaying hydra, has closed in upon our species, it is certainly not a useless trap, over which we could have jumped had we been smarter. So why make it in the first place if it were only to get out of it? If the visionary shepherd of Upanishadic times could have jumped directly to supermanhood, then what is the

evolutionary sense of all this sweat and blood? Nothing is useless in this world. We have yet to find the pain that does not have its secret power of growth.

But its use is not as the mind imagines in the arrogance of its knowledge and discoveries, for the mind always mistakes the instrument for the Master. We thought that the mental tool was both end and means, and that that end was an increasing, ever more triumphant and rigorous mastery over the mental field, which it has colonized with marvelous cities and less marvelous suburbs. But that is only a secondary end, a turbulent by-product, and it turns out that the major effect of the Mind in man has not been to make him more intelligent (intelligent with respect to what? The mouse in its hole has the perfect intelligence for its own terrain), but to individualize him within his own species and endow him with the power to change—while the other species were invariable and only individualized as a general type—and finally to make him capable of casting a look at what exceeds his own condition. With this individualization and power of variation began the “errors” of man, his “sins,” his afflicting dualities; yet his capacity for error is also a secret capacity for progress, which is why all our moralities based on right or wrong and all our flawless heavens have failed and will forever fail—if we were flawless and irreproachable, we would be a stagnant and infallible species, like the shellfish or the opossum. In other words, the Mind is an instrument of accelerated evolution, an “evolver.” In fifty years of scientific development, man has progressed more than during all the prescientific milleniums. But progress in what sense? To be sure, not in the sense of the fallacious mastery, nor in the quality of life or the degree of comfort, but in the sense of the mental saturation of the species. One cannot leave a circle unless one has individually and collectively

exhausted the circle. One cannot step alone onto the other side; either everybody does it (or is capable of doing it) or nobody does it; the whole species goes together, because there is but one human Body. Instead of a handful of initiates scattered among a semianimal and ignorant human mass, the entire species is now undergoing its initiation or, in evolutionary terms, its supreme variation. We have not passed through the mental circle for the sake of sending rockets to the moon, but in order to be individually, innumerably and voluntarily capable of effecting the passage to the next higher circle. The breaking of the circle is the great organic Fact of our times. All the dualities and opposite poles, the sins of virtue and the virtues of sin, all this dazzling chaos were the instruments of the Work, the "tensors," we could say, bending us to the breaking point against a wall of iron—which is a wall of illusion. But the illusion falls only when one decides to see it.

That is where we are. The illusion is not dead; it even rages with unprecedented violence, equipped with all the arms we have so obligingly polished up for it. But these are the last convulsions of a colossus with feet of clay—which is actually a gnome, an oversized, overoutfitted gnome. The ancient sages of India knew it well. They divided human evolution into four concentric circles: that of the men of knowledge (Brahmins), who lived at the beginning of humanity, in the "age of truth"; that of the nobles and warriors (Kshatriya), when only "three fourths of the truth" was left; that of the merchants and middle class (Vaishya), who had only "half of the truth"; and finally ours, the age of the "little men," the Shudra, the servants (of the machine, of the ego, of desire), the great proletariat of regimented liberties—the "Dark Age," Kali Yuga, when no truth is left at all. But because this circle is the most extreme, because all the

truths have been tried and exhausted, and all possible roads explored, we are nearing the right solution, the true solution, the emergence of a new age of truth, the "supramental age" Sri Aurobindo spoke of, like the but-tercup breaking its last envelope to free its golden fruit. If the parallel holds true between the collective body and our human body, we could say that the center governing the age of the sages was located at the level of the forehead, while that of the age of the nobles was at the level of the heart, that of the age of the merchants, at the stomach, and the one governing our age is at the level of sex and matter. The descent is complete. But that descent has a meaning—a meaning *for matter*. Had we stayed forever at the forehead level of the divine truths of the mind, this earth and body would never have been changed, and we would have probably ended up escaping into some spiritual heaven or nirvana. Now, everything must be transformed, even the body and matter, since we are right in it. Ironically, this is the greatest service this dark, materialistic and scientific age may have rendered us: to compel such a plunge of the spirit into matter that it had either to lose itself in it or to be transformed with it. Absolute darkness is but the shadow of a greater Sun, which digs its abysses in order to raise up a more stable beauty, founded on the purified base of our earthly sub-conscious and seated erect in truth down to the very cells of our bodies.

*O Force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race,
 O petty adventurers in an infinite world
 And prisoners of a dwarf humanity,
 How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind
 Around your little self and petty things? . . .
 A Seer, a strong Creator, is within,
 The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your days,
 Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.²*

This impossible endeavor (for us) is not impossible for the Great Executrix who has led the evolutionary play to this crucial turning point. It is She who can. We just have to seize her secret springs, or rather, let Her seize hold of us and collaborate in our own evolution by having an intimate understanding of the Great Process. None of the spiritual virtues and athletics of the old closed system will be of any use. What is needed is a sort of radical leap, fully conscious and with eyes wide open, a very childlike surrender to the gods of the future, an iron resolve to track the momentous Illusion down to the smallest recesses, a supreme opening to the supreme Possibility—which will lift us up in Her arms and carry us upon Her sunlit road even before we are satisfied of having taken a quarter of a step toward Her. For indeed “there are moments when the Spirit moves among men . . ., there are others when it retires and men are left to act in the strength or the weakness of their own egoism. The first are periods when even a little effort produces great results and changes destiny.”³

We are just at that moment.